



REPORT ON MCCD

February 2022

By Paula Heeschen for Brookhead Watershed Association

MCCD discusses public school busing costs, spotted lanternfly mitigation

Snow and cold temperatures kept most Environmental Education Center lessons inside local schools in the early weeks of 2022. But the Monroe County Conservation District's EE arm faces an additional, non-seasonal challenge to its public-school programs: **BUSING COSTS**.

"Busing is ridiculous," EE Coordinator Roger Spotts told the district board at its February meeting. Pleasant Valley and Pocono Mountain school districts, whose student busing is contracted out, face rising costs to transport kids to outside activities.

The EE Center charges \$75 for a program for 20, he said, while school districts typically pay busing costs of more than \$100 per class. Last year, PV paid \$350 to send its teams to the all-day Envirothon, Spotts said.

East Stroudsburg Area School District has its own district-employed drivers, and is the easiest to deal with, Spotts said, but "In the future, busing is going to be the issue."

The Kettle Creek Fund can help defray busing costs, Spotts said. Board member Chuck Gould suggested Spotts contact the Monroe County Transit Authority to see if they could offer more affordable busing to districts facing prohibitive costs.

EE STAFF HAVE BEEN BUSY tapping maple trees at the Sugarbush in Marshalls Creek in anticipation of public maple sugaring days in March. As of mid-February, the district had 197 tree sponsors and 150 people registered to take part in the weekend public programs.

IN ITS AGRICULTURAL SECTION, the district will continue holding programs and offering tips to counter the spotted lanternfly. The spotted lanternfly is an invasive insect that can damage fruit trees, grape vines and many landscape trees and plants. Prolonged cold snaps can kill their egg masses, but persistent cold stretches have become less common in recent winters. Within a few years, the fly has spread dramatically, including into Monroe County.

District staff are focusing efforts on education and outreach. Last year they held a "Fireside Chat" event at a local winery for those interested in protecting their crops or landscape plants from the pest. Upcoming programs will aim at educating municipal officials and teaching people how to build a circle trap, which captures the nymphs without harming birds or other insects. (Trap-building information is available at <https://www.mcconservation.org/spotted-lanternfly.html>)

District staff will continue seeking grant funds from the Department of Agriculture to support other efforts to combat the fly. "We need some boots on the ground," District Manager Kristina Heaney said.

THE BOARD ALSO:

- Discussed strengthening its committee system, including holding regular committee meetings as issues require. Gould, a farmer, suggested that the board consider an occasional evening meeting, so that daytime working residents would have a chance to attend should they wish.
- Voted to appoint Heaney as a voting member, and Gould as a nonvoting member, of the Quality Assurance Board that oversees the local Dirt and Gravel Low Volume Roads program funded by the state.
- Voted to renew a contract with PenTeleData for \$125.95 a month. The company recently nearly doubled the district's cable service levels.
- Agreed to expand the inventory of the bookstore beyond field guides and bird seed to make it more of a destination.

"It's not just income-oriented, it's more for recognition," Heaney said, to raise the profile of the district and its environmental education arm.

The store may include "any item as long as it's conservation oriented," Gould said.

THE NEXT DISTRICT BOARD MEETING WILL BE AT 8 A.M. ON THURSDAY, MARCH 17, 2022. The MCCD board meets at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.