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Native Eels Return to Pickering Creek

Project partners celebrate the release of American Eel into Pickering Creek

Chester Springs, PA – On Thursday, August 29, the Delaware Riverkeeper Network, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, and United States Geologic Survey held an event at the Historic Yellow Springs celebrating the release of over 1,000 American Eels into Pickering Creek.

American Eels are native to the Pickering, but they are a migratory fish whose access to streams has been reduced by dams. Over the past few decades, American Eel populations have decreased dramatically in the Schuylkill River watershed, including Pickering Creek. An integral part of the ecosystem, declines in eels have potentially far-reaching implications for the health of the streams they traditionally live in.

Project partners Delaware Riverkeeper Network, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, and United States Geologic Survey are undertaking a three-year study in which they will re-introduce eels to Pickering Creek. Project partners have been working with local conservation groups, including Green Valleys Watershed Association, French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, and Historic Yellow Springs. A major component of this study is to learn if the re-introduction of eels has an effect on the population of invasive crayfish in the creek, the numbers of which have increased as the numbers of eels decreased. Re-introducing native eels could be a potentially valuable conservation tool in the efforts to control invasive crayfish and restore native crayfish.

At the event, project partners released over 1,000 young eels into Pickering Creek, marking an important step in the study and ecological restoration of the creek.

“The conservation of migratory fish such as American Eels is worthy on its own, but this project highlights how migratory fish also play pivotal ecological roles that must be protected and valued. It is why we at the Delaware Riverkeeper Network advocate so strongly for free-flowing rivers and streams, and why we continue to press for the self-sustaining restoration of all of our key migratory and non-migratory species,” said **Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper and leader of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network.**

“This project represents an incredible collaboration among researchers from non-profit organizations, academia, and the federal government. The distinct contributions from each organization is what both opens up such unique restoration opportunities and makes this research

endeavor so important in improving our understanding of these amazing ecological systems,” said **Dr. Erik Silldorff, Restoration Director, Delaware Riverkeeper Network.**

“In 1810 in the Pennsylvania *Port Folio*, Yellow Springs was described as a ‘perfection of landscape.’ With nearly 300 years of documented history, the site has been: a Lenape Indian village; a health spa with healing mineral water; a Revolutionary War Hospital George Washington commissioned; the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Country School and the Good News Productions’ movie studio, famous for the “Blob”. As this unique place unfolded and reinvented itself over the centuries entwining the people, the history and the environment, it seems so fitting to reintroduce a native species that was once here. Reintroducing the eels to the creek will again help preserve a section of our environment at Historic Yellow Springs, continuing to move us forward to flourish and to adapt within this ‘perfection of landscape.’ It has been wonderful working with Dr. Erik Silldorff and his team; we have learned so much about the unique ecosystem of the Pickering Creek, and are excited to be a part of this study,” said **Karen Walter, Executive Director, Historic Yellow Springs.**

“The reintroduction of eels to the Pickering Creek drainage, decades after their extirpation, represents a unique opportunity to restore the ecological services they provide to the basin. We are particularly interested in determining if eels can eliminate or control exotic crayfish, which have spread throughout the basin in recent years, eliminating or greatly reducing native crayfish at invaded sites,” said **Dr. David A. Lieb, Invertebrate Zoologist, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.**

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