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ALCOHOL USE IS RISING IN OLDER AMERICANS. A7

We're *All* About It

Tuesday, April 2, 2024

\$1



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Some of the land associated with the reclaiming, revitalization and restoration of abandoned mine land surrounding the Nanticoke Creek Watershed in Hanover Twp.

CLEANING UP

Nanticoke Creek Watershed restoration starting soon

BY MICHAEL P. BUFFER
STAFF WRITER

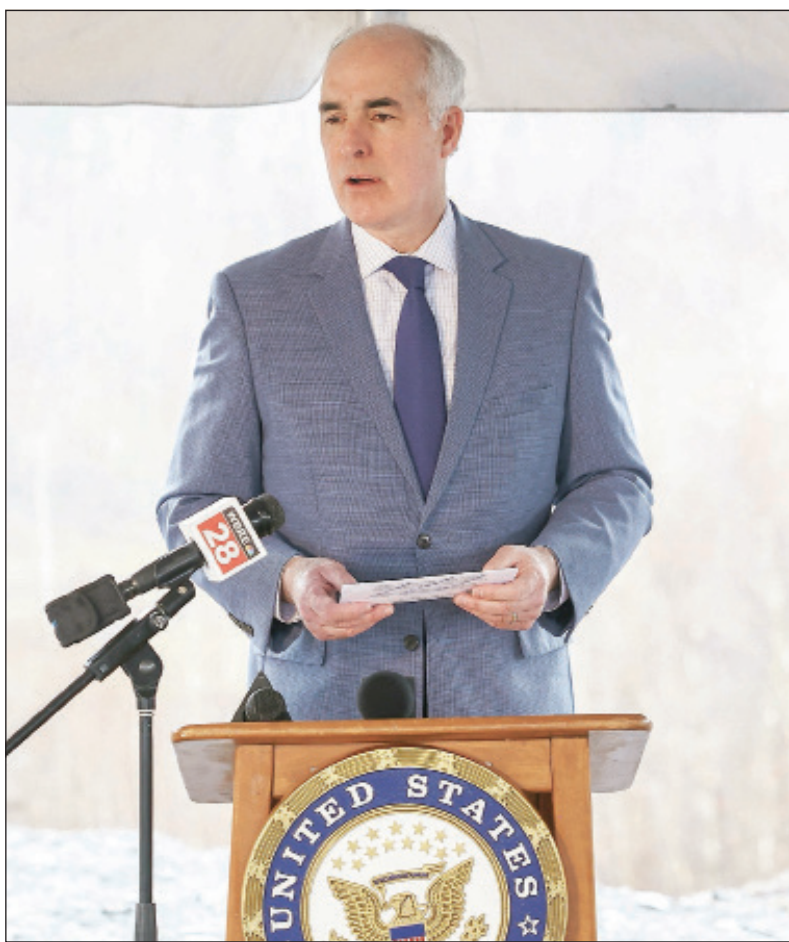
HANOVER TWP. — U.S. Sen. Bob Casey joined state officials Monday morning to discuss progress on the upcoming project to restore the Nanticoke Creek Watershed and combat impairments caused by the legacy of anthracite coal mining, such as obstructions, flow loss, dry stream beds and acid mine drainage.

Earth Conservancy is receiving \$1.96 million from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields and Land Revitalization Program and \$17.5 million through the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Abandoned Mine Lands and Acid Mine Drainage Grant Program for the watershed project.

Casey noted that Pennsylvania in 2022 received \$270 million in federal funds for abandoned mine land cleanup — \$26 million in annual funding from the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund program and an additional \$244 million from 2021's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Because of the funds provided for the watershed project, Earth Conservancy can start work this summer and finish in three to five years, said Terry Ostrowski, president and CEO of Earth Conservancy.

Please see **FUNDING**, Page A5



FRANK C. LAURI / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, D-Scranton, talks Monday about federal funding to reclaim and restore land impacted by coal mining.

APRIL 8 SOLAR ECLIPSE

Safety key when viewing eclipse

Looking at a solar eclipse can be dangerous without proper glasses.

BY ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — Millions of people along a narrow band in North America will look up when the sky darkens during a total solar eclipse on April 8. When they do, safety is key.

Staring directly at the sun during a solar eclipse or at any other time can lead to permanent eye damage. The eclipse is only safe to witness with the naked eye during totality, or the period of total darkness when the moon completely covers the sun.

Those eager to experience the eclipse should buy eclipse glasses from a reputable vendor. Sunglasses are not protective enough,

and binoculars and telescopes without a proper solar filter can magnify light from the sun, making them unsafe.

"Please, please put those glasses on," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said.

Where to find eclipse glasses

Since counterfeit glasses abound, consider purchasing glasses from a local science museum or order online from a seller cleared on the American Astronomical Society's website.

Eclipse safety experts say legitimate eclipse glasses should block out ultraviolet light from the sun and nearly all visible light. When worn indoors, only very bright lights should be faintly visible — not household furniture or wallpaper.

Please see **SAFETY**, Page A5

AG warns of fake eclipse glasses

Scammers could harm your eyes.

BY STEVE MOCARSKY
STAFF WRITER

State Attorney General Michelle Henry is alerting Pennsylvania consumers to beware of scammers selling glasses to view the solar eclipse on April 8, as those glasses might not keep you safe.

NASA is recommending that the millions of people expected to watch the eclipse use solar-viewing glasses due to the intense energy from the sun. Legitimate

solar-viewing glasses have special filters to protect your eyes; fake glasses do not have those filters.

"This is a fun and exciting global event, and that widespread anticipation has attracted scammers looking to make a buck without consideration of potential harm," Attorney General Henry said. "Do your research to make sure the glasses you buy will thoroughly protect your eyes and allow you to safely view the solar eclipse."

Please see **SCAMS**, Page A5



ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

A woman wears special glasses to watch a total solar eclipse in Piedra del Aguila, Argentina, in 2020.

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China's growing efforts to influence the US election are raising alarms

China appears to be trying to undermine the Biden administration.

BY TIFFANY HSU
AND STEVEN LEE MYERS
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Covert Chinese accounts are masquerading online as American supporters of former President Donald Trump, promoting conspiracy theories, stoking domestic divisions and attacking President Joe Biden ahead of the election in November, according



to researchers and government officials.

The accounts signal a potential tactical shift in how Beijing aims to influence American politics, with more of a willingness to target specific candidates and parties, including Biden.

In an echo of Russia's influence campaign before the 2016 election, China appears to be trying to harness partisan divisions to undermine the

Biden administration's policies, despite recent efforts by the two countries to lower the temperature in their relations.

Some of the Chinese accounts impersonate fervent Trump fans, including one on X, formerly Twitter, that purported to be "a father, husband and son" who was "MAGA all the way!!" The accounts mocked Biden's age and shared fake images of him in a prison jumpsuit, or claimed that Biden was a Satanist pedophile while promoting Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan.

"I've never seen anything along those lines at all before," said Elise Thomas, a senior analyst at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a nonprofit research organization that uncovered a small group of the fake accounts posing as Trump supporters.

Thomas and other researchers have linked the new activity to a long-running network of accounts connected with the Chinese government known as Spamouflage.

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Reveka Pasternak, left, and her sister Tristen use pinhole projectors to view a partial solar eclipse on Aug. 21, 2017, on the campus of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Cambridge, Mass.

SAFETY: Eclipse can damage your eyes

FROM PAGE A1

Old eclipse glasses from the 2017 total solar eclipse or October's "ring of fire" annular eclipse are safe to reuse, as long as they aren't warped and don't have scratches or holes.

Glasses should say they comply with ISO 12312-2 standards, though fake suppliers can also print this language on their products. NASA does not approve or certify eclipse glasses.

How to view the eclipse without glasses

If you don't have eclipse glasses, you can still enjoy the spectacle through indirect ways such as making a pinhole projector using household materials.

Poke a hole through a piece of cardstock or cardboard, hold it up during the eclipse and look down to see a partial crescent projected below. Holding up a colander or a cracker will produce a similar effect.

Another trick: Peering at the ground under a shady tree can yield crescent shadows as the sunlight filters through branches and leaves.

Eye experts warn against viewing the eclipse through a phone camera. The sun's bright rays can also damage a phone's digital components.

Why looking at a solar eclipse is dangerous

Eye damage can occur without proper protection. The sun's bright rays can burn cells

in the retina at the back of the eye. The retina doesn't have pain receptors, so there's no way to feel the damage as it happens. Once the cells die, they don't come back.

Symptoms of solar eye damage, called solar retinopathy, include blurred vision and color distortion.

In a rare case of eclipse eye damage, a woman who viewed the 2017 eclipse without adequate protection came to Mount Sinai's New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, complaining of a black spot in her vision. Doctors discovered retinal damage that corresponded to the eclipse's shape.

"The dark spot she was describing was in the shape of a crescent," said Dr. Avnish Deobhakta, a Mount Sinai ophthalmologist.

There's no set rule for how long of a glance can lead to permanent damage. Severity varies based on cloudiness, air pollution and a person's vantage point.

But doctors say looking at a solar eclipse for even a few seconds unprotected isn't worth the risk. There are reports of solar retinopathy after every solar eclipse, and U.S. eye doctors saw dozens of extra visits after the one in 2017.

Spectators who plan ahead can secure a stress-free eclipse viewing experience.

"It can be dangerous if we aren't careful, but it's also very safe if we take the basic precautions," said Dr. Geoffrey Emerson, a board member of the American Society of Retina Specialists.

SCAMS: Be wary of fake eclipse glasses

FROM PAGE A1

Pennsylvanians in Crawford, Erie, Mercer, and Warren counties are in the direct path of the solar eclipse and should see a 100% total solar eclipse. The remainder of the Commonwealth will experience a partial eclipse ranging from 88 to 99% of coverage of the sun.

Scammers have been capitalizing on growing consumer demand to buy glasses to view the eclipse. According to the American Astronomical Society, fake glasses have flooded the market.

The Office of Attorney General issued these safety tips for viewing the eclipse:

- The only safe way to look directly at the sun is through special-purpose solar filters such as "eclipse glasses" or handheld solar viewers.

- Be sure your glasses are marked with the international

safety standard — certification number ISO 12312-2. This number will be on the glasses' frame.

- If viewing the eclipse through a camera or telescope, be sure your lens has a solar filter.

- Read information on suppliers of safe solar viewers and filters, as well as how to safely use handheld viewers on the American Astronomical Society's website.

- Ordinary sunglasses — even darkly shaded ones — should not be used as a replacement for eclipse viewing glasses or handheld solar viewers.

If you believe someone sold you a fake pair of solar eclipse glasses, call the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-441-2555 or email scam@attorneygeneral.gov.

Contact the writer: smocarsky@citizensvoice.com 570-821-2110, @MocarskyCV

FUNDING: Watershed flows into the river

FROM PAGE A1

The Nanticoke Creek Watershed is an 8.2 square-mile sub-watershed of the Susquehanna River Basin that flows through Nanticoke, Hanover Twp. and Newport Twp. and Warrior Run. It flows into the Susquehanna River and eventually the Chesapeake Bay and loses water to underground mines.

Only 30% of the streams in the Nanticoke Creek Watershed have the hydrological, ecological and aesthetic qualities and functions of a natural stream. Work to be done includes creek realignments, channel lining, new culverts, dam removal, obstruction removals and erosion control.

The area includes the site of the former Truesdale colliery, piles of mine spoils, closed depressions and other disturbances. A large pile of mine refuse near Hanover Street completely blocks flow from progressing downstream.

At other points, flow is lost to subsurface mine voids, and that results in acid mine runoff and drainage, much of which is discharged at the Asklam borehole.

The watershed project seeks to restore the historic



FRANK C. LAURI / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Bobby Hughes, executive director of the Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation, discusses the Nanticoke Creek Watershed project.

alignment of the Nanticoke Creek, beginning near Clarks Cross Road and progressing upstream. Impairments on both tributaries — the Upper Nanticoke Creek and Leuder Creek — also will be addressed. Nearly 15,000 feet of permanent stream and floodway impacts are planned.

Monday's news conference was located off Hanover Street in Hanover Twp. Also at the event were: Jessica Shirley, state Department of

Environmental Protection acting secretary; John Stefanko, DEP deputy secretary, and Bobby Hughes, executive director of the Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation.

Earth Conservancy is working on another project with Abandoned Mine Lands funding. In January, DEP announced Earth Conservancy was receiving \$1.3 million for an energy park study involving the evaluation of

3,000 acres in Newport Twp. heavily impacted by historical mining activities, including culm banks, highwalls, and deep pits.

Data will determine site constraints and earthwork requirements, as well as inform stormwater management plans and permitting. This examination could result in further investigations and decisions.

Contact the writer: mbuffer@citizensvoice.com 570-821-2073, @cvmikebuffer

ELECTION: Seek to exploit divisions in US

FROM PAGE A1

Several of the accounts they detailed previously posted pro-Beijing content in Mandarin — only to resurface in recent months under the guise of real Americans writing in English.

In a separate project, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a research organization in Washington, identified 170 inauthentic pages and accounts on Facebook that have also pushed anti-American messages, including pointed attacks on Biden.

The effort has more successfully attracted actual users' attention and become more difficult for researchers to identify than previous Chinese efforts to influence public opinion in the United States. Although researchers say the overall political tilt of the campaign remains unclear, it has raised the possibility that China's government is calculating that a second Trump presidency, despite his sometimes hostile statements against the country, might be preferable to a second Biden term.

China's activity has already raised alarms inside the American government.

In February, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence reported that China was expanding its influence campaigns to "sow doubts about U.S. leadership, undermine democracy and extend Beijing's influence." The report expressed concern that Beijing could use increasingly sophisticated methods to try to influence the American election "to sideline critics of China."

Thomas, who has studied China's information operations for years, said the new effort suggested a more subtle and sophisticated approach than previous campaigns. It was the first time,

she said, that she had encountered Chinese accounts posing so persuasively as Trump-supporting Americans while managing to attract genuine engagement.

"The worry has always been, what if one day they wake up and are effective?" she said. "Potentially, this could be the beginning of them waking up and being effective."

Online disinformation experts are looking ahead to the months before the November election with growing anxiety.

Intelligence assessments show Russia using increasingly subtle influence tactics in the United States to spread its case for isolationism as its war against Ukraine continues. Mock news sites are targeting Americans with Russian propaganda.

Efforts to beat back false narratives and conspiracy theories — already a difficult task — must now also contend with waning moderation efforts at social media platforms, political pushback, fast-advancing artificial intelligence technology and broad information fatigue.

Until now, China's efforts to advance its ideology in the West struggled to gain traction, first as it pushed its official propaganda about the superiority of its culture and economy and later as it began denigrating democracy and stoking anti-American sentiment.

In the 2022 midterm elections, cybersecurity firm Mandiant reported that Dragonbridge, an influence campaign linked to China, tried to discourage Americans from voting while highlighting U.S. political polarization. That campaign, which experimented with fake American personas posting content in the first

person, was poorly executed and largely overlooked online, researchers said.

The recent campaigns connected to China have sought to exploit the divisions already apparent in American politics, joining the divisive debate over issues such as gay rights, immigration and crime mainly from a right-wing perspective.

In February, according to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a Chinese-linked account on X calling itself a Western name alongside a "MAGA 2024" reference shared a video from RT, the Russian television network controlled by the Kremlin, to claim that Biden and the CIA had sent a neo-Nazi gangster to fight in Ukraine. (That narrative was debunked by the investigative group Bell-ingcat.)

The next day the post received an enormous boost when Alex Jones, the podcaster known for spreading false claims and conspiracy theories, shared it on the platform with his 2.2 million followers.

The account with the "MAGA 2024" reference had taken steps to appear authentic, describing itself as being run by a 43-year-old Trump supporter in Los Angeles. But it used a profile photo lifted from a Danish man's travel blog, the institute's report on the accounts said. Although the account opened 14 years ago, its first publicly visible post was last April. In that post, the account attempted, without evidence, to link Biden to Jeffrey Epstein, the disgraced financier and registered sex offender.

At least four other similar accounts are also operating, Thomas said, all of them with ties to China. One account paid for a subscription on X, which offers perks like better promotion and a

blue check mark that was, before Elon Musk bought the platform, a sign of verification conferred to users whose identities had been verified. Like the other accounts, it shared pro-Trump and anti-Biden claims, including the QAnon conspiracy theory and baseless election fraud accusations.

The posts included exhortations to "be strong ourselves, not smear China and create rumors," awkward phrases like "how dare you?" and signs that the user's web browser had been set to Mandarin.

One of the accounts seemed to slip up in May when it responded to another post in Mandarin; another was posting primarily in Mandarin until last spring, when it briefly went silent before resurfacing with all-English content. The accounts denounced efforts by American lawmakers to ban the popular TikTok app, which is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, as a form of "true authoritarianism" orchestrated by Israel and as a tool for Biden to undermine China.

The accounts sometimes amplified or repeated content from the Chinese influence campaign Spamouflage, which was first identified in 2019 and linked to an arm of the Ministry of Public Security. It once posted content almost exclusively in Chinese to attack the Communist Party's critics and protesters in Hong Kong.

It has pivoted in recent years to focus on the United States, portraying the country as overwhelmed by chaos. By 2020, it was posting in English and criticizing American foreign policy, as well as domestic issues in the United States, including its response to COVID-19 and natural disasters, like the wildfires in Hawaii last year.

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