



REPORT ON MCCD

2018 year in review

By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association

Year in review: A busy 2018 for MCCD

Monroe County Conservation District directors had a busy 2018, from defending the state's stream classification system to maintaining its historic role in working directly with developers on compliance issues.

The year began with new board directors. These include new public director Roger McFadden, a retired biology professor and member of the Monroe County Planning Commission; and farm representatives Carl B. "Chuck" Gould, a third-generation family farmer and Chestnuthill Township supervisors chairman; and Mountain View Vineyard owner Randy Rice.

In February, board directors shared their priorities for the coming year. Chairman Pat Ross identified as one of his 2018 priorities working more closely with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to curb potential pollution from road salt and other chemicals.

During a March meeting, local resident Tom Van Zandt accused district Director David Moyer of a conflict of interest, noting that Moyer, owner of a Stroudsburg excavating business, "stands to make tremendous profit" from a proposed \$350 million development in Tobyhanna Township called Pocono Springs Entertainment Village. Moyer has had a longstanding business relationship with the township, through contracts for road materials and equipment. (On Dec. 3, the State Ethics Commission announced that Moyer had violated sections of the Public Official and Employee Ethics Act by voting, as a district director, to disburse grant funds to Tobyhanna Township for dirt and gravel road maintenance when he had outstanding invoices for some of that work.)

District staff worked closely over several months during 2018 with the county Planning Commission and the BWA on the important stream monitoring program. They collaborated to identify 36 stream testing sites for the year and then to carry out the testing itself. The information the tests gather create a snapshot of stream health, designed to serve as part of a continuum of stream profiles over time.

District staff fielded pointed questions during the May directors meeting from Tobyhanna Township Supervisor Anne Lamberton about the stream assessment process and the district's role. Lamberton was involved with the Monroe County Clean Streams Coalition's appeal to the Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board over the way the DEP classifies streams. At the May meeting, she asked whether in the stream testing selection process the agencies "just pick where it looks better for testing." District Technician Steve Baade and district Manager Adam Schellhammer explained that the county's annual survey is separate from the state's stream redesignation process. (In October, the EHB ruled against the coalition's disputing of the state's method of classifying streams.)

In July, the board voted to stay in the Level III delegation agreement with the DEP, reversing a 2017 vote to reduce the district's role in permit reviews to Level II. The vote was never implemented, and discussion had continued intermittently on the value of maintaining Level III status. The Level III

agreement authorizes the district to provide more direct, local input into construction permit reviews, which the majority of the board agreed was more beneficial to developers.

Other highlights of the year at MCCD include:

- In February, district directors entered an agreement to provide space to Pocono Avian Research Center. Former district technician Darryl Speicher and his wife, Jackie, run the center, which monitors bird populations, bands birds and offers public educational programs.
- The month also saw the district holding Design/Build workshops at Northampton Community College, outlining permit application procedures and highlighting the benefits of regular communication between project designers and construction crews.
- In April, the district's Environmental Education section held another successful public Earth Day event at Northampton Community College, featuring 29 exhibitors and attracting close to 1,200 visitors.
- In May, district engineers and staff members held a well-attended public round table to highlight what the Conservation District does and why it is important. Representatives from the state Department of Environmental Protection, Natural Resource Conservation Service and the state Conservation Commission helped with the presentation, which touched on the district's role in functions from preserving farmland to managing dirt and gravel road projects and monitoring construction sites to reduce runoff. The event received positive feedback from the farmers, developers, project designers and others who attended.
- In August, directors heard a report from technical staff head Lori Kerrigan that stormwater management measures are working well. Frequent and hard rainfalls did not create flooding problems that occurred elsewhere, she said, indicating that compliance with good management practices saves government money that would otherwise be used in responding to emergencies or cleanups.
- In November, the district staff took part with Northampton County Conservation District in a public "Protect the Tap" program at Blue Ridge Estate Vineyards & Winery in Saylorsburg. The event brought together local groups, including the BWA, to highlight the importance of protecting high water quality.
- It featured entertainment, games and trivia contests to raise funds in support of the two county districts' environmental education programs.

The district board's next meeting is at 10 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 13, 2018, at Stroudsmoor Country Inn. A holiday luncheon follows.