

A Rural Revolution of Environmental Collaboration

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Biographical Sketches of Authors

Sheila Vukovich and Lindsay Abraham are Environmental Resource Specialists with the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection; Office of Abandoned Mine Lands and Reclamation; Stream Restoration Group.

Sheila worked with the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Water Resources from 1979 to 1995 in the NonPoint Source Program dealing with mineral extraction. During that time she was responsible for sampling streams impaired by abandoned mine drainage within the Monongahela River Basin, and documenting the associated mine drainage sources.

In 1995 Sheila was transferred to the "newly" created Stream Restoration Program in the Office of Abandoned Mine Lands and Reclamation where she and Greg Adolfson developed the Holistic Watershed Approach Protocol for stream characterization and restoration, which provides a means for integrating partnerships to effectively achieve restoration efforts.

In 1996, Lindsay Abraham joined Sheila, forming the Stream Restoration Group field team. The Group samples abandoned mine drainage sources and affected receiving streams statewide. This information is used to determine the extent of stream impairment due to abandoned mine drainage sources, types of restoration technologies to implement at reclamation sites, and stream improvement resulting from construction of reclamation projects. In order for these two to accomplish their job duties, the Stream Restoration Group works with watershed associations throughout the State.

Abstract

As government agencies experience funding cuts, we know that to effectively and efficiently obtain adequate data to make informed decisions about watershed protection, restoration, and ecological integrity we must partner with multiple stakeholders. These stakeholders may range in backgrounds, goals, and expectations; so, it is imperative to coordinate data collection and handling efforts to benefit all. This effort demonstrates how a small group, West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection's Stream Restoration Group, developed a philosophy that led to partnerships that fostered many collaborative efforts between watershed associations, government agencies, industry, academia, private clubs, and the public. No one knows the environmental problems, seeks the technical resources, and pursues watershed protection, restoration, and ecological integrity better than those who live there; thus, the formation of watershed associations became the perfect vehicle for a rural revolution of environmental collaboration. The Stream Restoration Group became the driver. Documentation of the Stream Restoration Group history and future possibilities, along with the increasing role of watershed associations serves as an example of partnering opportunities for others.

Key words: partnerships, collaborative efforts, watershed associations, rural revolution, environmental collaboration