



# MIFFLIN COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## 2021 Annual Report

### Index of Programs

- Dirt & Gravel Roads
- Erosion & Sediment Control
- Watershed Assessment & Restoration
- Chesapeake Bay
- Nutrient Management
- Farmland Preservation
- Environmental Education
- Other District Activities

### District Staff

District Manager:  
**Trevor Weaver**

Administrative Assistant:  
**June Morningstar**

Ag Conservation Technician:  
**Erica Smith**

Ag Resource Conservation:  
**Mike Stuck**

Resource Conservation:  
**Floyd Ciccolini**

Watershed Specialist:  
**Bailey Coder**

Part-time Secretary:  
**Cathy Yohn**

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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 3,000 nationwide, dedicated to conserving our soil and water resources.

In 2021, the MCCD continued to deliver on our commitments to local natural resource conservation. From completing our Countywide Action Plan (CAP) to adopting planters in downtown Lewistown, there were many new things happening this year! See all of the accomplishments and activities in the next few pages of our 2021 Annual Report.

- Trevor Weaver, District Manager

### Board of Directors:

Cathy Haughwout, Chair  
David Glick, Vice Chair  
Murray Laite, Treasurer  
Keith Spicher  
Raymond Snyder  
Dave Filson

### Commissioner Director

Mark Sunderland

### Associate Directors

James Hostetter



MCCD staff (l to r): Floyd Ciccolini, June Morningstar, Mike Stuck, Trevor Weaver, Bailey Coder, Erica Smith, (Missing from photo: Cathy Yohn)

## **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.*

### **New Watershed Specialist!**

The MCCD welcomed a new Watershed Specialist, Bailey Coder, in February of 2021! Bailey graduated from Susquehanna University with a degree in Ecology and worked for the Freshwater Research Institute (FRI) as a fisheries technician. While working at the FRI, Bailey sampled surface waters of the Commonwealth as part of the Unassessed Waters initiative. Bailey also worked with the PA Fish and Boat Commission studying catfish in the Juniata River and traveled abroad to Fiji where he assisted with biodiversity studies in the Bahamas studying the dietary preferences of the invasive Lionfish. Bailey loves the outdoors and spends much of his time fishing and hunting. Bailey is most excited about making a positive impact towards the conservation of central Pennsylvania's natural resources.

### **Countywide Action Plan (CAP)**

The Mifflin County Conservation District joined a four county group in completing Countywide Action Plans (CAP) for nutrient and sediment reductions. Mifflin County Conservation District joined Juniata, Perry, and Dauphin counties in hiring Herbert Roland Grubic (HRG) to complete individual Countywide Action Plans as part of an effort to

reduce nutrient and sediment loads to the Chesapeake Bay. The partnership of the four Tier 3 counties was managed by the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC) who applied for and administered the grant funding for CAP development in each county. Dauphin, Perry, Juniata, and Mifflin (DPJM) counties set up workgroup meetings and committees to seek public input and identify key goals and strategies to meet reductions suggested by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP). Action Plan development was also informed by County Toolboxes provided by PA DEP with local information on priority areas, nutrient loading rates, and reduction goals.

CAPs were completed in the fall of 2021 and efforts to start implementation began immediately. The MCCD proposed completing five stream restoration projects in 2022 between the MCCD, PA Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC), and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The MCCD also proposed piloting a turf conversion program aimed at planting native meadows in replacement of traditional lawns on residential and commercial properties.

### **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 and administered as grants a total of over \$1.2 million for funding, administration, and educational events related to dirt and gravel road improvement projects in Mifflin County. The District has completed 38 projects involving seven different townships, with an additional \$5,000 committed to pending projects. Through the District's Dirt and Gravel Roads Program, more than 17 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 \$445,000 for low volume road improvements.

The District has completed a total of 13 projects and has committed over \$44,000 toward future projects. Projects have been or are being completed in six different municipalities totaling over 4 miles of road length.

## **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 25 initial and 50 follow-up E&S plan reviews encompassing 225 project acres and 125 disturbed acres. Our staff performed 40 site inspections, responded to 260 requests for technical assistance, and investigated one E&S related complaint.

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 an 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 6 Individual and 10 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 \$2.6 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 2021, the District installed the following BMPs in cooperation with local landowners:

- **Project #1:** Construction of the following BMPs: 1-32 ft. x 88 ft. Roofed Heavy Use Area/Manure stacking structure, 200 ft. of up slope diversion, 2 storm water inlet boxes with rock outlet, 200 ft. of gutters and downspouts, 2034 ft. of streambank fencing, and 2 stream crossings.
- **Project #2:** Construction of the following BMPs: 1 – off stream watering facility, 235 ft. diversion, 300 ft. animal trail & walkway, 30 ft. culvert crossing, 1,383 ft. of fencing for diversion, walkway and pasture.



### Riparian Buffer Management

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 one 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 2021, the District was able to continue assisting multiple landowners in maintaining over 25 acres of riparian

forest buffers. 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) impaired waters list is a distinct possibility in the future. The District has been sampling water quality in these watersheds since 2014. Surface water assessments are conducted each year during the month of April or May and collect a snapshot of water quality conditions through biological, physical, and chemical data. Samples taken in April of 2021 showed water quality improvement across many sites, most notably in the Hungry Run watersheds. Improving waters data was submitted to PA DEP for further consideration. The Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds funded the 2021 sampling season. Record high IBI scores were achieved in many sites in Hungry Run and the Upper Kish, indicating positive impacts from stream work as well as other BMPs. Sampling is planned to continue in 2022 through a partnership with local PA DEP biologists. Sampling in 2022 will complete a 9-year data set in these watersheds.

### Chesapeake Bay Program

2021 marked the 32nd 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 the required Ag Erosion & Sediment Control (E&S) plans and Manure Management plans to be in compliance with relevant environmental regulations. The District also assisted four farmers in developing Manure Management plans covering 1,170 acres and assisted 20 farmers with the development of Ag E & S plans covering 2,084 acres.

### Nutrient Management Program

2021 completed the 24th year of the conservation district’s delegated agreement with the State Conservation Commission to administer Pennsylvania’s Nutrient Management (Act 38) Program. 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 2021, the Conservation District reviewed and approved 10 nutrient management plans. Additionally, the District completed 23 annual status reviews of previously approved nutrient management plans.

## Farmland Preservation

The Conservation District serves as the 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 5,923 farms preserved in 59 counties totaling 601,647 acres. In Mifflin County, there are now 27 farms preserved totaling 2,968 acres at a cost of \$3,423,337.

## Environmental Education

The District continued its sponsorship of the Envirothon, an environmental education competition for senior high school students that tests their knowledge of natural resource issues. The 2021 Mifflin County Envirothon was held virtually. The event went smoothly without any technical difficulty. One team of five

students from Belleville Mennonite School (the Spud Squad) participated in the online event. BMS was eligible to compete in the PA Envirothon virtual State event but could not compete due to a schedule conflict. The MCCD also received a \$400 grant from the PA State Envirothon that was used to purchase educational resources to lend to area schools.

The District participated in several other youth education events. The MCCD staffed a stream health education station at the Reeds Gap Fall Fest (Reeds Gap State Park) in October and had a Cleanup Day/Field Event at Kish Park with students from the Belleville Mennonite School. MCCD staff also led a healthy streams presentation to the Juniata Valley YMCA preschool class and cohosted a station at the Lewistown Festival of Ice with the Juniata County Conservation District. The Districts had wildlife pelts/furs available as well as a paw print identification activity. The wildlife kits were donated by the PA Game Commission for environmental education.

The wildlife kit is available for future presentations and to check out of the Districts lending library. The District also has two Enviroscape models available to teachers to check out of our environmental lending library. If you would like more information about what material is available, please contact our office.

Education was not limited to youth. The MCCD assisted with and/or participated in several

educational and outreach meetings for the Ag community and the general public. Mike Stuck and Erica Smith did one on one Manure Management manual trainings at the MCCD district office. District staff also presented to numerous local groups including the Water for Agriculture work group, the Mifflin County Planning Commission, and the Lewistown Rotary.

The MCCD also received a PACD Non-Point Source Pollution Education mini-grant to fund the design and installation of an educational sign at Kish Park to highlight the recent stream project completed in 2019-2020 along Kishacoquillas Creek.

## Other District Activities in 2021

In 2021, the MCCD brought back their annual tree seedling sale. The 2021 sale included evergreens, shade trees, flowering trees and shrubs, and wildflower seed. The MCCD sold 620 trees/shrubs. Proceeds from the annual seedling sale fund environmental education efforts in Mifflin County.

The MCCD also adopted planters in downtown Lewistown as part of the Downtown Lewistown Adopt-A-Planter program. Planters were planted with native flowers and perennials to help display plants that are native to our region.



District personnel also participated in the following resource-related activities: PA Envirothon Board of Directors, the DG&LVR QAB Committee, the PA Agroforestry Brain Trust, PA Riparian Forest Buffer Advisory Committee, PSU Extension’s Water 4 Agriculture Leadership Committee, Mifflin County Farm Bureau Nominations Committee, Kish Park Study Committee, and the Countywide Action Plan Leadership Committee. 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.

