2005 Targeted Watersheds Grants: Cheat River

West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania

WHY IS THIS WATERSHED SPECIAL?

The Cheat River flows 157 miles and drains 1,420 square miles before meeting with the Monongahela River and, eventually, the Ohio River. The watershed serves as a haven to endangered species of bats and snails. Native trout, wild turkey and black bear also abound in parts of the watershed. Cheat Canyon, a popular recreation area, attracts thousands of whitewater enthusiasts each year, and rock climbers, cavers, fishermen and hikers also come to enjoy the river and its incredible natural beauty. However, recreational opportunities are diminished by the contaminated water and complaints of ailments after contact with the unhealthy waters of the Cheat.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Large-scale mining and strip mining have occurred in the watershed since the 1920s. Acid mine drainage went largely unabated until the passage of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977. When two significant abandoned mine blowouts occurred in 1994 and 1995, millions of gallons of untreated acid mine drainage flowed into Muddy Creek, a major tributary of the Cheat River.

The Targeted Watersheds Grant focuses on a number of environmental problems stemming from years of mining and acid mine drainage. Heavy metals, including iron, aluminum and manganese; and a low pH from the Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) threaten human health, fisheries and water quality of the Cheat River.

Mainstem of the Cheat River at the confluence with Muddy Creek, showing iron precipitate entering the river from an impaired stream.

RESTORATION ACTIVITIES

To achieve water quality improvements in the lower Cheat River, the Friends of the Cheat will use EPA Targeted Watersheds Grant funds to restore 28 stream miles in the Muddy Creek sub-watershed. They will:

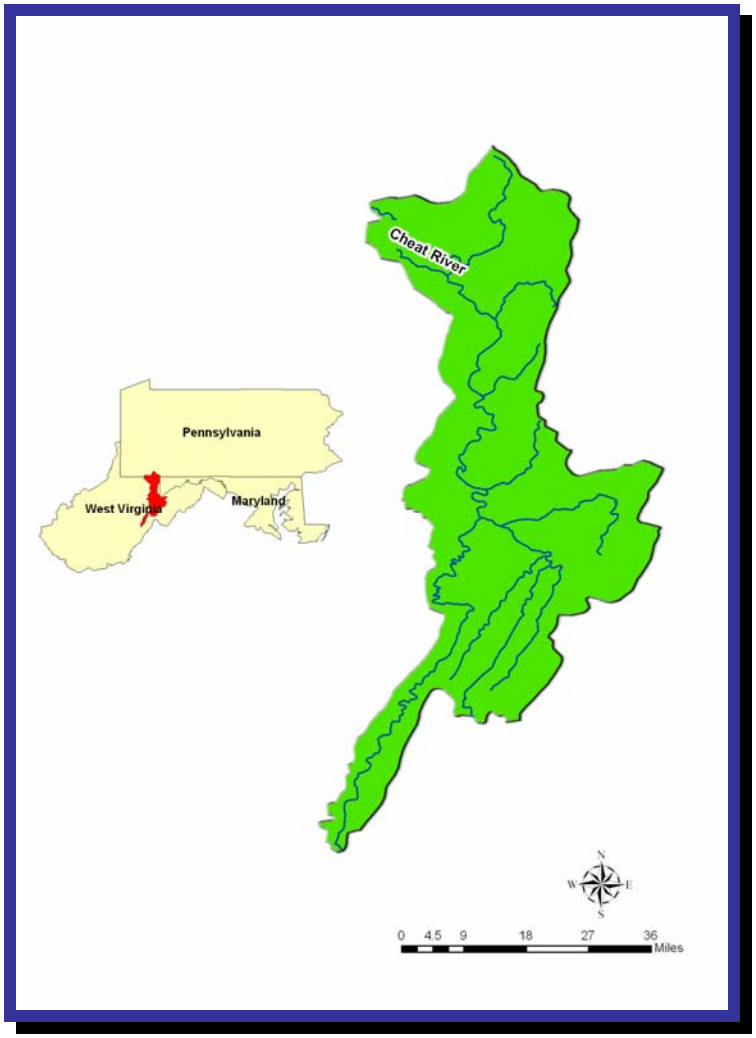
- Restore streams using three different treatment technologies, both active and passive, and assess the resulting ecological benefits.
- Compare the efficacy (cost and ecological benefits) of each treatment technology.
- Initiate water quality monitoring and macroinvertebrate sampling at 13 stream locations
- Determine and plot cumulative downstream loadings for Muddy Creek watershed, the largest sub-watershed tributary to the lower Cheat River.

Targeted Watersheds

A STRONG PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE

Formed in 1995 in response to repeated mine blowouts that caused an impact on the whitewater recreation in the area, the Friends of the Cheat work in collaboration with many partners. *The River of Promise*, a public-private partnership lead by Friends of the Cheat, includes diverse organizations committed to restoring the watershed, such as:

- West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection
- West Virginia Department of Natural Resources
- U.S. Office of Surface Mining
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- National Mine Land Reclamation Center at West Virginia University
- West Virginia Rivers Coalition



EPA's Targeted Watersheds Grants

EPA's Targeted Watersheds Grants program is a competitive grant program designed to encourage collaborative, community-driven approaches to meet clean water goals.

Friends of the Cheat's OSM/VISTA Doug Ferris at an AMD seep at a "surface reclaimed' site.

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