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ENVIRONMENT AND RECREATION

STOCK DOWN, THANKS TO MUDDIED WATER

State cancels trout stocking in lower Roaring Brook after water company dam project releases large amounts of silt, sediment



JIM LOCKWOOD / STAFF PHOTO

The confluence of Roaring Brook and the Lackawanna River in South Scranton on Friday shows Roaring Brook still discolored brown from silty sediment upstream from Pennsylvania American Water's No. 7 Reservoir dam rehabilitation project in Dunmore, and the stark contrast of the muddied Roaring Brook where it dumps into the clear waters of the Lackawanna River.

"We are canceling the stocking. We don't want to put fish in a place where they won't thrive."

Michael Parker
State Fish and Boat Commission spokesman

BY JIM LOCKWOOD
STAFF WRITER

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission canceled upcoming trout stockings in lower Roaring Brook in Dunmore and Scranton because of the muddied condition of the waterways from a dam project at the No. 7 Reservoir in Dunmore, an agency

spokesman said.

The statewide opening day of trout season is April 6. The commission planned to stock trout on March 19 and April 9 and 23 in Roaring Brook between the No. 7 Reservoir in Dunmore and Myrtle Street in Scranton.

Such stockings are known as "put and take," meaning the fish are put into a waterway specifi-

cally to be taken, or caught, by the first-day and early-season crowds expected to come out as usual.

But a Pennsylvania American Water project to rehabilitate the old dam at the No. 7 Reservoir has muddied Roaring Brook in the past two weeks with large

Please see **WATER**, Page A6

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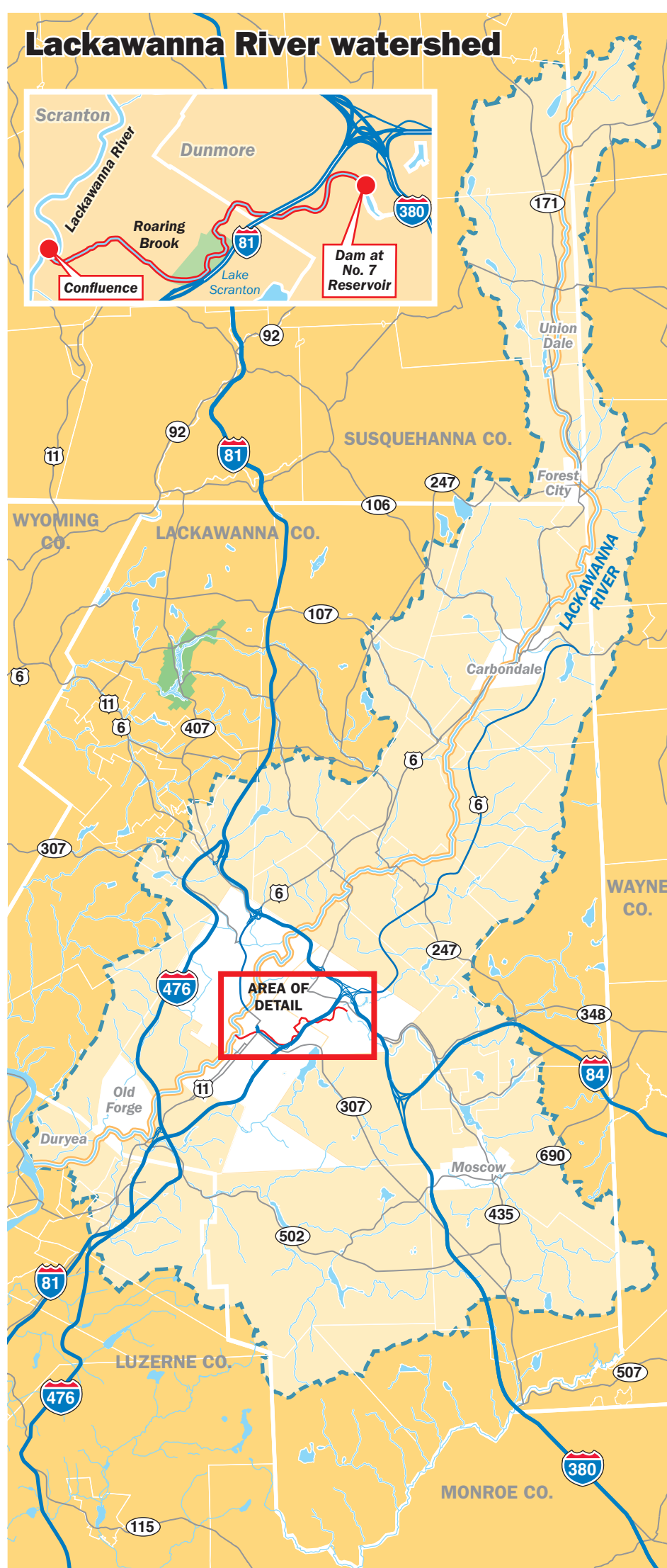
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Health/SciA10 PuzzlesD9-11
HoroscopeD11 School notes.....A4
LotteryA2 TravelD3



KEVIN O'NEILL / STAFF ARTIST

WATER: Stockings are scuttled

FROM PAGE A1

amounts of silt and sediment inadvertently released into the waterway, which flowed silty and brown into the Lackawanna River at their confluence in South Scranton.

The current silty condition makes the upcoming pre-season and in-season stockings questionable, and so they have been scuttled, commission spokesman Michael Parker said.

"We are canceling the stocking" in lower Roaring Brook, Parker said. "We don't want to put fish in a place where they won't thrive."

Advocates of clean waterways predicted the trout stockings would be shelved.

"They're not going to do that. There's no way," said Bernie McGurl, senior project manager of the Lackawanna River Conservation Association.

Michael Kashuba, a longtime board member of the Lackawanna Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited, added, "They're not going to put fish in there."

Trout Unlimited is a conservation organization focused on the cold water habitat of trout.

There is very little trout reproduction in Roaring Brook below the No. 7 Reservoir because that stretch of waterway is too warm for it, Kashuba said.

Still, the annual "put and take" trout stockings drew crowds to Roaring Brook, especially to access areas along Richter Avenue across from the East Scranton Little

League between Ash and Myrtle streets in Scranton, and to a bend in the brook just downstream of Myrtle Street at the northern end of Nay Aug Park and its Davis Trail, Kashuba said.

McGurl and Kashuba also fear that ecological damage from the sediment will significantly impair Roaring Brook and rivers downstream and their aquatic wildlife of macroinvertebrates and fish for some time, perhaps years.

That's because sediment settles and covers riverbed habitats of macroinvertebrate food sources for trout and other wildlife in the water, including stoneflies, mayflies, caddisflies and dragonflies. Sediment also suppresses dissolved oxygen in water that fish filter through their gills, choking them. Sediment smothers algae eaten by macroinvertebrates as well as the tiny eggs they lay, and the impact goes up the food chain, as fish and amphibians feed on macroinvertebrates and aquatic mammals like minks and otters eat fish.

They wonder and worry about longer-term, larger impacts on aquatic ecology and habitats of Roaring Brook and downstream, on the Lackawanna River that flows into the Susquehanna River, which feeds the Chesapeake Bay.

"There are a lot of concerned advocates for water quality and the fishing community," McGurl said. "It's not just McGurl and the Lackawanna River, this (silt) is going down into the Susquehanna River."

The Fish and Boat Commission shares such concerns.

"Any siltation in a stream can have a harmful impact on aquatic life and we will continue to monitor conditions," Parker said. "Stream dwelling species are all susceptible to changing environmental conditions, including excessive siltation, and this current condition is not ideal for any species of aquatic life."

Meanwhile, a state Department of Environmental Protection spokeswoman on Friday said the DEP will test samples of silt-polluted waters of Roaring Brook and the Lackawanna River as part of a "cause and effect study."

The reservoir also refilled in recent days after the closing of two old valves in the dam where silty sediment passed through, such that water is flowing over the spillway again, a water company spokeswoman said Friday.

On Thursday, the Lackawanna County commissioners called for the Lackawanna County District Attorney's Office to conduct a criminal investigation into the situation.

Kashuba is glad the incident is getting attention.

"I don't want this to be dropped, to be swept under the rug. It's too big of a disaster," Kashuba said. "There has to be consequences to this. If it's not criminal, it's at least civilly liable."

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