

# River Currents

Newsletter of the Lackawanna River Conservation Association



Photo by Matt Giambra

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## Executive Director's Notes

“The current social distancing and business closure conditions require us to adapt our organization's activities and operations . . . However, we continue to advance the LRCA's Mission and work . . .”

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## New Property Acquisitions

Learn more about our new parcels of land that the LRCA and LVC acquired along the Lackawanna River to help build up the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail. Exciting developments are coming in the future!

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## Current Events

Join us for our first-ever Virtual Kayak Run now until June 28<sup>th</sup>. Paddle on your own time then register to be considered for top prizes. Partake in our Street Sweeping Contest now until July 1<sup>st</sup>. Top prize is \$100 cash!

## Executive Director's Notes

### MAY 2020 NOTES

This year began with promise. In early January, the Lackawanna River was chosen to be Pennsylvania's River of the Year for 2020! We THANK the many readers of *River Currents* who voted online and helped the Lackawanna River become the top vote-getter in the annual contest.

The River of the Year contest is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PADCNR), the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers (POWR), and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC). As the nominating organization, we received a \$10,000.00 Leadership Grant in addition to state and region-wide honor. We will use this grant for a variety of family-friendly educational outdoor activities to get folks more aware of the River and its 350-square mile watershed in parts of four Northeast Pennsylvania counties.

During February, we began discussing activities with several partner groups, and we started selecting event dates for April through October. We planned for our annual RiverFest event to be for May 9th. At the time, we were most concerned about the sequence of spring-time rain for safe paddling levels for RiverFest. However, as February leaped into March, the specter of the Coronavirus pandemic loomed bigger and scarier every day.

During our March Board meeting, we began to realize that our concerns, event planning, and decision making for our organization's future had to adjust. We anticipated that strong public health actions would soon be instituted, which would have a profound impact on our Nation, our Commonwealth, and our Region. Since the LRCA interfaces with federal and state emergency management agencies, we also anticipate that current safety measures will be with us, in one form or another, for at least the next twelve months.

The current social distancing and business closure conditions require us to adapt our organization's activities and operations. We have canceled all of our spring-time cleanups and fundraising events, including our largest annual fundraising event, RiverFest. Our office at "River House" in North Scranton is closed for the time being, and our staff members are now working from home on reduced hours due to the loss of our fundraising events. However, we continue to advance the LRCA's Mission and work on our conservation and education programs as much as possible under the current emergency.

Moreover, we are expanding our use of social media and digital communications to keep in touch and active with the community. You may have heard from us recently from an LRCA email, Facebook post, Instagram post, the LRCA's YouTube channel, or by text messaging. We are busy planning a range of virtual activities and events that you will be able to participate in while maintaining the social distance and shelter-in-place guidelines. We just held a children's coloring contest posted on Facebook and our website, to keep both children and adults busy. Currently, there are plans for a photography contest in the works and a "virtual scavenger hunt" in early summer.

Additionally, something else we can all do with proper social distancing is taking part in our new "Street Sweeping Contest." We recently noticed that our local municipalities are starting to pay more attention to street sweeping to meet their responsibilities for better Stormwater Management. Hopefully, your Department of Public Works (DPW) has run a street sweeper past your home in recent months. If not, consider jumping in on this contest by sweeping up the street in front of your home! Remember, "Clean Streets mean Clean Creeks." For more information, read further on in this edition of *River Currents*, or visit our website at [www.lrca.org](http://www.lrca.org) (cont.)

Furthermore, we are nothing if not optimists along the Lackawanna River. Over 150 years ago, the coal and iron industries pulverized the River with land exploitation and pollution. Rapid urban development during this time added additional strain to the River's ecosystem. In the 1950s, the River stank of sewage and mine waste and was a carrier of garbage. Although the coal industry's glory days of dumping millions of gallons of coal wash water into the River were finally over in the 1960s, it left a legacy of Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) and burning culm piles along the River.

In response to industry pollution, local towns and cities began to build modern sewer collection systems and treatment plants. A couple of years after the first EARTH DAY in 1970, the River was finally clean enough for some recreational use. In 1973, the LRCA's predecessor, the Luzerne / Lackawanna Environmental Council (LU-LAC), partnered with the Scranton JC's to host the first annual Lackawanna River Canoe-A-Thon to celebrate the River and its progress.

When we started the LRCA in 1987, we took over the Canoe-A-Thon event. We decided a few years later to expand the event to include more vendors and establish it under the new name "RiverFest." Until recently, the LRCA has only canceled RiverFest twice; one time in 1992 due to a flood and a second time in 1995 due to a drought. Now, we have had to make the same tough decision this year as well. If our Public Health Authorities and Governors determine that shelter-in-place restrictions can be adjusted and some scale of public activities can be allowed, we will look to see how we might stage RiverFest on September 26, 2020.

One way or the other, we will be engaging our Members, Volunteers, and the public with safe and fun virtual activities and events. In addition to the "Street Sweeping Contest", we are conducting a "Virtual Paddle Run" for both experienced and novice paddlers. Keep an eye out for postings for the "Virtual Paddle Run" on our website and Facebook page.

Additionally, we have unmet needs for site stewardship at many of the Preserves we own through our affiliate the Lackawanna Valley Conservancy (LVC). If you are interested in making a commitment for a few hours a month to help with the stewardship of one of our properties, please email Bernie McGurl at [lvc@lrca.org](mailto:lvc@lrca.org).

Please check out the other articles in this edition of *River Currents*. The following articles will help you gain more perspective on the work we are doing for the future of our Watershed and give you a stronger understanding of the River's environment. Also, consider becoming a Member or renewing your Membership to help support our mission and work. You may start or renew your Membership by visiting our website at [www.lrca.org/get-involved](http://www.lrca.org/get-involved) or email us at [lrca@lrca.org](mailto:lrca@lrca.org) with the subject "Membership".

*Please note that you can set up or renew your Membership as a "recurring" donation through our secure site. A recurring donation will put your support for the LRCA on Autopilot. Therefore, helping us budget more effectively and saving on the cost of stamps and paper!*

As a member-driven organization, your recurring pledge helps to strengthen the foundation of the LRCA. With your support, the LRCA and LVC can help create a sustainable and resilient future for the Lackawanna River Watershed and all the creatures that call it home.

Thank you for your time and support. We hope you enjoy this newsletter. Stay safe and we hope to see you along the River soon.



Bernie McGurl

## Want to Support Our Mission?

Here are some ways you can support us:

- Join our Membership! Pay what you want, when you want, and how often you want by cash, check, or credit card. Become a Member at [www.lrca.org/get-involved](http://www.lrca.org/get-involved)
- Become a Volunteer! We have opportunities for field work or in-house operations. Become a Volunteer by visiting [www.lrca.org/get-involved](http://www.lrca.org/get-involved) or email us at [lrca@lrca.org](mailto:lrca@lrca.org).
- “Like” us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/lrcaandlvc](http://www.facebook.com/lrcaandlvc) & on Instagram at [www.instagram.com/lrca\\_lvc](http://www.instagram.com/lrca_lvc)
- Spread the word! Share our posts and forward this newsletter to your friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues.

# LACKAWANNA RIVER

## PENNSYLVANIA RIVER OF THE YEAR 2020



## What Are Our Goals?

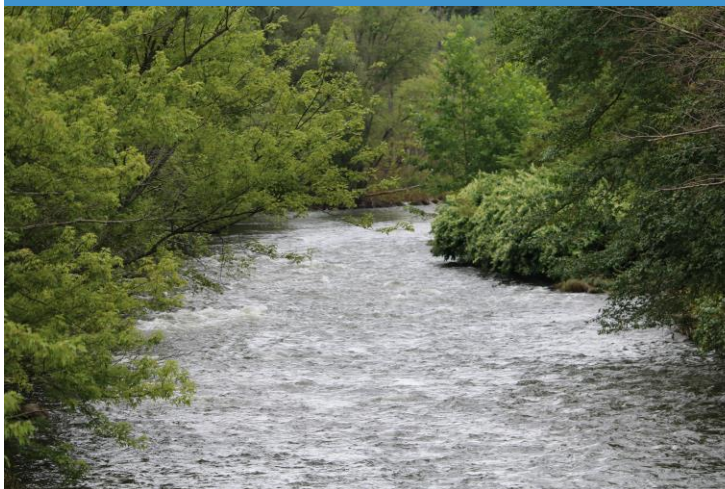
AS A COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATION

1. Clean up the River environment
2. Aid in the development of the 40-mile Lackawanna River Heritage Trail
3. Create partnerships with government, businesses, and community groups to promote conservation & recreation
4. Work with schools, universities, and the general public to promote environmental & conservation education
5. Advocate for the conservation of open space and natural habitat throughout the watershed

We now offer  
**Text-To-Give!**

**Text GIVE to  
(570) 258-8630**

or text **PLEDGE** if you want to  
pledge a particular amount to  
our organization.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The Lackawanna River is 62 miles long and the Watershed covers 350-square miles. The River flows from its headwaters in Mount Ararat of Northern Wayne County down to Coxtion Point in Duryea, where it meets the Susquehanna River. Coxtion Point is a Conservancy Preserve under our affiliate, the Lackawanna Valley Conservancy (LVC).

## Conservancy News

The LRCA incorporated the Lackawanna Valley Conservancy (LVC) as an affiliate to provide land conservation services across the Lackawanna River Watershed. Since the LVC's inception in 1995, the organization has acquired over 200 acres in 17 different properties within vital water resource and scenic areas along the Lackawanna River. The acquisition of these properties was made possible through charitable gifts from property owners, raised funds from members and donors, and through grants from state agencies and philanthropic foundations.

Part of the LVC's mission is to acquire strategic properties along the River to aid in the advancement of the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail. Through the Conservancy, over three miles of old railway property has been granted through conservation easements to the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority to incorporate more property for the Heritage Trail. In August of 2019, the LVC acquired a two-acre lot next to the Parker Street Bridge in North Scranton through a donation from Christian Saunders. The LVC has since used that site as the launch point for the LRCA's annual ShiverFest event.

Soon, this Parker Street lot will become part of a larger trailhead site for the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail. The segment of Trail along this property will be extended northward along the River up to the County Recycling Center at Boulevard Avenue. This extension will eventually reach the Trail into Throop and Dickson City.

Moreover, we are pleased to announce a total of three new property acquisitions. These acquisitions will further improve the Lackawanna Heritage Trail and provide three new access points to the Lackawanna River for fishing and paddle sport. In February, we completed the first of two acquisitions of land adjacent to the Market Street Bridge in North Scranton from the Marciano family. Phase one funded the purchase of the larger of the parcels, the former Rudy's Wrecking Auto Parts Salvage Yard. Funding for this project was secured through a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (PADCED).

We had previously acquired three parcels of the former New York, Ontario and Western Railway (NYO&W) that pass adjacent to the Marciano parcels. Those NYO&W parcels will help extend the Heritage Trail from Diamond Avenue in Bulls Head to Dean Street in the Plot. The "Rudy's" site will become a developed trailhead parking lot and River Access site. Altogether, the development of the Trail and River Access site will take place over the next ten years. Some of the trail work will integrate into the replacement of the Green Ridge Street Bridge, a major capital transportation project under development by PennDOT.

While that bridge project is in progress, LRCA and LVC will develop funding to clear and open up the NYO&W property between Green Ridge Street and Market Street. That property had been a dumping ground for building demolition materials and utility trench waste in the 1970s. Over 10,000 cubic yards of that waste completely block the rail grade and prevents trail passage to Green Ridge Street. We believe it is one of the most damaged and degraded sections of land along the Lackawanna River. Our acquisition, cleanup, and redevelopment of these properties will remove blight and create noticeable long-term benefits to the region.

We also just completed our acquisition from the Lackawanna County Tax Claim Bureau of another strategic property on the Lackawanna River. It is the former Lehigh Electric Superfund Site adjacent to Bridge Street in Old Forge. LVC had previously acquired an adjacent 10-acre parcel as part of a mine land reclamation project. (Cont.)

Together, the Lehigh Site and our adjacent Misty Ridge parcel will provide approximately 4000 feet of riverfront property for the Heritage Trail Development and a River Access Site to a large gravel bar across the River from Lonesome Road.

We have worked on this acquisition project for the past year due to the challenge present on the site. After the discovery of dumping transformer cooling oil containing Poly Chlorinated Bi-phenols (PCB's) into the ground, the Lehigh Electric Company went bankrupt. The EPA and the PA DEP conducted the regions first Super Fund Clean-up work there in the 1980s.

Our Conservancy has developed an Operations and Maintenance Agreement with EPA and DEP. These agencies are responsible for monitoring several groundwater wells on the property since there is still some detectable hazardous material in groundwater 30 to 50 feet underground. We will work with these agencies to develop a Trail and River Shoreline Access Site and maintain the integrity of the soil cap and security fencing on the balance of the site.

Going forward, the LRCA and LVC will need to develop funding and community support to help with the continued cleanup and redevelopment of these blighted sites. We welcome our Members to help with the stewardship needs of these sites by volunteering through our Lackawanna River Watershed Conservation Corps. Please contact us if you would like to help with the stewardship and management needs of these sites. We have a busy ten years ahead and could use your help!

## Current Events



**Lackawanna Challenge  
Virtual Kayak Run**

From Friday, May 29th to Sunday, June 28th

Join the Lackawanna River Conservation Association (LRCA)  
for their FIRST ever Virtual Kayak Run!

**For Event Rules and Entry  
Please Visit [www.lrca.org](http://www.lrca.org)**




### Street Sweeping Contest!

**Top prize includes  
\$100 cash.**

**Deadline: July 1st**

**Homeowners,  
tenants, &  
business owners  
can enter. No fees!**

**For more  
information visit:**

**[www.lrca.org](http://www.lrca.org)**

