

BLAIR COUNTY
CONSERVATION
DISTRICT

SPECIAL POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- **Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) supports Blair County agriculture.**
- **Bats in the Barn...leads to deep guano.**

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2023
ANNUAL
REPORT

2023 Annual Report

Something Old....Something New...

The Blair County Conservation District in it's 57th year has a strong foundation from which to operate. Some things have not changed - our commitment to the ag community - our commitment to the education and nurturing of our next generation of conservationists - our commitment to locally led leadership. However, there is often and always something new to develop and explore; and that strong foundation allows us to seek new opportunities for growth and development

2023 saw the development locally of the newest agricultural technical and financial assistance program - Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP). As you will read later in this report, Blair County is slated to received 1.6 million dollars from the PA Clean Streams Fund, to be administered locally at the Conservation District level. We set the program (within state legislation, policy and guidelines) to best serve our Blair County agricultural community. The District Board and Staff continually strive to provide for an efficient and equitable distribution of our allotted funds. Hopes are that if the program goes well across the Commonwealth through the present deadline of 2026, that dedicated funding may be secured to continue the program. Our success with ACAP is built upon our past successes with the Clover Creek PL-566 Program (in the 1980's) and the Chesapeake Bay Program (in the 1990's and into the 2000's) and most recently the Countywide Assistance Program (starting in 2022).

You will also read later in this report about our educational programs. **2023 was the first full year at the District where we have employed a Full-Time Conservation Educator.** Although all of our programs and staff have educational opportunities and output requirements, having a full-time staff person dedicated to the overall educational initiatives of the District and guiding the continued development of programming at NatureWorksPark is new and exciting! Again building on that strong foundation of the past, some of our school outreach dates back to our beginnings with Land Judging (early 1970's); the Envirothon (1986); Library Programs (2000's) and Wetlands, Woods and Meadows (2010's). Our newest programs and outreach are proactive and geared toward working with nature, like "Going Batty" and the "Turtle Talks," as well as timely when dealing with things like the Spotted Lanternfly.

Finally related to new and more experienced, our **2023 District Board**, with our newest member (Cindy Bigelow) just finishing her 3rd year of her first 4-year Term is joined and supported by the remaining 6 members - Jim Biddle (first term started in 1992); Blaine Smith (1995); John Morrow (1999); Alan Gearhart (2002); Gary Long (2007) and Commissioner Erb (2020). That is a combined total of 126 years of experience and institutional knowledge; is there any wonder why we are successful!

It is the honor of the board and the staff to continue to serve the citizens of Blair County and to carry out **our mission to protect, preserve and enhance Blair County's natural resources!**



2023 Conservation District Board

(L to R) Commissioner Bruce Erb, Jim Biddle, Cindy Bigelow, John Morrow, Gary Long, Blaine Smith (absent Alan Gearhart)

Plans for Compliance and Funding



Planning continues to be the first step for farm compliance and funding programs on all agricultural operations.

The District participated in the PA Assoc. of Conservation Districts Plan Reimbursement Program in 2023, providing **4 landowners with a total of \$3,200 toward plan preparation.** The District continues to write plans on a limited basis for a fee and supports landowners preparing their own plans using the Pa OneStop Program and the Manure Management Manual as the need arises.

During 2023, the District prepared 2 Manure Management Plans representing 460 acres and **3 Ag**

Erosion and Sediment Control Plans for 601 acres.

The District's delegation 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) resulted in **5 plans and/or amendments** reviewed and approved; along with the review of **1 nutrient balance sheet** if manure is being imported to a farm.

The final and perhaps key component of planning and implementation is reporting. Staff continue to input plans into the state based PracticeKeeper System, and are now verifying

existing and functioning practices with the end goal of calculating sediment and nutrient reductions.

Blair County is tasked with reducing nitrogen pollution by 585,000 pounds. We have already met our phosphorus reductions according to state models. The District has "planned" to implement and/or report 21,000 acres of Cover Crops; 25,000 acres of Conservation or Ag E&S plans; 25,000 acres of Nutrient or Manure Management plans; 500 acres of Riparian Buffers; and 10,000 Animal Units of Manure Storage by 2025.

Contact us if you would like more information about our agricultural programs and funding.

Region Leader 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 2023 the program preserved two farms totaling 201 acres, one of which will utilize Federal funds through the PA Department of Ag application to the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service. This was the fourth farm in Blair County where Federal funds were used. Federal funds stretch the local and state dollars and can be a good fit for the right farm. Blair continues to be one of the leaders in the Central PA Region with **61 farms and 8,908 acres preserved!** To date, nearly **9.9 million dollars** has been provided to Blair landowners to ensure ag land use for perpetuity.

Blair County Commissioners allocated \$106,891 for preservation efforts in 2023, one of the highest in our region. The State threshold was increased to 42 million, with the resulting State funds available to Blair County listed as \$316,101. County funds continue to be matched at an average of 3 to 1. Blair County received 0.74% of the total State funds.

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

farmland value as determined by an appraisal) for Blair County stands at \$1,109 per acre. However, the average easement value of current purchases is closer to \$1,600/acre.

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 of each year are ranked to be considered for funding in the following year.

For an application, visit the District website or call Rich Huether or Donna Fisher at 814-696-0877 ext. 5.

Blair County continues to lead the Central PA Region with 61 easements and 8,908 acres permanently preserved for Agriculture.....

County	# of Easements	Acres	Avg \$/Ac	Co Allocation
Blair	61 Farms	8,908Ac	\$1,109	\$106,891
Centre	64 Farms	9,050 Ac	\$2,409	\$352,184
Bedford	18 Farms	3,855 Ac	\$ 555	\$ 4,104
Cambria	24 Farms	3,631 Ac	\$1,049	\$ 10,000
Huntingdon	12 Farms	1,616 Ac	\$1,256	\$ 47,413

Blair ACAP and CAP Implementation Funds

Agriculture is the Number One industry in Blair County and for the first time in a long time funding has matched the importance of agriculture to Blair County! The **Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP)** legislation was passed in July 2022 committing 154 million dollars statewide for agricultural best management practices. Blair County is to receive a total of 1.679 million dollars over 3 years for the administration, design and implementation of BMP's. Three allocations will be forthcoming through the Blair County Conservation District for contracting by December 2024 and spending by December 2026. In 2023, we received two advance payments (April and August) totaling \$559,819 as the advances from the first two allocations. As funds are spent, the District is able to request the remaining funds from these first two allocations for another \$559,819. A final advance and allocation will be made in 2024 along with the balance of the total allocations as funds are spent.

The District worked diligently to develop policies to effectively manage the program in Blair County. In order to allow a diverse distribution of funds, we have chosen to institute a cap of \$250,000 annually to a landowner and/or ag operation, as well as a maximum of 90% payment of any proposed project. We have instituted application rounds to solicit interest in the program and applicants are ranked within their round for funding consideration. Our first application and completed project was for a grassed waterway to minimize erosion from crop fields for a total cost of \$8,211. We have also committed an additional \$283,000 to a covered manure stacking area and two grazing projects in 2023. Finally for 2023, the District committed \$95,000 toward our Cover Crop Incentive Program whereby we reward good conservation practices with an incentive payment. Fourteen landowners applied for a minimum of \$25/acre incentive to plant cover crops covering 3,265 acres with a cap of 500 acres/landowner. **By the end of 2023, we had committed a total of \$386,414.**

All eyes are on the PA State Conservation Commission (facilitator of the program at the state level), Conservation Districts and Pennsylvania's Farmers to efficiently and effectively utilize these funds for the installation of Best Management Practices with the ultimate goals of reducing pollution and maintaining the long term viability of our farms and farmland. We will do our part in Blair County! If you are interested in more information about the Blair County ACAP Program contact Rich Huether at 814-696-0877 ext. 5 or rhuether@blairconservationdistrict.org.



**First ACAP Project Completed
Grassed Waterway**



**Cover Crops for Conservation
and Soil Health**

The second round of **Countywide Action Plan (CAP) Implementation Funds** were received in Blair County in **2023 totaling \$95,706** (about 60% of our first allocation). The District chose to utilize these funds for a stream restoration project that was "shovel ready" on the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River just south of the Freedom Township Sewer and Water Treatment Plant. The project to restore approximately 2,600 linear feet of stream channel had been designed and permitted by the US Fish and Wildlife Service working through California University and with the Trust For Tomorrow organization. The total cost of the project was over \$200,000. Blair CAP funds were coupled with local Blair County Intergovernmental Stormwater Committee funds to complete the majority of the project by the fall of 2023.

The District applied for and received \$200,000 late in 2023 for use in 2024. We plan to continue our stream restoration and ag best management practice efforts with those funds. Stay tuned!



Modified Mud Sill used on the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River to Stabilize the Streambank and Provide Aquatic Habitat

Erosion Control and NPDES Permitting



Compost Filter Sock, a Rock Construction Entrance and Netting on steep slopes are all best management practices used to limit erosion on an Earth Disturbance Site and should be maintained until the site is fully stabilized.

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.

Did you know....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. Written plans are to be maintained on site and implemented. It is also important to note that many local municipalities have within their ordinances, the requirement of plan review and approval as part of their final land development authorizations.

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 by the District.

There was no shortage of workload related to development projects in 2023. Numbers remained consistent with previous years.

In 2023, **15 General and 5 Individual Permits** (located in High Quality Watersheds or with discharges to Special Protection Waters) were processed and/or approved. In association with those permits and including projects of less than 1 acre, a total of **86 Erosion and Sediment (E&S) Control Plans** were reviewed and approved based on the State's Chapter 92 and 102 Regulations.

Processing times in Blair County average **50 calendar days** for General NPDES Permits and **12 calendar days** for E&S Plan reviews.

Twenty-nine complaints were logged and **88 inspections** were conducted at earthmoving sites and the pipeline project. Over 100 technical assistance contacts were provided to individuals, municipalities, consultants, developers and contractors.

Remember, planning and permitting should be done prior to the commencement of the earthmoving activity. Contact Tyne Blazier or Devon Weyant at 814-696-0877 ext. 5 if you are planning an earth disturbance project or observe sediment issues related to construction sites.

ISC Continues Project Implementation, and Renews Municipal and Conservation District Partnerships



Since 2012, the Intergovernmental Stormwater Committee (ISC) of Blair County has been collaboratively combining resources regarding the MS4 Program. This past year the ISC continued 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 contributed annually to both project and administrative funds. To date the ISC has

completed a total of 29 projects that are reducing 934,688.56 lbs./yr. of sediment within Beaverdam Branch, Frankstown Branch, and Little Juniata Watersheds. This year the ISC implemented 2 stream stabilization projects through their partnership with Trout Unlimited and formed a new partnership with Trust for Tomorrow, contributing funding to implement 2,600 linear feet of the Frankstown Branch Stream Restoration Project. In addition, Land Studies continues to assess the Beaverdam Branch for a potential Floodplain Restoration Project which the ISC hopes to fully construct by 2025. The ISC also entered into a new agreement with the local municipalities in effect until December 2025, at which time the agreement will renew automatically each subsequent year. At the end of 2023, the District renewed their agreement with the ISC to support the Stormwater Coordinator position for another 5-year period now slated through the end of 2028.

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 Blair County's and the Chesapeake Bay Watersheds.** For more information contact Chelsey Weyant at 814-696-0877 ext. 5.

(right) Trust for Tomorrow and Habitat Forever place a log vane in the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River



Municipalities by the Numbers.....

Plan and permit numbers are tracked by the County as well as by the Municipality. Complaints and inspections are also identified by municipality, with copies of all correspondence provided to the specific municipality where the issue has occurred. The District appreciates the close working relationship that we have with our Blair County municipalities and we strive to keep them informed of our activities. As you can see in the table below, the workload is spread across the county with some obvious higher density townships where more development occurred in 2023. Many of our Boroughs are “built out” and earth disturbances may be limited, unless there would happen to be grading to clear lot(s). The large disturbed acreage in Greenfield Township is related to our first proposed “solar farm.” Inspections are conducted in response to complaints or as routine inspections on permitted or active earth disturbance sites. One site in Antis Township was referred to DEP for enforcement in 2023.

Municipality	# Plan Reviews	Individual NPDES	General NPDES	Total Disturbed Acres	Complaints	Inspections
Allegheny	10	0	1	10.4	4	21
Antis	11	1	1	27.6	3	12
Blair	4	0	0	2.1	2	0
Catharine	2	0	1	27.9	0	0
Frankstown	5	1	0	7.1	3	11
Freedom	2	0	1	12.0	1	1
Greenfield	7	2	1	141.6	0	6
Huston	0	0	0	0	0	0
Juniata	0	0	0	0	0	5
Logan	9	0	2	8.7	4	4
North Woodbury	2	0	0	1.6	2	4
Snyder	3	1	0	11.0	3	11
Taylor	3	0	1	11.1	0	0
Tyrone	0	0	0	0	0	0
Woodbury	2	0	0	1.3	0	3
City of Altoona	19	0	5	42.1	5	5
Bellwood Borough	1	0	1	3.6	0	0
Duncansville Borough	0	0	0	0	2	0
Hollidaysburg Borough	3	0	1	2.6	0	0
Martinsburg Borough	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry Borough	0	0	0	0	0	0
Roaring Spring Borough	1	0	0	0.8	0	5
Tyrone Borough	2	0	0	1.2	0	0
Williamsburg Borough	0	0	0	0	0	0

Spotlight on the DGLV Road Program



**\$100,000 Allocated for
Dirt & Gravel Roads**



**\$84,808 Allocated for
Low Volume Roads**

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). Conservation Districts administer the program and are locally led by a Quality Assurance Board (QAB) in each County. Local People solving Local Issues!

Funding for the program remained strong, Blair County received **\$184,808** for administration and projects in 2023/24. Program funds must be committed and spent within two years of allocation to maximize funds; thus it is important that both the municipalities and the District have a strong commitment to the projects that are chosen.

Two Dirt and Gravel Road projects were completed in 2023 - **Igou Road in Antis Township and Creps Road in North Woodbury Township.** Igou Road converted a partially paved road back to "dirt" road using Driving Surface Aggregate (DSA) and upgrading the upslope road



**DSA and Upslope Ditch Project
Igou Road, Antis Township**

ditch and installing a French Mattress and outlet for a total cost of \$34,471. Creps Road was the first project undertaken by North Woodbury Township and consisted of stormwater controls (rock lined ditches and cross pipes) and 1,600 feet of Driving Surface Aggregate for a total cost of \$138,690.

Any Blair County municipality that has received training in the Environmental Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) of Roads within the last 5 years is eligible for funding. To date, Blair County has funded **67 sites for \$1,944,275 on over 22 miles of roads.** We encourage all to become trained and get involved!

Stream Projects with DCED Funds



Stream Stabilization on Spencer Run

Construction was completed on Phase 2 of a streambank stabilization project along Spencer Run, Allegheny Township (Cross Keys Area) in 2023.

The project was designed and permitted by **Keller Engineers, Inc.** working with **UMH Properties** as the landowner and fund by **DCED, Keystone Community Funds.** Construction was completed by **DirtWorks by Johnston** from East Freedom. Approximately 500 of streambank was stabilized with rock rip rap and several in-stream gravel bars were removed to the allowable height of 6 inches above the stream elevation.

The final project to be completed with DCED funds was initiated on the UNT to Brush Run parallel to Hawthorne Street also in Allegheny Township. Stream stabilization again with hard armor (rip rap) along with several grade structures will be permitted and constructed in 2024.

Conservation Awards 2023

Annually the District recognizes Individuals, Organizations, and/or Farms for service and achievements that support the District Mission to protect, preserve and enhance our natural resources through technical assistance and education. **For 2023, we chose both an Outstanding Farm Operation, as well as an Outstanding Conservation Organization.**

Stoney Spring Farm owned by Trevor and Heather Chenault in Blair Township was recognized for their most recent work to convert some very steep cropland into a more environmentally friendly Rotational Grazing System for their growing herd of Black Angus. Just under 30 acres was enclosed by 6,850 feet of exterior fencing and another 2,800 feet of interior fencing, along with a well and watering system. The Chenault's received cost share through the District's CAP funds and expressed that as a beginning farmer the improvements would not have been possible without the technical and financial assistance.

Jordan Wild with WildOnes PA Ridge & Valley was recognized for his work to raise public awareness about the benefits of native plants and to introduce those plants into our landscape. He has worked tirelessly to connect with partners (like the Conservation District) and like-minded people to build the Blair County Chapter and find meaningful projects to increase native plants and biodiversity in our county. Jordan was awarded Paw Paw Tree Seedlings (one of his favorite native species) to plant at a location of his choosing. Jordan aspires to host a Paw Paw Festival in Central PA!



(Left) Heather Chenault and Rich Huether, BCCD



(Right) Jenna Rose Wild, Beth Futrick, BCCD and Jordan Wild



In 2023, we recognized retiring Blair County Commissioner Bruce Erb at our annual banquet held in October.

Commissioner Erb served both as a voting member on the Conservation District Board for 4 years and also as the County Liaison to the Agricultural Land Preservation Board. He brought his leadership and financial skills to both boards and was a valuable member of our Team!

Thank You Commissioner Erb

and we wish you the very best in your Retirement!

(L to R) Jim Biddle, District Chairman and Commissioner Bruce Erb

Education and Outreach 2023

The Blair Conservation District welcomed their new educator, **Lisa Haas**. She started in February and quickly made connections with W.R. Grace, Envirothon teachers, librarians, and poster contest teachers.

The Wetlands, Woods and Meadow field trips at W.R. Grace continued this year. We were able to fill all twelve spots for the year, teaching 550 students from across the county about a variety of topics related to conservation.

Lisa became a regular speaker for the Blair County Senior Centers, teaching gardening workshops, showing off the turtles and including them in the What's Hatching, Monarchs program.

We also had a successful year with our workshops held at the local libraries. A build-your-own container garden workshop was held in anticipation of Mother's Day weekend; as well as What's Hatching, Monarchs and Wreath Making programs. We also added Pollinator and Mason Bee workshops and a variety of other programs



that were offered at all the Blair County libraries.

During the summer and fall months, the educator helped the District with Spotted Lanternfly (SLF) education. With help from

a PDA grant, we were able to purchase SLF traps that we gave away at produce auctions, farmers markets, conservation districts, Chambers and other farm events. We also held workshops to educate farmers on the importance of getting the SLF permit and taught them how to limit the transportation of this pest.

The District hosted both annual **Earth Day and Family Fun Day at NWP** in April and August, respectively. The events aimed to be an immersive educational experience for the entire family. Fall brought our first Wag-O-Ween event where we asked pet owners to bring their costumed pet and a donation for the local animal rescue shelters.

Lisa also continued to work on the Facebook pages with the District and NatureWorksPark. We now have over 2.6K followers between the two sites. Call or email Lisa Haas or follow us on Facebook for updates on programs and activities planned in 2024.

Blair County Envirothon



**First Place Winner -
Williamsburg HS
"Blue Team"**

Hosted on a brisk, sunny April day at Valley View Park, fourteen teams from six school districts competed in the annual event.

The local event was sponsored by: Altoona Kiwanis, ISC, Leighty's Boot Outlet, Keller Engineers, Stiffler McGraw, New Pig, Sheetz and the Blair Conservation District.



**Above - Second Place Winner -
Central HS "Team 2"**



**Left - Third Place Winner -
Altoona Area HS "Red Maples"**

2023 Land Judging Contest

The annual Land Judging Competition aimed at FFA students saw participation from Bellwood-Antis, Central Cove and Williamsburg Chapters. The event was held at Jerry Bechtel's farm just outside of Curryville. We had a strong contest with over 50 students participating. **First place was taken by Hunter Smith, a tie for Second by Heather Brumbaugh and Mary Grill and Third Place by Danielle Heltzel, all representing the Central Cove FFA.** A total of 10 points separated the top three places! The top finishers from **Bellwood-Antis were Alexis Schratzmeier, Gabe Waltermire and Josh Miller placing 11th, 12th and 20th respectively.** **Ethan O and Ty Uplinger from the Williamsburg FFA finished 14th and 19th.** The top three places will receive a plaque and each school will also have the opportunity to send their top students to the state contest in the Summer of 2024 if they desire.

Congratulations All!



**2023 Land Judging Competition at Jerry Bechtel's Farm
October 5, 2023**

Annual Poster Contest

The Blair County Conservation District again sponsored and facilitated the Annual Poster Contest. The theme for 2023 was "One Water." Entries were received in each grade category (K-1, 2-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12) and cash prizes were awarded to 1st, 2nd and 3rd place entries in each grade category. We also provide the teachers of the winners with a monetary prize, since we realize that often teachers go above and beyond for their students! Winners were recognized at the District's Earth Day Event at NatureWorksPark!

Winning posters at the local level are submitted to the PA Association of Conservation Districts with the possibility of reaching a national event.

Winners were: Callum Furry, Trey Saltzburg, Abd Almajeed AlKayem; Kate Moyer, Amylia Cook, Reiley Helsel; Owen Witham, Kaylie McCabe, Margaretta Burke; Rhiannon Benson; and Nora Hoy. Teachers recognized were: Rachel Cahill, Cindy Byrne, Rachel Mabb and Tiffany Hoy.

Congratulations to all the 2023 Winners and their Teachers!



What's Happening at Bedford Street

New Stick Library,
Little Brown Bat and
Water Festival at
NatureWorksPark



NatureWorksPark 2023 was a year of education and outreach initiatives.

We are excited to resume Water Festivals at the park where we rotated elementary school students through stations highlighting wetlands, food webs, stormwater runoff, gardening and recycling. We could not have done it without the help of our friends at the IRC and Penn State Extension Master Gardeners of Blair County who each developed the curriculum for their stations.

We would also like to thank the seniors at Hollidaysburg High School for all their help in planting pine and cedar trees by the amphitheater for a sound break. These inexhaustible students also planted 80 small trees around the property from the K10 program, tackled Russian olive, privet and multiflora rose in our wetland and wildlife area and planted our raised beds with vegetables that we allowed the community to come and pick at will.

Through the CREP grant, community workshops were held to highlight numerous ways a multifunctional buffer can be managed and utilized. We relied on experts to teach how to make and use botanical dyes, how to build a cut-flower business, practicing floral design, and planting a moon garden to attract nighttime predators such as bats.

A community favorite program was Going Batty with Garrett Harris. He is a local bat enthusiast who taught the importance of conserving bats. The two programs started at twilight so we could count the bats that came out of the barn. Both nights we counted over 100 bats residing in our barn. Yes, the guano can get pretty deep, but we have a plan



NatureWorksPark®



Boardwalk at twilight

for that in 2024. During the second program, Garrett netted a feisty Little Brown Bat and took all the measurements for the Appalachian Bat Count. Our County Highway Department was gracious enough to hang 2 bat houses on the outside of the barn with hopes that some will choose to move in. However, according to Garrett, it would be like asking someone to move from a mansion into an apartment and may not be likely.

We hosted 3 festivals at the park this year. These were the Earth Day festival, a Family Fun Day with Canal Basin Park and for our fall programming, we hosted a Howl-O-Ween event. It was rainy and cold but we still had people come with their costumed pets to see the new Stick Library and play games. We asked for donations to our local rescues as well.

We were pleased to report that the park averaged 1,100 visitors per month from April through August 2023 with the most visitors in May totaling 1,670! We had over 10,000 visitors this year!

Another thanks to the Master Gardeners of Blair County for their Pollinator Garden, beautification plantings and upkeep throughout the park. Special Shout Out to the Blair County Highway Department and the Blair County Prison for mowing and general cleanup at the Park.

Stay in touch by visiting [Natureworkspark.org](https://www.natureworkspark.org) or following us on Facebook or contacting Lisa Haas, Conservation Education Specialist at 814-696-0877 ext. 5 or email lhaas@blairconservationdistrict.org

District Staff - Recognition and New Staff



Bonnie Young - 5 Years of Service

One staff anniversary was recognized in 2023. **Bonnie Young has been with the Conservation District for 5 years, starting in March 2018.** Bonnie was hired as an Administrative Assistant from within the County of Blair, serving previously at the Prison and Controllers Offices. Her position was reclassified as the Administrative Coordinator based on duties in 2021. Bonnie received a 5 years of service certificate from the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts and was recognized at the October District Banquet. Bonnie is most often the first contact as individuals call or visit the District and we appreciate all that she does to ensure efficient service and a prompt response to all!

New Staff Hired

(L) Lisa Haas, Conservation Education Specialist and

(R) Sarah Oreskovich, Resource Conservation Technician for Agriculture and the Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Road Program.

Joshua Stoehr, Resource Conservation Technician pursued other job opportunities outside of the District in 2023. We thank Joshua for his service (a second time) and wish him the best of luck!

Lisa Haas was hired in February 2023 as the Conservation Education Specialist. She comes to the district with a degree in Horticulture and 20 years experience in the Horticulture industry. Most recently Lisa served as the Penn State Master Gardener Coordinator for Blair County where she honed her skills as an educator. Lisa had already been involved with plantings and programming at NWP as part of those duties.

Sarah Oreskovich was hired to fill the open position of Resource Conservation Technician in June 2023. Sarah comes to us with a B. S. degree in Ecology from Susquehanna University; as well as large animal care experience. Sarah was Giraffe Keeper at Lake Tobias Park and most recently a Stable Hand at Grier School taking care of 55 horses on a daily basis.

We are excited to welcome both Lisa and Sarah to our team!

Also of special note in 2023, **Rich Huether** was recommended by PACD to serve on their behalf to the State Conservation Comm. Nutrient Management Advisory Board. His years of service in the program will provide valuable insight for the board. **Lisa Haas** was appointed to the State Envirothon Board and **Chelsey Weyant**, presented testimony on behalf of PACD and Blair CD at the Democratic Policy Committee Hearing on Water, Sewer and Stormwater Management.

Meet the Rest of the Team

Donna Fisher, District Manger started with the District in 1985.

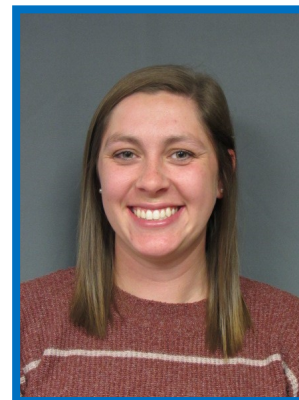
Rich Huether, Ag Conservation Specialist started in June 2000.

Beth Futrick, Ag Ombudsman and Resource Coordinator started for the second time in 2008.

Chelsey Weyant, Stormwater Coordinator/Watershed Specialist started in August 2017.

Tyne Blazier, Resource Conservation Technician/Watershed Specialist started in January 2019.

Devon Weyant, Resource Conservation Technician started in May 2022.



Spotted Lanternfly Program and Funding



Blair County was added to the quarantine list for Spotted Lanternfly in 2020 and sightings have been steadily increasing. It is now obvious that the insect is prevalent throughout the County. A **\$25,000 education and outreach grant** was received by the District in 2023 to conduct permit workshops focusing on farmers and the plain sect and to also provide traps to the community, neighboring conservation districts and surrounding Chambers of Commerce. Our Ombudsman also had links added to the ombudsman website and traps were installed at NatureWorksPark, PNG Field at Lakemont and in Blair County neighborhoods. Additional workshops and outreach events are planned for 2024. Penn State Extension has taken a lead on education and outreach materials. Visit their website for more information **or to report a sighting.**

<https://extension.psu.edu/spotted-lanternfly>



Resource Conservation Since 1966

1407 Blair Street

Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

Phone: 814-696-0877 ext. 5

E-mail: bcd@blairconservationdistrict.org

www.blairconservationdistrict.org

www.natureworkspark.org



2023 Conservation District Board

Jim Biddle, Chairman
Blaine Smith, Vice-Chairman
Gary Long, Secretary/Treasurer
John Morrow
Alan Gearhart
Cindy Bigelow
Commissioner Bruce Erb

2023 Conservation District Staff

Donna Fisher, District Manager
Bonnie Young, Administrative Coordinator
Rich Huether, Ag Conservation Specialist
Beth Futrick, Ombudsman/Resource Coordinator
Chelsey Weyant, Stormwater Coordinator/WS
Tyne Blazier, Resource Conservation Technician/WS
Devon Weyant, Resource Conservation Technician
Sarah Oreskovich, Resource Conservation Technician
Lisa Haas, Conservation Education Specialist

Conservation District Funding

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

Conservation Districts across the Commonwealth continue to receive funds via 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 2023 were received as a block grant in the amount of \$70,278 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 and NatureWorksPark.

The SCC funds are distributed in base amounts plus a calculated portion of Unconventional Well Counts per county. Thanks to the Legislature and the Departments of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, a significant increase originally received for district staff and administrative costs in the State 2022/23 Budget was continued in 2023/24! Blair County was allocated \$203,765 to be utilized to cost share salaries (for 6 staff positions) and administrative expenses (both for the District and Farmland Preservation Program).

Continuing in 2023 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 make up the ISC. The agreement with the ISC outlines their contribution of up to \$100,000 annually for administration through 2023. The District budgeted \$50,000 toward staff expenses and support in 2023.

The County of Blair contributes 19.4% of District revenues, the State 43.7%, the ISC 5.5% and District Fees, Reserves and Miscellaneous 9.4% of the operating budget. Grants are budgeted at \$200,000 or 22.0% but often exceed budgeted amounts.

2023 General Fund Budget

Expenses:

Salaries/Benefits	\$522,800
Rent/Insurances/Audit	\$ 40,100
Operating Expenses	\$ 67,200
Property Expenses	\$ 47,000
Payment to County	\$ 33,000
Project Grants	\$200,000
Total Expenses	\$910,100

Revenues:

Beginning Balance	\$ 35,000
County Commissioners	\$177,001
E&S/NPDES Fees	\$ 25,000
State Program Funds	\$397,633
Grants	\$200,000
ISC for Staff Expenses	\$ 50,000
Blair CWF/Reserve	\$ 14,116
Misc. Revenue Sources	\$ 11,350
Total Revenues	\$910,100