Greene County Conservation District

NEWSLETTER | JANUARY 2015

Conservation District Honors Six at Annual Awards Ceremony

WAYNESBURG, PA – The Greene County Conservation District honored six recipients during its annual awards ceremony Tuesday, Nov. 18, at Thistlethwaite Vineyards in Jefferson. Each year, the Conservation District honors those within the county who have shown an outstanding commitment to soil and water conservation.

Bill and Faye Milesky of Skymile Farms in Oak Forest received the 2014 Cooperator of the Year Award. The Mileskys were recognized for their outstanding accomplishments in the conservation of water, soil and natural resources through their farming practices. Their 552-acre, 80-cow/calf operation of Maine Anjou cattle is located along Woods Run and Pursley Creek in the south fork of the Ten Mile Creek watershed.

The Mileskys began their operation in 1982 and have worked diligently to improve their operation over the years. Since 2008, the couple has managed to install 27,000 feet of fence, 50 feet of animal walkway, 11 spring developments, 12 watering facilities, eight stream crossings and 300 feet of pipeline to help manage 282 acres of prescribed grazing, 16 acres of upland wildlife habitat and 28 acres of brush management. Their work was achieved through the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Faye and Bill Milesky of Skymile Farms in Oak Forest received the 2014 Cooperator of the Year Award. The Mileskys (left) are pictured with their grandson, Hunter, and Bradley Eisiminger, Greene County Conservation District Chairman (right).

MaKayla Henary, a junior at Waynesburg Central High School, received the 2014 Conservation Speaking Award. Henary, an FFA member, was recognized for her outstanding speaking skills and achievement of winning the 2014 Greene County FFA Speaking Competition with her speech entitled "Fracking and Farming." The speech focused on the Marcellus Shale natural gas industry and the environmental impacts that are made throughout the drilling process. Henary is the daughter Jim and Kim Henary of Mt. Morris.

The 2014 Greene County Forest Conservationist of the Year Award was presented to Ryan Egidi of Morgantown, W.Va. Egidi was recognized for his outstanding accomplishments in the conservation of Greene County's forest resources. Although Egidi officially entered the Forest Stewardship Program in 2013, he has been sustainably managing his property well before entering the program. Egidi has spent countless hours on the property ridding it of invasive species such as tree of heaven and multiflora rose.

Egidi is currently entered in the USDA-NRCS EQIP cost-share incentive program as he intends to continually improve his 50-acre Jefferson Township tract by implementing forestry practices that include invasive control, early successional habitat development and tree establishment plantings. These particular practices promote forest stewardship through a means of enhancing diversity and sustainability and creating wildlife habitat restoration opportunities throughout his property.

MaKayla Henary, a junior at Waynesburg Central High School, received the 2014 Conservation Speaking Award. Henary (right) is pictured with Bradley Eisiminger, Greene County Conservation District Chairman.

Ryan Egidi of Morgantown, W.Va., received the 2014 Greene County Forest Conservationist of the Year Award for his property in Jefferson Township. Egidi (center) is pictured with Russ Gibbs (left), service forester for the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Bradley Eisiminger (left), Greene County Conservation District Chairman.

This year for the first time, the Conservation District chose to award a contractor that has worked in Greene County and has shown

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- Archie Trader, Commissioner Vice Chairman
- Blair Zimmerman, Commissioner

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- Archie Trader, Vice Chairman/Commissioner Representative
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COOPERATING AGENCIES
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
  Rennie Stoy, District Conservationist
- PA DCNR Bureau of Forestry
  Russell Gibbs, Service Forester
- PA DEP Field Representative
  Chuck Kubasik

DISTRICT LOCATION
Our office is located on the Mezzanine Level of the Fort Jackson Building at
19 South Washington Street, Suite 150
Waynesburg, PA 15370
Phone: 724-852-5278
gccd@co.greene.pa.us
Hours: 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday-Friday

Calling All Farmers to Invite Us to Visit their Operation

Greene County Conservation District has support to offer to our county's agricultural producers; you only need to ask. Laurel Rush, Agricultural Technician and Certified Nutrient Management Specialist, can provide educational and technical advice, help make connections with other agricultural agencies, assist with general permit applications for livestock crossings, and help with other common farm activities. She can also assist in developing a manure management plan or agricultural erosion and sedimentation control plan. The Conservation District also coordinates the Farmland Preservation Program for Greene County.

Farming has a long tradition in Greene County with many farms spanning multiple generations. Across the US, there has been a decline in farm ownership since the early 1980's. The 2012 Census of Agriculture reports that 7 million acres of farmland has been taken out of production since 2007. Many people leave the rural life for school and jobs and then find themselves returning to a farm that they haven't been involved with for many years. "Our goal is to give farmers the tools they need to sustain their operations," said Rush. "Whether you are just starting out or have been farming for years, we have something to offer to everyone."

To schedule a visit with our staff, please call 724-852-5278 or email lrush@co.greene.pa.us. We look forward to hearing from you.

(Continued from Front Cover)
awareness of the importance of erosion and sediment control practices, or has shown tremendous improvement in their practices. The inaugural Conservation Contractor of the Year Award was presented to Nello Construction Company of Canonsburg.

Nello Construction Company – founded in 1952 by Giulio Torriero – has served as the general contractor for several recent area projects, including those for Carmichaels Area High School, R.G. Johnson Company, National Guard Readiness Center and Avalon Court apartment complex. The award was presented to Jerry Falso and Jason Betters, Nello project managers, in recognition of their commitment to the protection of the environment and Greene County's natural resources from erosion and sedimentation, their respect for the land and their willingness to work with the district.

Two service awards were given to current Conservation District board members Jim Kenney, farmer director, and Thomas Headlee, public director. Both men have committed time to the district as board members and have worked to shape the direction of the district, which has led to the valuable conservation of Greene County's natural resources. Kenney was awarded for his 10 years of service, and Headlee was awarded for his 30 years of service.

The Conservation District also recognized and thanked the following for their contributions during the past year that helped improve district programs: Alpha Natural Resources, for its contribution to the annual Envirothon scholarship; Community Foundation of Greene County, for funding to assist with the Envirothon; Bill Iams, for his donation to improve the Conservation District's Greene County Fairgrounds display; the winning Envirothon team members from Carmichaels Area High School; and all cooperating agencies and the County of Greene for another year of support.

For more information on the Conservation District awards, call 724-852-5278.

Nello Construction Company of Canonsburg received the inaugural Conservation Contractor of the Year Award. Pictured, from l. to r., are Jason Betters and Jerry Falso, project managers for Nello, and Bradley Eisiminger, Greene County Conservation District Chairman.]

Controlling Soil Erosion and Water Pollution in Greene County

By: Zack Basinger,
Environmental Program Specialist

Erosion is defined as the land surface being naturally worn away by the activity of water, wind, and chemical processes. Note the use of the word "naturally." Erosion is a naturally occurring, everyday process. Problems arise when human activities cause accelerated erosion. Accelerated erosion is defined as land surface being worn away more quickly than is natural by the combined activity of natural erosion and erosive forces related to human activity. As more soil is lost to accelerated erosion, we have less healthy soils to support agriculture, forestry, and landscaping. Also, that soil that is being lost from our land pollutes our streams and rivers, impacting water quality and aquatic life. Sediment is, in fact, the number-one pollutant in the world, surpassing chemical discharges, power plant and industrial discharges, and even energy development activities.

My job is to protect our soil and water resources by ensuring that human activities are conducted in ways that don't speed up erosion. During my workday, I inspect all sorts of sites that require land disturbance, such as interstate pipeline activities, the new Taco Bell that was recently constructed in Waynesburg, or even landowners working on their own property. The Conservation District is not an enforcement agency like the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP). Our goal is to work with landowners and companies to help them remain in compliance with Clean Stream laws by ensuring correct permitting and proper work practices. Any activity – large or small, whether on your own land or a commercial property – that disturbs land can result in accelerated erosion. These kinds of activities require both permits and erosion controls. Working with the Conservation District is a great way for landowners and companies to avoid liability and penalties from enforcement agencies such as PADEP.

I also investigate complaints related to accelerated erosion. Our office is here to address the concerns Greene County citizens have about soil and water resources. An anonymous complaint from a citizen is often how we become aware of problems related to accelerated erosion. Any work that is disturbing large amounts of land or takes place near a stream should have erosion controls like silt fence, filter socks, and seed and mulch installed. We recommend contacting the Conservation District promptly should you see work sites that don't have these controls in place. Accelerated erosion problems can be contained better when they are small and fresh. Oftentimes, the pollution event has already been occurring for some time before someone calls the Conservation District. Calling our office at the first sign of soil erosion and runoff into streams helps to avoid washouts, slips, and other problems.

Situations like these cause property damage and impact the quality of life of neighboring landowners. They also pollute downstream reaches and impact water quality and aquatic life. As serious as these situations are, they can be avoided by working in conjunction with the Conservation District. Remember, we are here to help you. Please do not hesitate to call us if you…

- Are considering work that will involve land disturbance, especially near a stream.
- See work that involves land disturbance, especially near a stream, but does not have erosion controls or seed and mulch installed.

Our soil and water resources are precious, and together we can protect them.

Coverage Selection for New 2014 Farm Bill Safety Net Programs Began Nov. 17

Producers have Until March 31, 2015, to Choose the Program Best for their Operation

Farm owners and producers are reminded that the opportunity to choose between the new 2014 Farm Bill established programs, Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC), began Nov. 17, 2014, and continues through March 31, 2015. The new programs, designed to help producers better manage risk, usher in one of the most significant reforms to U.S. farm programs in decades.

USDA helped create online tools to assist in the decision process, allowing farm owners and producers to enter information about their operation and see projections that show what ARC and/or PLC will mean for them under possible future scenarios. Farm owners and producers can access the online resources, available at www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc, from the convenience of their home computer or mobile device at any time.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice (which includes short grain rice), safflower seed, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat. Upland cotton is no longer a covered commodity.

Dates associated with ARC and PLC that farm owners and producers need to know:

Now through Feb. 27, 2015: Farm owners may visit their local Farm Service Agency office to update yield history and/or reallocate base acres.

Nov. 17, 2014 to March 31, 2015: Producers make a one-time election between ARC and PLC for the 2014 through 2018 crop years.

Mid-April 2015 through summer 2015: Producers sign contracts for 2014 and 2015 crop years.

October 2015: Payments issued for 2014 crop year, if needed.

To learn more about which safety net options are most appropriate for specific farming operations, farmers can use new Web tools at www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc, which can be accessed from the convenience of a home computer or a mobile device at any time. To learn more about upcoming educational meetings, farmers can contact their local Farm Service Agency county office at http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app.

www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc, which can be accessed from the convenience of a home computer or a mobile device at any time. To learn more about upcoming educational meetings, farmers can contact their local Farm Service Agency county office at http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app.

Visit www.fsa.usda.gov or the local FSA office for information about FSA and the 2014 Farm Bill programs.

There will be informational sessions held on February 17, 2015

9:00 AM at the Washington County Conservation District Conference Room

12:30 PM at the Hoss's in Belle Vernon

6:00 PM at the Westmoreland County Service Center

Laurel Rush Resigns from the Greene County Conservation District

The Greene County Conservation District Board of Directors accepted Laurel Rush's resignation at their December meeting. Laurel has served the people of Greene County as the Conservation District's Agricultural Technician for seven years. During this time, she administered many of the Conservation District's programs, including Farmland Preservation, Agricultural Security, and Nutrient Management. Through these and other programs, Laurel has provided assistance to many of the County's farmers.

Laurel is leaving the Conservation District to accept a position with the State Conservation Commission, where she will continue to assist farmers in Greene, as well as the surrounding counties of Southwestern Pennsylvania. All of the Conservation District staff will certainly miss Laurel's daily presence in the office. We all wish her the best as she moves on with her career and look forward to the prospect of working with her in her new position.

Pennsylvania Game Commission Hunter Access Programs for Private Landowners

Private Lands make up more than 80% of Pennsylvania. The majority of hunters in Pennsylvania hunt on private lands. As a result, private landowners are our most important cooperators when it comes to hunting and appropriate wildlife management.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission recognized this important relationship and created the first Hunter Access Program in 1936. We currently have 13,000 landowner cooperators on 3 million acres of private lands. The Game Commission continuously strives to improve the hunter-agency-landowner partnership.

In Greene County, nearly 300 landowners are already enrolled in one of the agency's hunter access programs opening more than 45,000 acres of property to hunters.

Landowner Benefits

- **Liability Protection** - Landowners who allow hunting access must feel comfortable that they are protected from liability. In 1966, the PA Legislature passed the Recreation Use of Land and Water Act (RULWA). The Act provides liability protection to landowners who allow public hunting access. Enrollment in the Hunter Access program affords RULWA protection to landowners.

- **Game News** - The PGC provides every hunter access cooperator with a free subscription to PA Game News, the agency's monthly magazine.

- **Free Habitat Improvements** - Many new options, 100% Paid for, no hassle.

  - **Non-commercial tree cutting** - cutting wooded areas with low timber value to encourage new woody and shrub growth beneficial to rabbits, woodcock, deer, and other wildlife that use shrubby areas. At least 5 acres in size.

  - **Shrub plantings** - shrub plantings into failed clear-cuts, reclaimed strip mines, and other human disturbance sites that are at least 100 feet wide, or at least 5 acres in size.

  - **Native grass planting** - establishing blocks of native grassland habitat of at least 10 acres per property (can be field edges, slopes and waste areas, or whole fields).

  - **CREP Incentive** - For Hunter Access cooperators enrolling in CREP, an incentive payment is available for landowners who opt for the "Establishment of Permanent Native Grass" conservation practice (CP2).

  - **Paid Grassland Delayed Use** - Inside Wild Pheasant Recovery Areas, contracts for annual ($80/acre) or 3-year ($100/acre) seasonally deferred use on existing hay land and cropland. No use between April 1st and July 15th, but may apply manure or harvest or graze outside those dates. Current mulch hay not eligible. Minimum size of 10 acres. See specific brochure for more details and options.

- **Reduced Fee Landowner Hunting License (min. 80 acres)**

- **Landowner Guaranteed Antlerless Hunting License (min. 50 acres)**

- **Free Tree Seedlings and Bird Boxes**

- **Pheasant Stocking (min. 15 Acres Habitat Required)**

- **ATV and other Game Law Enforcement:** A variety of signs are available to landowners, including "Keep Gates Closed," "Livestock Area," "No Motorized Vehicles," "Hunting by Permission Only," "Safety Zone," and others. Additionally, greater protection under the Game Law is afforded to lands enrolled in our hunter access programs.

Who is Eligible?

- **Ownership** - All privately owned lands, including individuals, corporations, partnerships and conservancies.

- **Land Use** - All undeveloped land uses, including farmland, forest land, wetland, and mineland are eligible.

- **Property Size** - Minimum of 50 acres of farmland, forestland, reclaimed mineland, or other huntable land.

What are the Landowner Obligations?

- **Enter 5-Year Agreement** to allow hunting or trapping access(10 years if new habitat is established by PGC).

- **Allow reasonable Hunter Access** to at least one of the four following categories: Deer/Bear, Turkey, Small Game, or Trapping. Some limitations are permitted, but at least one category must have no limitations.

  Enrolled properties are marked by a dot on a county level map available to hunters on the PGC website. All personal information is protected by law. Names, addresses, phone numbers or any other personal information will not be released or available to the public.

For more information about the Hunter Access program or to enroll your property, contact the Pennsylvania Game Commission Southwest Region office at 724-238-9523. A PA Game Commission representative will be happy to meet with you to discuss your property and the benefits of our hunter access cooperative programs.

Appalachian Grazing Conference

Grazing conferences are great opportunities for livestock farmers to increase their productivity and profit through improved farming practices. Numerous speakers will present topics relevant to any and all livestock farmers no matter how long they have been farming or how big or small their farm is. These are also great opportunities to meet and talk to other farmers who have similar operations and face similar challenges.

There are two conferences coming up this spring:

- The 2015 Northwest Pennsylvania Grazing Conference will be held on March 19 at the Zion Church in Clarion, PA. Focused on the theme "Finding more $Green$ in Your Grazing," The conference's topics will include holistic planning, stockpiling forage, fencing, meat labeling and marketing, EQUIP funding, and more. Lunch will be provided and prizes awarded during the Farmers Panel.

  Registration for the Northwest Pennsylvania Grazing Conference is $30. For more information, contact the Headwaters RC&D Council at 814-503-8653 or visit their website at www.headwaterspa.org.

- The 2015 Appalachian Grazing Conference will be held on March 13-14 at the Waterfront Place Hotel and the Greater Morgantown Conference and Convention Center in Morgantown, WV. Focused on the theme, "Dollars & $ense of Grazing;" conference topics will include discussion of forage species selection, plant identification, pasture condition and appraisal, fencing, weed control, nutrient management, and business planning and marketing, as well as topics related to animal selection and health. Meals and entertainment are included in the registration, and vendors will also be on site to discuss applications and practices.

  Early registration for the two-day event is available until March 5 and costs $100. Registration for the two-day event after March 5, 2014 costs $125. Single-day registration is available for either day and costs $100. For more information, visit the conference website at http://www.grazeappalachia.org/

Attending either conference is a great way for Livestock farmers to work towards better, more productive farms. Contact the Conservation District at 724-852-5278 for more information about either of these conferences.

Scholarship '15

The Ralph K. Bell Bird Club of Greene County is pleased to announce that they are now accepting applications 2015 Scholarship. The Ralph K. Bell Bird Club awards a single, $1,000 scholarship each year. The Greene County Conservation District is proud to provide partial funding for this scholarship.

Anyone interested in applying for this scholarship should call 724-852-3155 or send an e -mail to rkbbirdclub@yahoo.com. An application may also be obtained by contacting the Conservation District at 724-852-5278.

GCCD bids farewell to long-time partner at NRCS

Suzy Funka-Petery, has dedicated a substantial portion of her career to serving the citizens of Greene, Fayette, and Washington Counties as an employee of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). As a Supervisory District Conservationist, she has worked alongside the Conservation District on many projects that directly benefited Greene County landowners.

Suzy's career has led her away from Greene County as she has recently accepted a position with NRCS in North-Central West Virginia. Her successor has not been named so watch future issues of the Conservation District Newsletter updates.

The Conservation District wishes to thank Suzy for everything that she has done in Greene County over the past 30 years and to extend best wishes for her future endeavors in service to the people of West Virginia.

When Was Your Well or Spring Last Tested?

After speaking with many landowners throughout the county, it has become clear that most do not regularly test their drinking water. It seems that many people have the mistaken idea that water quality does not change. Many seem to think that if a well or spring is tested once and shown to be safe that it does not need tested again. Unfortunately this is not the case. Water quality can and does change over time. What's more, the causes of these changes may not be readily apparent. Current and historic land use changes within a watershed such as development, energy extraction activity, even agriculture can affect water quality. Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) recommends periodic testing of wells and springs including annual tests for coliform bacteria, nitrates, total dissolved solids, and pH levels.

- Coliform bacteria represent a large group of naturally occurring, single-celled organisms that are most commonly found in human and animal wastes. The most well-known group of coliform bacteria is called Escherichia coli (E. Coli), which is only found in human and animal wastes. Sources of coliform bacterial pollution include failing sewage systems and runoff from agricultural sites. Some coliform bacteria, including E. coli, can cause human health problems and death.

- Nitrates are a form of nitrogen that is commonly found in fertilizers and industrial chemicals, as well as in human and animal wastes. Sources of nitrate contamination include failing sewage systems, runoff from agricultural sites, and industrial discharges and spills. The greatest risk from nitrate pollution is to infants. Children ages six months or younger may develop illness and possibly die.

- Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) is a measure of dissolved, suspended, and settleable solid particles in water. These include things like calcium, chlorides, iron, sulfur, clay particles, algae, organic debris, and virtually anything else that can be dissolved or carried by water. Because TDS is such a broad category, sources of TDS vary. Some examples include failing sewage systems, runoff from agricultural sites and roads, industrial discharges and spills, energy development, and current and legacy resource extraction activity. Moderately high levels of TDS give water an unappealing taste, odor, or color. Higher levels can cause stomach discomfort and function as a carrier for toxic substances. Water testing showing high levels of TDS is generally followed up by more extensive testing to identify specific pollutants.

- pH is an indicator of acidity or alkalinity in water, with values less than seven being acid and values above seven being alkaline. pH is generally determined by the geology of the groundwater aquifer; however, industrial discharges as well as current and legacy resource extraction activity can affect pH. Neither acidity nor alkalinity, within the ranges commonly encountered by homeowners, would lead to health concerns; however, acidity can leach metals from plumbing equipment that can cause human health problems from drinking water.

Nothing can take the place of annual testing by a state-certified laboratory, but there are things that you can do to monitor the water in your well or spring. Many Greene County residents are already taking advantage of a water monitoring program offered by the Conservation District. In fact, we have participants in almost every watershed in the county. The program allows a landowner to monitor TDS, via temperature and electrical conductivity, with a simple and easy-to-use device called a CATTFish. There is no cost to the landowner for this device. It takes about a minute to install in a toilet tank. This device measures and records the temperature and conductivity of fresh water coming into the tank. This program is a great way for landowners to ensure the water that comes out of their well or spring is safe both today and in the future. If you have a well or spring and are interested in taking part in this program, please contact Jared D. Zinn, the county watershed specialist, at jzinn@co.greene.pa.us, or call 724-852-5278.

Are You Curious About the Water Quality in Your Well or Spring?

Many rural residents of Greene County rely on private wells or springs. Groundwater quality can be affected by a number of things like:

- Improper handling & application of manure, fertilizers or nutrients.
- Leaking underground storage tanks and septic systems.
- Pollution associate with landfills, industry, and energy development.

Monitoring our groundwater resources gives us confidence that the water we are drinking is safe. It also allows us to detect and identify problems early so we can take action.

The CATTFish is an easy way to find out about water quality in your well or spring. It installs in your toilet tank in less than five minutes. You may even qualify for comprehensive, professional water testing!

Contact Jared D. Zinn to find out more about the program and how to get involved. 724-852-5278 or email jzinn@co.greene.pa.us

Greene County
Conservation District

19 S. Washington St.,
Fort Jackson Bldg. Mezzanine
Waynesburg, PA 15370

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PAID
Pittsburgh, PA
Permit No. 503

Greene County Conservation District

Promoting Soil and Water Conservation in Greene County Since 1956

Landowners and Groups Urged to Apply for Grant Funding in 2015

Greene County Conservation District is currently accepting applications for the first round of our Water Quality Mini-Grant Program. The Conservation District will award as many as five grants in 2015 of up to $5,000 each. These grants are to fund projects that address water quality improvement through implementation or installation of Best Management Practices (BMP). Here are some examples of projects that would be eligible for funding:

- Stabilization of eroded streambanks to protect land and property
- Replanting of riparian buffer areas to reduce soil loss and create wildlife habitat
- Placement of physical structures to reduce erosion and enhance aquatic habitat
- Installation or implementation of farming conservation practices to improve productivity and reduce pollution

Individual landowners, homeowners associations, civic groups, school- and scouting-based organizations, sporting associations, and locally based environmental organizations are urged to complete their application soon. **Applications must be received prior to the Conservation District Board of Directors meeting in July to be considered for this round of grant funding.** Those who have never before received funding through this program before are particularly encouraged to apply as they will be given priority during this round.

Landowners or groups interested in applying for funding may contact the Conservation District at 724-852-5278 to discuss a potential project or schedule a site visit. Our staff is ready to offer technical assistance with projects and with the grant application process. Full program and application information is also available on the Conservation District website at www.co.greene.pa.us/gccd.

This is a before and after view of a stabilized stream crossing installed in the Ruff Creek Watershed with assistance from the Conservation District. This best management practice provides ease of access to the landowner while reducing soil erosion and stream sedimentation throughout the watershed.