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Dunkard fish kill topic of hearing

DNR expert, DEP official to testify

Staff, submitted reports

CHARLESTON — The state Legislature plans to look into the Dunkard Creek Fish kill this week on the final day of interims.

The Joint Legislative Oversight Commission on State Water Resources, co-chaired by Delegate Tim Manchin, D-Marion, and Sen. John Unger II, D-Berkeley, has included a presentation on the issue for its Thursday meeting, set to begin at 9 a.m. in the Senate Judiciary Committee Room. The meeting is open to the public.

Scott Mandirola, of the state Department of Environmental Protection, and Frank Jernejcic, district fisheries biologist with the state Division of Natural Resources, will address the committee.

“The frustrating thing is that folks in the Upper Monongahela River Association predicted that something like this would happen last year,” Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, said in a press release.

Fleischauer helped set the wheels in motion to bring the matter to the committee. She also co-sponsored a bill introduced last session, HB 2960, intended to require the DEP “to develop specific standards to control levels of total dissolved solids in the state’s rivers and streams.” Mon County’s three other delegates and Delegate Linda Longstreth, D-Marion, were also among the sponsors.

Dunkard Creek zigzags across the West Virginia-Pennsylvania border, from its source in western Mon County to the Monongahela River. Dead fish were first spotted in early September.

The dead zone extends the length of the creek and as far upstream as St. Leo near the mouth of the South Fork tributary, southwest of Wadestown near the Marion County border.

Fleischauer said the kill has since affected at least 161 aquatic species.

Officials are still examining the cause but put much of the blame at this point on a golden algae bloom, *Prymnesium Parvum*, which is native to salt water.

Some have attributed the algae growth to chlorides and “total dissolved solids” tied to mine drainage.

Looking to Thursday, Manchin said, “I hope the interim meeting ... will bring attention to the causes of this modern environmental disaster. I think it is important to look quickly into what other states have done in order to prevent this from spreading to other streams in our state.”

