



## REPORT ON MCCD

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*By Paula Heeschen for Brodhead Watershed Association*

# ***Real* conservationists needed on district board**

Brodhead Watershed Association members have another opportunity — make that an obligation — to seek and recommend a conservation-minded person to serve on the Monroe County Conservation District board. For the second time this year, a board member's resignation has left an unexpected vacancy.

Longtime MCCD board member and former board president Mark Sincavage resigned earlier this month, leaving Monroe County commissioners to call for a new round of nominations.

Sincavage's departure brings to four the total appointments commissioners ultimately must make to fill the conservation district board. The four positions include a commissioner position (county Commissioner Charlie Garris currently serves); a public position, which Sincavage just vacated; and two farmer positions, one of them held by Josie Porter Farm director Heidi Secord and the other by lawyer Joe Hanyon, who once owned a tree farm.

Will commissioners appoint two actual farmers, Secord and Chuck Gould, who've been recommended by several nominating agencies?

An Oct. 10 letter from commissioners' Chief Clerk Greg Christine to nominating agencies stated, "A good conservation district director is one who believes in conservation, practices it at every opportunity, and is willing to give freely of his or her time and talents to get others interested in it as well."

If only such individuals were nominated, and if only the commissioners would appoint such people, the district board would be heading in the right direction. These four vacancies could make a big difference in whether the conservation district board heeds its sworn obligation to protect the county's natural resources — or whether a board majority will kowtow to business interests. In recent years, commissioners have appointed to the district board several people who have placed economic development ahead of conservation and have challenged, and sometimes even undermined, the important work of the conservation district staff.

Recently, associate district board member Janet Weidensaul spent hours recruiting officials from the state Department of Environmental Protection and state Conservation Commission to take part in a round table meeting for the district board, township officials and local builders and business people. The plan was to talk about how the various agencies work together and to clarify what their respective responsibilities are to the law as it regards protecting natural resources. These resources are, under the Pennsylvania Constitution, an "inherent right" of all current and future Pennsylvanians.

By early October, Weidensaul had arranged for the round table for this Wednesday, Oct. 18, at the county Safety Center in Snydersville. Regional officials from DEP had agreed to attend, as had Carl Brown, executive secretary of the SCC. Such a meeting would have provided a great opportunity for local officials to meet face to face with regulatory officials, asking questions and sharing concerns.

Then, on Oct. 6, conservation district board President Hanyon directed District Manager Adam Schellhammer to cancel the meeting, saying some board members could not attend.

Much is at stake when it comes to who serves on the conservation district board. Nominating agencies forward names of prospective board members to the county commissioners for consideration. These agencies include the BWA, along with Pocono Mountain Visitors Bureau, the Brodhead chapter of Trout Unlimited, Pocono Heritage Land Trust, Pocono Builders Association, Pocono Mountain Industries, Pocono Mountain Association of Realtors, Monroe County Beekeepers, Tobyhanna Tunkhannock Watershed Association, League of Women Voters of Monroe County, Monroe County Federation of Sportsmen's Club, Monroe County Garden Club, Monroe County Penn State Extension, the Farm Service Agency and, added most recently, the Pocono Mountains Municipal Airport Authority.

If you know anyone in these groups, ask that they recommend to commissioners only individuals who understand the importance of keeping soil on the land. BWA member Craig Todd, who was MCCC manager for many years, has been trying to get on the district board since his 2016 retirement. He's keeping his hat in the ring. But he's been passed over twice already despite strong support among nominating agencies and of minority county Commissioner John Christy.

Besides talking with the nominating agency members, you can always attend district board meetings, including this Thursday's, and the regular Wednesday meetings of the Monroe County commissioners.

Public officials at every level, whether they're elected, like the commissioners, or appointed, like district board members, are supposed to be public servants. It's up to ordinary, concerned citizens to remind them that Monroe County residents deserve conservation-minded individuals on the conservation district board.

*The MCCC board will meet at 8 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 19, at Kettle Creek Environmental Education Center, 8050 Running Valley Road, Bartonsville.*