

PENN SOIL RC&D COUNCIL

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

May 17, 2006

Some of the highlights of the last three months work are listed below:

FRYBURG WATER QUALITY PROJECT

The grant contract expires at the end of this month. The water sampling has been completed and we have received copies of the individual sample results. To date about \$12,500 has been spent of the \$15,000 grant. I have received an update and a copy of the engineering report produced by Curfman Engineering from Rick Obenrader. Curfman Engineering has completed their work under the original RFP and provided the final bills. Approximately \$2500 in grant funds remains available. I asked Rick to discuss with Curfman and see if there were additional work items that could be added on to the original RFP that would benefit the project and move the Water Quality Project forward. I also suggested that we could get additional copies of the final report prepared since they only received one copy of the report. I am sure there will be a need for additional copies of the report as they seek more funding to move their project ahead, and there were funds allocated in the grant for printing and copying. We can spend the available grant funds until the end of May if any additional work is completed on the project.

2006 CONSERVATION TILLAGE CONFERENCE

The Tri-State Tillage conference was held January 24th, 2006 at the Radisson hotel in West Middlesex. One hundred and forty people attended the conference. Financial support was provided by sponsors totaling \$2600. A \$1400 grant was received from PACD through the Erie Conservation District and a \$500 grant was also received from the New York State Soil & Water Conservation Society to help support this Tri-state conference. Income of \$2416.07 over and above expenses for the conference was received to support future conferences.

Planning is well underway for the 2007 Tri State Tillage Conference which is scheduled for January 23, 2007 at the Radisson Hotel.

DRY HYDRANTS

Penn Soil is administering the Statewide Grant of \$ 284,000 to install a minimum of 40 new dry hydrants in each council across the state. A total of 328 dry hydrant kits have been purchased and distributed to the nine RC&D's in PA to date. Forty-seven hydrant installations have been reported completed as of this date. Penn Soil RC&D has the most (17) installed and reported complete of any of the nine RC&D's in PA. Progress has been less than I hoped for this past year with all the field office workload responsibilities and the volunteer nature of the projects combining to slow completion. I know of several projects that are completed, but the local sponsors don't seem to be in too big a hurry to claim their expenses and earn a rebate, so I don't include them as a completed project. To date, we have spent a total of \$126,158.49 of the grant funds. Since the grant contract expires at the end of August this year, I anticipate that I will have to apply for an extension on this project in order to complete it. I traveled to Somerset last week and provided survey and design training on two sites to the Southern Alleghenies and Penn's Corner RC&D Coordinators to help them streamline the design process.

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VALUE ADDED SMALL SCALE DAIRY PROCESSING PROJECT

I have received all nine modules of the **Make Something More from Your Milk** educational video series. The video production is ready to be released and we have begun to advertise that the tapes are available. Free copies of the tapes will be distributed to the individuals and partners who assisted in developing the tapes, and provided at a cost to anyone else interested in the tapes. The sale of the tapes and/or DVDs may help Penn Soil recover costs of the production and support the value added scholarship fund. The video modules sell for \$12.00 each or \$89.00 for the complete set on VHS tape or \$15.00 each or \$120.00 for the complete set on DVD. We have already received our first order for the complete set of videos from a Crawford County dairy farmer. We have received our first shipment of the Raw Milk videos and DVDs, but there has been a six to eight week delay in getting the rest of the modules copied for our first order due to personal issues with the owner-operator of the video production company. I finally was able to get assurance from him that production was getting back on track last week and we should get the rest of our order sometime this week.

On a related note, Jack Preston asked me to submit this project as an RC&D Success Story to the Conference Planning Committee for the National RC&D meeting in Savannah, GA in June and it was selected for presentation to the rest of the attendees. This was the only success story selected for presentation by a Pennsylvania RC&D council. Jack and I will get together on the presentation on behalf of the Penn Soil RC&D Council

I worked with Mercer CD Manager, Jim Mondok and Harold Schueller, Sales Representative for Van't Riet Dairy Processing Equipment Manufacturing Company to develop the floor plan layout and equipment needs for the proposed Dairy Incubator Facility at Munnell Run Farm. Jim and I collaborated on developing an application for the PA First Industries Program for funding the project planning and design of the incubator facility. The proposal for funding was submitted last winter, but we learned that the application was not funded at the March meeting. From what I have heard, it sounds as if more of the money is going to tourism projects as opposed to agricultural projects. There was an opportunity to submit a new grant proposal to the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, so Jim and I collaborated on revising a grant proposal to cover the Architectural and Engineering (A&E) on the incubator plus \$50,000 toward the dairy processing equipment for the incubator. That application was submitted at the end of April.

On another project, I have worked out the details for Penn Soil RC&D to sponsor a three day cheese making class in Mercer from August 24-26th. The hands-on training course is limited to 15 participants and will be taught by Peter Dixon, a well known cheese maker from Vermont. We are now taking registrations for the course which will cost \$325 per student. Penn Soil RC&D will still have scholarship funds available to help defray the cost of attending the class for Penn Soil residents. Mercer Conservation District is assisting us with this event, by making local arrangements with the host site and providing audio visual equipment at the site for the class. Peter Dixon has also volunteered to present a slide presentation of his travels in eastern Europe teaching cheese making for USDA. This will be an evening program which we can use to promote our value added dairy project and will be open to the public.

I presented a program detailing Penn Soil's Value Added Dairy Project to the Erie Conservation District in April and the presentation was well received by the group. Interest continues to build in this project

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UPPER ALLEGHENY COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROJECT

Jack Preston and I met with Peter Winkler, Congressman Peterson's Aide, and John Phillips and Randy Seitz of the Oil Region Alliance to discuss the administration of the Upper Allegheny Community Outreach Project. While the meeting was very positive in terms of ORA and Penn Soil RC&D being able to partner together to work on projects of mutual interest, no clear resolution to the administrative management of the position was agreed upon. ORA certainly values Deb's work for them at a high level and wants to continue to host the position and keep Deb on their staff. Randy and John expressed their willingness to make outreach and collaboration on behalf of Penn Soil RC&D part of the duties of the position and to try to incorporate RC&D activities into Deb's plan of work. The overall concept is still dependent on the funding source, however, and ORA would be seeking funding from Penn Soil or other sources to continue the position past the expiration of the current grant funding supplied through the companion grants that Venango and Clarion Economic Development Corporations received. In the meantime, it appears that our original three way memorandum of understanding between Penn Soil RC&D, ORA, and CCEDC has not functioned the way it was intended and Penn Soil has not received or escrowed any funding to support the position beyond the initial grants. ORA and CCEDC may seek grant extensions from the SBA to extend their current grants until they have utilized the available funding supporting the position. Both ORA and Penn Soil RC&D had requested earmark funding through Congressman Peterson's office to support the future of the position, but no further information has been received regarding streamlining the administration of the position.

TIONESTA VISITORS CENTER

Tionesta Borough awarded a \$41,000 contract for renovations to the Visitor's Center to Remco Construction of Warren, PA and they started the construction last summer on August 12th. The Phase I grant of \$10,000 from the U.S. Forest Service was completed by the end of August, 2005. This grant was used to remove and replace the large plate glass windows of the converted gas station with smaller, more energy efficient and attractive windows to improve the overall exterior appearance. The project continued into Phase II using an additional \$15,000 Forest Service Grant and a \$25,000 DCNR grant to finish the front exterior of the building to provide a more attractive facade and a handicapped accessible ramp to the building entrance. Also the floor level in the main meeting room which previously required visitors to negotiate a step down was raised to make the floor inside the building all one level and eliminate the step. I met or discussed the project with the Tionesta Borough Manager on several occasions to help them figure out where they stood with the project and what invoices they needed Penn Soil RC&D to pay. We have now spent all grant funds to complete Phase I and II of this project and submitted the closeout reports to the Forest Service. We still have a \$10,000 Forest Service grant for Phase III to complete which involves repairs to the drainage system around the building and parking lot.

The latest development in this project is that there is some indication that neither The Chamber of Commerce or the Tionesta Borough are interested in continuing to operate the visitor center and the Borough may seek to sell or lease the building to someone else. The Forest County IDA may seek to take over the lease and would like to maintain the visitor center if at all possible. I have tried to get an answer from the Forest Service regarding the ramifications of the Borough's decision on the recently completed grants as well as the pending grant, but have received no response yet.

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VENANGO COUNTY ON-LOT WASTEWATER TREATMENT PROJECT

This is essentially part of the same project as the Crawford County on-lot wastewater treatment project that was previously completed. Originally there were to be ten sites in this study. The construction of the four Venango County sites were delayed for a while and only completed this past fall. Venango CD began collecting the monthly water samples last November under a contract with the Penn Soil Charitable Trust and funded by a PENNSTEP grant in the amount of \$7,500 which will cover the data collection and the final assessment report. Sampling is ongoing under the terms of the contract. The grant contract was extended by the Northwest Commission until the end of this calendar year.

BIODIESEL PROJECT

In July of 2005, I assisted Penn Soil RC&D in modifying our original grant proposal under a new notice of funding availability offered by DEP under the Energy harvest Program. We used the original grant proposal to request \$69,956 of state funding to demonstrate the feasibility of local production of biodiesel fuel from waste vegetable oil. We received word that the project again did not make the cut, so I need to continue to look for a funding source for this project. There are two new funding opportunities available through Energy Harvest and Pennsylvania Energy Development Authority now through June. I will be resubmitting the project under one or both of those programs.

RIVER ROAD CRITICAL AREA TREATMENT PROJECT

I submitted a request for NRCS engineering assistance on this project to perform an Inventory and Evaluation of the erosion problem to determine possible alternatives and cost estimates. The request was accepted and ultimately assigned to Justin Griebel, PACD Engineering Technician to visit the site and evaluate the problem. Justin and I completed the field visit on October 26, 2005, and I received his report in Mid December to review it with the local sponsor to determine a course of action. I have forwarded the Inventory & Evaluation report to the sponsor in late December, 2005, for their review and to determine whether they wish to pursue the suggested remedies which were estimated to cost roughly \$16,000 dollars. No response has been received to date.

TIONESTA VALLEY SNOWMOBILE CLUB (TVSC) TRAIL MAINTENANCE PROJECT

Dianna and I had assisted TVSC prepare a DCNR grant application for \$9800 to fund the purchase of trail maintenance equipment for maintaining snowmobile trails in Chapman State Park and the Allegheny National Forest. We were waiting for a response to the application. In the meantime, I was contacted by Jim Thompson, aide to State Representative Kathy Rapp, to discuss a new grant request from the same group for additional equipment. I told Jim that I had heard that DCNR was overwhelmed with grant administration of these ATV and snowmobile grants since they only had one person doing these for the whole state and it might make some sense to DCNR to combine the two requests into one project. Since we had not received a response to the original grant application, I suggested Jim check in with DCNR about the possibility of revising the original project application instead of doing a separate application. He did check with DCNR and was told that we could combine the requests and revise the original application to a new grant request totaling \$23,894.00, which we did in March. There is still no word on an award yet.

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PROJECT GRASS

I collaborated with NRCS Grazing Specialists Tim Elder and J.B. Harrold to develop a \$79,900.00 grant proposal to fund a demonstration of controlling invasive plant species such as multiflora rose, autumn olive, burdock, and thistle on pastures by using multi-species grazing in twenty-nine western PA counties including all of the Penn Soil RC&D Area. Successful control of these invasive species by utilizing goats and sheep has been documented, but is little publicized. The project would seek to provide at least 15 demonstrations in the 29 counties to better publicize this control option.

Powerline Right-of-way Before Goat Grazing



Powerline Right-of-way After Goat Grazing



Western PA Farmers Market Partnership

I had received requests from three different community farmers markets within the Penn Soil Area for assistance in improving and promoting farmers markets to both consumers and farmers who could sell their products at these markets. I identified a funding opportunity through the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service to apply for grant funds to assist these and the other 12-15 farmers markets listed for the Penn Soil RC&D area in promoting their markets. At the same time, I learned that PASA and the Farmers Market Alliance of Western Pa were also considering submitting a similar grant proposal for western PA. When David Eson suggested that the three entities might all collaborate and combine our proposals into one proposal that would benefit all of western PA, I agreed to include the other eleven counties beyond the Penn Soil area that make up the western region of PASA. A proposal was submitted by Penn Soil RC&D which would make up to \$2000 in matching funds available to eligible markets for use in promoting local community farmers markets. In addition two regional training sessions would be offered to assist farmers selling through farmers markets on how to direct market to consumers. Penn Soil RC&D would administer the grant and PASA and FMA WP would provide the technical assistance to work with Community Farmers Markets.

CHANDLER'S VALLEY DAM

State Senator Mary Jo White sponsored this project for a DCED grant and we have received a letter of award from DCED indicating that the \$10,250.00 in funds have been awarded to Penn Soil RC&D on behalf of the Chandlers Valley Community Association to effect repairs on the Jackson Run Dam. I arranged a check presentation picture with Senator White presenting the check to Penn Soil RC&D Vice-Chairman David Bauer and Gene Falconer representing the Chandlers Valley

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Community Association. Since my last report, we have received the authorization from DEP to proceed with the repairs after June 15th. As soon as we receive the contract and the award, we will schedule the site showing for prospective bidders and award a contract for the repairs. Work should be completed by fall.

BOLLINGER ENTERPRISES INC. (BEI) HANDWASH SYSTEM AT CHAPMAN ST PARK

BEI's food concession operation at Chapman State Park (CSP) is licensed by the PA Department of Agriculture, requiring proper food handling procedures and equipment to ensure public safety. They are limited in what they can sell to the public because of the basic and primitive utility infrastructure at the concession stand. The hand wash station will enable them to meet Department of Agriculture requirements for compliance as a public eating place. This hand wash station will also enable them to offer more choices of food for consumption by the public enhancing Chapman State Park's ability to serve the recreating public. BEI has a ten year contract for the food concession at the park, commencing in 2004, so the useful life of the hand wash station would be over this time period.

BEI's mission is to develop and provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The CSP Concession has provided a unique employment experience that has been well received by employees with disabilities working there. Non-disabled concession managers are always present offering work skills training to employees with disabilities. The concession operation is seasonal, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, offering full and part time employment to eight people. Some private funding has been raised to support the project, but its continuation is contingent on revenues from the retail sales of food and boat rentals to cover wages and other operational costs. The hand wash station funded by the Penn Soil program will help achieve the economic viability of the CSP Concession Stand Employment Project.

The application for this \$3500 project was submitted to DCED stating that Penn Soil RC&D was willing to commit the first \$1000 to this project if DCED will fund the remainder. We learned somewhat later that DCED would not even consider requests for less than \$5000, so we were advised to either expand the project to do more work or buy a better system. To their credit, when I explained the situation to BEI, they were reluctant to do that since they had recently learned that the state would be making some improvements in the Park's infrastructure in two years, and they didn't want to waste the grant funding doing something temporary. I then suggested that we may be able to find a temporary solution for our original \$1000 dollar commitment. I located a portable hot water handwashing station that could be purchased and provided to BEI to use at the Park until the park makes their improvements. At that time, BEI would return the portable unit to Penn Soil RC&D and we could make it available for other uses such as Project Grass Field Days and community festivals where it might be needed. The Penn Soil Conservancy Charitable Trust voted to purchase the unit in time for BEI's summer season beginning later this month. I will set up a photo and press release to promote Penn Soil RC&D's ability to meet this community need.

Respectfully submitted,

Wesley W. Ramsey
RC&D Coordinator