



CVC Annual Report – 2022

*Conserving and promoting natural and recreation resources of
the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin*

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Thaddeus Pajak – AmeriCorps Member, Stream Team Coordinator

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



Area Partners

Executive Director John Wenzel joined CVC in March, 2022. He made the rounds, introducing himself to the area watershed associations and reaffirming those partnerships. John also initiated discussions with several of the principal parties regarding water quality data in our region, and how to improve public accessibility.

Marketing

Joshua Byers of the Tribune Democrat dedicated one of his podcasts to the West Penn Trail. Josh met with Jack Maguire, Jack Maher, Jerry Seitz, and John Wenzel in Saltsburg to discuss the restoration of the old rail bridges and the trail itself. It can be found at:

https://www.tribdem.com/podcasts/west-penn-and-westmoreland-heritage-trails/audio_fbb89c58-35dc-11ed-b323-bf89e2cab7de.html

University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown marketing Professor Skip Glenn assigned some of his marketing students to examine our public face and submitted extensive suggestions. Their contributions will be incorporated into CVC's website.



Bird Trail

Several birding hotspots in the Laurel Highlands have been identified to form the basis of a West Penn Bird Trail. All are public lands except CVC's own Conemaugh Gap Gateway Park, which is open to the public. CVC is now working with potential funders and certain partners such as the National Aviary, Somerset County Conservancy, and Indiana County Parks to establish a chain of bird watching stations that will educate the public and attract visitors from outside the area.

Strategic Planning.

The Board engaged Rita Coleman-Graham, an experienced facilitator, to direct a Strategic Planning exercise regarding CVC's functions and priorities. This work will continue to mid-year 2023.

Gap Park

A struggling park on the outskirts of Johnstown in Lower Yoder Township received a shot in the arm this past fall. When not busy with the Stream Team, Thad Pajak removed weeds as tall as he is, revealing beautiful trees and shrubs that will welcome future visitors. The clean-up included building a 900 foot walking trail that provides a spectacular view of the Conemaugh River and bustling train tracks below. Future work on the park will include benches, wildflowers, and an overlook platform to take in the natural beauty and industrial history of the Conemaugh Valley.

STREAM TEAM

Water Monitoring

The Stream Team was busy throughout 2022, obtaining more than 400 water samples from more than 90 streams, AMD discharges, and treatment systems in the Kiski Conemaugh River Basin. Chaperoning the efforts forward is Thaddeus Pajak of AmeriCorps, who joined us in August. Thad carries forward an effort to review and prioritize the sites the Stream Team serves and to increase the capacity of the Team. In parallel with Thad's effort, Emma Ferlan joined us for several months to review the documentation for more than 100 Stream Team sites, confirming proper alignment with DEP records, flagging collecting points and ensuring correct GPS coordinates, and also providing photographs of the sites to orient new team members. This work will ensure that inevitable transitions among

personnel go smoothly in the future, and guarantee stability and high performance in this important task.



CVC participated in the recognition of the completion of renovations to the large Oven Run treatment systems, a project that is credited with great advances in restoring Stonycreek to a more healthy state. Four of the Oven Run treatment systems are regularly monitored by CVC as part of our stream programs. The recognition ceremony included Senator Robert Casey as the keynote speaker.



Macroinvertebrate ID workshops, September-October, 2022

With support from the Consortium for Scientific Assistance to Watersheds (C-SAW), CVC's Macroinvertebrate ID workshops were a big success. We organized a free, two-hour workshop, repeated over four weeks at three different locations (Greensburg, Indiana twice, and Cairnbrook). We served 44 people from 16 watershed groups and other conservation organizations. Students reported strong learning gains and the most common suggestion was more sessions.



UPPER BASIN ACTION

Inclined Plane Riverside Park

Planning, evaluation, and design work continued on the envisioned recreational enhancements to Johnstown's Inclined Plane hillside.

The hillside already features a growing mountain biking trail network, but CVC, the City of Johnstown, and Cambria County Transit Authority (CamTram) are working to develop an ADA-accessible river access, additional trail connections, and more. Design challenges and shifting funding options took center stage in 2022, as coordinators explored an opportunity to develop an Abandoned Mine Lands Economic Revitalization project grant. The DEP funding focuses on projects that mitigate abandoned mine impacts while advancing economic enhancement. The project would include reclamation of several abandoned-mine features on the hillside while also developing river access.

CVC also is continuing to assess the feasibility of developing a zip line and/or an adventure park on the hillside.

CVC acquired a two-acre parcel to assure trail access where the trail crosses this parcel. Plans include extending this trail as a loop of the developing September 11th National Memorial Trail.

Stonycreek-Quemahoning Initiative

The Quemahoning Trail system expanded with completion of 6.5 miles of additional mountain-bicycling trails. The first 17 miles of trails that encircle the entire dam opened in 2020 and were mostly for novice cyclists with some intermediate-level trail. The new trails are several loops designed mostly for experienced or intermediate cyclists.

SQI supported efforts to develop an ADA-accessible kayak launch at the Quemahoning Family Recreation Area. This project is being led by Open Waters for All in close cooperation with the Cambria Somerset Authority and its affiliated Cambria Somerset Conservancy. One grant was received and another was pending as this report was written, but partners hope to have the ADA kayak launch built in 2023.

Concert for Conservation

The first Concert for Conservation was held on September 17, 2022 at People's Natural Gas Park in Johnstown. The event featured Buffalo Rose. The Concert drew about 175 people and raised more than \$2,000 with half of the money used as seed money for next year's event and half going into a trust fund to maintain the AMD discharges that are being treated along the Stonycreek River.



STONY-KISKI-CONEMAUGH RIVERS SOJOURN

Sojourn Committee

Brenda Mahoney – Coordinator
Mike Burk – Chair
Rick Bloom
Clark Fisher
Emily Fisher
Margaret Golik
Laura Hawkins
Bryan Mahoney
Mike Mance
Mark Shank



It was “magic in the water” on Thursday, June 2-Sunday, June 5, while 49 paddlers join us for the 40-mile Sojourn – 20 paddlers were with us for all 4 days.

The event continued to draw attendees from neighboring states, including WV, VA, MD, NJ, NY, OH. One participant from New Jersey commented on the beauty of the river valley, indicating the recreation resource would be overrun with mansions where she comes from, limiting access and ruining the scenic beauty of the landscape.



Last year, the Sojourn drew new attendees from local communities that had never heard of the event. The committee encouraged them to recruit additional local participants to showcase this resource for the river town residents along the corridor. They were back this year with additional local participants, as promised. This new wave of locals is helping us connect local citizens with river stewardship work, which is a concern since all of the watershed associations in this area, and others, are aging and need new members.

Evaluations also reveal that our paddlers find this sojourn to be one of the best recreation values in the region, since registration includes shuttling, meals, paddling support, and camaraderie.

Sojourners continue to comment on the welcoming, friendly, casual nature of our guide boaters and team members, and how much that enhances their enjoyment of the experience.

Thanks to our sponsors Community Foundation for the Alleghenies, InFirst Bank, Gibson-Thomas Engineering, AmeriServ Financial Bank, Spangler Subaru, Western PA Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinic, Indiana County Tourist Bureau, Friends of Blairsville Communities, Indiana County Conservation District, Leonard S. Fiore, Inc., Berkebile Chiropractic. Sponsors keep our registration fees affordable and allowed the event to contribute more than \$4000 to CVC operations.

Save The Date for the 2023 SKC Sojourn -Thursday, June 1-Saturday, June 4



WEST PENN TRAIL

WPT Council Members

Jack Maguire – Trail Manager
Jerry Seitz – President
Cliff Wissinger – Vice-President
Jack Maher – Secretary-Treasurer
Damien Boudreaux
Bevan Day
Mike Keltz
Jack Ruebel
Bill Rodgers
Barry Tuscano
Kitty Tuscano

Mile Marker Sponsors

Nature's Way Market
The Lumber Store and More
Chan-Soon-Shiong Medical Center at Windber
W.N. Tuscano Agency

Value of Volunteer Time

Volunteers spent more than 429 hours in 2022 on routine mowing and trimming, clearing debris and clearing trees and drainages, major projects like resurfacing, and event planning and coordination for a value of more than \$12,848!

Thank you, volunteers! Your time and talent makes this community resource a special place for trail users!

Colcom Support

CVC received a generous grant from the Colcom Foundation for work on an extension of the trail.

Trail Volunteer Fund Repairs



Thanks to a grant from the Trail Volunteer Fund administered by the Pittsburgh Foundation, volunteers repaired and resurfaced two sections of trail: approximately 1.5 miles on the Mayer section between Auen Road and Tunnelton Road; and approximately 2 miles of the Kiski section, from Saltsburg to just past the Maguire bridge over Blackleggs Creek.

Six volunteers – Jerry Seitz, Jack Maguire, Jack Maher, Cliff Wissinger, Mike Keltz, Jack Ruebel - put in between 5 and 20 hours - a total of 70 man hours - to complete the resurfacing work, including light repairs, scraping some trail surfaces with a box blade, distribution and compression of rock dust. The tractor operator spent 15 hours preparing trail surface and clearing ditches or drainages. The work was done in late September and early October.

Due to the outstanding work of this crew, several comments were received during the 2022 Triathlon about the great condition of the trail, despite having heavy rains the day before.



Pollinator Paradise

If you frequent the Conemaugh River Lake section of the trail near Blairsville, this summer you may have noticed a new feature – but you might not have known it is a pollinator's paradise.

Dorothy Pierini-Rodgers continued her development and maintenance of a native planting site near the Q-Span bridge. The site grew from an original 58' x 20' space to 100' X 45', and expanded to 55' X 22' and 45' X 35' areas around nearby old stone pier. Among the many natives planted here are Black Eyed Susan, Common Milkweed, Butterfly Weed, Bee Balm, Ironweed, Russian Sage, and Coneflowers. The first year a Monarch cocoon produced a viable





butterfly. Planted around the stone wall were Foxglove, False Indigo - Blue and White, Royal Catchfly, Wild Bergamont, and more.

Mountain Mint, reputed to be one of the best pollinator plants, will be added in 2023. Plot volunteers hope to incorporate several native endangered and threatened plants, such as Green and Gold, as the site develops.

Be sure to spend some reflective time near this wonderful asset when you visit the trail.



West Penn Trail Triathlon



More than 140 participants enjoyed the trail, the river, and played in and around Saltsburg, PA on Saturday, October 8, 2022 during the boat-bike-run West Penn Trail Triathlon.

The event netted more than \$7300 - the second-highest financial performance in the decade-long history of the event! - to support the maintenance work of our volunteers.

Many thanks to our partners and sponsors: Tres Rios Sports, Steel City Undercoating, TMR Roofing, Nature's Way Market, Deglau Family Chiropractic, Shelly Drilling, Hammer

Nutrition, Kiski Flats Keepers, S&T Bank, Dr. John Tollari, Chambois Butt'r, Saltsburg Volunteer Fire Department, US Army Corps of Engineers, Two Dam Kayak Rentals, Saltsburg Kayak and Canoe



Outfitters, Lifestat Ambulance Service, Saltsburg Borough, Tunnelton Volunteer Fire Department, Four Seasons Brewing, Culligan Water.

We deeply appreciate the leadership of Mike Keltz, who took over coordinating responsibilities from event founders Barry and Kitty Tuscano in 2022. Barry, Kitty, Mike – thank you for bringing such a professional, organized, and exciting event to West Penn Trail.

Save The Date for the 2023 Triathlon – Saturday, October 14



MEMBERS, DONORS, and SPONSORS

The Conemaugh Valley Conservancy expresses our sincere appreciation for members, donors, and sponsors who support our work. Your investment in our mission helps us enhance the quality of life in the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin.

Barry Adams	Eden Hall Foundation
AmazonSmile	David & Carol Eibling
Ameriserv Financial	Friends of David & Carol Eibling
Armstrong Conservation District	William Elwell
Michele Belak	Donna Faff
Berkebile Chiropractic	Joy Fairbanks
Douglas Beri, Jr	Anne & George Fattman
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Blairsville Community Development Authority	Flat Tire
Blairsville Rotary	Friends of Blairsville Communities
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Damien Boudreaux	Nathan Gaston
Jim Brett	Gregory Gdula
Kathleen Case Burk & Michael Burk	Gibson-Thomas Engineering
Richard Burkert	Paul & Barbara Godish
Robert Callahan	Beth Good
Cambria & Indiana Trail Council	Catherine Gowen
Christine Casey	Dr. Brian & Hazel Gunnlaugson
Susan Chahoy	Linda Gwinn
Chan-Soon-Shiong Medical Center at Windber	Robert Hainan
Brad Clemenson	HairStory
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Thomas DeStefano	Indiana County Conservation District
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Western PA Sports Medicine & Rehabilitation Clinic
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FINANCIALS



WAYS TO GIVE

Like what you've read here? Join us! There are many ways to support our conservation and recreation work – membership, donations, event sponsorship, contribution toward the endowment, and more. For more information on any of the support options or to donate on-line, visit www.conemaughvalleyconservancy.com

The official registration and financial information of the Conemaugh Valley Conservancy may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Endowment

The Community Foundation for the Alleghenies houses an endowment for longer-term financial security for Conemaugh Valley Conservancy initiatives. The endowment has primarily been built through Nature's Way Market's participation in the 1% for the Planet program. The CVC endowment currently exceeds \$300,000. The Board of Directors welcomes your participation.

CVC encourages Planned or Major Gifts including Bequests, Gifts of Retirement Funds, Charitable Gift Annuities, and Gifts of Life Insurance Policies. Any planned gift should start with a discussion with your financial advisor, who can assist you in finding the best tool to meet your charitable goals. For more information, or to contribute to the endowment, contact Mike Kane at the Community Foundation at mkane@cfalleghenies.org or visit www.cfalleghenies.org

Become a member!

You can become a member on-line, or select your membership level below and return this form to CVC / P.O. Box 218 / Johnstown PA / 15907-0218.

Name _____ Email _____ Phone _____

Address _____

☐ \$500 Champion ☐ \$250 Patron ☐ \$100 Sponsor ☐ \$50 Supporter ☐ \$25 Individual

☐ Other _____

Please direct my gift to _____ (CVC program or project)



Financial support for this project is provided by BHE and GT&S which is dedicated to the economic, physical, and social health of the communities served by BHE GT&S companies.

This grant program was administered by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in a commitment to its core mission of conserving Pennsylvania's diverse ecosystems through science-based strategy, leadership and collaboration.

www.conemaughvalleyconservancy.org