McKean County Conservation District

Conservation Times

Winter 2025

Thompson Awarded NACDE President's Award

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Cliff Lane, as the Northeast NACD Executive Board Member, presents Sandy Thompson, District Manager with the NACDE President's Award

The Northeast Association of Conservation District Employees (NACDE) recently announced their 2025 award recipients.

Sandy Thompson, Manager of McKean County Conservation District and former Vice President of the Northeast Association of Conservation District Employees (NACDE), received the NACDE President's Award. President Michael Kent, from Cape Atlantic Conservation District in New Jersey, selected Sandy for the award.

The NACDE President's Award is given in recognition of outstanding service to NACDE and the Conservation Partnership in the Northeast Region.

Sandy is a long-time member of NACDE, serving as Secretary from 2011 to 2016 and as Vice-President from 2017 to 2023. She has served both her District and NACDE with professionalism, dedication, and service to the cause of conservation and of District employees in the northeast. She began her conservation career in a small, rural district with limited resources and big challenges. Over nearly two decades, she built something remarkable, not just through programs and partnerships, but through people. Her success didn't go unnoticed. Another County, eager to recreate that same level of impact, sought her expertise. For the past 19 years, she's been doing what she does best, building teams, mentoring talent, and creating space for others to thrive.

Over the years, Sandy has helped launch multi-county initiatives and expanded conservation services. Her work spans watershed management, invasive species control, streambank stabilization, nutrient management, and more. But her legacy isn't just in the programs—it's in the people she's trusted to carry them forward.

She reminds us that leadership isn't about being in the spotlight, it's about making sure others have the space to shine.

Annual BMP Tour

District Watershed Specialist Adam Causer with Representative Martin Causer & Associate Director John Stratton at the Barr ACAP Project.

On October 3rd, the District held its Annual BMP Tour to showcase water quality projects and partnerships. Tour participants included Representative Martin Causer, Tamara Bleggi, Field Representative for Senator Dush, conservation district staff and directors, representatives from the McKean County Planning Commission, Lafayette Township and representatives from the State Conservation Commission and the Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training.

Participants visited Lafayette Township's Taintor Road Dirt, Gravel & Low Volume Road Project The project included milling the existing sealed surface, adding road fill to build-up the base installing underdrain, crosspipes, a french mattress, stone-lining the ditches and placement of DSA (Driving Surface Aggregate). This stop also included viewing a future stream restoration project along Taintor Road crossing an unnamed tributary to the East Branch of the Tunungwant Creek funded through DEP's Growing Greener Grant Program.

The second stop highlighted the recent completion of an agricultural project utilizing funding through the District's Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) at Qanah Ranch, owned and operated by Andy & Judy Barr. The project included the installation of a roofed heavy use area/manure stacking pad, stream exclusionary fencing, watering facilities and an access road.

The third and final stop of the tour was to the Long Branch Stream Restoration Project. Tour participants were able to view some of the in-stream fish habitat streambank stabilization structures installed as part of the project funded through DEP's Growing Greener Grant Program and includes working with four landowners to mitigate the extensive streambank erosion and denuded riparian corridors on Long Branch, an impaired tributary to Annin Creek in Annin Township.

During the tour, District staff emphasized the importance of funding Conservation Districts across the Commonwealth. The District has a budget of nearly $2 million with 92% of these funds restricted toward the implementation of water quality programs such as the Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Road and ACAP programs. The district also utilizes a portion of its Act 13 funds to implement streambank stabilization/fish enhancement structures for landowners throughout the county. Discussion was also held on prevailing wage requirements and how the state can advocate to lessen these requirements when it comes to state funded projects.

For more information on the district and its programs go to www.mckeanconservation.com

Participants at Lafayette Township's Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Road Project.

Erosion Control In Our Forests Workshop

On October 9th McKean County Conservation District partnered with the Pennsylvania Implementation Committee, Cameron, Elk, Potter, and Tioga County Conservation Districts and Generations Forestry Inc. to offer an Erosion Control in our Forests workshop in Wilcox, PA. There was a great group of participants, thoughtful discussions on how to protect our soil and water resources during timber harvesting, and wonderful weather for looking at practical examples of best management practices (BMPs) in the field.

Workshop Partners: L-R Katie Sasala, Morgan Jones & Jason Childs from Potter CD, Sarah Carlson, Sandy Thompson & Katelynn Decker from McKean CD, Glenn Dunn, Potter CD, Scott Moore, Tioga CD, Chuck Coup, SFI, Jim Zoschg, Cameron CD & John Saf, Generations Forestry

The workshop was a day long event that was split between classroom learning and field education. In the classroom participants learned about topics such as BMP and common site problems, the fundamentals of regulations, considerations when it comes to stream crossings, how to do a PNDI and web soil survey. They were also shown the Timber Harvest E&S Plan Action Packet and the Timber Harvest Checklist which can be found on our website here.

After lunch participates packed up to visit 3 different timber sites. The first location showed participants properly installed BMPs. At the second stop participant saw areas where timber harvest practices could be improved. The third and final location was a timber harvest site that was in the process of actively installing BMPS. Workshop participants were split into two groups and held discuss on where/what BMPs the timber harvester planned to install.

Cover Crop Workshop

Cover crops provide numerous benefits, including improved soil health through increased organic matter and water infiltration, reduced soil erosion, better water quality by capturing nutrients, and suppression of weeds and pests.

Cover crops are any crops grown to cover the soil and may be incorporated later into the soil for enrichment. Cover crops cut fertilizer costs, reduce the need for herbicides and other pesticides, improve yields by enhancing soil health, prevent soil erosion, conserve soil moisture, and protect water quality.

To choose a cover crop, first define your goals, such as improving soil, controlling erosion, or adding nitrogen. Next, consider factors like the climate and soil type, the following cash crop to be planted, and the desired growth rate and life cycle (annual, perennial, winter-killed). Finally, select species that fit your needs, like using grasses for biomass and nitrogen scavenging or legumes for nitrogen fixation.

The District held a Cover Crop Demonstration Day on Thursday October 17th to showcase the benefits of using a cover crop. The district partnered with King's AgriSeeds, a seed dealer whose strength is in forage systems and cover crops. David Hunsberger taught on topics of cover crop selection, benefits, and management. Afterwards, the workshop continued outside with a live demonstration of three mixes using the District's no-till drill.

The no-till drill is available for rent on a first come first serve basis. Contact Adam Causer, District's Watershed Specialist at 814-887-4003 for more information.

David Hunsburger showing the participants the seed being planted by the District's No-Till Drill.

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Thank you to District Chairman, Jeff Larson, shown here with Association Director Chris Payne, for helping to plant the cover crop demo.

Guidance on Spreading Manure in the Winter

The most common times to spread manure are fall and spring; however, some operations have no other option but to apply manure in the winter due to daily haul situations or storage limits. When spreading manure in the winter there are key requirements to remember and can be different depending on how an operation is regulated – manure management vs. a nutrient management operation or manure imported from a nutrient management operation. This article outlines these requirements.

Winter Manure Application and Setbacks

Winter application is any manure spread between December 15 – February 28 or when the ground is frozen four inches or deeper or ground is snow covered. For any operation whether it falls under manure management or nutrient management program requirements, spreading may not occur within 100 feet of a stream, within 100 feet of an identified wetland located in a 200-year floodplain of an exceptional value stream or has surface flow to that wetland, and within 100 feet from an above ground inlet. All crop ground shall also have a minimum of 25% ground cover or residue or an established cover crop. Operations that are regulated by the manure management program also cannot spread on ground with slopes greater than 15%. This would be any soil type that ends with a D or a greater letter designation. An example would be MOD – Mt Airy Manor soil with a D slope of 15%-22%.

Maximum Manure Application Rates

Application rates for winter depend on the operation and what program the manure is regulated under. Manure from an operation under the manure management regulations can only spread in the winter 5,000 gallons per acre, 20 tons per acre of solid non-poultry manure, and 3 tons per acre of dry poultry manure. Manure spread by a nutrient management regulated operation or exported from a nutrient management regulated operation can spread up to 9,000 gallons per acre of liquid or semi- solid manure. Why is there a difference between manure management vs. nutrient management? Manure from a nutrient management operation is regulated in more nutrient detail to allow a larger application rate.

In-Field Manure Stacking

Many operations if choosing not to spread during the winter will field stack manure. The term "field stacking" is manure stacked in a crop field where nutrients left behind after removal of the stack will be taken up by a crop during the growing season. For any stacked manure regulated by the manure management program, the manure shall be covered with a tarp if spread after 120 days. For any stacked manure that falls under nutrient management, it must be spread within 120 days or by the next growing season if this falls before that time limit or covered with a tarp or other impermeable cover. Also, manure from a nutrient management operation shall not be stacked on soils where the seasonable high-water table is less than 3 feet, on soils that are excessively drained, and not stacked above any subsurface drain tiles.

For both types of operations manure cannot be located within 100 feet of streams, lakes, ponds, and active wells and must be applied within 120 days. Manure stacks shall also not be located within water concentration flow areas and rotated within a four-year window to not be stacked in the same location year after year. Proper selection of the field site is important to make sure the stacks are not on greater than 8% field slopes and are located no more than 100 feet from the top of the field slope.

It shall be noted that the above in-field stacking requirements are not the same as manure stacked on the farmstead, manure stacked on improved waste stacking facilities, manure composting sites, and emergency related manure stacking. For more information, contact Sarah Carlson, District's Resource Technician at 814-887-4017 or slcarlson@mckeancountypa.gov

Native Plant Giveaway

Native plants are those that occur naturally in a region in which they evolved. They are the ecological basis upon which life depends, including birds and people. Without them we cannot survive.

Unfortunately, most of the landscaping plants available in nurseries are non-native species from other countries. These exotic plants not only sever the food web, but many have become invasive pests, outcompeting native species and degrading habitat in remaining natural areas.

Native plants are important because they are adapted to local conditions, require less maintenance and water, and provide critical food and habitat for local wildlife, which supports biodiversity. They also help with soil health, erosion control, and reducing air pollution.

Landscaping choices have meaningful effects on the populations of birds and the insects they need to survive.

The District held a Native Plant Giveway by partnerering with DCNR, Bureau of Forestry, Allegheny Plateau Invasive Plant Management Area and the Penn State Extension PA Wilds Region Master Watershed Steward Program.

Through funding from DEP's Growing Greener Grant and PACD's PRISM Pilot Grant Program, the District was able to purchase 110 plants to give away to local homeowners that attended the workshop. The workshop involved a short presentation discussing the importance of native plants and a in-depth overview of specific native plants and how to provide the best care for them. After the presentation the district handed out 10 different native plant species to the 20 participants.

DIRT, GRAVEL & LOW VOLUME ROAD STREAM CROSSING WORKSHOP

Wednesday, December 10, 2025
10:00 AM -Noon
Smethport Fairgrounds – Grange Building
7172 PA-46, Smethport, PA 16749

Targeted towards Municipal Road Workers and Engineers

Workshop is eligible for Professional Development Hours (PDH)

- Brief discussion on local DGLVR Policy updates
- Overview of DGLVR Stream Crossing Policy and Standard
- Purpose for the DGLVR Stream Crossing Policy and Standard
- Stream Crossing Grant Eligibility
- Hands on Stream Table simulation presented by Trout Unlimited

Those municipalities that attend will receive **additional points** when their DGLVR project is ranked for funding. Staff from the Conservation District and State Conservation Commission will be available for questions.

Call 814-887-4002 to register or
email lktrojanowski@mckeancountypa.gov by December 5th

Pennsylvania SCC

TROUT UNLIMITED PA COUNCIL

McKean County Conservation District

Center for Dirt and Gravel Road Studies

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Chase Miles - Vice-Chairman
Cliff Lane--Secretary/Treasurer
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www.mckeanconservation.com

The McKean County Conservation District was organized at the request of the County residents. The County was declared a District by the board of County Commissioners on August 19, 1959, according to provisions of the Soil Conservation Law of 1945, Act 217 of the General Assembly, as amended.

The primary goal of the District is the development, improvement, and conservation of the County's Soil, water and related resources as well as educating the community in various conservation and environmental practices and methods.

The District is administered by a board of seven Directors-three farmer members, three public (non-farmer) members and one County Commissioner. District Directors are appointed by the County Commissioners from a list of names submitted by countywide nominating organizations. The Commissioners also designate one of their members to serve as a Director.

Vision: The Conservation District is the steward of McKean County's natural resource and embraces environmentally responsible decisions.

Mission: The Conservation District provides leadership and stewardship to ensure the protection and sustainability of McKean County's natural resources by fostering public and private partnerships.