



Beaver Tales

Winter 2020

Beaver County Conservation District

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Our Mission

The Beaver County Conservation Districts mission is to preserve natural resources and to protect/promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of Beaver County. Also to provide technical services to improve resource management for the benefit of farmers and urban residents.

Fire in the Forest

November 10, 2020 was a beautiful day. The sun was shining brightly, and the temperature was 76 degrees. The humidity was 47%, and winds were light from the south. The steep south-facing hillside of the Conservation District Environmental Center had a heavy cover of very dry leaves, much of them oak leaves. Then, all of the sudden... something happened... nobody knows for sure... and in an instant there was fire on the ground.

Within minutes flames were racing up the hill. The steep hillside aided the fire's spread. As soon as District personnel became aware of the scope of the scene unfolding on the hill, 911 was called. District personnel used the tools available to them to slow the spread of the fire and warn neighbors up on top of the hill. District personnel continued to assist first responders until sufficient resources were summoned to put out the fire. In total, about 2.2 acres of upland forest on District property and our neighbors' was burned. Fortunately, no homes were lost.

Fire is a natural part of upland oak forests in Beaver County. The forest will be fine. Some trees not well adapted to fire will be lost, but most trees growing on the hill side are none the worse for wear. Mature oak trees were protected by their thick bark. Smaller oak trees which were burned will resprout from the roots in spring. These oaks will have room to grow as hemlock, maple and beech trees, which are not well adapted to fire, are lost to the flames and resulting injury.

If you walk the forest path next May you will find that the beautiful wildflowers and the fresh leaves will once again spring forth.

The Conservation District would like to thank the many fire companies who responded in our time of need. The service of these volunteers is much appreciated!



Dry leaves provided the primary fuel for the fire.



Firefighters used the trail system to gain access to the fire.



The hillside is blackened and smoldering, but the forest remains and will soon teem with life again.

Beaver County Conservation District

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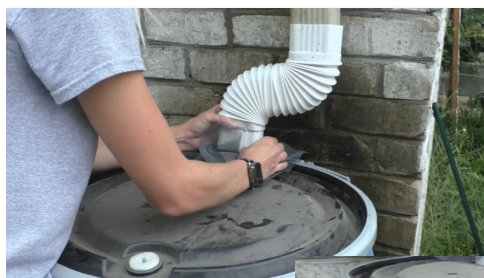
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BCCD's Annual Rain Barrel Workshop

This year the Beaver County Conservation District hosted a virtual workshop titled "Stormwater Help for Homeowners" the week of October 12-16. Susan Boser from Penn State Extension presented a PowerPoint program focusing on watersheds, nonpoint source pollution, and stormwater best management practices. Hannah Ward, BCCD's Watershed Specialist, demonstrated how to build a rain barrel in a recorded video. In the video Hannah installs a rain barrel onto the district's downspout. This rain barrel will be used to water landscaping around the district grounds.

The program was originally set to be presented in person, but due to restrictions it was presented via video and recorded PowerPoint presentation. Despite this change the workshop was still very much a success and there were still 19 participants! Participants were asked to watch the "How to Build a Rain Barrel" video and recorded PowerPoint presentation. After they did this they were able to pick up their free rain barrel and rain barrel kit at the district. The "How to Build a Rain Barrel" video is available for viewing on the Beaver County Conservation District's YouTube channel.

Next year we hope to be able to host the workshop in person again, but for the time being we hope that everyone is staying healthy!



Horses, Horses Everywhere!

Horses, horses everywhere! Beaver county is home to over 1100 horses on 166 farms according the USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture. That is a lot of horses. Most horses in the county are pleasure horses, with a few working horses. These horses provide beauty to rural settings and bring joy to their owners. Proper pasture management can improve the health of horses and protect water and soil.

Horses need a lot of feed. Many acres of pasture in the county are utilized by horses. Proper management of these pastures can improve horse nutrition and reduce costs associated with feed. The first step in proper horse pasture management is soil testing and proper fertilization. Proper grazing management is then needed to optimize productivity.

At the other end of the horse, manure management is needed to protect water quality. A manure management plan or a nutrient management plan is required by law. Proper use of manure can provide nutrients to grow forage crops for your horse, thus educing your fertilizer costs.

Every horse owner has a preference as to the best forage crop for their horse. Timothy grass, alfalfa and clover are commonly found in horse pastures, but many other forage plants are fine for horses. There are plants which are toxic to horses, so owners must pay attention to all the types of plants growing in or near the pasture.

The conservation district provides assistance to those managing pasture for horses or other grazing animals. The district can provide support developing grazing and manure management plans as well as soil testing. Contact the conservation district. We are a tool in the toolbox for all farms seeking to improve their operation.



No-till Drill For Rent

The Beaver County Conservation District owns an 8' Truax FLEXII 812RD No-Till drill that is available for rent to interested farmers in Beaver County. The purpose of the drill rental program is to encourage and assist farmers in implementing no-till crop production systems, including cover crops, as well as promote good pasture management. Reducing tillage can improve soil health and improve farm economics. Renting this drill provides farmers with a low-cost opportunity to try no-till planting and determine if it can be an asset to their farm management. More information is available on our website or you can contact the district's agricultural technician.

Does My Activity Qualify Under a Chapter 105 Waiver?

There are many activities that require a Chapter 105 Water Obstructions and Encroachments General Permit. These general permits cover activities such as the installation of fish habitat enhancement structures, small docks and boat launching ramps, intake and outfall structures, and temporary road crossings, just to name a few. There are, however, situations that do not require a permit; this is where waivers come into play. As a conservation district, we will be able to assist you in determining if your activity may qualify under a Chapter 105 waiver. The authority to review and ultimately issue the waiver, however, lies with the Central Office at the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. This waiver may be issued either verbally or in writing.

When attempting to determine if your activity qualifies for a Chapter 105 waiver, there are some key questions you will need to consider. First, how would you generally describe the area? This may include surrounding structures and businesses, is it rural or urban, etc. Second, is this activity part of a larger project? Third, what sort of impact are you proposing? Are you constructing a dam, doing maintenance on a ford, installing a bridge, culvert, or pipe, placing fill in a water body, etc? Fourth, what is the proposed impact area? In other words, what is the square footage, length and width? Fifth, what is the anticipated use of the area in question? Sixth, what are the site features of the area? This may include topographical features, water sources, utilities, roads, and land use. Lastly, are there any endangered species that may be affected by the proposed activity? The information you provide in regard to these questions will likely mirror that of a general permit registration.

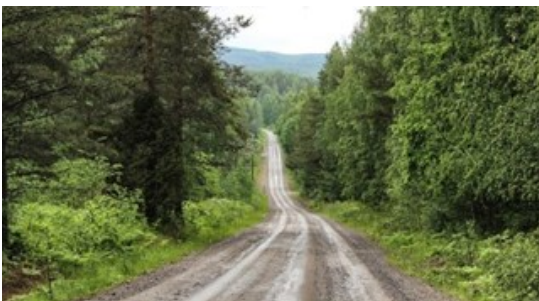
There are 16 waivers that fall under Chapter 105. The most common of these is waiver two, which is used for a water obstruction in a stream or floodway with a drainage area of 100 acres or less. This waiver cannot be used for wetlands that are in the floodway. Other examples include waiver three, which may be used for a fill not located on navigable water body, and waivers seven and eight, which are in place for the upkeep of constructed field drainage systems used for crop production. For information regarding all other waivers, please contact the district. Listed below are some of the essential reasons why a waiver would not be granted:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1) Environmental impacts | 6) Threatened & Endangered Species |
| 2) Water Quality Standards violations | 7) Disturbance to natural drainage patterns |
| 3) Wild and Scenic River | 8) Potential stormwater impacts |
| 4) Impact to Wild Trout Waters | 9) Property issues |
| 5) Protected Uses violations | |

Additionally, PA DEP may require a permit for any activity which could have a detrimental impact on health and safety. For more information regarding Chapter 105 waivers, please don't hesitate to contact the district!

Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Roads Program Beaver County

PA's Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Roads (DGLVR) Program provides local road owning entities with grant funding for road and environmental improvements on unpaved and low-volume paved roads. The Beaver County Conservation District administers and implements this program at the county level with the goal to create a more environmentally and economically sustainable dirt and low-volume road network through education, outreach, and project funding. If your municipality has a road you think is eligible and are interested in finding out more about the DGLVR program and how it can help you, please contact us...



Beaver County Conservation District: Moving Forward

Given these difficult times with COVID19, budget issues, and other challenges, the conservation district is moving forward, accomplishing and even exceeding goals and expectations.

New management and a reinvigorated staff have accomplished many tasks as they have focused on our mission to preserve natural resources and protect/promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of Beaver County.

Despite challenges in 2020 the district has held two in person agriculture workshops to support our farming community and provide updated science-based information. The district has also held a virtual rain barrel workshop and our annual tree sale. We also hosted a Scouts BSA merit badge event. The conservation district is currently developing future events to support our community.

These times call for an increased presence on the web and social media. The district implemented numerous updates to our website <https://www.beavercountyconservationdistrict.org/> . A YouTube channel was created <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCA5wbgtimAkODLIE2TOW4CQ> .- The district also maintains a Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/BeaverCountyConservationDistrict/> . Several educational videos have been produced. Topics include tree identification, wetland plant identification and wetland functions just to name a few. Log on to our social media sites and see the good things happening.

Our Environmental Center is open to the public. The district has refurbished the native plant rain garden. Trails have been maintained and improved. Invasive plant management has begun. A recent Eagle Scout project placed new bat boxes on the grounds. Come, take a walk. Enjoy the Environmental Center grounds.

The district is available to assist farmers, homeowners, contractors, and others in Beaver County. Our office is open by appointment. Call the district office at 724-378-1701 with any questions you may have. The district welcomes the opportunity to help the residents of Beaver County.



Wetlands and forests are managed at the Environmental Center grounds. The Beaver County Conservation District works with people throughout the county to preserve our natural resources.

Winter in the Wetlands

Heather Humbert, Environmental Educator



Even without Covid mitigation, winter is a time when we see fewer visitors at the Conservation District's wetlands. There are no school or scout groups looking for fieldtrip opportunities, and fewer people come to walk the trails in the cold weather. But winter is still a great time to spot wildlife.

Once the leaves fall from the trees, birds become more visible as they flit among the branches. While warblers and other insect-eating songbirds have already headed south for the winter, other species, like dark-eyed juncos which nest farther north, are settling into our backyards for the cold months. Many woodpeckers will stick around over winter, able to find enough insects and their larva hibernating beneath tree bark to keep them fed until spring. But offerings of suet and birdseed at backyard feeders can help them and many other winter residents make it through the cold.

While studying larger birds, you may notice some ducks and geese migrate, but others remain in the area. As long as there is open water where they can dabble and feed, these resident waterfowl will stay in Pennsylvania. Hawks and other birds of prey will follow a similar winter weather

routine, some migrating during autumn while others only move on when competition for limited prey resources forces them to do so.

There are numerous mammals awake and active during the cold months too. Squirrels are a common sight at birdfeeders and also hunting for acorns and walnuts in the woods. White-tailed deer search for food close to sunrise and sunset but will bed down in areas sheltered from the wind on cold days. Foxes and coyotes hunt mostly at night, and the only evidence we may see of them is their tracks in the snow. Other animals active during the cold months, like muskrat and beaver, may never be seen due to their aquatic habitats. Beavers store branches at the bottoms of their ponds to use as food over the winter and may never need to travel onto shore from their lodges until the spring thaw. Muskrats have burrows in addition to their lodges, and may be seen on the ice along stream and pond banks, grooming their fur in the scarce sunlight. Both animals have thick pelts to help keep them warm while swimming in icy waters.



If you're adventurous enough to brave the winter cold, tracking animals in the snow can be a great way to discover what wildlife species are living as your neighbors and what they do when people aren't around to see. Each time it snows gives us a new opportunity to explore the daily lives of wildlife and learn a little more about how they've adapted to living through Pennsylvania's winters.