

OUTDOORS

BULLETIN BOARD

The Conservation Coalition will hold a chainsaw safety course at the Luzerne Conservation District Office on Saturday, March 20, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The course will provide comprehensive and hands-on instruction for basic chainsaw maintenance, safety techniques and proper tree-cutting techniques. Course instruction will be given by state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources forester Andy Duncan. An award will be given to the best tree cutter, and refreshments will be provided. Registration is \$10 per person, and the deadline to register is March 15. For information, contact Shawn Rybka at 674-3412.

The Factoryville Sportsmen's Club will hold its regular monthly meeting on Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. in the clubhouse. All membership dues requirements need to be satisfied by the end of the meeting. Tickets for the SUPER-GUN event in May will be distributed.

The Northeast Pennsylvania Chapter of Pheasants Forever will hold a special event at the Dietrich Theater, 60 E. Tioga Street, in Tunkhannock, on March 10. Doors open at 6 p.m., and the program starts at 6:30. Speakers include: Jay Delaney, PGC commissioner for District 7; Shon Robbins, PF Regional Wildlife Biologist; and Colleen DeLong, PGC Wildlife Biologist. Topics include the PGC's 10-year Pheasant Management Plan, the Pennsylvania wild pheasant restoration program and general PF information. The event is free. Food and beverages will be available. For information, visit www.nepapf.org or call Scott Seaseck at 885-1122.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is seeking public input on a draft deer management plan, which can be reviewed on the agency's Web site (www.pgc.state.pa.us) by clicking on the "Draft Deer Management Plan" icon under the large photo in the center of the homepage. Public comments on the agency's deer management plan will be accepted until March 12, via the Web site or by mail to: Deer Management Plan, Pennsylvania Game Commission, 2001 Elmerston Ave., Harrisburg, Pa. 17110-9797.

Additionally, public comment can be offered at the open houses that the Game Commission will be hosting in six communities around the state between Feb. 20 and April 10. Open houses will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on a Saturday to maximize the opportunity for those interested in attending, and are being held in different locations than the three previous rounds to afford residents in other areas of the state the opportunity to attend. The open house for the northeast region will be held Saturday at the PPL Wallenpaupack Environmental Learning Center on 126 PPL Drive in Hawley.

The Lackawanna Valley and Endless Mountains chapters of Trout Unlimited will host a conservation banquet on Saturday, March 27, from 6 to 10 p.m. at Amadeo's Restaurant, 4001 Birney Ave., in Moosic. Cost is \$30 per person, and auctions and raffles will be held for wildlife art, wildlife photography, outdoor gear and fishing equipment. Proceeds go toward river and stream conservation projects and youth education. For information, email chaps2000@comcast.com or call 562-3383.

The Tubmill Trout Club will sponsor a statewide coyote hunt from March 19-21. The hunt begins at 12:01 a.m. on March 19, and concludes at 8 p.m. on March 21. Harvested coyotes can be checked in at the V.F.W. Post 7622 pavilion in New Florence. For information, visit www.tubmilltroutclub.org or contact Lindon at 724-235-9798 or lingamble@verizon.net.

PENN STATE EXTENSION will hold a Forest Landowners Conference on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Forest Resources Building in University Park.

Competing interests weigh in on water-release issue



GARY VISGAITIS/THE TIMES LEADER

Dean Druckenmiller, president of the Lehigh Coldwater Fishery Alliance, fly fishes for trout on the Lehigh River below Bowmanstown last fall. Druckenmiller would ultimately like to see a water-release plan that protects the wild and stocked trout that inhabit the Lehigh River.

Balancing act on Lehigh

By TOM VENESKY
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WHITE HAVEN — George Sauls has a task that not many people would envy.

As the northern area engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Philadelphia District, he oversees the daily operations of five dams, including the Francis E. Walter Dam.

As part of those duties, Sauls has to design an annual Flow Management Plan for the Francis Walter Dam, dictating how much water will be released into the Lehigh River below and when. What makes the job tough is there are two interests — anglers and whitewater rafters and kayakers, that want the water. At the same time, Sauls must balance what's best for the environment, the communities along the river and keep in mind the dam's top priority — flood control.

It's a balancing act that would challenge even the best tightrope walker in a circus.

"It's tough," Sauls said on Thursday after he unveiled the list of water releases for 2010 during a public hearing at the Mountain Laurel Resort.

This season's schedule calls for the same amount of water releases as the last two years — 24 — but they are more condensed than in the past. Instead of the October releases that occurred last year, this season half of the releases will occur in July and August.

Sauls said the releases will benefit anglers who want less rafting traffic on the river in the spring and fall, and the rafters and guide businesses who want more releases to coincide with their busy season during the warmest part of the summer.

It's a change that Sauls said was suggested by anglers who fish the river.

"The fishing interests brought it up. There is a greater interest in the spring and fall to fish, and a greater interest from rafters for warm weather," he said. "For the last 20 years the rafting demand has been used to spring and fall releases. Now, the rafting populace likes it warm."

While the release plan was designed to provide the greatest benefit to the users of the river while allowing the Corps to keep flood control a priority, some of those in attendance felt it neglects a vital resource of the river — the trout that call it home.

Dean Druckenmiller, president of the Lehigh Coldwater Fishery Alliance, said congregating releases during the August could result in deluges of summer-warmed water being released downriver. That could be devastating to



Lehigh River brown trout released

2010 whitewater release dates

24 scheduled releases from the Francis E. Walter Dam. All releases occur between 1 a.m. and 1 p.m.:

- May: 15, 29, 30
- June: 12, 13, 26, 27
- July: 10, 11, 24, 25, 31
- August: 1, 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28, 29
- September: 4, 5, 17*

*4,000 cubic feet per second release if sufficient storage is available

Release plans change over time

2005:	1,335 ft.	22 releases planned	10 held
2006:	1,365 ft.	22 releases planned	22 held
2007:	1,365 ft.	22 releases planned	19 held
2008:	1,370 ft.	24 releases planned	23 held
2009:	1,370 ft.	24 releases planned	24 held
2010:	1,370 ft.	24 releases planned	

NOTE: Feet refers to water height in the dam

Lehigh River facts

- Drains a 1,345-square-mile watershed
- Flows through 108 municipalities and 10 counties
- Contains 2,006 miles of tributaries
- 103 miles in length from its headwaters in Wayne County to its confluence with the Delaware River
- 32-mile stretch between White Haven and Jim Thorpe designated as a Pennsylvania Scenic River

SOURCES: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Wildlands Conservancy GARY VISGAITIS/THE TIMES LEADER

the trout below, he said, that are at risk anytime the water temperature exceeds 68 degrees.

"You get a thermal blanket in the reservoir and the water temperature can exceed 75 degrees, and those are pretty warm discharges that will go into the river," Druckenmiller said. "The water temperature increases in the summertime, and in July and August you have the lowest inflow of water into the dam and the highest outflow. My concern with clumping the releases is what will happen if we get a dry, hot summer. One warm discharge at that time of year and we lose a significant number of trout in the Lehigh River."

Ray Youngblood, who is an Alliance board member, cited additional concerns with the

plan, including the weekend releases and the subsequent high water in the river making it unfishable on Saturday and Sunday.

"The river is basically impossible to fish, and it's dangerous, when the water is high," he said.

Youngblood said the river benefited last summer when rainy conditions kept the water cooler during the summer. But if things get hot this summer, the release schedule will still benefit rafters but deluges of warm water from the dam won't do anything to help the fishery in the river, he said.

"It's a wait-and-see deal. The concern is what will happen if we see higher temperatures this summer with eight releases in August, right in the heart of it," Youngblood said.

Jerry McAward, who owns a kayak school and a whitewater rafting company in Jim Thorpe, said August releases will provide cooler water to the river for at least two days each week.

He added that the concentrated release schedule is also good for business, providing more whitewater opportunities during the summer months when most people want to be on a raft in the river.

By eliminating release dates from September and October, McAward said it removes days from the time of the year that didn't generate a lot of business and puts them in the middle of the busy summer season.

It also reduces the potential for conflicts between rafters and anglers, he said.

"The fishermen talk a lot about the second season — September and October. Concentrating the release dates to a time when more people want to paddle (in the summer) gives fishermen the solitude in the second season," McAward said.

But potential conflicts with rafters wasn't a concern to Druckenmiller, who said he'd ultimately like to see a plan that protects the wild and stocked trout that inhabit the river.

"I understand whitewater releases are vital for local economies and communities," Druckenmiller said. "But I'd rather see the releases more spaced out. In September and October, the cool nights cool the water in the dam, but it won't benefit the river if it's not released."

Sauls said differing opinions between anglers and rafters regarding the releases are nothing new, but the two sides are becoming more familiar with each other's issues.

Still, he admitted more changes are likely for release plans in the future.

"Ultimately, we want to get the perfect plan. We're not there yet," Sauls said.



TOM VENESKY

OUTDOORS

More than deer to blame for woes of forests

When I read the audit of the Pennsylvania Game Commission's deer management program that was released last week, I was troubled by one of the conclusions.

The audit, which was performed by the Wildlife Management Institute under a directive from the House Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, did yield some findings. Basically, it found that the agency's methods are scientifically sound but can be improved.

The audit (to read the audit visit <http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/reports/2010/43.PDF>) recommended that the agency use forest health as the barometer to measure the health of the deer herd, and not the current method of counting embryos per adult doe. To me, this is a step backwards. If forest health is the measuring stick, then how is the health of the deer herd going to be gauged in places like Lancaster County where forested land is minimal? Forests aren't the only habitat in the state — farmland and even suburban areas need to be considered as well.

The report also determined that the agency model used to track deer population trends is credible, and it shows that the 2007 population estimate was approximately 1.03 million deer in the state, a decrease of 25 percent from the 2002 estimate. All of these findings are well and good, with one exception.

In the audit, it states that Pennsylvania's forests are challenged by a number of environmental and social factors, but "abundance of deer is a major cause of forest regeneration failure."

In my opinion, this is a dangerous assumption to make.

And it's one that can be seemingly refuted thanks to a statement made by an official with a state agency that has always taken the stance that deer are to blame when the trees don't grow.

After the PGC's January meeting when the board voted to add four Wildlife Management Units to split buck and doe season, and also discussed halting the issuance of DMAP permits until applicants submitted an approved management plan, an official with the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources fired back.

In a released statement, DCNR's state forester Dan Devlin chastised the board for taking four WMUs out of the concurrent two-week buck and doe season format.

"The areas where hunters are seeing few deer also are the areas where we are seeing little forest regeneration, which begs the question — where are more deer going to find more food?" Devlin wrote, surmising that the move away from the concurrent will result in a deer population increase.

The bigger question generated by Devlin has nothing to do with deer and food. If hunters are seeing few deer in areas where Devlin admits DCNR is seeing little forest regeneration, then there are factors in play other than deer.

Could acid rain or poor soil quality be impacting forest regeneration as much or more than deer?

Did WMI consider those possible factors when they conducted the audit?

State Rep. Ed Staback, who chairs the House Game and Fisheries Committee, said he was pleased with the audit overall, but he also took exception to the finger being pointed at deer in regards to poor forest regeneration.

"The fact that the number of deer has been reduced so low and forest regeneration hasn't been so quick makes you think there are factors other than deer," Staback said. "Deer do their share, but they aren't the only culprit."

What makes the entire issue more troubling is not only the possibility that other factors are impacting forest health, but it seems that little has been done to identify them and come up with a solution.

Sure, the audit was an interesting read, but by blaming deer for poor forest regeneration and failing to look anywhere else, it made a dangerous conclusion.

NEPA chapter of NRA to hold fundraising event

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Chapter, Friends of NRA, will hold its 18th annual fundraising banquet on Saturday, March 20, at Genetti Manor, 1505 N. Main Ave., Dickson City (off Exit 190 of Route 81).

In addition to the family-style dinner, the event consists of live and silent auctions, bucket drawings and door prizes, and other games and special events. Included in the auctions are firearms, limited edition prints and sculptures and many other valuable items.

Since its inception in 1992, Friends of NRA has held more than 12,000 events, reached more

than 2 million attendees and raised more than \$140 million for The NRA Foundation, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Each year, The NRA Foundation allocates half of all net proceeds to fund projects within the state in which the money was raised and uses the other half to fund similar projects with national scope.

These funds are made available to qualified people or groups through NRA Foundation State Fund Committee Grants. Committee volunteers are appointed to State Fund Committees to make recommendations for local grant funding in areas such as youth firearm safety and educa-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

NEPA Friends of NRA committee: Lisa Spencer, Barbara Mozeleski, John Kistler, Nancy Brdaric, Ed Kochanski Jr., Russ Cowher, Joe Giordano, Mark Cooper, Chris Czachor and Carl Mozeleski.

tion programs, hunter education, range development and improvement, women's training seminars, and wildlife conservation efforts. Recognizing that America's young people represent the future of the shooting sports, State Fund Committee grants are frequently given to youth programs,

allocating more than 50 percent of grant monies to this important area.

For information on the Friends of NRA, visit www.nrafoundation.org. For information on the banquet, call Carl Mozeleski at 587-2662 or e-mail at dbcmoz@epix.net.