



MCKEAN COUNTY  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

*Conserving Natural Resources for Our Future*

**McKean County Conservation District  
Allegheny Plateau Invasive Plant Management Area**

**Testimony before the  
Center for Rural Pennsylvania**

Submitted by:

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Good morning. My name is Jody Groshek and I am the Communications and Outreach Director for the McKean County Conservation District. The McKean County Conservation District provides leadership and stewardship to ensure the protection and sustainability of McKean County's natural resources by fostering public and private partnerships.

Conservation Districts statewide implement state and regional programs for the benefit of Pennsylvania's natural resources. Many Districts also enter into delegation agreements with the state to administer clean water and nutrient management programs (delegated through PA DEP and the State Conservation Commission). Despite no dedicated funding, 28% of Conservation Districts currently have established invasive species programs, with most providing education and outreach. Invasive species impact many facets of environmental work. Riparian buffer plantings can fail if invasive plants monopolize the project site; Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road projects can be impacted by invasive species growing on disturbed roadsides and this can provide a vector for seeds to spread to other sites; aquatic invasive species harm ecosystem balance in lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. Invasive insects have significant economic impacts to agriculture and forests. Knowledge of invasive species, their identification, prevention, and management, is important for Conservation District staff.

The PA Association of Conservation Districts implemented an invasive species survey completed by 50 conservation districts in 2019. Ninety-six percent of PA Conservation Districts envision taking part in cooperative invasive species work if there is opportunity to participate in a CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area; or PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management). While 28% of Districts are doing invasive species work; the other 64% state that their current financial resources are a limiting factor to integrate any invasive species work, although most are willing to do so.

The McKean County Conservation District became involved in the formation of a local partnership beginning in 2017. Myself and the previous Penn State Extension Forestry Educator Dr. Kimberly Bohn attended several meetings of the neighboring Sinnemahoning Invasive Plant Management Area (SIPMA) and decided to investigate the potential of a new collaborative in the McKean County area. Numerous partners, ranging from state and federal agencies to non-government organizations, to local trail groups, were invited to attend an initial meeting. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and numerous partners agreed to commit to form a collaborative. Dr. Bohn had extensive experience with CISMAs in Florida and we worked with a smaller steering committee to develop a draft strategic plan that was adopted in 2018. APIPMA currently has over 50 partners and has achieved a great deal in 3 ½ years on basically a "shoestring" budget of small grants.



A Program Coordinator was hired with a start-up grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation “Pulling Together” program (which unfortunately no longer exists). The coordinator began as a summer intern for the District in 2018 and moved into full time employment (with other District responsibilities) in the fall of 2018. Around the time APIPMA was formed, a new Allegheny Forest Health Collaborative was starting. They requested for APIPMA to act as lead for the Non-native Invasive Plant (NNIP) Working Group. This role has greatly increased APIPMA exposure and support. APIPMA outreach through the press, social media, and numerous workshops has exponentially increased public awareness in the area. The District receives numerous calls and requests for technical assistance from citizens who want to manage their invasive plant problems after learning more from our outreach efforts. Others request plant identification when they learn of noxious or invasive plants that may be on their property.

During its short existence APIPMA has coordinated a five county, multi-partner collaborative - sharing information; disseminating education pieces; providing training for citizens, students, professionals, and local workforce personnel on the best ways to identify, manage, and treat invasive plants; and has started an active treatment program for prioritized species. APIPMA is recognized statewide and is an active participant in the PA Invasive Species Council. Committed, passionate partners have made this possible.

In summary, formally organized and fully funded invasive species partnerships will play a key role in many facets of preventing and managing problems statewide. Their power lies in the ability to act rapidly to threats; utilize local entities and trusted partners, many of which already work with Conservation Districts; and relying on dedicated personnel acting locally understand and recognize county and regional needs. Leadership, continued outreach, and consistent work by these partnerships moving forward requires dedicated funding at a state level. Conservation Districts are able to take effective, rapid actions on a variety of land ownerships. Districts are grassroots, “boots on the ground” organizations who can pull together various partners to efficiently accomplish conservation projects and goals. This work is a daily occurrence in District offices. Invasive species management is most effective when local partners can act quickly, especially with early detection, rapid response threats, to take actions. Brian Pilarcik has also demonstrated this with his aquatic invasive experiences in Crawford County.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide this information to the Committee. I am happy to answer any questions.

