



REPORT ON MCCD

February 2018

By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association

Smoother sailing at MCCD, but still some turbulence

Disgruntled challenges to Monroe County Conservation District technical staff have largely disappeared from recent monthly district board meetings.

On Feb. 15, new board chairman Pat Ross conducted the meeting with businesslike efficiency, asking district board member Charlie Garris to swear in new member Randy Rice and welcoming three associate directors: Janet Weidensaul, Edie Stevens and John Lyman.

Ross expressed interest in working with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation on curtailing the use of salt or harmful chemicals on roadways, which can pollute streams and waterways.

In other business, District Manager Adam Schellhammer reported on the Design/Build workshops the district held Feb. 12-13 at Northampton Community College. The workshops outlined permit application procedures and highlighted the importance of ongoing communication between project designers and construction crews. Close to 180 attended.

And the board approved an agreement to house Pocono Avian Research Center, which will operate a bird banding program at MCCD and provide educational programs to the public. Former district educator Darryl Speicher heads the center.

Yet under the apparently smooth waters, some eddies may be swirling at the district.

Twice in February, a group calling itself the Monroe County Clean Stream Coalition ran full-page ads in the *Pocono Record*, decrying the state Department of Environmental Protection's stream classification system and suggesting that the DEP's current method for evaluating streams is "improper." The coalition claimed in its newspaper ads that its interest is in safeguarding Monroe County's streams, but also suggested that the DEP's stream classification system is secretive, unfair and stifles economic growth.

The ad announced that the coalition was formally challenging DEP's classification determination of six local, pristine streams — Tunkhannock Creek, Swiftwater Creek, Cranberry Creek, Paradise Creek, Devil's Hole Creek and Tank Creek — as Exceptional Value waters. The coalition has filed an appeal with the Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board, saying it wants to make sure that the DEP "properly classifies streams."

BWA has a direct response. With the Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future, BWA filed a petition to intervene in the coalition's challenge. BWA's mission is protecting and improving the quality of water in Brodhead Creek and its tributaries, and the volunteer group has dedicated energy, expertise and financial resources to that end — including efforts on behalf of Swiftwater, Cranberry, Paradise, Devil's Hole and Tank creeks.

The coalition's EHB appeal makes official complaints the district board heard during a meeting last April. Then, Pocono Raceway employee George Ewald of Tunkhannock Township and Tobyhanna Township Supervisor Anne Lamberton, who works for district board director Dave Moyer, complained that formally designating the Tunkhannock to Exceptional Value, to reflect its purity, would stifle economic growth.

The two complained because a previous MCCD's board supported the Tunkhannock stream upgrade petition when it was introduced years ago, and the current board had not officially changed its position.

District directors swear an oath to protect the commonwealth's soils and waterways, and by long precedent have supported the special protection the Exceptional Value designation confers on streams when scientific evidence supports that designation.

Now, Lamberton's name appears in the EHB docket on behalf of the appellant coalition. The appellant lists the coalition's address as 186 Murphy Run, Stroudsburg — the physical address of Papillon & Moyer Excavating and Paving, Dave Moyer's business.

As this column has pointed out before, Monroe County grew rapidly under the very environmental regulations — including the stream classification system — that the coalition decries. The county's streams remained remarkably clean during that (pre-recession) growth period, when explosive residential and commercial development took place here.

All citizens, not just business owners, depend on clean drinking water and benefit from the aesthetic and economic benefits of clean air, soils and waters. It will take months for the challenge to make its way through the legal process.

Meanwhile, those interested in clean water should follow the actions — during and outside of meetings — of the directors on the MCCD board.

The MCCD board meets at 8 a.m. Thursday, March 15, at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.