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2019 President's Message

By Geoff Rogalsky

The virtues of balance

So much of the news these days seems so dismal – in the environmental realm alone the current global narratives are about projected rising sea level, the possible beginning of a mass extinction, steady habitat loss, outbreaks of invasive species, plastics everywhere, continuing chemical pollution of water, land and air (choose your favorite new toxin) – it goes on and on. It seems that scientists are finding new threats faster than they can de-fang the already known ones. It raises the question: what can one person reasonably do to correct this seemingly overwhelming trajectory? We all want to believe that we're doing what we can – it's the rest of humanity that is out of control and what can one person do about that? Various people and organizations have their specific needs and want to think that theirs is more important than the needs of others – what can be done to reconcile these conflicts? I admit that I can get rather discouraged – my morale waxes and wanes and I find myself having to reflect on these questions frequently.

As I've written before, it is the deeply held position of TCTCWA that the watershed contains many invaluable resources, and we have a strong sense of responsibility for engaging in cooperative stewardship with all of our watershed's occupants and users. Our challenge is in balancing the needs of the region and its users with the nature and value of the resources that are present. As with most things, value is in the eyes of the beholder – how do you view the Pocono region? Is it the uniqueness of its outdoors that is the prime value? Or is it the economic opportunity that being located within two hours of two major metropolitan areas offers? Is the best use of its water resources to feed water parks? Or sustain "last great places" habitat (The Nature Conservancy's designation for the Poconos), including such sensitive features as native trout streams? I'm a big fan of the Eagles (yes, the football team but in this case the band) and take to heart their line: "call some place paradise, kiss it goodbye." At the same time, part of me sympathizes with Denny Crane, an individual rights proponent on the TV show "Boston Legal" who at one point tells an environmental lawyer: "You're evildoers . . . Let me tell you something, I came out here to enjoy nature – don't talk to me about the environment."

Individual rights and freedoms are important, but as the world becomes smaller I think we are more and more discovering that everything is connected to everything. When this area was a wilderness you could reasonably think that whatever you chose to do with your property, no one else would be significantly impacted. But this belief is no longer the case, as all of these incremental property-altering decisions add up as population density rises. Mix in the changing climate and, to me, the needs of the

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President's Message (Continued from page 1)

many have started to weigh more heavily against the needs of the individual. It is unreasonable and impractical in this day and age to think that a private citizen can isolate his/her activities from the rest of the world. And the Poconos contain headwaters – everything we do in our area gets conveyed downstream in one manner or other. This does not mean that the enemy of individual freedom – the vilified regulation – needs to preclude economic development. The issue is balance – regulation should be instituted to allow private economic development decisions that can exist in harmony with the broader public good such that impacts are offset or even reversed to undo previous damage to resources upon which the region depends to maintain its identity and vitality.

Among the options available to help balance the development/preservation equation is the protection afforded to proven unique and unspoiled water resources by assigning the designation of Exceptional Value (EV), a standard which requires development projects to implement all measures necessary to preserve existing water quality of EV-designated waters. As noted in last year's President's message, recent decisions to grant such protection to waters in the Poconos are being fought in court. This fight has more recently evolved into lobbying the state legislature to eliminate the entire EV standard. The "Our Pocono Waters" (OPW) campaign, for which TCTCWA is an active participant, continues to defend the standard and the PADEP's assignment decisions as was discussed in last year's President's message. However, this promises to be a multi-year battle that will require constant vigilance for behind-the-scenes maneuvering. To lose this battle would allow the Pocono's remaining unspoiled waters to be degraded by a thousand tiny impacts to some minimum broadly-applied standard, and the ecosystem to similarly devolve to a small set of species that can adapt to that standard. This change in the aquatic ecosystem would likely occur only a little at a time – so gradually as to not be in the living memory of future generations what the un-homogenized stream was really like.

It must be conceded that many Pocono waters have already suffered this fate to various degrees – as discussed earlier, much existing development was done at a time when the long-term impacts were either poorly understood or considered trivial. Impacts have included thermal, baseflow, chemistry, and biotic (flora and fauna) alterations. Can anything be done to stem and/or reverse this inherent consequence of individual-rights-oriented development? From a practical perspective, it would seem that the best strategy would be to implement an array of policies/actions that individually may improve your surface waters of interest imperceptibly, but together may have a meaningful impact. So, circling back to the original question I posed:

What one person can do for TCTC waters:

- Support upstream EV designations for eligible streams, which will provide greater protection to riparian habitat, enhance bank stabilization, and prevent direct pollutant discharges.
- Support projects that add shade anywhere/everywhere and scrutinize projects that eliminate it, even if upland. Any unshaded area (especially paved areas) would benefit from added canopy and reduce the potential for general stream warming and for water temperature spikes. Be prepared to restore canopy eliminated by invasives (e.g., hemlocks killed by woolly adelgid).
- Oppose groundwater withdrawal without offsetting in-basin groundwater replenishment. Net groundwater losses have the potential to reduce base streamflows throughout their upstream watershed. Less water means shallower surface water which heats up more easily, and increases retention/heating time in lakes. Note that the Pocono Springs development plan may result in groundwater withdrawal in TCTC watershed and discharge to the BCRA wastewater treatment plant which is in Stroudsburg. And in addition, developers within TCTC may want to use some of the BCRA's excess sewerage capacity, which again will ultimately pipe to Stroudsburg.
- Support bank stabilization/channel deepening/narrowing projects and remove dams that serve no valid purpose. This will also serve to reduce potential for increased water temperatures.
- Support erosion/sedimentation control enforcement on any/all development. Sedimentation smothers benthic-dwelling aquatic organisms.
- support retrofitting of rainwater detention basins to help with spreading out the intensity of stormwater runoff and further assist shallow groundwater replenishment. We're getting as much if not more than average total rainfall in recent years, but it's coming more and more in short intense doses and measures need to be taken to manage the rate of release into streams.

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President's Message (Continued from page 2)

- Support the missions of advocacy groups with your time and effort, not just financial contributions. Many of these measures will require local, state, and regional governmental support. If you pay taxes, you have a right to be heard. Or better yet, lead by example and volunteer a half-day here and there for a project in the watershed.
- Don't forget to manage your own property's impact. Know whether your sewage is properly treated or disposed. Enhance your riparian buffers.
- Lastly, engage with friends and neighbors. Invite them to get educated, take a position, and get involved.

I find I am often tempted to simply classify my meager efforts as insanely Sisyphean and leave it to the next person to come up with a better approach. Or resign myself to an "inevitable" outcome of a planet ultimately transformed into 100% human habitat (reassuring myself that at least it won't happen in my lifetime - probably). Then I come to realize that the truly insane thing to do is believe that I have zero influence on the future of the planet (it might not be much, but it's something). And to enhance our motivation to act, I think it helps to face the bigger question of whether there is a link between the health of the planet and our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life. I think there is. I may be wrong. But there's so much interconnectedness and interdependence between the welfares of humanity and nature, and once a connection is broken, can human ingenuity and effort always fix it?

With this question in mind, can we expect anything to get better without effort? And if we think we're making effort and things aren't getting better, then perhaps we're not doing enough? Or perhaps we are not doing the right things? Although I falter at times, I believe that we have to keep after it – unless we're really ready to give in and accept the unknown place we'll end up. Of course, no one knows with absolute certainty what will happen except that the planet itself will survive – the only questions are whether humanity will be part of that distant future and if so, with what quality of life. Ultimately, the choice we all face is whether to work together and balance the collective needs, or go it alone and solely defend the needs of our little part of paradise – if we really think we can isolate our part of paradise from everyone else.

OUR MISSION

The purposes of the Tobyhanna Creek/Tunkhannock Creek Watershed Association shall be to promote and preserve the water quality and the environment of the Tobyhanna Creek and Tunkhannock Creek watershed including surrounding areas of special concern and improve the water quality of the associated creeks and tributaries, promote the natural bounties thereof, provide educational materials on the benefits of and methods to achieve protection and preservation of the natural integrity of the watershed, educate the general public and interested parties in the value of stress controls and land activities, promote and coordinate the conservation of natural resources of the watershed, and protect and preserve terrestrial and aquatic life in the watershed.

ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY



On Saturday, April 13, 2019 members of the watershed met at Kistler Run and set out to do our semi-annual Adopt-A-Highway clean up project.

On the left: Geoff Rogalsky, Dean Neely and John Lyman
On the right: Lorraine Kosciusko



What Is a Riparian Buffer?

By John Lyman



The Tobyhanna Creek with the riparian buffer just coming into bloom.

Pennsylvania is home to 86,000 miles of rivers and streams. That is a remarkable number, almost 3 times the circumference of the earth. Monroe County has more than 900 miles of streams in it, and every single one of those is somebody's drinking water. Rivers and streams are not important just for their drinking water. Every organism uses water in some fashion, and we all benefit from the beautiful surroundings of a lake or stream.

Several items have been in the newspapers this year about streams. Two of them have a direct impact on streams in Monroe County:

1. the detrimental effort to reduce the Clean Water Drinking Act, and
2. the beneficial effort to make more streams high quality (HQ) and exceptional value (EV).

The Clean Water Drinking Act has been in the news because there are political forces trying to minimize it and the clean water requirements it specifies. This is particularly true at big construction sites that excavate great piles of earth and don't

want to control the muddy runoff. There are reasons for erosion control and it all comes back to protecting the drinking water. The effort to make more streams HQ and EV has made the news because of its positive impact on riparian buffers and the requirements that contractors must follow to take more care of these streams.

The clean streams of Monroe County are one of the things that makes the County unique. The lakes and streams of Monroe County don't tend to have the pollution issues that haunt the watersheds in the southwest corner of Pennsylvania. Within the county, the Tobyhanna and Tunkhannock Creeks do not have the pollution issues that haunt the streams flowing through Stroudsburg.

So, what is a riparian buffer? The definition from Wikipedia is:

"A riparian buffer or stream buffer is a vegetated area near a stream, usually forested, which helps shade and partially protect the stream from the impact of adjacent land uses. It plays a key role in increasing water quality in associated streams, rivers, and lakes, thus providing environmental benefits."

In short, a riparian buffer does two things, it protects the stream from contaminants and gives the water some shade. Often the contaminants are from man-made sources like fertilizer from lawns, dog waste, or construction sites. A riparian buffer also has a positive impact on temperature since it shades the stream from the sun. On the Tobyhanna Creek, I have measured a water temperature of 75°F on sections that have no riparian buffer, a temperature nearly fatally high for trout.

Stream ecology is complex and not entirely understood. It is a mix of water temperature, chemical composition, flow rates, elevation change, the seasonal changes, and a host of other variables. Two of those variables, temperature and composition are significantly impacted by the presence of a riparian buffer.



Pocono Lake

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What is a riparian buffer?

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Riparian buffers are critical to water quality particularly in areas that have a lot of development. The compromised streams flow into rivers that feed into the Delaware River where the water is used extensively for drinking and other human activities. It is said that one of the blessings of Monroe County is that we drink the water first. By the time it gets to Philadelphia it has been taken out and put back in 8 times.

To protect water quality, the state of Pennsylvania has various laws and regulations that restrict what contractors can do to both water quality and riparian buffers. But ethical environmental management and compliance takes money, money that many contractors would rather take home as profit. So there is often a running conflict between what keeps water clean and what contractors want to build. Plus, both the science of water ecology and the laws are extremely complex. Simply trying to understand what is required is often beyond a contractor.



A section of the Tobyhanna that has little shading. This is by the PPL bridge on 423. This is where I recorded a high water temperature, July 2018 of 75°F.



A section of the Tobyhanna that has an excellent riparian buffer. Come summertime, the stream will be completely in shade

One example of a complex law is the current Pennsylvania Act 162. This law was enacted in October 2014 by the outgoing Pennsylvania Congress to reduce the restrictions on contractors who were working on properties that had a stream flowing through them. Before Act 162, a contractor had to maintain a 150 foot riparian buffer between his construction and the stream. Unfortunately, Act 162 reduced the 150 foot requirement, a number that was scientifically backed, to 50 ft – or less. After Act 162, contractors could reduce the buffer requirement but also had to account for stream designations. Act 162 added wording to protect important watersheds that had EQ and HV designations. EQ and HV streams are considered exceptional quality streams and the law is written to maintain that quality. Contractors most spend more time protecting these streams and the wetlands that are attached to them.

There are **serious** efforts by a number of environmentally responsible organizations to designate more streams as EV and HQ.

This is a bureaucratically complex effort since it must go through the DEP and meet a host of criteria. Groups like PennFuture want to protect the streams in Monroe County for future generations. It is much easier to prevent unscrupulous contractors from destroying a stream in the first place, than to try to repair the stream once the damage is done. EV and HQ designations offer additional protections that a stream with a lower designation would not have. TCTCWA supports these efforts and applaud those who are trying to do it. This is thankless work that has no financial benefit to the volunteers.

But there are efforts by contractors to prevent streams from getting high-quality designations. A lot of these battles are taking place in Monroe County since many of the streams have high-quality designations or proposals to make them high-quality.

The effort to keep Monroe County beautiful continues. Environmentally friendly groups continue to work for high-quality water and to protect the water we have, so future generations can enjoy it.



Blooming dogwood on the banks of the Tobyhanna.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT
YEAR END COMPARISON - 2018 VS 2017

	<u>Jan - Dec 18</u>	<u>Jan - Dec 17</u>	<u>\$ Change</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Ordinary Income/Expense				
Income				
4000 · Member Dues				
4002 · Single Membership	60.00	120.00	-60.00	-50.0%
4003 · Family Membership	300.00	210.00	90.00	42.86%
4004 · Corporate Membership	0.00	150.00	-150.00	-100.0%
4005 · Adopt-A-Stream	900.00	0.00	900.00	100.0%
4006 · Other Membership	<u>650.00</u>	<u>240.00</u>	<u>410.00</u>	<u>170.83%</u>
Total 4000 · Member Dues	1,910.00	720.00	1,190.00	165.28%
4100 · Grants				
4117 · Fidelity Grants	<u>1,250.00</u>	<u>250.00</u>	<u>1,000.00</u>	<u>400.0%</u>
Total 4100 · Grants	1,250.00	250.00	1,000.00	400.0%
4999 · Interest Income	<u>10.78</u>	<u>10.20</u>	<u>0.58</u>	<u>5.69%</u>
Total Income	3,170.78	980.20	2,190.58	223.48%
Expense				
6120 · Bank Service Charges	22.00	16.00	6.00	37.5%
6130 · Sec'y/Bkcp Expense	780.00	780.00	0.00	0.0%
6140 · Contributions				
6142 · Educational Expense	<u>398.24</u>	<u>508.43</u>	<u>-110.19</u>	<u>-21.67%</u>
Total 6140 · Contributions	398.24	508.43	-110.19	-21.67%
6160 · Dues and Subscriptions	30.00	30.00	0.00	0.0%
6180 · Insurance				
6185 · Liability Insurance	<u>323.00</u>	<u>323.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.0%</u>
Total 6180 · Insurance	323.00	323.00	0.00	0.0%
6250 · Postage and Delivery	116.58	91.63	24.95	27.23%
6260 · Printing and Reproduction	396.70	434.60	-37.90	-8.72%
6290 · Rent	507.20	507.00	0.20	0.04%
6340 · Telephone				
6341 · Voice Mail	<u>75.37</u>	<u>75.05</u>	<u>0.32</u>	<u>0.43%</u>
Total 6340 · Telephone	75.37	75.05	0.32	0.43%
6350 · Travel & Ent				
6360 · Entertainment	<u>65.64</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>65.64</u>	<u>100.0%</u>
Total 6350 · Travel & Ent	65.64	0.00	65.64	100.0%
6550 · Office Supplies	0.00	116.59	-116.59	-100.0%
6670 · Program Expense				
6672 · Stream Monitoring Expense	<u>31.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>31.00</u>	<u>100.0%</u>
Total 6670 · Program Expense	31.00	0.00	31.00	100.0%
6810 · Web Site	<u>184.87</u>	<u>139.50</u>	<u>45.37</u>	<u>32.52%</u>
Total Expense	<u>2,930.60</u>	<u>3,021.80</u>	<u>-91.20</u>	<u>-3.02%</u>
Net Ordinary Income	<u>240.18</u>	<u>-2,041.60</u>	<u>2,281.78</u>	<u>111.76%</u>
Net Income	<u>240.18</u>	<u>-2,041.60</u>	<u>2,281.78</u>	<u>111.76%</u>

MAJIS
WATERSHED AWARENESS MONTH

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