



MIFFLIN COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2019 Annual Report

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The Mifflin County Conservation District was organized in 1956 as a legal subdivision of state and local government, under the authority of Act 217, to assist the county's landowners with natural resource related concerns, and provide the technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices on their land. There are 66 conservation districts in Pennsylvania, representing every county except Philadelphia, and nearly 3000 nationwide, dedicated to conserving our soil and water resources.

*Roy Stine, long time MCCD public director, passed away November 1, 2019 at the age of 92. Roy served as a board member since 1978, certainly one of the longest tenured CD directors in the state. Roy's support of the District was unwavering and he could always be counted on to voice his opinion. He will be missed. On December 19th, the Mifflin County Commissioners appointed Associate Director Dave Filson to fill Roy's unexpired public director term.

Board of Directors:

Cathy Haughwout, Chair
 David Glick, Vice Chair
 Murray Laite, Treasurer

Keith Spicher
 Roy Stine*

Raymond Snyder

Associate Directors

James Hostetter

Dave Filson*

Morgan Stimely

Commissioner Director

Steve Dunkle



MCCD staff (l to r): Cathy Yohn, Mike Stuck, June Morningstar, Dan Dunmire, Erica Smith, Floyd Ciccolini, Trevor Weaver.

Conservation District Mission Statement

The mission of the Mifflin County Conservation District is to conserve the county's natural resources through coordinated and professional guidance, technical assistance, and education to the landowners, public agencies, and residents of Mifflin County.

Dirt & Gravel Roads Program

The Dirt and Gravel Road (D&GR) Program was created in 1997. The purpose of the program is to provide training and funding to local road owning entities to mitigate stream pollution from dirt roads. To date, the District has received a total of over \$1,006,000 for funding, administering, and educational events related to dirt and gravel road improvement projects in Mifflin County. The District has completed 33 projects involving 6 different townships, with total project and program costs totaling more than \$810,000, with an additional \$31,000 committed to pending projects. Through the District's Dirt and Gravel Roads Program, more than 15 miles of Mifflin County's dirt roads have been improved to demonstrate the use of environmentally sensitive road maintenance practices.

In 2015, the traditional D&GR Program was expanded to include some low volume, paved and/or tar-chip roads under the Low Volume Roads (LVR) portion of the program. The purpose and mission of the Dirt, Gravel, Low Volume Roads (DGLVR) Program remains the same: provide training and funding to local road owning entities to mitigate stream pollution from dirt and low volume roads. To date, the District has received approximately \$340,000 for low volume road improvements. The District has completed a total of

10 projects and has committed over \$45,000 toward future projects. Projects have been, or are being, completed in 6 different municipalities.



Erosion and Sediment Control Program

The District, under delegated authority from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the State Conservation Commission, administers the Erosion and Sediment Pollution Control Program at a Level II authority under the Chapter 102 regulations and the Pennsylvania Clean Streams Law. This involves technical review of erosion control plans for earthmoving activities, project inspections, compliance activities, complaint response and public education. The purpose of this program is to protect our land and waters from accelerated erosion and resulting sedimentation during any earth disturbance. The scope of projects reviewed by the District can range from single building construction disturbing a minimal area

to massive highway projects involving hundreds of acres of disturbance.

In the past year the District performed 21 initial and 53 follow-up E&S plan reviews encompassing 411 project acres and 59 disturbed acres. Our staff performed 40 site inspections, responded to 249 requests for technical assistance and investigated 12 E&S related complaints.

Construction sites involving more than 1 acre of earth disturbance must apply for and receive a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit prior to commencing any earthmoving activities for the discharge of stormwater from those sites. Anyone that expects to begin a construction project that may involve more than 1 acre of earth disturbance over the life of the project is urged to contact the Conservation District to determine whether or not NPDES permit coverage is required.

The Conservation District is delegated to administer the NPDES program for construction sites in Mifflin County. This includes processing and technical review of applications and accompanying E&S plans, and regular inspections of permitted sites to ensure compliance with permit conditions. Individual NPDES permits are issued for those sites located in Special Protection watersheds, and General Permit coverage is given to all other sites.

The District processed 2 Individual and 1 General NPDES permits in Mifflin County in the last calendar year.

Watershed Assessment and Restoration

Upper Kish & Hungry Run Section 319 Grants

The District has focused on two priority watersheds for water quality improvement in Mifflin County through the EPA Section 319 Funding Program. These watersheds were identified as priority areas after the completion of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protections surface water assessment in 2001. Watershed assessments and restoration plans were completed for both the Upper Kishacoquillas Creek watershed and Hungry Run watershed in Mifflin County.

The Upper Kishacoquillas (Kish) Creek watershed includes the main stem of Kish Creek from Belleville to Allensville and all of the tributaries in-between. The Hungry Run watershed, a tributary of Kishacoquillas Creek, flows through the village of Vira and meets the Kish below Burnham. Each watershed contains a majority of streams with an “aquatic life” use impairment. Sediment and nutrients are the cause of impairment in both watersheds and the implementation plans addresses reductions of both agricultural and urban sources of sediment and nutrients.

Grant money is available to projects in impaired watersheds that have EPA approved Watershed Implementation Plans through the Section 319

Nonpoint Source Pollution Program. To date, the District has received more than \$2.1 million in 319 and Growing Greener funds for agricultural BMPs and watershed restoration efforts in the Upper Kish and over \$1.4 million for the Hungry Run Watershed. The MCCD submitted an updated Watershed Implementation Plan to the US EPA for the Upper Kish Watershed in 2019. This update included new cost estimates, updated watershed modeling and reduction estimates, and included an expanded area of the impaired watershed (extended downstream to Applehouse Road). (The updated plan was approved in February of 2020).

During 2019, the District installed the following BMPs in cooperation with local landowners through the Section 319 grants program:

Upper Kishacoquillas Creek

- 2 Stream Crossing
- 800’ Animal Trails and Walkway
- 1200’ Livestock Exclusion Fence



Designs are being completed for 3 additional farms in the Upper Kish watershed.

NFWF Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund Grant

The MCCD was awarded a \$175,000 grant in October of 2017 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to continue vital stream and riparian restoration along with funding additional technical assistance and outreach for water quality improvement projects.

In 2019 the District completed several projects through this grant implementing various stream related improvements. The District planted trees on approximately 2.8 acres of streamside area, installed over 77 fish habitat enhancement and bank stabilization structures, and 2 stream crossings.

NFWF grant money is available to landowners within Mifflin County who have a demonstrated need for stream and water quality improvements. Projects are selected based on existing water quality impairments, habitat conditions, and potential nutrient and sediment reductions.

DCNR Multifunctional Riparian Buffer Grant

In 2017 the MCCD received a \$50,000 grant to install multifunctional riparian buffers throughout Mifflin County as part of a renewed effort to increase riparian forest buffer adoption by the Pennsylvania DCNR. This buffer initiative focuses on riparian forest buffers that can produce alternative uses or income for landowners.

Examples of multifunctional buffers are those used for tree crops (fruits,

nuts, syrup), firewood, woody florals, or recreation.

The MCCD installed one multifunctional buffer in 2018 that totaled 2.8 acres and planted over 300 trees. In 2019, the District used DCNR funding to plant an additional 200 trees and shrubs at Kish Park in Burnham. This planting was completed by volunteers at our Arbor Day planting event at Kish Park in April. Volunteer groups included the students from the Mifflin County Junior High School, Penn's Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and several Mifflin County Home School families. Additional plantings are planned at Kish Park in 2020 and several other sites.

Chesapeake Bay Special Projects Grant

In 2017 the MCCD received a \$25,000 grant to maintain and revive existing riparian forest buffers in Mifflin County. In 2019 this grant funded the installation of 2,000 feet of livestock exclusion fencing and 1 stream crossing. This grant also supported interns, purchased equipment, and contracted services to complete supplemental management of riparian buffers (mowing, trimming, mortality planting, etc.). In 2019, the District was able to assist multiple landowners in maintaining over 25 acres of riparian forest buffer. This maintenance and management is vital to long term project success!

Surface Water Assessment Program (SWAP) Monitoring

In light of the extensive work the District and its partners have done in the Upper Kish & Hungry Run

watersheds, the possibility of removing these waters from the 303(d) list of impaired waters is a distinct possibility in the future. The district has been sampling water quality in these watersheds since 2014. In 2016, the District secured another three years of funding (\$72,692) for surface water quality assessment in both watersheds, extending the duration of this assessment through 2019. Surface water assessments are conducted each year during the month of May and collect a snapshot of water quality conditions through biological, physical, and chemical data. Samples taken in May of 2019 showed water quality improvement across many sites.

Chesapeake Bay Program

2019 marked the 30th year for the Conservation District's administration of the Chesapeake Bay Program. The Bay Program is a unique regional partnership leading and directing restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The program works with landowners who would like to reduce sediment and nutrient runoff from their farms.

District personnel performed 63 farm inspections as part of a new requirement with the "reboot" of the Chesapeake Bay Program. The purpose of these visits was to ensure that Mifflin County Ag producers have required Ag Erosion & Sediment Control (E&S) and Manure Management plans and are in compliance with relevant environmental regulations. The District also assisted 32 farmers develop Manure Management Plans totaling 2,253 acres and assisted 29 farmers with the development of Ag E & S plans totaling 1,799 acres.

Nutrient Management Program

2019 completed the 22nd year of the conservation district's delegated agreement with the State Conservation Commission to administer Pennsylvania's Nutrient Management Law (Act 38). The District's primary responsibility is the technical review and approval of nutrient management plans that are prepared and submitted by commercial or individual planners for farms that are considered Concentrated Animal Operations (CAOs). A concentrated animal operation is a farm with more than two animal equivalent units (AEU's) per acre of land suitable for manure application (animal equivalent unit defined as 1,000 pounds of animal weight). In addition, farms that are not legally required to comply with Act 38 may do so voluntarily. Nutrient management planning is done with nitrogen and phosphorus as the nutrients of concern. Other features of the program include odor emission regulations for certain size livestock operations and a certification program for commercial manure haulers.

In 2019 the Conservation District reviewed and approved 9 nutrient management plans. Additionally, the District completed 28 annual status reviews of previously approved nutrient management plans.

Farmland Preservation

The Conservation District serves as administrator of the Mifflin County Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. This program preserves the future of productive farmland in the county by purchasing the development rights to participating farms. Farm owners are paid a percentage of the easement value, or difference between the agricultural and market values of the land, to keep their farms in productive agriculture. Funding for easement purchases is provided by the PA Department of Agriculture, the Mifflin County Commissioners, and in some cases, USDA.

In order to be eligible, a farm must meet the following minimum criteria: (1.) be located within a duly recorded Agricultural Security Area that has at least 500 acres enrolled, (2.) contain at least 50% of soils which are available for agricultural production and are Capability Classes I through IV, (3.) contain the greater of 50% or 10 acres of harvested cropland, pasture, or grazing lands, (4.) be contiguous acreage of at least 50 acres, unless the tract is at least 10 acres and is utilized for a crop unique to the area or is contiguous to a property which has a perpetual conservation easement in place. Farms that meet this criteria are then competitively ranked according to the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) process. The LESA assigns points to each farm according to soils, farm productivity, development pressure, and clustering or proximity to other farms in the program. Depending on funding available, the highest ranked farm(s) receives an offer for easement purchase based on

certified appraisals of the farm's agricultural and market value. Once the easement is purchased, that farm must remain in agricultural production in perpetuity.

Statewide, there have been 5,675 farms preserved in 59 counties totaling 579,940 acres for a purchase price of over \$ 1.5 billion. In Mifflin County, there are now 25 farms preserved totaling 2,738 acres at a cost of \$3,124,298 or \$1,141 per acre.

Environmental Education

The District continued its sponsorship of the Envirothon in 2019, an environmental education competition for senior high school students that tests their knowledge of natural resource issues. The 2019 Mifflin-Juniata Joint Envirothon was held May 9th at Kish Park in Mifflin County. The event went smoothly and we had the excitement of having Game Warden Amanda Isett bring a captured black bear. Warden Isett showed the students how a bear is processed and tagged during the lunch hour. We also received a \$700 grant from the PA State Envirothon to use for state team registration, t-shirts, and awards of the top three teams.

The event had students from both counties, including teams from Juniata Sr. High, East Juniata Sr. High and Belleville Mennonite High School. Participating agencies included USDA-NRCS, DEP, and DCNR-Bureau of Forestry, PA Game Commission, and PA Fish & Boat Commission. Students were tested in soils and land use, aquatic biology, forestry, wildlife, and this year's current issue, "*Agriculture and the Environment: Knowledge and Technology to Feed the World*".

The winning Mifflin County team, the "Vicious and Delicious", was coached by Bryce Clapp and was made up of Belleville Mennonite School students Noah Hartzler, Mark French, David Yoder, Isaac Byler, and Tristan Henderson. The first place team earned the right to compete at the State Envirothon at University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown on May 21st and 22nd.

The District did a stream health education station at the Reeds Gap Fall Fest in October. MCCD staff also participated in the Lewistown RC&D Nature Camp, Mifflin County 6th Grade career tours, the Mifflin County Farm Bureau 3rd Grade Ag Tour, and healthy streams presentation to the Juniata Valley YMCA preschool. The Enviroscope model is available to teachers to check out of our environmental lending library at the District. If you would like more information about what we have available in our library, please contact our office.



Woodland Owners' Association

The Conservation District played a supporting role in the Mifflin-Juniata-Perry County Woodland Owners' Association, which was formed to provide education and a means of networking to owners of private forestland in Mifflin, Juniata and Perry counties. District staff, along with DCNR Bureau of Forestry service foresters Jeff Osborne and Luke Book, serve in an advisory role on the association's steering committee, which meets regularly to plan educational programs. Several public programs and field days were held in 2019, covering topics such as the Spotted Lanternfly, Agroforestry, and a tour of the Energex American wood pellet plant in Juniata County. M-J-P Woodland Owners members, MCCD and DCNR staff also manned a booth at the 2019 Kid Connection in Lewistown on April 27th and distributed educational materials. Response to these programs has been outstanding, showing that forest landowners are truly interested in good stewardship of their land.

Juniata River Clean Up

Since 2013, the Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful/PA Cleanways local affiliates in Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata and Perry counties have held organized events to remove and properly dispose or recycle trash and discarded tires from the bed and banks of the Juniata River in these four counties. These events have been supported by grants from the Foundation for PA Watersheds and the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies that were awarded to and



Mifflin County's 2019 Winning Envirothon team from Belleville Mennonite School. From left to right, Mark French, Tristan Henderson, Noah Hartzler, Isaac Byler, and David Yoder

administered by the Mifflin County Conservation District.

In 2013-14, \$13,600 was awarded to the Mifflin County Conservation District (MCCD) to help pay for eight clean up events over a two year period in the four counties. The results for 2013-14 were as follows: 264 volunteers contributing 1,364 hours; 32.3 tons of trash removed, including 1,227 discarded tires; and 9.5 miles of river cleaned up. A total of \$30,838 of in-kind match and services from local volunteers, businesses, and organizations was contributed towards the project.

In 2015, the Mifflin County Conservation District (MCCD) was awarded another \$9,000 by the foundations to support another series of river clean ups in the four counties. A total of seven clean up events were held during the summers of 2015 and 2016. A total of 242 volunteers contributed 1,212 volunteer hours to remove and properly dispose of or

recycle 33.33 tons of trash, including 1,221 discarded tires, from the bed and banks of 17.41 miles of the river, with a total project cost of \$42,496.71, which included \$33,496.71 of in-kind and cash contributions.

In 2017, another grant of \$5,000 was awarded to MCCD by the Foundation for PA Watersheds and the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies to continue supporting river clean up events in the four counties. Unfortunately, the next two years saw record precipitation in Central Pennsylvania, and even though events were planned and scheduled (and rescheduled several times) in all four counties, the resulting high water levels in the Juniata River made clean up events all but impossible. River clean up events were only held in Huntingdon and Perry counties and grant funds were rolled over into 2019.

The sponsoring organizations, PA Cleanways of Mifflin County, Keep

Huntingdon County Beautiful, Keep Juniata County Beautiful, Keep Perry County Beautiful, and the conservation districts in all four counties began planning four more Juniata River clean-up events in early 2019. Fortunately, after a wet start in the spring precipitation levels returned to more normal levels and water levels in the Juniata River consequently dropped enough by summer to allow better access to potential clean up sites.

The Mifflin County event was held on August 10, 2019 at the confluence of Musser Run and the Juniata River. This site had historically been an area where tires carried by high water had accumulated because of the hydraulics caused by a break in the river current and the shoreline configuration. In 2010, PA Cleanways of Mifflin County had removed and recycled 115 tires from this area, but in the time

period since then a significant number of additional tires accumulated in the same place. In 2019 14 volunteers contributed 56 hours to remove 283 tires and a small amount of other trash from about .5 mile of the river, netting a haul of 4.78 tons. The tires were hauled away by Mahantango Enterprises to be recycled.

Totals from the six clean up events held in the four counties in 2018 and 2019 were 131 volunteers contributing 812 volunteer hours to remove 15.6 tons of trash including 572 discarded tires from

approximately 13.84 miles of the Juniata River. Project costs totaled \$27,458.17 and included \$22,458.17 of in-kind and cash match.



Other District Activities in 2019

District personnel also participated in the following resource-related activities: the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD), PACD Legislative Committee, PACD Conservation Committee, the Chapter 102 Erosion & Sediment Control Advisory Committee, PA Cleanways of Mifflin County, the PA Envirothon Board of Directors, the PA Agroforestry Brain Trust, the Mifflin County Planning Commission, the Planning Commission Subdivision & Land Development Review Committee, PSU Extension's Water 4 Ag workgroup, and the Mifflin County Solid Waste Authority. The District welcomes these opportunities to form partnerships with local agencies, organizations, and governments to further promote conservation, and ensure the protection of our natural resources for future generations.

