



REPORT ON MCCD

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By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association

Meetings help public monitor projects around streams

Monroe County Conservation District's May 16 round-table discussion got rave reviews from district board members during their meeting the following day. District staff, along with representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the State Conservation Commission, spent several hours on May 16 reviewing the district staff's responsibilities with contractors, public officials and other interested parties. They explained how the DEP works with the professional staff and the board. MCCD board member Chuck Gould said it was the most informative public meeting he'd attended in 30 years.

Challenges arose on another joint venture, though. Tobyhanna Township Supervisor Annie Lamberton attended the May 17 district board meeting and closely questioned staff about the county's annual Water Quality Study, which for more than 30 years has offered a look at the health of area streams and waterways. MCCD works with the county Planning Commission on the yearly assessment.

Lamberton asked several questions about how the county conducted its Water Quality Study, including whether it tested the same site year after year and whether the county study did the same kind of testing as the state does for its stream redesignation evaluations.

"Or do you just pick where it looks better for testing?" Lamberton asked.

District technician Steve Baade explained that the annual survey does in fact do some repeat tests at the same sites, as a monitoring effort to help ensure area streams are maintaining good water quality.

Meanwhile, district Manager Adam Schellhamer said the county's annual survey, and the state's evaluation of streams undergoing the predesignation process, are different efforts. The county survey serves as a benchmark look, year by year, at the overall health of the streams and their water quality. If any survey site shows a shift in quality, the district and other agencies and individuals monitoring water quality may be able to pinpoint a pollutant or other upstream change and address it at the county level. The DEP does its own, independent testing in connection with stream redesignation applications.

Tobyhanna Township recently announced it is supporting the proposed "Pocono Springs" development, a 175-acre, \$350 million project in the headwaters of Swiftwater Creek. The conservation district's monthly board meetings often serve as a window into development plans. The agency focuses on keeping the soil on the land, and keeping soil and other pollutants out of waterways. In the past, the district staff has worked closely with developers large and small as myriad new houses, big-box stores, strip malls and resort development made Monroe County the state's second fastest growing county. All this development occurred with a minimum of adverse impact to area streams.

BWA's mission is to protect and improve water quality in the Brodhead watershed, including its tributaries — such as Swiftwater Creek. Intensive development in the Swiftwater's headwaters will undoubtedly affect both the quality and the quantity of the water flowing there.

Going unaddressed at the district's May meeting was a challenge a local citizen made during the April meeting, a charge that board member Dave Moyer, an excavator, has a direct conflict of interest since he could profit by contracts with development projects.

BWA members and all those who take an interest in clean water should keep watching the district. A changing board may shift its attention from what developers are doing and instead focus on working with transportation officials to reduce runoff from roadways, as Moyer has suggested.

There are many different paths district directors can follow to fulfill their sworn duty to protect the soils and waterways of Monroe County. Which will they choose?

The MCCD board will meet at 8 a.m. Thursday, June 21, at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.