

PENN SOIL RC&D COUNCIL

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

August 15, 2007

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

DRY HYDRANTS

Penn Soil is administering the Statewide Grant of \$ 284,000 to install minimum of 360 new dry hydrants across the state. A total of 370 dry hydrant kits have been purchased and distributed to the nine RC&D's in PA to date. **UPDATE: One hundred and thirty-two hydrant installations have been reported completed as of this date. Penn Soil RC&D has the most (29) installed and reported complete of any of the nine RC&D's in PA. To date, we have spent a total of \$165,405 of the grant funds. The contract was due to expire on August 31, 2007, however, we sought and were granted a one year no cost extension for the grant. As there is a five year maximum time limit on Forest Service Grants, this will be the final extension for this project. The grant contract will end on August 31, 2008.**

2008 CONSERVATION TILLAGE CONFERENCE

Planning for the 2008 Tri State Tillage Conference is underway. The conference will be held on January 22, 2008 at the Radisson Hotel, in West Middlesex, PA. Committee members are making contacts with suggested speakers to determine their availability for the event. Dianna and I worked together to develop an application for a \$1900 PACD Mini-grant to cover printing, postage, and speaker fees which will be submitted by the Erie County Conservation District. **UPDATE: The agenda for this year's conference has been finalized and everything is proceeding smoothly. Erie CD informed us that apparently PACD will no longer fund projects not directly administered by a conservation district applicant, so our grant proposal was not successful.**

ALLEGHENY REGION GEOCACHING TRAIL

The proposal I developed for the PA Wilds Geocaching Trail was partially adopted by the Oil Region Alliance for Business, Industry, and Tourism and was successful in obtaining federal funding to carry out a Tourism project for the Allegheny National Forest and gateway communities. The Allegheny Tourism Project will involve using the growing sport of geocaching to promote tourism in ten counties: Clarion, Forest, Crawford, Venango, Warren within the Penn Soil RC&D Area, and Cameron, McKean, Potter, Elk, and Jefferson in Headwaters RC&D. Penn Soil RC&D has entered into a contract for professional services to coordinate certain aspects of the project. **Update: The project is progressing as well as can be expected with so many partners needing to take an active role involved. A great deal of time was involved with approving the contractor to mint the eleven commemorative geocoins and in finalizing the designs for the printed materials and the eleven unique coin designs. The first geocoin proof has now been received and approved for production. Designs are underway for the next six county coins and the passport booklet is currently at the printers. At the last Project Steering committee meeting, the decision was made that the project will officially go active for the public on October 1, 2007. There may be some counties, whose geocoins are not ready yet, but we will have the geocaches placed and people can get their passports validated. They may end up receiving their souvenir coins by mail if that is the case.**

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TIONESTA VALLEY SNOWMOBILE CLUB (TVSC) TRAIL MAINTENANCE PROJECT

Dianna and I had assisted TVSC prepare a new DCNR grant application for \$15,432 to fund the purchase of trail maintenance equipment for maintaining snowmobile trails in Chapman State Park and the Allegheny National Forest. I had discussed the original project application from last year with DCNR and found out that when TVSC had us revise the original budget request last year to ask for more money, the proposal was too reliant on in-kind volunteer services doing the trail maintenance, that DCNR thought it would take too long to earn the match required. This year's proposal is based on cash match and should be viewed more favorably. **Update: We are still waiting to hear from DCNR regarding the success of this grant proposal. A total of \$3800 dollars in local match is required for the grant award requested. The local match would be split between the TVSC and the Penn Soil Conservancy Charitable Trust, each providing \$1900 if the grant is awarded.**

CHANDLER'S VALLEY DAM

We finally received the check for the \$10,250 award from PA DCED, so we can move the project forward as soon as the construction season begins. A site showing is scheduled for 10:00 AM, May 18, 2007 to secure bids from prospective contractors for completing the repairs. The notice to proceed with the repairs should be given by June 15th with completion expected by September 30th, 2007. **Update: No bids were received during the open solicitation period that was publicly advertised. After the bid solicitation period had ended, one local contractor called to inquire about the job. Since we had received no bids for the project, we agreed to award a contract to John Allen Excavating Company, Sugar Grove, PA, to complete the repairs to the dam for the NRCS engineer's estimate of \$9,650 dollars. A notice to proceed was given to the contractor on June 15th allowing a performance time of 90 days to complete the work. The project is expected to get under construction the week of August 20th and be completed by the end of August.**

PROJECT GRASS

Penn Soil RC&D was awarded a new \$51,000 Growing Greener Grant on behalf of the NW Project Grass Chapter to expand Managed Grazing demonstrations in NW PA. The grant will assist us establish or expand a minimum of eight managed grazing system demonstrations over the next two years within the following watersheds: Chautauqua-Conneaut, French Creek, Shenango, Mahoning, Beaver, and Upper Ohio River watersheds in Crawford, Erie, Mercer, Lawrence, & Venango counties. NRCS Grazing Specialist Tim Elder and I have worked together to develop a project plan as we prepare to administer the grant. Tim will be working with Conservation Districts and local field offices of NRCS to put out a call for project applications. Selected landowners must provide a 30% local match to grant funds awarded. The grant funds may be used to pay for purchasing and installing exterior fencing, interior fencing, stream bank fencing, stabilized stream crossings, stabilized livestock walkways, spring developments, water systems, buffer systems, and diversions associated with grazing systems. All practices installed with grant funds must meet the NRCS practice standards & specifications and be certified complete by the local office of NRCS. **Update: We have received our grant contract from DEP and have begun implementing the project. NRCS Grazing Specialist Tim Elder is working with local Conservation Districts and NRCS Field Offices to implement projects. To date, we have completed two projects and spent a total of \$ 9,572 of the grant funds.**

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CREP WEED CONTROL/WILDLIFE HABITAT PROJECT

Penn Soil RC&D entered into contracts with the following County Conservation Districts to conduct the field visits with CREP participants in their respective counties: Crawford, Erie, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, & Warren. Penn Soil also contracted with the Pheasants Forever group to do the field visits in Clarion & Forest counties since Clarion Co. Conservation District declined to participate in the project. Field reviews are underway and the first reports are coming in now. The feedback from producers has been entirely positive judging from the phone calls we have received in the office. A Warm Season Grass Management field day will be held on August 27th at the Walt Robertson farm in Clarion County. The public is invited to learn more about the establishment, identification, and management of warm season grasses and about the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

AG AWARENESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CLASSROOMS

The proposal submitted on behalf of the Warren Future of Agriculture Task Force was to develop a teacher in service program to highlight agriculture as part of economic development. The project was successful in receiving funding. State Representative Kathy Rapp (65th District) supported this application and notified us that the project was awarded a \$7500 DCED Community Revitalization Grant. The project was done without funding on a reduced scale in the summer of 2006 as a dry run with 12 teachers participating. It is anticipated that the full proposal would be implemented in 2007 once funding is received. **UPDATE: Penn Soil RC&D has received the check for this award from PA DCED. The 2007 Teacher In-Service Program was scheduled for June 18-21st but was postponed due to insufficient enrollment. I met with members of the Warren Future of Ag Task Force to review the grant contract and discuss options for carrying out the project. Some of the grant funds were assigned to cover the travel expenses of Joel Salatin for the educational program he did in Warren County earlier this year. The members of the Future of Ag Task Force are discussing further options on developing educational resources that will meet with the intent of the grant. The funds must be spent by June 30, 2008.**

BIG BEND BIRD VIEWING AREA & NATURE TRAIL

We developed and submitted the full proposal to the PA Lumber Heritage Region by the April deadline. We also developed and submitted a \$10,000 DCED grant proposal to pay for professional engineering services in conjunction with this project. In the meantime, the Allegheny Outdoor Club has been doing some brush management work at the project site and working with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) to finalize a project agreement regarding the construction & maintenance of the project on lands administered by the USACOE. I have scheduled to meet with Justin Griebel, PACD Engineering Technician to begin the topographic survey of the project area on June 5, 2007. This information will be needed by the design engineer as the project progresses. **UPDATE: The survey and preliminary Inventory & Evaluation (I&E) report have been completed as scheduled. Copies have been provided to the local sponsors for their use in project planning. A new \$10,000 DCED grant application was submitted in July to cover Professional Design services that will be required for the Lumber Heritage Region Grant (when approved) and a funding request was developed and submitted to the First Energy Foundation for the \$25,000 in required local matching funds. Allegheny Outdoor Club president Bill Massa has been very active in promoting this project and assisting with meeting with potential partners in the project to move it forward as rapidly as possible.**

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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. Forest County Commissioners have reached an agreement with Tionesta Borough and DCNR to takeover the visitor center and continue to operate it for the original purpose of the previous grants. In addition, DCNR will provide an additional \$15,000 to address handicapped access restroom facilities to make the facility ADA compliant. That work is expected to be complete by early summer of 2007. The Visitors Center is set to open for Memorial Day weekend; however, renovations are not complete as of this date. After the ADA compliance issues are addressed, Forest County will issue an RFP to complete the parking lot with the Phase III grant awarded by the U.S. Forest Service to Penn Soil RC&D. These grant funds are available until September 30, 2007. **UPDATE: I met with Forest Co. Commissioner Basil Huffman and Forest Co. IDA Director, Scott Henry on August 10th to review the grant purpose, look at the project, and discuss contracting of the paving work. I furnished a list of three paving contractors who they could contact to get a quotation for the work to be done. They will try to get the paving contract awarded so that work can be completed by the end of September. The visitor center is currently open, although some renovations to the building are not complete yet.**

RIVER ROAD CRITICAL AREA TREATMENT

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. **UPDATE: Penn Soil RC&D received a \$2,000 grant recently toward the estimated \$16,000 Critical Area Stabilization Project in Venango County. The grant was awarded by the Western PA Watershed Program of the Community Foundation of the Alleghenies. Further coordination with the local sponsors is needed to determine the status of this project.**

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MUNNELL RUN FARM CENTER FOR VALUE ADDED AGRICULTURE

Regarding the Incubator project at Munnell Run Farm, Jim Mondok and I gave a presentation to the Northwest Commission Local Development Committee regarding our proposal requesting \$25,000 from Northwest to cover the Architectural & Engineering Design of the Incubator facility. We were one of twelve projects under consideration for local development funding. We have received word that the top three project requests were funded and our request was not among them. We continue to research other potential funding sources. **Update: I have learned that the Northwest Commission has opened up a new application period for their Local Development Funding, so I reapplied for the \$28,000 in Architectural & Engineering Funding needed for the project. I also submitted a pre-application for \$190,000 in construction funding and met with Ned Goucher of the Northwest Commission for Appalachian Regional Commission funding. This project will not make it to the top of the NWC priority list for FY08 funding, but it will now be on their radar screen and hopefully stand a good chance to make it to the top of their priority list for FY09. At Ned's recommendation, I also scheduled a meeting with Bob Schoenfeldt and Barry Miller of USDA Rural Development to discuss the project. RD would be the managing entity for any ARC grant funding received, so their support and partnership role is essential to the project. The presentation seemed to be well received and they indicate that they would be interested in working with us on this project.**

Also related to this project, Penn Soil RC&D will co-sponsor a Shared Kitchen Informational Session at the Mercer County Extension Office from 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Friday September 14, 2007. The meeting will feature a presentation by Dr. Cameron Wold, a nationally known expert on establishing shared kitchen incubators. The meeting will be open to the public, so both potential users of the facility and potential partners who may be involved are invited to attend to learn more about setting up and operating shared kitchen facilities. Council members are encouraged to attend the session to learn more about what will be involved in managing this project.

VALUE ADDED SMALL SCALE DAIRY PROCESSING PROJECT

Penn Soil RC&D will sponsor a two day cheese making class in Mercer again on May 30-31st. The hands-on training course will be limited to 20 participants and taught by Melanie Dietrich-Cochran of Keswick Creamery, a well known cheese maker from Southern PA. Jim Mondok is working on arrangements to secure the same facility as we used last year at the Trinity Church in Mercer. From the number of preliminary contacts we have had about the course, it appears that there is still a high degree of interest in learning cheese making and we should be able to fill the class. **Update: Twenty-one students attended the two day cheese making course and gave the course and the instructor good reviews. We continue to receive telephone inquiries about when we will host our next class. No date has been set for another course, but it looks like there continues to be a demand for this service.**

PENN SOIL RC&D FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

A great deal of time has been spent this quarter on summarizing the data and public input collected for consideration and inclusion in the new updated version of our Area Plan. This document outlines the Council's goals, objectives, and strategies for our plan of work for the period 2007-2012. The draft plan is being presented at the August 2007 Council meeting for review and adoption.

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TIONESTA BEACH

The grant proposal to hire a beach manager to coordinate summer recreation projects and supervise a youth crew renovating the miniature golf course was successful in its quest for DCED funding. State Representative Kathy Rapp (65th District) supported this application and notified us that the project was awarded a \$5000 DCED Community Revitalization Grant. The work was carried out by The Lions Club, Penn Soil RC&D, and numerous other partners during the summer of 2006; however, we are still waiting for the state funding. **UPDATE: The \$5000 in state funding has been received. Invoices have been received and paid by Penn Soil RC&D to close this grant out. This project has been completed.**

HUNTING & FISHING MUSEUM OF PA

Penn Soil RC&D is managing two separate grants to assist in the completion of the Architectural & Engineering Design of the Main Museum Complex. The grants are both funded by the U.S. Forest Service to assist the Museum in developing the A&E design to the point where construction could take place when sufficient funds have been raised. One grant (\$30,000) is expected to be closed out by the end of September, while the other one (\$90,000) is about half expended and will probably need an extension to complete the work. The project is being matched by local and state funds expended by the Museum in pursuit of the design and construction. Two invoices have been paid from the larger grant to date. Invoices are paid alternately with state funds and the grants we are administering.

Dianna and I participated in a ribbon cutting ceremony at the Hunting & Fishing Museum recently as many project partners were on hand to witness the official opening of the newly constructed handicapped accessible fishing pier. This project was a companion project in the Allegheny Wild Scenic River Complex project where Penn Soil RC&D administered a Forest Service grant that funded the improvements to the parking area and existing boat launch last year.

MID ATLANTIC RC&D ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Chairman Jack Preston, Program Assistant Dianna Hendrick, and I have all been working diligently to help plan and carry out the upcoming 2007 Mid Atlantic RC&D Annual Conference which is scheduled for September 16-19, 2007 in Grantville, PA. Dianna and Penn Soil RC&D are taking the registrations for the conference on behalf of PARC&D and we all have been involved in monthly conference planning committee meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

Wesley W. Ramsey
RC&D Coordinator