



REPORT ON MCCD

August 2021

By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association

MCCD technicians praise new e-reporting system

Monroe County Conservation District's technical staff continues to improve its communication processes, benefiting project owners and builders and the environment.

Technicians regularly visit construction sites, ensuring the proper measures are in use to control erosion — the loss of topsoil — and to prevent or lessen sedimentation. Rain and wind can carry exposed soil into streams and other waterways, polluting the water and damaging fish and other aquatic life.

Traditionally, technicians would return to the office to summarize their findings, prepare a written report and mail or email it to builders and property owners. That could result in an even longer process, especially for projects like the New Ventures Park, a multifaceted commercial project in Tobyhanna Township with more than 100 lots.

Resource Conservation Specialist Steven Baade told the district board during its August meeting that the process has changed and improved thanks to portable electronic devices.

"I'll do the inspection report on site there," Baade said, "and as long as there's an individual there that's following the inspection, and hanging out while I do the report, I'll get a digital signature and distribute that report" electronically to the builder and permit holder.

"It's an even more immediate system than we had when we printed (reports) on site," District Manager Kristina Heaney said, "so there's no gap in knowledge, if there's any kind of violation or issues on the site."

In-the-moment inspection reports are just one way the district has been working toward faster review times and better communication with the regulated community. District staff also are holding informational strategic planning meetings designed to review regulations and procedures, giving project developers, designers and builders a better handle on what to expect from beginning to end. The next information session is scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 2.

FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

In other business, district staff will launch a new Farm to School program this year and next in Stroudsburg Area School District, thanks to a \$44,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The program, for high school students, will involve ecology and home economics students, and will highlight the significance of agriculture in the ecosystem, sustainable agriculture and career opportunities in agriculture.

Students will learn how to prepare food available at farm markets, and will visit the Josie Porter Farm in Stroud Township, among other activities.

District staff will guide the lessons during the first school year, with school personnel doing the teaching during the second year of the program. The Farm to School program will include a website for teachers and other users outlining the curriculum and offering lesson plans. The district hopes to expand the program in the future to other farms and to the county's other school districts.

SPOTTED LANTERNFLY UPDATE

The district also is continuing its efforts to combat the spread of the invasive spotted lanternfly. Recently the office has been receiving many calls daily from county residents reporting sightings. The flies damage trees and agricultural crops, including grapes. The district is conducting educational sessions and teaching people how to build circle traps that catch the insect in its nymph stage.

The fly is of great concern already in Pennsylvania, including in Monroe County, which has several wineries, but could widen its impact, Heaney warned. She described it as "a hitchhiker" on vehicles. "This could become a national problem," she said.

FLOOD MITIGATION PROJECT

The board approved a roughly \$17,000 contract extension with engineering firm Barton & Loguidice to help prepare bids for a large flood mitigation project in the headwaters of Pocono Creek. The overall \$800,000 project involves bank stabilization of Sand Spring Run, in Pennsylvania state gamelands, and installation of in-stream structures to reduce the erosive force of floodwaters. Heaney said she hopes it will serve as a working example both of the destructive potential of nature and of a community's ability to protect against the worst damage of flooding.

"We should see improved water quality and safety," she said after the meeting.

BUDGET NOTES

The board dedicated some time to reviewing a draft budget for 2022, in the end approving a draft budget of \$1.9 million budget subject to changes. The budget is substantially larger than 2021's thanks to an \$800,000 Growing Greener grant that will fund the Sand Spring Run/Pocono Creek project.

The draft budget anticipates roughly \$40,000 more in revenue from review fees as construction continues to surge; and a significant increase in revenues from in-school environmental education. "We are anticipating a normal school year" as COVID-19 restrictions loosen, Heaney said.

Increased expenditures will include a roof replacement, the replacement of a 2006 vehicle and an upgrade to the fire alarm system.

The district will hold its annual bird seed sale on Saturday, Oct. 23. An online order form is available at <https://www.mcconservation.org/uploads/9/0/3/0/90302089/2021.pdf>.

The MCCD board's next meeting is at 8 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 16, 2021, at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.