

2014 ANNUAL REPORT

**SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:**

- Local Food Initiative promoting farmers' markets
- Green Alternatives for Stormwater
- Hands-On Educational Activities

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Bedford Street Property



Blair County Conservation District
1427 Rock Street
Hollidaysburg, PA 16868
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NEW OFFICE COMPLEX BLAIR COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Plans are progressing for the Conservation District Property located at the intersection of Rt. 36 and Bedford Street in the Borough of Hollidaysburg. 2014 brought about the first "visions on paper" of our proposed project!

The District has retained Keller Engineers, Inc. to complete the master plan for the site. We also retained their services to work with the Borough related to zoning and overall site development.

Baechle & Associates has been retained as the architect for the proposed office complex. A design team has been assembled to include a consultant that will assist the district in attaining

LEED certification for the proposed 6,000 sq ft office. A 0.5 acre wetland mitigation project by the Sheetz Corporation began in 2014, which will include a boardwalk through the site for educational purposes.

The next steps will be soliciting for grants to build the Outdoor Environmental Education Facility, preparation of required permits and thoughts for fund raising opportunities.

Always a question...is the utilization of the 1920 era bank barn. Structurally sound, the barn will remain and be enhanced to be used

for storage, hosting of events and to serve as a reminder of Blair County's long history as an agricultural community.

Stay tuned in 2015 to follow the progress of the District Property!



Proposed LEED Certified Office Building

Supporting Blair County Agriculture



Stabilized Animal Walkway & Fencing

Agriculture is the Number 1 industry in Blair County and the Blair District has a strong program to support agriculture.

The district was created by a petition from local citizens—mainly farmers—in 1966. Since then, we have implemented programs and projects to provide technical and financial assistance to farm landowners.

Funding through the Chesapeake Bay Program was

attained in 2014 for the design and construction of a Rotational Grazing, Roof Runoff, Tile Drainage and a Waterway system on Blair County farms. Funds were also distributed for Nutrient Management Planning.

The district also serves as the reviewing entity for submitted Nutrient Management Plans, either volunteer or required by regulations and as the local contact for agriculture related complaints.

A major focus for the ag staff starting in 2012 and continuing through 2017 is to conduct “Farm Visits” to inform local landowners of their regulatory requirements associated with Erosion Control and Manure Management. 100 visits are required annually of the Blair District staff. If you would like to schedule a visit to your farm....please contact Rich Huether, Ag Conservation Specialist at 696-0877 ext. 5.

Local Foods Initiative



Juniata Winter Market

The Blair County Conservation District supports agriculture in all shapes and sizes.

A target in 2014 was the advancement of knowledge for our area direct-market farmers growing local food. Two “Farmer to Farmer:” workshops were held with topics including pricing of specialty crops, effective marketing, growing in high tunnels, growing/harvesting/selling brambles and other

small fruit, and manure management. The workshops provide information and mentoring opportunities for local growers.

Working with the Partnership for Health, the district helped to implement a “market buck” program funded by a United Way Grant. The idea of market bucks is for participants to receive and redeem “bucks” to buy fruit, vegetables, eggs, and dairy products from local

Farmers’ market. The Juniata Market was targeted in 2014.

The District continues to meet with many community stakeholders to help support Blair County’s local food initiative. Together, we are working to improve the entrepreneurial outcome for farmers and bring more healthy foods to the community.

Check out one of the many Blair County Markets this year!

Farmland Preservation

There is no shortage of interest in the Conservation Easement Purchase Program in Blair County.

To date, 46 farms totaling just under 6,700 acres have been preserved for agricultural use in perpetuity!

Blair County Commissioners allocated \$80,000 for

preservation efforts in 2014, which was matched with State Funds. The total allocation of \$331,217 allowed us to consider the purchase of the development rights on 2 farms in Sinking Valley in 2014.

The average easement value (the difference between the development value and the

farmland value as determined by an appraisal) for Blair County stands at approximately \$1,000 per acre.

Annually, applications received by October 15th are ranked to be considered for funding in the following year. Application forms are available on the District website or call 696-0877 ext. 5.

“To date, 46 farms totaling just under 6,700 acres have been preserved.....”

Dirt & Gravel Road Program



Woodbury Township Project

Historically, the Conservation District received an annual allocation of approximately \$20,000 for distribution to state or municipal entities for the repair and stabilization of Dirt & Gravel Roads within their jurisdiction.

The district worked in 2014 to lay the groundwork for a 5-fold increase in funding expected for 2015, made possible through Act 89 of 2013. Both a significant increase in funding for dirt and gravel roads along with a “Low Volume Road” component means that Blair County will receive \$180,817 for 2015!

The funding program continues to address sediment pollution from undermanaged roads and drainage

facilities on Dirt & Gravel Roads, and now allows for projects on paved Low Volume Roads (less than 500 vehicles per day).

To attain funding, the project sponsor must become and maintain certification in the “Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance of Dirt & Gravel Roads” training. Currently, only seven Blair County municipalities and the PA Game Commission maintain certified personnel for the program.

Applications are solicited annually and ranked for funding approval. For more information or [to find a training session near you](#), contact Jim Eckenrode at the district office at 696-0877 ext 5.

Erosion Control and NPDES Permitting

The Blair County Conservation District is delegated duties related to public information, plan review, permit issuance, complaint handling and inspections associated with earth disturbance activities in Blair County. Workload and the flow of plan submittals seems to be on a rise—which is an indicator of the stronger economy.

All earthmoving activities are required to have a written Erosion Control Plan. Many local

municipalities have within their ordinances the requirement of plan review and approval. Sites involving a disturbance of 1 (one) acre or more are required to attain an NPDES permit prior to commencement of the project.

NPDES permits are authorized and/or processed thru the District.

In 2014, 20 General and 6 Individual Permits (located in High Quality Watersheds) were processed. In addition, 74 Erosion and Sediment

(E&S) Control Plans were reviewed and approved based on the State’s Chapter 92 and 102 Regulations.

35 complaints were logged and 38 inspections were conducted at earth moving sites.

Chris Myers took over as the Resource Conservation Technician in April of 2014. Chris has a background in Forestry and hit the ground running for the district. Funds are budgeted to hire another E&S staff member in 2015.

“...Sites of one acre or more require an NPDES permit...”

Funds for Stormwater Projects



The Blair County Conservation District, working with the local MS4 Workgroup, received just over \$420,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Federation to implement green infrastructure projects for the control of stormwater. The MS4 Workgroup is a collaboration of 13 municipalities located in the urbanized area of the County.

Six projects are proposed across the county to serve as demonstrations for the construction and management of practices like Rain Gardens and other alternative stormwater designs.

Along with the implementation phase, a stormwater website will be developed to provide public and municipal education.

There is also a water quality monitoring phase of the grant whereby the district and others will set up long term monitoring stations to establish a baseline of the existing water quality and to demonstrate improvements within the watersheds with the implementation of green alternatives. For more information contact Beth Futrick or Jim Eckenrode at the district office.

Environmental Education



Taking the Environment to the Classroom!

The Blair County Conservation District offers a wealth of educational opportunities through its Environmental Education Specialist, Jody Wallace aka the “[Creature Teacher](#)” and the Conservation District Staff. In fact, this year the district’s Environmental Education Programs served 10,000 people.

Youth programs include a variety of hands on activities, experiments, songs, games, and often live animals. Because of the hands-on nature of the

instruction, most are designed for one classroom at a time but some can be adapted to large group audiences. Most programs last about an hour, this can also be adjusted to meet the needs and interests of the group. Each lesson’s objective addresses one or more of the Pennsylvania Standards for Environmental Education and/or Science and Technology.

It’s not just kid stuff either! We do a variety of adult programs including Manure Management Workshops,

Water Quality Training, Cover Crop Workshops and Pollution Control training for Municipalities. A highlight the last several years has been participation in the Sheetz Earth Day event at their distribution center near Claysburg.

Jody Wallace earned the 2014 Outstanding Environmental Educator Award from the PA Assoc. of Environmental Educators!

“The District Board has been honoring Outstanding Conservation Efforts since 1968...”

Outstanding Conservationist Award

The District presented two Outstanding Conservationist Awards to retiring partners for their outstanding service to the Conservation District at the annual banquet in October.

State Representative Jerry A. Stern was honored for his steadfast support of the district and district programs over his 22 year tenure in the House of

Representatives serving the 80th district. Jerry was always reactive to our requests for assistance and proactive in solving environmental issues within his legislative district. He was also instrumental in creating the Resource Enhancement and Protection Act (REAP) where landowners can receive state tax credits for conservation practices.

Bill Clouser retiring from the State Conservation Commission was acknowledged for his support of the Blair and surrounding districts related to the Nutrient Management Program. Bill was an excellent resource for our staff and a strong advocate for the farming community.



Honorable Jerry A. Stern with Blaine Smith, Vice-Chair and Donna Fisher, District Manager

Bill Clouser with Blaine Smith, Vice-Chair and Donna Fisher, District Manager



Blair County Envirothon



The 29th annual Envirothon Competition was held on May 8th at Canoe Creek State Park. Our local event is co-sponsored by the Altoona Kiwanis Club. The contest is open to all Blair County Schools,

“Team Tree Bark” from Claysburg-Kimmel HS

grades 9 to 12. Six schools were represented in 2014. Students complete written exams as a team at 5 different testing stations. Station topics are Aquatics, Forestry, Soils, Wildlife and a current environmental issue. The 2014 current issue was Sustainable Agriculture. Testing stations were staffed by regional resource professionals from the PA Department of

Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry; the USDA, Natural Resource Conservation Service; PA Game Commission; PA Fish and Boat Commission and the Conservation District.

First Place was won by “Team Tree Bark” from Claysburg-Kimmel High School. They went on to represent Blair County at the State Event.

Second Place was taken by Williamsburg High School’s “Kickin Bass” and Third Place by the Bellwood High School “Blue” Team.

“.....students are required to judge test pits dug to expose the soil horizons and characteristics”

FFA Sponsored Contests

Annually the District, along with the FFA Chapters in the Bellwood-Antis, Central, Tyrone and Williamsburg School Districts, sponsor two contests specific to the Future Farmers of America Chapters.

Each spring a Public Speaking Contest is hosted at the county level in preparation for statewide participation. The winner of the

Blair County “Conservation” Speech was Brandon Decker from the Tyrone Area FFA.

The fall brings the annual Land Judging Competition. Gary Stern hosted the 2014 event where the students are required to “judge” test pits dug to expose the soil horizons and characteristics.

Over 100 students converged on 4

test pits dug on the Stern Farm, located outside of Martinsburg .

First Place, for the second year in a row, with a perfect score of 300 points was taken by Nathan Smith, Central-Cove FFA -

Second Place by Ben Smith, Central -Cove FFA and -

Third Place by Aaron Clouse, Central-Cove FFA.

School Riparian Buffer Plantings

Still a popular school activity, the district continues to partner with local municipalities, agencies and school districts to develop and implement a lesson plan related to floodplains, water quality and riparian buffers.

Classroom presentations introduce the concepts of watersheds, stormwater, floodplains and buffers.

The culmination is a day long tree planting event. Students, teachers and parents planted over 500 trees at two locations in 2014. Work on Kentucky Avenue (a floodzone “buyout” property in the City of Altoona); and we started a new site on the Biddle Farm just outside of Williamsburg. There students also learned about and toured Best Management Practices used in Agriculture.

A “time capsule” is prepared for each site—packed by the students and planted beneath a tree at the closing of each event.

Interested in participatingcontact Jody Wallace at 696-0877 ext. 5. New planting sites and schools are being sought!



Trees planted along Clover Creek at the Biddle Farm



Resource Conservation Since 1966

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Conservation District Board

Harold Bailey, Chairman
Blaine Smith, Vice-Chairman
Jim Biddle, Secretary/Treasurer
John Morrow
Alan Gearhart
Gary Long
Commissioner Terry Tomassetti

Conservation District Staff

Donna Fisher, District Manager
Margaret Angle, District Clerk
Rich Huether, Ag Conservation Specialist
Jim Eckenrode, Watershed Specialist
Chris Myers, Resource Conservation Technician
Diane Thomas, Resource Conservation Technician
Beth Futrick, Ombudsman
also in contract with the district
Jody Wallace, a.k.a. "the Creature Teacher"
as the Environmental Education Specialist

Conservation District Funding

The Blair County Conservation District receives funding from several sources to include: Local, State and Federal funds.

Annual allocations are received from the Blair County Commissioners through the General Fund and the PA Departments of Agriculture and Environmental Protection.

Most recently, conservation districts across the Commonwealth have been written into the Act 13 Legislation related to the Marcellus Shale Development in Pennsylvania. Impact fees are collected from the industry and a portion of those funds are distributed to the Conservation Districts through both the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and the State Conservation Commission (SCC).

PUC funds in 2014 were received as a block grant in the amount of \$56,818 per conservation district across the Commonwealth. The PUC funds in Blair County have been allocated for the development of the District Property on Bedford Street.

The SCC funds are distributed in base amounts plus a calculated portion based on Unconventional Well Counts per county. Blair County received a base amount of \$76,063 plus an additional \$6,436 for our 6 wells. These funds are utilized to cost share salaries and administrative expenses.

It is important to note that the SCC base amount is not necessarily "new funds" but rather funds that were available previously through line item allocations in the commonwealth budget and are included in the state program funds.

2014 General Fund Budget

Expenses:

Salaries/Benefits	\$313,473
Rent/Insurances/Audit	\$ 30,350
Operating Expenses	\$ 60,300
Payment to County	\$ 33,000
Project Grants	\$ 70,000
Total Expenses	\$507,123

Revenues:

Beginning Balance	\$ 66,225
County Commissioners	\$125,250
E&S/NPDES Fees	\$ 25,000
State Program Funds	\$217,333
Grants	\$ 70,000
Misc. Revenue Sources	\$ 3,315
Total Revenues	\$507,123