

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy  
French Creek Steering Committee  
Meeting Notes  
June 5, 2001 – 11 A.M.  
Edinboro University, Edinboro

Attendees: Todd Sampsell, Charles Bier – WPC; Brian Pilarcik – Crawford Co. Conservation District; Dave Skellie – Erie Co. Dept. of Planning; Jeff Lang – Conneaut Lake/French Creek Valley Conservancy; Cindy Smith – PA DOT; Jim Mondock – Mercer Co. Conservation District; Brian Zimmerman, Hank Lawrence – Edinboro University; Jess Sunder – Venango Co. Conservation District

Objectives: The purpose of this meeting was to continue to develop specific recommendations to address perceived threats in the watershed. From those specific recommendations, the next step was to define and develop specific management options and action plans for organizations, municipalities, agencies, and others in the watershed to adopt and carry out.

Results: Todd Sampsell began with a summary of findings from the May 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting. This led to a short discussion about point source pollution and the need for the plan to present discharge info. and a plan to identify potential dischargers that aren't permitted.

An excellent discussion ensued for approximately 4.5 hours. The committee finished proposing specific recommendations to address threats in the watershed.

The committee decided that the plan should have a 3-year timeframe with the idea of re-evaluating and revising the plan at that time.

The committee listed the top priority action plans/management options for protection of land, water, biological, and cultural resources to be accomplished within the 3 years following the completion of the plan.

The committee decided on other important action plans, which address:

- 1) expanded educational programs with increased coordination between organizations currently doing education in the watershed
- 2) plan should present a reference tool for people to easily determine what topics require education, what are the issues about the topics that should be emphasized in educational programs, and who is the target of those educational programs

In closing the discussion, the committee decided to continue meeting, potentially quarterly, and to include members of sub-watersheds groups

that are recommended to be formed in the plan. This group will meet to discuss success and failures as the recommendations in the plan are implemented. Lastly, it was determined that periodic forums should be held throughout the watershed to encourage targeted groups (i.e. municipal officials, scientists, educators, landowners, etc.) to come together for facilitated discussions about issues they face in the watershed.

The following is a summary of the thoughts discussed at the June 5<sup>th</sup> meeting. For each threat, specific recommendations are listed and for resources, management options/action plans are prioritized for completion in 3 years following completion of the plan.

### Alterations of Hydrology

- In the plan, expand on how dams not only increase scour but also prevent natural flooding and natural erosion/deposition patterns
- Agencies should consider controlled flooding
- Agencies should look at how releases are managed
- Develop a watershed budget/hydrologic model which takes into account stormwater
  - o Key partners – USGS & team of university researchers
  - o Start w/ theoretical model and build onto by monitoring and collecting info.
- Check on new GIS being developed for the purpose of stream reach evaluation
  - o May be a tool the conservation districts utilize
- Address the many agricultural drainage tiles in the watershed
- Encourage counties to develop stormwater management plans and municipalities to adopt stormwater development ordinances
- Promote BMPs for urban development (both new development and retrofitted BMPs)
- Retrofit projects in established urban areas
- Promote urban reforestation

### Water Withdrawals

- Encourage better monitoring/permitting of individuals withdrawing
- Monitoring should be designed to provide early warning of impacts to watershed
- Consider revising state regulations with PA DEP as the authority
- Tie community withdrawals into an overall hydrologic model
- Determine adequacy of well info. and permitting for residential wells
- Conduct meeting of withdrawers to coordinate withdrawals
- Encourage ag operations to make reservoirs for withdrawals, identify funding to help

## Channel/Streambank Modifications

- Promote more incentive programs for streambank fencing and riparian buffer/streambank restoration
- Educate landowners to benefits to both environment and landowner for streambank protection
- Educate landowners on resources/agencies available to help
- Re-establish natural channel morphology at bridges (through engineering)
- Educate landowners that modifications of natural streambed/banks is not desirable
- Educate landowners/loggers that cutting trees off streambank is not beneficial to stream
- Education should be geared towards the idea that FC is dynamic and that symptoms are too often addressed w/o addressing the problems (i.e. hydrologic alterations can increase flows, which result in increased erosion – fixing the erosion is not addressing the causes)
- Education has to include the “big” picture of how the watershed works (need hydrologic model)

## Agriculture/Livestock

- Increase streambank fencing
- Sub-watershed associations should go after funding to help local landowners
- Promote agricultural BMPs and NMPs
- Promote leaving riparian buffers between crops and streams

## Logging

- Wetland (and vernal pool) protection should be a priority
- Stricter enforcement of E&S plans is needed; may require modifications of regulations
- Introduce bonds as is used in mining
- Require logging permits
- Promote lobbying for state regulations requiring sustainable forestry practices

## Mineral Extraction

- Identify critical properties that are likely to be mined and promote easements
  - o Should be prioritized based on impacts to watershed
- Promote volunteer monitors for mine effluents
- Mandatory setback from wetlands/waterways for drilling rigs

## Transportation Corridors

- Make sure emergency response is adequate for stream protection (need knowledge of train/truck cargo)
- County and PA DEP emergency response education for dealing with stream protection (not just public health)

## Recreation

- Address ATV usage
  - o Promote regulations for stream crossings (fines for non-compliance)
  - o Promote designated trails in less sensitive areas
  - o Increase education requirements for ATV riders
- Promote rail/trail development along stream
- Access areas must be located in appropriate areas based on ecological research
- Increase education about invasive species transportation
- Promote catch and release
- Creel limits and sizes should be customized to French Creek
- Increase and enforce regulations for taking of baitfish
- Increase education about the impacts of powerboating and environmental degradation
- Develop guidelines for riparian development for cabins or trails

## Urbanization

- Promote setback regulations for development
- Development plans should maximize green space
- Restore bank and riparian habitats in urban areas
- Focus on urban streams as community assets (park land)
- Target growth areas with state funds
- Conduct long range planning
- Promote assistance to municipalities for zoning issues

## Landfills

- Need to address small, old, individual, or abandoned municipal dumps
- Promote volunteer inventory of sites coupled with water quality monitoring
- Provide incentives and education to landowners for dump clean-up
- Promote recycling and household hazardous waste management

## **Management Options/Plan of Action**

- 3-year review (initially)

- Prioritized
- Municipality must nominate plan to state registry

#### Land Resources

- 1) Form network of sub-watershed associations or citizen action committees to implement help implement plan recommendations
- 2) Promote county and municipal land use comprehensive plans, zoning, and subdivision regulations (existing plans should be updated to incorporate Smart Growth concepts)
  - a. Utilize conservation plan in process
  - b. Stress environmental protection in process
  - c. Stress farmland preservation
- 3) Identify key riparian buffer areas
  - a. Identify where degraded
  - b. Increase promotion of riparian restoration
- 4) Develop conservation easement program
- 5) Summarize, disseminate, and encourage BMP implementation for:
  - a. Agriculture
  - b. Logging
  - c. Urban areas
  - d. Development

#### Water Resources

- 1) Assess physical stream conditions
  - a. Visual assessment of stream channel and riparian areas
  - b. Biological assessment for water quality (watershed wide)
  - c. Water quality assessment (nutrient budget)
- 2) Develop hydrologic model/water budget
  - a. Include impacts from low-flow withdrawals
- 3) Begin development and implementation of comprehensive systematic water quality monitoring plan
- 4) Encourage watershed stormwater management plan and municipal stormwater regulations
- 5) Assess impacts to biota during base or lower flows with potential exacerbation from withdrawals
- 6) Apply sub-watershed approach
- 7) Assess wetland resources to allow monitoring and protection

#### Biological Resources

- 1) Complete CNH Inventories
  - a. County-wide or just watershed
  - b. Update Erie Co. inventory

- 2) Complete watershed-wide species of concern and natural communities assessments
  - a. Instream habitat
  - b. Wetland habitat
- 3) Inventory and monitor and plan for control or removal of invasive species
  - a. Zebra mussel
  - b. Purple loosestrife
  - c. Gobie
  - d. Hogweed
  - e. Eurasian milfoil
  - f. Hybrid cattail
  - g. Phragmites
  - h. Japanese knotweed
- 4) Monitor select endangered species
  - a. Clubshell
  - b. Northern riffleshell
  - c. Others to be identified or already known
- 5) Monitor stream community
  - a. Identify appropriate indicator organisms/protocols for monitoring FC community health
  - b. Mussels, insects, fish at select locations
  - c. Plankton might be appropriate indicator to monitor

#### Cultural Resources

- 1) Inventory and map existing public lands and FC access points
- 2) Assess impacts and develop watershed recreation plan to include:
  - a. ATV usage
  - b. Watertrail feasibility
  - c. Railtrail feasibility
  - d. Appropriate access areas
  - e. Fishing regulations or recommendations customized to FC
  - f. Greenway corridor identification

#### Other Action Plans

- 1) Expanded educational program
  - a. Develop brochures with “top 10” lists of ways to protect FC targeted to different audiences
  - b. Increased coordination and cooperation of existing educational programs (FCP, WPC, Creek Connections, Universities, Glinodo, Cons. Districts, PFBC, DCNR, PGC, Asbury Woods)
- 2) Summarize public educational needs as identified throughout the plan and present within plan as a tool that would identify topics for education, issues regarding topics that need to be addressed in education, and targeted audiences for education

**Future Considerations by Committee:**

- 1) French Creek Steering Committee will include representative of each sub-watershed association and will meet periodically after plan is produced and implemented to discuss successes and failures and to review and update plan.
- 2) French Creek Steering Committee should consider holding periodic forums throughout watershed to target specific groups to come together and discuss watershed issues.