



BLAIR COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT
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Homeowners Guide to Environmental Regulations

Awareness is the Key...

Awareness of the regulations is the key to helping the average homeowner meet the regulatory requirements, protect the environment and still accomplish their goals and dreams for their property. Asking questions before deciding to do anything on your property is a good way to comply with the regulations and stay out of trouble. The Conservation District is always willing to help with any questions you may have about the environment and the regulations that govern your property. This guide will help you to better understand the requirements and the consequences of certain actions that may be detrimental to the environment. In addition several other guides also are being developed to further discuss issues such as permitting, erosion and sediment control and the importance of riparian areas. Please check back at the Conservation District office or on the District webpage at www.blairconservationdistrict.org for future additions.

Determining a Good Location to Construct a Building

Constructing a home or other buildings on your property may involve several components. Just like determining the proper design and materials to be used, consideration to location, permitting, and environmental impact should also be planned carefully. Most local municipalities (township, city, or borough) require building permits for construction, remodeling, or improvements to your home. Always contact your local municipal office to determine building permit requirements before you start construction. In addition several state and federal environmental regulations must be kept in mind when preparing for development. Issues such as stream encroachment, wetland

disturbance, and accelerated erosion all require permits.

It is also important to consider utilities, water, and sewer systems in determining the location of your building. If you do not have access to public water or sewer systems, then you must consider a well and septic system location. All septic systems require a permit. Your municipal office can help with this process and may supply you with the necessary permit application.

Remember to Protect Your Drinking Water Supply:

- Use high quality construction and grouting materials for your well construction.
- Place a well at least 100 feet from your on-lot septic system.
- Always try to place a well upslope from any possible sources of pollution.

Floodway & Floodplains



Streams should be considered when determining the location of a building. All streams have a floodway and floodplain. **Floodways and floodplains are identified on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Boundary and Floodway Maps.** These maps are available for review at your local municipal office and at the County Conservation District office. Floodways and floodplains are areas that frequently flood or have flooded in the past. The regulations in these areas are meant to protect the property owner from flood damage and possibly loss of life. It is not recommended that buildings be placed in these areas.

Floodway:

- The area directly adjacent to the stream that is often inundated with water during normal high flow events.
- If not identified on the FEMA maps then the Floodway is defined as the area within 50 feet from the top of the stream bank.
- The Floodway area is regulated by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

Floodplain:

- Is the land outside the designated Floodway where annual high flow events may overflow.
- The Floodplain area is regulated by your local municipality through ordinances.
- Floodplains are often designated either 100 or 500 year; check with your municipality for regulations or limitations.

Erosion and Sediment Control- is the implementation of best management practices to limit the potential for accelerated erosion and sedimentation from earth disturbance activities

Before you begin construction or begin any earth disturbance, you must consider erosion and sediment control and the corresponding permits. These permits should be obtained before site preparation begins. According to the Pennsylvania Code Title 25, Chapter 102 all earth disturbance activity requires implementation and maintenance of erosion and sediment control best management practices to minimize the potential for accelerated erosion and sedimentation. In other words, you must implement **erosion control devices** for any earth disturbance activity you are conducting.

Erosion and Sediment Control Devices:

silt fence
straw bale barriers
vegetative buffers
rock filters
mulching & permanent seeding

Timber Harvesting Practices:

- Require an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan.
- Disturbed areas near a stream or wetland are to be protected with erosion control devices.
- Skidding through a stream is NOT permitted.
- Skid trails, haul roads and landings must be stabilized when completed.

Agricultural Practices

Earth disturbances associated with agricultural tillage operations fall under slightly different requirements. Persons conducting an earth disturbance associated with agriculture tillage operations should identify erosion and sediment control devices as part of a Conservation Plan (contact the U.S.D.A. NRCS office for help with a Conservation Plan).

Permitting

It is important to know what activities will require a permit. Finding the right agency to talk to about permitting can sometimes be confusing and frustrating. The Conservation District can help to minimize this confusion. The Conservation District staff is available to assist in determining the correct agency to talk to about permitting and to point you in the right direction.

Building

Most local municipalities (township, city, or borough) require building permits for construction, remodeling, additions, or improvements to your home or other buildings. Contact your local municipality concerning building permit requirements.

Streams and Wetlands

Generally speaking, most activity in or along streams will require a permit. In Blair County, those permits are reviewed and issued by the PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) South central Regional Office.

Floodway and Floodplain Permits

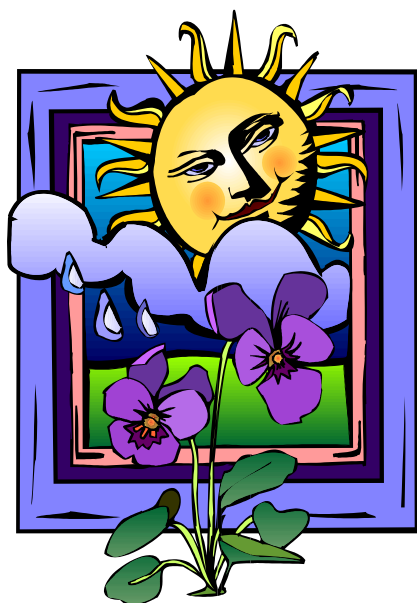
General Permits (GP) are required for agricultural crossings, stream-bank stabilization/ gravel bar removal, utility crossings, temporary or permanent road crossings, outfall structures, and fish habitat structures.

A water obstruction and encroachment permit may be required for the crossing of larger streams and/or disturbance to wetlands.

Construction

Any construction activity that will disturb 5 acres of land or more over the life of the project requires an National Pollutant Discharge Elimination Systems (NPDES) Permit.

Construction activity that will disturb between 1 and 4.99 acres of land and that has a water discharge from a pipe, channel, berm, swale, waterway, or similar water conveyance and that discharge to a stream, storm sewer system, roadside channel, inlet, or similar waters, will need a permit. These permits are issued by the County Conservation District.



PNDI-This database identifies the locations of threatened & endangered species, species of special concern, and unique geological features.

Some permits require a Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI) search. PNDI is a database of information collected from the PA Game Commission, PA Fish & Boat Commission, PA DCNR Bureau of Forestry, US Fish & Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. A PNDI search is often required to see if your project will interfere with one of these species or special areas. The County Conservation District can assist you with your PNDI search.

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Wetlands are often referred to as bogs, wet spots, marshes, springs and swamps.

- Wetlands are identified by three characteristics: hydric soils, hydrology, and specific plants.
- Wetland plants may include cattails, sedges, rushes, willows, dogwood and skunk cabbage.
- Wetlands are a valuable resource that must be protected.

They provide filtration of surface pollutants from our groundwater resource and provide a diverse habitat for hundreds of plant and animal communities.

*Cutting vegetation in a wetland is allowed without obtaining a permit, provided that the device used to cut the vegetation does not disturb the soil and that the roots of the vegetation are not removed.

*Any disturbance would require a permit from the PA DEP and the US Army Corps of Engineers.

A number of government agencies regulate and enforce restrictions over private properties. The thought "It is my property, I can do what I want with it" does not always apply when it comes to the environment. It is important to remember that these rules and regulations are put in place to protect the environment so our children and their children can enjoy the same environment as we do today, perhaps an even better one.



Things to Keep in Mind When Planning for Development

It is always easier to ask questions before hand:

Feel free to contact the Conservation District Office or any of the offices listed in this guide with questions.

Consider what permits you may need:

There are utility crossing permits, temporary and permanent road crossing permits, wetland permits, erosion and sediment control permits, etc.

Some permits require fees and public review time:

Plan ahead, don't let the time necessary to process a permit delay your schedule.

When possible always use native plants:

Native plants will flourish in the Pennsylvania climate, will be less susceptible to diseases and will minimize the use of non-native and potentially invasive species.

Always limit run-off from any disturbed areas:

Erosion and Sediment Control devices are often easy to install and limit sediment run-off from leaving the site while protecting the stream from sediment pollution.

Limit all activity to the area outside of the designated Floodway:

If the Floodway is not defined, limit activity outside the area from 50 feet of the top of bank.