



REPORT ON MCCD

April 2018

By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association

Massive project brings up big questions

Brodhead Watershed Association met earlier this year with Monroe County Conservation District and the county Planning Commission to identify stream testing sites for this year. Assessors will be out this week and next looking at 36 sites across the county.

These annual studies (the 2017 study will be available soon) play a key role in providing an overview of the conditions of the county's waterways. And this year's samplings will be more important than ever, serving as a part of a continuum of stream profiles over time to which BWA – and others committed to clean water – can refer as development occurs here. Are the streams being degraded? Are they maintaining their quality over time?

Just last week, Tobyhanna Township officials announced they are working in partnership with a developer and a realty company to build a 75-acre, \$350 million "Pocono Springs Entertainment Village" adjacent to Kalahari Resort water park. Reminder: This is proposed for the headwaters of Swiftwater Creek, an Exceptional Value watershed.

Plans with Alberta Development Group and JEMB Realty of New York call for a mixture of retail, amusement and restaurant space. Township Manager John J. Jablowski Jr. said construction would begin in May 2019, and the first phase would open in 2021.

One important question: How will township supervisors oversee the very project they're promoting? In the past, officials zoned vulnerable land, with limited water and sewer resources, for maximum commercial development. What role will supervisors play? Will they ask taxpayers to support the infrastructure that the project will require?

Remember that it's not only water quality that matters, but water quantity. If you take water out of the stream and don't return all of it, that will affect the flow of the entire stream. And if you pull water out of the ground — for drinking, cooking, even for fountains, as this project plans — and that water doesn't all end up back in the ground, there will be less groundwater to feed the stream. These are important factors in the planning process.

It's the district technicians' job to work with developers during the planning process, to make sure their engineering designs comply with state environmental regulations. The technicians also monitor construction, once it begins, to ensure dirt from the rearranged landscape doesn't end up in area streams.

But it's not clear where board members stand when it comes to the staff's role in protecting ground and surface waters or preventing construction-related pollution. Board member David Moyer, an excavator, has lent his company's address to a group called Monroe County Clean Stream Coalition, which includes Tobyhanna Township Supervisor Anne Lambertson, who's also one of his employees. The coalition is appealing the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's determination that the

Tunkhannock Creek, the Swiftwater and four other streams merit the Exceptional Value designation, which confers special protection. The Cranberry, Paradise, Devil's Hole and Tank creeks, all pristine waterways, are also in the coalition's crosshairs.

For her part, Lamberton has complained to the district in the past that EV designation stifles economic growth.

At the March district board meeting, Moyer did not mention the coalition's appeal. He did voice complaints about the state Department of Transportation's use of road salt. Board Chairman Pat Ross also spent several minutes talking about addressing streambank erosion, and decrying what he deemed PennDOT's unnecessary use of herbicides along roadways, which he said contributes to non-point-source pollution. Neither Moyer nor Ross mentioned earth-moving construction projects, small or large, as a personal or board priority for 2018, though the district staff is charged with monitoring these activities that have great potential for polluting waterways.

BWA's mission is protecting and improving the quality of water in Brodhead Creek and its tributaries. With the Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future, BWA has filed a petition to intervene in the coalition's challenge.

The district board meets at 8 a.m. Thursday, during the first week of the annual stream sampling. Now that Tobyhanna Township has unveiled its massive development plans, Monroe County residents should monitor how district board members, including several new members who joined the board in recent months, respond. Let's hope they support their technical staff's efforts to work with developers, to achieve plans that provide the very best protection of area streams.

The Pennsylvania Constitution grants every citizen the right to the commonwealth's precious natural resources, declaring them public natural resources that are "the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come."

Every one of us relies on clean, abundant water. Economic development should not come at the environment's expense.

The MCCD board meets at 8 a.m. Thursday, April 19, at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.