

# Local district celebrates conservation district week

- By JESSE RICE Staff Writer
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The state Senate and House of Representatives declared May 5-11 as “Conservation District Week,” establishing a week to celebrate the work of the local conservation districts.

One simple reason for celebrating conservation districts is because “everyone needs clean water and healthy, productive farms,” said Celina Seftas, district manager for the Huntingdon County Conservation District.

“We really look at Conservation District Week and Earth Day as a two-month window when we have a lot of outreach to schools and community events, we’re really busy with construction on our agricultural conservation projects, dirt and gravel road projects, and inspections for erosion and sedimentation construction projects. This particular week is just highlighting what we do all the time,” Seftas said.

Seftas explained the only specific thing the district did to honor the occasion was receive a proclamation recognizing the week from the county commissioners during the commissioners’ meeting Tuesday. Otherwise, it was business as usual.

“We are gearing up for the 33rd annual Huntingdon County Envirothon,” she said. “High School teams from across the county will come to the Raystown Field Station and compete in an event that showcases their knowledge of the environment, wildlife, forestry, aquatics and soils.”

The Envirothon will take place Tuesday, May 14. The different schools will compete to test their knowledge of environmental information and work on creative solutions to the problems, according to the Pennsylvania Envirothon website.

The district will also be holding other school events.

“We’re also gearing up to do a stream study with Huntingdon Area Middle School,” Seftas said. “We call in a bunch of partner agencies: the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Shaver’s Creek Environmental Center, Science in Motion and the Little Juniata River Association. The students go through a whole bunch of stations learning about water quality, how land use impacts water quality, the benefits of riparian buffers and the importance of clean water. There will be stations on fish, as well and fly fishing.”

The district also works with the community beyond the schools.

“As far as community outreach, we were at Earth Day at Blair Park,” Seftas said. “We also did a ‘Splash in the Stream’ event at Mayfest.”

The district also was at the recent First Friday event in Mount Union.

“We did fish printing in conjunction with the Huntingdon County Arts Council,” said Seftas. “We used models that are (based) off real fish to teach people about fish coloration and camouflage, the importance of clean water for our fisheries and drinking water. You also got to paint on the fish and stamp it with a piece of cloth so you would have something to take home to remember what you learned about conservation.”

Along with the special events, the district also does a lot of day-to-day activities helping the community, especially local farmers.

“Agriculture is how we started,” Seftas said. “After the dust bowl, farmers petition the local government for conservation assistance. This is especially our focus in Huntingdon County where agriculture is the number one industry.”

Every day the district is overseeing construction projects on farms such as stream bank fencing, stabilized cattle crossings, and stream bank restorations to prevent stream bank erosion in a pasture.

“We’ve also been completing grant contracts for some upcoming projects like rotational grazing systems and some barnyard conservation projects,” Seftas said. “All those projects help to keep soil in the fields and help reduce nutrients and sediment pollution in local streams.”

Seftas said they also have programs that helps farmers with nutrient and manure management plans, and a program that helps townships with low volume roads.

“The (roads) program started with Trout Unlimited and Penn State looking at a lot of small dirt and gravel roads that also tend to travel along some of our best trout streams,” she said. “This programs seeks to maintain those roads in an environmentally sensitive manner, so there is less erosion to those small trout streams and less upkeep for the townships. By building the road using best practices, they shouldn’t have to replace as much material over time because a stable road isn’t eroding into streams.”

For more information about Huntingdon County Conservation, visit [www.huntingdoncd.org](http://www.huntingdoncd.org).