



6024 Glades Pike, Ste. 103
 Somerset, PA 15501
 814-445-4652 ext. 5
 somersetcd@wpia.net



SOMERSET
 CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Conserving Natural Resources for Our Future

2020 Annual Report

Somerset Conservation District provides all of its services without any monetary contribution from Somerset County tax dollars. The District staff are not county employees. The County supports the District operations through the Somerset County Post Closure Landfill Trust Fund. This Fund is earmarked for conservation-related initiatives and only a portion of the Fund is currently allotted to the District. The District also receives an allotment of funds from the legislative-mandated Act 13 Marcellus Shale Impact Fees. The balance of its operations is funded through the State Conservation Commission's delegated or contracted programs with the PA Department of Environmental Protection and the PA Department of Agriculture, grant writing, public fundraising, and other innovative, fundraising methods.

How the District is Funded

Walter Lyon Award

District Manager, Len Lichvar, and the Somerset Conservation District staff were recognized with the 2020 Walter Lyon Award presented by the Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Professionals. The award recognizes excellence in professional conservation efforts and outstanding natural resource enhancement project accomplishments.



Seated from left: Aimee Steele, Len Lichvar, and Susan Moon.
 Standing from left: Greg Shustrick, Keith Largent, Don Williams, and Terry Tallion.

Oven Run Trust Fund Established



An effort began in 2020 that led to the creation of a trust fund for future operation, maintenance and reconstruction of the four Oven Run AMD passive treatment systems on the Stonycreek River. For the past several years the Somerset Conservation District, which is legally responsible for the perpetual ongoing maintenance of the systems and the Somerset County Conservancy that owns the land of two systems, have worked together to explain why long-term funding is essential to the sustainability of the improved water quality of the Stonycreek River.

In early 2020 through the efforts of District Manager Len Lichvar, front page articles in both the Somerset Daily American and the Johnstown Tribune – Democrat as well as a news segment on WJAC –TV brought the current and future underfunding predicament to the attention of the public and private sectors. Chad Gontkovic, owner of Coal Tubin in Johnstown, set up a Facebook Fund Raiser that in two weeks netted over \$1,700 of small donations from the public.

In late 2020 the Somerset County Commissioners contributed \$25,000 to the fund which enabled the District to set up the Oven Run Sites A, D, E and F Trust Fund with the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies. Efforts to secure additional contributions for the Fund will continue in 2021 and beyond.

Contributions from individuals and organizations can be made to the fund at cfalleghenies.org/oven-run.

Somerset Conservation District
 6024 Glades Pike Suite 103
 Somerset, PA 15501
 www.somersetcd.com

2020 Board Members

Chairman, Roger Latuch
Vice Chairman, Marlin Sherbine
Secretary/Treasurer, Bud Weyand
Commissioner, Gerald Walker
Shawn Saylor
Richard Berkley
Kurt Walker
Sue Saylor
James Ringler



Seated Left to Right: Marlin Sherbine, Roger Latuch, Sue Saylor.
Standing Left to Right: Bud Weyand, Jim Ringler, Rich Berkey, & Kurt Walker. Absent: Gerald Walker & Shawn Saylor

2020 Associate Board Members

Jack Tressler, Gary Wetterberg, Greg Elliott, Tom Croner, Meade and Mari Meyers

District Staff

Len Lichvar len-scd@wpia.net 814-289-4259

Len Lichvar, District Manager, manages & oversees six professional staff members of the District & the Southwest Technical Assistance Program. He assists with grant writing, pursuing innovative funding methods, writes press releases and media exposure, helps initiate internal and external workgroups, develops projects, attends meetings and events to represent the District, and maintain contact and communication with local, state, and national elected officials and agencies. He has a knowledge of all District projects and programs to assist with and is responsible for their timely completion and success.



Susan Moon sue-scd@wpia.net 814-289-4246

Susan Moon is the Assistant Manager and provides assistance to the manager to achieve the District's mission, goals, and objectives. Susan reviews and prepares policies for Board review and adoption. Assists with personnel such as interviewing, hiring, and training. She is responsible for the District's operations fiscal management and annual audit. Susan prepares the annual budget, reconciles bank accounts, and provides monthly Board reports. Susan attends and represents the District at local, regional, and state meetings. She assists with grant writing. She also administers the Somerset County Farmland Preservation Program.



Phil Wilson & Phil Gardner - PACD Technical Assistance



PACD Technical Assistance Grant Program is a statewide program funded by the PA Growing Greener Program and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service. The Somerset Regional Technical Office space is provided by the Somerset Conservation District. The Conservation Technicians include Phil Gardner, part-time, and Phil Wilson, full-time. Engineering assistance is also provided by Danielle Kalp, from the Clarion TAG which includes surveying and mapping, project designs, project cost estimates, construction oversight, soil investigation, and grant application assistance. Projects include abandoned mine drainage, agricultural best management practices, and stream restoration. The office serves twelve counties in Southwest Pennsylvania. Eligible entities for assistance include county conservation districts, non-profit organizations, watershed groups, counties, municipalities, and educational institutions.



Penn State Extension is a modern educational organization dedicated to delivering science-based information to people, businesses, and communities. We provide access to face-to-face and online education to our customers—when they want it, where they want it, and how they want it—to help them address problems and take advantage of opportunities for improvement and innovation. Penn State Extension educational programs focus on seven subject areas – 4-H Youth Development, Agronomy and Natural Resources, Animal Systems, Energy, Business, And Community Vitality, Food Safety and Quality, Horticulture, and Food, Families, and Health. Extension Educators throughout the state visit Somerset County to deliver programs in these subject areas. Partnering with and funded by federal, state, and county governments, we have a long tradition of bringing unbiased support and education to the citizens of Pennsylvania. We make a difference locally through focused engagement, and more widely to customers connecting in the digital landscape.



Jeff Hackenberg, CRM

4-H

Led by Laurie Hubbard, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development, as well as Carol Pyle, 4-H Program Assistant, Somerset County 4-H currently engages approximately 360 Somerset County youths. A major factor contributing to the 4-H youth development program's success is the dedication of its 129 adult volunteers who give their time and energy to the program. Volunteers work closely with staff to ensure both state and program guidelines are followed. The 4-H program offers a wide variety of events and activities to members, including: Officer training, Communications Day contests (public speaking, presentation, essay, photo, and poster), annual Kick-off event, State Leadership Conference, State Capital Days event, Regional Camp (residential camping), Farm City Day event (teen leaders teaching countywide third grade students about agriculture and 4-H), Ag Literacy (teen leaders reading to county classrooms as part of PA Farm Bureau's Ag Literacy program), Fashion Revue (sewing, fashion, modeling event), Foods Revue (culinary workshop, showcasing skills), and Day Camps to name a few. 4-H members can experience projects in health, hiking, biking, photography, babysitting, electricity, welding, robotics, animal science, gardening, veterinary science, shooting sports, cooking, sewing, woodworking, STEM, and more.

Nutrition and Health

Karen Serball, Nutrition Education Advisor with Nutrition Links Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), in cooperation other agencies and entities such as Twin Lakes Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Center, The Village at Somerset, The Boys and Girls Club at Somerset, Highland Hills, EARN, Children's Aid Home, and Tableland, helps low-income families acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that lead to nutritionally sound diets.

Agronomy

Leanna Duppstadt, Agronomy Educator, serves Somerset County and Southwestern PA as a resource for field and forage crop production. This can include production and harvesting, grazing management, species selection, soil fertility, nutrient management, organic production, weed and pest management, and more. She also works with the statewide agronomy team on program development to deliver the most relevant and up-to-date information for producers through online and in-person formats. Leanna is committed to assisting the public by phone or email but is also available for on-farm visits and field walks for a more in-depth look at producer questions and concerns.

Master Gardeners

Master Gardener volunteers provide valuable residential horticulture expertise answering hotline calls at the Extension office. These services are provided during the summer months. In addition, Master Gardeners present horticulture-related educational programs and events to adults and elementary students throughout the county. The Somerset County Master Gardeners are also available to talk and answer questions at the Somerset County Farmer's Market.

Penn State Extension – Somerset County Staff

Leanna Duppstadt
Field and Forage Crops

Jeff Hackenberg
Client Relationship Manager

Laurie Hubbard
4-H Youth Development

Stan McKee
Business Operations Manager

Carol Pyle
4-H Program Assistant

Karen Serball
Nutrition Links

Linda Woods
Administrative Assistant

To contact the Penn State Extension Office: 814-445-8911

Farm Service Agency

The primary responsibility of the Somerset County Farm Service Agency is to administer locally the farm programs enacted by Congress. This is accomplished under the auspices of the Farmer Elected County FSA Committee. USDA created the Farm Service Agency by merging the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service and the Farmers Home Administration (Farm Division). The Committee's responsibility was expanded by the merge. The programs administered by the FSA were created to help build and maintain family farms by stabilizing production, supporting commodity prices, and encouraging conservation and timber production.

FARM LOANS

Agriculture Credit Loans are the US Department of Agriculture's chief credit source for the farm community. Special emphasis is placed on guaranteed loans in cooperation with area lenders. Local lenders make these loans: FSA guarantees to limit potential loss incurred by the lender. This allows a farm family to receive credit that would not otherwise be available from private lenders.

These funds can be used to purchase feed, livestock, and equipment, spring planting needs, etc., either directly or by refinancing debts. Farm ownership loans may be used to buy farmland and to construct or repair buildings.

Somerset Ag Credit is the Headquarters County for 5 counties have:
173 direct borrowers with 344 loans for \$31,317,010.08
29 guaranteed borrowers for \$13,291,225.24
These are supervised credit loans.

THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

Encourages farmers to stop growing crops on highly erodible cropland, keeping it in a grass or tree cover throughout the 10-year or 15-year contract. During 2020 there were 168 active contracts, with a conservation plan that helps retain soil in place, maintain water quality and prevent floods. A total of \$283,020 in annual payments were made in 2020 to participants in Somerset County.

Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) & Price Loss Coverage (PLC)

The Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill combine provisions from previous programs delivered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) (the counter-cyclical portion of the Direct and Counter-Cyclical Program, the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments Program and the Average Crop Revenue Election Program) with revenue insurance delivered by the Risk Management Agency. Owners made a one-time election to reallocate crop bases, update program payment yields and producers select the type of coverage (price protection, county revenue protection, and/or individual revenue protection) for crop years 2019-2023. Payments were made in 2020 to participants in Somerset County.

PRICE SUPPORT PROGRAM

The MAL (Marketing Assistance Loan) program provides commodity loans to eligible grain producers, to allow them to meet obligations as they market or use farm production to their best advantage over a nine (9) month period. A total of \$94,115.86 in commodity loans was issued in 2020. Another option for producers is the FSFL (Farm Storage Facility Loan) Program. This program provides low-interest financing for producers to build or upgrade farm storage and handling facilities.

The Dairy Margin Coverage Program (DMC) was authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill. It replaced the Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MPP-Dairy). Much like the MPP-Dairy program, the DMC program is a voluntary program that provides dairy producers with risk management coverage that will pay producers when the difference (the margin) between the national price of milk and the average cost of feed falls below a certain level selected by the program participants. There were 20 DMC contracts in Somerset County in 2020.

THE CROP DISASTER PROGRAM: Assists County farmers in recovering from crop losses.

LIVESTOCK ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: Assists County farmers in recovering from feed losses.

OILSEED PROGRAM: Assists County farmers in recovering from poor prices on Oil Seeds.

NON-INSURED ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: Assists County farmers in recovering from losses on non-insurable crops.



District Staff

Don Williams don-scd@wpia.net 814-289-4248

Don Williams is the District's Ag Conservation/Nutrient Management Technician. He provides technical assistance on agricultural issues for Somerset County producers. Don provides technical assistance for the planning, design, and installation of Best Management Practice (BMP's) along with assisting landowners with REAP program applications, Nutrient Balance Sheets, and reviews Nutrient Management Plans. Don conducts public meetings and workshops to educate producers on regulations, manure management, and conservation practices.



Terry Tallion terry-scd@wpia.net 814-289-4251

Terry Tallion started in 2014 as the Dirt & Gravel, Low Volume Road Technician. Terry works with the county townships & municipalities informing them of the programs regulations and grant request deadlines. He assists townships in preparing grant requests and project planning. He then does project inspections and submits final completion reports and payments. Terry also has to enter all project information into the DGLVR GIS system.



Keith Largent keith-scd@wpia.net 814-289-4250

Keith Largent, is the District's Erosion & Sediment Pollution Control Technician. The E&SPC program oversees the minimization of accelerated soil erosion and sedimentation as well as post construction stormwater runoff that results from various forms of construction and earthmoving activities. Keith is responsible for reviewing plans, permitting, inspections, and the proper implementation and maintenance of Erosion & Sediment Pollution and Post Construction Stormwater control plans.



Greg Shustrick greg-scd@wpia.net 814-289-4247

Greg Shustrick, the District's Watershed Specialist, is responsible for implementing projects that improve, sustain, monitor, and conserve the water resources within the county which directly benefit the public and all downstream waters. Various projects that have been completed since the development of this program include stream restoration and fish habitat projects, abandoned mine discharge and mine land remediation projects, installation of agricultural best management practices, surface and groundwater monitoring, aquatic life assessments as well as educational outreach programs.

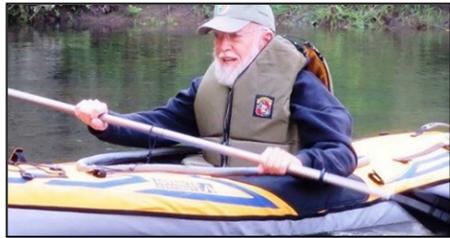


Aimee Steele aimee-scd@wpia.net 814-289-4236

Aimee Steele is the Conservation District's Resource Technician and organizes the District's educational workshops and events such as the yearly Envirothon held for local schools to compete on a county level in current environmental issues. She also works with the Trout-in-the Classroom program with the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Aimee is in charge of preparing the annual report for the District and also works with partnering conservation organizations in preparing their newsletters. She attends and takes the minutes for the District's monthly board meetings and the Quality Assurance Board meetings to type and distribute. Aimee assists the District Manager and Assistant Manager.



In Remembrance



Gary Wetterberg was not a native of Somerset County. He and his wife, Page, relocated to the area after Gary retired from a federal position that took him to various parts of the country. When they decided to make Somerset County their retirement home, Gary quickly went back to work in local conservation efforts. Gary became active in and strongly supported the efforts of the Casselman River Watershed Association and also contributed significant time to the conservation of the Laurel Hill Creek watershed where he resided. Gary also became an active Associate Board Director for the Somerset Conservation District.

Gary and his wife chose Somerset County to live in primarily because of its outstanding natural resources they enjoyed and they wanted to make sure they did all they could so that others could do so as well.



Thurman Korn at the Wells Creek Watershed Association's system, Adams #7.

Thurman Korn passed away in October at the age of 90. He grew up in the Wells Creek watershed that had long suffered from abandoned mine drainage (AMD) pollution. Thurman was a truck driver who simply wanted to do something to give back to his home area and actually did something about it by volunteering in the growing conservation efforts in the Cambria-Somerset region. Through that involvement he gained knowledge about water quality improvement efforts and in 1999 he established the Wells Creek Watershed Association and served as its President until 2014. Under his leadership the WCWA secured grant funding and worked with other partners to design and construct AMD treatment systems that have restored aquatic life and a trout fishery to the watershed.

He also became involved in regional efforts through serving as Chairman of the Water Resources Committee of the Southern Alleghenies Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council and served as a long-time board member for the Somerset County Conservancy. Thurman also joined the board of directors of the Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project (SCRIP) and served as its Treasurer and was in charge of the SCRIP River Keepers who monitored water quality in the Stonycreek River and its tributaries. It was Thurman, who through his monitoring efforts, made the historic and scientific discovery that the Stonycreek River had changed from a net acidic to a net alkaline waterway which served to further foster the momentum and efforts to continue the now proven, successful AMD abatement projects.



Ron Donlan passed away in late December 2020 at age 71, shocking those who knew him since Ron always lived life to the fullest. Ron was a professional conservationist who served as the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service's federal Coordinator for the Southern Alleghenies RC&D Council. The RC&D, in the 1990's and throughout the early 2000's, was a multi-county federally designated and empowered unit that was the genesis for the most significant conservation and economic initiatives ever undertaken in the region. The origin of the Oven Run AMD abatement projects on the Stonycreek River, the public acquisition of the Manufacturers Water Company properties that included the Quemahoning Reservoir, the initial efforts to create the Allegheny Highlands

Trail that would later become the Great Allegheny Passage Trail are just a few of the cutting edge natural resource conservation projects that the RC&D and its implementation arm the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy generated and supported. Ron was also instrumental in the formation of SCRIP and provided essential assistance to volunteers that enabled them to establish local watershed organizations.

Ron served as that support mechanism, often taking the risks that no one else wanted to, that put him in the forefront of the projects yet still behind the scenes so that elected officials, conservation districts, watershed groups and non-profits could achieve their project goals that would not have been possible without Ron's assistance, advice and often hard-charging mentality.

Agency Partners

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service works with agricultural producers and private forest landowners to address concerns to our natural resources. Maintaining the sustainability of and promoting wise use of working lands and their natural resources is at the heart of the agency's mission. NRCS provides conservation planning and technical assistance, as well as information on soils, agronomy, engineering, wildlife, and land use management.

The position of Supervisory District Conservationist, previously held by David Steele, was not able to be filled. Somerset, Cambria, and Blair counties will now be supervised by Phil Evans, located in Fayette County. He will now be responsible for Fayette, Greene, Washington, Somerset, Cambria, and Blair County.

Conservation Technical Assistance is the program that provides the framework for sound conservation on agricultural operations. Assistance in the form of conservation planning and inventory and evaluation of resource concerns, is provided at no cost to ag producers and private forest landowners. NRCS soil conservationists can provide guidance on alternative management for pasture, cropland, barnyard, woodland, and wildlife land uses to solve resource concerns. Conservation was applied on over 3,395 acres of land in the county through the Conservation Technical Assistance program in 2020.

NRCS administers several programs that are funded by the Farm Bill. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and the Agricultural Management Assistance program (AMA) are the different programs that producers can participate in to implement conservation measures on their operations or to further enhance conservation systems they have in place. Despite the challenges of working remotely and social distancing from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we managed to complete CSP contracts totaling \$60,172.00 on approximately 426 acres of land and EQIP contracts totaling \$458,436.00 on approximately 1,180 acres in Somerset County. AMA funds were not available for Somerset County.

2020 Forestry Report for Somerset County

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Bureau of Forestry has a mission to ensure the long-term health and productivity of the Commonwealth's forests while conserving native wild plants. The Forbes Forest District covers six counties with a large section of the Forbes State Forest system in Somerset County. District-managed state forestland includes several tracts along the Laurel Ridge and over 6,000 acres surrounding Mt. Davis. Other primary functions of the Bureau of Forestry include private forest stewardship, forest health, and wildland fire.

The DCNR Bureau of Forestry is committed to the conservation and sustainable management of privately-owned forestland and community trees throughout Pennsylvania. The Forbes Forest District is welcoming a new service forester. Michael Doucette will serve Somerset, Westmoreland, and Allegheny County landowners while Celine Colbert is available to assist with managing community and street trees. Free technical assistance, information on managing private woodlands, and advice for municipalities managing trees is available by contacting the district office at (724) 238-1200.

Celine Colbert - Service Forester for Somerset, Westmoreland, and Allegheny Counties

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission



As the new Waterways Conservation Officer for Southern Somerset County, I am pleased with the partnership between The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and the Somerset Conservation District. As the PFBC we are here to protect, conserve, and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities. Both the PFBC and the District bring a variety of resources and assets to the table to carry out that mission. From a Waterways Conservation Officer standpoint this relationship is a key factor in our job. WCO Pat Ferko and I, along with our deputies are here to assist the District in environmental concerns and complaints throughout Somerset County.

One of the most recent projects the PFBC and the District have been working on side by side is the construction at Somerset Lake. With the recent lake habitat work and other work being completed, the public will soon be able to enjoy the lake again here soon. High Point Lake has also been placed on the list as a future hazardous dam project and will be a future project within the county. The PFBC and District will continue to work together to complete the ongoing list of conservation needs and projects throughout Somerset County.

Dina Cable, Waterways Conservation Officer

Public Relations

The *Daily American*, the *Tribune Democrat*, the *Meyersdale Republic*, local radio stations, and *WJAC-TV* published news stories on District projects and activities in 2020. The 2019 Annual Report was sent to over 500 cooperators, agencies, organizations, and governmental agencies. District Manager, Len Lichvar, published numerous editorials and articles on subjects related to the District in local and statewide media.

Somerset County Fair—The District distributed information and demonstrated a functional rain barrel at its Somerset County Fair booth.

Website – The District’s website is updated to reflect the District’s articles and ongoing projects and initiatives. The site now includes the ability to view and download the numerous project reports and other data-rich information that has been assembled and completed by the District in recent years. Information on all phases of the District’s involvement in the conservation of natural resources can now be found on the site at www.somersetcd.com.

Facebook—You can find and “like” the Somerset Conservation District on Facebook.

Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative – The Initiative is a consortium of organizations, agencies, non-profits, and other stakeholders in the Laurel Highlands region. This organization has set specific agendas on crucial natural resource and economic topics to assist all partner organizations achieve their individual goals while also creating an impact collectively. The Initiative secured funding for and chose a consultant to produce a Laurel Highlands Economic Impact study of the value of clean water to determine the positive economic contributions of resource conservation that was completed in 2020.

Somerset Conservation District History

The Somerset Conservation District was organized at the request of county citizens interested in soil and water conservation, land use planning, and flood prevention. The county was declared a Conservation District on March 22, 1957, in accordance with the provisions of the "Soil Conservation Law" of 1945, Act 217, of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

The District was organized to provide for the conservation of soil and water resources, assist in watershed protection and flood prevention, prevent damage to dams and reservoirs to help in maintaining the navigability of rivers, preserve woodland and wildlife, protect public lands, preserve the tax base, and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people. Today, the Somerset Conservation District activities serve a broad range of interests from tree planting to environmental education in schools.

During the 1950s and 1960s there were modifications to state laws governing conservation districts that allowed districts to expand their services to meet emerging resource needs. This increase in responsibility caused district officials to assume a greater leadership role in resource use and development in their communities.

The Somerset Conservation District is a member of the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD) and the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).



The Somerset Conservation District (SCD) is one of 66 Conservation Districts statewide and nearly 3,000 nationwide dedicated to conserving our soil and water resources.

We are part of county government and a sub-unit of state government working closely with the USDA agencies to promote soil and water conservation and economic development in the county.

Our adopted strategic plan provides the framework to achieve our goals and objectives.

If you have a problem or question regarding conservation issues and do not know whom to contact, your Conservation District is a good place to start.

Education

Manure Hauler & Broker Meeting

Manure Hauler & Broker Meeting On Tuesday, January 28, 2020, Somerset CD hosted a Manure Hauler & Broker Workshop. The purpose of these workshops is to provide attendees with the latest information on regulations and manure industry issues. In addition, Commercial Manure Haulers & Brokers earn Continuing Education Credits towards maintaining their certification. Approximately 17 haulers, farmers, and agency personnel attended this event. Robb Meinen, Penn State Dept of Animal Science, was the instructor for this training which focused on fundamental nutrient concepts, manure gas safety, and odor management planning. It also included a presentation on antibiotics and hormones in manure.



Robb Meinen of Penn State explains safety issues associated with manure pumping and application.

Voice of Ag

The Voice of Ag Work Group continued to identify and discuss important agricultural issues specific to Somerset County and identify potential partnerships and assistance opportunities.

SCD - Ag Technical Assistance—REAP - 2020

The Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP) is a Pennsylvania tax credit program for agricultural producers who implement best management practices or purchase equipment that reduces the amount of nutrient and sediment runoff and improves the quality of Pennsylvania’s waters. 2020 marks the 13th year that this program has been available. Many Somerset County producers have utilized this program to have Manure Management or Agricultural E&S Plans written, acquire no-till equipment, and install Best Management Practices. During fiscal year 2019-2020, SCD assisted 9 producers with REAP applications. During that time 7 county operations had applications approved which resulted in \$333,296 of State Tax Credits being awarded to Somerset County Farmers.

Cooperative Intern Program

The District’s Cooperative Intern Program, in cooperation with the Somerset County Conservancy, continued in 2020. Brady Walker, a student at Pitt-Johnstown, served as the intern for the summer season. Brady assisted the Conservancy in multiple ways in the upkeep and expansion of the outdoor facilities and land resources the Conservancy maintains while also assisting with several of the District’s projects.



Summer intern Brady Walker at work at the Rock Tunnel AMD Passive Treatment System.

From the District Manager

We all know that 2020 was a challenging year for everyone both personally and professionally. Despite the pandemic, that created unanticipated changes and challenges, the District continued to operate at full capacity. Not only that, but every project that required completion was accomplished and every deadline was met in all phases of the District operations.

This is a testament to the dedication and professional skill sets of the entire District staff. These outstanding efforts have enabled natural resource conservation in Somerset County to move steadily and proactively forward year in and year out, even in a year like no other.

Len Lichvar, District Manager

Water Quality

E&SPC Technician, Keith Largent, right, discusses the E&S control plan for the Somerset Lake project with Thomas Construction Project Superintendent, Rick Dunwoody.



SLAC

The Somerset Lake Action Committee (SLAC) continued to successfully pursue goals of enhancements to the Somerset Lake Nature Park. A pavilion was funded, designed and constructed at the North Boat Launch by SLAC and the first phase of a walking trail was also completed by the County. Funds raised by SLAC will be utilized for the initial and first ever fish habitat project on the dry lake bed in 2021 in advance of the lake being refilled.

Value of Clean Water

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council's Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative, which the District is a part of along with other regional partners, completed the "Valuing of Clean Water" Report that puts an economic value on ecosystem services in the Laurel Highlands. District Manager, Len Lichvar, serves on the Steering Committee for the project that oversaw the creation of the report completed by Key-Log Economics.

The report documents that watersheds in the Laurel Highlands produce \$3.7 billion a year in economic impact. The report was officially introduced to citizens, elected officials, and conservationists in 2020 as a tool to use to understand the economic impact of clean water and natural resources in the Laurel Highlands.

Rock Tunnel Sludge Removal

The Somerset Conservation District utilized an innovative method to remove iron sludge from the Rock Tunnel AMD treatment system. GAP VAX, of Johnstown, used their special mobile equipment to remove sludge from the wetland portion of the treatment system. The effort proved successful. However, only approximately 33% of the sludge was removed given the funding available that allowed for only one day of operation. SCRIP contributed funds and the District provided the balance for the experimental effort. This method as well as other options will be examined for potential future sludge removal.

The Rock Tunnel system, located on the South Fork of Bens Creek, was the first AMD passive treatment system that was constructed in the Stonycreek River watershed through the coordinating efforts of SCRIP in 1991. Unfortunately, there is no official entity obligated to maintain this system and the Conservation District has voluntarily assumed the responsibility for it despite limited staff and even more limited funds to continue the ongoing operation and maintenance that this system requires.

Jennerstown Nature Park

Jennerstown Borough now owns over 300 acres adjacent to the borough and is in the process of creating a full management plan for the forested property. The Borough has entered into agreements with the Pennsylvania Game Commission to place the property in the Commission's Hunter Access Program and for habitat management assistance and has laid out a formal pathway through a portion of the property for a designated walking trail. The property is open to the public for low impact recreation uses. District Manager Len Lichvar serves on the Committee that is charged with developing the overall recreational use management plan and making recommendations to the Borough for implementation.

Dirt & Gravel/Low Volume Road Program

The Somerset Conservation District is working closely with Somerset County's Townships and Municipalities to identify potential problem areas and to provide technical support, using Environmentally Sensitive Road Maintenance Practices and funding to remediate the problems. The program is managed through the State Conservation Commission and the individual County Conservation Districts. With the increase in funding by the Commonwealth of PA, the amount of funds available to the individual Conservation Districts has increased considerably. The 2019-2020 allocations to Somerset County were \$463,417 for Dirt & Gravel Roads and \$178,010 for Low Volume Roads. The 2020-2021 allocations for Somerset County are \$463,417 for Dirt & Gravel Roads and \$173,304.

The District's county wide-program is overseen by the locally led Quality Assurance Board (QAB). Members of the QAB are Terry Tallion, Chairman, and voting members Marlin Sherbine, Somerset Conservation Board member, Michael Hamilton, NRCS, (Gisela Carmenaty Martinez, NRCS Alternate) and Pat Ferko, PA Fish and Boat Commission. The QAB meets as needed to set policies for the program, evaluate the merits of each application for funding, and recommends projects for the District Board to formally approve. The QAB met once in 2020 to review and recommend project requests to the Somerset Conservation Board for funding, and to review and approve project amendments and final project payments. 2019-2020 projects that were funded, started and/or completed are:

Dirt & Gravel Road projects :

Vought Hill Rd./Sanner Rd, Black Township (project to be completed in 2021)
Trent Road, Stonycreek Township
Spangler Road, Jenner Township
Belltown Road, Lincoln Township
Colflesh Road Phase II Lower Turkeyfoot Township
Comps Road, Fairhope Township
Commissary Road, Allegheny Township

Low Volume Road projects :

Lohr Road, Greenville Township
Shaulis Road, Lincoln Township
Romania Road, Summit Township (2018-2019 project)
Old Mill Road, Brothersvalley Township (project to be completed in 2021)



*Dirt & Gravel Road Project
Spangler Road, Jenner Township
French Mattress Installation*

To review the DGLVR Program, the Administration Guidelines, the Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) procedures and other aspects of the program go to www.dirtandgravel.psu.edu.



*Dirt & Gravel Road Project
Trent Road, Stonycreek Twp*



*Low Volume Road Project
Romania Road, Summit Twp*

Agricultural Programs

Conservation Planning and Nutrient Management

Because water quality is an important resource concern, the Somerset Conservation District encourages proper nutrient management on Somerset County farms. A nutrient management plan (NMP) considers existing soil nutrient levels and nutrients needed for achieving crop yield goals. The NMP accounts for manure generated on the farm and determines a proper application rate. The NMP calculates the quantity and location of additional nutrients needed. The NMP may also recommend practices to reduce soil loss and prevent nutrients from contaminating surface and ground water. Through a delegation agreement with the State Conservation Commission, SCD is tasked with the review and approval of NMP's. Currently Somerset County has eight CAFO farms with approved nutrient management plans.

Beginning in October 2006, Pennsylvania regulations require Nutrient Balance Sheets (NBS) for farms that import manure. Since 2007, the Conservation District has assisted many county farms with development of these NBS. At the end of 2020, Somerset County has 72 Farms with NBS which include over 12,600 acres.

Project Grass

Southwest Project Grass is a cooperative effort by local Farmers, County Conservation Districts, USDA-NRCS, and other partners. This program promotes conservation through proper pasture management in 14 counties in southwestern Pennsylvania. The SCD supports the Southwest Project Grass Chapter to achieve its goals of improving the economic position of local farmers, increasing production, energy efficiency, and utilization of resources while improving soil and water quality. Don Williams, SCD, serves on the Project Grass Executive Committee. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 40th anniversary activities scheduled in 2020 were cancelled.

Farmland Preservation Program



The District administers the County's Agricultural Land Preservation Easement Purchase Program (ALPEPP). The program promotes the protection of valued agricultural land to ensure continued production of local crops and economic growth. Landowner participation in the program is strictly voluntary and the landowners must realize that their development rights are purchased in perpetuity. Any parcel to be considered for the purchase of development rights must be part of an Agricultural Security Area. Once the development rights for a tract of land are purchased, the landowner still maintains ownership of the land and may continue agricultural practices

while following a conservation plan. The purpose of this program is to strike a balance between development and agriculture. To date, there are 12 easements perpetually preserving 1,618 acres in Somerset County.

Erosion & Sediment Pollution Control Prevention

Earth disturbance caused by human activities creates the potential for accelerated soil erosion. The Conservation District's E&SPC Technician works with contractors, developers, engineers, timber harvesters, and a host of others to develop and implement plans to minimize the impacts of accelerated soil erosion caused by earthmoving. The Conservation District handled the following in 2020:

- E&SPC BMP's/controls were applied to minimize erosion on 460 disturbed acres
- 23 stand-alone E&SPC plans were processed, reviewed and approved
- 11 General NPDES/PCSM construction permits/E&SPC/PCSM plans were processed & approved
- 1 Individual NPDES/PCSM construction permit/E&SPC/PCSM plan was processed & approved
- 48 earth disturbance assessments/inspections were conducted
- 214 Ch. 102 E&SPC/NPDES/Ch. 105 technical & informational assists were provided
- handled & processed 10 citizen complaints

Oven Run Rehab Project: Update

On August 20, 2020, the reconstruction of Oven Run AMD passive treatment Site F at Hawk View, located in Shade Township Somerset County, was completed under the oversight and administration of the Somerset Conservation District. Whitehorse Excavating served as the contractor for the project. The system's redesign will enable it to treat more water than the original system and incorporate enough upgrades to sustain the full function of the system for the next 20 years or so. With the previous reconstruction of Oven Run Site E, this leaves Oven Sites A and D, which are not fully functioning, to be reconstructed and upgraded. The Pennsylvania Association of Conservation District's Technical Assistance Group has designed both systems while the Conservation District awaits release of funding for reconstruction. Recent information received from the PA DEP and the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds indicates that a contract for the funds to reconstruct Oven Run sites A and F will be made available sometime in 2021.



Reconstruction of the Oven Run AMD Passive Treatment System Site F at Hawk View.

Now that some verified data has been collected and analyzed it proves that the reconstruction of Oven Run Passive Treatment Sites E and F has been extremely successful and effective. The District's goal was not just to reconstruct, but to improve the functionality and effectiveness of the systems and that goal appears to have been achieved.

At Site E, Gallons per Minute (gpm) of treated water has increased from 125 gpm of treated water to 250 gpm. This results in a 100% increase in the system was originally designed to treat. The pH level has increased from 3.5 to 7.7, aluminum has decreased from 4.4 mg/L to .5 mg/L, iron reduced from .7 mg/L to .5 mg/L and alkalinity has increased from 0 mg/L to 87 mg/L.

At Site F GPM has increased from 125 gpm to 175 gpm being treated, pH has increased from 3.3 to 7.8, aluminum decreased from 11.5 mg/L to .5 mg/L, iron decreased from 1.2 mg/L to .3 mg/L and alkalinity increased from 0 mg/L to 151 mg/L.

The reconstruction of these systems is a task that takes time, effort and special professional skills to accomplish. The successful results at Oven Run are thanks to the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation District's Technical Assistance Group of Danielle Kalp, Phil Wilson, and Phil Gardner, and the District's oversight and management skills of Watershed Specialist, Greg Shustrick, and the administrative contributions of Sue Moon. The projects were funded by a PA DEP Growing Greener Grant. Reconstruction of Oven Sites A and D are still scheduled to take place later this year. The Somerset Conservation District is legally bound to maintain four of the Oven Run AMD passive treatment systems that are responsible for creating and sustaining the improved water quality of the Stonycreek River. This responsibility requires ongoing oversight as well as the current complete reconstruction of the sites that have now reached or exceeded their effective life span.

Hawk View Revegetation



Topsoil being spread during the Revegetation Project at Hawk View.

The Somerset Conservation District's Hawk View Revegetation Project is now essentially completed and is located adjacent to Site F on the Hawk View property owned by the Somerset County Conservancy. This project will improve 3 acres of wildlife habitat on the property. The District is working with the Conservancy, the Pennsylvania Game Commission, and Somerset County Pheasants Forever on the project which was initially planted with a cover crop. Native plants and pollinators will be planted in the spring of 2021.

The culmination of the reconstruction of Site F and the improvement of the adjacent land will provide the public accessible site a vastly improved water quality project further protecting and enhancing the Stonycreek River while also significantly improving habitat for game and non-game wildlife species at the same location.

Soap Hollow Run Project

The Soap Hollow Run Fish Habitat Improvement project was officially dedicated on October 15, 2020, with a ceremony recognizing the project's contribution to the enhancement of the Class A wild trout stream located in Greenhouse Park, Conemaugh Township Somerset County.

A variety of invited speakers discussed their role in the project that began over three years ago through the efforts of the Somerset Conservation District. District Watershed Specialist, Greg Shustrick, designed, secured grant funds, and oversaw the construction of the project.

The project received volunteer assistance and funding from the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited and additional funding came from National Trout Unlimited's Embrace-A-Stream Grant Program, Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited's Forever Wild Grant Program, Pennsylvania Environmental Council's Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape Grant Program, and Johnstown Vision 2025 River Capture Team Grant program.

Articles in the Johnstown-Tribune Democrat, Somerset Daily American, and a segment on WJAC-TV further promoted the efforts of all the partners in enhancing the coldwater resource and the significance of wild trout to the ongoing eco-tourism industry and recreational assets in the Cambria-Somerset region.



Marla Papernick, of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, speaks at the dedication of the Soap Hollow Run Fish Habitat Project at Greenhouse Park.



The Oven Run Sites A, D, E and F Trust Fund will help ensure that the significantly improved water quality in the Stonycreek River will be sustained into the future.

SCRIP

District Manager, Len Lichvar, stepped down as Chairman of the Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project (SCRIP) in 2020 after serving 24 years as its chairman. Len is a founding board member of SCRIP which in 1991 began the coordinating efforts to reduce AMD impairments in the Stonycreek and Little Conemaugh Rivers in Cambria and Somerset Counties.

SCRIP still provides essential support and direction for those ongoing efforts today. An effort in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and the Shade Creek Watershed Association to provide a pathway for the eventual construction of an active AMD treatment system in the Shade Creek watershed continued to gain momentum in 2020. If constructed over 16 miles of the Shade Creek watershed could be significantly improved along with additional water quality benefits to a still impaired section of the Stonycreek River.

Quemahoning Creek

The District is spearheading an effort to determine what additional water quality improvements can or could be accomplished in the Quemahoning Creek watershed. Major improvement in the water quality of the watershed has occurred enabling a fishery to be established and significant improvement to the water quality entering the Quemahoning Reservoir has already been achieved. However, serious water quality impairments are still ever present in the watershed. The District is partnering with St. Francis University and Hedin Environmental in assessing the remaining water quality issues and developing a plan to address them.



A still unabated source of AMD entering Quemahoning Creek.

Bens Creek

The District is working in partnership with the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited (MLTU) to assess the entire Bens Creek watershed utilizing a GIS data base created for MLTU by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. Currently volunteers are traversing the entire watershed and using a National Trout Unlimited devised app documenting negative as well as positive attributes in the watershed. The data collected will be utilized to justify funding, design and implementation of water quality improvement projects that will more specifically benefit wild trout, and build upon the results of the projects already completed in the watershed.

Quemahoning Reservoir Fish Habitat Project

The Quemahoning Reservoir Fish Habitat Project continued in 2020 although it was challenged by the pandemic. Berlin Brothersvalley High School students constructed 48 fish habitat structures in early 2000. Although volunteers were prevented from assisting in the project, as they have since its inception in 2006 because of Covid 19 restrictions, a small group of Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Bureau of Habitat personnel provided the hands on physical effort to place them in the reservoir in May. The project continues to significantly improve and sustain the game fish populations in the reservoir further enhancing the public recreational use of the reservoir.



PFBC Bureau of Habitat staff prepare fish structures for placement in the Quemahoning Reservoir.

Lamberts Run

The District's Phase 2 of the Lamberts Run AMD abatement project to significantly minimize the final remaining source of AMD impairment in the watershed continues through the District's consultant Hedin Environmental. This project will add additional retention time for the iron to drop out at the outflow of the existing Anoxic Limestone Drain treatment project that is currently in place. Additional data has been collected, a conceptual design has been created, and the challenging process of permitting the project is now underway in order to enable construction of the project to proceed.

Casselman River

The District driven efforts, in cooperation with the Casselman River Watershed Association, to determine a solution to minimizing the AMD impacts to the Casselman River from the Shaw Mines complex have resulted in a conceptual design devised by Hedin Environmental that if implemented could achieve that result. However, due to the serious complexity of land rights and more significant issues of the mixing of water from permitted AMD discharges with abandoned discharges on the site, public funds, due to regulatory guidelines cannot be used to fund the proposed project. The good news is that if funding can be secured from another non-public source or another innovative solution could be devised, there is a plan in place that would achieve the water quality improvement goal.



Despite water quality issues the Casselman River is a destination point for recreational river users.