



POTTER COUNTY  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## 75th Anniversary Newsletter

Potter County Conservation District is proud to have been the first District established in Pennsylvania, on November 28th, 1945. Despite the many challenges of this year, as well as those faced in Potter County throughout the decades, we'd like to celebrate the growth of our own conservation-related work, as well as the spirit and resiliency of our community.

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Coudersport 1978 Comprehensive Plan

A History of the Potter County Conservation District—1969

Potter County Potato and Cannery Crop Farming, 1850-1960

ExplorePaHistory.com



### Our History

The Potter County Conservation District was organized on November 28, 1945 as the state's first such entity. Much of the effectiveness of conservation districts is due to their ability to successfully work with local, state, and federal agencies and organizations. Conservation districts are equally comfortable being environmental mediators and peacemakers as they are environmental planners and program originators.

### Our Vision

The Potter County Conservation District is dedicated to establishing innovative conservation practices with leadership and education through partnership with the community we serve. It is our goal to foster stewardship of our natural resources by inspiring current and future generations to preserve the legacy of conservation.

### Our Mission

The Potter County Conservation District will provide leadership to ensure the protection of the natural resources of Potter County through project implementation, educational programs, technical assistance, and by fostering public and private partnerships.



## 2020 Board Of Directors

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Recent 2020 addition\*

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## Our Establishment

Across the country, the establishment of conservation districts was first tied with agricultural practices and the motivation to ensure our lands' future agricultural productivity. Although some early Americans became especially aware of the need for conservation of natural resources in the 1800's, the notorious events of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression led to the first existence of conservation districts in America. Potter County Conservation District was the first to be proposed in Pennsylvania, on November 28, 1945. Our official establishment was made by commissioners on December 13th, 1945. The culmination of our exceptional wilderness and productive farm grounds led legislators of the time to begin the work that we still carry out today—work to ensure protection of Potter County's natural resources.

### Potter County's Strong Agricultural Roots

Although small family farms existed through the 1800's, Potter County's first cycle of agricultural growth began in the 1912-1915, when potato chip company "Saratoga Chips" out of New Jersey led farmers to the climatic conditions of Ulysses, PA where a superior seed type, the "American Giant," was produced. Here is where Potter County's venture into commercial potato growing officially began. Although initially very successful, blight eventually became a problem for our early farmers. In 1918 fungicides were developed and used on farms through the establishment of community sprayer groups. A county "agricultural agent," similar to today's Penn State Extension workers, would organize these groups, made up of farmers within a local area. The farmers would pool their funds together for shared spraying equipment and a hired man to operate it. The equipment would travel from farm to farm, each using their own team of horses, to defeat any signs of blight and help produce a quality crop. The first sprayer group was in Germania, consisting of 17 farmers. The idea caught on fast and by 1928 there were 150, made of 860 growers. By this time many farmers were working so many acres that they resorted to purchasing their own equipment. However, the growers group idea stayed strong, and in 1945 there were still 32 groups of 465 growers and about 6,500 acres. They say it takes a village to raise our children—in Potter County's early farming years, it also took a village to raise our crops.

Gradually, the century-old farms of the first pioneers became large growing productions. The very first field of potatoes approved for disease-free seed was of L. S. Erway in 1919. 1919 also brought the first "Potato Tour," held in Germania, during which the county agent and farmers toured various farms to observe new methods and developments in potato growing.

Through the 20's, 30's, and 40's, growers worked hard to establish themselves, and dairying grew to become the major income producing enterprise in the County, with potato growing often operating as a secondary crop. Some acreage numbers are subjective, but the first large scale growers were the Blass's, who began in 1919. Another early large scale grower was George Barnett and sons of Fox Hill, as of 1936. These early years laid the ground work for research and development in Potter County and soon after led to even more interest in our humble farmers and rolling hills, from across the state and beyond.

### Camp Potato and Early Agricultural Growth

**AUGUST 15, 1938.**

#### **'SPUD' LABORATORY TO BE ESTABLISHED**

**Pennsylvania Farmers Seek  
to Make Mountain Land  
Productive.**

**By the Associated Press.**

**HARRISBURG, Pa., Aug. 15.—**  
Pennsylvania farmers will establish a  
"spud" laboratory in the mountains  
near Coudersport and call it "Camp  
Potato."

The agricultural work center, lo-  
cated on a plateau near the State's  
northern border, will be dedicated  
Wednesday as a site for experiments

in converting scrub mountain land  
to a profitable use in growing po-  
tatoes.

Approximately 100 boys assigned by  
the National Youth Administration  
will carry on the work under the su-  
pervision of State agricultural of-  
ficials.

Living quarters for the boys and the  
experimental staff will be established  
on the 270-acre tract.

The Pennsylvania Co-operative Po-  
tato Growers Association and the  
State Department of Agriculture have  
joined forces to promote the project.  
The workers will experiment with 25,-  
000 specimens of seedlings to find the  
type best adapted to mountain soil  
that is usually unproductive.

Spud research in Potter County occurred both formally and by informal trial and error since about 1922. During these years, Agent Bert Straw (modern day equivalent of a Penn State Extension worker) invited Penn

State Plant Pathologist Ernest L. Nixon to Potter county for observations of growing development efforts. Mr. Nixon was so excited over Potter County's potato progress that in January of 1928, he proposed the construction of an "experimental potato development project" on Denton Hill. With the help of other Penn State colleagues and local farmers, the land was prepared and plans for construction were finally unveiled in April, 1938. That year's Potato Tour Field Day, held August 17th, 1938, included the dedication of what was first named "Camp Potato." In 1947, land adjacent was purchased by the Pennsylvania Cooperative Potato Growers Association for the construction of an additional administrative building and 12 smaller dwellings, later completed in 1951 and operated as the "Potato City" Hotel. These early undertakings put Potter County on the map as a mecca for agriculture and potato growing development.

The "Spud Laboratory," later known as Potato City Hotel, operated for several years, and delved deeper into research of Potter County soils and climate. Land development, population, and

## Potter County Becomes First Soil Conservation District

Potter County has become the first in Pennsylvania to be established as a soil conservation district under the State Soil Conservation Law passed by the 1945 Legislature. Secretary of Agriculture Miles Horst, announced today.

Official notice has just been received from the Potter Board of County Commissioners that they had adopted a resolution declaring the entire county as a soil conservation district.

Secretary Horst, who is chairman of the State Soil Conservation Commission set up by the act, said that Potter County Commissioners have been asked to send petition blanks to officers of County-wide agricultural organizations so they might request representation for their organization to nominate farmers for appointment as members of a County Soil Conservation Board.

Eligibility of Potter County farm organizations will be passed upon by the State Commission at a meeting scheduled for December 18 in Harrisburg. A definition of a county-wide agricultural organization has been prepared by the State Commission to aid farm organizations in determining their eligibility to be named as one of the nominating groups.

The county farm groups approved by the State Commission will send delegates to a county-wide meeting for nomination of at least eight farmers, four of whom will be selected by the county commissioners to serve on the county soil conservation district board.

Secretary Horst to date has ap-

peared at meetings of farmers to explain the new law in Crawford, Fulton and Centre Counties. He will meet with farmers of Somerset County at Somerset on December 30. Requests are on hand from Jefferson and Lehigh County Commissioners for meetings as soon



**MILES HORST**  
Secretary of Agriculture

as suitable dates can be arranged. The new law replaces an act of 1937, and provides for voluntary action by farmers and others to develop cooperatively an over all county conservation program, and contains no compulsory features, the Secretary said.

## Setting the Stage for District Establishment

Needless to say, the entire country saw trying times during the economic turmoil of the Great Depression. That, coupled with poor agricultural practices, drought, and resulting Dust Bowl in the Midwest spelled out a new era of political action for the protection of natural resources, namely soil and water. Legislators and other leaders knew that without these protections, the well being of farming families and of the entire country were at stake. Part of this movement included the beginnings of Conservation Districts. Potter County's years of agricultural success and research helped poise us as the first county in PA to establish a Conservation District under the Pennsylvania Act 217.

The first district board consisted of four farmers: **Norman Chapman, Roselle Leete, Roy W.H. Maurer, and Edward Fisher, chairman.** Henry James served as commissioner director. A county survey was conducted through the district in 1946 to assess needs of farmers across the county. In fact, Potter County can also boast being the first county with a complete soil survey.

These and related mapping completed by 1953 prioritized the impacts of soil erosion control, improvement of woodlands, and land adjustments for maintaining tax base. With time, new conservationist ideas and projects gained traction in the community. By 1953, nearly all farmers of the county became cooperators in this movement as well as many District-led projects.

## The District's Founding Fathers

Through the late 1930's until 1945, three influential local figures spearheaded the establishment of the District – Henry Staiger, an agriculture teacher and involved community member, and Ed Fisher and Roselle Leete, both progressive farmers. The initial goal of the district was preventing soil erosion for the sake of future farming and conserving water quality. As Mr. Staiger explained to a then skeptical public, *"would you allow a hole to remain in your pocket if you were only losing a dime at a time?"* the example being that soil erosion, although often slow, is a steady loss with long term negative effects.

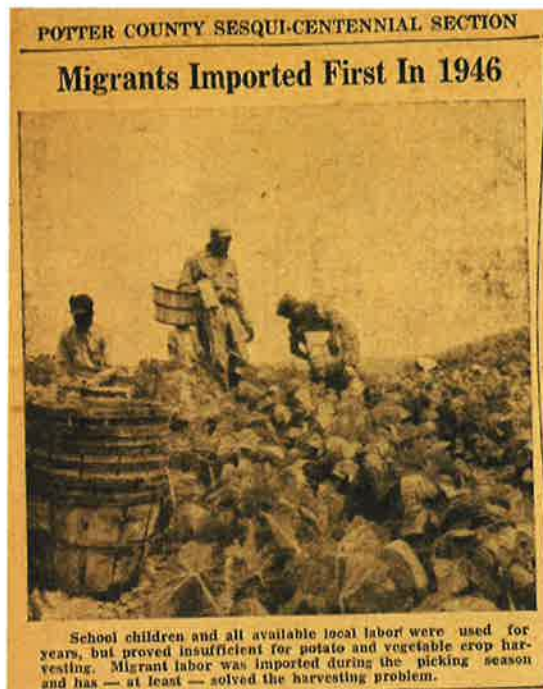
Unfortunately at an initial meeting to discuss the district start-up, one opposing farmer exclaimed *"Quit reading funny books and let's get to work."* Despite this initial feedback, commissioners overcame skepticism and established the District under Act 217 (effective May 1945), which gave counties the right to declare themselves Districts through applications to the Secretary of Agriculture in respective states. Through the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the District board continued on to promote and implement agricultural best management practices that would assist in conserving soil health and water quality. At first, these included simple ideas such as crop rotations, cover crops, and no till. Henry Staiger went on to teach Agriculture for 55 years, founded the Millport, Genesee, and Port Allegany Fairs, served as editor in chief of the Keystone Farmers Monthly magazine, and took on many other ventures. Ed Fisher worked himself up to the presidency of the State Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Directors. With time other district board directors emerged including farmers, commissioners, and urban/public directors, all forming comradeships with each other and the community. This tradition still stands today.



Henry Staiger (L), awarding Ed Fisher with a Potter County Cooperator of the Year award, 1960's.



### Invaluable Migrant Workers in Potter County



World War II and the Great Depression saw the beginning of a need for migrant workers on many farms across Pennsylvania. As jobs became hard to come by, more and more people moved near cities in search of work. This meant less of an available work force for farm labor in days before mass mechanization on farms. However, this created more job opportunities for the low income minority groups that became known as Migrant Crews. Migrants included mainly African American men, women, boys and girls who lived in quarters provided by farmers and worked through the growing period. When harvesting was done, they'd head off to the next farming area in need of workers. Although some crews across the state lived in poor conditions, many in Potter County were very much appreciated and valued. Some locals still share fond memories of the migrants and agree that they gave much more to our community than their hard work.

At a 1951 census, Potter County alone held the highest numbers of migrants in the entire state, with a total of 1,367 individuals and 40 crews. The second highest count of the same year was that of a 9-county south central region, with 1,072 individuals and 24 crews. Migrant workers were a commodity to Potter County farms until about the 70's, when mechanization largely replaced their labor. Much of the growing golden years are owed to them.

### Early Dairy Industry

Although potatoes in Potter County received acclaim from the rest of the state, many proud dairy farmers operated throughout the 1900's as well. Dairying developed along a parallel to other Northern Tier counties, meaning farms carried half a dozen or more dairy cows producing fluid milk mostly for New York City market, and were thus governed by New York sanitation statutes. In this period, potatoes actually emerged as a notable complement to the dairying economy. A 1927 census revealed the largest farms, over 200 acres, included 10 or more acres of potatoes within a mix that included livestock and field crops. However, smaller farms that raised significant amounts of potatoes tended not to have a diverse operation. For decades, various processing plants were located close to the dairymen, often accompanied with railroads designated to haul product to the plants. Although lumber and tanneries were the initial motivation for outside investors to lay tracks in Potter County, The Dairymen's League took over a condensory at Whitesville in 1921, making "milk trains" a common fixture in Potter County for decades to come.



Above, the Abbott Cream Cheese Plant in Coudersport, 1941. This plant served as one of the largest producers of cream cheese in the state, and employed the product of about 221 Potter County dairymen at it's peak production.

### The Start of Our Conservation Work

Dating back to 1939, a handful of farmers began agreeing to offer their land as district "demonstration farms" to promote the usefulness of strip cropping, drainage ditches, contouring, and other agricultural best management practices. With time these gained popularity, as did the District. By about 1970, 282 active District cooperators were obtained, covering about 670,000 acres of land. At a 1969 count, the following cumulative conservation work on demonstration farm projects were reported:

Strip Cropping – 20,793 acres	Spring development – 23	Underground drains – 87,668 feet
Woodland Improvement – 13,610 acres	Land protected from erosion – 82,255 acres	Tree planting – 5,191 acres
Diversions – 817,080 feet	Pasture and Hayland renovations – 14,295 acres	Ponds – 299
Open Drains – 150,458 feet	Land Clearing – 5,229 acres	Wildlife area – 654 acres



## The Farming "Hay Day"

After a gradual build, the humble, hilly, unassuming fields of Potter County reached the pinnacle of their productivity and fame in the 1950's and 60's.

The first growers, dairymen, and other native farmers held on strong while others joined in on the bounty of God's Country.

Some came from hundreds of miles after hearing all the opportunity Potter County had to offer a hard worker.

In 1952, E. P. Gagnon came from Caribou, Maine and became the new owner of Ramseyer land, located on Sweden Hill. Milton Snowman too journeyed from Caribou in 1953, acquiring prime land on Ayers Hill.

In 1960 came even more Mainers, John and Ferd Irish, also from Caribou. They began working lands bordering Gagnon on Sweden Hill as well as land near Ulysses. The Kosa family came all the way from coal regions of Kentucky after his family immigrated from Hungary nine years earlier. Their family primarily produced dairy, potatoes, and oats.

Meanwhile, our key District founders and cooperating farmer list continued to grow.

The District operated on a shoestring budget for the majority of our early years, but happily celebrated the 1,000th District Cooperator, Mr. Clyde Rushmore, in 1969.

A mere 20 years prior brought the very first cooperator, Mr. Wesley Cary.



## A DREAM COME TRUE

THE earliest pioneers in Potter County dreamed dreams of rich, fertile farms and the produce that could be grown here. In their eyes they could see the dense woods leveled into rolling farmland and crops springing out of the fertile ground, growing rapidly through the summer and ripening in the fall, ready to keep the county fed during the winter months.

FROM the days of plowing an acre of ground with oxen, Potter County farmers were able to extend their operations many fold in the days to come when a good team of horses became the prime motive power. Then it was only a matter of years until the farm became mechanized and the farmer was able to cultivate miles of farmland with modern equipment.

OVER 35 years ago, progressive farmers found they could leave the low-lying valley land and turn their hilltop acreage into potato producing lands. This not only gave the farmer more land under cultivation but provided a major industry within the county.

SINCE that time, the raising of certified seed potatoes and U. S. No. 1 Potatoes for city markets has added to the progress of Potter County by the purchase of additional equipment, erection of potato storage houses, more business for the railroads and more business for local storekeepers because of an increase in labor.

THIS ADVERTISEMENT SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING  
POTTER COUNTY POTATO GROWERS

**Ed Fisher**  
**Barnett Brothers**  
**Everett Blass**  
**Waldo Horst**  
**Milton Snowman**  
**Claude Bennett**  
**Mack VanWegen & Son**  
**Ed Gagnon**

Left, Potato Blossom Queen candidates at the 1954 annual Potato Festival. The wagon is labeled "Our Prize Crop."



## The Prized Water and Wilderness of God's Country



A fisherman enjoying a tributary of the Allegheny River near Coudersport, circa 1940.

Given our abundant pristine waters and wilderness, Potter County was a paradise to outdoorsmen and loggers alike. This however created an interesting juxtaposition in balancing the needs of business with the need for conservation. Although great strides have been taken since the old days, this struggle dictates activities in Potter County and beyond still today.

Pioneers recklessly enjoyed the bounty of Potter County streams and wilderness for nearly 150 years, and statewide calls for conservation efforts first came about in the 1850's. By 1900, 60 percent of the once thick, bountiful forest in PA had been timbered. The loss of these trees and the resulting erosion and other environmental issues led to grave water quality impairments, loss of biodiversity, and the first introductions of invasive organisms. Overharvesting wild game also wreaked havoc on ecosystems. Around this same year, the first PA state forest commissioner Joseph Rothrock's hired surveyor explained *"there are few places in the East where the natural beauties of mountain scenery and the natural resources of timber lands have been destroyed to the extent that has taken place in northern Pennsylvania."*

The work of the newly founded Game Commission, Forest Service, Conservation Districts, Penn State Extension, and agricultural workers gradually banded together to undo this damage. Pennsylvanian policy and a few key PA citizens in fact played major roles in America's environmental protection movement. In Potter County, The Conservation District helped stress the importance of biodiversity, forestry, water quality, and other ecology themes and topics in schools and to community organizations.

Average citizens also played a role in environmental improvements. By and large, overzealous, local Potter County hunters and fishermen gradually became the boots on the ground guardians of their beloved pastimes.

## Lumbering in Potter County

Dating back to 1870, botanist Joseph Rothrock began a twenty-year campaign for forest protection in Pennsylvania. Likewise, Gifford Pinchot, whose family had built a fortune on timber in Eastern PA, would join Rothrock in becoming two of America's great forest conservationists of their time. Their plans for sustainable and managed use of forests shaped the entire American system for forest conservation in the twentieth century. Forest recovery was and still is an ongoing, slow process. Especially before mechanizations became readily available, trees had to be replanted by hand and protected from wildlife and invasive pests and disease. Threats to new trees and the future of lumbering first came with the Chestnut blight, and shortly afterwards came the invasive Gypsy Moth.

The great lumber industry in Potter County lasted for 105 years, from 1815 to 1920, when the very last hemlock log was cut near Costello. Hundreds of lumbermen, camps, and saw mills called our ridge and valleys home. By the 1960's, After more than a century of over-harvesting and other resulting ecological issues, Potter County's forests had only just begun to prove profitable, healthy, and sustainable once again. By the 80's, the District took on a more direct role in timbering activities through stream encroachment permit approvals, and overseeing that proper erosion and sediment control procedures were maintained during harvests. The District's consistent integration of Forestry education for local Vo-Ag and science students and the general public also helped further the message of sustainable timbering.



Skidway of logs along the Allegheny River above Coudersport, Potter County, n.d. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the state's once pristine forests had been transformed into a depleted and scarred landscape. Poor agricultural practices, industrial encroachment, and "unscientific" forestry further aggravated the situation resulting in widespread erosion.

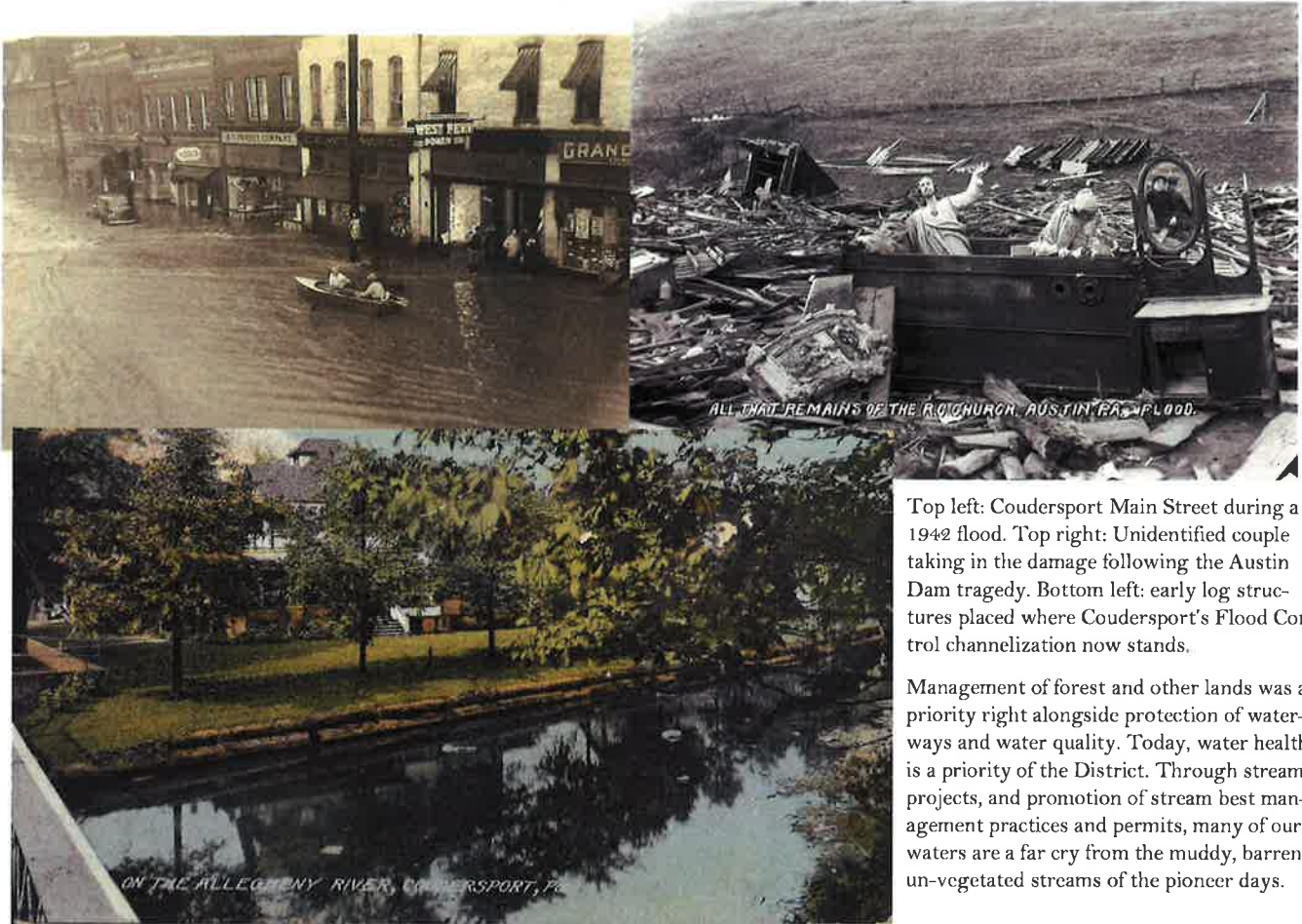


## Early Environmental Policy in Pennsylvania

Although many disparities and environmental injustices still exist today, Americans of all backgrounds once dealt with decades of little legal protection from pollution-related health issues and environmental disasters for the sake of industry. Many lawsuits ensued, accounting the environmental impacts and their resulting lessened quality of life of American citizens, yet the Supreme Court dismissed case after case, citing the discomfort as “voluntary” as these citizens benefitted from “living and doing business in a near modern city.” The Court was reluctant to hold big industry polluters accountable, as these industries were powering the young American economy. Mining, gas drilling, railroads, and iron and steel were all within their right to dump wastes with reckless abandon. Although the country enjoyed economic success as a result, many people came forward as early as the 1920’s with firm demands for policy change at the top—challenging the country’s short-sighted view of environmental issues.

Flood Control was another contentious issue that pitted business interests against public safety. This was never so clear as it was following the 1889 Johnstown Flood, in which a millionaires’ country club dam left in disrepair broke, killing around 2,209 people. Despite the arguments that ensued following this tragedy, the Pennsylvania Commonwealth did not actually pass dam safety and inspection legislation until 1911, following Potter County’s own Austin Dam tragedy, which claimed somewhere between 78-90 people. The dam was built as a resource to the Bayless paper mill. Although it had cracked within its first year of existence, relieving pressure through a blast at the top of the dam lulled residents of Austin into a false sense of security. Many accounts of this tragedy lie at the core of Potter County history as well as statewide history and the resulting legislation.

Later still came the beginnings of waterways encroachment legislation, which set safety and environmental standards for stream crossings, bridges, and other waterway structures. This legislation plays a huge role in District operations to this day. The 1930’s through the 60’s especially brought debates on federal government’s role in regulations and guidance, and Pennsylvania often stood as the example for environmental policy needs. With the Great Depression came less focus on industry, and much more on restoration project prototypes, the Civilian Conservation Corps, work of Conservation Districts and related agencies, and various flood control projects held to inspections and standards. After World War II, Pennsylvania finally passed laws that also held mining companies accountable and responsible for restoration work. Federal Air protection legislation also passed at this time. Gradually, more livable yet economically successful urban spaces were created.



Top left: Coudersport Main Street during a 1942 flood. Top right: Unidentified couple taking in the damage following the Austin Dam tragedy. Bottom left: early log structures placed where Coudersport’s Flood Control channelization now stands.

Management of forest and other lands was a priority right alongside protection of waterways and water quality. Today, water health is a priority of the District. Through stream projects, and promotion of stream best management practices and permits, many of our waters are a far cry from the muddy, barren, un-vegetated streams of the pioneer days.

## Diversifying the District's Work

### The Modern Conservationist Movement

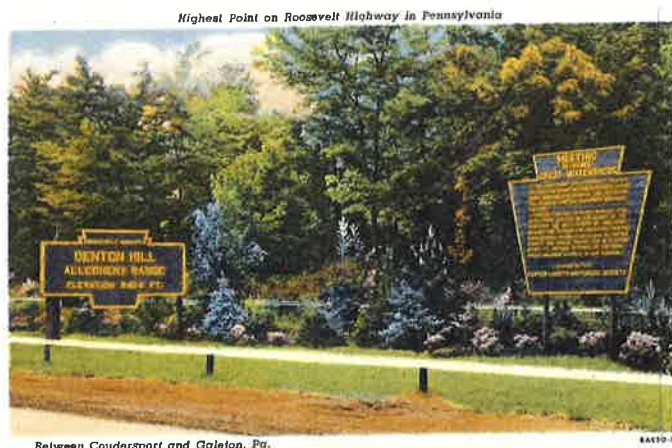


Racheal Carson, 1960, at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. Carson's *Silent Spring* exposed the detriments of DDT and other popular pesticides on birds and wildlife. A proud Pennsylvania native, Carson is considered the mother of the modern environmental movement for her work.

Pennsylvania's history of environmental leadership is a rich one. In the early 1900s people like Gifford Pinchot, a governor and forester, and J. Horace McFarland, a colleague of Sierra Club founder John Muir, helped organize state and national conservation and preservation efforts. In 1962, Rachel Carson, an Allegheny County native for whom DEP's headquarters building in Harrisburg is named, helped start the modern era of environmentalism with her book, *Silent Spring*. In 1971, Maurice Goddard took on the challenge of leading the newly formed Department of Environmental Resources that had responsibility for forests, parks and environmental protection programs. At about the same time, Sen. Franklin Kury and other legislators led the effort to make Pennsylvania one of the first states to amend its constitution with an "Environmental Bill of Rights." Ralph Abele led the Pennsylvania Fish Commission on a crusade against water pollution. The 1970s saw a flurry of environmental action through basic regulatory programs development. In the 1980s and 90s, a new generation of environmental programs grew again as recycling, hazardous site cleanup, air quality and water quality expanded rapidly.

The second half of the twentieth century brought a wave of national and state-controlled legislation, and this reflected a fundamental change in American attitudes towards the environment. Although many strides were made, enforcement at first was erratic and the battle for a safer healthier environment was far from won. Leading into the 1990's and new millennia, changes in legislation and funding gave agencies like the Conservation District gained an edge in the world of environmental education, project implementation, and technical assistance to public groups. The decades-long fight for change had also finally brought the beginning of tangible, boots on the ground work in diverse habitats and project site areas.

### Growth in Tourism and Celebrating Natural Resources



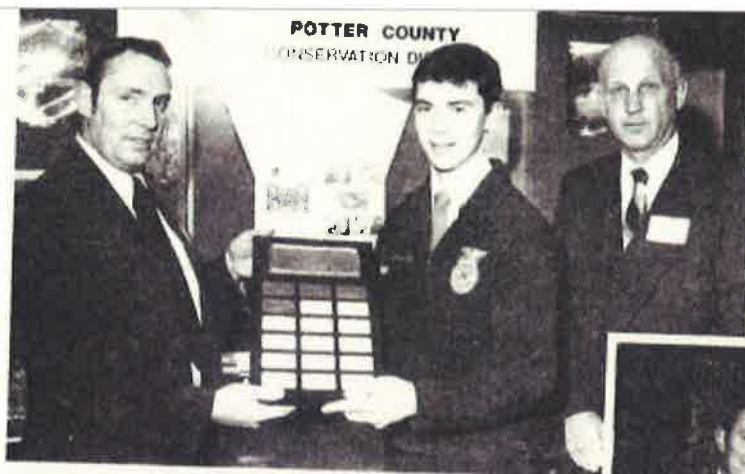
Between Coudersport and Galeton, Pa.

The original visitor signage, made by Walter Hall, marking Denton Hill and sharing the story of Potter County's now famous triple divide watershed. The 1970's marked the beginning of a new phenomenon we now know as "Ecotourism." This helped create new jobs and opportunities, and helped conservationist practices and environmental education gain traction in the community and beyond.

According to a 1978 Coudersport Borough Comprehensive Plan, agriculture in Potter County employed about 40% less workers in 1974 than 1964. Farms became larger but fewer in number, and more mechanized both locally and across the state. Lumbering and farming collectively remained active, but new doors in the commercial sector had begun to open. The community recognized one such potential within the commercial sector—tourism revenue, stemming from visitors' love for hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities. With this new priority in planning came the responsibility of agencies like the Conservation District to educate visitors and local citizens alike of sustainable land use, permitting and land development, and both the intrinsic and tangible value of Potter County natural resources. Thus, locals began understanding yet another reason for the importance of conserving them.



## Expanding Community Presence and Leadership



The awards pictured here were distributed across the county by the District in 1981. These events and awards took place for decades to come, and are still awarded today. This not only supported the community and promoted conservation-minded citizens, it helped create a more public presence for the District as a community leader and service provider.

◀ **ROBERT BARNETT AWARD:** Presented to Edward Cornell as the Northern Potter Vo-Ag student showing most improvement in his program. Earl Brown, awards chairman, left and Ed Kosa, chairman, right.



◀ **ESSAY WINNERS:** Earl Brown (right) presents check to Kathy Cote of Coudersport, first place winner in sixth grade conservation essay contest. Her mother Carol Cote stands behind her. Other winners are Lesile Fourness, Austin, third place with her mother on steps behind her and Doug Brown, son of Earl, second place. Standing at rear is Wayne Wynick, district manager for the Conservation District.



**CONSERVATION EDUCATION AWARD ▶** Timothy Clifton received Potter County Conservation District's 1981 education award March 26 for his "Wildlife Studies" course at Galeton High School. Presentation made by Earl Brown.



The Conservation District has been blessed to be led by many upstanding, hardworking farmers, teachers, foresters, township workers, and more. Quite a few board directors tended to wear many hats, taking on leadership roles in the community without reservation. Earl Brown has served on the District board for over 50 years, and has done just that. In his time as a community leader, Earl has been a respected teacher of Agriculture, football and track coach, District board member, and now serves as District Board Chairman.

We are indebted to his leadership and friendship!

## Grassroots Movement for Dirt and Gravel Roads Restoration

In 1990, the God's Country Chapter of Trout Unlimited became concerned with sediment from dirt road entering streams in Potter County. At the request of chapter member Roy Magarigal, members of PA TU's Environmental Committee were invited to Big Moore's Run to discuss the issue with God's Country TU. Following this initial meeting of the minds, four major figures went on to spearhead years of fighting for significant funding allocations towards projects preventing the stream siltation issue. They were, in no particular order, God's Country Chapter President Dr. Pete Ryan, Ed Bellis, retired Penn State biology professor, Bob Cardeline, biologist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bud Byron, retired insurance salesman and President of the PA TU Environmental Committee. At their initial meeting, it just so happened to rain and the siltation issues in Potter County was visible in real time for the group to witness.

Thus began a seven year journey of spreading the word, meeting with legislators, local organizations, and state agencies. In 1993 a "Task Force on Dirt and Gravel Roads" was formed, and years of Potter County studies on dirt road impacts were undertaken. In 1995, it was determined a state-wide survey would be necessary for any legislation to pass funding a dirt and gravel road program. At this time, Ed Bellis created a PA Trout Unlimited-approved score card to assess dirt and gravel impacts on streams. Ed Bellis also deployed volunteer groups and training sessions to complete these surveys across the state. By 1996, these surveys identified 700 hotspots throughout the state, 90 of which were in Potter County!

In 1997 the PA General Assembly amended House Bill 67, the Transportation Revenue Bill, to include a \$5 million annual appropriation earmarked for Dirt and Gravel Road Maintenance. Coinciding with this update came a new section of the PA Motor Vehicle Code specifying environmental purpose, methodology, and grant procedures for the new program.

The Dirt and Gravel Roads Program has continued to grow, now under guidance from Penn State's Center for Dirt and Gravel Roads Studies. In 2000, the Task Force received a Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence, and 14 years after their first meeting here in Potter County, Pete Ryan was awarded a PATU Founder's award for his diligent work and leadership in Potter County. Pete continues this work as a member of our Quality and Assurance Board for the Potter County DGR Program, and as an associate director for the District. Since its inception, the program has distributed over 9 million dollars in Potter County alone, completing 155 sites and 124 road miles – greatly reducing sediment loading to streams as well as assisting local municipalities in road maintenance and funding.

Wednesday, December 5, 1990



### T/U SPOKESMAN FIGHTING SILTATION

James H. "Bud" Byron, right, the chairman of Trout Unlimited's state environmental committee, and Ed Bellis, left, the secretary of T/U's state council addressed the organization's God's Country Chapter meeting in Coudersport on Thursday. Byron told local members he is trying to enlist the support of various state agencies to find solutions to the siltation of high-quality headwater trout streams in parts of Potter County. Much of the problem is caused by erosion problems on dirt roads under the jurisdiction of townships and the Pa. Bureau of Forestry. He said T/U has worked with officials in parts of central Pennsylvania to help eliminate such runoff problems.

Mack Schmieding Photo



Andrew Mickey, current DG/LVR Specialist (L) and Pete Ryan (R) with Pete's PATU Founder's Award

## Watershed Associations Gain Traction

Our local Watershed Associations serve as boot-on-the-ground activists for watershed health. The forming of Watershed Associations was an initiative undertaken by DCNR in the mid-1990's to create water quality groups not confined to county boundaries but by the watersheds themselves. Charter members were tasked with



Upper Allegheny Watershed Association is known for its stewardship and protection of the headwaters in Potter and eastern McKean counties, but the group also supports the Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful roadside trash collection campaign. Out collecting debris from a section of Rt. 6 from Roulette to Burtville last weekend were association members (l. to r.) Tim Baker, Tim Bizzaro, Dave Saulter, Phil Wirtz, Larry Wyckoff and Frank Weeks.

acquiring interested citizens within a watershed together to form the conservation group. The two main priorities of the Associations is water quality monitoring and restoration efforts such as litter clean ups, stream bank restorations, and habitat establishment. By the 2000's and the coming of shale gas drilling, interest in watershed association volunteering grew, which helped establish their necessity in our community. We've been blessed to work with these non-profit groups on a wide variety of projects throughout the last two decades.



## Our Recent Years

### Improving Headwater Streams

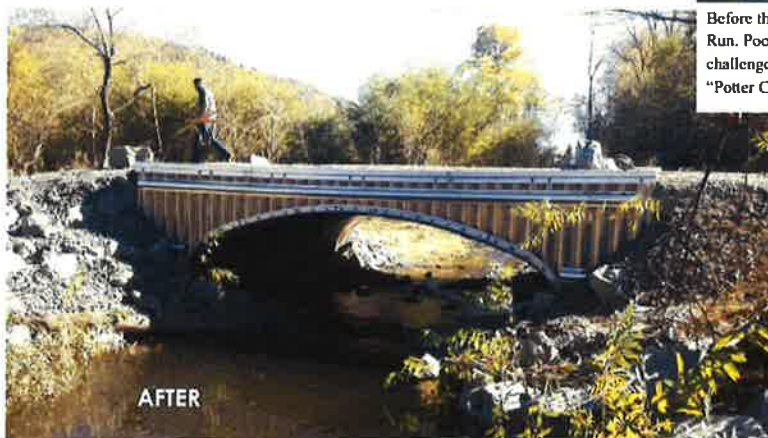
In recent years, water quality and watershed projects education has become a major priority to the District. Stream structures, specialized stream crossings, riparian plantings, and other efforts all help improve and protect our headwater streams. These projects are completed through an array of funding distributions and grants, including partnerships with the Pennsylvania Trout Unlimited, the PA Fish and Boat Commission, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, PA Department of Environmental Protection, the Center for Dirt and Gravel Road Studies, and many more.

#### 2016 Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence

We were awarded this honor for the Water Quality Protection and Education: Ludington Run and Beyond Project, a joint stream and dirt road restoration initiative. We took on the project on a tributary of the Genesee River, to serve as a pilot collaborative model across the state and wider region as well. The project included a multi-faceted approach, implementing stream barrier remediation, in-stream fish habitat structures, and road sediment reduction. The holistic approach greatly improved stream quality, aquatic organism passage, and road drivability.



Before the completion of this pilot project, native trout could not access the upper reaches of Ludington Run. Poor drainage fouled the headwaters tributary of the Genesee River with sedimentation and challenged both PennDOT and Bingham Township. The site was chosen as a launch point for the "Potter County Water Quality Protection and Education Initiative."



This state-of-the-art 'bottomless culvert' on Ludington Run and related habitat improvement work, along with a drainage and surface rehabilitation project, have resulted in more than 10 miles of aquatic connectivity and reduced almost 500 tons of sediment for every tenth of a foot of surface erosion. Strategic plantings stabilize the streambank and shade the waterway to prevent thermal pollution.



Those at the Governor's Awards for Environmental Excellence ceremony on Tuesday are (from left) Davitt Woodwell, Pennsylvania Environmental Council President; Cindy Dunn, state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources secretary; Jason Childs, Potter County Conservation District Manager; Patrick McDonnell, state Department of Environmental Protection Secretary; and Alex Veto, Potter County Conservation District dirt/gravel/flow-volume roads specialist.

### Stream Structures and Project Methodology

Different types of stream structures have been developed across the years, and implemented by the District in the last three or four decades. As pictured to the right, they are often intended for areas of accelerated erosion occurring as the result of human activities. This structure is called Mudsill Cribbing, which acts to hold the bank in place and provide overhead cover for fish. Other structures include single and multi log vanes, which can be placed (where appropriate) to slow the flow of water. Large Woody Debris projects are yet another up and coming practice in which large streamside trees are strategically dropped to mimic natural waterway obstructions and habitat formation.





### Weimer Hollow Project—Combining Forces across District Programs

Weimer Hollow Road is located in Pleasant Valley Township and involved remediation of the stream channel as well as the road profile. A roughly 400' section of the road was at the same elevation or lower elevation than the adjacent stream. The unnamed tributary to Sartwell Creek, locally known as "Weimer Hollow", is a class A trout stream. An earthen dike created by cutting the road in was the only thing holding the creek back from the road. The stream breached the dike during a high water event in the spring of 2019, causing a large amount of the flow to travel directly down the roadway before re-entering the stream channel hundreds of feet downstream. This breach caused a massive sediment release to the stream and created an unsafe roadway.

The only long-term solution to correct this issue was to raise the road profile over four feet for a 200' length of the road and taper the fill out in both directions for a total length of 750'. Limestone was used as the driving surface due to its close proximity to the stream. The raised road profile now prevents the stream from flowing into the road. In-stream log structures were used to stabilize the shared stream-road bank and provide fish habitat. Two cross pipes were replaced and one new cross pipe was installed to improve drainage. Both the upslope ditch and downslope side of the road were seeded and mulched for the project length to stabilize the site from erosion.



Before this project, the road profile is significantly lower than the stream profile, easily leading to stream and drivability problems. The road was raised over 4 feet, and mudsill cribbing was added where the difference was most severe. Other in stream structures included cross vanes (bottom R) and new DSA was laid on the 750' of project length (top R)

### Land Development, Permitting, E&S Control

Resource Conservationist Glenn Dunn II is our sentinel force fighting erosion, loss of land, and related waterways pollution. Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plans, reviewed by Glenn, (Chapter 102) are required for all Earth Disturbance activities over 5000 square feet. The goal for this program is to help decrease accelerated erosion by land development / earth disturbance activities. Disturbance of any kind has the potential to discharge into waters of the Commonwealth. General Permit (105) Regulations are required for construction, operating, modifying, enlarging, or abandoning any dam or water encroachment. An encroachment is defined as any structure that may have an effect on the course of a body of water, including wetlands.

Although the District is not a regulatory entity, Glenn has investigated many issues relating to timbering, stream crossings, wetland disturbances, and much more. When these issues arise, we work with the landowner in a way that will meet both landowner and soil and water needs.



Above, Glenn Dunn II, Resource Conservationist, assisting at a 2017 DGR Southwoods Road project site. Erosion from the hillside deposited directly to the stream below. The resulting project included DGR funding towards soil pinning, new road base and top coat of driving surface aggregate, and installment of a guard rail.



## Agricultural Projects

Just as it was in the beginning, serving the agricultural community is still among our top priorities. Many projects diverse have taken place across the county to assist the farmer as well as conserve natural resources, such as the fencing and stabilized stream crossing pictured below, which acts as a means to prevent soil erosion and stream impairments as livestock cross the area. In the last several years the District has also had no-till equipment for rent to interested farmers. In our arsenal is one John Deere 1590 Drill, one Great Plains 1006 Drill, and one John Deere 7000 No-till Corn planter. In 2020 alone, these pieces of equipment have been used on a collective estimate of about 655 acres. No till improves rainfall infiltration and soil biology, reduces soil erosion, compaction, and water quality issues, and reduces labor and time usage. Through other equipment loans such as the recently obtained Rotational Grazing Kit, the District is continuing to promote progressive agricultural best management practices. Multiple related grant funding sources are sought out by us and distributed for the sole purpose of supporting the agricultural community.



## Farmer Events and Education

Much like the farm tours of the past, the District holds annual farmer workshops, educational events, and other networking opportunities. Aiming to drive home tried and true agricultural best management practices, these events often include partnerships across county lines and between diverse organizations. Grant funding through the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, the PA Department of Agriculture, and others are often obtained by the District to undertake these events. The District administers other funding and initiatives such as the Farmland Preservation Program, furthering support to farmers and their precious land and heritage. Agriculture has changed drastically in the last several decades, and has grown into a complex industry. With every technological advancement, up and coming funding program, or educational tool that may arise, the District continues to stand by to serve farmers and the community they support.



Above is a still from recent supplemental videos created for our promotion of our Rotational Grazing Kit. Genesee Farmer Aaron Wolf graciously helped introduce his personal experience with rotational grazing for this project!



During a 2019 Ag-stravaganza farmer panel discussion, three volunteers shared their stories, struggles, and triumphs through the years. The panel consisted of John Francisco, Jeff Cady, and Joan Petzen (L to R)

## Environmental Education

Education has always stood at the core of the District's mission. Events and workshops of many forms have been offered since our inception, and in the last three years, our undertaking Environmental Education implementation has been developed even further through the addition of a Communications and Outreach Advisor, Emily Shosh. Emily's background in EE has brought the addition of District-official lesson plans and related educator materials, learner-driven workshops and programs, and a presentation of information and concepts designed to improve the environmental self-efficacy of the general public. The end goal of Environmental Education, as stated in the 1977 Tblisi Declaration, is to supply individuals with the knowledge, experiences, and tools to make more environmentally responsible decisions in their personal lives. Ideally with time these individuals' confidence in their ability to create positive change (or, self-efficacy) increases and is shared with others, and these decisions become second nature. This ripple effect is integral to the conservation of natural resources. With Emily's knowledge of EE methods and history, we've been able to assess our educational offerings through a well-rounded, holistic lens as conservation educators.

We've also been blessed to have had a number of steadfast educators and speakers volunteer during annual youth events and other workshops. Some annual events organized by the District include the 5th Grade Conservation Field Days, Envirothon Competition, and Arbor Day Programs. The District staff as well as invaluable volunteers serve as educators for these various events. We are also annually invited to teach during other camps and programs including Public Library Summer Reading programs, 4H Meetings and Camps, The Potter County Junior Conservation School, and more.

We look forward to holding these events again in the near future, and will plan on hosting small in person workshops to those interested amidst concerns with the COVID-19 pandemic.



Stan Hess (L), District Board Member and retired DCNR Forester, shares with students his stories of wildfire fighting and forestry during the District's annual 5th Grade Conservation Field Days



Above, PCCD Educator Emily's lesson on soil. Each year at the Potter County Junior Conservation Camp, the district teaches up to 5 lessons. The camp is held at the Black Forest Conservation Association and Range, and has been organized by retired Forester Paul Lilja for the last 40 years.

## Expanding Virtual Education Content

Although experiential learning is paramount, the ability for in-person programs and events was mostly out of the question for 2020. We did however succeed in filling the void through creating virtual contests, a handful of web-based information campaigns, and educational videos, all of which will serve a purpose in the future as well. Nearly all District staff took part in these projects, which included Trout in the Classroom, Arbor Day, Dirt and Gravel Projects, Watershed, Native Plants and Pollinators, and summer school lessons virtual programming. In the very near future, some of our content will be featured in a virtual water festival held by the New Hampshire Drinking

Water Coalition of NH DEP. We have also been asked to present our experience in creating virtual content with an Allegany College "Creek Chats" group of educators and students, and our content will be featured on their website as well. Furthermore, many of our videos have been added to the Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Educators' website! Although virtual is not ideal, we took this as an opportunity for creativity and growth. We look forward to meeting in person again, but are in part thankful for the challenge 2020 has posed to our education programs!



(L) The Long children pose for their entry in our recent virtual scavenger hunt. (R) Educator Emily in the midst of filming our first YouTube video covering Macroinvertebrates and stream health. At this time, the video has now reached 630 views!





## POTTER COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Come in and see us! We will gladly assist you with any questions you may have. We have bird seed for sale as well as ear corn (in the winter), information on permitting, native and invasive plant guidance, and much more!



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*"Here is your country. Cherish these natural wonders, cherish the natural resources, cherish the history and romance as a sacred heritage, for your children and your children's children. Do not let selfish men or greedy interests skin your country of its beauty, its riches or its romance."*

- Theodore Roosevelt

Find us on the web [www.pottercd.com](http://www.pottercd.com)



### Our Programs:

Erosion and Sedimentation Control, National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), Chapter 105—Water Obstructions and Encroachments, Environmental Education, Nutrient Management, Chesapeake Bay Program, Dirt & Gravel / Low Volume Roads, Agricultural Land Preservation, Watershed Restoration, Conservation, and Environmental Education.

**You may contact us at any time by email or phone to be added to, or removed from, our mailing list. Simply call 814-274-8411 or email [pccd@zitomedia.net](mailto:pccd@zitomedia.net). If you would rather "Go Green," email us with the words "electronic newsletter" in the subject line and we will send our newsletter to you electronically.**