



The Resource

A Newsletter of the Mercer
County Conservation District

Volume 24, Issue 1

January 2024

Welcome, Zoe & Tim!

Zoe Heckathorn is the new Mercer County Vector Management Coalition Coordinator. She is from Franklin, PA, but has spent the last four years in Greenville while attending Thiel College. Zoe graduated in 2023 with a B.S. in Environmental Science and a minor in Wildlife Biology. When she isn't on the water or exploring the outdoors, Zoe volunteers for the Venango County Humane Society and Relay for Life. She is excited to work with local communities to protect public health and increase awareness about mosquitoes and ticks.

Tim Davis is the new Agricultural Resource Conservationist. He graduated with a degree in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana. Tim is looking forward to meeting and working with producers in the county.



A field planted with cover crop as part of a cost-share project through ACAP.

Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program in Mercer County

By Tim Davis

The Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) is up and running in Mercer County! The purpose of the program is to provide both financial and technical assistance for the implementation of best management practices (BMPs) on agricultural operations in the Commonwealth. Agricultural producers within our county can apply for financial assistance with planned conservation practices that reduce nutrient and sediment pollution from the farm. We accept applications on a quarterly basis with deadlines as follows: 2/5, 5/6, 8/5, and 11/4. Please direct any questions about this program to Agricultural Resource Conservationist Tim Davis at 724-662-2242 or tdavis@mercercountypa.gov.

Pioneers in Conservation Awards

By Kelcy Marini

We presented the 2023 Pioneers in Conservation Awards at our annual dinner on March 30th at the Mercer County Career Center. These awards recognize individuals and organizations who have committed to local conservation efforts and made it their mission to inspire others through their actions. The following people were chosen for an award:

Conservationist (Lifetime Contributor): John Oliver for his lifelong dedication to conserving and protecting the great natural resources of Pennsylvania.

Educator (Teacher): April Claus for her enthusiasm towards environmental education and by providing hands-on experiences for both children and adults.

Individual (Volunteer): Dana Christy for his involvement with Shenango River Watchers and installing the new mile markers along the Shenango River.

Individual (Posthumous): Pete Anthony was a long-time member of the Neshannock Chapter of Trout Unlimited and a founding member of the Munnell Run Cooperative Trout Nursery.

Individual (Posthumous): Gayle Hillkirk was a long-time member of the Neshannock Chapter of Trout Unlimited, a director of Friends of Goddard, and a co-founder of the Deer Creek Project.

The 2024 dinner will be on Wednesday, March 6th at the Mercer County Career Center. Please call our office at 724-662-2242 to purchase tickets.

MOSQUITO AND TICK FACT VS FICTION

By Zoe Heckathorn

MOSQUITOES ARE THE DEADLIEST ANIMAL ON EARTH

It is estimated that 1 million people die every year due to diseases spread by mosquitoes. Most deaths occur because of Malaria, but viruses such as West Nile, Yellow Fever, Dengue, and Zika can also be fatal.

FACT

BATS LOVE TO EAT MOSQUITOES

While providing habitat for endangered bats is beneficial for many reasons, it will not fix a mosquito issue. Bats will eat mosquitoes if nothing else is available, but they would much rather seek larger meals like moths or beetles.

FICTION

ONLY FEMALE MOSQUITOES BITE

Female mosquitoes require proteins from blood to produce their eggs. Depending on the species, a female may lay up to 500 eggs in her lifetime. Male mosquitoes feed on plant nectar and do not require any blood meals.

FACT

YOU WILL HAVE A BULLSEYE RASH IF YOU'RE INFECTED

Only around 70% of people that are infected with Lyme Disease have the telltale bullseye rash, also known as erythema migrans. This rash may present in many ways and can look different for everyone.

FICTION

TICKS PREFER GRASS, BRUSH, AND LEAVES

Ticks are often found in tall grasses or shrubs that are less than 3 feet tall. During the winter, they seek forest understory or leaves to survive. Ticks use the vegetation to "quest" or extend their front legs, waiting for a host to pass by so they can crawl onto it.

FACT

TICKS ONLY CARRY LYME DISEASE

Ticks can transmit more than one disease at a time. The diseases a tick may carry also varies by species. Lyme Disease may be the most common, but cases of anaplasmosis, babesiosis, and ehrlichiosis have been on the rise.

FICTION

2024 Field & Forest Event

By Nick Trivelli

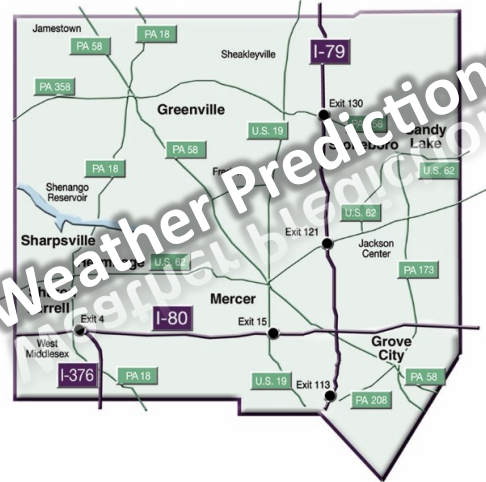
The Mercer County Conservation District (MCCD) is happy to announce that we will be holding our 2nd Annual Field & Forest event. This year's program will be held at WestWinn Urban Ag aquaponics facility in Sharon, PA. This year's guest speakers will be Dave Cole from Living Soil Garlic Farm, Mike Kovach from Walnut Hill Farm, Hannah Durkin from All-Bee-Right Apiary and Haleigh Coryea from Coryea's Maple Products. Our keynote speaker is Rob Studor from WestWinn Urban Ag.

Come join us for this unique agricultural event on Saturday, March 23rd from 10:00am to 2:00pm. The event is free, registration is required and will be capped at 40 attendees. Doors open at 9:30am. A light lunch will be provided. Donation to WestWinn Urban Ag are encouraged. Please register for the event at www.MercerCountyCD.com or on our Facebook page.

What does an El Niño Spring / Summer Mean for Mercer County?

By Gerald Bickel

After reading the news you may have found yourself asking, what is an El Niño, and what does that mean for my area? El Niño / La Niña is a 2-to-7-year climatic pattern that strongly effects the United States. In an El Niño Year like 2024, warm water from equatorial Asia gathers off the west coast of the Americas, changing weather nationwide. According to the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center, during the 2024 El Niño year, Mercer County should expect a spring with above average temperatures and average rainfall, followed by a summer of both above average temperature and rainfall. Above average temperatures should continue through the remainder of 2024, while precipitation should be average for fall and winter. With increased summer rainfall, it is important to be mindful of weather forecasts when exposing soil or applying fertilizers, and avoiding these activities if rain is in the forecast. This increased rainfall will also impact local streams. High stream flow from heavy rain may erode banks, deposit woody debris, and cause flooding in many areas this year. If you have questions about fertilizer use or stream damage, MCCD has resources to assist you.



A New Life for Lyons Road

By Shawn Hedglin

The Dirt and Gravel Roads Program funded a significant project on Lyons Road in Lake Township during 2023. The road extends 8,866 feet from its intersection with Stockfarm on the South to its intersection with Fredonia Road on the North. The funded project is located on the southern 2,840 feet of the roadway, which is constructed primarily of stone, dirt, and dust with the native underlying soils consisting of Frenchtown and Ravenna map units. These soils are both very limited for use as road building material as they have shallow depths to the saturated zone, are prone to ponding, are susceptible to

frost action, and have low strength. The elevation of the roadway with respect to the surrounding area, lack of crown, and poor material all contributed to a saturated road base that exhibited significant surface deformation and potholes. The outlined conditions culminate in a surface that requires frequent maintenance and is a source of sediment pollution to two streams that cross the project area.

Because of the road elevation, low soil strength, and predisposition for saturated conditions, a significant amount of open graded stone was utilized to accomplish two goals: (1) raise the road profile (2) provide adequate base which has the ability to freely drain to the road shoulder and discharge to areas adjacent to the streams through constructed stone drains (keeping subsurface water clean). This road base was placed on top of geotextile fabric which extended from the existing road banks and was covered on top with a layer of geotextile fabric functionally creating a free draining base that when combined with the newly created road crown, promotes subsurface water to seek the road shoulder and drain through the resulting constructed stone drain. Three separate French Mattresses were also installed to provide additional drainage in areas where wet conditions directly abut the roadway. Following the drainage/base installation, 2A limestone was added to provide material that could be shaped to deliver proper crown to receive Driving Surface Aggregate. Finally, 8 inches of loose Driving Surface Aggregate was placed and compacted to provide a final wearing surface. The combination of materials and practices provides a strong road surface capable of carrying traffic, providing drainage, and reducing maintenance.

Our thanks and appreciation go out to Lake Township and their road workers for making this a successful project!

Quick Facts

Materials Used

19,000 Sq.Yards Geotextile
358 Sq. Yards Geogrid
3,069 Tons AASHTO #1 Limestone
4,175 Tons 2A Limestone
1,981 Tons DSA
Total Cost: \$382,923.38



The Lakeview "Scudmarks" with advisor Justin McGinnis and Mercer County Commissioner Timothy M. McGonigle.

A Look Back at Envirothon 2023

By Kelcy Marini

This year, approximately 85 students made up 17 teams from 6 schools in Mercer County: Commodore Perry, Greenville, Hickory, Lakeview, Jamestown, and West Middlesex. We also had exceptional representation from our station experts: PA Game Commission for the Wildlife station; USDA National Resources Conservation Services for the Soils and Land Use station; PA DCNR Bureau of Forestry for the Forestry station; University of Pittsburgh Pymatuning Lab of Ecology for the Aquatic Ecology station; and Carnegie Museum of Natural History for the Current Issue station.

We would like to congratulate the Lakeview "Scudmarks" and advisor Justin McGinnis for winning 1st place at the 2023 Mercer County Envirothon. They went on to the statewide competition and placed 13th overall against 63 teams and 3rd overall in the forestry station. We would also like to congratulate West Middlesex's "Sassaglass" and advisor Brock Glass for taking 2nd place, as well as the Commodore Perry "Bull Frogs" and advisor Jay Carlson for taking 3rd place in the county competition.

Ross Paulenich Memorial Conservation Scholarship

By Nick Trivelli

We would like to congratulate our 2023 scholarship winners: Michael Mendoza from Reynolds High School and Mason Ray from Sharpville High School. We commend Michael and Mason for their academic achievements, extracurricular activities, and dedication to conservation, and we hope that these experiences will inspire them to have a lifelong dedication to supporting conservation efforts in the community.

The Mercer County Conservation District is proud to offer the Ross Paulenich Memorial Conservation Scholarship once again this year. The scholarship is open to Mercer County high school seniors planning to major in Environmental Science or Studies, Agriculture, Biology, Engineering, Conservation, Natural Resource Management, or similar. Applications are due by January 31st and can be found at www.MercerCountyCD.com/Education/Scholarship.

Funds raised through the Mercer County Conservation District's Photo Contest support the scholarship. The Photo Contest highlights the natural resources and beauty of Mercer County through a cooperative effort with residents and visitors to our great county.



The 2023 photo contest winner, "Autumn Rain" by Mariah Richael.



Campers kayaking at Lake Wilhelm

Mercer County Discovery Camp

By Kelcy Marini

In just 6 days, Mercer County Discovery Camp (MCDC) visited 8 locations, met with 18 experts, and travelled almost 200 miles throughout Mercer County. MCDC introduced 6th-8th graders to topics, people, and places they may have never known. MCDC sought to give students living in environmental justice areas and beyond the opportunity to have hands-on experiences with new concepts and careers in our field. With thanks to the PA DEP's 2023 Environmental Education Grants Program, it accomplished exactly that. Students gained a new perspective on and appreciation for the natural environment surrounding them and the careers they may have someday that work to protect our water, climate, and more.

Day 1 was spent at the Kidds Mill Bridge with Monica from Shenango River Watchers. We learned about Leave No Trace, hiked the Kidds Mill loop trail, searched the Shenango River for macros, and went fishing. On **Day 2** we toured the aquaponics facility at WestWinn

Urban Ag, the science labs at Penn State Shenango, and the City of Hermitage's Food Waste to Energy and Wastewater Reclamation Facility. **Day 3** was spent with the US Army Corps of Engineers at Shenango River Lake. Here, we went on a scavenger hunt on the Seth Myers trail, learned about PA wildlife, and toured the inside of the dam. On **Day 4** we spent the day at Munnell Run Farm where we learned about all things forestry with the Bureau of Forestry and the Allegheny Hardwood Utilization Group. **Day 5** was spent with DCNR at M.K. Goddard State Park. We learned more about Leave No Trace, kayaked on Lake Wilhelm, and went birding. MCDC concluded on **Day 6** with a day at Keystone Safari. We had a great time celebrating an awesome three weeks and learning about the conservation of animals in PA and throughout the world.



Campers looking for macros in the Shenango River.

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Calendar of Events: January–May 2024

Wednesday, January 31	Scholarship Application Deadline
Monday, February 6	Board of Directors Meeting
Monday, February 19	Office Closed: Presidents’ Day
Tuesday, February 20	MRF Workshop Series: Coryea’s Maple Products
Wednesday, February 28	Mercer Co. Envirothon Registration Deadline
Monday, March 4	Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, March 6	Pioneers in Conservation Awards Dinner
Friday, March 15	Seedling Sale Order Deadline
Saturday, March 16	Life in a Vernal Pool Workshop
Saturday, March 23	Field and Forest Workshop
Friday, March 29	Office Closed: Good Friday
Monday, April 1	Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, April 3	Mercer Co. Envirothon Training Day
Saturday, April 6	Spring Watershed Workshop
Wednesday, April 10	Seedling Sale Order Pick-Up
Wednesday, April 24	Mercer Co. Envirothon
Monday, May 6	Board of Directors Meeting
Monday, May 27	Office Closed: Memorial Day

Mercer County Conservation District Staff

Gerald Bickel, Watershed Specialist	Kelcy Marini, Environmental Education Coordinator
Tim Davis, Agricultural Resource Conservationist	Bob McDonald, Conservation Technician
Zoe Heckathorn, Mosquito Control Coordinator	Jay Russell, District Manager
Shawn Hedglin, Conservation Resource Specialist	Nick Trivelli, Conservation Resource Specialist

Let’s Keep In Touch

		If you need to subscribe, unsubscribe, or update your address for the newsletter, call
@mercercountycd	@mercercountycd	724-662-2242