

# State commission signs off on Aquetong Lake

*Approval affirms Solebury Township ownership*

*Bridget Wingert*

For more than 150 years, Aquetong Lake has been part of the Solebury Township landscape.

Its dam once powered Benjamin Parry's mill and other mills on the way to New Hope.

Now the dam is gone, the lake is drained, and the Aquetong Creek flows freely to the Delaware.

On Aug. 3, the Pa. Fish and Boat Commission approved the township's removal of the dam, and its early efforts to restore the creek to its original condition. The commission signed off on the work, finalizing the transfer of the land to Solebury Township.

The area is the site of a future public space. There's more work to be done but the end is at last in sight after many years of planning and the breaching of the dam.

Marion Swann donated the land and the house on the property to the fish and boat commission in the late 1990s. The lake was visible through trees and bushes from the highway, across from Samuel Ingham's mansion. The lake was once part of his domain.

The township acquired the prized 45 acres along Route 202, including the lake formed by the obsolete 1870s-era dam, in 2009. The township agreed to find a long-term solution to the challenges of maintaining the dam at the agreement of sale.

A township committee brought in experts to review options and settled on a plan to remove the dam and allow the spring to flow naturally into Aquetong Creek. The decision was based on the stream's designation as a high quality cold-water fishery by the state.

The highly productive ancient Ingham Spring supplies 3 million gallons to the Aquetong Creek daily. According to the Aquetong Watershed Association, the spring was a vital source of water to the Leni Lenape tribes that first inhabited this area.

The township drained the lake in 2015, after approvals by the township supervi-

sors and the fish and boat commission. With the dam removed, the lake receded and seeding established land boundaries for the creek.

County, state and federal agencies, the Pennsylvania legislature and U.S. Congress needed to approve the dam's removal. The work to develop a long-term plan for the land has just begun, the township says. Solebury's Aquetong Spring Advisory Committee presented preliminary findings to the supervisors this spring. They are now seeking proposals to fully restore the creek to a natural state.

"The creek and the surrounding lake bed are making amazing progress in the year since the breach," Solebury Township Supervisor Jim Searing said. "We are engaging a restoration specialist and will be working on a master plan with significant community participation. And, someday, we will see the reintroduction of native trout to where it once flourished in a clean, coldwater environment."

The efforts are intended to create a park that will protect natural, historic and scenic resources for future generations.

"With the removal of the dam and the restoration of Aquetong Creek, Solebury Township continues to make major strides in its long-term vision to protect and preserve its beauty, unique character and natural resources," Supervisor Chair Helen Tai said.

The groups who made the project possible were the Solebury Township Board of Supervisors, Bucks County Commissioners, Pa. Fish and Boat Commission, Pa. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Native American Alliance, Trout Unlimited, the Aquetong Park Advisory Committee, Solebury Parks and Recreation, the Aquetong Watershed Association and the residents of Solebury Township.

"Our community, both current and future, owes a big thanks to these people and organizations for their foresight and contributions," Tai said.