

Thank you for the opportunity to be here and speak today. My name is Rob Cronauer and I am the Watershed Specialist for the Westmoreland Conservation District. I am here today, to discuss the Conservation Districts role as it pertains to transportation.

First I would like to discuss the Conservation District's role with the Dirt and Gravel Road Program.

The Dirt and Gravel Road Maintenance Program was established by section 9106 of the Pennsylvania motor vehicle code in 1997. The purpose of the program is to implement and promote "Environmentally Sound Maintenance Practices" on publicly owned unpaved roads throughout the state. These Environmentally Sound Maintenance Practices are designed to accomplish two objectives: first, to reduce the amount of sediment pollution to Pennsylvania's Streams; and second, to reduce long-term road maintenance costs. In short, the purpose of the Program is to create a more environmentally and economically sustainable rural road system.

Each year since 1997, the Program has received \$5 Million in annual non-lapsing allocation. \$1 Million goes to the PA Bureau of Forestry for their Dirt and Gravel Road Program on the 3,000+ miles of road they own. The remaining \$4 Million goes to municipal roads through the State Conservation Commission and Conservation Districts. I am going to speak to you largely about the \$4 Million municipal program today, because that is where most of my involvement is.

The Dirt and Gravel Road Program is different: The Program is not run by road experts, rather by erosion experts. The Program is housed under the State Conservation Commission at the PA Department of Agriculture, and is implemented at the County level by Pennsylvania's network of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. There are currently active Programs in 64 of Pennsylvania's 67 Counties. Public road-owning entities, mostly second class townships, can apply to their Conservation District for funding to address specific sections of road.

One of the guiding principles of the program is LOCAL CONTROL. What local control means is that the Program puts more emphasis on decision-making at the local level, Counties and Municipalities. Why? Because Pennsylvania is a diverse state, and who knows the local geology, ecosystems, finances, and roads better than the people who live there? The program relies heavily on guidance, education, and a Quality Assurance / Quality Control effort to insure that local projects and procedures meet the intent of the Dirt and Gravel Road Program.

I would like to take a minute to talk to you about the actual projects that the Dirt and Gravel Road Program has put on the ground in Westmoreland County: how they happen, what they cost, and what is actually done. Westmoreland County receives only \$25,000 annually for construction from the program to stretch out to 134 miles of Dirt and Gravel Roads. There have been 27 work sites completed since the program was established in 1997, totaling 12 miles of road stabilized.

How are projects identified and chosen? The Conservation District has established an inventory of 137 locations in Westmoreland County where public unpaved roads are affecting water quality, called worksites. Municipalities apply to the Conservation District for funding to address individual worksites. The actual project work is done either by the municipality, or a private contractor, under the supervision of the Conservation District.

So what is the Actual Work on the ground? One of the most important things we try to accomplish on Dirt and Gravel Road Projects is “drainage disconnection”. What I mean by this is that we try to reverse the traditional “urban stormwater” mentality of collecting as much water as we can in ditches, and getting it to the stream as quickly as possible. Instead, we try to disperse water to encourage infiltration and reduce runoff to streams. To do this, we have many practices we employ. One of the simplest is the crosspipe or culvert. Adding pipes under the road helps to divide road drainage into more manageable volumes. But pipes are just the beginning. Another practice we employ is importing fill material such as shale to fill a road that has become sunken over time to eliminate roadside ditches altogether.

The Dirt and Gravel Road Program is different. It is efficient. Speaking for the funds allocated to Westmoreland Conservation District, 93% of the total allocation is used to pay DIRECTLY for on-the-ground projects in the form of materials, equipment and labor. 93% is good, but it gets even better when you consider in-kind contributions. In-kind contributions are materials, equipment, and labor that the municipality contributes, but receives no reimbursement for. Westmoreland County has averaged 117 cents of in-kind contributions from participants for every dollar of Program money spent, even though there is NO IN KIND REQUIREMENT. When you put 117% in-kind contributions together with 93% efficient spending, you get this amazing figure: The Dirt and Gravel Road Maintenance Program allocates \$27,000 per year to Westmoreland County, and the Conservation District puts \$54,000 dollars per year of ON THE GROUND in the form of materials, equipment, and labor.

So why am I here? I am here because the Dirt and Gravel Road Program is in danger of being marginalized as the value of its annual \$5 Million dollar allocation continues to erode. The Program’s annual \$5 Million allocation began in 1997, but only has the buying power of \$3.7 Million in today’s economy, and a projected \$2.5 Million by the end of this decade.

At the current rate of funding and considering inflation, the Program will NEVER have enough money to address the current site inventory. Not to mention having the capacity to re-address previously funded sites as they age.

So I am here to ask you to consider additional funding for the Dirt and Gravel Road Maintenance Program. An increase of Program funding of \$5 Million to a total of \$10 Million would mean that all of the currently identified worksites could be completed by 2036. An increase of Program funding of \$10 Million to a total of \$15 Million would mean that all of the currently identified worksites could be completed by 2025. Again, neither of these figures accounts for re-addressing old sites, but at least it puts the Program ahead of the inflation curve.

The Program benefits Rural Municipalities: In addition to on-the-ground projects, municipal officials gain knowledge of practices that will reduce environmental concerns and maintenance cost for their roads. While municipalities are the main player, other entities such as the PA Game Commission, PA Fish and Boat Commission, and PENNDOT are also active in the Program.

The Program Benefits Road Users: The rural road users, both public and private, gain a more sustainable rural road network.

The Program Benefits local businesses: Many local businesses throughout the state benefit from these projects including quarries, excavating companies, equipment operators, and suppliers of materials such as pipe.

Lastly, The Program benefits Pennsylvania's Streams: Ultimately, this program is about making long-term improvements to water quality: Reducing sediment pollution; Encouraging groundwater infiltration; Reducing flood flow to streams. This benefits all of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Next I would like to discuss the Conservation District's role with Transportation as a whole.

Working within the private sector: The Conservation District regularly meets with local engineers and developers to discuss topics related to minimizing roadway impacts to water quality and quantity. These meetings are typically a result of development projects throughout the county pertaining to industrial parks or housing plans. The Conservation District works within this private sector typically when a NPDES or stream crossing permit is required. The District is able to justify and recoup some cost associated with this technical assistance through the associated permit fees.

Working within the public sector: Much like the above mention technical assistance for the private sector, the Conservation District routinely offers services to the public sector. This typically includes local municipalities and Penn DOT. Whereas the District is able to recoup some cost of this technical assistance with permit fees through the private sector, currently the Conservation District is unable to charge a fee to a state agency. This restriction creates budget shortfalls, particularly when the Penn DOT projects are some of the largest and most time consuming that we encounter within the public sector. Large projects such as Route 22 construction require extensive time from the Conservation District to attend planning meetings, review erosion and stormwater plans, and conduct construction inspections.

We would like to request from you that you lift the current permit fee exemption from Penn DOT. This would allow the Conservation Districts to recoup some of the cost of our technical assistance, thus allowing us to better serve the public as a whole.