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The River Unites Us:

Stories about the Scenic Wild
Delaware River by those who know it best

This month's column features Alan Hunt, Executive Director, Musconetcong Watershed Association

The River Unites Us:

What does the Musconetcong Watershed Association (MWA) do?

Alan Hunt: Our grassroots organization was formed in 1993 by residents who believe that a community that is fully aware of the importance and vulnerability of its natural, cultural, and recreational resources will actively support efforts to ensure environmental quality. We engage our residents in watershed conservation through training volunteer citizen scientists in our River Watcher program and teaching children about watersheds and environmental stewardship in schools and summer camp. We work in public/private partnerships to restore the river. We engage our local municipalities and counties to provide training on stormwater management. People have prospered in this watershed for over 12,000 years. We hope to tell that story in the stone grist mill we are restoring and inspire people to look after our resources, ensuring the watershed remains a great place for generations to come.

TRUU: What challenges does the watershed face?

AH: There are a variety of challenges, from drinking water supply diversions that reduce water flow in its headwaters, to significant withdrawals for power plant cooling water, to stormwater runoff from towns and farms. Several large-scale projects are proposed along the River, including housing development, warehousing and a power plant – all of which could impact water quality to the Musconetcong, and potentially, the Delaware River. These are significant threats, but our residents have a vision that the Musconetcong River should be restored to ecological health to support tourism and recreation. Examples of projects we do to support that vision are removal of obsolete dams to lower water temperatures for native Brook Trout and improve habitat for migratory fish like American Shad. We participate in the SWDR geotourism program and have formed a board committee to promote agricultural and heritage tourism.

TRUU: The Scenic Wild Delaware River (SWDR) Geotourism Program encourages travelers to experience the region's natural resources. As a partner in SWDR, how does MWA's

work educate recreational users about the importance of conservation efforts?

AH: Like most of the Delaware River, the majority of the Musconetcong is designated a National Wild & Scenic River based on its recreational and scenic values. With 16 public access points on the river and over 10,000 acres of preserved land, the Musconetcong is accessible for fishing, hunting, and paddling and camping.

We are working on updating our Water Trail Guide and have applied for a National Water Trail designation to increase awareness of paddling opportunities. We are removing an abandoned building on a quarter acre island near our headquarters to increase access in a favorite fishing spot. We always have projects ready for volunteers to help with, including expanding our River Education Trail to a four-mile loop trail making it a more valuable visitor experience.



Alan Hunt

TRUU: SWDR encompasses a 150-mile, three state, 9 county region. What are the benefits of taking a regional approach to conservation?

AH: You can't go it alone and expect to be effective. Back in the time of European settlement, rivers were used as boundaries and dividing lines. This resulted in a legacy of fragmented management for our region's water and natural resources. Collaborations like the Musconetcong River Management Council, which includes 14 riverfront municipalities and four counties, help unite us in stewarding our natural and cultural

resources. Collaboration means thinking like a watershed – that whatever and whoever is in it should be considered when stewarding the watershed's resources.

TRUU: What are some "must see and experience" places that you recommend for travelers that can be found at www.scenicwilddelawareriver.com

AH: Besides outdoor recreation, we've got some great things to do in our watershed. Alba and Villa Milagro Vineyards are nearby. Check out the breweries and festivals in Hackettstown, NJ, just a stone's throw from the Musconetcong River. The Asbury Mill tours tell about our history. Centenary Stage Co. brings quality performances. Get Jersey fresh produce at Donaldson Farms. MWA'S spring volunteer events are listed on our SWDR page for those who want to get up close and personal with our work.

This column is syndicated by the **Blue Valley Times**



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About The Scenic Wild Delaware River Geotourism Project:

Scenic Wild Delaware River Geotourism is one of only 23 geotourism programs created by National Geographic worldwide. Working collaboratively in the 3 states along the middle & upper Delaware River region, the Program promotes and sustains the region's resources for long-term economic and environmental vitality. NPCA helps staff this program.

Visit the interactive travel website showcasing local experiences at

www.ScenicWildDelawareRiver.com



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