Conservation District Week

May 3-9, 2020

Thank you for supporting the Commonwealth’s 66 Conservation Districts!

2020-2021 Budget

Conservation districts thank members of the PA House and Senate, as well as the Governor, for supporting the districts by providing the funds necessary to preserve and protect our Commonwealth’s natural resources through the state budgetary process. Governor Tom Wolf’s proposed budget recommends continued funding for conservation districts in both the PA Department of Agriculture (PDA) and PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) budgets.

Conservation districts often enter into contracts and accept authority delegated by state agencies. Over the last several years, agencies have struggled with decreased funding resulting in fewer employees. Consequently, conservation districts have taken on additional responsibilities without additional compensation.

**To ensure that conservation districts can accommodate agency and community needs, the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD) is respectfully requesting the Commonwealth’s 2020-2021 budget keep level funding in the “Transfer to the Conservation District Fund” lines in both the PDA and DEP to maintain current programs and services for local communities.** **Even though these lines have not been increased since the 2004-2005 fiscal year, given the economic downturn caused by COVID-19, we believe it would be irresponsible for conservation districts to be requesting a budget increase at this time.**

Conservation districts have enjoyed partnering with state agencies in the past and are looking forward to working with them efficiently and cost-effectively in the future. By maintaining the “Transfer to the Conservation District” lines in the PDA and DEP budget, districts will be able to continue providing the Commonwealth with the services Pennsylvania citizens have enjoyed and grown accustomed to receiving.

Pennsylvania’s Dirt and Gravel / Low Volume Road Program

The purpose of Pennsylvania’s Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road Program is to create a better public road system with a reduced environmental impact, utilizing site-specific, long-term solutions to prevent erosion and pollution. The Program focuses on “Environmentally Sensitive Road Maintenance Practices” that reduce the impact of road runoff and sediment to local streams, while reducing road maintenance costs. In 2013, Act 89 was enacted, effectively increasing the funding for the Program from $5 million to $35 million annually. The Act dedicates $28 million to dirt and gravel road improvements and also mandates that $8 million be used for the maintenance of low-volume paved roads with less than 500 vehicles per day.

Pennsylvania's 20,000 miles of publicly owned unpaved roads are a prime example of non-point source pollution. Unpaved roads not only generate sediment, but also act as collectors for runoff and sediment from adjacent land uses. The Act 89 funding allows conservation districts to assist local municipalities and more effectively reduce water pollution.

**Thank you for your support of the program to improve Pennsylvania’s roads and water quality.**

Third Party Reviewer Legislation

HB 509 includes language allowing for third party permit reviews. Conservation districts are concerned that allowing for these private reviews will hinder the permit review process and result in permit approval delays with the potential for approved permits not meeting state standards. This legislation could also mean the same private firms who develop the permit application would be the reviewer of those permits. As a result, many of the federal permit programs prohibit third party private consultants from permit review and approval to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

**For these reasons, PACD opposes HB 509.**

Statewide Expedited Review Legislation

SB 891 creates a statewide expedited review permit approval process designed to reduce the timeframe for a permit approval. Many conservation districts already have an established expedited permit program for Erosion and Sedimentation NPDES permits, and PACD is working with Senator Yaw, the prime sponsor, to ensure that those districts will be able to continue with their current process.

**Please consider joining Senator Yaw and PACD in supporting an amendment to the legislation allowing conservation districts to continue with their current expedited permit program.**