

75th Anniversary press release

On November 28th, 1945, the Potter County Conservation District became the first district established in the state of Pennsylvania.

In the beginning, our roots began in the farming community, with the primary goal of helping agriculture thrive while protecting natural resources. Through the late 1930's until 1945, three influential local figures spearheaded the establishment of the District – Henry Staiger, an agriculture teacher and involved community member, and Ed Fisher and Roselle Lette, both progressive farmers. The initial goal of the district was preventing soil erosion for the sake of future farming and conserving water quality. As Mr. Staiger explained to a then skeptical public, “would you allow a hole to remain in your pocket if you were only losing a dime at a time?” the example being that soil erosion, although often slow, is a steady loss with long term negative effects.

Through the latter half of the 20th century, the District promoted agricultural best management practices that would assist in conserving soil health and water quality. At first, these included simple ideas such as crop rotations, cover crops, and no till. Through farm tours, supporting cooperative grower groups, and other festivals and educational field days, the District along with Potter County potato growers and dairymen worked together to share ideas, experiences, and feedback on budding conservationist practices.

Especially beginning in the 1970's and 80's, the District became an established service provider to the community as a whole through active participation in schools, organizations, continued support to farmers, and partnerships with other agencies. At this time, the District also began offering various county conservation awards to progressive, conservation-minded farmers and teachers, as well as FFA and Agriculture student scholarships. The District also began building its capacity for environmental education through forest and farm tours, expanding content for agriculture and FFA students, and promoting the incorporation of watershed health in local classroom curriculum.

Substantial state and local budgeting came through for the District starting in the 90's, which gradually led to stream bank restoration projects and the beginnings of the Dirt and Gravel Roads Program. Thanks to work from our own local fishermen turned staunch conservationists - Pete Ryan, Bud Byron, Bob Cardeline, and Ed Bellis - the Dirt and Gravel Roads Program was officially adopted statewide in 1997. This program is now active in all counties in PA, working to prevent sediment washing into streams from our many dirt roads.

In the new millennia, different challenges have arisen, but our mission remains the same: protect the natural resources of Potter County through project implementation, educational programs, technical assistance, and by fostering public and private partnerships. As we did from the beginning, we've held strong in continuing to promote up and coming conservation practices to the agricultural community. Our reach has grown towards also promoting or providing various backyard conservation tools and practices, stream and habitat restoration, land development and construction BMP's, dirt and gravel roads restoration and related technical assistance, and a diverse array of environmental education programs.

Although 2020 has brought many challenges to us and our community, we're proud to take a small moment to celebrate our 75th anniversary this year! To celebrate, we've compiled a newsletter outlining a few milestones in Potter County through the last 75 years, and the District's involvement in these memories. This publication will be available on our website; printed copies will be placed in the Gunzberger Building and our office at 107 Market St. We feel that our 75th anniversary is not only about celebrating our work and history, but that of our larger community as well. We hope you enjoy the stroll down memory lane, and we look forward to a bright future of continuing our service to our local environment, and to you, our remarkable community.



(March, 2020) Each spring, the District holds a legislative luncheon in which local leaders, representatives and commissioners, our board and others are invited to hear a recap of our work through the past year. Staff members present a summary of their respective programs, and ample time for networking and Q&A is provided. The luncheon is held at the beautiful Susquehannock Lodge on Route 6 in Ulysses. (Front row, L-R: Stan Hess, Earl Brown, Betsey Long, Don Heiner, Brenda Shambaugh, Pete Ryan, Charlie Tuttle, Nancy Grupp, Susan Paisley, Glenn Dunn, Barry Hayman. Back row, L-R: Jason Childs, Jon Blass, Kimberly Johns, Steve Putt, Chuck Dillon, Jared Dickerson, Paul Heimel, Andrew Mickey, Emily Shosh, Jeff Cady, Chris Robbins, Phil Lehman.



The District works closely with Watershed Associations on a number of projects, including river clean ups (pictured here,) water quality monitoring, various habitat and water research efforts, citing and prioritizing stream projects, and more. Pictured here are members of the Upper Allegheny Watershed Association (UAWA) in 2019, after completing a cleanup on several miles of the Allegheny River. L-R: Jason Childs, PCCD Manager; Heather McKean, UAWA President; Madey McKean; Bob Volkmar, UAWA member; Stubby Wertz, UAWA member; Janie Weeks, UAWA member; and Frank Weeks, UAWA Treasurer.



The District works to organize riparian plantings and other environmental action projects for all ages. Here is one such stream-side tree planting effort organized by Emily Shosh, PCCD Educator, and the Beyond the Horizon 4H Group of Coudersport. The planting took place on the property of Genevieve Gehman on Sartwell Creek.



The District remains active in promoting agricultural BMP's and administering various services to interested farmers. One such project is the recently deployed Rotational Grazing Kit, which offers farmers a chance to test out rotational grazing equipment before buying their own set up. Rotational grazing ensures livestock receives better nutrition, protects soil health, can help with weed suppression, and helps prevent non-point source water pollution. Above, District Manager Jason Childs assists farmer and now District Board Director Jeff Cady install the new rotational grazing kit.



Dr. Pete Ryan is one instrumental figure in the establishment of the Dirt and Gravel / Low Volume Roads program. Pictured above is current DGR Specialist Andrew Mickey (L) with Dr. Ryan (R) and the Founder's Award Pete received from the PA Trout Unlimited in 2004, partly for his work in Potter County in the dirt and gravel roads realm. Starting in 1997, Pete was one of several Potter County individuals and Trout Unlimited representatives who began the Dirt and Gravel Roads "Task Force," which later led to the statewide program and budgeting for maintaining dirt roads and conserving prime fisheries and water quality.