



REPORT ON MCCD

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By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association

Board president wants to shift MCCD's focus

Monroe County Conservation District's chief mission in recent decades has been to monitor construction projects, helping to keep soil onsite and preventing sediment and other pollutants from reaching area streams and waterways. Waters here have remained remarkably clean, overall, despite the county's population doubling since the 1980s, with the accompanying explosion of new houses, schools and commercial development.

But August's MCCD board meeting showed that at least two board members would like to shift the district's focus. Board President Pat Ross launched an active defense of developers, citing dead fish as evidence.

Ross referred to a recent article about trout stocking. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission stocks hundreds of thousands of fish in the state's streams every spring. But by July and August, Ross noted, when temperatures rise, "It's belly-ups and a wasted resource," Ross said. "Only 5 percent of stocked fish survive."

This provided evidence that "there are a lot more issues with our streams than development," he said. "And it's time to start looking at those."

Ross suggested setting up a meeting or workshop to talk about these issues "instead of just going after the people who develop."

Later in the meeting, board member David Moyer added his two cents. Moyer, who flies a private airplane, fretted about trees falling in streams in state gamelands, the natural erosion of stream banks, and road chemicals, mostly salt, washing into ditches and streams.

"We're all turning a blind eye to what's going on," he said. "We do nothing."

Brodhead Watershed Association Executive Director Bob Heil responded to Ross by citing the difference between the needs of native trout — fast, cool water — and stocked fish aimed at the recreational fisherman. Monroe County boasts a number of Exceptional Value streams in which native trout still thrive. "We've got to keep these cold streams cold and of good quality," Heil said, "because that's where native trout are reproducing."

Two local fishing enthusiasts, Jack Fossett and John Lyman, a district associate director, bolstered Heil's argument: Headwater streams enjoy tree cover that keeps them cool enough for native trout. There can be as much as a 10-degree difference between a shaded stream and one in the sun. That's why protecting headwaters and maintaining buffer zones between built areas and streams is key to protecting waterways and coldwater species like trout.

District Manager Adam Schellhammer encouraged Moyer to distinguish between the natural processes of erosion and manmade damage.

"We don't manage wilderness areas," Schellhammer said, but the district can and should monitor human activity that can adversely impact streams. "You take the buffer away from streams, it's no wonder you're getting" pollution and warmer water, he said.

In other business, Ross stated his opposition to appointing BWA Board President Craig Todd, who was district manager until three years ago, to a district associate director position. Todd has been seeking the position since retiring, but the board adopted a three-year hiatus policy, and Ross has delayed placing the appointment on the agenda. Meanwhile, the district has only two associate directors; in the past, it has had six to eight.

"I don't think he (Todd) should come back and serve on a board that supervises the person who took his place," Ross said. "I just don't think it's good to be looking over the new man's shoulders."

District board member Chuck Gould responded, "Respectfully, I disagree. In business practice it's common" for former supervisors to return in a board capacity or as consultants. "That's a resource to me. They have the background and knowledge" to be an asset to the board.

Besides, Gould added, "associate directors don't oversee the district manager position. That's the board's function." Ross agreed to raise the appointment at an upcoming meeting.

The MCCD board's next meeting is at 8 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 19, 2019, at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.