

# NOTES

*from the field*

## Caring for rivers

By John Page Williams

It's a quiet morning as we launch Lance Dunham's 16-foot john-boat into the Susquehanna at Wysox to float the 15 miles to Terrytown. Dick Rivers has a 10-inch smallmouth on for two jumps in the first hundred yards. A juvenile bald eagle lifts from a tree on the east bank and flies across the river. Lance works us through a riffle with his oars as we watch six American merganser ducklings learning to fish. A great blue heron stalks a backwater. I look up at the river flowing from a 200-foot high wooded gorge behind us.

The Chesapeake is 200 river miles downstream, and the water under us now will float my skiff in Annapolis in a couple of weeks. In this section, between Towanda and Tunkhannock, about 25 miles below the New York state line, the river meanders between high, rocky bluffs, with lower meadows and woodlands on the insides of the turns. There's not much pavement, only a highway and a train track that follow the river's course. No urban runoff here. Rain soaks into the ground and percolates into the creeks.

Timber was the major industry here until, as they say, "the woods worked out" early in this century. With the trees gone, people moved away and the woods grew back. No wonder the river looks so good. Removing the pressure of people is a remarkably effective tactic for environmental restoration.

I ask Lance if he sees water quality problems on the river. He mentions three industrial plants in Towanda, a large paper mill at Mehoopany, and several sewage treatment plants, but he says that, "The state keeps after them pretty well." By regulating these point source discharges, the Clean Water Act, 25 years old this October, appears to serve this part of the Susquehanna well.

A week later, I think about "restoration by abandonment" as CBF's Potomac River workboat, *Susquehanna*, cruises down that

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