



**McKEAN COUNTY
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

2024
STRATEGIC PLAN

Conserving Natural Resources for Our Future

McKean County Conservation District 2024 Strategic Plan

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INTRODUCTION:

The McKean County Conservation District was declared a District by the Board of County Commissioners on August 19, 1959 under the provision of the Soil Conservation Law, Act 217. This Law enacted in 1945 gives Districts broad powers to provide services, employ and manage staff, charge fees for services, own and manage property, and authorizes Commonwealth agencies (including Counties) to cooperate with District in carrying out programs.

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 (7) Directors—three (3) farmer members, three (3) public (non-farmer) members and one (1) County Commissioner. District Directors are appointed by the County Commissioner from a list of names submitted by countywide nominating organizations. The Commissioners also designate one of their members to serve as a Director.

Since 2006, the McKean County Conservation District has been providing services in conservation education, nutrient management, dirt, gravel and low volume roads, erosion and sediment control, water obstruction and encroachment, streambank stabilization/habitat improvement initiative, water quality monitoring and invasive species management.

This Strategic Plan was developed as a tool for the District to meet the new challenges and ever-changing land use issues facing our county. While we realize this plan is not all encompassing it is a good base to build on. This plan is a living, breathing document that will be implemented and changed as needed. Constant evaluation will help the District to meet the needs of our county, understand the benefits and impacts of our activities and make decisions based on better information. We appreciate everyone's involvement and dedication to guiding the District over the next several years.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Jeff Larson, Chairman, Farmer Director

Chase Miles, Vice-Chairman, Farmer Director

Cliff Lane – Secretary-Treasurer, Public Director

Tom Kreiner – Commissioner Director

Blaine Puller, Farmer Director

Kerry Fetter, Public Director

Ken Kane, Public Director

ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS:

Pete Mader

Boyd Fitzsimmons

John Stratton

Jeff Holcomb

Lori Coffman

STAFF:

Sandy Thompson, District Manager

Lindsay Trojanowski, Resource Conservationist

Adam Causer, Watershed Specialist

Katelynn Decker, Conservation Technician

Sarah Carlson, Resource Technician

WHO WE ARE:

The Conservation District is a local conservation organization which was formed for the protection, maintenance, improvement, and wise use of the land, water and other resources in McKean County. The District is a source of natural resource information, solutions to community conservation concerns, and support local environmental efforts. The District coordinates educational events, implements conservation projects funded by various grants, and cooperates with many partners to ensure the sustainable use of our natural resources. The District staff is available to assist farmers, landowners, citizens, partner organizations, and municipalities.

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.

VISION:

The Conservation District is the steward of McKean County’s natural resources and embraces environmentally responsible decisions.

PHILOSOPHY:

The McKean County Conservation District, being a grass-roots organization will coordinate programs and information between the District and other governmental agencies to educate and guide development to protect, preserve, and improve the environment.

BENEFICIARIES:

The McKean County Conservation District provides services to the citizens, landowners, businesses, local governments, visitors, and future generations of McKean County.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT:

The McKean County Conservation District held a meeting on May 8, 2024 to update the 2019 Strategic Plan. The session was facilitated by Dr. Julia Morgan, Assistant Professor, Program Director of Environmental Studies and Dr. A.R. Gresock, Assistant Professor Business Management and Program Director, Business Management at the University of Pittsburgh Bradford. The session was attended by 23 individuals representing Conservation District Directors and staff; agency representatives; University of Pittsburgh Bradford Staff and representatives from the District's nominating organizations.

During the session the District Manager, Sandy Thompson gave a brief overview of the 2019 strategic plan and outcomes as well as how the Strategic Plan is shown in the Annual Workplans, Staff Monthly report and the District's Annual Report. The facilitators reviewed the steps to be taken during the session.

Participants were broken into (4) key groups to go through a series of exercises.

Step 1: - Group Exercise: 3 Central Questions to Consider

1. What is our present situation?
 - a. Current conditions and pressures, community standing/presence
 - b. What is going right & what needs improvement?
 - c. What are our prospects in light of changes taking place in the environment?
2. What should the future direction be and what performance targets should we set?
 - a. What needs/wants to satisfy
 - b. Which growth opportunities to emphasize
 - c. Where to head/what outcomes to strive to achieve
3. What's our plan for running the organization and achieving good results?
 - a. Challenges you to craft a series of moves and approaches – a strategy – for heading the organization in the intended direction, staking out a position, attracting those who are important, and achieving the targeted outcomes.
4. What resources exist externally?

Step 2: Pre-SWOT Analysis

- Resources – A resource is a productive input or asset that is owned or controlled by an organization.
- Capabilities – A capability is the capacity of an organization to perform some activity proficiently.

Step 3: SWOT Analysis: Group Exercise: To Consider MCCD's Strengths & Weaknesses in relation to the Market Opportunities and External Threats?

1. Internal strengths (the basis for strategy)
 - a. How does MCCD best utilize strengths to become stronger/better?
2. Internal weaknesses (deficient capabilities)
 - a. How can MCCD lessen those weaknesses or turn weaknesses into strength?

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3. Market opportunities (strategic objectives)
 - a. How does MCCD use strengths to take advantage of opportunities?
4. External threats (strategic defenses)
 - a. What can MCCD do to mitigate effects of the threats and lessen or even eliminate these threats?

Step 4: 5 Elements to Consider in MCCD's Strategy

- Arenas – Where will MCCD be active?
- Vehicles – How will MCCD get there?
- Differentiators – How will MCCD be successful?
- Staging & Pacing – What will be MCCD's speed and sequence of move?
- Economic Logic – How will MCCD see being successful?

Step 4: Group Exercise: Force Field Analysis - Consider the forces for & against

1. Define the problem (current state) and the target situation (target state)
2. List forces working for & against the desired changes
3. Rate the strength of each force (Scale 1-5; 1=weak, 5=very strong)
4. Indicate how important each force is (Scale 1-5; 1=not important, 5=very important)
5. List how to strengthen each important supporting force
6. List how to weaken each important resisting force.
7. Identify resources needed to support forces for change and reduce forces against change.
8. Make an action plan: timing, milestones, and responsibilities.

Through these exercises, a draft Strategic Plan was developed and shared with the participants for comment and then reviewed by the Board.

Approval: On this 19th day of June 2024, the McKean County Conservation District Board of Directors hereby approved by resolution this Strategic Business Plan.

Jeff Larson
Board Chair

Cliff Lane
Board Secretary/Treasurer

HOW PRIORITIES WERE CHOSEN:

The identification of the key issues affecting the District were derived through the series of exercises that were completed during the Strategic Planning Session. These methods triggered discussion among the participants to understand the next steps in developing the Strategic Plan: What did we discover? Understanding where MCCD is now...and where you want it to be. Creating a direction and thinking about feasibility. Understanding that change is inevitable, and MCCD's strategy needs flexibility.

This strategy provided the groundwork for setting and prioritizing the District's goals and objectives, and create action plans to implement these goals and objectives.

Objectives

- A: Implement projects that maintain and improve our natural resources.
- B: Provide programs that maintain and improve our natural resources.
- C: Sustain, enhance and grow the Conservation District
- D: Increase awareness of Conservation District programs and functions through community involvement.

OBJECTIVE A: Implement projects that maintain and improve our natural resources.

Goal #1: Implement stream restoration/riparian buffer/water quality projects as funding and resources permit.

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Inventory & Prioritize Sites	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028
Develop, design, and implement a minimum of 6 stream projects as funding & resources permit.	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028
Promote climate adaptation and resilience strategies	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028
Work to secure necessary funding	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028
Design, implement and monitor riparian buffers	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028
Foster collaboration with partners and create community ambassadors, as appropriate	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028
Develop and provide education and outreach efforts	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028

Goal # 2: Provide support to implement Agricultural BMPs as funding and resources permit.

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Provide one-on-one technical assistance, as needed	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024-2028
Create & maintain a database of needs while promoting resources from other organizations/partners	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024-2028
Work to secure necessary funding for at least 5 projects	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024-2028
Develop a project ranking system	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024
Assist with the development of the plans & designs	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024-2028
Promote climate adaptation and resilience strategies	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024-2028
Oversee the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the practices	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024-2028
Foster collaboration with partners and create community ambassadors, as appropriate	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024-2028
Develop and provide education and outreach efforts	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024-2028

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Goal #3: Develop a method to monitor our natural resources.

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Determine a method of monitoring/management	Watershed Specialist	2025
Develop a plan to analyze before and after data	Staff	2025
Implement stream and invasive plant monitoring as projects are constructed	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024-2028
Maintain stream monitoring data and invasive plant data	Watershed Specialist & Resource Technician	2024-2028
Foster collaboration with partners, as appropriate	Staff	2024-2028
Develop and provide education and outreach efforts	Staff	2024-2028

OBJECTIVE B: Provide programs that maintain and improve our natural resources.

Goal# 1: Implementation of the Nutrient/Manure Management Programs as delegated

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Conduct informal, educational site visits	Resource Technician	Annually
Write 10 Manure Management Plans	Resource Technician	Annually
Write or amend 5 Nutrient Management Plans	Resource Technician	Annually
Develop and provide education and outreach efforts	Resource Technician	2024-2028
Foster collaboration with partners and create community ambassadors, as appropriate	Resource Technician	2024-2028

Goal # 2: Implementation of the Chapter 102 Program as delegated.

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Review E&S Plans & Issue Earth Disturbance Permits	Conservation Technician	Annually
Perform inspections as required	Conservation Technician	Annually
Provide technical assistance to the regulated community, as requested.	Conservation Technician	Annually
Monitor earth disturbance permits to assure Notice of Terminations.	Conservation Technician	Annually
Develop and provide education and outreach efforts	Conservation Technician	2024-2028

Goal # 3: Implementation of the Chapter 105 Program as delegated.

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Acknowledge General Permits	Conservation Technician	Annually
Perform inspections as required	Conservation Technician	Annually
Provide technical assistance to the regulated community, as requested.	Conservation Technician	Annually
Develop and provide education and outreach efforts	Conservation Technician	2024-2028

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Goal # 4: Implementation of the Dirt, Gravel & Low Volume Road Program.

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Promote ESM practices to forest industry and private sector	Resource Conservationist	2024-2028
Assist municipalities with implementing DGLVR practices	Resource Conservationist	2024-2028
Provide technical assistance to municipalities, as requested	Resource Conservationist	2024-2028
Promote 100% ESM certification of municipalities	Resource Conservationist	2024-2028
Develop a plan and conduct dirt and gravel road assessments	Resource Conservationist	2024-2028
Develop and provide education and outreach efforts.	Resource Conservationist	2024-2028

Goal #5: Grow the district’s no-till program

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Promote the district’s no-till drill	Board & Watershed Specialist	2024-2028
Determine method of maintaining the no-till drill	Board & Watershed Specialist	2024
Develop no-till and cover crop demonstration plots	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028
Create a program evaluation for landowners to complete	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028
Foster collaboration with partners and create community ambassadors, as appropriate	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028
Develop and provide education and outreach efforts	Watershed Specialist	2024-2028

Goal #6: Implementation of an Invasive Species Program

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Work to secure funding for program implementation	Resource Technician	2024-2028
Monitor and map invasive plant infestations	Resource Technician	2024-2028
Identify and prioritize plant species for treatment	Resource Technician	2024-2028
Foster collaboration with other districts and other entities	Resource Technician	2024-2028
Develop and provide education and outreach efforts	Resource Technician	2024-2028

Goal #7: Promote a county-wide recycling program

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Lobby County Commissioners to hire a recycling coordinator	Board & manager	2024
Assist county recycling coordinator with education and outreach efforts	Manager	2024-2028

OBJECTIVE C: Sustain, Enhance and Grow the Conservation District.

Goal #1: Promote professional growth of the staff and board

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
At least two directors attend at least one PACD Executive Council Meeting annually.	Board	2024-2028
Encourage directors and staff to participate in various planning functions and committees to provide input.	Board & Manager	2024-2028
Provide professional growth opportunities for directors and staff	Board & Manager	2024-2028
Encourage cross-training and diversifying responsibilities among staff.	Manager & Staff	2024-2028
Expand director orientation to include increased written resources, mandatory training, and opportunities for mentorship from other board members.	Board & Manager	2024-2028

Goal #2: Strengthen connection and working relationships between board and staff.

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Include staff presentations on programmatic work at board meetings at least 4 times per year.	Board & Manager	2024-2028
Offer opportunities for group interaction between board and staff at least twice per year.	Board & Manager	2024-2028
Leverage directors’ skills and expertise, as needed and where appropriate, to support district operations and programs.	Board & Manager	2024-2028

Goal #3: Build the “pool” of associate directors

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Recruit a minimum of two new associate directors, focusing on recruiting individuals with key skills, connections, and demographics that reflect the community and will strengthen the district’s reach.	Board & Manager	2024-2028
Identify and utilize new channels for publicizing open positions to reach a more diverse pool of candidates.	Board & Manager	By 2025

Goal # 4: Evaluate staff needs and increase capacity where feasible

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Conduct an annual review of job descriptions and staff	Manager	2024-2028
Investigate staff retention tools	Manager	2025
Conduct an organizational assessment to evaluate factors such as leadership, operations, and grant writing.	Manager	2024-2028
Based on assessment adjust existing staff responsibilities, hire new or temporary staff, and engage consultants accordingly to reduce over subscribing staff.	County, Board & Manager	2024-2028
Investigate utilization of interns	Board & Manager	2024-2028

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Goal # 5: Enhance the district’s technical, and operational capacities to effectively balance mission and financial health

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Update policies and procedures as needed	Board & Manager	2024-2028
Leverage partnerships for funding to meet community needs		2024-2028
Investigate necessary equipment and resources to implement programs		
Improve financial literacy among staff	Manager	2024-2028
Development of succession plans for both board and staff	Board & Manager	2024-2028
Develop a method to maintain the district’s existing equipment	Board, Manager & Staff	2025

Goal # 6: Monitor and implement the district’s plans

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Gather input for development of Annual Plan of Work	Board, Manager & Partners	2024-2028
Monitor implementation of Strategic Plan and Annual Plan of Work annually.	Manager & Staff	2024-2028
Update the Strategic Plan	Board, Manager, Staff & Partners	2028

OBJECTIVE D: Increase awareness of Conservation District programs & functions through community engagement.

Goal # 1: Market the activities of the Conservation District

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Distribute an Annual Report	Manager	Annually by March 31 st
Publish and distribute a minimum of 3 newsletters per year; distribute electronically, on website, and paper copies as needed	Manager & Staff	2024 – 2028
Prepare and submit news releases to media for events and general information	Manager & Staff	2024-2028
Maintain and update district publications	Manager & Staff	2024 – 2028
Promote district education programs (pre and post program)	Manager & Staff	2024 – 2028
Maintain/improve social media presence; goal -one media post per week minimum Monitor use and effectiveness monthly	Manager & Staff	2024 – 2028
Maintain/ improve website Monitor use and effectiveness monthly	Manager	2024 – 2028
Manage distribution lists - digital and mailing lists.	Manager	2024 – 2028

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Goal # 2: Conduct conservation education programs

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Develop and market 3-4 Youth Programs per year (prepare curriculum and materials to deliver program as needed), annually	Board, Manager, Staff & Partners	2024-2028
Conduct various educational workshops for adult and community.	Board, Manager, Staff & Partners	2024-2028
Programs to promote Eco-tourism	Board, Manager, Staff & Partners	2024-2028
Consider smaller, personalized programs	Board, Manager, Staff & Partners	2024-2028
Foster collaboration with partners, when appropriate.	Board, Manager, Staff & Partners	2024-2028
Promote conservation careers & scholarships for youth	Board, Manager, Staff & Partners	2024-2028

Goal # 3: Raise literacy of elected officials, policymakers and stakeholders

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Foster greater communication	Board & Manager	2019/2024-2028
Develop and provide education and outreach programs	Board, Manager, Staff & Partners	2024-2028
Foster collaboration with partners and create community ambassadors, as appropriate	Board & Manager	2024-2028

Goal # 4: Present district exhibits and presentations

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Host an interactive exhibit for the McKean County Fair annually	Board, Manager & Staff	2024-2028
Coordinate a minimum of two additional exhibits at other events or meetings throughout the County	Board, Manager & Staff	2024-2028

Goal # 5: Hold or participate in a Conservation Recognition Event

Action Step	By Who?	By When?
Sponsor or participate in an event	Board & Manager	2024-2028
Recognize contributions of Board, staff members, partners, students, and others who have helped reach goals and mission of the district	Board & Manager	2024-2028
Foster collaboration with partners, when appropriate	Board, Manager, Staff & Partners	2024-2028

CONTINUING EVALUATION AND MONITORING OF THE PLAN:

The Strategic Plan is being implemented employing constant communication with the individuals and agencies which support the District on an annual basis. This will help maintain good partnerships and ensure continued support from inside and outside the District.

The Strategic Plan will be distributed to the McKean County Commissioners, Cooperating Agencies and Nominating Organization (listed below) as well as to those who make a request.

COOPERATING AGENCIES & PARTNERS

State Conservation Commission (SCC)
Pennsylvania Association of Conservation District (PACD)
Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
Farm Service Agency (FSA)
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Penn State Extension
McKean County Planning Commission
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
DCNR - Bureau of Forestry
PA Fish & Boat Commission
PA Game Commission
PENNDOT
Penn State Center for Dirt & Gravel Road Studies

NOMINATING ORGANIZATIONS

Penn State Extension
Farm Service Agency
Association of Township Officials
McKean County Bar Association
McKean County Fair Association
McKean County Planning Commission
McKean County Historical Society
McKean/Potter Farmer's Association
Upper Allegheny Watershed Association