

A hand holding a pen points to a line graph on a computer screen. The graph shows a fluctuating line with a shaded area underneath, set against a grid background. The overall image has a green and blue color scheme.

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Venango Conservation District

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2023 VENANGO CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania designated conservation districts as a primary local government unit responsible for the conservation of natural resources in the Commonwealth and to be responsible for implementing programs, projects and activities to quantify, prevent and control nonpoint 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, businesses and visitors of Venango County by providing educational, technical and financial assistance for quality and sustainable natural resource management.

2023 VENANGO CONSERVATION DISTRICT

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mike Ohler
Chairman
Tom Arbuckle
Vice Chair
Chris Weber
Secretary/Treasurer
Sam Breene
Commissioner
John Kolojejchick
Joe Pastor
Jeff Schwab

STAFF

Lisette Lane
District Manager
Haley Bechtel
Resource Technician
Jane Burkett
Ag Resource Technician
Jake Cochran
DGLVR Technician
Bailey Kozalla
Watershed Specialist
Abbey Zerbe
Administrative Secretary

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Sam Breene
Chairman
Chip Abramovic
Mike Dulaney

2023 YEAR IN HIGHLIGHTS

Strategic Highlights

Work accomplished on our five-year strategic plan action steps in 2023:

- At least 6 new Dirt & Gravel Road & Low Volume Roads Program projects will be completed.
 - Four Dirt & Gravel Road projects were completed in 2023
 - Four Low Volume Road projects were completed in 2023.
- Complete 2 Barnyard Stabilization Projects.
 - Construction was completed on a complex barnyard stabilization project in 2023. Construction was started in 2022 and funded in 2021.
 - A smaller project for an animal walkway and an improved animal heavy use area was completed in 2023.
- Continued Funding for Ag BMP projects will be established.
 - Two Northwest Commission funded projects were completed in 2023: one spring development and one improved animal heavy use area.
 - The Conservation District held its first ever round of Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) application rankings, and all the funding was awarded.
 - A Growing Greener grant was applied for in 2023 and rankings will be announced in 2024.

Financial Highlights

- The Venango Conservation District was awarded a Growing Greener grant and a Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) grant for its Fisherman's Cove Streambank Stabilization project which allowed the District to finally begin construction.
- The Venango Low Volume Roads (LVR) program was able to hold a supplemental grant round. The VCD was pleased to support municipalities throughout the county and see more LVR projects completed.

Operating Highlights

- In January of 2023, the Venango Conservation District brought on four new staff. The staff have all been working hard to acclimate to their positions, and they are excited to see what the new year will bring.
- The Venango Conservation District welcomed a college intern for the summer. Elijah Flinchbaugh, a student from Thiel College, worked with the staff to learn about the duties of conservation districts and to help install the new pollinator garden.
- The VCD experienced some staff turnover in 2023 within the administrative secretary position. Turnover always presents challenges, and the staff is banding together to find their way through it and help each other learn.

We are so thankful for the hard work and dedication of our staff members, new and existing alike. We look forward to seeing what we all will accomplish together as the newcomers grow into their positions.

Looking Ahead

- Staff is working together to coordinate several educational events for 2024 that will be open to the public.
- Staff is looking forward to contracting and, hopefully, beginning construction on the ACAP project in 2024.
- Staff is excited to see more progress on the Fisherman's Cove Streambank Stabilization project in 2024.
- Staff is looking forward to seeing the newly planted pollinator garden in bloom and ready for visitors.

DISTRICT PROGRAMS IN 2023

Agriculture

The Venango Conservation District administers the Pennsylvania Nutrient Management Program in Venango County. This program provides technical assistance and local program administration. The District maintains a list of commercial nutrient management planners available to develop a plan. Jane Burkett is the district's Agricultural Technician/Resource Conservationist.

- Jane assisted an operator in transferring a Nutrient Management Plan to a new landowner in 2023.
- Jane assisted operators in completing 4 Manure Management Plans in 2023.
- Jane completed 2 Ag E&S plans in 2023.

The District coordinates agricultural education events in Venango County.

- Jane participated in several outreach efforts with cooperating conservation districts. She gave a talk at Clarion Conservation District's Russ Wilson Pasture Walk.
- Jane spoke to a homeschool group on a farm about the importance of Nutrient and Manure Management Plans and Best Management Practices.
- Jane held an ACAP outreach dinner at Hoss' in June. She presented information about the new funding opportunity to operators, provided them with resources, and answered their questions.
- Jane began planning several large educational events that will be held in the upcoming years.

The District works to bring funding to operations in Venango County to install best management practices in an effort to reduce nonpoint source pollution.

- Jane completed a complex Growing Greener project she was awarded in 2022 in the French Creek watershed.
- Jane was awarded two Northwest Commission grants in 2022 - one to install a spring development and the other to install a heavy use area at operations in Venango County. Both of the projects were completed in 2023.

- Jane spearheaded the Venango Conservation District's ACAP program as it held its first round of rankings. Nine applications were received from operators throughout the county. The District believed the awarded applicant to have an excellent project.



To the left is a progress picture of the Animal Heavy Use Area constructed with the Growing Greener grant Jane completed this year.

Watershed Activities

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania provides grant funding to conservation districts to employ a Watershed Specialist. The Watershed Specialist supports local watershed associations in their efforts to provide an environment for healthy local watersheds. Bailey Kozalla is the Venango Conservation District's Watershed Specialist.

- Bailey attended regular meetings of local watershed groups throughout 2023, including the Scrubgrass Creek Watershed Association, the Oil Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and the PA Senior Environmental Corps.
- Bailey provided Venango County land owners with technical assistance. Land owners asked for guidance on planting riparian vegetation, preventing stream bank erosion, identifying stream protection projects, and preventing access road washout and sediment deposition on their properties.
- Bailey gave an educational presentation at "Training Day" for Venango County Envirothon in 2023.
- Bailey assisted Crawford County Conservation District, PA Fish & Boat Commission, and Pymatuning Lake Association with constructing and placing fish habitat structures for the Pymatuning Reservoir.
- Bailey assisted Clarion Conservation District with several electrofishing surveys as she worked toward earning her own electrofishing license.
- Bailey assisted the Clarion Conservation District and Trout Unlimited with a streambank stabilization project on East Sandy Creek in Venus, PA.

- Bailey was awarded funding for a Remake Learning Days mini grant which she used to hold a *What's in Your Water?* event to teach families about identifying stream water quality.
- Bailey obtained monthly piezometer readings at Two Mile Run park's Justus Lake reservoir dam.
- Bailey participated in many other educational outreach initiatives with cooperating organizations and conservation districts.

Dirt Gravel & Low Volume Road Program

The Venango Conservation District administers the Pennsylvania Dirt Gravel & Low Volume Road (DGLVR) Program in Venango County. This program provides technical assistance and funding to construct Best Management Practices on dirt roads as well as sealed surface roads with an average traffic count of less than 500 cars per day. The practices reduce nonpoint source pollution to local watersheds. Jake Cochran is the Venango Conservation District's DGLVR Technician.

Projects completed in 2023:

- Irwin Township, Kerr Road (Phase II) \$174,185.00 DGR - added fill material
- Rockland Township, St. George Road \$122,000.00 DGR - added fill material and added underdrain
- Rockland Township, Seneca Hemlock Road \$107,051.00 DGR - added fill material and placed a DSA driving surface
- Pinegrove Township, Hale Road (Phase II) \$194,580.00 DGR - added turnouts, added new cross pipes, replaced existing cross pipes, added fill material, and seeded/mulched
- Rouseville Borough, Highland Avenue (Phase II) \$24,398.62 LVR - installed turn outs, replaced cross pipes, installed bank benches, thinned/pruned vegetation, and seeded/mulched
- Richland Township, N. Kahle Lake Road \$59,741.75 LVR - added new cross pipes, replaced existing cross pipes, added underdrain
- Oakland Township, Creek Road \$55,690.00 LVR - added fill material and installed a high-water bypass
- Oakland Township, Creek Road (Phase II) \$8,700.00 LVR - performed daylighting

Projects awarded funding in 2023:

- Canal Township, Wood Road \$95, 877.00 DGR - plan to add fill material, add new cross pipes, add grass swale, add new cross pipes, add DSA driving surface.
- Oakland Township, Gifford Road \$147,430.96 DGR - plan to add new cross pipes, add fill material, and perform daylighting
- Pinegrove Township, Hale Road (Phase III) \$197,720.00 DGR - plan to replace existing cross pipes, add new cross pipes, and add fill material.
- Irwin Township, Kerr Road (Phase III) \$219,306.60 DGR - plan to add fill material and surface material
- Irwin Township, Whieldon Road \$23,700.00 LVR - plan to daylight with the intent to address drainage concerns in the future

Pennsylvania Chapters 102 & 105 Programs

The Venango Conservation District administers these Pennsylvania programs concentrating on employing Best Management Practices at earth moving projects to reduce sediment pollution to local watersheds. Haley Bechtel is the Venango Conservation District's Resource Conservation Technician.

- Haley completed 14 Erosion and Sedimentation Plan reviews in 2023.
- Haley reviewed and approved 6 PA G02 NPDES Permits and reviewed 12 General Permits of varying types.
- Haley provided technical assistance to Venango County land owners by conducting site inspections, answering questions, and responding to complaints.
- Haley collaborated with Armstrong, Clarion, and Jefferson County Conservation Districts to hold a workshop which was free and open to the public. This workshop presented basic information on Chapter 102 and 105 regulations, invasive species, and PA Fish & Boat Regulations.

Other Work in 2023

- The Venango Conservation sold 840 tree seedlings through our 2023 Annual Seedling Sale.
- The District sold its turbine blower to a local municipality in 2023. The District found that there was a decreased demand from municipalities to borrow the unit and was happy to sell it to a township that able to use it for the improvement of its community. The District was also able to share some of its garage space with its cooperators to make it easier for the cooperators to carry out their initiatives.
- The Venango Conservation District received a mini grant from Keep PA Beautiful to install an educational pollinator garden on the office grounds.

Fisherman's Cove Road Streambank Stabilization Project

- The Venango Conservation District was able to award Venango Dirt & Gravel Road Program funding to Victory Township to stabilize the streambank on Fisherman's Cove Road in 2021. Then a significant slide event in March of 2022 caused the price of the Fisherman's Cove project to skyrocket. Thanks to the efforts of VCD's previous district manager, the District was awarded a Growing Greener grant and a DCED grant in 2023 to combine with the Dirt and Gravel funding to cover the extra costs, allowing construction to finally begin in 2023.



On the left, is a before picture of the slide and, on the right, is a progress picture of construction at Fisherman's Cove

