

**BLAIR COUNTY
CONSERVATION
DISTRICT**

2019 Annual Report

**SPECIAL POINTS OF
INTEREST:**

- **Programming Begins at NatureWorksPark**
- **Local Leadership Rewarded**
- **Streambank Stabilization BMP's Funded**

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**2019
ANNUAL
REPORT**

District Snapshots

Read More Inside!



March 28, 2019 was the first scheduled classroom event at NatureWorksPark! Over 100 students from the Tyrone Area Elementary School participated in a Water Festival at the Park. The Blair County Envirothon was also hosted at the Park for the first time this past spring. Local artist, Sarah Vogle assisted the District in multiple Rain Barrel "Paint to Drip" workshops during summer and fall was filled with Riparian Buffer workshops and plantings.

County Commissioner Terry Tomassetti was recognized as Blair County's "Local Hero" during the May 2019 PA Farmland Preservation Association Meeting hosted in Blair County. Presented by PFFPA and American Farmland Trust, the award recognizes local support for the easement purchase program. District staff (Donna Fisher and Rich Huether) support the County program. Blair County continues to lead our region - Thanks Terry!



Two of three proposed Streambank Stabilization Projects were completed in 2019 using \$75,000 in Growing Greener Grant Funds. The third project is proposed for 2020.



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Planning is the Focus for Agriculture



Stormwater BMPs Planned and Implemented to “Keep Clean Water Clean”

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

The District adapted and continued its emphasis on planning in 2019, preparing 8 Manure Management Plans representing 443 acres and 10 Ag Erosion and Sediment Control Plans for 471 acres. In addition, 4 workshops were held locally to guide

landowners in plan preparation. District planning efforts are a direct correlation to our decision in participate in “Farm Inspections” as dictated by PA

DEP for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

The District is also delegated to review and approve Nutrient Management Plans (required for operations which meet thresholds related to the number of animal units per acre of ground available for manure application). Seven plans and amendments were reviewed and approved in 2019; along with the review of 5 nutrient balance sheets if manure is being imported to a farm.

Construction, with limited funding made available through a Chesapeake Bay Special Project grant, to install stormwater controls, roof water management and associated

practices was completed in 2019. Funding for additional practices on the farm (streambank fencing and riparian buffer establishment) was received from Western PA Conservancy and Trust For Tomorrow.

Rotational Grazing and Pasture Management continues to be a focus. The Blair and Huntingdon Districts combined forces to hold 3 well attended workshops/field days in 2019.

If you would like more information regarding programs, planning, funding or inspections ...contact Rich Huether, Ag Conservation Specialist or Stephen Dumm, Resource Conservation Technician at 696-0877 ext. 5.

Blair County is a leader in the Central PA Region with 55 easements and 8,133 acres permanently preserved for Agriculture.....

Blair Leads Region Again in Farms Preserved

Blair County’s Conservation Easement Purchase Program was approved in 1991. The Conservation District facilitates the program for the County of Blair.

In 2019 the program had a banner year having 4 farms approved and continued to lead the Central PA Region with 55 farms and 8,133 acres preserved! To date, just over 8.5 million dollars has been provided to Blair County landowners interested in ensuring that their farmland remains in agricultural use for perpetuity.

Blair County Commissioners allocated \$120,000 for preservation efforts in 2019, second highest in our region. The average easement value (the difference

between the development value and the farmland value as determined by an appraisal) for Blair County stands at \$1,056 per acre. However, the average easement value of current purchases is \$1,300 per acre.

Blair County hosted the PA Farmland Preservation Assoc. meeting in May of 2019.

Highlight of the event was the presentation of the “**Local Hero Award**” to Comm. Tomassetti for his steadfast support of the program. Of course, the group was treated

to a tour of Sinking Valley Farmland, Fort Roberdeau (with presentation by Karen Morrow, local eased farm owner), Railroaders Memorial Museum and the Horseshoe Curve!

The success of the program is a tribute to the commitment of the County Board and the relationship with the County Commissioners.

Applications received by October 15th are ranked to be considered for funding in the following year. For an application visit the District website or call 696-0877 ext. 5.

County	# of Easements	Acres	Avg \$/Ac	Co Allocation
Blair	55 Farms	8,133 Ac	\$1,056	\$120,000
Centre	53 Farms	8,019Ac	\$2,291	\$155,547
Bedford	18 Farms	3,855 Ac	\$ 565	\$ 2,598
Cambria	18 Farms	2,914 Ac	\$1,086	\$ 7,000
Huntingdon	9 Farms	1,068 Ac	\$1,307	\$ 7,207

Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Road Program



**Stabilized Road and Culvert Endwall
PA Game Commission, SGL 147**

The DG&LVR program continues to address sediment pollution from undermanaged roads and drainage facilities on Dirt & Gravel Roads and paved Low Volume Roads (less than 500 vehicles per day).

Funding for the program remained strong, Blair County received \$127,338 for administration and projects in 2019. However, this amount is slightly less than in previous years due to a backlog of unspent funds in the Dirt and Gravel Road portion of the program. Program funds must be committed and spent within two years of allocation, thus it is important that both the municipalities and the District have a strong commitment to the projects.

As a result of the QA/QC Visit by the State Conservation Commission and Dirt & Gravel Road Center, the District committed additional staff resources to the program in 2019 and continues to increase both our public/municipal outreach efforts and training.

Final payments for Dirt & Gravel Road projects were made to Catharine and

Woodbury Townships, PA Game Commission and Newry Borough (2 projects). The Low Volume Road Program had 2 projects completed. The first for Logan Township and one in Newry Boro. All are to be commended for helping the District reduce our funding backlog.

Only about half of Blair County municipalities are currently trained in the Environmental Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) of Roads for Blair County. ESM training certification is a pre-requisite for funding and recertification is required every 5 years. The District encourages all to become involved!

For more information, a funding application or [to find a training session near you](#), contact Diane Thomas, Chelsey Ergler or Stephen Dumm 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/permit submittals has steadily increased—to that end...the District budgeted and hired a second full time E&S Technician position starting in January of 2019.

All earthmoving activities over 5,000 square feet are required to have a written Erosion Control Plan. Cropland requires an E&S or Conservation Plan as do Timber Harvesting sites. Many local municipalities have within their ordinances, the requirement of plan review and approval as part of their land development approvals.

Sites involving a disturbance of 1 (one) acre or more are required to

obtain an NPDES permit prior to commencement of the project. NPDES permits are authorized and/or processed thru the District.

In 2019, 22 General and 2 Individual Permits (located in High Quality Watersheds) were processed and/or approved. In addition, 71 Erosion and Sediment (E&S) Control Plans were reviewed and approved based on the State's Chapter 92 and 102 Regulations.

50 complaints were logged and 68 inspections were conducted at earthmoving sites. 164 technical assistance contacts were provided to private individuals, municipalities, consultants, developers and contractors. Another year of intense storms created numerous calls related to stormwater, flooding and stream permitting questions. Significant staff time continued on the inspection of the pipeline project.

Remember, planning and permitting should be done prior to the commencement of the earthmoving activity. Contact Steve Beach or Tyne Blazier at 696-0877 ext. 5 if you are planning an earth disturbance project or observe sediment issues related to construction sites.

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



Rock Construction Entrances limit sediment from leaving sites during earthmoving

Streambank Repair and Buffers



Spring Run site before construction

The District was successful in obtaining a Growing Greener Grant in 2016 to work on three stream segments in Blair County. The projects located in Spencer Run, Spring Run and Poplar Run were submitted for funding. Following

design, permitting and bidding, two of the three projects were completed in 2019.

The section of Spring Run, located downstream of the Altoona Campus, was chosen for the high degree of erosion and potential impending structural damage to a home and a bridge. An existing railroad tie wall was collapsing and severe erosion and sedimentation was occurring. Tight circumstances within the urban setting proved challenging. The bank was stabilized with a rock toe and rock above the normal water flow. The remaining embankment was "laid back" to a more stable angle and planted with native landscape plants for a safe "No Mow" zone. The project was completed by Kerr Landscaping of Altoona.

Spring Run after construction



The second project took place on Spencer Run adjacent to the Carson Valley Cemetery. The Cemetery Association had contacted the District as early as 2012 asking for assistance at their site. Severe erosion had created a nearly 15 foot vertical cutbank along their southern property line and was threatening a cemetery roadway and eventually grave sites.

A project proposing both bank stabilization and instream controls was developed by BluAcres LLC and constructed by Claycomb Excavating. A modified mudsill was constructed at the toe of slope and similar to Spring Run, the embankment angle was reduced to allow for permanent stabilization by planting 600 tree stakes along the slope. Two rock veins were constructed in the channel, designed to maintain the stream flow away from the embankment.



Installing mudsill



Installing Rock Vein

The third and final project with this grant, on Poplar Run, will be bid and constructed in 2020. Grant funding is very competitive and the District will continue to apply as worthwhile projects, willing landowners and strong partners avail themselves.



Spencer Run after construction

Partners in Stormwater Successes

Stormwater runoff is a rising problem that has initiated numerous campaigns and efforts to improve the health of local waterways. Over the past eight years green infrastructure and stormwater improvement projects have been implemented across Blair County encouraging community engagement and outreach activities. Partnering with municipalities, organizations and schools is a key component to successful project completion and expansion of knowledgeable community members.

This year the District partnered with a local artist to host a Rain Barrel Workshop funded through the Pennsylvania Partners in the Arts Project Stream Program. This workshop entitled "Paint to Drip" allowed Blair County residents to



Sunflower Fields Workshop

become aware of the importance of stormwater control through rainwater reuse while remaining cost efficient and esthetically pleasing within the landscape. The District held a total of four workshops each featuring a different painting theme, created and instructed by local artist Sarah Vogel. During breaks and lunches a brief

stormwater lesson was presented on the benefits of rain barrels, how to install them, and maintenance required for the barrels.

All workshops were a great success and received high recognition and participation throughout the community.

Participants painting at the Cactus Chaos Workshop



Since 2012, the Intergovernmental Stormwater Committee (ISC) of Blair County has been collaboratively combining resources regarding the MS4 Program. This past year the ISC began implementing the Blair County Collaborative TMDL and Pollution Reduction Plan (PRP). This Plan encompasses a series of projects that will reduce a total of 1.4 million lbs./yr. of sediment within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed over the course of 5 years. With estimated costs determined in 2018,

the ISC has begun to contribute annually to both project and administrative funds. This year the ISC received grant funding in the amount of half a million dollars from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and



Grant funded projects will be within the Brush Run Watershed

DEP's Growing Greener program to construct a series of green infrastructure improvement projects along Brush Run within the PNG Stadium and Lakemont Park, reducing approximately 15,000-20,000 lbs./yr. of sediment.

The ISC is actively seeking additional grant funds and beginning the process of developing plans/permits for a select group of stream bank stabilization and stream restoration projects.

The creation of Local and State Partnerships with the ISC has led to new and innovative ideas/projects, developed educational platforms, enhanced recreational and habitat opportunities, and ultimately is improving the health of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. For more information contact Chelsey Ergler at 696-0877 ext. 5 or by email to cergler@blairconservationdistrict.org

What's Happening at Bedford Street....



**Wetland Boardwalk
At
NatureWorksPark**

NatureWorksPark is open for business and visitors! If you want to take a quick break from your busy day...visit NWP at 108 Bedford Street, Hollidaysburg to take a stroll on our quarter mile stone dust trail. Saunter past the Riparian Buffer, linger on the Boardwalk over the Created Wetland and enjoy the sweet smells of the Pollinator Garden in bloom. Open daily from dawn to dusk, we encourage you to stop by and enjoy!

The District has begun programming (school and community offerings) at the Park and we encourage you to keep up to date with scheduled activities on our Facebook page.

Also starting in 2019, the District began working with partners to install a series of riparian buffer demonstration areas within the Park and along the Beaverdam Branch of the Juniata River. Six different buffer types to include: Edible, Floriculture, Pollinator, AgroForest, Wildlife Grass and Wooded Wildlife areas are proposed. Three of the buffer areas along with educational workshops were completed last fall with assistance from DCNR, Bureau of Forestry, PS Extension, Master Gardner's of Blair County and the Hollidaysburg Women's Club.



Riparian Buffer Planting by Volunteers



NatureWorksPark®

Did you know that the pavilions at the park are available for rent? Reservation should be made by contacting Bonnie Young at 814-696-0877 ext. 5 or info@natureworkspark.org. Currently, there are no electric or water facilities. Portable, accessible restrooms are available in season.

We have only just begun with the opportunities at the park. To

learn more about programs offered, pavilion rental or what you will see at the park please visit www.natureworkspark.org or follow us on Facebook.

If you, your school or community group is interested in a program (at your site or our Park) contact Suzanne Black, Conservation Education Specialist at 814-696-0877 ext. 5 or email sblack@blairconservationdistrict.org



(above) Small Pavilion seats 32

(below) Large Pavilion seats 120 and is located next to the created wetland and boardwalk



Blair County Envirothon



**First Place
“Gold Team” from
Bellwood-Antis
High School**



**Third Place
“Red Maple”
from
Altoona Area
High School**

**Williamsburg
Area High
School “Blue
Team” took
Second Place**



The 34th Annual Blair County Envirothon Competition was held on April 26th at NatureWorksPark. Our local event is co-sponsored by the Altoona Kiwanis Club. 11 teams from 5 school districts participated in 2019.

Outstanding Conservation Efforts Recognized

As part of the District’s Annual Banquet we like to take time to recognize the good work done, not only by the District, but also by others in Blair County. This past year the District chose to recognize Jennifer Farabaugh with the 2019 Outstanding Conservationist Award.

Jennifer Farabaugh, Chesapeake Bay Watershed Manager for the Western PA Conservancy, has worked in our area for the last 11 years and has been a tireless promoter of conservation and a valuable asset in planning and implementation of Best Management Practices for our agricultural producers. Jen does not only work in Blair County as her title suggests; however, we feel blessed that she contributes significant time to our county.

Jen can be found writing nutrient management and manure management plans along with Ag E&S plans for our Blair County Producers. It is fortunate that we have a local source for planning as many of the “big ag consultants” hail from the Southeast. Whenever possible, her planning efforts are followed by funds for implementation as the Conservancy

has attained numerous grants for the installation of Best Management Practices – or her work is an integral piece to other funding opportunities.

Jen is trained and aids in water quality monitoring and biologic assessments related to Watershed Planning and Assessments. She is often called upon to identify macro invertebrates or participate in electro-shocking of streams. Streambank Restoration Projects and Riparian Buffer Planting Projects are also a specialty for Jen, most recently working in the Plum Creek Watershed of Blair County.

Jen also serves as the facilitator for the WPC’s Hollidaysburg Advisory Committee. On a quarterly basis she pulls together interested citizens from our region to have a conversation about what’s happening locally and on a statewide basis. The connections made through the Conservancy have opened doors for projects in Blair and surrounding counties.

She is also most willing to assist in training of District Staff and our Stream Volunteers.

Thank you Jen for all you do!

Also recognized was outgoing County Commissioner Terry Tomassetti for his 12 years of service to the District and Ag Land Preservation Boards. Terry was a strong supporter both in attendance and through County financial assistance for both programs. Terry was an advocate for the proposed work at NatureWorksPark and a valuable asset in discussions related to District programming. The District was in good hands with Commissioner Tomassetti!



**Jen Farabaugh (left) received
Outstanding Conservationist Award
from Donna Fisher**



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**
- Bonnie Young, Administrative Assistant**
- Rich Huether, Ag Conservation Specialist**
- Beth Futrick, Ombudsman**
- Diane Thomas, Watershed Specialist**
- Stephen Dumm, Resource Conservation Technician**
- Tyne Blaizer, Resource Conservation Technician**
- Steve Beach, Resource Conservation Technician**
- Chelsey Ergler, Stormwater Coordinator**
- Suzanne Black, Conservation Education Specialist**

Conservation District Funding

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

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 2019 were received as a block grant in the amount of \$59,828 per conservation district across the Commonwealth. The PUC funds in Blair County continue to be allocated for the development of the District Property on Bedford Street.

The SCC funds are distributed in base amounts plus a calculated portion of Unconventional Well Counts per county. Blair County received a base amount of \$79,429 with no additional for well activity, since there have been no "spudded wells" within the last 5 years. These funds are utilized to cost share salaries and administrative expenses.

Continuing in 2019, the District held an agreement with the Intergovernmental Stormwater Committee (ISC) to employ a Coordinator and facilitate the operation of the committee. Nine municipalities and the County of Blair, that are required to obtain Federal MS4 permits for stormwater facilities, make up the ISC, formalized in 2017. The two year pilot program expired in December 2018 and a new agreement was signed to contribute \$100,000 annually for staff expenses, consulting fees and limited project funds for a five year period through 2023.

The County of Blair contributes 20.8% of District revenues, the State 39.8%, the ISC 8.4% and District Fees and Reserves 11.6% of the operating budget. Salary and Benefits are the major expense, representing 66.9% of the operating budget.

<u>2019 General Fund Budget</u>	
Expenses:	
Salaries/Benefits	\$448,040
Rent/Insurances/Audit	\$ 31,050
Operating Expenses	\$ 58,000
Payment to County	\$ 33,000
Project Grants	\$100,000
Total Expenses	\$670,090
Revenues:	
Beginning Balance	\$ 30,000
County Commissioners	\$139,671
E&S/NPDES Fees	\$ 20,000
State Program Funds	\$266,454
Grants	\$100,000
ISC for Staff Expenses	\$ 56,500
Blair CWF/Reserve	\$ 44,115
Misc. Revenue Sources	\$ 13,350
Total Revenues	\$670,090