

THE CATALYST

SLIPPERY ROCK WATERSHED COALITION MONTHLY ACTIVITIES UPDATE

THIS MONTH'S MEETING: 7 pm on Thursday 3/8/12 at Jennings Environmental Education Center, pizza and pop provided. 2/9/12 meeting attendance: P. Barrett, T. Baumgandner, J. Belgraden, J. Bogush, L. Campbell, V. Cank, D. Carney, C. Denholm, R. Donlan, M. Dunn, E. Hartmann, V. Kefeli, B. Lubold, A. Miller, A. Richards, S. Smith, N. Turner, J. Vogt

Cherry Pie Hike — Worth Braving the Cold!

To commemorate George Washington's birthday, the **Butler Chapter of the North Country Trail Association** (NCTA), the **Butler Outdoor Club**, and the **Slippery Rock University History Department** hosted the annual Cherry Pie Hike on Saturday, February 25. Over 100 individuals braved a windy and snowy day with temperatures not quite thirty degrees to enjoy an interesting history lesson, hike the trails neighboring where George Washington once tread, and, of course, eat some delicious cherry pie!

Participants met at the **Old Stone House** (a valuable asset to our community highlighted in the Slippery Rock Creek Watershed Conservation Plan!) which is a reconstructed 1822 inn, tavern, and stagecoach stop at the intersection of Route 8 and Route 173. Sessions were held at 9 AM, 11 AM, and 1 PM, with SRWC participants **Shaun and Melissa Busler** attending the last session. **John Stehle**, President, Butler Chapter of the NCTA, welcomed the hikers and made opening remarks. **Dr. Aaron Cowan**, assistant professor of history at Slippery Rock University, and one of his

students, **Joe Tesone**, shared their knowledge of the Old Stone House and the area's local history to the crowds gathered for the hike. It was interesting to learn the reason why the Old Stone House is not on the National Register of Historic Places. By 1870, the house was no longer used as a stopping place for stagecoach travelers. The last occupants abandoned the house in 1918 and it fell into disrepair. In 1963, the Western PA Conservancy began restoration, and, because the architect who restored the structure did so with a shift of 15 degrees to one side to make the house more aesthetically pleasing, the building in its entirety is not in its exact original location—thus disqualifying it from national historic landmark status.

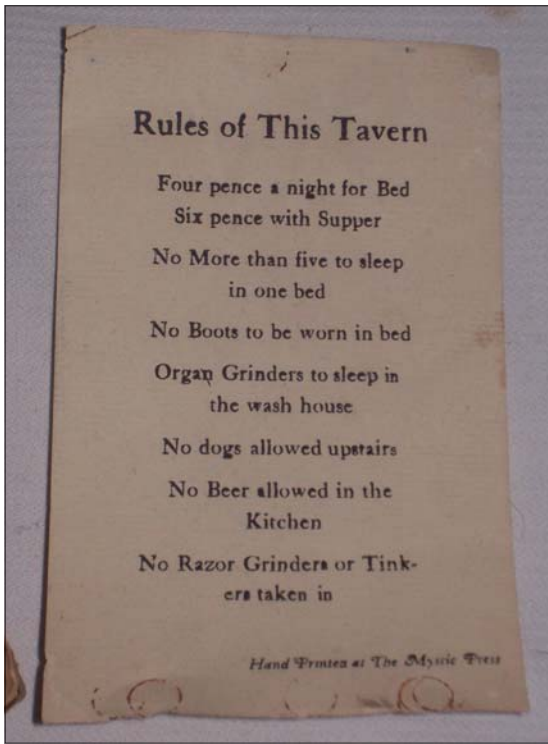
It was also interesting to learn about stagecoach travel, when during the 1820s approximately 90-95% of the travelers were men because travel was not something people desired to do! It would take two days to travel from Pittsburgh to Erie by stagecoach. Stopping overnight at an inn could mean sleeping in a bug-infested bed, with ropes rather than box springs, with up to 4 other men you had never met before (none of whom likely had bathed in days). The Old Stone House offered fireplaces in the guest rooms, but firewood was not included in the

price of lodging—it cost extra! One of the most intriguing tales told by Joe was about an 1880s counterfeiting operation that was run right out of the Old Stone House. Counterfeiters made fake silver coins out of tin and lead. As the story goes, federal grand marshals chased the crooks into Ohio, where they were eventually apprehended, and what is exciting is that several of the counterfeit coins have been recovered!!! Furthermore, a new archaeological excavation behind the Old Stone House, believed to be in the area of the old privy, holds promise of unearthing even more artifacts.

Following the history presentation, participants had the chance to explore the upper floor of the house, which featured several interesting displays of 18th and 19th century artifacts. Then it was time to hike! Many people chose the "short" 1-mile hike route, which was led by **Jennings Environmental Education Center's Wil Taylor**. Wil's interpretive hike involved seeing the landscape as George Washington may have seen it in terms of resources - forest, wildlife (specifically beaver), and how the glacial history impacted these resources. Wil talked primarily about Washington's walk from Virginia to Fort Le Bouff, the French and Indian War, and the prairie. His group hiked through the prairie and looped through the woods and along Big Run. In fact, Wil enjoyed the hike so much, he led it three times! Shaun and Melissa were in a group of a dozen folks who opted for the "long" 2-hour hike on the North Country Trail, which is approximately in the area of the old Venango Trail travelled by George Washington and Christopher Gist in 1753. The hikers enjoyed the light snow and pine tree buffer from the wind as they wound their way up and down the trail to an old spoil pile from long-past surface coal mining. Much conversation focused on the topography of the landscape and its mining history. An interesting cardboard-tarred chute for drainage from 1950s mine reclamation marked the turnaround point for the hikers.

Thanks goes out to the **North Country Brewing Co.** for donating the yummy cherry pie, coffee, tea, and water! If you missed this year's Cherry Pie Hike, be sure to sign up for next year!





The Old Stone House museum is run with care by Slippery Rock University. Many 18th and 19th century artifacts, like those pictured here, are on display in the building, which hosted the annual Cherry Pie Hike on Feb. 25. (See article on front page.)

2012 Butler County Hazardous Waste and Electronics Collection Days Announced

The first of several hazardous waste and electronics collection days will take place for Butler County and area residents on **Saturday, March 17, 2012**. Drop-off times are *by appointment only* and nominal fees apply. Pre-registration is required by calling the contractor, ECS & R (Environmental Coordination Services & Recycling) at **1-866-815-0016**. The collection location is 129 Ash Stop Road, Evans City, PA 16033 (the corner of Ash Stop Road and Route 68, across from the Forward Township Building). Collection days are open to all area residents regardless of county of residence. So if you have been wondering what to do with that outdated computer, broken VCR, old paint, etc. look no further! The following items will be accepted:

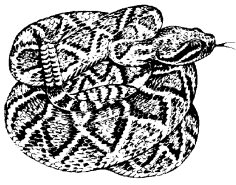
Household Chemicals (HHW) Accepted:

- Cleaning Products**
- Pesticides**
- Batteries**
- Automotive Products**
- Flammable Products**
- Fluorescent Bulbs & CFL's**
- Lawn & Garden**
- Pool Chemicals**
- Aerosols**
- Chemicals**
- Mercury Thermostats**
- Propane Cylinders**
- Paint & Paint Products**

Consumer Electronics (E-Waste) Accepted:

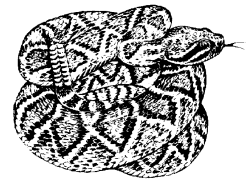
- Televisions**
- Stereos / Tape Players**
- Laptop Computers**
- Computers, Printers & Phone Systems**
- VHS & Cassette Tapes**
- Peripherals**
- Mobile Phones**
- CD's, DVD's, etc.**
- CD Players**
- Fax Machines**
- VCR's**

If you can't make the March 17 collection date, check out the remaining collection dates for 2012: April 14, May 19, June 9, July 21, August 4 and 18, September 1 and 15, and October 20. This program is made possible by the **Board of Butler County Commissioners** and by grant funding from the **Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection**. Thanks to **Sheryl Kelly**, Environmental Specialist and Recycling & Waste Management Coordinator for the Butler County Dept. of Recycling & Waste Management, for the recycling and collection information (skelly@co.butler.pa.us).



The KIDS Catalyst

SLIPPERY ROCK WATERSHED COALITION FUN ACTIVITY

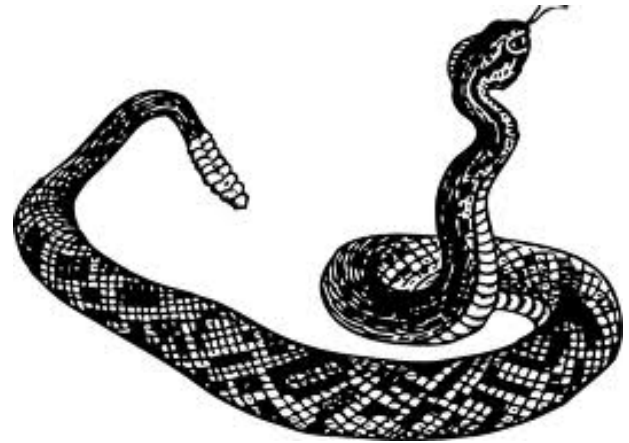


Test Your Rattlesnake I.Q.

A herpetologist is a scientist who studies reptiles like snakes. A herpetologist will tell you to be careful around places where rattlesnakes might live, but you don't need to be afraid of them. They will leave you alone if you leave them alone. Many rattlesnakes are able to strike out at distances that are two-thirds their body length. Rattlesnake venom has the potential to cause a fatal injury, but antivenin given quickly reduces the death rate to less than 4%. See if you can call yourself a junior herpetologist by taking the quiz below about rattlesnakes. Write true or false after each statement. When you're all done, check your answers at the bottom of the page (upside down). If you've missed 2 or less, you're a pro! If you miss 3 or 4, you're on the right track. If you miss 5 or more, keep on studying! If you mail us your completed paper, we'll send you a free gift certificate!

True or False?

1. Rattlesnakes hibernate underground throughout the winter. _____
2. Rattlesnakes chew their food before swallowing. _____
3. Rattlesnakes lay eggs. _____
4. Rattlesnakes smell with their tongues. _____
5. Rattlesnakes are mammals. _____
6. Snake skin is slimy and wet. _____
7. Rattlesnakes are herbivores (plant-eaters). _____
8. Snakes shed their skin in one piece. _____
9. Rattlesnakes bite only as a last resort. _____
10. Snakes "hear" by feeling vibrations through their jawbone. _____
11. Snakes are covered in scales that feel like our fingernails. _____
12. A rattlesnake's venom helps them to digest their prey. _____



Name _____ Age _____

Address _____



Slippery Rock Watershed Coalition c/o Stream Restoration Incorporated
A PA Non-Profit Organization
434 Spring Street Ext.
Mars, PA 16046

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Dr. Dean DeNicola Presents Long-Term Stream Study at February SRWC Meeting

At the February 8th SRWC monthly meeting, **Dr. Dean DeNicola, Biologist, Slippery Rock University** presented the findings of **research conducted with approximately 30+ students from 1995-2007**. The presentation focused on the changes in stream chemistry as it related to the watershed restoration effort and the associated changes in benthic algae which are used as indicators of water quality conditions. Stream sampling was conducted at 4 locations below passive treatment systems, 1 AMD impacted site with no treatment, and 2 non-AMD impacted streams used as good quality reference streams. The objective was to determine if periphyton communities (the mixture of algae, bacteria, microbes, etc. living on the rocks and other surfaces within a stream) have responded to water quality improvements by comparing long-term trends in streams below passive treatment systems to trends in streams impacted by untreated AMD and the 2 non-impacted reference streams. If the stream is recovering, there should be a noticeable trend over time where the populations within these communities would move from more acid-tolerant organisms to the circumneutral organisms that were living in the reference streams.

Results indicated that diatom species richness significantly increased in streams below 2 of the 4 treated sites, with no increase at reference or untreated sites. An ordination of communities indicated that temporal trends in diatom species composition at the 2 low-order treated sites became progressively more similar to communities at the low-order reference site (site not impacted by abandoned mines). This change was associated with a decrease in acid-tolerant taxa and an increase in circumneutral taxa. The percentage of circumneutral diatom taxa also increased at the 2 high-order treated sites, although those communities remained quite different in composition from the large-order reference community throughout the study. In summary, the results of the study indicated that the restoration effort has resulted in an appreciable but incomplete recovery of the periphyton communities in the watershed. The study also indicates that the changes at the treated sites were mostly related to increases in pH and alkalinity. It is unclear as to whether these communities will further improve over time or whether additional restoration activities are needed. [One thought is that time may be needed for the iron coating to be "washed off" of the rocks in the stream before a more complete restoration of the periphyton community.]

Interestingly, even though there have been significant watershed restoration efforts throughout Pennsylvania, according to Dr. DeNicola there have been very few published studies that have used a consistent, long-term monitoring program to assess biological recovery in watershed-scale projects. Assessing the effectiveness of large-scale, stream restoration is improved by long-term monitoring at the correct spatial/temporal scale, controlling for natural variability by using reference sites, choosing sensitive metrics, and examining successional pathways.

One interesting side note is that Dr. DeNicola referenced a paper written in **1909 by A.E. Ortmann entitled "The Destruction of the Fresh-Water Fauna in Western Pennsylvania"** which describes impacts to aquatic life with one of the primary causes being AMD! While numerous streams were evaluated, he mentions that the **headwaters of Slippery Rock Creek was in very bad condition due to mine water** but was improved by the confluence of Wolf Creek and Muddy Creek. **How exciting that after 100 years of being degraded, Slippery Rock Creek is recovering!!!!**