

BLAIR COUNTY
CONSERVATION
DISTRICT

SPECIAL POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- NatureWorksPark
- Local Food Initiatives
- Conservation and Leadership Rewarded

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2018
ANNUAL
REPORT

2018 Annual Report

NatureWorksPark Phase 1 Completed

Before and After



It was a challenge to do construction during 2018, but all prevailed and the first phase of NatureWorksPark was nearly completed by the end of the year!

Phase 1 construction saw the completion of the 0.25 mile series of walking trails, 2 pavilions, the amphitheater, a pollinator garden, several raised beds in anticipation for 2019 garden plantings, rain gardens for stormwater control and educational signage. Special thanks to both Keller Engineers, Inc. and Ventura Construction Services, Inc.

Garden plantings, possible cover crop plantings and a proposed riparian buffer demonstration area are on tap for 2019.



Accessible Amphitheater located to overlook exceptional value wetlands

Pollinator Garden in the shape of a butterfly

Planning is the Focus for Agriculture



Manure Storage, Stabilized Access & Stormwater BMPs Planned and Implemented

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 2018 preparing 21 manure management plans representing 1,895 acres and 23 Ag Erosion and Sediment Control Plans for 1,815 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. Forty "initial inspection for ag operations" were completed to ascertain compliance with plan requirements associated with both Erosion Control and Manure Management.

We again took our planning efforts state-wide via a grant with the Center for Dairy Excellence to host planning workshops in conjunction with the Ombudsman Program.

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). Ten plans and amendments were reviewed and approved in 2018; along with the review of nutrient balance sheets if manure is being imported to a farm.

Planning was initiated for limited funding made available through a Chesapeake Bay Special Project grant to install a rotational grazing system and a heavy use area that will be constructed in 2019.

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

Blair Leads Region in Easement Acres

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

In 2018 the program continued to build on the milestone of over 50 farms and 7,600 acres preserved! To date, just under 8 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 \$80,000 for preservation efforts in 2018, 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 \$1,035 per acre. However, the average easement value of current purchases is \$1,300 per acre.

The Blair County Farmland Program went through its 7-year recertification in 2018 and was again approved by the State Board.

The success of the program is a tribute to the commitment of the County Board and the

relationship with the County Commissioners. Five local citizens are appointed to the County Board, representing agriculture, development, municipalities and a member at large. Comm. Tomassetti represents the County of Blair.

Annually, 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 X 5.

Blair County is a leader in the Central PA Region with 51 easements and 7,697 acres permanently preserved for Agriculture.....

County	# of Easements	Acres	Avg \$/Ac	Co Allocation
Blair	51 Farms	7,697 Ac	\$1,035	\$ 80,000
Centre	51 Farms	7,646 Ac	\$2,262	\$112,596
Bedford	17 Farms	3,786 Ac	\$ 565	\$ 2,214
Cambria	16 Farms	2,718 Ac	\$1,084	\$ 7,000
Huntingdon	9 Farms	1,068 Ac	\$1,307	\$ 4,316

Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Road Program

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

Funding for the Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Road Program remained strong, with Blair County again receiving over \$180,000 for projects in 2018.

The funding 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).

The Conservation District had a Quality Assurance, Quality Control Visit by the State Conservation Commission and Dirt & Gravel Road Center Staff in June of 2018. The District met or exceeded expectations in Program Administration, Functionality and Project Site Management. We were encouraged to increase our public outreach efforts to facilitate project applications and accelerate project implementation. We were

commended on our use of Low Volume Road funds to implement green infrastructure BMPs for stormwater management.

Duncansville Borough, Taylor Township and the PA Game Commission all completed projects in 2018.

Currently 14 townships & boroughs and the City of Altoona are 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.

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

Erosion Control and NPDES Permitting

The Blair County Conservation District is delegated duties related to public information, plan review, permit issuance, complaint handling and inspections associated with earth disturbance activities in Blair County.

Workload and the flow of plan/permit submittals remains steady—to that end....the District is cross training additional staff in our delegated duties and has budgeted to employ a second full time E&S Technician position to begin in 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 attain an NPDES permit prior to commencement of the project. NPDES permits are authorized and/or processed thru the District.

In 2018, 19 General and 2 Individual Permits (located in High Quality Watersheds) were processed and approved. In addition, 65 Erosion and Sediment (E&S) Control Plans were reviewed and approved based on the State's Chapter 92 and 102 Regulations.

28 complaints were logged and 53 inspections were conducted at earth moving sites. 637 technical assistance contacts were provided to private individuals, municipalities, consultants, developers and contractors. The unusually wet year 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 earth moving 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....”



Inlet Filter Bag utilized to trap sediment until a construction site is stabilized

Local Food Initiative



Blair County's Urban Ag Network traveled to Pittsburgh to visit many urban ag sites.

Over 30 Blair County residents, municipal staff, teachers, church groups and garden clubs attended BCCD bus tour.

The start of the Blair County Urban Ag Network.



Over the past eight years the Blair County Conservation District has explored ways to strengthen our community food system by hosting workshops and developing technical outreach for local producers. It started with two grant awards (USDA Farmer Market

Promotion Program and PA Dept. of Ag. Specialty Crop grant). This funding sparked our work to organize a farmers' market, arrange farmer-to-farmer training, and develop a local food network. The farmer-to-farmer trainings allow experienced farmers to host workshops. This provides mentoring support where seasoned producers share how to grow, market, and distribute locally grown food. The network is an email distribution list of farmers, restaurant owners, various agency staff and other local supporters and consumers. Through this email list, producers can coordinate and share resources or provide technical support. Information about workshops, events, and new marketing ideas are also shared.

Our work also includes organizing pasture-walks. This is another type of farmer-mentoring and supporting our local food initiative. Experienced cattle graziers host field-days at their farm. They show their best management practices that help make their operation successful. At these events, meat producers across the region can share their successes and barriers of raising animals on a pasture system. Producers also share ideas about marketing and how to get pasture-raised products to local customers.

Our goal of supporting local producers is to bolster agricultural economy and to improve on-farm conservation. Another reason for this work is to address the food insecurity problems our communities face. About 16% of Blair County citizens live in poverty and 13% experience food insecurity. Food insecurity is not having consistent access to food that supports a healthy life.

Farms that market in the community food system cannot solely address the food insecurity issues. Profit margins are small and risks are high for any type of agricultural business.

However, the District was awarded a NACD Urban Ag grant to provide technical support to anyone interested in growing food in a food insecure area—or what is known as a

food desert. Through this grant, the District built a network of community members who are interested in supporting urban ag projects such as community gardens. The goal of the urban ag network is to build a coalition of educators, gardeners, municipal staff, and others who can share knowledge and resources. Together we plan to support existing gardens and identify good locations to start new gardens.

The District is currently partnering with Blair Community Action to build three gardens in a food desert neighborhood of Altoona. The network will deliver a variety of workshops on gardening, cooking, and menu planning to help make the new gardeners successful.



Products sourced from Blair and surrounding counties provide food for Blair's first Farm2Fork Dinner

And finally, the past two years the District has helped organize a farm to fork dinner. This event is held late summer and is a meal provided by a regional chef who creates a menu using locally sourced food. This is a great event to help our urban and suburban residents learn about the delicious, seasonal foods we have growing in our County.

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 seven 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 the City of Altoona and Stiffler McGraw for the completion

of the St. Therese Rain Gardens. Located at the intersection of 5th Street and 25th Avenue, both rain gardens reduce a total of 50,000 lbs of sediment pollution from flowing into local waterways. Funding from the Department of Environmental Protection Stormwater Implementation Program made the \$80,000 project possible.

Prior to planting day, in-classroom lessons were held with Holy Trinity Elementary School students who learned the importance of preventing pollution in our streams. Together the students participated in planting over 500 plants in record time.

Their enthusiasm has inspired fellow classmates and our community to volunteer in green initiatives.



Holy Trinity fourth grade students assisted in the planting of St. Therese Rain Garden



Since 2012, the Intergovernmental Stormwater Committee (ISC) of Blair County has been collaboratively combining resources regarding the MS4 Program. This past year the ISC received the approved Blair County 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. The ISC immediately took action, formulating project priority lists, estimating costs, completing select projects, and submitting 3 grant applications. A primary focus for the committee is the sediment removal of the Lakemont Reservoir

and a series of upstream green infrastructure improvements along Brush Run.

To observe the impacts of stormwater runoff resulting from urbanization, as well as measure the improvements made over time following the implementation of green infrastructure projects, water quality monitoring equipment has been installed upstream

and downstream in Brush Run. The analysis of data collected will aid in funding requests and future research and reports.

The initial and pilot ISC agreement expired at the end of 2018. All but one of the original member municipalities (now numbering ten) remained and entered into a new five year agreement as the ISC to implement the Pollution Reduction Plan by 2023.



Installation of equipment downstream of Brush Run and Lakemont Dam

Creation of local and state partnerships are leading to new and innovative ideas, building educational formats, recreational and habitat opportunities, and ultimately improving the health of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Outstanding Conservation Farm Award



Contour Strips and Cover Crops are critical to the Barnes' Conservation Plan

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

The Barnes Family are life time participants with the Conservation District and the USDA, NRCS. Their mother Sarah signed the first conservation plan for the farm in 1974 and the family since has actively engaged in conservation efforts.

Leroy and Barry Barnes both returned to the farm after receiving associates degrees from Pittsburgh and Penn State, respectively. The brothers have segregated the farm duties to facilitate management of the operation. Leroy handles the Crop Management and Barry focuses on Herd Management.

The Brothers were awarded this same award in 1994 for their conservation work to date. They were re-considered for the award this year due to their continuous and sustained work to better

their operation and consideration of both soil and nutrient management in all aspects of their farms. Farming in the Blue Knob area lends itself to some unique and extreme challenges to include slopes and climate! Contour strips and cover crops on over 800 acres are paramount in helping the brothers maintain soil health and productivity. A rotational grazing system installed in the 1990's is still being maintained today and they continue to improve on the trails, walkways and heavy use areas.

Taking conservation to the next level, they currently have several projects related to establishing habitat on 60 acres, which will

lead to protecting sensitive and threatened bird species as well as controlling invasive plants.

Recently awarded the Century Farm designation—the Barnes Brothers have set the stage for another 100 years perhaps by their long-standing conservation management and consideration of the our natural resources!



Rotational Grazing has been a part of the operation for 20 years

Senator Eichelberger Recognized

Annually the PA Association of Conservation Districts recognizes a PA Legislator that provides support, leadership and commitment to conservation efforts in their region and across Pennsylvania.

The Blair District was honored to nominate Senator John H. Eichelberger, Jr. for the 2018 award. The award was presented to Senator Eichelberger at the Joint Annual Conference held in July. Senator Eichelberger began his service to the Blair County

Conservation District as the Commissioner Director from 1996 to 2006. He served an active role as a Director and had an integral knowledge of both program and budget aspects of our District. His firsthand knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of a Conservation District and County Government in Pennsylvania was beneficial for our collective cause as he moved from

County to State Government.

John was always a strong supporter of Blair County Agriculture, the county's Number 1 industry, and thus the District's involvement in agricultural activities and programs in his legislative area. "Citizen" John continues as an Associate Director for the Blair District.



Blair County Envirothon



**First Place Team
"Red Oaks" from
Central High
School**



**Third Place
"Blue Team"
from
Williamsburg**

**AAHS's
"Blue
Spruce"
took
Second**



The 33rd annual Blair County Envirothon Competition was held on April 26th at Canoe Creek State Park. Our local event is co-sponsored by the Altoona Kiwanis Club. 13 teams from 5 school districts participated in 2018.

What's Happening at Bedford Street....

As noted on the cover, Phase I of the construction of **NatureWorksPark** was nearly completed in 2018.

The Groundbreaking Ceremony was held on March 29th. The first phase was the development of the outdoor education area to include the trails, 2 pavilions (one to seat 32 and one to seat 120), amphitheater, areas for urban agriculture and conservation plantings, functional and educational stormwater practices, a pollinator garden and educational signage.

The trail circuit now connects to the existing boardwalk trail over the created wetland on site.

A second DCNR grant was received for a project to install a series of buffer demonstration areas along the Beaverdam Branch of the Juniata River that borders the northern edge of the property. Six different buffer types to include: Edible, Floriculture, Pollinator, AgroForest, Wildlife Grass and Wooded Wildlife areas are



NatureWorksPark®

proposed. A planting plan was developed in 2018 and planting along with instructional workshops will occur starting in 2019.

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



**(above) District Board, Agency Representatives
and Elected Officials at Groundbreaking
(right) District Staff lift a shovel!**





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Conservation District Board

Harold Bailey, Chairman

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Conservation District Staff

Donna Fisher, District Manager

Bonnie Young, Administrative Assistant

Rich Huether, Ag Conservation Specialist

Beth Futrick, Ombudsman

Diane Thomas, Watershed Specialist

Joshua Stoehr, Resource Conservation Technician

Stephen Dumm, 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 2018 were received as a block grant in the amount of \$58,712 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 \$77,101 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 2018, the District held an agreement with the Intergovernmental Stormwater Committee (ISC) to employ a Coordinator and facilitate the operation of the committee. Ten 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 21.4% of District revenues, the State 52.5%, the ISC 9.6% and District Fees and Reserves 16.5% of the operating budget. Salary and Benefits are the major expense, representing 67.1% of the operating budget.

2018 General Fund Budget

Expenses:

Salaries/Benefits	\$ 453,571
Rent/Insurances/Audit	\$ 30,550
Operating Expenses	\$ 58,650
Payment to County	\$ 33,000
Project Grants	\$100,000
Total Expenses	\$675,771

Revenues:

Beginning Balance	\$ 30,191
County Commissioners	\$144,439
E&S/NPDES Fees	\$ 20,000
State Program Funds	\$254,821
Grants	\$100,000
ISC for Staff Expenses	\$ 65,000
Blair CWF/Reserve	\$ 45,805
Misc. Revenue Sources	\$ 15,515
Total Revenues	\$675,771