

OUR OPINION

Cleaning Toby's Creek can be just the beginning

Thousands of motorists drive alongside it every day, but hardly notice it. It contains and supports a wide variety of plant and animal life. It has had an impact on the Back Mountain across the decades. Yet almost no one pays attention to Toby's Creek, except when it floods. That may be about to change, starting next Saturday.

The Wyoming Valley Watershed Coalition has targeted a stretch of Toby's Creek in Dallas Borough for inclusion in the statewide "Great Pennsylvania Cleanup" program. With encouragement and support from many other organizations and individuals, the coalition has organized a cleanup from 8 a.m. to 12 noon for the section of the stream that parallels Lake Street. Volunteers will meet at the Commonwealth Telephone parking lot off Lake Street, and anyone with an interest in improving the region's environment is welcome to join in. In addition to picking up debris, participants will plant shrubs that will stabilize the stream bank.

The Dallas visioning committee, in cooperation with the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association, plans to install a "greenway" walking trail in the area, and the cleanup will be the first step toward integrating this natural asset into the community. We hope it will also be only the beginning of a movement to restore and reveal the beauty that is now hidden behind tangles of overgrown brush, under layers of dead leaves and that is dotted with thoughtlessly discarded trash.

As it weaves its way down to the Susquehanna River, Toby's Creek has powered mills, irrigated fields and — in its meaner moments — destroyed homes and roadways. We have tamed it a good deal, but we have also neglected and abused it, with the result that a precious resource is regarded as little more than an inconvenience. Perhaps Saturday's cleanup will begin the process of establishing the stream as the focus of a newfound appreciation for the environmental wonder that it always has been, and — with support from those of us who could enjoy its charms — will be a jumping off point for even more positive developments in the future.

Don't penalize volunteers for their commitment

It appears the Dallas School District is ready to move ahead with a plan to require criminal background checks on volunteers. As disheartening as that step may sound, it probably is prudent given heightened concern about abuse and the ease with which a lawsuit might be filed even in the absence of guilt.

One troublesome aspect of the proposal as described is that volunteers will be asked to pay the \$40 cost of screening. When originally discussed in January, the fee was pegged at \$20. Even at that, it is likely some willing helpers will be discouraged from signing on for duty, either out of principle or due to the expense. In that case, the district will lose far more value than would be represented by the cost of paying for all clearances.

Asking volunteers to pay for these clearances is not the same as asking a paid vendor to pick up the tab for review of its employees. In that case, the company is making a profit on its services and it's almost certain the cost is built into its pricing. Volunteers are different; not only do they offer freely of their time and talent, it's not unusual for them to bring along needed supplies at their own expense. In the end, the savings to the district realized by having volunteers pay for their clearances — something in the range of \$2,000 a year — is inconsequential compared to the value volunteers deliver.

And here's one other suggestion; if a potential volunteer is found to have an unsavory background, don't keep it a secret. While it might be unethical — even illegal — to name names, the district should inform the public how many volunteers are disqualified and for what reasons. That will prove the system is working and is worth the effort and expense. Or maybe not, in which case it can be safely eliminated after a sufficient trial period.

Letters, columns and editorials

Editorials, which are the opinion of the management of The Post, appear on the editorial page and are written by the editor unless otherwise indicated. Any artwork represents the opinion of the cartoonist, and columns are the opinion of the author.

Letters to the editor are welcome and will be published, subject to the following guidelines:

- Letters should not exceed 500 words.
- No writer may have more than one letter addressing the same topic published during a 30-day period, except as a reply to another letter.
- Letters must be signed and include the writer's home town and a telephone number for verification.
- Names will be withheld only if there exists a clear threat to the writer.
- The Post retains the right to accept or reject any letter, and to edit letters for grammar and spelling, as well as to eliminate any libel, slander or objectionable wording.

In addition to letters, we welcome longer pieces that may run as columns.



Study in color and contrast. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

GUEST COLUMN

IMAP identifies important mammal habitat

By ELIZABETH WEBSTER

Pennsylvania's two-year-old wildlife conservation program, the Important Mammals Areas Project (IMAP) is the first of its kind in the world. Modeled after the Important Bird Areas Project, IMAP seeks to identify conservation sites for threatened, endangered, and vulnerable mammals, as well as sites that host a diversity of mammals or that are important for public education about mammals. IMAP receives most of its funding through the State Wildlife Grants program administered by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

The program is currently in the process of delineating boundaries around the 45 designated sites, which include the Northern Allegheny Plateau, Chestnut Ridge and Laurel Ridge, the Wyoming State Forest, and the Delaware State Forest among others.

Part of IMAP's selection criteria is the area's capacity to

provide habitat for "species of special concern." However, another important goal of the project is to select sites that are important for educating the public about mammals; for example, the Northern Allegheny Plateau IMA includes the Benezette Elk Viewing Area, which provides a unique opportunity for visitors to observe elk in their natural habitat.

While the majority of the project areas are publicly owned, areas like the Wyoming State Forest, IMA may encompass both public and private tracts. Project Coordinator, Alana Hartman emphasizes that IMAP is a non-regulatory, voluntary program. "Every landowner should know that nothing would be imposed on them, whether they want to be part of the project or not."

According to Project Director Alicia Linzey, only nine of the 45 Important Mammal Areas are wholly privately owned, and of those nine, three are

owned by conservancies. Hartman compares the IMAP conservation plans to the wildlife objectives for a forest stewardship plan; both outline management practices to sustain desired species, for example, planting fruit trees, shrubs, and vines, and creating brush piles to provide winter cover for rabbits and other small mammals. She says, "Each landowner would be their own steward."

"A lot of the species that are in trouble are the relatively small mammals, such as bats, and the shrews and rodents," says Linzey. "You might argue that we've lost the big ones already: wolves, bison, moose, and mountain lions. The small ones are especially vulnerable because they are very place-based, and require specific habitats. Water shrews, for example, live in cold, rocky streams and eat insects. Any land-use practice that results in an increase in water temperature or stream sedimentation

will compromise the habitat. When this happens, they have nowhere to go."

The IMAP program does not plan to consult with individual private landowners, or to offer landowners financial support for conservation projects. However, by 2005 they hope to be able to assist private landowners in finding government and private funding sources, says Rick Spencer, Mid-Atlantic Regional Organizer for the National Wildlife Federation. According to Spencer, one of the goals of IMAP is "helping landowners do the right thing, and helping them tap into funding from federal and state programs."

To learn more about IMAP or to find out if your land falls within a designated Important Mammal Area, visit the Pennsylvania Wildlife Federation web site at www.pawildlife.org/imap.htm or call the IMAP office at 717-232-3480.

70 Years Ago
April 20, 1934

FATHER O'LEARY TO BE WELCOMED HOME

Rev. J. J. O'Leary, pastor of St. Therese's Church in Shavertown, will return from Miami, Florida early next month. He left because of ill-health; he is reportedly feeling better.

A Lake Township man has been jailed for breaking quarantine. Leroy Hunter was committed to Luzerne County Prison.

Three cases of scarlet fever at his home had been reported. Elmer Kerr, district

ONLY YESTERDAY

health officer said this week that strict observance of all quarantines will be demanded.

60 Years Ago
April 21, 1944

LOCAL MAN KILLED IN ACTION AT ANZIO

Mr. and Mrs. Elmer D. Roderick of Centermoreland received delayed word — via telegram — that their son, T/Sgt. Robert M. Roderick,

was killed in action in Italy March 1.

Rev. Clayton Hoag of Trucksville United Methodist will be replaced by former Endicott, N.Y. pastor. The decision was made at the recent Wyoming Conference meeting.

Items that could be purchased at the local ACME Market: bread, big loaf, 9¢; grapefruit, 3 for 23¢; Ivory soap, 3 large cakes, 29¢.

50 Years Ago
April 16, 1954

STERLING COWS ARE BIG PRODUCERS

Two Guernsey cows owned by Andrew J. Sordoni's Sterling Farm completed Advanced Registry testing supervised by Penn State University. Milked three times daily, Sterling Joyce produced 11,120 pounds of milk and 541 pounds of butterfat over 10 months. Sterling Belinda produced 12,646 pounds of milk and 575 pounds of butterfat.

Connecticut tobacco camps are signing up girls and boys for summer break. Mrs. Raymond Garinger, Harveys Lake, who annually oversees one of the dormitories, said girls of 16 or over may work overtime while those under 16 work

eight-hour days. Day-light saving means campers will enjoy long evenings for recreation but also earn substantial pay.

40 Years Ago
April 16, 1964

FACES CHANGING ON MAIN STREET

More changes are expected on Main Street in Dallas. Boyd R. White will expand his store to include the present Dallas-Shavertown Water Company office. In the mean time, the water company will move into the present quarters of Mrs. Lettie C. Culver's "Young Men's Shop" at 42 Main Street.

30 Years Ago
April 18, 1974

FISHERMAN FLOCK TO CREEKS

Thousands of fisherman lined Back Mountain lakes and streams Saturday for the first day of trout season.

U. S. Air Force Sgt. Thomas W. Rowett, son of Margaret Rowett, 95 Columbia Ave., Dallas, will participate in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization 25th anniversary observances this month.

Items that could be purchased at Back Mountain Acme Markets: pot roast, 79¢ per pound; Ideal coffee, one can, 79¢; sugar, 5-pound bag, 89¢.

20 Years Ago
April 18, 1984

DALLAS HIGH BAND GOES TO NASHVILLE

The Dallas High School Band, under the direction of David Benn, will go to Nashville, Tennessee, to compete in the "World of Music Festival" to be held later in month.

Shavertown United Methodist was the setting for the recent marriage of Estella J. Parker, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Parker, Sr., of Shavertown, and Attorney Stephen B. Killian, son of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen F. Killian of Nanticoke.

Prince of Peace will hold its 32nd annual Antique Show and Sale May 1.

THE POST

TIMES•LEADER Community Newspaper Group

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2004 Dallas Harvest Festival meeting

There will be a meeting of the 2004 Dallas Harvest Festival Committee on Wed., April 28, starting at 7 p.m., at the Dallas Borough Municipal Building, Main St., Dallas.

This year's event will incorporate the 125th anniversary of Dallas Borough.

Volunteers and additional task force members are needed. Ques-

tions can be directed to the Dallas Borough Administrative Office at 675-1389.

Access the Dallas Borough Calendar on-line, at www.dallasborough.org, for upcoming community events and future meetings. Any community organization scheduling a future event may also contact the Dallas Borough Administrative Office.

Fresh Air Fund seeks host families

Since 1877, New York City children growing up in low-income neighborhoods have experienced the joys of summer in suburban and small-town communities through The Fresh Air Fund's Friendly Town Program. By welcoming visitors into their homes during the summer, host families give Fresh Air children a break from the sometimes dangerous, hot and crowded city streets.

For more information on hosting a Fresh Air child, contact Denise Moskaluk at 674-3707 or The Fresh Air Fund at (800) 367-0003, or visit The Fund's Web site at www.freshair.org.