Water quality always on their mind

A former DEP Watershed Assessment Branch staff member measures flow in Little Sandy Creek (Cheat River Basin) during the cold of winter.

By Colleen O'Neill

Trainee program benefits agency

Regulatory Trainee Program participants working in the Division of Mining and Reclamation are (from left) Andrew Roberts, Katie Murphy, Mary Kate DeFrancesco and Sarah Miloski. The federal Office of Surface Mining, along with the Southwest Conservation Corps and AmeriCorps, sponsors the program.

By Tom Aluise

Water quality is the common denominator. And no group knows that better than the Department of Environmental Protection’s Watershed Assessment Branch (WAB). The WAB is the agency’s boots-on-the-ground part of a massive Chesapeake Bay cleanup plan; or a heightened focus on mining’s impact on West Virginia’s streams and rivers.

West Virginia water has been in the news a lot lately. State water issues are continually finding their way into headlines, be it water withdrawal and disposal concerns associated with the natural gas drilling boom in the Marcellus Shale; a federal push to reduce nutrient loads in the state’s Eastern Panhandle as

By Colleen O’Neill

Being young definitely has its benefits. But when the economy is strained and jobs are scarce, the youth factor can be a deterrent to finding employment.

The federal Office of Surface Mining joined forces with the Southwest Conservation Corps and AmeriCorps to offer the Regulatory Trainee Program. This program enables recently graduated students to stretch their legs in their major within a regulatory program. A win-win situation, the trainee gets needed experience, while getting a feel for his or her major, and the agency benefits from the additional manpower.

The trainees serve in their fields for one year. The Department of Environmental Protection

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From Colombia to Charleston

Office of Oil and Gas employee says life is much safer these days

By Colleen O'Neill

America is known to many as the land of opportunities. To Bernardo Garcia, it was just that. Coming from Colombia, he wanted a life that was more stable and less stressful. And he found it, here in West Virginia.

"I left (Colombia) because you just have a number of opportunities in your life and you cannot waste them," said Garcia, who works in permitting in the Department of Environmental Protection’s Office of Oil and Gas. "I was tired of working in Colombia because I worked as a consultant and the payment was not enough, compared with the risks I was facing in the areas where oil and gas are found."

Garcia said all of Colombia’s major cities are in the mountains, including Bogota, which is located 8,500 feet above sea level. The country’s oil and gas reserves are in rural areas at lower elevation.

"Those areas are plagued by guerrillas and paramilitary forces fighting among themselves," Garcia said. "They’re fighting to gain control of certain areas, resources and routes in the country. Thus, I was at risk of being killed or wounded if I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, or if I had been a suspect for them in any way."

Fortunately, I did not have any major problems.

See COLOMBIA, Page 5

Bernardo Garcia says his work in his native Colombia took him to dangerous areas of the country. Fortunately, he did not have any major problems.

DEP employee honored

The Association of West Virginia Solid Waste Authorities recognized the DEP’s Theodora Plumley for her service to the environmental health of West Virginia during its 2010 conference. Plumley, who works in the Youth Environmental Program out of French Creek, is pictured above being presented by AWVSWA officer Roger Frame.

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Department of Environmental Protection booths were set up on both the House and Senate sides on the second floor of the State Capitol for DEP Day at the Legislature on Jan. 19.

**DEP Day at the Legislature**

DEP Day at the Legislature came earlier in the session this year (Jan. 19) than in the past. Several of the DEP’s divisions and offices were represented at the State Capitol, where they mixed with legislators and visitors. Offices and divisions represented included Abandoned Mine Lands; Special Reclamation; Division of Mining and Reclamation; Office of Explosives and Blasting; Rehabilitation Environmental Action Plan; Division of Water and Waste Management; Office of Oil and Gas; Public Information Office; Environmental Enforcement; Project WET; Office of Environmental Advocate; Youth Environmental Program; Division of Air Quality; Human Resources; and the Solid Waste Management Board.

Tom McCarthy answers a question at the Division of Land Restoration’s Office of Special Reclamation booth.

John Killian helped man the Environmental Enforcement information booth at the Capitol.

DEP Cabinet Secretary Randy Huffman stopped by and visited with DEP staff and other well-wishers.

**New event focuses on unique type of reuse**

West Virginia’s first ZeroLandfill event to focus on “upcycling,” or keeping waste materials intact so they can be reused for another purpose, is being hosted by the Habitat for Humanity of Kanawha & Putnam County ReStore in Charleston. The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection is a sponsor of the event.

ZeroLandfill is a national reuse program that supports the supply needs of local artists and art educators, while reducing pressure on local landfill capacity.

It takes samples traditionally disposed of as waste and turns them into art and education supplies. On March 18 and 24 and again on April 1, between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., expired specification samples such as carpet tile, glass, fabric swatches and laminate chips from the architecture and interior design community can be dropped off at the ReStore located at 301 Piedmont Rd.

Once sorted, the “upcycled” items will be available for free to local art teachers and artists at the ReStore from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on April 2, 9 and 16.

For more information about the event, contact ZMM’s Jill Watkins at 304-342-0159 (ext. 240) or jmw@zmm.com. Learn more about ZeroLandfill at www.zerolandfill.net.
Current and past DMR employees mingle at DEP headquarters during a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the state being awarded primacy over mining.

DMR takes time to reflect on key day in its history

By Tom Aluise

More than 100 current and past Division of Mining and Reclamation employees filled the Coo pers Rock Room at DEP headquarters on Jan. 27 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of West Virginia’s primacy over its mining program.

On Jan. 21, 1981, the state’s permanent regulatory program was approved by the U.S. Department of the Interior. It marked the culmination of a four-year process during which state regulators either developed or approved the necessary regulations. The program was designed to protect the state’s water quality standards.

Special certificates were awarded to DMR employees who’ve been in the program 30 years or more. Pictured with DMR Director Tom Clarke (sixth from left) and Cabinet Secretary Randy Huffman (far right) are Larry Alt, Benny Campbell, Frances Browning, Sandy Humphreys, Charlie Sturey and Lewis Halstead.

Whole effluent toxicity (WET) testing is a key component to West Virginia’s new permitting guidance for surface coal mining operations. The guidance, which was released last summer by the Department of Environmental Protection, is intended to assist DEP mining permit writers in developing site-specific National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit conditions that will protect the state’s narrative water quality standards. WET testing is part of that guidance’s holistic watershed management approach.

In WET tests, lab-reared aquatic organisms are exposed to various dilutions of effluent for a specific time period, in order to predict at what levels the effluent may cause harm to the organisms. WET tests are designed to predict the impact and toxicity of effluents discharged from point sources into rivers and streams.

Because it’s a new component to mining permits in West Virginia, the DEP hosted an Environmental Protection Agency-sponsored training program on WET testing in January. The two-day train-

See DMR, Page 6

The DMR’s Joe Hager (left) talks with former Reclamation employee Bill Raney.

See CROWD, Page 5

New Additions

Recent DEP hires

► Kevin Coyne, DWWM
► John Dombloader, DMR
► Jennifer Mullen-Thaxton, OOG
► Lester Pritt, DLR
► Samuel Ward, OOG
► Amaris Zirkle, DMR
DEP, EPA partnering on ENERGY STAR Webinars

The DEP, in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and ENERGY STAR®, is providing three free Webinars to help West Virginians save money and protect the environment through energy-efficient products and practices.

Webinar Schedule:

**Thursday, March 10, 1 p.m.**

**Overview of ENERGY STAR Program** (90 minutes) — Webinar provides introduction to energy conservation and energy efficiency.

**Thursday, April 28, 1 p.m.**

**ENERGY STAR — Changing Behaviors and Getting Buy-In** (60 minutes) — Webinar discusses ENERGY STAR tools for promoting energy awareness and behavior change.

**Tuesday, May 24, 10 a.m.**

**Using ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager** (90 minutes) — Webinar provides detailed introduction to the ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager building benchmarking tool.

To register for one or more of the Webinars go to: [http://apps.dep.wv.gov/registration](http://apps.dep.wv.gov/registration) for more information contact Greg Adolphson at 866-568-6649 (ext. 1332) or gregory.e.adolphson@wv.gov.

**More than 80 people turned out for two days of WET Training.**

The Division of Mining and Reclamation had the most representatives at the training, which also attracted representatives from the Division of Water and Waste Management.

"We had a primer on the WET lab methods in 2008," Campbell said. "We knew then there were a lot more permit questions — how you put this into a permit, how you develop permit limits. This course went back and refreshed folks on the lab methods, but it was a little more focused on how you develop permit limits and what to look for in the data you receive from the lab. The feedback I've heard has been positive."

Jeff Parsons, who heads up NPDES permitting for DMR, said the WET training was extremely beneficial to his staff.

"This class started with an overview of the NPDES WET program and then went through the entire process from beginning to end," Parsons said. "In my opinion, the most helpful topics were the determination of reasonable potential (RP) and RP exercises in conjunction with the permit development and WET limit calculation exercises. These procedures will be utilized by the DMR/NPDES permitting staff to write permits that are protective of the narrative water quality standards."
DMR Continued from Page 4

Current and past DMR staff filled up the Coopers Rock Room at DEP headquarters.

In remarks to DMR staffers gathered for the anniversary event, DEP Cabinet Secretary Randy Huffman said the mining industry has evolved in ways no one could have predicted.

“The industry has required you to be more educated and sophisticated and you’ve stepped up to that,” Huffman said.

He also praised the DMR’s ability to function efficiently and professionally amid the growing criticism and controversy surrounding the mining industry.

“You continue to rise above all that noise and mess and do your job day in and day out,” Huffman said. “You guys manage to stay on the high road.”

In memory

Lucy Pontiveros, 67, died on Dec. 27, 2010. Lucy was an assistant director for Hazardous and Solid Waste in the Division of Air Quality and had 28 years of service in state government. She lived in St. Albans.

Lucy is survived by husband, Benny Pontiveros, who retired from the DEP in 2002, and six grown children. Lucy moved to the U.S. in 1981 from her native Philippines.

Lucy will be remembered for her quiet and gentle nature. She was a conscientious, dedicated worker who held high expectations for herself, as well as her employees. Her greatest joy was the devotion she had for her family and her pets.

Safety Committee reminds staff to keep sick kids home

For the well-being of Department of Environmental Protection employees, children of DEP staff too sick to attend school or daycare facilities, or are being sent home from school or daycare should not be brought into the workplace, according to a reminder from the DEP Safety Committee.

Sick children could be contagious and spread illness throughout the workplace.

Employees who bring ill children to work will be sent home, as directed by management.

PROGRAM Continued from Page 1

has four trainees, three housed in the Division of Mining and Reclamation, and one in the Information Technology Office.

All four work for DMR. Some work in data entry, which involves looking at water quality data or creating a separate database, complete with hydrologic information, such as the pH and flow of the water, on some mining permits.

One trainee is mapping mining permit boundaries and mining limits, ensuring accurate visualization and thus, better decisions.

The trainees are Mary Kate DiFrancesco, 22; Sarah E. Miloski, 24; Katie M. Murphy, 25; and Andrew C. Roberts, 26. Murphy and Roberts are from Charleston. Miloski hails from New York and DiFrancesco is a Massachusetts native.

What began in mid-October as a one-year stint to gain experience and network, might turn into permanent positions for some of the trainees.

“I’ve applied for a GIS position at DEP,” said DiFrancesco, who’s a graduate of Salem State College, where she majored in geography. “I knew the basics of GIS, but through training and daily use, I’ve gained more knowledge about the tools and the potential of GIS. I’ve gained valuable hands-on experience.”

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team responsible for monitoring the state’s streams for general over- all condition and for possible violations of water quality standards. “We’re always thrown into these hot issues,” said Pat Campbell, who heads up the WAB for the Division of Water and Waste Management. “We were immersed in the Dunkard Creek fish kill, the South Branch fish kills and we’re immersed in Marcellus Shale issues. Everything that comes up, we’re in, whether it’s mining issues, water qualitystand¬ dards or land use and degradation issues. “Our data informs all of these issues. So, we’re inherently involved in them.”

Fully staffed, the WAB consists of 29 employees, including biologists, engineers and environmental scientists. Its roots stretch back to the mid 1990s, when the Environmental Protection Agency urged the DEP to begin monitoring more of the state’s waters and provided start- up federal funding to do so.

Today, the WAB has two legs, its Watershed Assessment Section (WAS), under the direction of John Wirts, and its Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Section, headed up by Dave Montali.

The Watershed Assessment Section’s main focus is to measure the water quality and biological health of the state’s rivers and state streams through various monitoring programs. Staffers can use instruments on site to measure a stream’s flow, temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH and conductivity. Samples, however, must be taken to a lab to test for fecal coliform bacteria, alkalinity, nutrients and other pollutants such as aluminum, iron and manganese. The Watershed Assessment Section determines the biological health of a stream by analyzing its aquatic life communities. It provides to the lab samples of benthic macroinvertebrates or “bugs” (insects, snails, worms, etc) that, when analyzed, can provide a clearer picture of what’s been happening in a stream months prior to the collection.

“What we do is more than fill sample bottles,” Campbell said. “There is a detailed habitat assessment that goes with every biological sample. There are all these measurements made: What is the condition of the streambank? What does the substrate of the stream look like?

“We have a well-developed standard operating procedure that we go through. We try to make sure our data is as good as it can be.”

Data compiled by the Watershed Assessment Section is used to produce various reports for the general public and government agencies. It’s also used to compile the state’s 303(d) list of impaired streams and to support the development of TMDLs for those streams. A TMDL is a plan of action used to clean up streams not meeting water quality standards. The WAB completed its first TMDL in 2005. Prior to that, the EPA, subject to a lawsuit by environmental groups, developed TMDLs for the state.

Currently, there is TMDL development underway in all five of the state’s hydrologic groups. West Virginia is divided into 32 major watersheds, accounting for over 32,000 stream miles and each water-

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Watershed Assessment Branch staff sort fish collected from the North River (Cacapon River Basin).
DIVER — will pass along their wisdom. “I am not as worried about my inexperience because the team knows about it and they are going to be there to help me learn the ropes,” Horton said. “I hope to get some more training and obviously experience by going on dives.” Chaney, who captains the dive team and has 37 years of experience, believes Dasher and Horton will contribute to the quality of the team.

“George is a skilled diver and as a geologist, he has done considerable work with caving,” Chaney said. “He is very talented with navigation and mapping knowledge.”

“Sarah is a biologist and is a recent graduate of Marshall University. Her work with Watershed Assessment makes her an asset to the team. She is the youngest member of the team and has a willingness to gain new skills.”

Dasher said he has logged some memorable dives. “My girlfriend and I went to New Smyrna Beach, which is on the east coast of Florida, and dove on two wrecks — we were only five or so feet apart and couldn’t see each other for the reef fish,” Dasher said. “And because God gave reef fish the first choice of all the colors in the world, it was a very colorful, moving wall of fish between us. It was a wonderful dive. I also dove on the Oriskany on another trip,” Dasher said. “That’s a big Korean and Vietnam war aircraft carrier that has been sunk (on purpose) off Pensacola.

“That was a neat deep dive where I got to play with an octopus. She thought one of my fingers was food and attacked it and would not let go.

“Octopuses have slightly abrasive suction cups, which are not painful at all. I had to pull very gently on my finger for a long time, before she let go, and when she did let go, she immediately turned from a pale pink to a dark red. I figured she was mad that she didn’t end up with my finger.”

“That was also an impressive dive because we were diving on a U.S. warship.

“There were also a lot of spider crabs and sea urchins on the wreck, which were also neat to see.”

The WAB staff recently got together for a group photo.