



## MCCD MONTHLY

July 2017

*By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association*

# Keep an eye on water co., conservation board

Not so long ago, international conglomerate Nestlé proposed to withdraw up to 200,000 gallons of water per day from wells it wanted to drill in Eldred Township. Under the plan, Eldred's water would become part of the ever-increasing flow of bottled water that more and more impressionable people now prefer to perfectly good tap water. Bottled water is now driving profits at beverage companies.

Organized opposition emerged – and grew – to water extraction by an outside entity, and last year Nestlé dropped its request. But the water-removal issue is back, this time in Barrett Township, with a proposal from Buck Hill Water Co. to sell water from Big Spring, in the headwaters of Buck Hill Creek, possibly to an outside vendor.

Already, the Barrett Township Zoning Hearing Board has voted to grant a variance to the BHWC to erect a building, which would house infrastructure that a water vendor would need to fill tanker trucks. Up to 1,000 trucks per year could carry water from local creeks out of the watershed. The plan would also require a land development approval.

Barrett Township does not have a water extraction ordinance, so there's no municipal control over who takes the water. However, BHWC does have a Delaware River Basin Commission permit, which limits its water sales to the host community – Buck Hill Falls Co., its residents and businesses. The company would have to amend its Commission docket in order to sell water to an out-of-county vendor.

Operations like this could have a big effect on the quality and quantity of water in a pristine area of Monroe County. Might removing water from the streams affect the water table, possibly having an impact on area wells? Would fishing be affected? Wildlife that depend on the streams? How would the addition of up to 1,000 tanker trucks affect area roads?

But there are considerations beyond the local.

Residents, flora and fauna downstream would have less water to sustain them. Ultimately, such plans raise important philosophical issues, among which are: Whose water is it? And is it prudent to sell a precious resource that can never be recovered?

Brodhead Watershed Association opposes selling water to bottling companies outside the watershed, which removes that water forever. The plan bears watching, so alert fellow BWA members and other interested parties.

Conflicts continue, meanwhile, at Monroe County Conservation District. At July's meeting, board Chairman Joe Hanyon denied board member Heidi Secord's request to add an item to the agenda discussing notices of violation. Hanyon acknowledged that, as a board member, Secord had standing to add agenda items. But he declined her request anyway. He also ignored association director Janet

Weidensaul's suggestion that instead of holding a public meeting, he was running the district as a dictatorship. Hanyon simply said they could talk about NOVs at the Aug. 17 meeting.

Hanyon and board members Pat Ross and Dave Moyer also still seem not to value the education, expertise and experience of the district's own professional staff. In July, Jack Fossett, a visitor who is a member of The Nature Conservancy, presented board members with a copy of TNC's recent magazine featuring the "Blue Revolution," addressing the pressures on finite water resources in a growing planet.

Fossett praised the past work of district staff in protecting local waters from pollution, and suggested TNC representatives could visit the district to discuss global water issues. Hanyon suggested that, rather, the district make a presentation to TNC. But he shut down Secord's proposal that District Manager Adam Schellhammer make the presentation.

And, Ross and Moyer hammered away on behalf of a shift in the agency's focus. District staff for decades has monitored and guided land clearing and the building process, preventing pollution. Waterways here have remained pristine despite rapid development. But Ross and Moyer want to focus not on regulating development, but on "cleaning up" what they say is stream pollution from storms.

Finally, the jury is still out on who will be the new Conservation District board member. Monroe County Commissioners (MCCD board member Charles Garris is one) outright refused an enthusiastic crowd's request in July that they name a replacement at their Aug. 2 meeting for Paul Canevari, who resigned from the district board in spring. They may announce their decision at the commissioners meeting on Wednesday, Aug. 16.

News coverage is scant for such goings on, leaving the job to local citizens who care about natural resources, property values and quality of life. Elected officials such as the commissioners and appointed officials such as the MCCD board members make decisions that affect us and the community we share. It's up to those committed to a sustainable, healthy community to hold them accountable.

*The commissioners' meeting will be held at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, Aug. 16, in Room 203 of the Monroe County Administrative Center, 1 Quaker Plaza, Stroudsburg.*

*The MCCD board meets at 8 a.m. Thursday, Aug. 17, at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.*