

Venango Conservation District 2009 Annual Report

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VENANGO CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania designated conservation districts as a primary local government unit responsible for the conservation of natural resource in the Commonwealth and to be responsible for implementing programs, projects and activities to quantify, prevent and control non-point sources of pollution through its Conservation District Law Act 217. The

purpose of the Act was to address local natural resource concerns at a county level.

Conservation districts are governed by a Board of Directors made up of local citizens representing all walks of life. These volunteers make themselves familiar with their county's natural resource issues. They guide the district's staff in making wise-use

decisions to maintain or enhance their community.

Established in 1961, the Venango Conservation District is a local agency, committed to serving the residents, business, and visitors of Venango County by providing educational, technical and financial assistance for quality and sustainable natural resource management.

2009—A YEAR OF CHALLENGE

Pennsylvania cancelled the West Nile Virus program in Venango County part-way through the season in 2009. The Black Fly Spray program was cancelled in July. Nutrient Management Program funding was reduced. Chapter 201 Program funding was slashed. Even still, the district buckled down and worked through and enjoyed successes throughout the year.

The Venango Conservation District was fortunate to have secured funding to reduce non-point source pollution throughout the county through Pennsylvania's Growing Greener funding. These projects provided money to area farmers to construct Best Management Practices

(BMPs) and provided a more efficient farming operation and reduced non-point source pollution. Funds allowed us to provide money to Clinton Township for their Dirt & Gravel Roads project. Their project provided a more stable roadway and reduced non-point source pollution. We were also able to realize a completed project on Sugarcreek near Wyattville. The project stabilized a severely eroded streambank, installed fish habitat structures and saved a farm field that was eroding away. Funding provided the district with money to plug abandoned wells in the Scrubgrass Creek Watershed. These wells were seeping non-point source

pollution into the watershed. Plugging the wells will reduce pollution and help return the watershed back to health. The district utilized funding to assist the Izaak Walton League in stabilizing the banks of Lower Two Mile Run that was eroding at the Waltonian Park.

The Venango Conservation District was also able to continue to provide technical support to farmers and contractors. We were able to provide local citizens, with environmental education. We were able to partner with local groups and agencies to work to conserve natural resources all over the county. Even through lean times, the district succeeded.

EROSION & SEDIMENT CONTROL PROGRAM

The Venango Conservation District manages Pennsylvania DEP's Erosion and Sediment (E&S) Control Program in Venango County. Sediment can cover macroinvertebrate habitat, clog fish gills, cloud the water and prevent plants from receiving sunlight, or can even carry heavy metals and excess nutrients. Erosion and Sediment Control Best Management Practices (BMPs) prevent sediment pollution from reaching streams. Venango Conservation District E&S Technicians review

Erosion and Sediment Control Plans. These plans define the use of E&S BMPs to collect runoff and filter sediment before releasing the water from project sites that disturb the surface of the land.

The district also reviews DEP's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits. These plans are needed for larger projects with earth disturbance. These permits add more structure to the plan to ensure pollution

threats are eliminated. District technicians inspect permitted sites to assure compliance with the approved plans. Technical assistance is also provided to landowners with site visits to address erosion concerns.

In 2009, 20 Erosion and Sediment Control plans were reviewed by the Venango Conservation District. 5 NPDES permits were issued in 2009 as well.

DIRT & GRAVEL ROADS PROGRAM

The Venango County Dirt & Gravel Roads program, administered by the Venango Conservation District, provides education and funding to municipalities to improve dirt & gravel roads in the county. Trout Unlimited found that sediment from dirt roads can be a major contributor of pollution to streams in Pennsylvania. As a result, the Commonwealth allocates four million dollars statewide annually to Conservation Districts for its Dirt & Gravel Roads program.

The Dirt & Gravel Roads program

can provide funds to pay for the purchase of surface stabilizing fabric, aggregate, culverts, subsurface drainage, slope protection materials and vegetative stabilization materials. Funds can also be used to rent heavy equipment that may be needed to complete the projects. A double benefit of Dirt & Gravel Roads projects is that not only does area stream health improve, but also, the municipalities end up with a more stabilized roadway requiring less maintenance that eases costs to their budgets.

In 2009, eight projects were funded to Venango County municipalities including:

Frenchcreek Township - \$11737.50

Cornplanter Township - \$9938.89

Richland Township - \$10600.00

Clinton Township - \$26588.00

City of Oil City - \$1881.34

Mineral Township - \$18808.00,
\$13308.00, and \$17759.00

LOWER TWO MILE RUN/EAST SANDYCREEK ASSESSMENT

The United States American Recovery Act provided funding for the Venango Conservation District, in cooperation with DEP and the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, to perform assessment work on the Lower Two Mile Run and East Sandy Creek watersheds. These watersheds have been identified as a priority to assess by DEP. Surface-water quality assessments are valuable because the information gathered can be used by organizations to develop programs to bring threatened watersheds to

health.

District staff performed assessment work in 2009 including warm water chemistry samples, high water and low water flow rates and a visual walking assessment of the watersheds. The information will identify actual and potential impacts to the watershed and determine if the environmental conditions are supporting statewide water uses, public health and safety, economic stability and quality of life for Venango County residents.

District staff will continue to perform assessment work into 2010. Samples will also include biological samples and habitat assessments. All sampling data will be provided to DEP. The information will be used to prepare a watershed protection and restoration plan. The plan will be used as a tool for watershed initiatives such as creating local storm water management ordinances, identifying growth, protecting of areas in local comprehensive plans, and targeting areas of restoration.

NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus are the major pollutants in lakes and estuaries and the second leading source of pollution in rivers. These nutrients can come from non point source pollutants from agricultural fertilizers, animal waste and sediments. These pollutants can cause excessive algae growth, which reduces the dissolved oxygen in the water. Reduced dissolved oxygen can inhibit respiration, growth and reproduction of aquatic life. The use of a Nutrient Management Plan can be very helpful in the reduction of nutrient pollution from agriculture operations.

In the spring of 1992, the Pennsylvania legislature passed and the

governor signed the Nutrient Management Act into law. Before this legislation was passed, problems with nutrient pollution were administered under the Clean Streams Law, which dealt only with surface waters. The Nutrient Management Act is the first law in Pennsylvania that requires regulatory oversight of nutrient plans on certain farms. The Act states that concentrated animal operations (CAOs) are required to develop and implement nutrient management plans.

Concentrated Animal Operations are defined as operations where the animal density exceeds two animals equivalent units (AEUs) per acre on an annualized basis. An AEU is defined as 1,000 pounds of live weight. Five to ten percent of Penn-

sylvania's farms are estimated to fall into the CAO category. The other 90% are encouraged to develop and implement nutrient management plans voluntarily.

The Venango Conservation District can provide technical assistance and local Nutrient Management program administration. We maintain a list of commercial nutrient management planners available to develop a plan and we can review and approve nutrient management plans. Staff has even created a checklist to help the operator gather information before the consultant begins planning in an effort to create a more streamlined planning experience.

AGRICULTURAL BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES PROGRAM

The Venango Conservation District was awarded three Growing Greener grants addressing Agricultural Best Management Practices and has completed two of those grants in 2009. Since 2006 the district has utilized the funds from these grants to implement Agricultural Best Management Practices (AG BMPs) on farming operations in Venango County. The ultimate goal of the practices is to reduce non-point source pollutants such as sediment and nutrients from entering nearby waterways. Results of the projects are reduced pollution,

and an operation that can be managed with less energy and even a healthier environment for livestock. Operators that have been selected to receive project funding are those that are actively participating in environmentally sustainable agriculture operations. Criteria that selection was based on include: overall need for the practice, environmental benefit, and the ability of the operator to complete and maintain the practice.

Agricultural Best Management Practices that were constructed in

2009 included the installation of roof gutters, which reduced the amount of sediment and nutrients making their way from the barn area to the nearby waterway. Also constructed were a heavy use area to reduce sediment runoff. On other projects, fencing was reorganized to keep livestock from tramping through nearby wetlands and streams or to promote rotational grazing. Another project addressed storm water runoff through the use of a grassed water diversion, barn roof gutters and a rubber water bar to divert water runoff.

CONSERVATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In 2009 The Venango Conservation District entered into an agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States Department of Agriculture to participate in their Conservation Techni-

cal Assistance program. This program provides resources to the district to provide technical assistance to farmers to implement conservation practices. District staff were trained to assist NRCS in preparing

conservation plans, inspection and certification of construction projects, to certify conservation practices, and to prepare grazing plans for farm operations in Venango County.

WATERSHED PROGRAM

The Venango Conservation District's Watershed Conservation Program is coordinated by the District's Watershed Specialist. The goals of the Watershed Specialist are to provide technical assistance to watershed organizations, to help new organizations form, to assess the quality of local watersheds, to aid in developing watershed preservation and restoration plans, and to educate the community about the importance of watershed conservation.

In 2009, the Venango Conservation District's Watershed Specialist provided technical assistance to the Scrubgrass Creek Watershed Association in their effort to install a passive treatment system in the watershed. He created a GIS map of the watershed for the group. He instructed the group on the proper installation of a weir.

The VCD Watershed Specialist as-

sisted the South Sandy Creek Watershed Association in their efforts to complete an assessment plan for the watershed. He also assisted the group with information to apply to the Pennsylvania Growing Greener Grant program to construct a passive treatment system to reduce non-point source pollution in the watershed.

The Watershed Specialist assisted the Venango PaSEC group by creating a GIS map of the abandoned well sites they have found on Oil Creek State Park through their Orphan Well Hunting program.

He also assisted the Oil Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited with their Trout in the Class Room Program. He coordinated the exchange of a tank and supplies from a Franklin High School classroom to a Cranberry Elementary School classroom. He coordinated the purchase

of a new tank and supplies for a Victory Elementary School classroom.

He assisted the Sandy Creek Conservancy Group with their habitat improvement project.

The Watershed Specialist worked with Two Mile Run County Park planning their environmental education trails. He also coordinated several Growing Greener Grant Program projects for the district.

The VCD Watershed Specialist coordinated environmental education efforts in 2009 by conducting environmental education programs for local elementary school students as well as for Clarion University students. He assisted the district in the successful placement of two AmeriCorps educator volunteers and coordinated their environmental education efforts.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The role of the environmental education program of the Venango Conservation District is to create a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and develops the necessary attitudes, skills, and expertise needed to address environmental issues and make informed decisions that lead to responsible action.

In 2009, the Venango Conservation District was able to utilize the AmeriCorps program with two education volunteers. Volunteers began work in May of 2009 and jumped right into participation in educational programs provided by the district. They familiarized themselves with previously created district lesson plans. In addition, the volunteer team created new lesson plans such as a Living Labora-

tory, Nature's Music, and Soil Painting. They made regular educational presentations to the Oil City YMCA Day Camp and the Oil City Salvation Army Day Camp throughout the summer. The team created several programs open to the general public such as How's Your Soil, Pond Management, Wildlife Conservation and Water Quality. The team also worked in cooperation with Two Mile Run County Park to place a series of educational geocache sites on the park.

The AmeriCorps volunteer team also took part in a Teacher Workshop where they demonstrated a lesson plan on water quality testing, a guided educational trail hike and presented an overview of educational resources available at Two Mile Run County Park.

The team provided an educational program "All About Soil" as part of the Titusville Middle School's Wilderness Camp at Wesley Woods Camp in Grand Valley. There were 150 sixth grade students in attendance, along with 10 middle school teachers, 10 Edinboro University student teachers and 10 camp staff members.

In 2009, the team also conducted two educational programs for high school students at the Natural Resources class at the Venango Technology Center. Sessions included a water pollution and quality testing presentation followed by a water quality testing lab and macroinvertebrate study of a neighboring stream. Total educational participants reached was 615 from the summer through fall of 2009.

SCRUBGRASS WELL PLUGGING PROJECT

In 2009, the Venango Conservation District saw the successful completion of this project, thanks to funding from two Pennsylvania Growing Greener grants. This two phase project gathered the cooperation of the district, the Scrubgrass Creek Watershed Association, Venango County Commissioners, Oil Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Venango PaSEC.

Scrubgrass Creek and its tributaries suffered great pollution by orphan well discharges. An orphan well is an oil, gas or water well that no longer has an owner. These wells can seep iron and other metals up through their shaft and out to the surface of the land. This project's goals were to find the discharging wells and plug them. Pre-project water chemistry samples were collected. Well hunters identi-

fied several wells for plugging. Wells were plugged and post-project water chemistry samples were collected. The plugging of these wells will aid in the restoration of the creek to a stocked trout fishery by removing pollutants such as Iron, aluminum, Manganese, and acidity from entering into the stream from old abandoned wells.

SUGARCREEK BANK STABILIZATION PROJECT

The Venango Conservation District received funding for the stabilization of the banks of Sugar Creek. This project, broken onto two phases, stabilized 500 feet of stream bank, and included 100 feet of riparian area and the installation of habitat improvement.

This project addressed severe erosion on a section of stream bank of Sugar Creek near Wyattville. The erosion of this stream bank was

contributing heavy amounts of sediment loading to Sugar Creek every year.

The construction included the creating of a bench which was rock armored from the toe. Entrenched rock armoring was installed in the bed of the stream. Fish habitat structures were installed as were log vein devices. The bank was slope back, seeded and mulched. Rock head walls were constructed

at each end of the project site. Water drainage was diverted to a rock filter channel and riparian plantings were installed.

The district sends special thanks to project cooperators who included, the land owner, PennDOT, US Fish & Wildlife, PA Fish and Boat Commission, Cooperstown Sand & Gravel, Venango PaSEC, Oil Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited and DCNR Bureau of Forestry.

VENANGO STREAM BANK STABILIZATION INITIATIVE

Venango County has 1,206.56 miles of stream of which almost all have bank erosion problems. This project provides funding to Venango County residents, agencies, non-profit organizations, and municipalities who wish to stabilize their stream banks that have erosion problems. Project applications were received in the spring of 2009. Applications went through a ranking process in June. Fourteen applications were received and ranked. The ranking committee chose the top six projects.

The projects chosen were design/build type projects. Overall, each project called for the digging of a

key trench at the base of the bank and placing a weighted rock toe of native R-7 riprap from the streambed to an appropriate height at or below the high water mark. The bank would be sloped, seeded with specialized riparian seed mix and covered with an erosion control fabric. The bank would then be vegetated using native woody species. Fish habitat structures would also be installed along the shoreline. These projects have a direct impact on restoring and protecting habitat and improving water quality.

The Venango Stream Bank Stabilization Initiative project directly relates to watershed plans in Ve-

nango County including the French Creek Watershed Conservation Plan and the Allegheny National Wild and Scenic River Plan, both of which recommend creating and restoring riparian buffer zones to help control non-point source pollution and stream bank erosion.

In 2009, two projects were completed. The first was located on Little Sugar Creek in Cherrytree Township. This project stabilized nearly 180 feet of stream bank. The second project was located on Upper Two Mile Run in Sugarcreek Borough. This project stabilized nearly 85 feet of stream bank. The district continues to coordinate projects to take place in 2010.

WEST NILE SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

In 2000, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection created the West Nile Surveillance Program. Counties receive funding to help their efforts to detect mosquitoes that could carry the West Nile virus. Humans who are bitten by and infected mosquito can contract encephalitis. Encephalitis is an inflammation of the brain.

The funds enabled the counties to cover personnel costs, as well as county-based public education efforts. The state provided the coun-

ties with all the necessary equipment, such as light traps, gravid traps and dippers to collect adult and larvae samples. These samples were then sent to the DEP lab for testing. Treatments would follow according to sampling results.

In 2009, the Venango Conservation District's West Nile Surveillance program began very smoothly. Surveillance at sites around the county started a little later in the year because of cold weather, but technicians collected samples and high

numbers of mosquitoes were found near the Oil City Marina, the Oil City Wastewater Treatment Plant and at Oil Creek State Park. These sights received treatments in an effort to reduce mosquito numbers in those areas.

Unfortunately, funding for the VCD West Nile Surveillance program was cancelled part way through the season for 2009 and no funding will be available for 2010.

NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AT TWO MILE RUN COUNTY PARK

The offices of the Venango Conservation District are located on Two Mile Run County Park. This provides us with an excellent opportunity to offer natural resource management guidance to park management. It also provides the district with opportunities for environmental education and improvement projects relating to water quality, forestry, agriculture, mineral extraction and wildlife.

JUSTUS LAKE DAM – In 2009, the dam at Justus Lake underwent a dam inspection by a County engineering consultant. The district assisted park management and the County in preparing the dam for inspection, coordinated the inspection with the consultant, and coordi-

nated another inspection with DEP. The DEP inspection required some maintenance to the Emergency Action Plan. District staff coordinated the necessary work to the plan.

PARK IMPROVEMENTS – The Venango Conservation District assisted the park in submitting grants for two park improvement projects in 2009. District staff worked with Park staff to submit a grant request to DCNR for improvements to the park's environmental education trail. One component of the project would be to make the trail handicap accessible. District staff also assisted with grant proposals to the Northwest Commission's Greenways Implementation Grant program and the Pennsylvania Fish

and Boat Commission. These applications proposed the construction of a new boat launch, dock and handicap accessible rest rooms. District staff also worked together with park management to plan for maintenance and improvements to existing trails on the park.

FISH HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS – In 2009, the Venango Conservation District coordinated with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and the Oil Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited to construct fish habitat structures and install them in the lake. In August, 15 porcupine crib structures were built and installed in the lake. These structures mimic natural fish habitat.

OFFICE SALES

As a public service, the Venango Conservation District offers the sale of kits and supplies for sale. The district offers the sale of 7.5 minute topographic maps of the county. In 2009, the district sold 51 topographic maps to the public.

The district also offers drinking water test kits. The kits test for fecal

coliform bacteria. In 2009 the district sold 15 water test kits to the public.

The district also offers Venango County Plat Books for sale. The books contain parcel information of properties in Venango County. In 2009 the district sold 21 Plat Books.

The district offers soil test kits for

sale to the public. The district sold 16 soil test kits in 2009

The district also offered its annual Seedling Sale. Over 4,100 trees were sold in 2009. The purpose of the sale is to promote conservation in Venango County through the planting of trees and the use of groundcover for erosion control.



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*“Humankind has not woven the web of life.
We are but one thread within it.
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
All things are bound together.
All things connect.”*

~Chief Seattle



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