



REPORT ON MCCD

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By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association

MCCD BOARD TAKES ON TAINTED “LANDSCAPE FILL”

Wildcat truckers have begun blighting Monroe County again with suspect loads of tainted “landscape fill.”

The loads sometimes include pollutants that sending states — New York and New Jersey — don’t allow. Pennsylvania’s laxer standards make its border counties magnets for truckers who dump undesirable materials on unsuspecting property owners, often homeowners just looking to improve their lots. Social media featuring cheap or even free landscape fill drive the illicit trade.

The resurgence of dumping prompted a lively discussion at the Monroe County Conservation District’s March 17 board meeting after the district’s technical division reported referring several such sites to the state Department of Environmental Protection. The board brainstormed ways to counter the tainted fill.

“It goes in waves,” Head Resource Conservationist Lori Kerrigan told the board. “We’re getting hit hard.”

Technicians reported sites in Polk, Middle Smithfield and Smithfield Township all had received undocumented loads from New Jersey. The largest, at Foxwood Campground in Smithfield, received more than 200 loads of the material, disturbing more than six acres of ground, the acreage threshold requiring a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit.

“We’ll follow up with that on the enforcement end,” Kerrigan said.

The district refers sites where possibly tainted landfill is dumped to the DEP and to the Attorney General for follow up. The DEP authorizes testing if the materials appear suspect or emit an odor of petroleum.

Kerrigan said one of the dumpers has been sued in the past. “I’m not sure why they can’t get stopped at the border,” she said.

State Rep. Jack Rader, R-176 said he had reached out to the DEP to address interstate dumping but “that’s where it ended,” blaming the agency for failing to follow up. Board member Brian Winot also has charged the agency with a lack of response.

DEP’s Northeast Watershed Manager Shane Kleiner said the agency is chronically underfunded, thus understaffed. The Northeast Region of DEP is in the process of filling two vacant field representative jobs, and staffing “in the compliance section has been minimal.

“I was the last (regional) field representative for districts,” Kleiner, attending the meeting via Zoom, said. “That’s been vacant for three and a half years.”

Kleiner said he would alert Carl DeLuca, acting program manager for the DEP’s Waterways and Wetlands Program, and ask him to attend MCCD’s next board meeting.

“We’ve got to keep it on the table,” said Sharon Laverdure, county commissioner representative to the board.

The board agreed to write letters to legislators and local officials and “let them know it’s still happening.” The district also will post information about the dumping problem, along with response guidance, on its web page.

IN OTHER BUSINESS, district Watershed Specialist David Hooker promoted the upcoming tree-planting program along Cherry Creek in the Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge. A grant from the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts is funding the April 2 program.

Activities include presentations on the history of the preserve, and on non-point-source pollution, what homeowners can do to prevent it, and the role of trees in preventing non-point-source pollution.

The outdoor project involves planting 50 trees and 90 plant cuttings — all native species — along at least 150 linear feet of the creek. The four-hour project relies on help from the Penn State Extension Master Watershed Stewards, the Friends of Cherry Valley and other volunteers.

Trees include box elder, river birch, tulip poplar, American sycamore, swamp white oak, swamp chestnut oak and black willow. Plant cuttings include button bush, silky dogwood, red osier dogwood, pussy willow and silky willow. All the plants are flood-tolerant species, with a mix of “pioneer” tree species to provide early leaf cover over the stream and “climax” species. Friends of Cherry Valley are providing lunch.

THE MCCD BOARD’S NEXT MEETING WILL BE AT 8 A.M. THURSDAY, APRIL 21 at the agency office on Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.