

MONROE COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Board meeting

Nov. 16, 2023

BWA Report by Paula Heeschen

Conservation Districts across the region and the state are doing their best to provide a uniform approach in regulating development. Head Resource Conservationist Lori Kerrigan addressed the issue with district board members during the November board meeting. She said the district's two professional engineers, Drew Wagner and Michael Wilk, meet with fellow engineers from other counties to share concerns, issues and approaches.

"This allows us to give a consistent message to applicants across the county," Kerrigan said, and "to make sure we're evaluating projects on a consistent basis across the state."

Common rules and procedures help builders and developers who work in more than one county or whose projects may cross political boundaries.

The discussions have expanded from eastern Pennsylvania to include representatives from Conservation Districts in western Pennsylvania. The goal, Kerrigan said, is so that "We're all looking at things in a consistent way."

Also at November's meeting, Environmental Education Coordinator Roger Spotts told the board the recent annual bird seed sale sold a bit more than last year. He thanked the county Solid Waste Authority for donating the use of a truck to store the seed during the sale. There's still bird seed in the shop for those who didn't make it to the sale, he added.

The EE section plans to expand its school-based agricultural program beyond Stroudsburg Area School District, where "Ag Day" has become popular.

Spotts said the section is waiting to hear back from Pocono Mountain School District with an eye to offering the program in April.

Three Eagle Scout projects are adding to or improving the district's Bartonsville property:

One applicant is replacing MCCD signs and structures along Running Valley Road; a second applicant is working on a footbridge replacement in the Sugar Bush near Marshalls Creek, where the district holds its annual maple sugaring program; and a third is showcasing a hydroponics display in the lobby.

A certified engineer from the state or possibly a private firm will inspect the finished bridge project before it's used. The project "fit right in for him," the scout, Spotts said, "because he wants to go into engineering."

Eagle Scout projects are a win-win for the district. Two other scouts are applying; they raise all the money for their projects, and the district benefits.

District Manager Kristina Heaney told the board she is working on highlighting issues from recent state Association of Conservation District meetings; these highlights will go to local state legislators in January.

She also has conducted meetings to plan for the proposed Swiftwater Solar project, which involves large-scale tree removal near Swiftwater to establish a solar farm.

And, Watershed Specialist David Hooker reported the completion of the county's first Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program grant project, which involved installing exclusionary fencing to protect the Buckwa Creek.

ACAP provides grants to Pennsylvania farmers to help them implement best-management practices on farms and other ag operations. The projects aim to keep healthy soils and soil nutrients on farm fields, pastures and streambanks, and out of waterways, where they can damage aquatic life.

The board also

* Agreed to seek county funding to help pay for the demolition of a dilapidated bungalow on district property near the offices in Bartonsville.

* Heard an update on the district's involvement in the state Department of Transportation project to create improved ramps and other changes to Interstate 80 in Stroudsburg. District staff has met several times with PennDOT, including more than five pre-application meetings. Ultimately, the district will have to sign off on the project, which is proposed along McMichaels Creek.

The next district board meeting will be at 10:30 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 14, at Stroudsmoor Inn in Stroudsburg.

Respectfully submitted,

Paula C. Heeschen