

MONROE COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT
Board meeting
Jan. 19, 2023

Newly appointed and reappointed conservation district officers swore their oath of office in January, pledging to manage natural resources and support the district's mission.

Board Chairman Bob Armstrong took the helm for a second term; Vice Chair Brian Winot again is vice chair, secretary is Craig Todd and treasurer, Roger McFadden. New member Jason Smith fills a board vacancy for a farm representative to the board.

District Manager Kristina Heaney noted the agency received a service award recognizing its 75 years as a district overseeing Pennsylvania's conservation district laws. It became a county Conservation District in 1947, and the MCCD has ever since acted to support the water and soil conservation programs adopted in 1945.

"January is a really great time for us to reflect back on 75 years of service to the community," Heaney said, thanking staff and board members for their efforts to protect natural resources and educate the community.

Todd agreed. "We're blessed with some really unique resources here and the challenges are great," he said, noting continuing development. "We've got to continue with innovation. We can meet that challenge."

Head Resource Conservationist Lori Kerrigan noted the district's ongoing efforts to help the county's 20 municipalities understand their obligations of stormwater management.

District staff are visiting all municipalities, and the agency has initiated bus tours that give elected officials and township engineers to observe best management practices to manage stormwater and protect rivers, streams and small waterways from sediment and other pollution stormwater carries.

Municipalities are interested, Kerrigan said, noting that in Coolbaugh Township a planned 10-minute discussion of Act 167, Pennsylvania's stormwater management act, ended up lasting 40 minutes.

“That’s definitely a big move forward,” she said.

District staff are also planning the annual waterways review, a long-term data collection of the condition of area waterways. The survey has been taking place since the 1990s and can give staff and the public a perspective on what’s happened to water quality over time.

Kerrigan said the year-end review for 2021, for example, showed that year to be “an outlier” reflecting a rebound in construction after very low activity during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kerrigan also stated that Monroe County’s district is time-efficient in its plan reviews. “We’re taking 57 percent less (time) than statewide for reviewing ... permits,” largely because the district has two engineers on staff. “We are being asked to do training statewide,” she added. “We’re ahead of the curve in helping people do things in an environmentally responsible way.”

Winot complained that, despite being timely, reviews are “getting very technical.” Engineer Drew Wagner responded. “It makes sense for us to make those comments up front,” he said. “If they have to make a large revision to the plan, getting them nailed down ahead of time makes sense.”

Heaney noted that 2022’s year-end permit application numbers are still elevated from an average year. “Things are still trending toward development,” she said, noting large-scale projects in Tobyhanna, Smithfield and Stroud townships. Newly elected state Rep. Tarah Probst, D-189, called in to report that she is working on opposing the full-scale, \$600 million plan to widen Interstate 80 for a few miles as it passes through Stroudsburg and beyond.

She will meet with former area state representative Mike Carroll, now acting secretary of the state Department of Transportation, to help convince PennDOT to scale the project back to focus only on widening and lengthening on-ramps and other safety necessities.

Probst pledged to support the district. “I will always support clean water and clean air,” she said.

In other business, Environmental Education Coordinator Roger Spotts reported that the district has renewed its agreement with the Nature Conservancy to manage the Tannersville Cranberry Bog.

The EE section has started several new programs, including four bus trips, working with the Brodhead Watershed

Association to provide public education programs in the Brodhead watershed. A William Penn grant is covering the cost.

EE program participation in 2022 was much higher than in 2020 and 2021, and has nearly rebounded to pre-Covid levels. Building attendance, at 1,500, was the highest in five years; income the highest in a decade.

All 2023 school programs are scheduled and the section has no free (time) until June.

The annual maple sugaring program will begin the week of Feb. 6. Spotts said the district is tapping now three weeks earlier than years ago. “That’s the case in sugar bushes all over the United States,” he said, attributing the earlier run to climate change.

ESSA Bank reached out exploring some possible green business opportunities at their buildings, Spotts said. Officials expressed interest in green roofs.

He will meet with their board. “They’re really excited about it,” he said, noting that a partnership with the local bank and savings institution offers a community education opportunity. Besides, he added, green roofs typically last 30 to 50 years and confer heating and insulation advantages.

The board also:

- * Heard that six landowners are working on plans to qualify for the agricultural assistance program.

- * Heard that the Fish and Boat Commission is raising its license fee, by \$2.50, for the first time since 2005.

- * Welcomed Smith to the board. Smith is a family farmer in Jackson Township. He has an agricultural business degree and worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in New Jersey. He now works for the Pocono Mountain School District.

- * Pledged to expand the popular Farm to School education program, which has been successful in Stroudsburg Area School District. Smith would like to introduce the program in PMSD.

Smith also said he hoped the formerly annual farm tour would begin again.

“I think it’s important to the public to have knowledge of what’s going on,” he said. “It’s important to get that visibility.”

The next district board meeting will be at 8 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 16, at the district’s Bartonsville offices and on Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Paula C. Heeschen