

MONROE COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

April 20, 2023

About 100 will attend the Monroe County Conservation District's May 12 Engineering Solutions public workshop at Northampton Community College.

The workshop is part of the district's ongoing effort to educate public officials, landowners and engineers on the importance of good resource management as a long-term economic tool as well as an environmental benefit.

Keynote speaker will be John K. Jackson, senior research scientist at the nonprofit Stroud Water Research Center in Avondale, who will discuss the science of buffers.

Stream buffers have become a topic of much discussion recently as municipalities reviewed and revised their stormwater ordinances to comply with the newly updated stormwater management plan, under Act 167, for the Brodhead, McMichael and Tobyhanna watersheds. The act requires counties to develop watershed-based stormwater management plans that reflect the needs of the watershed and protect water quality and quantity.

MCCD staff organized the workshop to help elected officials, engineers and planners understand more about how managing stormwater, including through buffers — especially in headwater areas — can help curb flooding and preserve higher water quality.

The workshop will also include speakers Jeanne Barrett Ortiz and Tom West, who will present the county's 2022 "Return on Environment Study," as well as presentations on analyzing sites for building, managing stormwater release, changes in permit processing and other topics. The information should be useful to property owners or developers creating and presenting plans, and to officials who review them for feasibility and compliance.

Going forward, Head Resource Conservationist Lori Kerrigan said, district technical staff also will be working with the county Planning Commission to create a summary of local buffer requirements.

In other business, district board member Donna Foulk expressed concern about the lack of use of the county's no-till drill.

“It’s driving me crazy,” said Foulk, a retiree who spent her career at the Penn State Agricultural Extension office. “It was used a lot, doing what it was supposed to do. ... We fought very hard to keep it here so farmers could use it.”

No-till drills are heavy drills that allow farmers to plant without first tilling. The no-till drill helps control erosion and saves fuel and time.

“But it’s not getting used,” Foulk said, noting insurance issues that arose after a grant expired. County officials have said any farmer wishing to use the drill must carry \$2 million in insurance coverage; few farmers have that level of coverage.

“Rather than see it sit in the barn,” Foulk said, “I would rather” let a county that doesn’t have all the issues we have provide it to their farmers. “It’s just sitting there doing nobody any good.”

District Manager Kristina Heaney and Foulk said they will continue exploring the insurance issue, which is the only impediment to the drill’s use here.

The district board also heard:

- * in a report from Environmental Education Coordinator Roger Spotts that the 2023 maple sugaring season was “kind of a landmark year,” yielding the highest net profit in a long time, Participation in the public days at the sugar bush was strong.

- * Revenue from the gift shop is rising thanks to the implementation of credit card processing; until this year, sales have been cash only.

- * The annual water quality study is complete, having collected new data about area streams. The district conducts the study in cooperation with the county Planning Commission.

Heaney reported that elected officials, engineers and others who took part in a recent district-organized bus tour visited various sites throughout the county where best-management practices are being used. They saw rain gardens, and at the Ray Price car dealership a green roof where observers could watch a pair of ground-nesting killdeer.

There are few green roofs in Monroe County — others are at the Cancer Center at Lehigh Valley Hospital in East Stroudsburg, Tobyhanna Army Depot and at Home Depot in Stroudsburg — but there is growing interest, including by locally owned ESSA Bank and Trust. There was a suggestion that all distribution warehouses install green roofs to mitigate habitat disruption and climate effects.

The recent Ag Day in Stroudsburg Area School District went well, involving high school students and discussing crops, animals, career paths and other topics. A regional rep from the U.S. Department of Agriculture also took part. Other school districts are interested in having an Ag Day.

And Heaney reported that a roof replacement on the district's building in Bartonsville will start May 22.

The district board's next meeting will be at 10 a.m. Thursday, May 18 in Bartonsville.

Respectfully submitted,

Paula C. Heeschen