

[WPCAMR Hosts DEP Secretary on Tour of Washington, Allegheny Counties](#)

Thursday, June 16th, 2011

By Anne Daymut, Watershed Coordinator

Michael Krancer, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP), recently made time in his busy schedule to spend a day touring abandoned mine sites and restoration projects throughout Washington and Allegheny Counties. WPCAMR staff lead an engaging and informative tour that highlighted the major challenges that the AMD/AML restoration and reclamation community currently faces.



Secretary Krancer was able to immerse himself into our community, witness a few of the many AMD/AML success stories, and provide valuable feedback to the issues that were presented to him.

Three main topics dominated the discussions at four stops:

- Building mutually-beneficial partnerships between the watershed community and the energy industry
- Protection of Pennsylvania's investment in water quality improvement
- Funding needs for further water quality improvements.

The intricacies of each topic were described by a varied group of watershed volunteers, DEP staff, professional engineers, landowners, energy representatives, and multiple partnering organizations and agencies.

Watershed groups know that successful projects require partnerships in many forms; diversified funding, technical knowledge, and connections to name a few. The best partnerships are those that satisfy multiple needs.

The tour highlighted a star project when it comes to partnerships: the North Fork Montour Run AMD Treatment System. Here, PA DEP funded the treatment system through the Montour Run Watershed Association who partnered with the Pittsburgh International Airport and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, and others. Secretary Krancer, being an aviation enthusiast, was impressed by what the diverse partners were able to accomplish in proximity to the Pittsburgh airport.

The tour also stressed the value of working with the energy industry as a partner in watershed restoration. They bring connections, expertise, and financial incentives to the table while providing jobs, supplying our energy demands, and aiding the economy. There are several challenges facing mutually-beneficial partnerships with the Energy Industry that the tour brought to light including; solving wetlands permitting and banking challenges; supporting the beneficial use of coal ash; encouraging remining and coal waste piles as alternative energy, GFCC permitting cost issues; and promoting the use of AMD as frac water.

Pennsylvania has, by far, invested more money and resources than any other Appalachian State into AMD/AML remediation and reclamation. Amazingly, Pennsylvania now has close to 300 AMD passive treatment systems constructed, operated, and maintained by Good Samaritans including watershed organizations, private landowners, state agencies, and Conservation Districts. This effort has led to nearly 65 miles of stream removed from the Environmental Protection Agency's Impaired Waters List for abandoned mining related pollutants. Improvements have been made in over 30 watersheds. Keeping these successes in mind, we continued to express our concerns to the Secretary about the possible negative effects that the Keely Decision and EPA's proposed conductivity benchmark would have on our community.

We also stressed to the Secretary that, while the construction of all these treatment systems has been a major "shot in the arm" for western Pennsylvania's environment, the follow-up care of these systems is equally as important. The Operation, Maintenance, and Replacement of these valuable treatment systems plays a vital role in maintaining our healthy waters. Without attention and a dedicated effort to secure funding for O,M&R of existing systems, much of the improvement made could be lost.

In spite of the difficult economic times, the watershed community remains confident that funding for future AMD treatment will continue in some form. Secretary Krancer heard from several participants about how the Growing Greener Grant program has been vital to the creation of these treatment systems and subsequently, in the improvement of our streams. Growing Greener has also been largely responsible for the funding for the Conservation District Watershed Specialist Program—an indispensable link between the environmental community and State agencies.

In addition to Secretary Krancer and his staff, WPCAMR would like to specifically thank and acknowledge everyone involved in the tour.

o **Presto-Sygan Abandoned Mine Discharge:** Margaret Dunn, Cliff Denholm, Shaun Busler, Buck Neely, and Laurie Popeck, Stream Restoration Incorporated

o **Gladden Discharge:** Rich Beam and Eric Cavazza, PA DEP BAMR; Amy Smith, South Fayette Conservation Group; Tom Gray, TetraTech

o **Champion Waste Coal Pile:** Raymond Bologna, Ray Bologna, and Tony Bologna, Landowners; Vicky Michaels, Raccoon Creek Watershed Association; Gary Stokum and Jennifer Halachak, Washington County Conservation District

o **North Fork Montour Run AMD Treatment System:** Kevin Gurchak, Pittsburgh International Airport; Mark Fedosick, Montour Run Watershed Association; Mike Houser, Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission; Stream Restoration Inc Staff; Amy Meyers, Allegheny County Conservation District, Ron Horansky, PA DEP

o **McCaslin Road AMD Treatment System:** Mark Fedosick, Montour Run Watershed Association; Chris Caruso, Findlay Township Public Works; Stream Restoration Inc Staff; Amy Meyers, Allegheny County Conservation District, Ron Horansky, PA DEP