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NEWS FROM THE PEQUANNOCK RIVER COALITION

Disaster Averted on Pequannock River

June 5, 2011 – To All:

On Sunday May 30 a thunderstorm pushed increased water over the dam at the Oak Ridge Reservoir. This spillway water is hot, especially with the recent hot weather, driving up the temperature of the river downstream. On Monday we alerted the City of Newark and the NJDEP, requesting that additional cold bottom water be released from the Oak Ridge Reservoir to cool the river. The NJDEP permit PRC fought for that controls this release says:

“The City of Newark shall... ..achieve a temperature in the Pequannock River immediately downstream of Oak Ridge Reservoir ≤ 68 degrees F value on a seasonal average with a maximum daily average temperature of less than 74 degrees Fahrenheit from May 31st to October 31st when Oak Ridge Reservoir is spilling water over the dam, the City of Newark shall... ..make additional bottom releases from the Oak Ridge Reservoir in order to maintain a water temperature immediately downstream of Oak Ridge Reservoir within the ranges described above... ”

The City assured us that additional water was being released. However, on Tuesday the river temperature continued to climb. We again contacted both the state and Newark, demanding more action. Finally more water was released in the afternoon, gradually reducing temperatures. The high point reached was 82.2 degrees, perilously close to a disastrous fish kill that would have wiped out trout and other sensitive species in the river.

Only our quick action and the short duration of these temperatures as shown in the graph below – about 2 hours - prevented tragedy. A follow-up survey the next day revealed no dead trout.

While we are pleased that we had the new permit conditions there to defend the river, there is no need for such a close call. In the future the response from Newark must be more immediate and more substantial. We are driving this point home with the NJDEP.

For now supporters of PRC can feel satisfied that our efforts have produced results – a river saved!

Thanks,
Ross Kushner, Executive Director
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