

Kettle Creek Home Rivers Initiative (1998 – 2007)

Since 1994, Trout Unlimited national staff has complimented local on-the-ground conservation efforts by its members by implementing an impressive array of large-scale watershed projects under its flagship program, the Home Rivers Initiatives. The national office of Trout Unlimited launched its first comprehensive watershed restoration project on the Beaverkill-Willowemoc River system in New York State. TU initiated this program based on the premise that everything in a watershed is related and connected, and that watershed restoration requires far more than site-specific treatments. Each Home Rivers project is a collaborative multi-year effort that combines applied scientific and economic research, community outreach, on-the-ground restoration, and the development of long-term conservation and management strategies and tools.

The Kettle Creek project, located in northcentral Pennsylvania, was launched in 1998 as TU's third Home Rivers Initiative. Thus began a unique partnership between the local Kettle Creek Watershed Association and national Trout Unlimited. The 244 square miles watershed has significant lands within state forest and park lands and several small communities. The main stem traverses nearly 43 miles before emptying into the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. The Kettle Creek watershed is home to over 5% of Pennsylvania's Class A wild trout streams.

Despite the seemingly pristine and undeveloped nature of the Kettle Creek watershed, approximately 12 miles in the lower watershed are severely polluted due to abandoned mine drainage (AMD) from past coal mining. Streams with little to no life and stained with reds, oranges and whites reflect a tragic legacy caused by historic coal mining practices that began in the late 1800s. Portions of the upper and middle watershed, despite having exceptional value water quality, suffer from habitat degradation due in part to the lingering effects of clear-cut logging and stream channelization common in the region between 1895 and 1913.

In 1998 TU began working with the newly formed Kettle Creek Watershed Association (KCWA) to address habitat degradation and abandoned mine drainage pollution. Major project accomplishments include:

- Conducted baseline surveys and assessments of fish, aquatic insects, and stream habitat conditions on more than 75 miles of Kettle Creek mainstem and tributaries.
- Developed strategic fish habitat conservation and abandoned mine drainage restoration and management plans for the entire watershed.
- Selected as the Keystone Project for 2000-2001 by the Pennsylvania State University Center for Watershed Stewardship that prepared a comprehensive watershed report for the Kettle Creek watershed.
- Constructed a dozen fish habitat and streambank stabilization improvement projects on Kettle Creek and its tributaries.

- Planted over five miles of native trees and shrubs to promote streambank stability and provide canopy cover along Kettle Creek and its tributaries.
- Constructed over a dozen monitoring collection systems, passive treatment systems, and a surface reclamation project to remediate abandoned coal mine drainage in the lower watershed.
- Trained more than a hundred of volunteers and landowners through landowner stewardship workshops and developed the Kettle Creek Watershed Conservation Guide: A Landowner's Handbook.
- Introduced a Trout in the Classroom program and accompanying watershed curriculum to the local school district.
- Abandoned coal mine drainage projects featured in several television documentaries that focused on regional and statewide water pollution problems.

The comprehensive watershed assessment and planning efforts accomplished by TU and its main partner, the Kettle Creek Watershed Association, were recognized by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with a first-ever "Governor's Award for Watershed Stewardship" in 2001.

TU and KCWA thank the numerous local, state, and federal government and non-government and private industry partners for their support and contributions over the years, which included everything from financial contributions to technical expertise and good old-fashioned sweat labor. Without these partnerships, and especially the dedication of individual volunteers, the Kettle Creek Home Rivers Initiative would not have been the success that we celebrate today.

The Kettle Creek Home Rivers Initiative ended with the completion of the Cross Fork Creek brook trout habitat project in 2007. The Kettle Creek Watershed Association remains an active volunteer-based watershed organization and continues to implement watershed projects and work with landowners, albeit on a smaller scale than what was accomplished through the Kettle Creek Home Rivers Initiative.

TU is still committed to the recovery of the lower Kettle Creek watershed and continues to work closely with the Kettle Creek Watershed Association on Kettle Creek AMD remediation, which is now TU's model project for the West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Initiative. Additionally, in 2005 the PA Department of Environmental Protection West Branch Susquehanna River Task Force selected Kettle Creek as one of its two priority watersheds for AMD remediation.

-by Amy G. Wolfe, 9/2008