

MONROE COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT
April 18, 2024 - Board Meeting

State Rep. Tarah Probst, D-189, attended the April Monroe County Conservation District board meeting to renew her efforts to curb an Interstate 80 expansion.

Probst spearheads the I-80 Task Force in a quest to reduce the scope of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation project. The current plans call for widening the highway through Stroudsburg, adding lanes, and changing or closing some on- or off-ramps.

The plan will take dozens of properties by eminent domain. Probst also suggested the extensive work will damage Pocono Creek and other waterways adjacent to the highway.

She asked whether she could attend a pre-permit hearing including PennDOT and district technical staff. "We know PennDOT environmental studies are not going to pass," Probst said. "I don't want them to be rubber-stamped."

However, district Manager Kristina Heaney said that she was waiting to hear from the state Department of Environmental Protection about whether the meeting could be open to participants other than the district's technical staff and PennDOT.

Board member Craig Todd noted that DEP authorizes the county district to represent the agency on the project. "We don't 'own the grass,'" Todd said. "We're 'mowing it' because the department lets us. These are deliberations. It's a back and forth."

"It's crucial that I or one of our members are there," Probst said. "We have a massive task force. We're watching this every step of the way."

Heaney assured Probst that the district is doing its best to provide transparency during the review process. "Thank you for being an active voice here," Heaney said.

The board also briefly discussed the "dirty dirt" issue, involving polluted fill that truckers bring from more tightly regulated New Jersey and New York, offering it as free landscaping fill to unwary property owners here. March saw an upswing of the activity, which the district addresses both by reporting it to the county Waste Authority and DEP and by educating local officials and the public. There were no dirty dirt reports on the April report, but Heaney told the board she would renew the discussion with municipal officials at the upcoming Council of Government meeting.

The board approved:

- A grant request for \$48,935.69 through the Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program for a rotational grazing improvement project at the Kresge farm in Saylorburg. The plan calls for installing perimeter fencing around 26 acres, currently used for crops, to create adequate space for rotational grazing.
- A grant request for \$5,610.36 in ACAP funds for cover crop seeding on acreage at the Gould Produce and Farm Market in Brodheadsville. Cover crops help curb soil erosion, which in turn reduces the incidence of sedimentation in nearby streams and waterways.

The board also heard from Environmental Educator Coordinator Roger Spotts that enrollment in the district's summer camps is going strong. The district offers both day camps to children and a week-long residential camp for students 14 through this year's graduating class.

"We don't have the ability to expand those camps any more," Spotts said.

The Environmental Education section has also been working on plant management at the Tannersville Cranberry Bog.

And the board heard that the annual water quality survey, conducted with the help of the county Planning Commission, is taking a bit longer this year because of heavy rains. The survey looks at 14 different measures, collecting data on 39 sites including repeat sites, to monitor trends at those locations. The next Conservation District board meeting will be at 10 a.m. Thursday, May 16 at the office in Bartonsville.

Respectfully submitted,
Paula C. Heeschen
Board member