

HATT August Meeting

Thursday, August 10, 2017 at Austin Blakeslee Nature Center

Attendance: 27 members, 8 nonmembers

Speaker: Geoffrey Rogalsky and John Lyman— The Streams of Tobyhanna

The meeting was opened by Rick Bodenschatz, program chair, at 11:12 a.m., welcoming all especially the members of the Tobyhanna/Tunkhannock Creek Watershed Association. He then asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Rick announced the program for the September meeting: Dick Gary who will discuss the “wood-hicks” or the life of the loggers who loaded the trains, and their families.

Also announced was the October Annual Dinner meeting at Lake Naomi Club, which will feature meteorologist Ben Gelber (originally from Stroudsburg) who will discuss weather and the changes in the Poconos. He has written and published two books on the subject and is now serving at a TV station in Columbus, Ohio. It will also be “media night,” and those who have supported HATT with advertising or other media support will be invited.

Rick asked for volunteers to distribute posters for next month’s meeting. Rick stated that there is the Lutherland book as well as a DVD of Lutherland available for sale with all the proceeds going to Clymer Library.

Dick Cary then introduced our speakers for today’s talk on “The Streams of Tobyhanna” — Geoffrey Rogalsky and John Lyman of the Tobyhanna Creek/Tunkhannock Creek Watershed Association.

Geoff began his talk on the process of assuring clean drinking water in our territory. He called it a summary of Watershed 101. A watershed is defined as anything uphill from a determined point (any point!).

The Tobyhanna-Tunkhannock Watershed (TTWS) ends at the Lehigh River and begins at several points north and east of Tobyhanna Township, but the township makes up more than one-third of the area within the watershed.

We are fortunate to have mostly “first-order” streams – streams that begin in our area. Two streams meeting up are second-order, and two streams meeting a third become a third-order stream, and so forth.

We drink our water mostly out of first-order streams which means our water is fairly pristine! Philadelphia has water processed so that seven people have ingested or used that water before.

The specifics of the TTWS is that it emanates from our plateau. It soaks up water easily, and since the soil is hard and rocky, there is little farming, which means limited contamination from fertilizer. It also means that if it is disrupted, there is little room to redirect or adapt — hence potential flooding. We are affected by acid rain quickly because we have low bio-mass. Additionally, mercury contamination is real and does not dissipate easily.

The top predator in streams is trout – they need aerated water, feed, and spawning areas. When the temperature rises from land development or decomposing leaves which rob the air of oxygen, you have rising temperatures in the water. The current state of affairs is improving with trees being planted after the deforestation during the height of the logging industry.

The TTWS is generally good – the Nature Conservancy claims the Poconos is one of the best places on earth for clean drinking water. The biggest issue remains development of land and industry with potential pollutants. Pesticides and fertilizer from tilled grass and gardens have a negative effect.

John Lyman then spoke about the TTWS streams feeding the Delaware River basin. Since the 1970s, many grassroots organizations have been involved in cleaning up what was called “The Black Lehigh” and its feeders. Now the Lehigh River is clean and flows into the Delaware – 130 miles from beginning to the Delaware Bay.

The pressure has increased to provide drinking water for an increased population here and elsewhere. We have 87 billion gallons removed from the Delaware for cities in the surrounding areas. The problems now are the droughts and floods. Only 20 percent of rainwater ends up in the groundwater. Droughts cause a lowering of the water table – 2010 being the last long drought. However, there was a significant flood in 2011.

Climate change has been identified as the reason for the stronger storms affecting the Poconos. So when the water tables go up and down, it is a problem for provision of water as it affects the “Brack Line” – where the water turns from fresh water to salt water. The water then becomes undrinkable.

The troubling trends in our area are: (1) the rapid increase in population, (2) uncontrolled construction, and (3) denuding stream-sides, creating ponding and/or channeling.

Ways to help your community and keep your drinking water safer are to (1) maintain your on-site septic system appropriately, (2) manage waste, (3) keep trees as much as possible and (4) get involved in supporting clean water through the Tobyhanna Township office.

The Tobyhanna Creek/Tunkhannock Creek Watershed Association has filed a petition to declare the TTWS as an “Exceptional Value Designation.” The discussion period is still open so folks can still contact the Tobyhanna Township manager by letter writing or emailing.

Thanks were extended to John and Geoff with a special certificate of appreciation given by Rick Bodenschatz on behalf of HATT.

Scarlett Rehrig was thanked for her hard work to provide the burgers and dogs, beverages and tableware setups for the picnic.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:02 p.m. and we all enjoyed the goodies and a great picnic! Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Rapp

Peggy Rapp, Secretary