

January, 2003

# Conservation Notes

## Board of Supervisors

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Bill Wissinger

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Jim Dillon  
Russ Heintz  
Jeremy Huggler  
Dan Jackson  
Josh Klepinger  
Caroline McColloch  
Lynn Peters

## NRCS District

## Conservationist

Steve Boeder

*Montgomery Soil and Water Conservation District  
10025 Amity Rd. Brookville, OH 45309  
(937) 854-7645 [www.montgomeryswcd.org](http://www.montgomeryswcd.org)*

## Board of Supervisors Welcomes Two New Members

September's Annual meeting drew a large turnout, with nearly four times the usual number of voters casting ballots. Two local business owners have won first time seats on the Montgomery SWCD Board.

Especially Notable is the fact that Laura Rench is the first female Board member in the District's 53 year history.

Outgoing members Dale Seim and Don Aukerman devoted a combined 15 years of service to conservation while serving on the Board. District staff extend our thanks to Dale and Don for their dedication and hard work to the cause of locally led conservation.

The staff members here would also like to offer a warm welcome to Laura and Bill as the newest members of our conservation team.

As with all Soil and Water Conservation Districts

across Ohio, the five members of the Board of Supervisors are elected for three year terms and volunteer their time to serve on the Board. They play an important role in guiding our District staff to implement work priorities and other policies.

The Board of Supervisors serve as the District's connection to our community. Through this vitally important democratic process of discussion and debate, we work to ensure that conservation dollars address the need for balance between people and the sustainable use of their local natural resources.

The communities of Montgomery County are very fortunate that people like Bill and Laura are willing to donate their time and talents for the good of the public and the protection of our soil, water, open space, and natural habitats.



Laura Rench, Co-Owner of Country Pines Tree Farm



Bill Wissinger, Owner of Brookville Tool Rental

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## Wolf Creek Stream Team Update



It's full steam ahead— well, weather permitting, at least. Actually, there's not much monitoring going on during the winter, but we did complete some at three of the eight sites last fall.

Our Stream Team is a group of twenty or so citizens who are concerned about the health of our local streams. They have made the effort to learn about stream ecosystems from the workshops presented last summer. Also giving of their time, the volunteers will continue to apply that knowledge in the coming season, by regularly monitoring the chemical and biological health of Wolf Creek.

On December 19th, some members of our team toured the Brookville Water Treatment Plant. It was a real eye-opening experience — This very important process is what stands between our waste and clean water in Wolf Creek! It's an amazing feat of engineering that removes human wastes (and a lot of other things that shouldn't be flushed) from Brookville's sewage. It should also be noted that this process goes on under a great deal of regulatory scrutiny from the Ohio EPA.



John Weist explains how the Separators work in the first step of raw sewage treatment

Many thanks to Plant Manager Ron Brandt and staff members John Weist and Joe Hamiel for a very detailed, open and informative discussion. We had lots of questions and they were answered very thoroughly; and all of this in a pouring rain, no less! Thanks also to Volunteer Coordinator Larry Bell for making the tour arrangements. Another tour is tentatively scheduled for some Saturday in January or February.

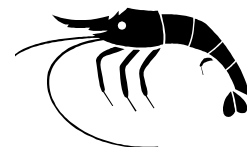
Within this same time frame, we're also planning to conduct a macroinvertebrate identification workshop for our team. Being able to recognize what kinds of insect larvae live on the stream bottom, is the basis of biological monitoring. Of course, this takes practice and we want our volunteers to be confident when they go out to their sites.

In other news, spring is just around the corner, and a third Stream Monitoring Workshop is going to be scheduled in late March for all the folks who couldn't make it to the two we held last August. This will be your big chance to get on the bandwagon!

Special recognition goes out to Volunteer Coordinator Larry Bell of Brookville. He has developed grant funding, a data base for monitoring results, and special web pages for our Stream Team. Check the Montgomery SWCD web site soon for these interesting additions. Just point your Browser to: [www.montgomeryswcd.org](http://www.montgomeryswcd.org) and click on Stream Monitoring from the Home Page.

It seems our stream monitoring program has lots of potential for something long term and effective because of the good group of dedicated volunteers that are involved.

If you'd like to find out more about becoming a steward of our local streams, give Caroline a call at the SWCD office.



## Drainage Program Makes Significant Changes

As in many areas of Ohio, drainage improvement projects in rural areas face many obstacles to success. The reasons for this are as complex as they are numerous. Generally speaking, the more landowners that are in the project area, the harder it is to get general agreement on design and distribution of costs. Difficulty in reaching a consensus is also encountered when there is a mix of residential and agricultural parcels in the project area. This situation makes it much more difficult to distribute costs, because the benefit varies widely between agricultural and residential land uses.

Another area of controversy has centered on the scope and costs involved. For a project of any given size, there are several options as to what type of system can be installed to carry the large amounts of runoff common to this region of the country. The basic structures used are grass waterways, open ditches, and underground drainage tile. Each one has advantages and disadvantages in terms of maintenance required, agricultural productivity achieved, costs, and capacity.

Regardless of what type of design is used, the standards adopted by Montgomery SWCD emphasize structural longevity and integrity. In other words, the design that requires the least amount of maintenance will cost less in the long run, even though the initial cost may be more. Also, projects designed by District technicians are designed to handle a storm event of a specified duration. If structural failure occurs under those conditions, the cost of repairs is covered through the partnership that the District has with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture.

These are conditions very difficult to achieve and maintain if the work is done on a volunteer basis. This means that landowners would have to hire an engineering design firm, and pay for the project cost up front. To protect their investment, they would then have to create a financial mechanism to share the costs of long-term maintenance. The only option to this would be if the project were constructed under the engineering standards adopted by the District, then it could be taken under maintenance.

There are approximately twenty five requests on a waiting list for construction of drainage projects. One of the major changes in our program involves how to prioritize this list. Previously, it has been by date of request. One of our goals this year is to begin reevaluating each of those requests in terms of public support, given the estimated cost of the project.

A second change involves the assessment process, to more fairly distribute costs of the project among the various land uses: roads, residential, and agricultural. The method previously used works very well with a single type of land use (traditionally agriculture).

Three initiatives are being pursued to bring down the cost of projects while still adhering to engineering standards adopted by the District. Two of those involve making changes to the State Law -Ohio Revised Code. Currently, prevailing (or Union) wages must be paid to the contractor, if more than 25% of the project cost is supported by public money. We are trying to get that changed to 50%. Also, the current pay-back period for assessments is 8 years. We believe that getting it increased to 25 years would be helpful. Both of these efforts involve lobbying with our State Legislators. Any public support (letters, phone calls) you could send would also be helpful. Finally, we are pursuing other funding sources such as from the State Bond Issue 2, and conservation funds through the new Farm Bill.

The important thing to remember is that we're all in this together, working for a water management system that will benefit everyone to some degree. Increased agricultural productivity, roadways safe from flooding, dry basements, properly functioning septic systems (leading to cleaner streams and ground water), benefit us all both directly and indirectly. But we must all be willing to share the costs *and efforts* for such mutual benefits.

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## The Upper Little Miami and Caesar Creek Watershed Project

Are you a land owner or contractor? Being environmentally sensitive doesn't have to cost a lot! You might qualify for cost share funds available through this Watershed Project. If your land is in the southeastern corner of Montgomery County, to the south of Route 35 and east of Route 48, then you might want to take advantage of this opportunity.

Homeowners, farmers, developers, and contractors can install various conservation practices that reduce the

amount of runoff sediment and nutrients into the rivers and streams within the Upper Little Miami River and Caesar Creek watersheds.

Cash assistance is available through the project for: pumping of on-site septic tanks, tree planting, streambank stabilization and construction of wetland septic systems. Also available is the free use of a tree planter and silt fence machine.

Farmers also qualify for cost share assistance on water

And sediment control basins, exclusionary fencing, and other conservation practices.

Applications are currently being accepted. Just call John Mueller at (937) 372-4478. General information about cost share programs is also available at the Montgomery SWCD office.



## Calendar of Upcoming Events

- Healthy Planet — Healthy People Expo  
Fairfield Commons Mall  
February 22, 23
- Grazing Schools for Livestock Producers and Horse Owners  
Various Counties around Ohio  
Contact Bob Hendershot: bob.hendershot@oh.usda.gov  
February - April, 2003
- Stream Monitoring Workshop  
Montgomery SWCD Office  
March 22 (Tentative)
- Environmental Education Council of Ohio Annual Conference  
Maumee Bay State Park  
Registration: www.eeco-online.org or (419) 893-1966  
March 28-30, 2003
- Montgomery-Greene County Envirothon  
Sycamore Conservation Education and Demonstration Farm  
Interested volunteers contact Montgomery SWCD office  
April 8, 2003
- Soil and Water Stewardship Week  
For Clergy and Educators, Contact Montgomery SWCD office  
April 27 –May 4
- Deadline for Ag/Natural Resources and Forestry Camp Scholarships  
Contact Montgomery SWCD office  
May 10