



JOHN HAEGER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

State Rep. Mike Cabell, R-117, Luzerne, Butler Twp., left, looks on and listen as Gary Leander, center, and Tim Ference of Friends of the Nescopeck, explain about the run off of the Jeddo Tunnel during a tour of the site on Friday.

TUNNEL VISION

State lawmakers consider solution to Jeddo Tunnel pollution

BY KENT JACKSON
STAFF WRITER

BUTLER TWP. — When the state lawmakers, township officials, engineers and volunteer creek watchers hiked down the path, sloppy from recent rain, they saw water swooshing through a rusty grate.

It was aqua blue like after shave.

The color comes from copper that the acidic water collects on its journey beneath coalfields of Hazleton to the mouth of the

Jeddo Tunnel here at Little Nescopeck Creek.

Copper kills fish, and Jeddo Tunnel generates 56% of the copper in the Susquehanna River, which the Little Nescopeck feeds. The tunnel also is the source of 17% of manganese and 3% of iron in the river.

For 128 years since the tunnel began draining mine, the Little Nescopeck Creek has been dead.

The volume of water flowing through the tunnel daunted engineers and financiers who

proposed ways to purify the water.

Then, 18 months ago, something changed.

“The good news,” state Sen. David Argall, R-29, Lake Hauto, said after hiking back up from the tunnel on Friday afternoon, “because of a new federal allocation, there is more money available than ever.

“The bad news is we still have to develop the technology.”

Tim Ference of Friends of the Nescopeck, a group of volun-

teers who have tested the creek water and advocated for a clean-up, said there are two ways to treat acid mine water that exits the tunnel.

Passive treatment plants into which water flows into a series of ponds where pollutants settle out but require more land than active treatment plants, which add calcium and aerate the water to allow copper and other metals to settle.

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Aluminum

limestone

TUNNEL: 'We know we're bigger'

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"Active treatment, realistically, for this site is the only way to go" Ference said, referring to the volume pouring out of the tunnel.

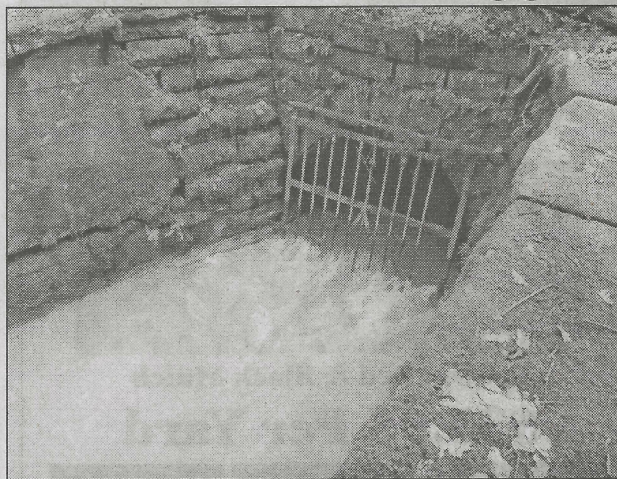
Asked by Janet Schmitt, president of Western Pocono Chapter of Trout Unlimited, what he would like done at the tunnel, Ference said he favored a treatment plant that would be large enough to treat the average volume, which is 35,000 to 45,000 gallons a day.

Peter Haentjens of Eastern Middle Anthracite Region Recovery pointed out that the Jeddo Tunnel really aggregates six tunnels built from 1895 to 1934 that drain 33 square miles. At the entrance to Tunnel X, the newest of the tunnels, near Cedar Street in Hazleton, the water is cleaner, and Haentjens has been trying to convince the Hazleton City Authority to treat the water there. Unlike the Lehigh River, an unreliable source during droughts that supplies the authority now, Tunnel X would provide steady supply, and the plan would reduce the flow into the Little Nescopeck Creek by 8 million gallons a day, Haentjens said.

On Friday afternoon, a gauge that U.S. Geological Survey installed at the tunnel outfall read 125 cubic feet per second, which is 80,794,800 gallons a day or about double the average flow.

A treatment plant would need a diverter for days like Friday when the flow exceeded the average.

Even if a coalition invests tens of millions of dollars to build a treatment plant and allocates annual operating funds, the Little Nescopeck Creek probably wouldn't support trout downstream



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Run off of the Jeddo Tunnel during a tour of the site on Friday.

from the tunnel, mining engineer Mike Korb told the township supervisors last year. Korb, who retired from the state Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation but works part-time for Tetra Tech engineering, did think a treatment plant would allow the water to support fish by where the Little Nescopeck enters the Big Nescopeck.

State Rep. Mike Cabell, R-17, asked where a treatment plant could be built.

One suggestion, he was told, is the township's pump station and former sewage treatment plant off South Beisels Road just downstream from the tunnel.

"I live here. This is important. I've been looking at this my entire life," said Cabell, who suggested involving federal lawmakers in the effort to treat the water.

Korb said the federal infrastructure bill, approved Nov. 6, 2021, gives Pennsylvania \$245 million a year for 15 years for projects like the tunnel.

Schmitt said if the tunnel water isn't addressed now when money is available, it never will be.

"There is some validity in that," Ference told her.

No place else in the state discharges a larger volume of polluted mine water than the Jeddo Tunnel, except perhaps the Old Forge Borehole in Lackawanna County.

"They claim they're bigger," Ference said. "We know we're bigger."

State Sen. Lynda Schlegel Culver, R-27, Rockefeller Twp., Northumberland County, has mine drainage and mining sites throughout the district that she was chosen to represent in a special election on Jan. 31, but looked up the Jeddo Tunnel before the tour.

"It's massive," Schlegel Culver said. "I was shocked."

She said the tunnel, built to solve a problem of flooded mines in the 1890s, led to unforeseen problems, which provides a lesson to the current generation as it engineers new remedies.

"I think they're on the right path," Schlegel Culver said. "I don't think it's going to be an easy or quick solution."

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