



REPORT ON MCCD

May 2021

By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association

How MCCD handles construction, inspection sites

Monroe County Conservation District staff and board spent time during their May 20, 2021, meeting discussing procedures employees follow when inspecting construction sites.

Technical staff members visit sites permitted under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System program, and also in response to complaints, as part of their duties. The district works to keep soil on the land and out of waterways, where it can harm fish and other aquatic life.

Board Chairman Pat Ross asked whether property owners receive notice in advance of in-person visits.

District practice is to provide at least a week's notice to the permittee named on the permit, Head Resource Conservationist Lori Kerrigan said. "Anyone who wants to be on the site can be on the site" during the inspection, Kerrigan added.

Three different laws authorize site visits: Conservation District law, Dam Safety law and the state Department of Environmental Protection's Chapter 102, which requires a permit from the DEP for construction activities that involve earth disturbances on one or more acres.

"We try to pay every respect to a person," confirmed Shane Kleiner, conservation field representative for the DEP, "knocking on the door, introducing ourselves," wearing IDs and explaining why they're there.

Staff practice is also to write a report and print it out on site when the permittee is present.

At times, the owner or occupant is not present because they are working during the day or because staff are responding to a complaint that requires a quick response, thus no advance notice. In those cases, staff will try if necessary to observe the site from the road or another vantage point. They will leave a card on the door.

Afterward, "we make contact as soon as possible," District Manager Kristina Heaney said.

Making certain permittees, property owners and residents have notice whenever possible, and understand the inspection process, are key to gaining voluntary compliance, Heaney and Kerrigan added.

On a related topic, Ross suggested the April minutes should reflect that Bob Brown of RGB Builders "wasn't satisfied" after a conversation with Carl DeLuca, the Conservation, Restoration and Inspection section chief for the DEP's Northeast Regional Office. The discussion involved the recent rise in violations on single-family residential lots that fall under the NPDES Common Plan of Development or Sale program. Residential construction is undergoing a resurgence.

Builders holding the Common Plan permit have been worried that they might have to get new permits if the combined earth disturbance from the development of multiple individual lots exceeded one acre. DeLuca, in his written report to the board for April, said that he told Brown all developers must meet the same standards, and added that "all parties were fine with the conversation and the end result."

Ross disagreed, and said, "Bob Brown was not satisfied. There was no resolution made."

Heaney agreed that his comments disputing DeLuca's account would appear in the board's May minutes.

In other business, Heaney reported attending a recent Federal and State Emergency Management workshop during which there was discussion of how best to get information out to the public about flood events.

Heaney mentioned a washout on the LaBar Village property in Stroudsburg for which the community received half a million dollars in emergency funds. Board member Craig Todd said analysis of the cause of the damage is important to understanding flooding, "to determine whether floods caused it, or undersized structures caused it."

Heaney noted that “replacing a 12-inch pipe with another 12-inch pipe doesn’t solve the problem. The ultimate solution would be (for municipalities) to contact the district, and we will help ... find a solution.”

The district works also with the DEP, the state Department of Transportation and Monroe County Planning Commission on flooding issues. Kerrigan said the planning commission is helping to identify where related problems occur, with an eye toward referring the problem areas to the DEP and/or PennDOT for upgraded infrastructure.

“The frequency and intensity of large-form events is not going away,” Heaney said.

On a statewide issue, the board approved sending a letter to the governor’s office supporting increased funding for the Department of Environmental Protection to help restore the level of staff lost due to pre-budget cuts. The board also agreed to copy Monroe County’s state legislators on the letter, on Todd’s recommendation. Todd is past BWA board president as well as a retired MCCD manager.

And, district Environmental Education Coordinator Roger Spotts told the board that Pleasant Valley High School won the county’s recent Envirothon, which was handled virtually, and will proceed to the state competition. PV also won the 7th- and 8th-grade Envirothon. Clear Run Elementary School won the 5th- and 6th-grade division.

The MCCD board’s next meeting is at 8 a.m. Thursday, June 17, 2021, at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.

UPDATE: Battling the invasive spotted lanternfly



Monroe County Conservation District continues to combat the invasive spotted lanternfly through public education and other efforts. The spotted lanternfly is indigenous to Asia, but was first discovered in Berks County in 2014. The invasive insect feeds on the sap of trees and other plants, posing special danger to grapevines, fruit trees, and numerous hardwood species that compose our riparian buffers. There are large infestations of it in the West End, but there have been sightings of the fly elsewhere in Monroe County.

District Manager Kristina Heaney, district Hydraulic Engineer Drew Wagner and Resource Conservation Specialist Alexandra Dutt gave a presentation recently at Eagles Rest Cellars, a Cherry Valley winery, demonstrating a circle trap that captures the nymphs of the fly. Dutt also has put together a video that shows property owners what supplies they need to assemble the trap and how to do it.

You can find the spotted lanternfly circle trap video at this link: <https://youtu.be/O5UBvzvkh7U>

Timing is critical, Dutt said last week. “They are hatching from the eggs now to instar nymphs,” she said.

Besides setting up traps, property owners can help protect their own and other properties by closely inspecting items, such as firewood or nursery plants, before they move them from or to their property. Business owners are required to conduct such inspections.

Heaney also met on May 19 with the state Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Commission to discuss a five-year remediation project on the spotted lanternfly. The effort will target specific sites in Cherry Valley.

“That area is surrounded by vineyards and agricultural areas,” which are vulnerable to the invasive species, Heaney said.

Interstate commerce has become a big concern, Heaney added. “We have to be very diligent about what we move,” because materials could easily transport the pest from place to place.

Learn more about Tree of Heaven, an invasive and the preferred host plant of the spotted lanternfly:
<https://brodheadwatershed.org/wp-content/uploads/treeofheaven1020.pdf>