

SUSQUEHANNA RIVER BASIN COMMISSION
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**POLLUTED AND HIGH QUALITY WATERSHEDS IDENTIFIED IN NEW REPORT
ON THE WEST BRANCH SUSQUEHANNA REGION**
Abandoned Mine Drainage Remains Number One Source of Pollution

HARRISBURG (July 29) – The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) recently released a report on the assessment of water quality and biological conditions of the West Branch Susquehanna Subbasin. The subbasin covers an area about 6,982 square miles and includes all or significant portions of 12 counties: Cambria, Cameron, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Lycoming, Montour, Potter, Sullivan, Tioga and Union. The findings in the report, which is entitled the *West Branch Susquehanna Subbasin Survey, A Water Quality and Biological Assessment, July – November 2002*, are based on the analysis of samples collected in 2002 by SRBC at 137 different sampling locations throughout the West Branch region.

SRBC Executive Director Paul Swartz noted that the report represents the first of a two-phase study. This Year-1 report covers nearly the entire region and provides the results of point-in-time sampling for three indicators: (1) water quality; (2) aquatic insects (known as macroinvertebrates); and (3) habitat. The conditions of the three indicators at each sampling site were ranked, based on the indicators. For example, they were ranked as higher quality, middle quality or lower quality for the water quality indicator, and nonimpaired, slightly impaired, moderately impaired and severely impaired for macroinvertebrates. (The Year-2 study, which is currently in the planning stages, will involve a more detailed assessment of a selected watershed.)

“The West Branch Susquehanna Subbasin is a region of significant contrasts,” said Swartz. “On the one hand, this subbasin contains the most scenic forestlands in the entire Susquehanna basin and many pristine waterways. Then, on the other hand, it has the largest percentage of severely degraded streams due to past mining practices.”

Of the 137 sites that SRBC sampled for this Year-1 report, 46 percent had either moderately or severely impacted biological conditions, with abandoned mine drainage (AMD) as the identified pollution source in about 83 percent of those impaired sites. Pollution from agricultural operations was the second largest source, followed by minimal effect from urban areas.

Some of the most degraded watersheds listed in the report for the West Branch Susquehanna Subbasin are Alder Run, Bear Run, Clearfield Creek, Deer Creek, Little Anderson Creek, Montgomery Creek, Moshannon Creek and Muddy Run in Clearfield County, Beech Creek, Cooks Run and Two Mile Run in Clinton County, and Dents Run in Elk County.

“People living along and near these impaired waterways are all too familiar with the impacts of AMD,” said Swartz. “Some of these streams are literally devoid of aquatic life and the orange-coated rocks that line their banks are a constant reminder of a time when the basin’s valuable water resources were not adequately protected.”

Swartz said, “The impaired waterways are only half the story in this West Branch Susquehanna Subbasin. Our findings show that the region does have very good habitat conditions. The excellent habitat conditions mean that even the impaired streams have the potential to be very high quality streams. Plus, the watershed already supports many very high quality streams such as Pine Creek.”

In addition to Pine Creek in Lycoming County, the other highest quality watersheds in the West Branch Susquehanna Subbasin include First Fork Sinnemahoning and Driftwood Branch Sinnemahoning in Cameron County, Young Womans Creek, Hyner Run and Paddy Run in Clinton County, Lick Run in Clearfield County, and White Deer Creek in Union County.

According to Swartz, SRBC previously conducted a large-scale study of the West Branch Susquehanna Subbasin in 1994. This new report also contains information on the 1994 findings. The 20-page Year-1 report is available in hard copy and on the web site under technical reports at <http://www.srbc.net/techreports.htm>. For hard copies, contact SRBC at (717) 238-0423, ext. 302 or by e-mail to srbc@srbc.net.

SRBC receives funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to conduct studies of the six major subbasins in the Susquehanna basin: West Branch Susquehanna Subbasin, Middle Susquehanna Subbasin, Lower Susquehanna Subbasin, Juniata Subbasin, Upper Susquehanna Subbasin and Chemung Subbasin. SRBC studies each subbasin on a rotating schedule.

The Susquehanna River Basin Commission is the governing agency established under a 100-year compact signed on December 24, 1970 by the federal government and the states of New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland to protect and wisely manage the water resources of the Susquehanna River Basin. The Susquehanna River starts in Cooperstown, N.Y., and flows 444 miles to Havre de Grace, Md., where the river meets the Chesapeake Bay.