SUSQUEHANNA RIVER BASIN COMMISSION

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HEALTHY AND POLLUTED WATERSHEDS IDENTIFIED IN NEW REPORT ON THE JUNIATA SUBBASIN OF THE SUSQUEHANNA RIVER

SOME FORMERLY POLLUTED RIVERS ARE NOW PREMIER TROUT FISHERIES

Harrisburg, Pa. – The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) today announced its findings for water quality, biology and habitat conditions in 2004, in the Juniata River Subbasin. Overall, streams in the subbasin were in good health. However, agricultural operations appeared to be a large source of impairment for the polluted stream stretches, with abandoned mine drainage (AMD) pollution and urban stormwater problems also having marked effects in select areas.

SRBC conducted the sampling work for the Juniata River Subbasin Survey from June to November 2004. This report, which represents the first of a two-phase study, is referred to as the Year-1 report. It covers the major tributaries and areas of interest throughout the approximately 3,400 square miles of the Juniata Subbasin, including all or parts of Bedford, Blair, Fulton, Huntingdon, Perry, Juniata, and Mifflin Counties. The Year-2 survey will be a more intensive study in the Morrison Cove area, which has been identified as a highly agricultural and potentially stressed groundwater area. Previous surveys of the Juniata Subbasin were conducted by SRBC in 1985 and 1995, and a comparison of the 1995 data and the 2004 results are included in the Year-1 report.

"SRBC has been conducting water quality and biological studies of the six major subbasins in the Susquehanna watershed on a rotating basis since the mid-1980s.
This report is the third one for the Juniata Subbasin. By comparing the data from the three Juniata reports, SRBC staff and others can identify possible water quality trends within the subbasin, as well as recommend streams that need to be restored or protected,"
said Paul Swartz, SRBC Executive Director.

The findings in the Year-1 report provide the results of point-in-time sampling for 101 sites throughout the Juniata Subbasin based on three indicators: (1) water quality;
(2) aquatic insects (known as macroinvertebrates); and (3) habitat. The conditions of each sampling site were ranked, based on the indicators. They were ranked as higher quality, middle quality, or lower quality for the water quality indicator, and as nonimpaired, slightly impaired, moderately impaired, and severely impaired for macroinvertebrates. In September, the

remnants of hurricanes Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne caused near-record streamflows, which may have impacted the biological and habitat ratings of streams sampled after those flooding events. Reoccurring high flow conditions prevented SRBC from sampling for macroinvertebrates at numerous stations, which reduced the information available for many streams.

Of the 101 sites that SRBC sampled, twelve sites demonstrated the best overall conditions in each of the three categories with higher water quality, nonimpaired macroinvertebrates, and excellent habitat. Seventy-eight sites had at least one parameter that exceeded a level of concern, including nitrogen (possibly due to agriculture), aluminum (in some cases, due to abandoned mine drainage), and phosphorus (potentially wastewater and agricultural sources).

Swartz said, "Our findings show that, in general, the waterways in the Juniata Subbasin are in good health, which means that even the impaired streams have the potential to improve. Agricultural best management practices, AMD remediation technologies, low impact development, and more groundwater recharge area allowances could go a long way toward facilitating water quality improvements."

The Little Juniata River Watershed is described in the report as an example of a watershed that has improved dramatically from a history of industrial and wastewater pollution prior to the 1970s to become a premier trout fishery today.

Some of the most degraded watersheds listed in the report were Burgoon Run, Beaverdam Branch, Shoups Run, Sixmile Run, and the Morrison Cove Area. The Frankstown Branch was the section with the most impairment overall, and the Raystown Branch had isolated sections of impairment.

The 20-page Year-1 report is available on the web site at http://srbc.net/techreports.htm, or in hard copy by contacting Patricia Adams, 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 River 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, sampling one subbasin approximately every six years.

The Susquehanna River Basin Commission is the governing agency established 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.

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