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Boater missing in Conewago Creek; search called off Thursday

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As the skies darkened and a storm brought heavy rain Thursday evening, police and fire crews were forced to call off a search for a man who went missing in the Conewago Creek earlier in the afternoon.

The man, who officials did not identify Thursday, had gone fishing with a friend at about 2 p.m. in a small rowboat south of Detters Mill. Just 30 minutes later, the two men were thrown from the boat after a low-head dam sucked them over its edge.

Fire and police crews from York and Adams Counties spent the next several [On mobile? Click here to view photo gallery](#) hours combing the creek with small motorized boats.

Jane Wiley, a resident on Davidsburg Road, which crosses over the creek, said she was gardening in her front yard when a man who ran up to her soaking wet asked to use her phone. The man, who later declined to comment, told Wiley that he and his friend had just capsized in the creek, and that the last thing he saw was his friend's arms sticking out of the water.

The man called 911 from Wiley's house about 45 minutes after the rowboat capsized. He later remained on scene and was not injured, but did appear visibly shaken as water rescue crews combed the creek until 8 p.m. Wiley said the man told her he made several attempts to pull his friend out of the water but was unsuccessful.

Officers with the state Fish and Boat Commission, which would take over the investigation from Northern York County Regional Police, were seen walking back and forth with the man back toward the dam, which is 4 feet high.

The dam is near Davidsburg Road at the Washington and Dover township line.

Lee Byers, fire chief of the East Berlin Fire Company, said crews searched a 3-4 mile section of the creek. A weather system moved into the area around 6:40 p.m., which, along with the approaching darkness, led crews to call off the search for the night.

Byers said a reduced crew of about three boats will resume a "recovery effort" this morning at 7 a.m.

The two men were not wearing life vests, Byers said.

William Sullivan, assistant chief of Hampton Fire Company, said he walked with three others about a mile down the creek, and there was no sign of the missing man.

By 6 p.m., roughly four hours after the two men first went fishing, a STAT Medevac helicopter was flying low above the creek, making several wide circles. Byers said a state police helicopter had been dispatched with infrared technology to aid in the search.

Byers added that the two men were towing a second rowboat behind them with coolers on it. Both rowboats had been pulled ashore by fire crews. York County's emergency services mobile communications unit was dispatched to the scene around 4:30 p.m.

Rescue crews were seen below the dam hours after the man went missing throwing full water bottles toward the dam to gauge the speed of the water.

"The search went really well today and all our departments worked well together," Byers said.

A large warning sign is posted on the bank of the creek, just above the low-head dam and Byers warned swimmers and fisherman to stay away from this type of dam because its hydraulics can draw anything in.

Low-head dam safety

Low-head dams can be dangerous for swimmers, boaters and anyone else on the water, according to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

Anyone who gets too close to the dam can be drawn into the backwash current and pulled underwater, according to the commission's Web site.

Victims are then pushed away from the dam, but when they resurface, they are often pulled back into the current, it said.

Pennsylvania law requires low-head dams to be marked. People are advised to heed warning signs and stay away from low-head dams.

The dams are inspected periodically by the Fish and Boat Commission, which works with the state Department of Environmental Protection to remove dams that are deemed unsafe, according to the commission.

Map of the area

Can't see the map? [Click here.](#)