

Juniata Clean Water Partnership gets grant for river weed control

By **RON MORGAN**
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The seven-county Juniata Clean Water Partnership (JCWP) will be launching a cooperative weed control project in the near future, a project aimed at protecting and enhancing the Juniata Watershed.

The announcement of the \$49,000 matching grant to support the project was made at the annual dinner meeting of the JCWP Jan. 30 in the Huntingdon Country Club. Members of the JCWP attended the session from the counties of Huntingdon, Bedford, Fulton, Blair, Juniata, Mifflin and Perry.

The JCWP was created a decade ago for the purpose of protecting and enhancing the Juniata watershed through a variety of educational, advocacy and partnership activities. In addition to watershed protection initiatives, the organization is involved in several greenways and rails to trails projects.

The \$49,000 matching grant was provided to the JCWP and Natural Biodiversity by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, said Michael Makufka, JCWP executive

director. In addition to the grant, matching funds from the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Recreational Equipment Inc. will be utilized to carry out the project, he said. The JCWP will be administering the grant.

Still in the preliminary stages, the proposed management plan will depend on the input from many partners, Makufka said. "The proposed project will focus on prevention, early detection and rapid response and on impacts upon sensitive plant communities, wild trout and agricultural environments within the Juniata watershed," he said.

The deadline for completing the management plan is a year with the project team partnering with municipalities and local conservation groups to form a cooperative weed management area partnership that will address invasive plant issues, Makufka said. The plan will focus on public areas like state and local parks within the Juniata watershed.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is a non-

profit group that provides funding on a competitive basis to projects that sustain, restore and enhance the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats through Keystone Initiative Grants and other Special Grant Program.

The Johnstown-based, non-profit Natural Biodiversity is dedicated to restoring nature's diversity in Pennsylvania's Allegheny Mountains through invasive plant management and native habitat planting projects, led by community volunteers and associated groups. Natural Biodiversity was formed in 1990 and provides field assessments, planning, on-the-ground projects, education and so on.

Also highlighting the recent dinner meeting were brief updates on several projects of which the JCWP is involved. Briefly, the projects include:

- State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Lower Trail Feasibility Study which includes a study into the possibility of extending the Lower (Rails-to-Trails) Trail from Alfarata to Huntingdon Borough.

- DCNR education and outreach in which the JCWP is helping with the implementation of a number of area Greenway plans.

- Natural Biodiversity activities in which the JCWP is working on a project at the Canal Basin Park in Hollidaysburg and the Lower Trail at Water Street. The project focuses on controlling the invasive plant species.

- JCWP education and outreach, a project in which the organization is working with area schools to implement environmental standards.

- A state Department of Environmental Protection-funded stormwater management project at the Tussey Mountain Junior-Senior High School, where the JCWP is working with the school district to construct a pervious pavement parking lot and two bio-retention cells ("Rain Gardens"). The project is being performed in conjunction with the district's \$18.5 million

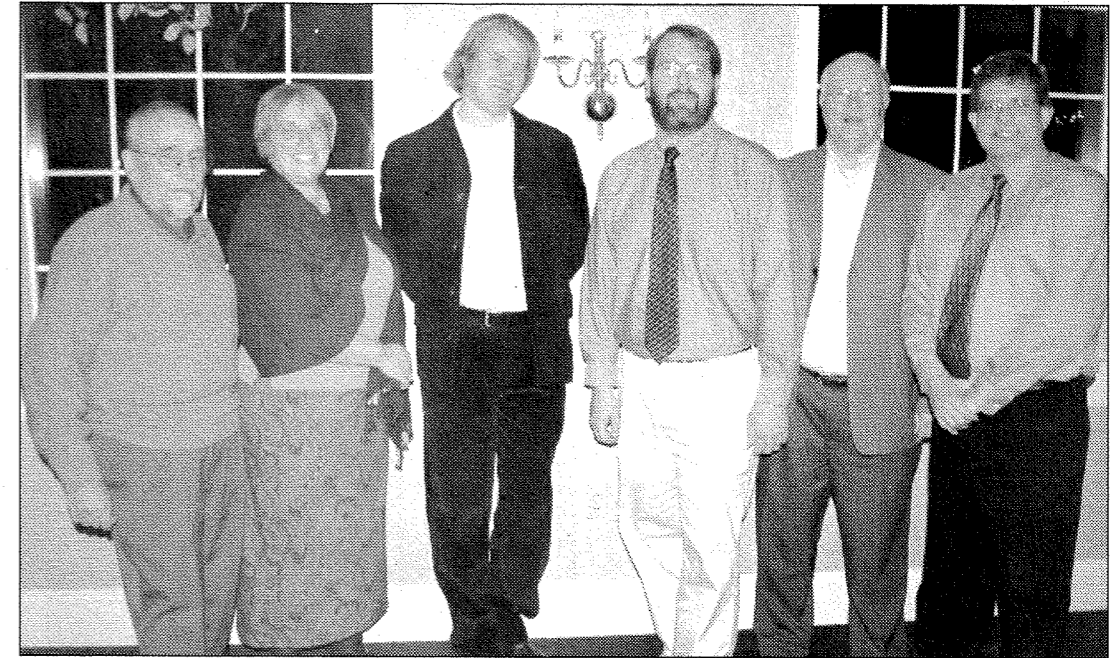


Photo by **RON MORGAN**

Taking part in Friday evening's Juniata Clean Water Partnership (JCWP) annual dinner program were its officers, from the left, Bernard Hoffnar, vice chairman; Juniata College Professor Kathy Jones, treasurer; author-hiking enthusiast Ben Cramer, guest speaker; James Eckenrode, chairman; Dick Haines, secretary; and Michael Makufka, executive director.

junior-senior high school renovations and additions project.

Guest speaker for the JCWP program was Ben Cramer, noted hiking enthusiast and editor of Pennsylvania Hiking Trails. Cramer, who has hiked over 3,000 miles on many Pennsylvania hiking trails, including many of the state's long-distance backpacking trails, spoke to the audience about the many benefits of hiking, ranging from improving and maintaining health to impacting the tourism economy.

The accomplished outdoor guide who has gained recognition for his focus on educating participants on Pennsylvania geography, history and environmental challenges described many of his "adventures" while hiking local, regional, state and national trails, many of which criss-cross several local counties. In addition to providing health benefits to all age groups and familiarizing hikers with the environment, hiking is an important component of the ecotourism business, Cramer added.

The guest speaker, a native of State College and an instructor at Penn State University, encouraged JCWP members to become active in hiking and other outdoor activities and the continued preservation of hiking trails. He reminded the audience that hiking continues to be a big sport in Pennsylvania with hikers flocking to many state parks, state forests and other public areas to enjoy the outdoor activities. He also noted that hikers often have the opportunity to experience the wonders of nature and the environment while monitoring potential threats to the environment, including watershed issues.

Cramer identified some of the well-known (and local) hiking trails he has traveled, including the Mid State Trail, Lower Trail, Standing Stone Trail, Tuscarora Trail and the Appalachian Trail.

Responding to a question about what to do when a hiker comes upon a potentially dangerous animal, reptile, etc.,

Cramer answered that in most cases creatures of the outdoors quickly go the other way, presenting a threat only if they are threatened. But he quickly added, "If you see something, you should feel honored to see it."

Regarding the "cooperative" preservation of the natural resources, Cramer urged JCWP officials to focus on education and public awareness, particularly in the schools. Regarding the growing health threats brought on by inactivity, particularly among young people who chose electronics (cell phones, television, computer games, etc.) over outdoor exercise, the guest speaker urged the public to "get out there and enjoy the environment."

Serving as master of ceremonies for the JCWP was Bernard Hoffnar, vice chairman of the organization, who introduced numerous guests, including representatives from many area watershed groups, businesses and others involved in JCWP activities.