

# 2017 Annual Report

SPECIAL POINTS  
OF INTEREST:

- Margaret Angle Recognized for Service
- Green Alternatives for Stormwater
- Plans Progressing for NatureWorks Park

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## District Recognizes Outstanding Service of Margaret Angle



Blair County Commissioners Ted Beam (left) and Terry Tomassetti (right) recognize Margaret Angle for her service as the longest tenured active County Employee!



So what were you doing on March 1, 1968 — the day that Margaret Angle started her tenure with the County of Blair and the Blair County Conservation District?

Margaret's exemplary service and dedication are to be commended as she chose to retire at the end of 2017.

Margaret has served the District, USDA, NRCS and for a time the Blair County Sanitary Admin. Committee for nearly 50 Years. She has been the constant through change — Serving 23 different board members, 5 Managers and 7 Commissioner representatives to the board. True to her dedication, Margaret has allowed us to hire her part time until her position is filled. She did indeed reach that 50 year milestone!

Existing and former Staff, Board, Colleagues and Friends joined Margaret in a Retirement Open House on December 15th.

Thanks Margaret for all you do and have done for Blair County. We wish you the Best of Luck in your well deserved retirement!



PA Senate and House  
Proclamations by  
Sen. John Eichelberger  
and  
Rep. Judy Ward

December 15, 2017



# Planning Leads our Agriculture Initiatives



**Contour Strips and Cover Crops reduce erosion on cropland**

Agriculture is the Number 1 industry in Blair County and the Blair District has a strong program to support agriculture.

In 2016 the District hosted an AmeriCorps member to initiate a program to create Ag Erosion and Sediment Control Plans and assist in the development of Manure Management Plans for Blair Landowners. In 2017 we solidified our commitment to planning by hiring Joshua Stoehr as a full time member of our District Staff. The

District also added Stephen Dumm in the summer of 2017 to support our planning program. District planning efforts is a direct correlation to our decision to participate in "Farm Inspections" as dictated by PA DEP for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. We did choose to provide a local presence to inspect farms and ascertain compliance with plan requirements associated with Erosion Control and Manure Management.

We took our planning efforts state-wide via a grant with the

Centers for Dairy and Beef Excellence to host planning workshops in conjunction with the Ombudsman Program. Blair District staff assisted Conservation Districts and Penn State personnel in 6 Counties (including Blair) with local workshops to create plans using the PAOneStop program in 2017.

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

*Blair County is a leader in the Central PA Region with 50 easements and 7,435 acres permanently preserved for Agriculture.....*

## Blair Leads Region in Farm Easements

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

In 2017 the program hit a milestone of 50 farms preserved! A total of just under 7,500 acres have been preserved for agricultural use in perpetuity! To date, 7.8 million dollars has been provided to Blair County

landowners interested in ensuring that their farmland remains in agricultural use.

Blair County Commissioners allocated a region leading \$80,000 for preservation efforts in 2017, which was matched with State Funds. That allocation brought the total county dollars committed to nearly 1.2 million dollars since the program inception. Increased allocations over the last several years were made possible by Marcellus Shale dollars distributed to the County.

The 50th farm purchased also put Blair County in the lead, for the Central PA region, in both farms sold and acres under easement, as of December 2017.

The average easement value (the difference between the development value and the farmland value as determined by an appraisal) for Blair

County stands at approx. \$1,000 per acre. However, the average easement value of current purchases is \$1,300 per acre.

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 Board with current members being: John Black of Sinking Valley, Chairman; Palmer Brown from Duncansville, Vice-Chair; Cindy Bigelow of Williamsburg; Don Delozier from Hollidaysburg and Robert Bailey from Roaring Spring. Commissioner Terry Tomassetti represents the County.

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.



# Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Road Program



**Poplar Avenue  
Hollidaysburg Borough**

Funding for the Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Road Program remained strong, with Blair County again receiving over \$180,000 for projects in 2017.

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).

Taylor Township, Hollidaysburg Borough, the City of Altoona and the PA Game Commission all completed projects in 2017.

Hollidaysburg Borough and the City of Altoona utilized LVR funds to complete projects on Poplar Avenue and Wordsworth Avenue respectively to control stormwater runoff. The Borough constructed a series of underground infiltration units, rain gardens and grassed swales along Poplar Avenue to infiltrate and convey stormwater from their road that had previously ponded in neighboring properties and driveways. Similarly, the City utilized a “green infrastructure” alternative and constructed a Rain Garden and a pervious parking area on Wordsworth Avenue.

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 X 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.

All earthmoving activities are required to have a written Erosion Control Plan. Many local

municipalities have within their ordinances, the requirement of plan review and approval. 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 2017, 18 General and 3 Individual Permits (located in High Quality Watersheds) were processed. In addition, 69 Erosion and Sediment

(E&S) Control Plans were reviewed and approved based on the State’s Chapter 92 and 102 Regulations.

32 complaints were logged and 69 inspections were conducted at earth moving sites. Significant staff time was spent on the facilitation of plan reviews and inspection of the cross county pipeline project.

Contact the District 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...”*



**Rain Garden at Blair Township Building**

## NFWF Grant Completed

The Blair District wrapped up a three-phased project funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation related to education, project construction and water monitoring in 2017. The grant entitled Green Infrastructure in the Juniata River Basin began with the creation of a stormwater specific website for Blair County citizens, educators, municipalities and resource professionals. Check it out at [www.cleanblairwater.org](http://www.cleanblairwater.org). The second phase of the project dealt with creating demonstration areas within the county related to green

stormwater alternatives. Local Municipalities installed 5 projects across the county at public sites and included signage for informational purposes. The final phase of the project was the preparation of a baseline water quality report that was the culmination of several years worth of in-stream continuous monitoring at 8 sites across the county.

The overall goal of the project was to increase the knowledge base of all related to Green Stormwater Alternatives and Water Quality!

# Outstanding Conservationist Awards



Jim Biddle provides an introduction of his farming practices to local FFA students

*“The District Board has been honoring Outstanding Conservation Efforts since 1968...”*

In 2017, the District chose to recognize both a local farmer and educator for awards – **both with a strong emphasis of Conservation Education.**

**Jim Biddle**, from Williamsburg was awarded the

Outstanding Conservation Farmer Award for his life-long approach to conservation. Mill Hill Farms, LLC now includes the Bicentennial Farm (established in 1797) where Jim grew up and developed his skills as a farmer and conservationist. Jim, and the Biddle family, manages 800 crop acres and over 300 dairy cows. The operation utilizes a plethora of “Best Management Practices” to minimize soil erosion and nutrient loss and maximize soil health and production. Jim recognizes that his land is within the Clover Creek Watershed, one of Blair County’s High Quality Streams, and is vigilant in his management to protect the resource. A strong advocate for no-till and cover crops, Jim has hosted training events at his farm to promote conservation. He is progressive in the management of his soil and nutrient resources and willing to participate in innovative practices and trials. Most importantly Jim is eager to share

his knowledge and promote conservation. As a matter of fact, Jim is featured in several YouTube videos describing the benefits of cover crops and soil health. Jim was also applauded for all the “little” things that he does – like taking an acre of ground out of production to plant a Pollinator Garden or hosting school students for contests and projects. Jim’s value as a Blair County Farmer and as a Conservation District Director, the longest tenured District Director (since 1992) is invaluable and his leadership has helped to guide Blair County’s Ag Industry and the District’s programs.

**Jean Sinal**, Life Science Teacher with 16 years of experience at Hollidaysburg Junior High School was honored as the 2017 Outstanding Conservation Educator. Jean puts forth exceptional skill, creativity, energy, passion, innovation and time into education. She introduces real world issues to her students through current events and then encourages them to discuss the impacts locally, nationally and globally. Jean is resourceful in attaining grants to build a strong curriculum and enhance her classroom experience. She sought and

received NOAA funds for a saltwater aquarium as part of her Chesapeake Bay Watershed unit and has utilized Juniata College’s “Science in Motion” to conduct hands on labs at her school. Jean’s impact on students extends beyond the classroom to include participation in School District events, clubs and committees. She has served on state and national level committees related to the State Standards for Environment and Ecology and Curriculum Review. She also is part of a “train the trainer” network serving as a facilitator for conservation and the environmental resource based programs with a focus toward hands on learning.



Jean Sinal (far left) plants trees in a rain garden at the Hollidaysburg YMCA site

Most recently Jean and her students participated in the design and planting of a Rain Garden at the Hollidaysburg YMCA property. The project now serves as a lasting demonstration of a “Green Infrastructure” alternative and the students that participated were part of a solution for urban stormwater runoff. Jean lives and teaches conservation all day and every day.

**Blair County is fortunate to have citizens such as Jim and Jean serving our students and their community.**



**Jim Biddle and Jean Sinal receive awards from District Manager Donna Fisher**

# Blair County Envirothon



**First Place Team  
"Blue Spruce"  
from Altoona  
Area High School**



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

**AAHS's  
"Red  
Maples"  
took  
Second**



The 32nd annual Blair County Envirothon Competition was held on April 27th at Fort Roberdeau. Our local event is co-sponsored by the Altoona Kiwanis Club. 14 teams from 6 school districts participated in 2017.

## What's Happening at Bedford Street....

Have you driven by the District's property at the intersection of Route 36 and Bedford Street lately....things are continuing to happen!

In 2017, we continued to develop our wetland resources by monitoring and conducting invasive species removal on approximately 1.5 acres of the existing wetland and also along the river corridor.



**Volunteers from the Zion Lutheran Church, Hollidaysburg spent a hot summer day cutting and removing Japanese Knotweed from the site!**

The District received authorization for both the Individual NPDES Permit for Construction Activities and the Chapter 106 Permit for work in the Floodplain in early 2017.

A second DCNR grant was received for the 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 proposed. A preliminary design was developed and planting will likely occur in the fall of 2018.

The District, with the assistance of DiAndrea Media underwent an exercise to name the site and begin marketing activities in anticipation of construction and programming at the site.

Now known as NatureWorks Park, a



# NatureWorksPark®

logo and Facebook page were created. Stay tuned for additional marketing endeavors.

Construction plans and ensuing agreements were finalized with Hollidaysburg Borough which cleared the way to advertise and bid the construction of the first phase of the development. Phase I includes the trails, signage, an amphitheater, pavilions and a soft access to the river at the outdoor environmental education area at the northern portion of the property.

A construction contract was awarded to Ventura Construction Services, Inc. at the end of 2017. Construction of the project is scheduled for March 2018 with completion in early fall. Coming soon...www.natureworkspark.org.

Natureworkspark.org



**Resource Conservation Since 1966**

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 Fax: 814-696-9981  
 E-mail: [bcd@blairconservationdistrict.org](mailto:bcd@blairconservationdistrict.org)  
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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  
 Margaret Angle, District Clerk  
 Rich Huether, Ag Conservation Specialist  
 Jim Eckenrode, Watershed Specialist  
 Beth Futrick, Ombudsman  
 Diane Thomas, Resource Conservation Technician  
 Joshua Stoehr, Resource Conservation Technician  
 Stephen Dumm, Resource Conservation Technician  
 Chelsey Ergler, Stormwater Coordinator  
 Suzanne Black, Conservation Education Specialist  
 Jody Wallace, Urban Ag Specialist  
 in contract with the district through Sept. 2017

## 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 2017 were received as a block grant in the amount of \$57,159 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 \$76,729 plus an additional \$15,390 for our existing well activity. These funds are utilized to cost share salaries and administrative expenses.

**New in 2017, the District entered 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 which also became formalized in 2017. Chelsey Ergler was hired as the Stormwater Coordinator in August of 2017. The two year pilot program will run through December 2018. \$100,000 annually is collected from the committee members based on a prorated basis for employment costs and project costs related to meeting the individual ISC member permit requirements.

### 2017 General Fund Budget

#### **Expenses:**

Salaries/Benefits	\$370,393
Rent/Insurances/Audit	\$ 30,550
Operating Expenses	\$ 67,150
Payment to County	\$ 33,000
Project Grants	\$100,000
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$601,093</b>

#### **Revenues:**

Beginning Balance	\$ 30,191
County Commissioners	\$139,465
E&S/NPDES Fees	\$ 20,000
State Program Funds	\$283,634
Grants	\$100,000
Misc. Revenue Sources	\$ 27,803
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$601,093</b>