

Summer 2020 Newsletter Volume 6, Issue 3



A different year...

The Scottish poet, Robert Burns once said, "the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." When our Board of Directors met in January of this year to approve our annual work plan, none of us could have anticipated what was in store for 2020.

As I am writing this introduction, our office is closed to the public, but appointments can be made with staff, if needed. I would like to emphasize my comment, "as I am writing this introduction," because things are changing regularly, and we are trying to adapt as best as we can. If meetings can be conducted virtually, we are encouraging staff to do so. When meeting with District staff, masks and social distancing are required by all attendees for their safety and the safety of our employees. I graciously ask that if you have an issue with this requirement, please do not take it out on our staff. Please contact me directly. (My contact information is in the next paragraph.) Our staff are following office procedures and doing their job in the most unusual of circumstances. In my almost 20 years at the District, I have never seen anything like this. Everyone in our office (and our Board of Directors) has handled this situation in a manner that makes me proud to be an NCCD employee. (I want to also point out that most encounters with members of the public have been positive to date. I am very appreciative of this, as well.)

We do have a presence in the field due to the very nature of our programs while following guidelines that have been set forth by the state. The office is staffed most days of the week, but if you ever have trouble reaching someone, please reach out to me at <u>ibecker@nccdpa.org</u> or 570-898-3710.

There is one additional reflection I'd like to share with you based on a meaningful conversation I had with a member of our staff. I'm sure you have seen an increased focus on the outdoors during this time. Boating, hiking, fishing, and biking have all seen an increase in these past few months as people have found themselves itching to get out. Even when things get back to some sort of normalcy, we are hopeful this interest continues. During my own outside activities, I have amassed a greater appreciation for the outdoors and all it has to offer. I hope you are experiencing the same and continue to, if you are able.

We continue focusing on conservation issues in Northumberland County within the bounds that we must work in. In the meantime, I wish you and yours good health, and please keep safe.

We will see you again soon.

Judy Becker



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"Conservation Quarterly" is a newsletter published by the Northumberland County Conservation District, Sunbury.

<u>Our Programs</u>: Erosion and Sedimentation Control, National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), Dam Safety and Waterway Management, Environmental Education, Chesapeake Bay Program, Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Roads, Agricultural Land Preservation, Watershed Protection and Education, Mosquito-borne Disease Control

Visit www.nccdpa.org for more information. We are also on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nccdpa.

NEW FACES AT THE NCCD

Meet New NCCD Employee, Sean Hartzell:



Greetings! My name is Sean Hartzell, and I am so happy to be a new part of the Northumberland County Conservation District team as an Erosion and Sedimentation Technician. In this position, I will be taking over the Chapter 102 Erosion and Sedimentation Control program; the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Program (NPDES); the Chapter 105 Dam Safety and Waterway Management program; and the Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Roads program after transition training by retiring Erosion and Sedimentation Technician, Michael McCleary.

I grew up nearby in the Bloomsburg area and recently attended Bloomsburg University to complete my Bachelor's (2015) and Master's (2017) degrees in Biology. I have a strong passion for environmental conservation and am so excited for this opportunity. I look forward to assisting folks doing construction work in Northumberland County protect our waterways from sediment pollution. In my free time, I enjoy spending time with my wife Brittney and our three dogs. I also enjoy hiking, cycling, fishing, kayaking, and

Heeter will again be focusing his efforts in Snyder and Union counties. We also had a new member on

searching for amphibians and reptiles as a volunteer for the Pennsylvania Amphibian and Reptile Survey project.

I am happy to provide technical assistance regarding the Chapter 102 Erosion and Sedimentation Control program; the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Program (NPDES); the Chapter 105 Dam Safety and Waterway Management program; and the Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Roads program. I can be reached at 570-495-4665 extension 302 or by email at shartzell@nccdpa.org.

2020 Mosquito-borne Disease Control Program Update (by Brandon Ball, Mosquito-borne Disease Control Program Coordinator):

The mosquito crew is back at it again! Though we have all been dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, the mosquitoes do not take a break. In April, we began conducting early season larval surveillance. This is a great time to search new areas and treat known problem areas before vegetation starts to leaf out. Starting in May, we began adult mosquito surveillance. We are now in the thick of mosquito season. In June *Culex* mosquito populations increase, and control measures begin to become necessary. However, we have just started seeing instances of West Nile Virus (WNV). As always, weather patterns drive the season, and it will be interesting to see what happens during the remainder of the year.

One of our seasonal mosquito technicians from last year has returned for another season of vector surveillance and control. Tyler



our team this year, Alexis Bowser. Alexis recently graduated from Penn State with a degree in Biology and plans to attend Bloomsburg University in the fall to begin working on her master's degree in Biology. For the past two summers, she was an intern for the DEP Office of Vector Management, where she learned to identify black flies (commonly known as gnats). That experience helped Alexis transition to her role as a field technician, and she did great work for us this season.

In addition to our mosquito surveillance and control efforts, we are continuing to conduct surveillance for ticks. During the summer months we survey deciduous leaf litter, in search of nymphal deer ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*), and tall grass/shrubs for other ticks, such as the American Dog Tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*). The ticks collected are sent to the DEP lab in Harrisburg where they are tested for multiple pathogens. These data are used by the PA Arboviral Surveillance Network, a working collaboration between the



Departments of Environmental Protection, Health, and Agriculture to formulate educational standards for the residents of



Pennsylvania. Education is key when it comes to protecting ourselves from vector-borne diseases.

We have scheduled a tire collection event for Saturday, September 19th, and it will take place at our office building. Please see page 9 of this publication for a flyer with more information about the event.

As always, please feel free to reach out to our office with any questions or concerns regarding mosquitoes and ticks. I can be reached at <u>bball@nccdpa.org</u>.

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S 2020 MEMBERS

Conservation Benefactor-\$1,000: KW Enterprises, LLC, Milton

Friend of Conservation-\$500:

Hoffman Brothers Lumber, Inc., Richfield Trumbull Corporation, Pittsburgh

Associate Members-\$100:

Anonymous Aqua PA, Inc., Shamokin In Memory of Marlin R. Becker Dan Shingara Enterprise, Inc., Paxinos Dave Gutelius, Inc., Mifflinburg Donald H. Beagle Excavating, Inc., Danville Ferster Excavating, Dalmatia

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Contributing Members-\$75 (New): Dutch Mill Bulbs, Hershey

Moser Seed Agency, New Columbia New Enterprise Stone & Lime Co., Inc., New Enterprise Northumberland County Anthracite Outdoor Adventure Area, Shamokin RJ Hoffman & Sons, Inc., Mt. Pleasant Mills Robert C. Snyder Farms, Inc.,

NCCD Membership Drive Form

Northumberland County Conservation District

Your Information (please print or type)

Name	
Billing address	
City	
State	
ZIP Code	
Telephone (home)	
Telephone (business)	
Fax	
E-Mail	
Donation Information	

I (we) plan to make this contribution in the form of: _____ cash _____ check _____ credit card _____ other.

Credit Card No.____

Name on Card___

Membership Type (please circle one)

Affiliate	Name in 1 NCCD newsletter.	\$50.00	Friend of Conservation	Business Ad in 2 NCCD newsletters.	\$500.00
Contributing	Name in 2 NCCD newsletters.	\$75.00	Conservation Partner	Business Ad in 3 NCCD newsletters.	\$750.00
Associate	Name in all 4 NCCD newsletters.	\$100.00	Conservation Benefactor	Business Ad in all 4 NCCD newsletters.	\$1,000.00

*All memberships will appear on our website. NCCD will contact your business with ad due dates for newsletters.

Exp. Date_____

Security Code_____

\$10 MILLION IN TAX CREDITS AVAILABLE TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY AND FARM SUSTAINABILITY (Credit: PA Pressroom Media Contact, Shannon Powers)

Applications are currently being accepted for the Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP), which was expanded under the 2019 PA Farm Bill. REAP is a PA tax credit program for agricultural producers who implement best management practices (BMPs) or purchase equipment that reduces nutrient and sediment runoff, enhancing soil and improving the quality of Pennsylvania's waterways. This is the 14th year Pennsylvania farmers have been able to take advantage of REAP tax credits. Farmers may receive up to \$250,000 in any seven-year period, and spouses filing jointly can use REAP Tax Credits.

The most common projects approved are for no-till planting and precision ag equipment, waste storage facilities, conservation plans, Nutrient Management Plans, and protecting animal heavy-use areas, like barnyards. Cover crops and riparian stream buffers are also common REAP-eligible practices. Farmers may receive REAP tax credits of 50 to 75 percent of the project's eligible out-of-pocket cost. Farmers whose operation is in a watershed with an EPA-mandated Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) can receive REAP tax credits of 90 percent of out-of-pocket costs for some projects.

Tax credits can be used in conjunction with other funding sources such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the Chesapeake Bay Program or Conservation Excellence Grants to help install BMPs.

REAP applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis. Baseline eligibility includes compliance with the PA Clean Streams Law and the Pennsylvania Nutrient and Odor Management Law.

Since the program began in 2007, REAP has awarded tax credits to more than 5,500 projects totaling over \$100 million. Improvements from these projects have kept more than 5 million pounds of nitrogen, 250,000 pounds of phosphorus, and 250,000 tons of sediment out of streams and rivers in Pennsylvania and the waterways they feed. Private investments in REAP have also contributed to the conservation projects, which in total are worth nearly \$250 million.

More information about REAP, including the 2020-21 application packet and program guidelines, is available at <u>agriculture.pa.gov</u>.

CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM INSPECTION AREAS HAVE BEEN SELECTED FOR 2020-2021 (by: Rachael Moore, Agricultural Conservation Technician)

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is committed to protecting local water quality and meeting specific Chesapeake Bay restoration goals. The agriculture community can help improve water quality both locally and beyond by following state regulations that relate to erosion control and manure management. All agriculture operations in Pennsylvania have been required to develop and implement Agriculture Erosion and Sediment Control Plans (Ag E&S plans) since 1972, and where applicable, Manure Management Plans since 1985.

The NCCD has been tasked by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to assess 50 farms from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. The District recently developed a strategy for the 2020-2021 inspection year. For the upcoming year, we selected operations in the Warrior Run, Logan Run, and Mahantango Creek watersheds. This will allow us to spatially cover the northern, central, and southern regions, respectfully, of the county. To select farms, farms in the watershed were assigned numbers and drawn by hand from a bag. This process allowed us to select farms randomly and anonymously.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, following social distancing guidelines and keeping landowners and staff safe is of utmost importance to us. During this time, and until further notice, the NCCD will be conducting inspections remotely through phone interviews.

The inspections are a multi-year process, and landowners may not be contacted to schedule an inspection for a few years. However, we encourage you to assist with the inspection process and volunteer for an inspection. Any farm in Northumberland County can volunteer to be inspected, regardless of what watershed it is located in. If you would like to volunteer for an inspection, have any questions about the inspection process, or would like your Ag E&S or Manure Management plans reviewed, please contact me at <u>rmoore@nccdpa.org</u> or 570-495-4665 extension 304.

SKINS, SKULLS, SCAT, AND TRACKS by: Chantel Shambach, Watershed Specialist

When receiving an educational wildlife kit put together and provided by the Pennsylvania Game Commission, I never expected to use it in a virtual classroom. However, I coordinated a lesson plan to be able to do so right from my own living room during the COVID-19 pandemic when students were learning through online Zoom classes.

The wildlife kit is stocked with twelve different Pennsylvania wildlife pelts ranging from the coyote to the small muskrat. It also has eight different replicated tracks and scat droppings, along with three skull samples.

This kit provides a unique learning curriculum that can be altered for many different grade levels. It shows the common wildlife throughout Pennsylvania and allows for the students to gain knowledge and appreciation for these animals and their environments.

During my virtual lesson I opened with Pennsylvania's wildlife history. Did you know that jaguars, bison, and wolves once roamed the lands of PA? It was a special treat to see the student's reaction to this topic, which then lead to how they disappeared. This gave the students time to reflect on how human activity can influence species existence, the four attributes that make up an animal's habitat and their ability to thrive in a specific area. The differences between the classification of being "endangered", "extinct", and "threatened" was also discussed. Using the wildlife kit, discussions on species symbolic to the state of Pennsylvania can also be highlighted like the state animal, state flower, state bird, etc.

After recognizing the Pennsylvania Game Commission for supplying the District with this unique kit, the next step in the lesson involved the showing of animal pelts. Numbered one through twelve, the texture of each coat was described (since virtual

showing hindered the ability for the students to personally feel the pelts). The pelts were then shown up close and from afar to provide scale. Once all the animals were shown, the students had the ability to answer what they guessed for each pelt number, followed by an exciting fun fact about each.

After going through the pelts, the replicated tracks and scat followed. The animal tracks gave the visual of how to identify certain qualities of each animal like the padding of the coyote, the



beaver, the phalange structure of the dexterous racoon, etc. As I'm sure you can imagine, scat was a fun topic for the 5th graders. Showing the droppings gave an inside look at the identifying animal's diet; discussing the texture, size, shape, and color of different droppings were added for this determination. This also provided a perfect opportunity to talk about what omnivores, carnivores, and herbivores are. Showcasing the delicate skulls also gave an exclusive look at animal's eating habits due to the structure and arrangements of their

teeth and jaws and

how they fit into the ecological food chain.

Although COVID-19 prevented these students from experiencing in-class opportunities, field trips, and 5th grade camp; we tried making the best of the situation with this virtual opportunity. If you or someone you know would be interested in the showing of this wildlife kit, please reach out to the Northumberland County Conservation District at 570-495-4665, or visit our website at nccdpa.org for more information.



VECTOR SPECIES FOCUS: ANOPHELES PUNCTIPENNIS by: Brandon Ball, Mosquito-borne Disease Control Program Coordinator

Anopheles is a genus of mosquito first described and named by J. W. Meigen in 1818¹. About 460 species are recognized around the world. While over 100 can transmit human malaria, only 30 to 40 commonly transmit parasites of the genus Plasmodium, which cause malaria in humans in endemic areas. Fortunately, this is not the case in Pennsylvania. Anopheles punctipennis is a multivoltine species, which means that it is known to have several broods in a single season. Like all mosquitoes, anophelines go through four stages in their life cycles: egg, larva, pupa, and imago (adult). The first three stages are aquatic and together last 5 to 14 days, depending on the species and the ambient temperature. The adult stage is when the female Anopheles mosquito acts as a malaria vector. The adult females can live up to a month (or more in captivity), but most probably do not live more than two weeks in nature².

Larvae can be collected from a wide variety of habitats; including temporary pools with or without emergent vegetation or floating plants, wetlands, canals, ditches, retention basins, ponds, catch basins, still areas along the edges of streams, and



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the occasional tire. Adult females overwinter in caves, animal burrows, hollow trees, root cellars, bank barns, abandoned buildings, tunnels, spring houses, and other protected places. They prefer cool, dark areas with high humidity. This species is primarily a large mammal feeder. It will bite humans during the day or night and has been known to enter houses to feed.

Larvae and adults are widespread throughout the state but are usually not collected in large numbers in any one sample. This is the most common Anopheles mosquito in the state of Pennsylvania³.

Sources:

1. Meigen, J. W. (1818). Systematische Beschreibung der Bekannten Europäischen Zweiflügeligen Insekten Vol. 1. Forstmann, Aachen, 332 pp.

2. "Anopheles Mosquitoes". Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. October 21, 2015.

3. Darsie RF, Hutchinson ML. 2009. The Mosquitoes of Pennsylvania. Technical bulletin #2009-001 of the Pennsylvania Vector Control Association. 191pp.

AVOIDING MUDDY WATERS: SEDIMENT POLLUTION AND MITIGATION IN PENNSYLVANIA by: Sean Hartzell, Erosion and Sedimentation Technician

Did you know that sediment is Pennsylvania's number one pollutant by volume in surface waters? Many of us have likely seen sedimentation in one capacity or another in our streams and rivers. For instance, I live next to the Susquehanna River and will sometimes see the river turn a dark, muddy brown color for a day or two when it gets loaded with sediment after we have a substantial rainstorm. Sedimentation is a natural process resulting from erosion. Every time it rains, each raindrop that hits the ground has the potential to dislodge little particles of soil from the earth. These little soil particles can then be transported by the sheet flow runoff and will eventually make their way with the runoff water to a stream. Erosion can also happen due to "scouring" of the earth where water flows. In this case, the flowing water will dislodge and carry soil particles with it as it flows, eventually reaching a stream. In either event, the sediment carried by the water in a stream or river will settle to the bottom as the flow of the water slows, such as in pools in our streams and rivers.

The process of erosion has been occurring on our planet since the beginning of time. It is natural that some sediment (dirt) will be dislodged from the ground due to an erosive process and will eventually reach a stream. However, the process of erosion is greatly slowed by the presence of vegetation. When it rains in areas with vegetation, the raindrops will hit the vegetation instead of the bare earth and so few soil particles will be dislodged. When runoff water flows over an area with vegetation, the roots of the vegetation help hold the soil together and so few soil particles will be picked up by the runoff. So ultimately, very little sediment should get into and accumulate in streams naturally.

AVOIDING MUDDY WATERS: SEDIMENT POLLUTION AND MITIGATION IN PENNSYLVANIA, continued

Historically, (in pre-colonial times), Pennsylvania was almost completely covered by forests. Some sources even suggest during that time a squirrel could jump from tree to tree and cross the whole state without ever touching the ground! As you might imagine, with all of those trees protecting the soil from erosion, very little sediment got into Pennsylvania's streams and rivers at that time. However, as Pennsylvania was colonized and our nation grew, much of Pennsylvania's forests were logged both to clean space for villages and farmlands and to fuel industry. By the early 1900s, Pennsylvania was almost entirely devoid of forests. Fortunately, a massive effort to replant Pennsylvania's forests was initiated soon thereafter, with millions of seedlings planted by the Great Depression era Civilian Conservation Corps and other groups. Today, we are fortunate Pennsylvania again has millions of acres of forests. However, our temporary loss of forests during that period contributed to a substantial amount of erosion which resulted in major sedimentation of our waterways. This "legacy sediment" still impairs our streams and rivers today. It is a major source of sediment pollution that gets to the Chesapeake Bay from streams in the Susquehanna River drainage, such as our streams and Susquehanna River in Northumberland County.

In addition to historic logging, legacy sediment in much of Pennsylvania, including in our county, is also the result of historic "mill dams" that were constructed along streams for water powered mills. Water powered mills were common in much of



Pennsylvania during 1800s, and the Northumberland County may have had over 100 of these operating at some points in its history. These dams were constructed along streams with outlet channels used to power the mill However, wheels. because the dams created large pools in the streams in which the flow of water slowed, this created many areas along streams where

Historic photo (early 1900s) of forest logging in Pennsylvania (image sourced from Wikimedia Commons)

sediment-laden water could slow and deposit sediment. This further added legacy sediment pollution to Pennsylvania streams.

This legacy sediment has built up along the banks of streams, causing them to be steep and muddy and contributing to increased erosion and sediment accumulation during high water events. We are having problems with sediment today that were set in motion well over a hundred years ago! Although legacy sediment is still a major problem in Pennsylvania, a number of steps can be taken to mitigate its effects on streams. For instance, we can remove some legacy sediment along the stream's floodplain to restore a more natural, gently sloping floodplain that resists erosion. Other steps could include seed vegetation or other erosion control such as riprap to stabilize the streambanks from erosion.

However, even aside from the complication of legacy sediment in Pennsylvania, our present infrastructure, development, and land use practices have the potential to cause accelerated erosion. For instance, anytime earth disturbance occurs due to construction, agricultural, or other practices, the absence of vegetation makes it almost inevitable that the bare soil will be eroded and deposited as sediment into a stream during a rain event unless Best Management Practices (BMPs) are followed. For example, farmers can plant cover crops to prevent soil erosion on agricultural fields, with an added benefit of improving soil fertility. On construction sites where earth disturbance occurs, such as the grading of soils, we can line the perimeter of the disturbed area with compost filter sock or another perimeter control BMP which filters the sediment out of runoff as it flows away from the construction site. Bare ground on disturbed areas can also be temporarily stabilized with temporary plantings of grasses or erosion control mesh. Pumps to filter bags can be used to clean water that becomes polluted with sediment on-site.

AVOIDING MUDDY WATERS: SEDIMENT POLLUTION AND MITIGATION IN PENNSYLVANIA, continued



Compost filter socks, a common construction site sedimentation BMP. (Image sourced from Wikimedia Commons)

Larger-scale projects may wish to use sediment traps or basins. These are temporary ponds that receive sediment-laden runoff and allow the sediment to settle out before the water can be discharged.

Most importantly, why is sedimentation so bad for streams? One way that sediment can be detrimental to streams is it can be a "vehicle" for other pollutants that come along with it. On a microscopic level, dirt particles look a little

bit like tiny sponges. They can hold other pollutants and carry them to the stream if the dirt was previously exposed to other pollutants prior to erosion or encounters

them on route to the stream. Also, if suspended in water, excessive sediment can make water difficult to process into drinking water. Additionally, sedimentation can impair the recreational value of waterways. Would you want to boat or swim in murky, muddy waters? My plans for fishing are always waylaid when the water in the Susquehanna River is too muddy and brown to fish a day or two after a storm. However, perhaps the most detrimental aspect of sediment pollution is its impact on aquatic life. In Pennsylvania, a typical healthy stream with minimal sediment pollution will have a rocky or sand/gravel bottom with occasional patches of mud (accumulated sediment) in pools where this would naturally appear. However, in streams with a high load of sediment pollution, most of these rocks, sand and gravel are buried by thick layers of accumulated sediment. This is a major problem for aquatic critters because many organisms, such as certain aquatic algae and plants, aquatic insects and other invertebrates, fish, and salamanders use spaces in between rocks, gravel and sand as habitat. When this becomes buried by sediment, these organisms may disappear. Because larger organisms, such as sport fish, consume these smaller organisms, sediment pollution can majorly impair fisheries. Additionally, this does not only impact aquatic life, but terrestrial life as well, since many terrestrial animals often feed on aquatic organisms.

Perhaps one of the most unique aquatic animals affected by sediment pollution in Pennsylvania is the Eastern Hellbender



Salamander, which was recently designated as our state amphibian. Hellbenders are very large (can grow over two feet long) fully aquatic salamanders that mostly eat crayfish. Historically, hellbenders were found in many Pennsylvania streams and rivers but have disappeared from many streams in Pennsylvania over the past hundred years.

Because hellbenders live and lay their eggs under larger rocks in streams which are prone to be buried by sediment, it is thought that sediment pollution may be one factor in the decline of hellbenders and other declining aquatic species in Pennsylvania. So, controlling erosion and sedimentation not only improves the value and aesthetics of our streams as a resource, but also protects aquatic life, such as hellbenders and game fish.

Eastern Hellbender Salamander in rocky streambed habitat. (Image sourced from Wikimedia Commons)

The Northumberland County Conservation District will be hosting a:



For Northumberland County Residents (limited to residential tires only)

September 19, 2020 | 7am – 1pm

- O Masks are REQUIRED
- O Proof of county residency is REQUIRED
- O This is a drive-thru event, we ask that you please do NOT exit your vehicle.
- O Check-In, payment, & unloading of tires will be handled by a NCCD staff member
- Cost is \$1 per tire | tires should be off the rim
- We CANNOT accept tires taller than 48" or wider than 14"

Pre-registration is REQUIRED

Registration Deadline: September 11, 2020

Call/Email Brandon Ball: 570.495.4665 ext. 303 bball@nccdpa.org

> Event Location: Northumberland County Conservation District 441 Plum Creek Road Sunbury, PA 17801

> > 570.495.4665

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM UPDATE by: Judy Becker, Northumberland County Agricultural Land Preservation Program Administrator

On July 31, 2020, the Northumberland County Agricultural Land Preservation program closed on the John and Jean Sensenig farm in Lewis Township. The Sensenig farm is a crop and livestock operation, and 154 acres were offered for easement purchase.

The next farm on our current ranking list has been chosen to begin the process of the next easement purchase. The farm is a 79 acre property in Turbot Township. Although COVID-19 has slowed down the purchase process, we hope to move forward within the next couple of months.

The program also just completed an open enrollment period accepting new applications. New applications are currently being reviewed and will be ranked. All new and current applicants will be notified in writing once rankings are completed.

The purpose of the Agricultural Land Preservation program is to preserve farmland by purchasing conservation easements (also called development rights) from owners of quality farmland. Conservation easements are permanent and remain with the property deed whenever it is sold. Applications are ranked



Sensenig property farmstead (image source: Brian Pedrick)

based on a variety of factors; including the level of development pressure on the specific farm from nearby urban areas that may cause conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural use, agricultural productivity and conservation farming practices, proximity to other preserved farms, and soil types.

Farms must meet minimum criteria to be considered:

- The farm must be in an agricultural security area consisting of 500 acres or more.
- The farm must have contiguous acreage of at least 50 acres in size, or 10 acres in size if the farmland is utilized for a crop unique to the area or is adjacent to a property that has a perpetual conservation easement in place.
- The farmland tract must have at least 50% of its soils available for agricultural production, and the tract's soils must be in Land Capability Classes I-IV as defined by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). (the program administrator will assist applicants with soil class determinations)
- The farm must contain the greater of 50% or 10 acres of harvested cropland, pasture or grazing land (Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) acreage cannot be included in the application to the program).
- Total farm gross receipts must equal \$25,000 or more annually.
- A \$100 non-refundable deposit is required on all applications.

Landowners selected may choose to receive the proceeds from easement sales in a lump sum payment, installments up to five years, or on a long-term installment basis. Many use the proceeds to reduce debt loads, expand operations, and to pass on to future generations.

The Northumberland County program has been in existence since 1992 and has secured 23 easements, totaling 2,573 acres. The county also has a backlog of 54 applications, totaling 6,273 acres. Funding is provided by the PA Department of Agriculture and the Northumberland County Commissioners. The state of Pennsylvania leads the nation in farmland preserved, totaling over 550,000 acres.

For more information on the Northumberland County Agricultural Land Preservation Program, please visit <u>www.nccdpa.org/</u> <u>programs/farmland-preservation</u>. You may also contact program administrator, Judy Becker at 570-898-3710 <u>jbecker@nccdpa.org</u> for more information.

DEP OFFERING GRANTS TO SMALL BUSINESSES AND FARMERS FOR ENERGY, ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS (Credit: DEP Newsroom Media Contact, Neil Shader)

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced the availability of \$1 million in grant funding to Pennsylvania small businesses and farmers for energy efficiency, pollution prevention, and natural resource protection projects through the Small Business Advantage grant program. New to the program this year is the opportunity for farmers to install solar pumping systems for their agricultural operations.

"Pennsylvania is committed to assisting those small business owners who want to become energy efficient, increase their profitability, and help the environment," said DEP Secretary Patrick McDonnell. "This funding will support projects designed to reduce operating costs and boost competitiveness, while simultaneously protecting the environment."

Eligible projects include adopting or acquiring equipment or processes that reduce energy use or pollution. Examples of eligible projects are HVAC and boiler upgrades, high-efficiency LED lighting, solvent recovery and waste recycling systems, and auxiliary power units deployed as anti-idling technology for trucks.

Last year, 233 small businesses were awarded grants for their projects. Natural resource protection projects may include planting riparian buffers, installation of streambank fencing to keep livestock out of streams, and investing in agricultural storm water management projects, with the goal of reducing sediment and nutrient loads in our waterways.

"We are excited to expand the program to help lower energy bills through the use of solar energy," McDonnell said. "Encouraging businesses to embrace alternative energy projects helps clean our

air, reduces greenhouse gases, and give small business owners a sense of satisfaction on making smart choices."

Pennsylvania-based small business owners with 100 or fewer fulltime equivalent employees are eligible. Projects must save the business a minimum of \$500 and 25 percent annually in energy consumption, or pollution related expenses.

Businesses can apply for 50 percent matching funds of up to \$7,000 to adopt or acquire energy-efficient or pollution prevention equipment or processes. Only costs incurred between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021, are eligible.

Applications will be considered on a first come, first served basis, and will be accepted until fiscal year 2020-21 funds are exhausted or April 12, 2021, whichever occurs first. All applications must be submitted through the Commonwealth's Single Application for Assistance (<u>www.esa.dced.state.pa.us</u>). Printed, faxed, and mailed applications are not accepted.

The complete grant application package, which includes step-by-step instructions and instructional videos for completing the online application, is available by visiting the DEP Small Business Advantage Grant (<u>https://www.dep.pa.gov/Citizens/GrantsLoansRebates/SmallBusinessOmbudsmanOffice/Pages/Small%20Business%</u>20Advantage%20Grant.aspx).

Information on grant funding available through DEP is also accessible by visiting <u>dep.pa.gov</u> and clicking on the "Grants" link near the top of the page.

Small Business Advantage Grant Program

2020 Grant Guidelines

Funding Projects for Pollution Prevention, Energy Efficiency & Natural Resource Conservation



To contact the Small Business Ombudsman's Office, call 717-772-5160 or email epadvantagegtrant@pa.gov.

Northumberland County Conservation District 441 Plum Creek Road Sunbury, PA 17801 Phone: (570) 495-4665 Website: www.nccdpa.org





Northumberland County Conservation District

The NCCD, formed in 1943 under the Conservation District Law, is a subdivision of state government and is one of 66 Conservation Districts throughout the state of Pennsylvania. The purpose of the Conservation District is to promote protection, maintenance, improvement, and wise use of the land, water, and other natural resources.

Directors

Mike Hubler: Chairman, Public Leon Wertz: Vice-Chairman, Farmer Joseph Klebon: Commissioner Gary Truckenmiller: Farmer John Kopp: Farmer Natalie Wertman: Public Rich Daniels: Farmer Mike Erdley: Associate Dave Crowl: Associate Lynn Wilson: Associate John Pfleegor: Associate Ted Carodiskey: Associate

Staff

Judy Becker: District Manager, AgLand Preservation, Editor Shirley Snyder: Administrative Assistant, Secretary and Treasurer Chantel Shambach: Watershed Specialist Michael McCleary: Erosion & Sediment Technician, Dirt & Gravel Roads Sean Hartzell: Erosion & Sediment Technician, Dirt & Gravel Roads Rachael Moore: Agricultural Conservation Technician Brandon Ball: Mosquito-borne Disease Control Program Coordinator Tyler Heeter: Mosquito-borne Disease Control Program Technician

NCCD Board of Directors Upcoming Meetings: September 3rd, October 1st, November 5th at 7:00pm Please check the NCCD website for meeting information. (www.nccdpa.org)