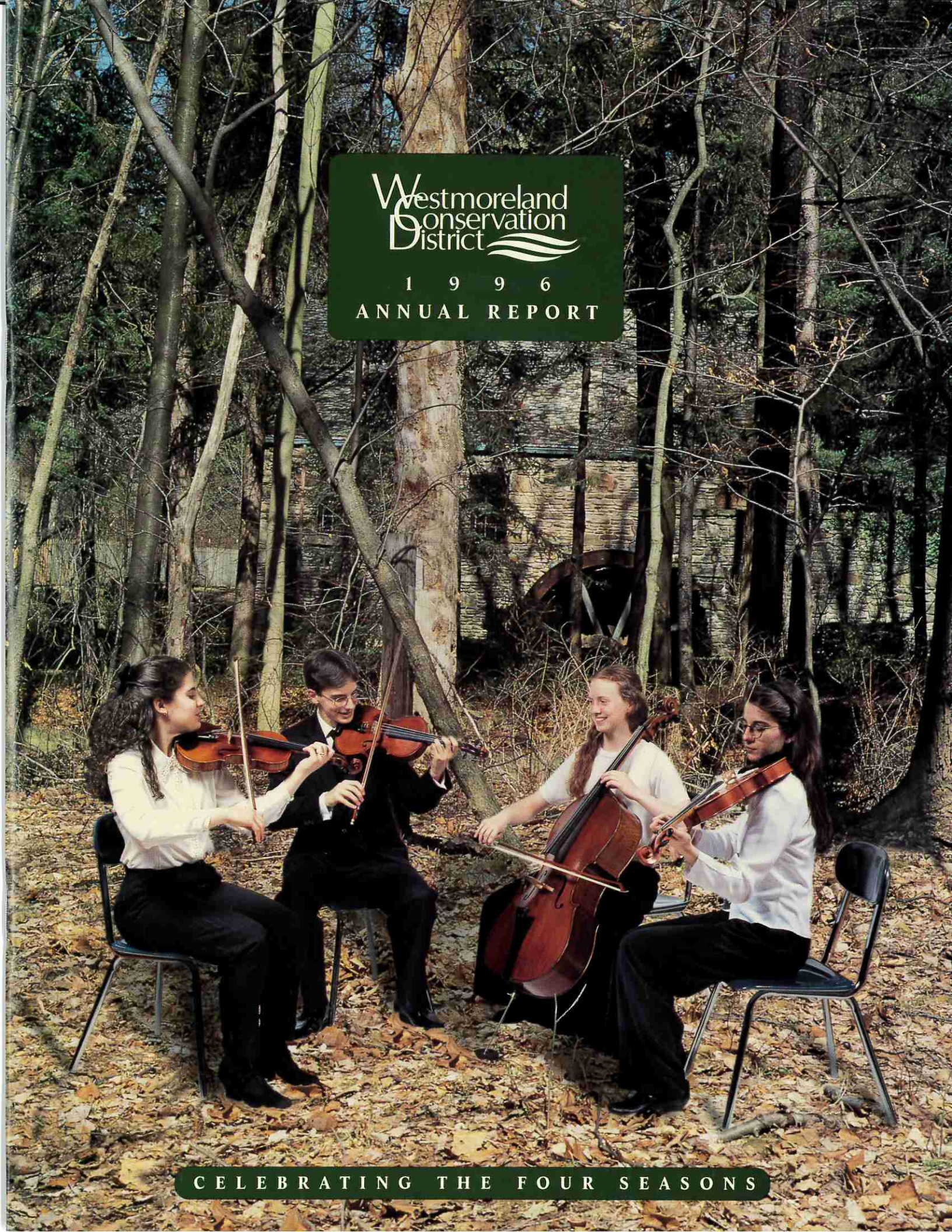


Westmoreland Conservation District

1996 ANNUAL REPORT

CELEBRATING THE FOUR SEASONS

The singular beauty and perfect discipline of four playing as one led British conductor Jeffrey Tate to conclude that, "The most perfect expression of human behavior is a string quartet."

We agree that it's a performance high in superlatives. But we're a little partial to what we feel is another form of exemplary human behavior--a practicing conservationist. Man and nature, working together in harmony, can also make some pretty beautiful music.

On The Cover:
Hempfield High School Student Musicians (l-r): Diane Persin, Tom Richardson, Sarah Morris, Mary Persin.
Special thanks to Dr. Roderick Booker, Music Department Chair, Hempfield Area School District, for his help in coordinating this photo.
Photo: Emil Kuhar

Dear friend of conservation —

Almost 300 years ago, an Italian violinist named Antonio Vivaldi embarked on a revolutionary idea – combining nature and music. He used short, staccato notes to mimic the tapping of a woodpecker . . . rolling bass chords and a lot of vibrato for the echoing power of a thunderstorm.

Vivaldi captured experience in sound. And his work endures today because he succeeded in retaining the sound's original freshness and power even while transforming it. In thinking about these things, we couldn't help but see the parallels with conservation.

That is why we chose Vivalidi's classic concerto "The Four Seasons" as the staff against which to play for you our 1996 achievements. As we travel through this piece of instrumental music, you will see a continuous connection to nature. Begin with L'Inverno - Winter, continue through the first bird calls of La Primavera - Spring . . . into the balmy breezes of L'Estate - Summer. . . and finally to the harvest celebration of L'Autunno - Fall . . . and you will get the sense of not just what was accomplished, but of how the work and the themes progressed with the unfolding of days and seasons.

In each season, we have used Baroque music's tempo, melody, harmony, and even its notes of special emphasis – trills – to reflect the original, living music our efforts composed last year. We hope you enjoy the performance.

J. Roy Houston
District Chairman

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741), a Baroque composer and violinist from Venice, Italy, was often inspired by the sounds of nature. "The Four Seasons," a suite of four violin concertos, reveals the joy he found in the changing seasons.

Vivaldi was a pioneer in linking natural sounds with musical instruments — especially the violin. In making this linkage, he deepened our appreciation for and love of nature.

Winter

(L'Inverno)

JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH

"This is winter, but, even so, what joy it brings!"
— Sonnet Text, "The Four Seasons"

TEMPO - FORTISSIMO MOLTO TREMOLO

Strong, energetic, steady

1996 began on a strong, high note of support for conservation from both the state and the county. The stature of the State Conservation Commission grew with the appointment of its first full-time executive secretary and with the broadening of its reach to include both the departments of Environmental Protection and Agriculture.

Financial allocations for Westmoreland Conservation District activities also grew, with state funding increasing 8% and the county allocation up 21%.

Energized by those commitments we set out to develop more intricate arrangements for our core programs, and to join with similar-minded organizations to improvisationally explore some new conservation approaches.

"Running hard"

MELODY

This is the main theme of the composition; the principal tune.
The Melody represents the District's core programs – those which support our mission to maintain the county's stable soil, clean streams, productive farmland, healthy forests, and sustainable communities.

Geographic Information System

We found the bridge that allowed us to move forward in building a comprehensive Geographic Information System (GIS) for Westmoreland County last year when we added two important pieces of equipment — a digitizer and a plotter. The digitizer in particular allows us be more proactive on the project — to set our own priorities and input relevant data into this computerized database system ourselves. (Previously, we had to wait until the information was translated into computer-acceptable language by other, outside organizations.)

GIS is an invaluable tool in making appropriate decisions about how land in the county is used. With one "snapshot," it can provide a variety of information about a particular site — from its physical properties (ground and surface water, land, topography, mineral deposits, and the age of any timber stands), to existing nearby uses.

We are focusing our initial GIS efforts on documenting the geographic and man-made features of Laurel Ridge, an upland region which stretches from Westmoreland into Fayette, Cambria, and Somerset counties.

Nutrient Management

The Middle Youghiogheny River Watershed Demonstration Program — a project designed to showcase best agricultural practices that prevent non-point source pollution — swung into action this quarter. Six farms — five in Westmoreland County and one in Fayette County — were selected to receive cost-share funds for their projects by our local Nutrient Management Advisory Board.

The Nutrient Management Advisory Board is comprised of representatives from the District, Farm Service Agency, Penn State Cooperative Extension Service, National Resources Conservation Service; two farmers from Westmoreland County and one farmer from Fayette County.

Some of the farm projects selected for cost-share include: barnyard stabilization, rotational grazing, stream crossing, and streambank fencing.

Part of the demonstrations also involve education outreach. A "Back to the Basics" display was created this quarter and its first showing was at the Crop Fair Days at Mountain View Inn.

Project Grass

Grazing is a key farm activity in Westmoreland County, in part because of the area's ability to grow grass so well. However, livestock grazing often creates problems such as erosion and sediment deposits in streams. Our nutrient management technician undertook this year to introduce some better conservation practices in grazing under a federal program called Project Grass.

Over the course of the year, this program provided cost-sharing to three Westmoreland County farmers for rotational grazing systems. Rotational grazing is an important conservation tool because, by keeping areas in grass, it inhibits soil erosion and by rotating the animals through a series of different pastures, it better distributes nutrients.

Farmland Preservation

February was the first of many Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Policy Review Committee meetings that would be held over the course of the year to respond to new state-required revisions to the county farmland preservation ranking system. The new requirements seek to make the ranking system more consistent state-wide, while still retaining flexibility in the individual county programs.

This ranking system prioritizes farms being considered for a conservation easement purchase by using a number of factors, including: development pressure, agricultural productivity of the site and implementation of conservation practices, proximity to other protected lands, and soil capabilities.

As we worked through the process of rewriting the county's Farmland Preservation Policy to meet the new state guidelines, the farmland preservation specialist and our technical assistant conducted numerous site tests to determine how specific changes in the criteria would affect the way farms are ranked.

Ultimately, revisions were made in several criterion, including the factors used to evaluate a property's development potential, farmland potential, clustering potential, and soils.

As part of the new Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) Formula in the FPP Policy, our technical assistant, Rich Binns, began a lengthy review of USDA aerial photography to identify agricultural areas within the county. This project resulted in the development of an Important Agricultural Area map, showing where the largest concentrations of crop and pasture land are located within the county. This is a very valuable planning tool that is considered when selecting farms for easement purchase.

Education/Outreach

High-schoolers – a group often neglected by conservation education efforts – were the main target of our outreach this quarter.

We challenged more than 60 area high school students to take center stage, sitting in for county officials, in a mock hearing to decide how a fictitious piece of property would be used. The issue was whether an industrial firm should be allowed to build its plant on prime farmland soil and wetland habitat. After much debate, the students ultimately voted the project down, but not without offering the industry a few alternatives, including an existing abandoned industrial site.

About 20 area high school teachers joined us in late March for a workshop on how to integrate air- and water-quality issues into their classroom learning activities. Ozone and non-point-source pollution were among the topics presented in lesson formats that ranged from pencil and paper exercises to science experiments. The District co-sponsored the free teachers' workshop with the Western Pennsylvania Section of the Air & Waste Management Association, a nonprofit, technical and educational organization.

Our program specialist/forester began planning this quarter for the 11th annual countywide Envirothon, scheduled for May 5. High school teachers were contacted and students in 10 area schools began preparing for the academic competition by studying aquatics, forestry, soils, wildlife, as well as the current issue, greenways.

Because aquatics has typically been one of the weaker subject areas in the Envirothon, we hosted a special workshop on that subject for teachers in late March. Six school districts sent their Envirothon Team Advisors to Powdermill Nature Reserve in Ligonier for this half-day workshop, which was so enthusiastically received that we plan to repeat it again in 1997.

As part of our outreach efforts, we began exploring new communications technologies — including e-mail and the Internet — to see how they might enhance the District's efficiency and expand our outreach efforts.

We began regularly sending our news releases to the state Department of Environmental Protection, which included them on its web site (http://www.dep.state.pa.us).

H A R M O N Y

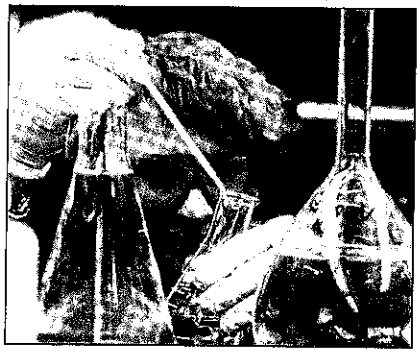
Harmony is the extra layer that gives the melody depth. A musician cannot make harmony by himself; he needs a friend to play along with him.

Nature Park

Just a few beats beyond the District's back door is Nature Park, a passive recreation park owned by the county. Over the years, these 50 acres of meadow and mature forest woods had become an almost-forgotten county asset. As a neighbor interested in the park's future, the District began a dialog in early 1996 with the County Parks and Recreation Department to see what might be done to restore the park's vitality and encourage its use.

Monastery Run Cleanup, Loyalhanna Watershed

Like a composer hearing the first notes of his symphony played, the District and other members of the Loyalhanna Creek Mine Drainage Coalition saw the first significant work begin this quarter on their $2 million project to remove the polluting iron oxide from Monastery Run, a tributary of the Loyalhanna Creek.



The first order of business was mine-subsidence work along nearby Beatty Road in Unity Township. Some 9,800 tons of a mixture of fly ash, sand, and cement were pumped into holes drilled into the mine shafts below the highway. This mixture will not only help with subsidence problems, but will prevent groundwater from entering the abandoned mine shafts and picking up the minerals which contribute to the creek's pollution.

Comprehensive Mine Reclamation Strategy

An exciting new initiative was launched by the state of Pennsylvania in an effort to get the most from mine cleanup efforts.

The idea behind this Comprehensive Mine Reclamation Strategy is to more closely combine the state's abandoned mine cleanup efforts with those of local organizations such as watershed associations, and then to concentrate those combined efforts in selected watersheds or other management areas.

Urban Corridor Planning

The District was involved in preliminary discussions with a number of other regional players – including the county's Highway Beautification Initiative and the national group Scenic America – on how to orchestrate their individual efforts into a unified composition for the county's highway corridors.

It was proposed that a demonstration program be developed for US Route 30 – one of the county's major east-west highways – to show how a guiding vision would enhance both economic development and quality of life.

Yough River Conservation Plan

The ball got rolling in this season on the Youghiogheny River Conservation Plan when our soil scientist, a resident of the river corridor, joined the committee preparing the corridor's comprehensive plan.

The plan will conserve and enhance river resources by identifying important local areas of concern and by providing a strategy for addressing these issues. Once this plan is complete, we will be able to use it to obtain state grants to implement the strategies outlined.

Funding for preparation of the plan, provided by a cost-share match from KEY 93, will provide for the hiring of a consultant.

Loyalhanna Lake Advisory Committee

The District participated in this committee which was formed to provide local input on the management of Loyalhanna Lake. Other groups serving included Loyalhanna Bass Masters, the Pennsylvania Game Commission, and local municipalities.

THE MUSICIANS

Musical identity is shaped by individual energy and commitment. We are grateful for the talent and contribution our staff, directors, and associates brought to this collaboration.

Board of Directors

Conrad Donovan's appointment to the board this quarter brought a valuable blend of experience in farming and finance. Connie is a part-time beef cattle farmer who also works as an auditor for Sarp & Company, a certified public accounting firm in Greensburg.

Ron Rohall stepped competently into the Treasurer's position following the retirement of long-time board member Frank Skacel. Ron, a consulting forester, was appointed to the Board in 1993. Frank served as a District director for 26 years and had been Board Treasurer since 1975 (see Fall, *Virtuoso*).

District Staff

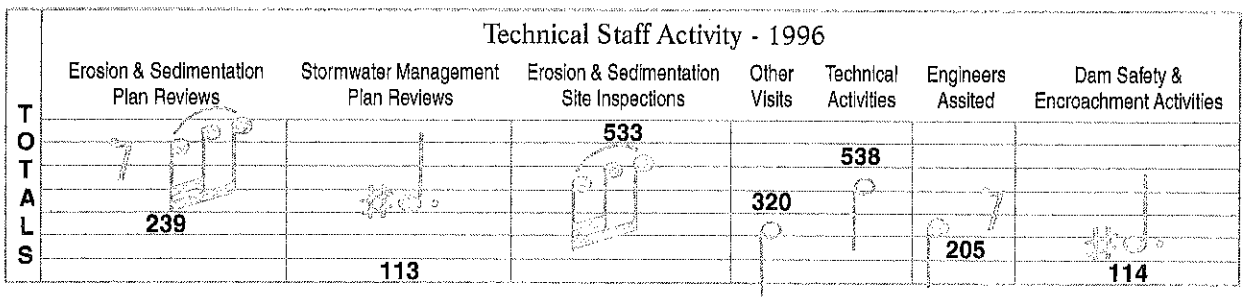
Steady growth in the provision of services (see chart) made it imperative that we restructure staff responsibilities and add additional personnel.

Adding administrative staff this quarter and realigning responsibilities set the stage to allow the District Manager to focus his efforts more broadly on developing the organization's vision and guiding its long-term direction, particularly in the areas of long-range planning, fundraising, political action, program development, and capital improvements.

Joanne Kitsko joined the District part-time to provide much-needed clerical support to a growing number of responsibilities. The addition of Joanne as receptionist enabled the staff to move forward with many projects, and concentrate more on their individual areas of expertise. She previously had worked for a number of years in purchasing and human resources for the trucking and transportation and manufacturing industries. Her most recent position was with Adelphoi Village where she performed a number of secretarial duties, including providing assistance to the executive director.

District staff and board members took an active role in the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, adding their voices to this larger chorus through service on the following committees:

Ron Rohall - Leadership Development Committee
Greg Phillips - Directions for the 90s and Public Relations Committees
Tony Quadro - Envirothon and Forestry Committees
Lorrie Stouffer - Public Relations Committee



T R I L L

Baroque music, such as "The Four Seasons," was embellished by trills – the rapid alternation of two notes/vibrato – for emphasis.

County Soil Survey

A long-time goal of updating the county's 1965 Soil Survey moved closer to reality this quarter with the hiring of full-time soil scientist Alex Dado (BS, soil science, The Pennsylvania State University).

The soil survey is one of the key land-use planning tools in the county, relied on by farmers, engineers, and builders to match soil characteristics with potential uses of the land. Besides being extremely old, the existing survey's 32-year-old data did not provide the variety of information users need today (such as photobase classifications) to make informed decisions.

As the new data is gathered, the updated survey information will be entered on our GIS system (see page 4) and be available in a digital, computer format.

Our next challenge is to attract the nearly $200,000 in funding needed to match the dollars committed to this project.

Spring

(La Primavera)

APRIL, MAY, JUNE

"Shepherds dance under the beloved canopy
At the brilliant appearance of spring."
— Sonnet Text, "The Four Seasons"

TEMPO — ALLEGRO AND PRESTO

Very fast and lively

The pace for conservation professionals and volunteers quickened in spring in keeping with the increased outdoor activity the season brings — planting on farms and construction work on various urban projects.

Spring winds sometimes bring storms and drainage and flooding woes, but they also bring the joy of rebirth and a rededication to the beauty that surrounds us.

The song of the birds

MELODY

Nutrient Management

Two of the demonstration farm projects selected to receive cost-share funds last quarter gave input into their own customized voluntary nutrient management plans. Technical determinations were made for the various demonstration projects. By the end of the project, all six of the demonstration farms will have these nutrient management plans.

Our nutrient management technician also continued to assist the Natural Resources Conservation Service in implementing conservation practices – including laying out contour strips, diversions, and tile lines – on area farms.

Farmland Preservation

April brought a record number of farms applying for easement purchase. Of the 47 farms evaluated, five were selected for easement purchase, and accepted the easement offers.

It also was a record year for the Farmland Preservation Program on the financial front, with allocations and contributions reaching close to $1 million. The Westmoreland County Commissioners again increased the amount of funding for the program, and the Loyalhanna Watershed Association and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy contributed $2,500 and $3,000 respectively to the land preservation fund. Local funds received a match from the Commonwealth of $2.90 for every $1.00 of local support.

Education/Outreach

Nine local high school teachers visited us this summer to learn about District activities and the environmental education opportunities we can provide for their students. The visit was part of BRIDGES, a program founded by St. Vincent College that pairs teachers with corporate professionals as a way to bring real-life relevance into the classroom.

Teams from ten high schools put their academic and practical knowledge of the environment to the test in this year's county Envirothon competition.

Top honors went to the consistently outstanding team from Franklin Regional. Kiski High

School — which participated for the first time this year — captured second place; and the Derry team rounded out the top three.

Franklin Regional went on to the state Envirothon competition in late June, and took second place. The 1996 Envirothon was supported through the corporate generosity of Waste Management of Laurel Valley and SuperValu.

In April, WCD Board Member Conrad Donovan joined District and Farmland Preservation staff in a trip to Washington, DC to discuss conservation issues with national legislators. The group met fellow conservationist Bob Kaufman (who at that time was serving as chairman of the Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation Executive Board), and spent the day talking with politicians about the Farm Bill, mine water remediation, and other conservation issues.

Our hydraulic engineer and program specialist/forester spent a day at camp with local fifth- and sixth-grade school students, teaching them about wetlands, hydrology, and forestry.

On the more technical side of conservation, we hosted a special workshop for Peoples Gas employees in the southwestern part of the county. More than 20 utility workers came to learn more about how to apply erosion and sediment pollution control practices when they are installing utilities in new residential developments.

H A R M O N Y

This quarter - as in most - our melody was enriched when we were joined in our efforts by PA CleanWays, Westmoreland County Bureau of Parks and Recreation, the Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation, Inc., the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the National Wildlife Federation, Penn State Cooperative Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Penn's Corner Resource Conservation & Development, Loyalhanna Creek Mine Drainage Coalition, Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation, Sewickley Creek Watershed Association, Loyalhanna Watershed Association, Westmoreland County Commissioners, and Farmland Preservation Program.

Murmur of the fronds and plants

Nature Park

One of the key obstacles to revitalizing Nature Park was the lack of county funds dedicated to the facility. So the project moved ahead creatively this quarter. Juvenile clients from Westmoreland County Regional Youth Service Center were enlisted to do the work of clearing a new trail. Private sources of community support – including foundations, garden clubs, and individuals – were identified and a fundraising campaign was begun.

Monastery Run Cleanup, Loyalhanna Watershed

At their May meeting, the Westmoreland County Commissioners approved the Loyalhanna Creek Mine Drainage Coalition's plans for cleaning up Monastery Run. This approval made the County Commissioners one of five project sponsors and allowed the District and other members of the coalition to proceed with the important process of applying for funding through Natural Resources Conservation Service, Public Law 566, Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act.

This is an innovative approach to fundraising, because these government funds previously have been used only for flood control. If successful in obtaining the funding commitment, the coalition will be one of the first groups in the country to apply this money for remediation purposes.

The $2 million Monastery Run cleanup project is being undertaken with no investment of county funds — other than the time of several District staff — but with great county benefits, projected to be in the range of $102,000 annually.

Also this quarter, the Loyalhanna Creek Mine Drainage Coalition completed a Resource Plan and Environmental Assessment. This document will provide a pathway for the passive wetland treatment of mine water.

The trickling spring

Wilson Run, Sewickley Creek Watershed

In addition to the work at Monastery Run, the District this summer helped to address a significant source of mine drainage pollution in Wilson Run, a major tributary of Sewickley Creek that flows between Mt. Pleasant and Armbrust. A new, low-cost, low-maintenance treatment facility (employing a compressor and static mixer) that will remove more than 95% of the polluting iron from the water was built and put into operation in June.

This project seeks to prove that certain large discharges from abandoned mines which previously have been considered untreatable, can be treated economically.

Education/Outreach

Earth Week brought out a full orchestra of players – from grassroots organizations to politicians – concerned about conservation and willing to invest time and energy to the cause.

Once again this year, the District served as the central clearinghouse for PA CleanWay's program of matching conservation needs with willing volunteers. Specific District-sponsored events included tree-planting at our Donohoe Center arboretum, distribution of educational wildlife kits, and distribution of seedlings.

The arboretum at Donohoe Center grew by 50 trees when our staff planted a new grove of sawtooth oak. Two varieties were planted in a controlled experiment to test hardiness. Sawtooth oak is an excellent wildlife tree because it has a good crown spread and is a more prolific acorn-producer than other oaks.

We distributed Wildlife Week kits to 10 area schools. The kits are geared primarily to learners in kindergarten through eighth grade, and provide a variety of activities to help students understand more about wetlands. The kits were prepared

by the National Wildlife Federation and supplied to us by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

We distributed some 4,000 seedlings — including scotch pine and several varieties of dogwoods — free-of-charge to area wildlife and sportsmen's clubs, and to farmers who wanted to create wind rows. The seedlings were supplied by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Urban Corridor Planning

This quarter, the county asked us to assume the role of facilitator to the Urban Corridor Planning project, which will help develop a public/private partnership to enhance and preserve the landscape along some of Westmoreland County's highway corridors.

This initiative is a vital element in the county's continuing effort to encourage quality economic development. It is also seen as a way to promote awareness of our scenery, foster community pride, enhance quality of life, and instill a sense of appreciation for our scenic/environmental assets.

The District's role is to lead an effort that will develop a vision of the project, enlist volunteers, provide technical expertise, and raise resources.

THE MUSICIANS

District Staff

Craig Barras, an earth science graduate of The Pennsylvania State University, joined the District as the new erosion control specialist this quarter, replacing Kelly Sofaly.

Craig brings previous experience as an environmental technician to his new position. He will assist land users throughout Westmoreland County in planning and applying soil and water conservation practices.

Interns

Dan Dodd, a fourth-year landscape architecture student at Penn State University, and Neil Okonak, a Greater Latrobe Area High School junior, joined us as summer interns.

Dan developed a professional and creative landscape plan for the new entrance of Nature Park and coordinated many of the logistics for the park's dedication ceremony this summer. Dan's landscape plan coordinates the adjacent elements of Donohoe Center and Nature Park while still maintaining a visual distinction between the two. He also produced a number of large-scale artist renderings of the property, which the District uses in presentations.

Neil helped us greatly advance the GIS for the Monastery Run project. He took the existing data, added new information, organized it, and developed it into usable maps. Neil also helped tremendously in setting up our office computer network.

Misty Giesey, a Seton Hill College student, joined us in the spring as a joint intern with PA CleanWays. She established a database and coordinated many of the Earth Week activities.

TRILL

We waxed rhapsodic this May when we received one of the region's highest honors — selection as one of three finalists for the prestigious Three Rivers Environmental Awards. These awards, regarded by many as the Oscars of environmental recognitions, are sponsored by The Pennsylvania Environmental Council and Duquesne Light Company.

Summer

(L'Estate)

JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER

"The cuckoo offers his voice, and, soon heard,
The young turtledove and goldfinch sing."
— Sonnet Text, "The Four Seasons"

TEMPO - ALLEGRO NON MOLTO

Fast, but not too fast

Conservationists were busy helping farmers put conservation practices on the land and making sure urban building plans were carried out with proper care of the soil and streams.

Yet summer's cooperative weather and long expanses of daylight meant there was time, too, for special events, such as the dedication of Nature Park; new cooperative initiatives, such as Urban Resources Partnership; and even a few moments to begin to re-examine our time-honored traditional programs for more creative approaches. It is a time of energy and high spirits.

MELODY

Nutrient Management

Another example of innovation in agriculture occurred this quarter when the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts supplied $990 in cost-share funds to three Westmoreland County farms. Each farm will use the money to purchase a pesticide sprayer cleaner for its operation.

The cleaners include a rinsing feature which helps eliminate a buildup of pesticides in any one area of the field. A rotating sprayer nozzle draws clean water from a separate tank, and uses it to rinse the pesticide tank in the field. The residue is then sprayed on the target crop, eliminating the need for an expensive rinsing pad.

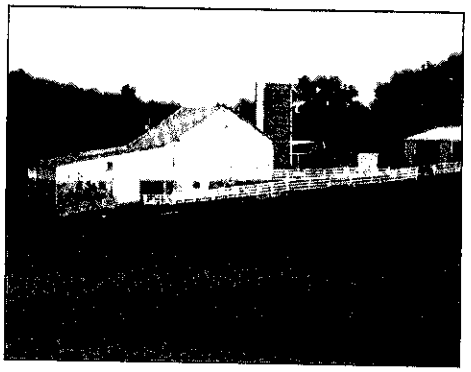
Strategic Plan for Agriculture

Agriculture is the lead musician – the number one industry – in Westmoreland County, yet it has no overall guiding vision. The District took the initial steps this quarter to meet with farmers to identify their needs and then to work as part of a task force to design an economic development plan for agriculture, including actively marketing the county's agricultural resources.

Conservation Farm of the Year

Welty, Joanne and Curt Keenan's Green Hill Farm near New Stanton was named the 1996 Conservation Farm of the Year by the District for its consistent and progressive conservation practices.

The Keenans have been farming for 40 years and always have been in tune with the latest conservation practices. Many years ago, they were one of the first to install a manure storage facility. One of their more recent major projects was a barnyard stabilization project, implemented through the technical assistance of the District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.



Farmland Preservation

State board members in August approved two new farms in Salem Township, an area where we've just begun to cluster farms, for easement purchase with funds allocated through 1996. This brought the total farms protected in Salem to three, with a fourth farm awaiting

state approval in early 1997. Countywide, 2,356.7 acres are accepted and approved for protection in perpetuity. These are the final closings of the 1996 funding.

In September, the federal government released $13.5 million for farmland protection in the US, of which Pennsylvania received $1.4 million. We are hopeful that future federal allocations will include Westmoreland County.

Education/Outreach

Our staff provided a day of GIS (see page 4) information and hands-on experience to high school and early college students as part of St. Vincent College's Summer Institute.

The workshop at Donohoe Center gave participants an opportunity to acquire hands-on research experience with watershed-wide data collection. To emphasize the contrast between the old and new database technologies, we first had the learners develop maps and overlays by hand. Then we showed them the improvements and efficiencies possible with GIS technology, and gave them the opportunity to do some global positioning, using satellites to determine a given longitude and latitude.

The farmland preservation specialist also played a role as a presenter for the Summer Institute. She gave students insight into how land and sites are evaluated for the Farmland Protection Program.

Summer's violent weather

Between the rains of a late summer storm, the District hosted a successful public tour of some of the notable trees in the central part of the county. Sixteen people attended this soggy Saturday morning outing that included the 140-tree arboretum at District headquarters at Donohoe Center, the grounds of Seton Hill College, and the arboretum at the Greensburg Garden and Civic Center.

Participants learned the different site requirements of various trees, and why some trees are better suited for our region than others.

A tour of a Ligonier dairy farm was part of a workshop the farmland preservation specialist gave to teachers in August. The workshop was part of the Pennsylvania Wildlife Federation Teacher's Workshop at Powdermill Nature Reserve last August.

Our program specialist/forester shared the secrets of forest ecology in a lecture and in a walk through the woods with sixth-grade students from Saltsburg Elementary School during an outing to Keystone State Park.

The District's booth at the Donegal Senior Citizen Expo was visited by more than 2,500 people in one day. This summer event was sponsored by State House Representative Jess Stairs.

Both the District and the Farmland Preservation Program had booths at the Westmoreland

County Fair. Literature was distributed, and staff had the opportunity to talk one-on-one with many county residents. FPP's fair booth also led to several new applications for easements.

Core Program Reassessment

When a contractor or developer repeatedly hits a sour note in his conservation practices, our last recourse is enforcement and fines. And while this approach may correct the specific problem on a particular site, it isn't effective in meeting our broader goal of changing behavior and building a conservation ethic.

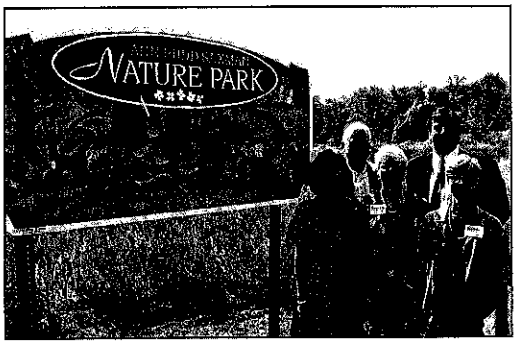
District staff met this quarter to brainstorm alternatives to enforcement and to creatively explore new approaches to encouraging individual stewardship, particularly in the area of erosion and sediment pollution control.

H A R M O N Y

This quarter, our existing chorus was joined by the voices of Adam Eidemiller, Inc., Champion Lumber, Bob Goodman, Albert Pearson, Eagle Scouts J. Aaron Farr and John Krempecki, Barry Whoric and Wilson Shope (Borough of Scottdale), Home Builders Association of Westmoreland County, League of Women Voters, Pomona Grange #38, Society of American Foresters, Westmoreland County Association of Township Officials, Westmoreland County Beekeepers Association, Westmoreland County Borough Association, Botanical Society of Westmoreland County, Westmoreland County Cattlemen's Association, Westmoreland County Dairy Herd Improvement Association, Westmoreland County Farm Bureau, Westmoreland County Farm Service Agency Committee, Westmoreland County Sportsmen's League, and Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association.

Nature Park

Months of work came to a crescendo on July 24, with the rededication of Nature Park in honor of pioneer conservationist, botanist, and landscape designer Ann Rudd Saxman. More than 120 people attended the ceremony, which included remarks by each of the Westmoreland County Commissioners and short walks through the park led by area naturalists, foresters, botanists, and birders.



In just a few months, the fundraising campaign brought in nearly $40,000 from 50 separate donors. The funds were used to infuse the park with new life. Ten adjacent wooded acres were acquired and added to the park, and a new entrance was added on the Donohoe Road between Donohoe Center and the Westmoreland County Public Works building.

The park's new entrance was made even more inviting in late August when a new 20-car parking area was paved, thanks to the generous donation of materials and labor by Adam Eidemiller,

Inc. This paved parking area is the first component of what will be a demonstration area to show the advantages of combining both paved and permeable surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff.

Other public donations for the park included a bench from Albert Pearson, and a variety of bird and bat boxes from master blue bird house maker Bob Goodman. These were placed around the perimeter of the park by J. Aaron Farr as part of his Eagle Scout badge work. John Krempecki erected bat boxes in the park as part of his activities for the rank of Eagle Scout.

Urban Resources Partnership

The District joined a new environmental effort launched this summer called the Urban Resources Partnership. This partnership is a way to pool resources with neighboring counties and address the common problems we all are experiencing. Joint efforts could include streambank restoration, community garden projects, open space preservation, and so on.

Thirty-three people from a variety of agencies and organizations attended a summer workshop where Patrice Carroll, coordinator of the Philadelphia Urban Resources Project, and Karen Hobbs, national coordinator, USDA, Urban Resources, shared their experiences with the program.

In breakout sessions, participants identified a number of ideas to make the local effort successful, including developing an environmental directory as a way to encourage interaction. One of our group's first steps was to form a steering committee to set projects and priorities.

Flood Controls Dedicated

The District was a key player in a project which constructed several dams and a modified channel to minimize flooding damage and provide recreation and wildlife habitat in the Scottdale/Everson/Mt. Pleasant area of Jacobs Creek. The final construction component was completed last year, and a dedication ceremony was held in September.

Much of the improvement work was already in place in January when a storm tested its mettle. The project worked admirably, averting much of the flood damage to property and threats to human safety that a storm of this magnitude would have caused in years past.

THE MUSICIANS

Board of Directors

The District took a very proactive approach this year to soliciting nominations for three upcoming vacancies (one farmer and two public positions) on our board.

Only 17 organizations in the entire county are permitted by law to nominate individuals for the Conservation District Board, and their recommendations carry a high degree of importance.

We sent each of our nominating organizations a letter, detailing the need to identify qualified candidates and supplying background on the current board members. District staff also volunteered to attend a meeting of the nominating organization to explain the nominating process.

The results were gratifying. In addition to soliciting nominations, this process gave us the opportunity to inform the nominating organizations and their members about the District's activities.

District Staff

Lorrie Stouffer, assistant district manager, received both state- and national-level professional appointments this quarter. She was named to the Total Quality Management Steering Team for the Pennsylvania Conservation Partnership, and to the editorial board of the *Tuesday Letter*, a quarterly publication of the National Association of Conservation Districts.

T R I L L

National WPCAMR Conference Hosted Here

Representatives from more than 20 states came to Pittsburgh in September to learn more about western Pennsylvania's successful efforts in reclaiming land and water damaged by past coal mining. The Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation – an organization which the District helped to found and continues to provide support for — hosted the national event.

More than 100 representatives from government, industry, academia, foundations, and conservation groups attended the workshop, which included panel discussions on how to obtain funding and build cooperative, grassroots efforts, as well as field trips to a modern mine drainage treatment plant in Cecil Township, Washington County, and a passive wetland treatment system (the Scrubgrass Wetland Project in Scott Township, Allegheny County).

As part of the preparations for this event, our technical assistant used the GIS to prepare a large-scale wall map which identified and plotted all of the abandoned mine reclamation projects ever completed in Pennsylvania.

Fall

(L'Autunno)

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER

"...celebrates the blissful pleasure
Of a happy harvest with dances and songs."
— Sonnet Text, "The Four Seasons"

TEMPO - ALLEGRO LA CASSIA

Swift rhythms of hunting and harvesting

Educators were beginning a fresh new academic year, while farmers, developers, and sportsmen moved into high gear, realizing that winter is just around the corner. The District kept up with them, offering technical support, information, resource referral, and creativity.

Harvesting, hunting and learning keep the District team marching in harmony and we all reap the rewards of this bountiful season.

MELODY

Nutrient Management

Two more of the demonstration farm projects completed customized voluntary nutrient management plans this quarter. One of these was a barnyard stabilization project in the Sewickley Creek Watershed that used gutters, downspouts, a dry pond, a vegetated filter strip, and two diversion ditches to help keep erosion and runoff from negatively affecting the nearby stream. The other project involved creation of a stable stream bed — made of permeable filter fabric with two layers of different sized stone on top — as an area for dairy cattle to use in crossing a stream.

The addition of these two customized plans means that four of six farm projects selected this year for cost-share funds now have voluntary nutrient management plans in place.

One of the most important administrative acts of the nutrient management program occurred this quarter when the District signed a Nutrient Management Delegation Agreement with the State Conservation Commission. This agreement ensures that the county has a say in how nutrient management is handled in the county. It also ensures that a nutrient management specialist will be available to provide technical assistance on these issues not only to area farms, but also in more urban applications as well.

Project Grass

By the end of this quarter, 9,368 feet of fencing had been installed on area farms — 6,468 feet to create a number of different pastures, and the remaining 2,900 feet to protect streambanks. This fencing translates into soil saved because it is kept in sod . . . less nutrient problems from manure. . . and lower feed and machinery costs for the farm.

Farmland Preservation

On December 20, the Pennsylvania Agricultural Land Protection Board gave the final approval of the new Westmoreland County Farmland Preservation Policy.

Coal rights continued to be an issue which plagued the easement program this year. In November, board members offered comments to the recently adopted Farmland Protection Policy of

the Department of Environmental Protection that may provide solutions to this problem. Groundwork has begun, and we are hopeful of possible changes in the future.

The number of Agricultural Security Areas increased in 1996, to 80,660 acres, owned by 800 landowners. Additional farmland has been added in South Huntingdon, Salem, Loyalhanna, and East Huntingdon townships.

Southwestern Pennsylvania closed the year with a stronger voice in the farmland protection arena. Neighboring Butler, Bedford, Washington, and Fayette counties each received state approval of their programs, and Washington and Butler additionally completed their first easement purchases in 1996.

Two new members—Richard Pounds and Richard Comp—were appointed to the Farmland Preservation Program Board of Directors.

Education/Outreach

In a joint educational effort with PA CleanWays, the District hosted 20 students from the Central Westmoreland Career and Technology Center to a tour of Donohoe Center, our outdoor education demonstrations, and Ann Rudd Saxman Nature Park. District Manager Greg Phillips gave the group an overview of the natural resources in our county, showed a video, and answered questions about what students can do to promote conservation.

Improperly designed and located erosion controls — including pond-outlet structures, silt fences, and channel linings — are some of the biggest causes of conservation problems on construction projects. In early November, the District hosted two technical workshops to help engineers improve their erosion-control practices. More than 80 people attended.

In October, as county residents were raking up the falling leaves, the District issued a news release explaining how that free organic material could be used to make compost that would beautify lawns, gardens, and flower beds next spring. Area newspapers printed this practical conservation message, and a number of county residents sent a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a free copy of our composting brochure.

Trees of Distinction Program

Seven trees were added in 1996 to our "Trees of Distinction" program which recognizes Westmoreland County trees noteworthy because of their age, size, history, or range.

The most fun we've ever had enrolling a tree in the program came in November, when we were joined by fifth-and sixth-grade students from Norvelt Elementary School in the task of measuring a white oak behind their schoolhouse. The event turned out to be a learning exercise not only in conservation, but also in mathematics. Students used the tape to measure the tree's diameter and we worked with the school's math teacher to explain how geometry was used to calculate the tree's height.

The oak turned out to be a 51-inch-diameter, 73-foot-high specimen, with a crown spread of 94 feet. It made the "Trees of Distinction" list as one of the largest of its species documented in the county.

WESTMORELAND COUNTY TREES OF DISTINCTION

SPECIES	DIAMETER	HEIGHT	CROWN SPREAD	LOCATION
Osage Orange	37.6"	54'	68'	Cedar Creek Park
American Sycamore	64.8"	98'	98'	Greensburg
Overcup Oak*	44"	93'	96'	Greensburg
Loblolly Pine*	13"	37'	29'	Latrobe
Shagbark Hickory	33"	84'	54'	Keystone State Park
White Oak	51"	73'	94'	Norvelt
Dawn Redwood*	24"	45'	26'	Latrobe

*Denotes a tree species out of its normal range

HARMONY

This quarter, our growing chorus was expanded to include the voices of: AmeriCorps, State House Representative Jess Stairs, Ligonier and Fairfield Township supervisors, Westmoreland County Commissioner Terry Marolt, and representatives from the Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation, City of Greensburg Park and Recreation Deparment, and the Heinz Foundation.

Nature Park

With the strains of summer's successful dedication ceremony still resounding, AmeriCorps began to survey the existing trail system and the park's new entrance. The District and other members of the committee set about the tasks of making the park amenable for people with disabilities, improving the existing trail system, and developing a memorial to Ann Rudd Saxman. A draft statement of purpose – including a guiding philosophy and management plan – was begun to help ensure that the park will remain as open space in perpetuity.

Copy for a brochure was begun to help visitors explore both the conservation demonstration areas on the Donohoe Center property and Nature Park as a total outdoor education experience.

Monastery Run Cleanup, Loyalhanna Watershed

The District was a part of the fourth annual Monastery Run Project Symposium, held in October at St. Vincent College. The symposium featured updates on the project's funding, wetland conservation and educational opportunities.

Friedline Mine Project, Loyalhanna Watershed

Work began on this project at the Friedline Mine, a decades-old abandoned house coal mine which is polluting Laurel Run, a tributary of Powdermill Run. In a collaborative effort, the Loyalhanna Watershed Association, Powdermill Nature Reserve, and the Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation will use a passive treatment system to eliminate this major source of acid mine drainage.

Limestone Diversion Well, Turtle Creek Watershed

Groundbreaking took place in October for a limestone diversion well system to improve water quality in the Export/Delmont area of Turtle Creek — once the second most heavily fished stream in Pennsylvania and now polluted by acid drainage from abandoned coal mines.

The unique limestone diversion well system will intercept acidic mine water at a small dam and then transport this water through six-inch piping to a downstream location where the water enters a concrete manhole containing limestone. The limestone is pulverized by the water pressure entering the well and then dissolves and changes the water's pH so that it is alkaline instead of acidic. It also causes the toxic metals to precipitate out.

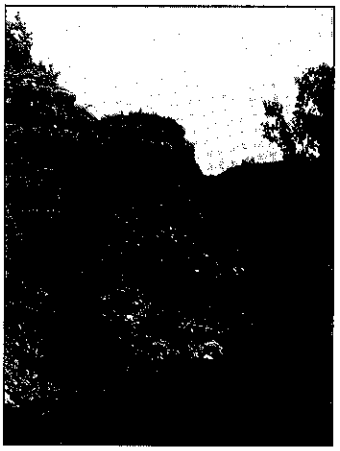
Officials hope that this well — and perhaps others like it — will clean the stream enough that the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission will be able to once again stock the creek for fishing.

AmeriCorps members served as water quality technicians to sample mine discharges in four counties, including Westmoreland. They gathered more than 600 total samples. In our county, they sampled Saxman Run and Monastery Run, Lowber, Export area and New Stanton area mine water discharge sites. This information will be used to design treatment facilities and get the cost estimates needed to procure funding. AmeriCorps also monitored a wetland system that was installed in Tintown to ensure that it was working properly.

Penn's Corner RC&D provided office space and supervision for the AmeriCorps members.

Jack's Run, Sewickley Creek Watershed

A partnership that included the District, Penn's Corner RC&D, Sewickley Creek Watershed Association, Pennsylvania Game Commission, City of Greensburg Parks and Recreation Department, and the Heinz Foundation was able to procure funding to begin improvements at Lynch Field in Greensburg. The plan, which is in the formative stages, will provide protection of the Jack's Run stream corridor, enhance environmental awareness, and initiate investigation of sources of mine drainage above Lynch Field.



Land Reclamation

The District took on the role of conductor, coordinating the efforts of the many organizations and individuals needed to undertake one of the largest land-restoration projects this region has ever seen. The damaged land is a 136-acre parcel in Ligonier and Fairfield townships that has been scarred since the turn of the century from deep coal-mining and from subsequent strip-mining in the 1970s.

More than $1,000,000 will be directed to reclaiming the soil, eliminating the spoil piles by using them to seal the deep-mine openings, and

backfilling some 4,000 linear feet of the dangerous high wall, taking its rise down completely.

Restoration work began with a ground-breaking ceremony on December 9, attended by State House Representative Jess Stairs, Ligonier and Fairfield Township supervisors, Westmoreland County Commissioner Terry Marolt, and representatives from the Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation. Work is expected to be completed in the spring of 1997.

Five Star Trail Groundbreaking

Grand fanfare marked the November 12 groundbreaking for the area's newest recreation resource – the Five Star Trail. The District was instrumental in promoting this project, which will transform a five-mile stretch of railroad right-of-way between Lynch Field in Greensburg and Westmoreland County Community College in Youngwood into a recreational trail. Additional support and funding was provided by Penn's Corner RC&D.

Over the longer term, the trail could be linked with another recreational trail being proposed for a seven-mile stretch along Sewickley Creek from Youngwood to Mammoth Park and, ultimately, with the Youghiogheny River Trail.

THE MUSICIANS

Bravo, one and all!

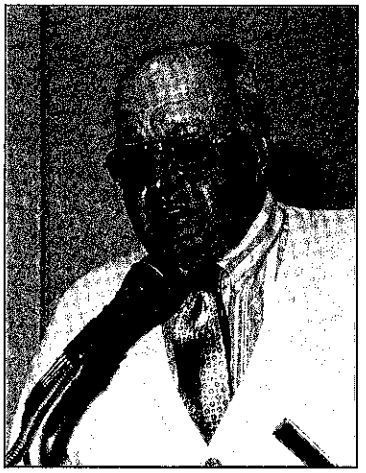
Awards were given at the District's annual planning meeting to those who displayed a special effort and noteworthy success in advancing the cause of conservation during 1996:

* Bill Kelly, executive director of the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service, received the Distinguished Service Award;
* the Outstanding Conservation Partner Award went to Adam Eidemiller, Inc.; and
* Ray and Donna Machulsky received the award for Leadership in Voluntary Nutrient Management. Their hog operation in Avonmore was the first voluntary nutrient management plan completed in the county.

Certificates of recognition also were given to: Rich Naugle, Champion Lumber; Nevin Ulery and Vivian Bernardo, Penn's Corner RC&D; Wes Gordon and Larry Stokum, Natural Resources Conservation Service; Malcolm Sias, Westmoreland County Parks Department; Tom Page, Turtle Creek Watershed Association; and Tom Keller, Sewickley Creek Watershed Association.

VIRTUOSO

At their November meeting, the Board of Directors named Frank Skacel, Sr. Director Emeritus in recognition of the substantial contribution he made to furthering the cause of conservation in Westmoreland County. For 26 years, Frank served as a valued member of the Board of Directors, and for 20 of those years further honored us through his diligent and conscientious service as Board Treasurer. Board Chairman Roy Houston presented Frank with an official proclamation at the District's annual planning meeting.



Frank also was honored by the Farmland Preservation Program in November at Farm City Night when he was named as a charter member of the Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Board. He retired from the Board on December 31, 1996, after serving that organization as Director and Treasurer since its founding in 1990.

T R I L L

This fall, the District garnered more awards than any of Pennsylvania's other 66 conservation districts — a total of three — in competitions held by the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD).

At an awards ceremony held in Lancaster, the Westmoreland Conservation District walked away with:

* first place in the annual report competition,
* first place in the regional competition for best conservation district, and
* an honorable mention in the state competition for best conservation district.

Additionally, one of the organizations which the Westmoreland Conservation District helped to found and currently provides office space for — the Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation — won the "Conservation Organization of the Year" award. WPCAMR, a group dedicated to cleaning up the land and water pollution from abandoned coal mines in western Pennsylvania, received the award in early October for its "contribution to the conservation of Pennsylvania's soil, water and related resources."

C O D A

(Repeat)

Although we conclude this report on the last day of 1996,
there is no such interlude in the interaction between
man and the environment.
The need for conservation carries on without pause from
day to day, season to season, and year to year.
Our composition is never truly completed, but plays on with
creative variations on the theme and a succession of changing activities
that harmonize with the perpetual cycle of
using and caring for our natural resources.

The Westmoreland Conservation District is dedicated to the conservation, restoration, and proper use of our natural resources.

Functioning as a unit of government, the directors and their associates commit themselves to the leadership and service required in pursuing activities beneficial to the environment.

If you are interested in joining us in caring for our county's soils, streams and water resources, forests, farms, and sustainable communities, please come to one of our monthly District meetings. It's a chance to learn more about what we do and how you can be a part of it. Call 412-837-5271 for meeting date, time, and location.

Westmoreland Conservation District

DONOHOE CENTER
R.D. #12, BOX 202-B
GREENSBURG, PA 15601
PHONE (412) 837-5271
FAX (412) 837-4127
EMAIL: wcd202b@aol.com

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