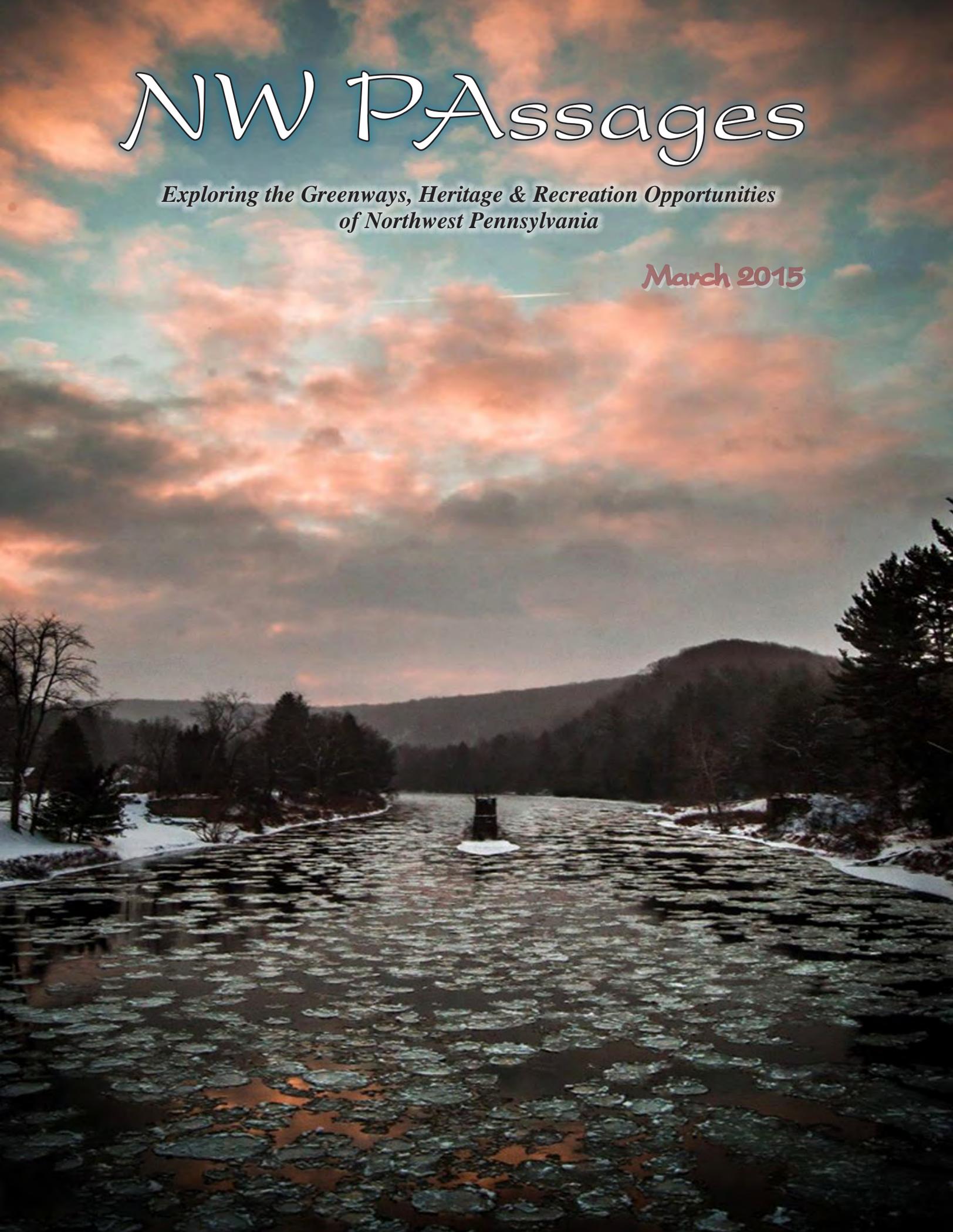


# NW PAssages

*Exploring the Greenways, Heritage & Recreation Opportunities  
of Northwest Pennsylvania*

*March 2015*



# NW PAssages

March 2015

Volume 1, Issue 9

## Letter from the Editors

If Punxsutawney Phil's forecast is accurate, this long bitter winter will turn to balmy spring by St. Patrick's Day. So, time to prepare for wilderness adventures!

In the spotlight is the non-profit **Penn Soil Resource Conservation & Development Council**, which just celebrated their 50th anniversary. Their mission is to assist in the development of economic, natural and human resources in eight NW PA counties.

March's Feature Story celebrates the 35th anniversary of the **North Country National Scenic Trail**, which winds through seven counties in NW PA, and connects our region to New York, Ohio and several other northern states.

The magical photography of *Rebecca Thomas* reveals the natural and historic treasures that abound here.

Check out *Afield & Afloat* for the many wonderful events on tap for March related to Nature, Heritage & Recreation.

May the trail rise up to greet you!

*Stephen & Beth West*

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Visit **NW PAssages**  
on facebook.

*Background photo ~ Rebecca Thomas  
Springtime at Springfield Falls  
Leesburg, Mercer County*



*About the Cover  
Colorful sunset over  
the icy Clarion River  
in Forest County by  
Anthony Thomas  
of Mountain Man  
Photography. Notice  
the stonework in  
the middle of the  
waterway and the  
abutments on each  
side -- they would've  
supported a bridge  
from long ago.*

It's *free* to subscribe to  
**NW PAssages**, just email us  
with your request.  
***beth@westpamag.com***

***Email us with your story ideas,  
event info, photos and suggestions!***

*This monthly electronic E-magazine was produced with financial assistance by the PA Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation via Greenways Block Grant Program grant to the County of Venango, awarded by the Northwest PA Regional Planning and Development Commission. Additional funds were provided by the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry and Tourism; the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail Alliance; and the Council on Greenways and Trails. Opinions and information expressed in this E-magazine are not necessarily those of the County of Venango, DCNR, ORA, EPTA, the Northwest Commission or CGT.*

NW Passages was created by Stephen & Beth West of Franklin, PA through the support of several great partner agencies, plus a grant from the PA DCNR, which expires with the April 2015 edition. Despite this challenge, the plan is to continue providing NW Passages free to our 1,700+ subscribers.

Partner Agencies will be needed, along with Corporate & Individual Sponsors. Please contact us if you're interested in participating in our mission to showcase our region's Nature, Heritage & Recreation Opportunities.  
 email: [stephen@westpamag.com](mailto:stephen@westpamag.com) (814) 437-3800



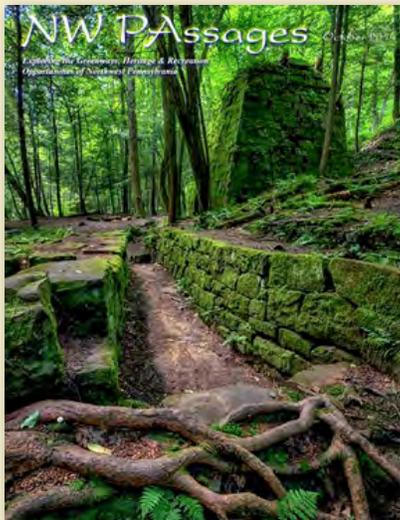
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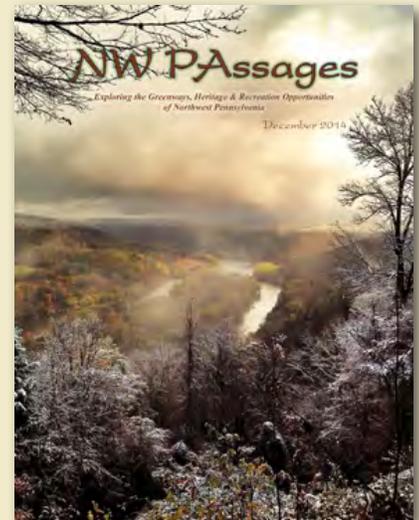
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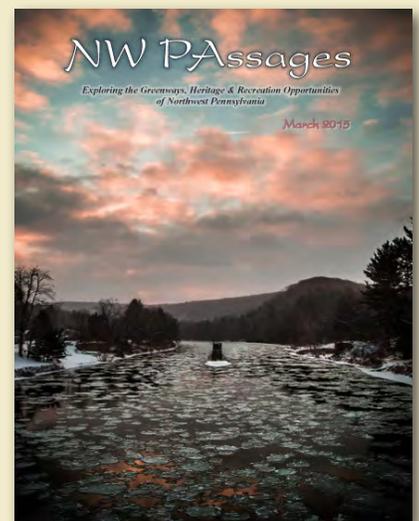
December 2014



January 2015



February 2015



March 2015

Your Adventure Starts Nearby.



### Navigating the North Country Trail thru NW PA

The North Country National Scenic Trail is a 4,600 mile hiking trail stretching from the border of Vermont/New York through seven states, to its western terminus in North Dakota. *It is the longest hiking trail in the U.S.*

The North Country Trail cuts through our state's northwest corner, traveling southwest through the Allegheny National Forest. Adventurers traverse the counties of Warren, Forest, Clarion, Venango, Armstrong and Butler, where the trail passes through Moraine State Park. The NCT next crosses into Lawrence County, where it follows Slippery Rock Creek through McConnells Mill State Park, then through Beaver County, on to Ohio and points west.



*Hiking the North Country Trail in McConnells Mill State Park, Lawrence Co.*



*Photos by Dave Brewer*

*Looking west into Ohio from atop Painter's Knob in Beaver Co., Pennsylvania.*





*Several chapters of dedicated members and volunteers maintain the North Country National Scenic Trail in Pennsylvania, covering 180 miles: The Allegheny National Forest Chapter; the Clarion Chapter; the Butler Chapter; the Wampum Chapter; and the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy. With the help of outstanding partners such as the Baker Trail, the Butler Outdoor Club and the Allegheny Valley Trails Association, these chapters build and maintain the NCT with the ultimate goal of completing the Pennsylvania section.*

website: [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org)

**Allegheny National Forest Chapter**

Crossing into Pennsylvania from New York, hikers follow 95 miles of the NCT as it meanders through the rolling hills and stream valleys of the Allegheny National Forest. Marked with white paint blazes and routed wooden signs, this route is one of the more established along the NCT.

Snuggled in rugged plateau country, the forest's rolling and sometimes steep topography is crisscrossed by hundreds of miles of creeks and streams, with elevations ranging from 1,000 to 2,300 feet. The NCT passes through some unique old growth forests, the 4,080 acre Tionesta Natural and Scenic Area, and the 120 acre Heart's Content Scenic Area.

**Clarion Chapter**

Clarion Chapter's section of the NCT features majestic old growth forests, the Wild & Scenic Clarion River, multiple opportunities for wildlife viewing and a taste of rural Pennsylvania. The Clarion section begins at the southern boundary of the Allegheny National Forest, then passes through Clear Creek State Forest and Cook Forest State Park.

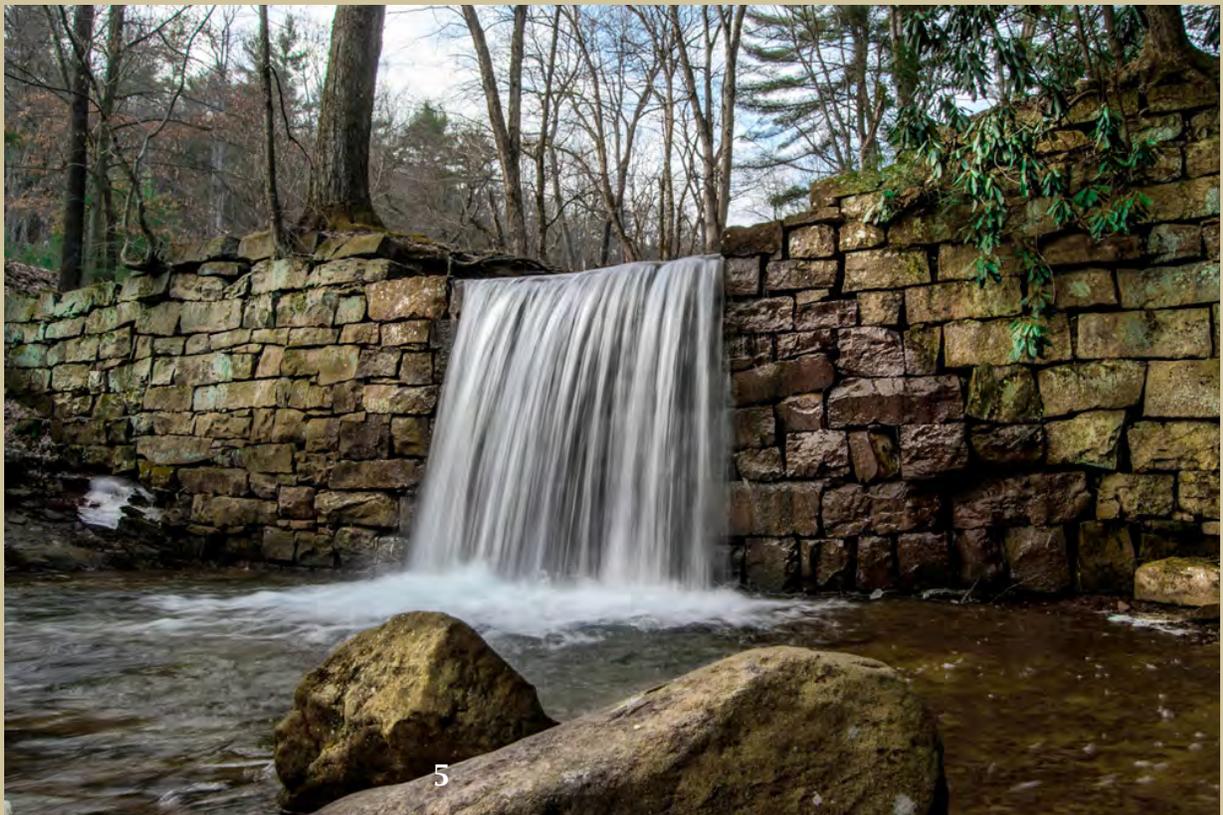


*In 2011, volunteers with the Clarion Chapter of the NCT constructed the Highland Hiker Shelter, using revenue generated from fundraisers.*

The NCT next joins with the Allegheny Valley Trails Associations' Clarion Highlands, Sandy Creek and Allegheny River Trails. On this gentle gradient rails-to-trails hike, one can soak in the serenity of the countryside and get a taste of the local culture and history. This blue blazed route contains several pedestrian safe bridges and three tunnels, two of which require flashlights.

*Slocum Spring Falls in Cook Forest State Park, Clarion County. The man-made structure is part of an old mill from long ago.*

*Photo by Anthony Thomas of Mountain Man Photography*





*A volunteer has the daunting task of clearing hillsides overlooking Lake Arthur along the NCT in Moraine State Park, Butler County.*



*Photo ~ Eric Watson*



*Participants in the Wampum Chapter's February 2015 hike.*

### Butler Chapter

This section passes through Armstrong County and Butler County, including Moraine State Park, providing access to 15 miles of trail along Lake Arthur and past the Davis Hollow Cabin (a project of the NCT). From there, the NCT connects to Jennings Environmental Center and the Old Stone House. The NCT then passes through the riverside town of Parker, Armstrong County.

The Butler Chapter, along with the Butler Outdoor Club, were key in establishing the vision, organization, and construction of the NCT in PA.

The chapter meets the second Thursday of each month at 6:30 pm in the Butler YMCA. All are welcome.

### Wampum Chapter

This section includes Beaver and Lawrence Counties, the westernmost section of the trail in PA. From there, it continues on to Ohio and points west.

The Wampum section is rich with industrial history, featuring a reclaimed strip mine, ruins of a historic gristmill, abandoned coal mines, and an old stone lime kiln last used in the 1930s. There are amazing opportunities for hiking and photography in the glacial-carved Slippery Rock Gorge at McConnells Mill State Park.

In 2013, the town of Wampum in Lawrence County was designated as the first Trail Town along the North Country National Scenic Trail, and two informational kiosks were installed.



**There are many ways to get involved with the North Country Trail, including:** building and maintaining the trail, blazing the route, fundraising, recruitment, marketing and communications, chapter leadership, and event planning. **Activities include:** monthly hikes along sections of the North Country Trail, trail work sessions, displays and fundraising at regional fairs and events, and a few organizational meetings a year.

website: [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org)



*Wampum Chapter volunteers (from left) Sabrina Royea, Janice Hansen and Jake Erhardt make upgrades to a bridge built by Ron Rice of the Butler Chapter 13 years ago. The bridge is located west of Wampum.*

*Photo by Dave Brewer*



The Penn Soil Resource Conservation and Development Council celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2014. The non-profit serves as a facilitator for sustaining the resources in the the counties of Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango and Warren.

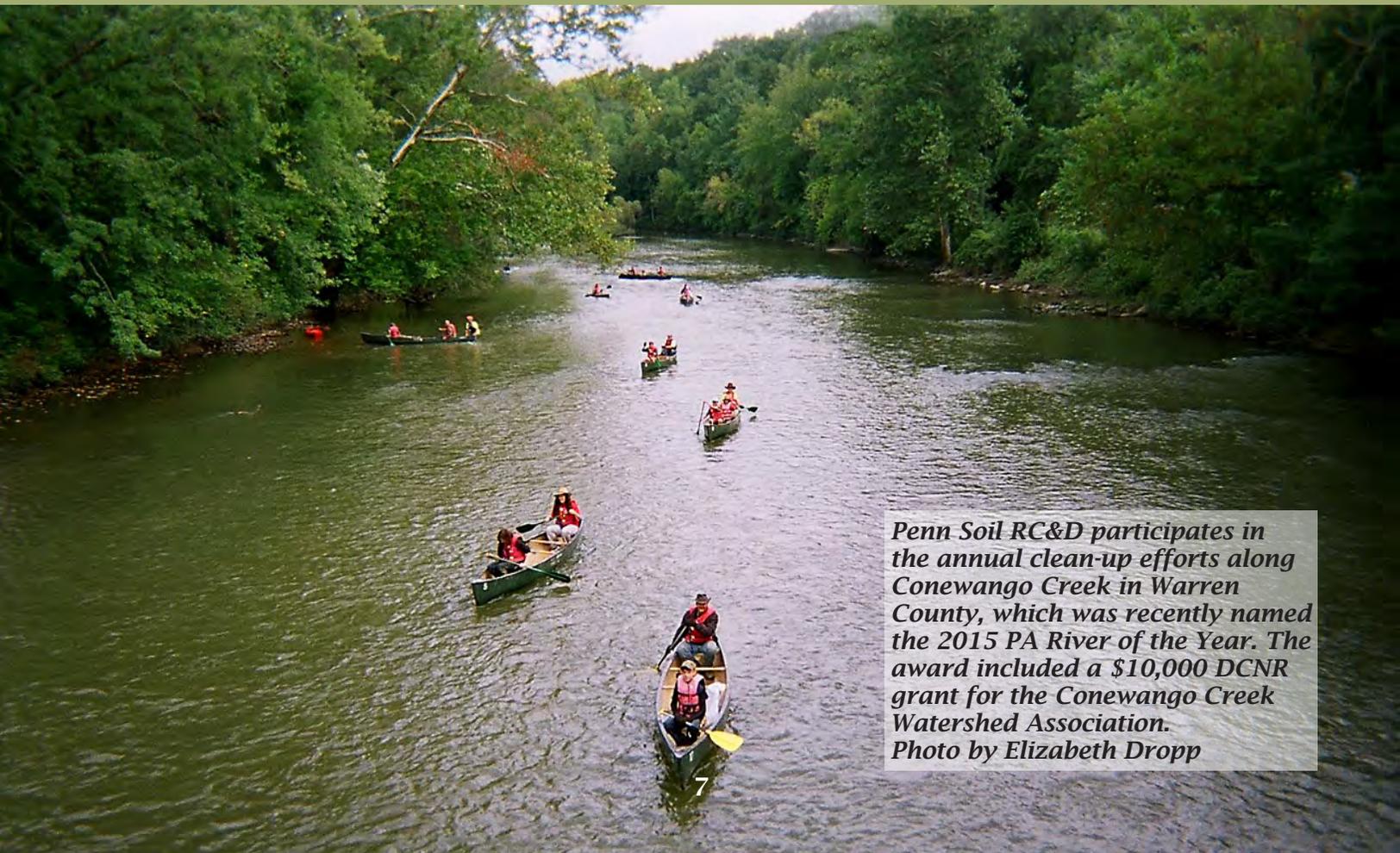
The mission of this organization is to provide the local leadership necessary to develop and implement a plan that will improve the economy, environmental and social well-being of the people through accelerated planning and development of the natural resources in the project area.



*Photo by Wes Ramsey*

*A group listens to a lecture about no-till farming during a workshop in Warren County last September. Farmers learned about managing crop fields with diversity, cover crops and no-till methods. The techniques are designed to provide improved soil health, reduced production costs, increased profitability and high level environmental protection.*

Penn Soil's primary interest is in improving quality of life in four areas: *Water Management, Agricultural Land Management, Forest Land Management, and Community Development.*



*Penn Soil RC&D participates in the annual clean-up efforts along Conewango Creek in Warren County, which was recently named the 2015 PA River of the Year. The award included a \$10,000 DCNR grant for the Conewango Creek Watershed Association. Photo by Elizabeth Dropp*

*A group assembled for the May 2010 dedication of the Big Bend Bird Viewing Platform and Self-Guided Interpretive Trail along the Allegheny River, just downstream from the Kinzua Dam.*

*Penn Soil RC&D was part of a partnership group consisting of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Allegheny Outdoor Club, which worked together to raise funds for the project.*

*Penn Soil RC&D served as the fiscal agent for the project and coordinated the partnership of numerous different funding sources in this \$85,000 project. The endeavor is a wonderful example of what can happen when volunteers, non-profit organizations, and government agencies at the local, state, and federal levels work together to improve our recreational opportunities and community facilities.*



*Photo by Wes Ramsey*

▶ A proposal for an RC&D activity may be submitted to the Council by private individuals, agency representatives, special interest groups, organizations, or council members and sponsors themselves.

▶ Proposals can include, but are not limited to such activities as: land conservation, water management, community development, recreation facilities, rural housing, health and education facilities, transportation and communication needs, energy conservation, and economic development.

▶ By adopting the proposal, the Council makes a commitment to help move the activity forward to completion by assuming either an active supporting or leadership role in working with the sponsors of the proposal.

▶ Support of proposals by the Council may be in the form of providing technical assistance, financial assistance, or a combination of technical and financial assistance.

Penn Soil RC&D Council  
210 North Drive, Suite E  
Warren, PA 16365  
website: pennsoil.org  
email: pennsoilrcd@wccconservation.net  
Tel: 814-726-1441 Fax: 814-406-0005



**Penn Soil RC&D serves as the fiscal agent for the annual Warren County Winterfest Planning Committee, and contracts for all necessary services. The annual three-day family festival takes place in mid-January at Chapman State Park in Warren County.**



*Photo by Pat Wenzel*

*The Polar Plunge into icy Tionesta Creek is a popular event at the Winterfest, challenging the hardiness of participants.*

*An eager group of Siberian huskies prepares to enter the Jim Lodbell Memorial Sled Dog Races at the Warren County Winterfest in January 2015. 110 teams competed in the event.*



*Photo by Laura Anderson*

**Coyote & Fox Talk**

**Saturday, March 7 ~ 1:00 to 3:00 pm**  
**Tom Ridge Environmental Center**  
**301 Peninsula Dr., Room 112, Erie, PA**

Learn more about the unique nature of the coyote and fox populations on Presque Isle, plus enjoy extraordinary photos of these beautiful animals. Seats are limited, register by calling (814) 833-7424.



**Friday-Sunday, March 13-15**

**Retreat to Wellness Weekend at the Gateway Lodge** is a local collaborative effort to bring health and wellness to the PA Wilds with a weekend of healing and restoration. The weekend kicks off with a wine reception Friday night in the majestic Great Room. Begin each morning with yoga or an interpretive walk through magnificent old growth forests. Participate in wellness workshops on Saturday, or indulge in a spa service from **The Woods Spa**. Package includes:

- two nights in a fireside jacuzzi luxury suite, breakfast both days, lunch & dinner on Saturday
- morning exercise sessions, wellness workshops, and a mini massage

**\$349/person for a weekend of renewal.**  
**Contact the Gateway Lodge - (814) 744-8017**  
**for more info, or visit: [gatewaylodge.com](http://gatewaylodge.com)**  
**14870 Rt. 36, Cooksburg, PA - Forest County**

**PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK EVENT --**

**New Year's Resolution Walk Series:**

**Thursdays thru March 26 ~ 6:30-8:30 pm**

Meet at Presque Isle State Park Ranger Station for guided walks of about three miles over wooded, sandy and paved trails. Park naturalists will enhance the walks with info about park updates, history and nature tidbits. Free.

**Got a Garden? Spring Gardening Symposium**  
**Saturday, March 14 ~ 8:15 am - 3:00 pm**



Workshops and demos with continental breakfast and lunch. \$45/person by registration deadline -- March 6. After deadline, \$50/person (if space permits). Walk-ins may be accepted (space permitting) for \$50 payable by cash, check or money order only. (724) 774-3003 *extension*. [psu.edu/gardening/events](http://psu.edu/gardening/events)

At The Confluence, 214 E. Washington St., New Castle, PA. **Sponsored by Penn State Master Gardeners in Lawrence County.**

**12th Annual Northwest PA Maple Association Taste & Tour Weekend**

**March 14 & 15**  
**10 am to 4 pm**



Fifteen sugarhouses in the northwestern counties of Crawford, Erie and Warren, including *How Sweet It Is Farm* and the

*Hurry Hill Maple Museum*, open their doors to the public on Taste & Tour Weekend. Come and visit with your local maple syrup producers and see how it's done. See first hand the process of tapping the maple tree, collecting sap, and boiling it down to make delicious syrup. Many maple sugar makers produce additional confections from their syrup. Most have free samples available, as well as products for sale.

For more information, call (814) 333-1258 or visit [www.pamaple.org](http://www.pamaple.org) 🍁

**Birding by Trolley: Waterfowl**

**Saturday, March 14 ~ 10:00 am -- 1:00 pm**  
**Tom Ridge Environmental Center**  
**301 Peninsula Drive, Erie**

Discover species that as the ice waterways. lunch and



the waterfowl can be found. Bring your binoculars.

We will travel around the park in the comfort of the trolley and get outside at some stops, so dress for the weather. Seating is limited, registration required by March 10, free. Call 814-833-7424.

**North Country Trail March Hike**  
**March 15 at 1:00 pm**

Hot dog cookout at old kiln area near Chewton. Hikers will shuttle to Sankey Hill Road off Snake Run Road and hike two miles to the kiln for hot dogs. Free - all welcome. Meet at Bevington Boat Launch on River Road across river from Wampum, PA - Lawrence County.

For more info: [www.northcountrytrail.org/wam](http://www.northcountrytrail.org/wam) or call (724) 827-2350



Leprechaun magic will abound with the call of the highland bagpipes as we begin to celebrate St. Patrick's Day in Foxburg. Returning by popular demand, the Irish Band, **CARNIVAL OF SOULS** will sound the call for the Irish with a family concert on **Sunday, March 15 ~ 2:00 pm** in Lincoln Hall, 42 South Palmer St., Foxburg. Presented by the Allegheny RiverStone Center for the Arts.

Lake Erie Shipwrecks and Maritime Tales



Wednesday, March 25 at 7:00 to 8:30 pm  
Tom Ridge Environmental Center  
301 Peninsula Dr., Room 112 TREC  
Erie, PA

Discover the history behind our Great Lake and hear the tales of the most notorious wrecks of our region. Free. Registration requested - call 814-833-7424.

**COOK FOREST ACTIVITIES - Forest County**

**Friday, March 20 ~ 7:00 pm**

**SNOWSHOE COOK FOREST AT NIGHT: FIRE TOWER ROAD**



Bring snowshoes and headlamps and meet at the Nuthole Cabin, located at the entrance of Ridge Camp, for an evening three mile interpretive snowshoe program along Fire Tower Road to Seneca Point. Identify animal tracks in the snow and explore the Seneca Point cave while snowshoeing under ancient hemlock and oaks. If no snow, we'll hike instead.

**Saturday, March 21 ~ 8:30-11:30 am**

**EAGLE WATCH**



Bring binoculars and spotting scopes to the Park Office for a driving tour to eagle hotspots along the National Wild & Scenic Clarion River. This is the prime time of the year to view bald eagles in their nests and find new nesting sites. Expect a long carpool and aggressive hike to some of the better areas, but the rewards will be worth it.

For more info: [www.cookforest.com](http://www.cookforest.com)

**31st ANNUAL COOK FOREST HALF MARATHON & 5K**

**Saturday, March 28**

Half Marathon: 11:00 am -- 5K: 11:15 am  
Entry Fee HM: \$25.00 until March 13th, then \$30.00 (pre-registration guarantees tee shirt).  
5K: \$20.00 until March 13th, then \$25.00 (pre-registration guarantees tee shirt)  
Current CU Students: HM - \$20, 5K - \$15

Cook Forest State Park, Cooksburg, PA

**Course:** Start and finish near Pale Whale Canoe Rental. The half marathon is flat to gently rolling entirely on River Road along the beautiful Clarion River. The course is out-and-back on traffic controlled roads. The 5K event is also out-and-back on the same road.



For more info: [www.cookforest.com](http://www.cookforest.com)

**Gull Point Clean Up - Saturday, March 28 9:00 am - 12:00 pm**

Help to keep Presque Isle beautiful! Join Park Naturalists for a litter clean up within the Gull Point Natural Area. Meet at Gull Point trailhead at Beach 10 parking lot. The total out-and-back walk is four miles over sandy terrain. Once we arrive at the tip of Gull Point, we will be picking up debris along the shoreline. Dress for the weather on that day. Please call to register by calling the park office at 814-833-7424.

**MAPLE SUGARING**

**Sunday, March 22 ~ 2:00 - 4:00 pm**

**Jennings Environmental Education Center  
2951 Prospect Road, Slippery Rock, PA**

Celebrate the end of winter with the seasonal tradition of maple sugaring ~ from past to present. This presentation will unravel the mystery of how a tree functions and show how sap from a tree becomes syrup for the breakfast table.

This annual, free program is open to the public. Registration is not required, but be sure to arrive on time to get a seat for this very popular event.

A variety of local maple products will be available for sale in The Nature Shop at Jennings.

Info: 724-794-6011 e-mail: [jenningssp@pa.gov](mailto:jenningssp@pa.gov)



**Peter Cottontail Express**

**March 28 ~ Train departs at 1:00 pm**

Join Peter Cottontail on a spring ride through "The Valley That Changed The World!" on the Oil Creek & Titusville Railroad. Cost: \$22/adults 13 & up, \$20/seniors 60 & up, \$15/children 1-12, \$35/all ages for first class. Plus, jelly bean contest! Ticket orders: (814) 676-1733. Board train starting at 12:30 pm at Perry Street Station ~ 409 S. Perry St., Titusville, PA Crawford County.

For info: [www.octrr.org](http://www.octrr.org)





*Bleeding-heart flowers*



*Hummingbird feeder in Forest County attracts one of these fine feathered friends.*

*Featured Photographer*

*Rebecca Thomas*

Raised in Cook Forest, a state park that includes parts of Clarion and Forest Counties, Rebecca was able to enjoy the many pleasures of growing up in the country. Her endless wilderness adventures included lots of camping, canoeing, hiking and fishing, which she has passed along to her four daughters.

Rebecca said of her work, *"I love to photograph nature, wildlife, barns and old structures. I was inspired by my husband, Anthony Thomas of Mountain Man Photography, to share the beauty of Cook Forest and the surrounding area."*

The couple's baby boy is due in April. Rebecca also raises Siberian Huskies, who often accompany her on hikes to explore the area. These days, she usually takes her camera along on adventures.

*"I take great pleasure in sharing with others what they are unable to see or experience themselves. There are many times that we go off the 'beaten path' to capture some of these spectacular views. You would be amazed at what you find by taking a hike in what seems like unexplored territory."*

Facebook page: *Photography by Rebecca Thomas*



*Monarch butterfly atop a purple thistle.*

*Putting the fun in fungi along Tom's Run in Cook Forest State Park, Clarion County.*





*Jakes Rocks Overlook in Warren County provides a wonderful view of Kinzua Dam and the Allegheny Reservoir.*

*Outflow of Kinzua Dam in Warren County*





*A little girl's pet lamb, Sam, romps in the snow near Springfield Falls in Mercer County.*

*A pair of dogs protects a herd of alpacas on a farm in rural Clarion County.*





*Sunset over the icy dunes along Lake Erie  
at Presque Isle State Park in Erie, PA*



*Massive moss-covered boulders along  
the Clarion River as it flows from  
Forest County into Clarion County.*



*1858 Erie Harbor  
Pierhead Lighthouse  
is a cast-iron square  
structure built at the  
Erie Harbor entrance  
on Presque Isle State  
Park's North Pier.  
The active beacon is  
maintained by the  
U.S. Coast Guard.*

*Featured Photographer  
Rebecca Thomas*