Greene County Conservation District

NEWSLETTER | NOVEMBER 2014

Greene County Students Attend Conservation Leadership School

Students at the Conservation Leadership creating aquatic habitat as part of a lake restoration project.

Christopher Thomas, Emma Lowry, and Blake Conard, three Greene County high school students, had an opportunity to attend Penn State's Conservation Leadership School this summer, whose theme for this year was *Our Natural Resources*. All three students earned scholarships offered by Greene County Conservation District and funded by Alpha Natural Resources. Each student spent a week in an outdoor classroom where they learned about natural resource conservation, teamwork, conflict resolution, and leadership while engaging in activities such as hiking, canoeing, bird watching, and fishing.

Highlights of their week included a tour of Sproul State Forest guided by a district forester, elk viewing at Benezette, and an opportunity to complete the thousand steps at Jack's Mountain. They also learned about energy production by touring Marcellus Shale gas well pads and the North Allegheny Wind farm. They gained hands-on experience with resource conservation by working as a group to build fish habitat structures and create forest wildlife habitat.

Attending the Conservation Leadership School has equipped these young people to be responsible leaders and stewards as they transition to adulthood and begin to make decisions that affect the future of natural resources in Greene County and beyond.

Emma Lowry (pictured left), a student from Carmichaels Area School District, at the Conservation Leadership School.

Students at the Conservation Leadership School placed their ears against the base of a wind turbine while exploring how wind can be turned into electricity.

Students at the Conservation Leadership building community.

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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

A Season of Outreach at the Conservation District

The Conservation District found a new home at the Greene County Fairgrounds this year thanks to the Iams family and Log Cabin Fence Company. Fairgoers visiting the new building could discuss soil and water conservation with staff, examine informational displays, ask about the many useful programs offered for landowners, and take away free gifts. They had the opportunity to learn more about the Conservation District's groundwater monitoring program by handling the CATTFish device that this program is centered around. They could also examine a rain barrel installation and take a look at a two-ton wet lime spreader the Conservation District offers for rental to landowners. Also on hand was the Natural Resource Conservation Service who demonstrated their rainfall simulator. The 2014 Greene County Fair was a great opportunity to connect with the public, raise awareness about soil and water conservation, and get the word out about the great things going on at the Conservation District!

The Conservation District was invited to present an educational program at the 2014 Greene County Summer Day Camps. Jared Zinn, the Watershed Specialist here at the Conservation District, and Nathan Ribar, our 2014 summer intern, developed a program to teach kids about water, the water cycle, the watershed concept, surface runoff, water pollution, and the our role in protecting water resources. The program incorporated discussion, physical activity, and a presentation using the Enviroscape watershed model. Zinn and Ribar presented this educational program at five different camps to approximately 300 children, with ages ranging from 5 to 15 years old.

Waynesburg University held its Service Learning Fair on Wednesday, September 3. The fair provides students an opportunity to connect with various non-profit organizations and find service opportunities fitted to their interests and talents. The Conservation District attended the fair and spoke with a number of students. Students from many different majors and backgrounds expressed an interest in the environment and an excitement for service opportunities. One student named Joe stated, "I'm interested in the environment, but I never expected to see something like this here. This is awesome." Our staff handed out pamphlets highlighting service opportunities for students and encouraged them to contact the Conservation District for more information.

Children's Fishing Day at the Waynesburg Sportsman's Club

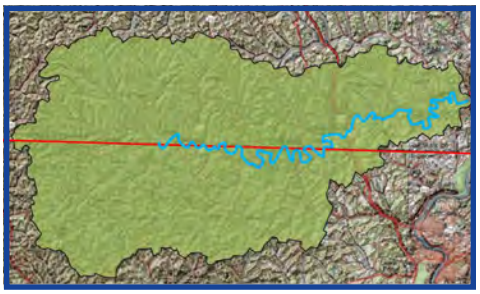
The Waynesburg Sportsman's Club hosted a Children's Fishing Day on August 16. The Club received a $250 grant from the Greene County Conservation District to fund the event. Fourteen children attended the event where they were able to fish in the club's pond, explore the natural areas surrounding the pond, enjoy a cookout, and win prizes. Chuck Royers, a newer member of the club, and his 11-year-old son, Zach, took part in the fish day. Young Zach can be seen here holding a catfish he caught that measured 27 inches and weighed 10 pounds. Ray Rutan stated that the children really enjoyed the event and that everyone was very appreciative of the opportunity that these funds from the Conservation District provided. Rutan can be seen here holding an 18 ½ pound snapping turtle that was also caught during the Children's Fishing Day.

Promising Recovery in Dunkard Creek

By: Jared D. Zinn,
GCCD Watershed Specialist

The Dunkard Creek watershed in many ways is where Pennsylvania and West Virginia come together. This 268.5-square-kilometer (103.7-square-mile) watershed is situated directly over the state line with nearly half the watershed in Pennsylvania and the remainder in West Virginia. The Creek itself forms in western Greene County near the town of Brave where the Pennsylvania Fork, and West Virginia Fork, converge. The Creek meanders eastward, crossing the state line more than 15 times before emptying into the Monongahela River.

Dunkard Creek received both local and national attention in 2009 when blooms of a toxic golden algae, *Prymnesium*, *parvum*, resulted in catastrophic aquatic die-offs. A



combination of environmental conditions converged to promote unprecedented growth of the algae, decimating fish and mussel populations. In the aftermath of this catastrophe, many experts predicted that the creek would take years to recover and might never be the same.

Five years have passed since the golden algae overran Dunkard Creek, and hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent by industry and government agencies to ensure the creek's recovery. The good news is that it seems to be working. I recently had an opportunity to speak with Frank Jernejcic, a Fishery Biologist with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR). WVDNR continues to monitor the recovery of Dunkard Creek. In fact, Jernejcic has just completed a survey of Dunkard Creek. He reports that Dunkard Creek continues to improve and is responding to restoration efforts. Five mussel species have been reintroduced, and Muskellunge are moving back into the creek from the Monongahela River. Jernejcic also noted Smallmouth Bass reproduction in Dunkard Creek. Jernejcic is very positive about Dunkard Creek's future. He notes that recovery is happening more quickly than expected and that biodiversity within the creek is now nearly the same as it was before the algal blooms.

Conservation District Warns About Issues with Livestock and Erosion Control Devices

The Greene County Conservation District is warning farmers and livestock owners to carefully monitor the placement of certain types of erosion control devices on their property. Certain devices, such as blanketing and survey flagging tape, may pose a hazard to livestock when used in grazing areas. Although biodegradable, the materials are not meant to be consumed and can cause serious intestinal damage, blockages and even death. Several cases of animal injury or death apparently due to the ingestion of these materials have been reported to the Conservation District.

The Conservation District urges landowners who have pasture areas used for grazing purposes to keep their animals off the site until full vegetative cover is established, and the controls have either been removed or completely vegetated. In areas where pasture animals tend to graze intensively, it is advised to ensure that the erosion control blanketing is completely degraded before letting livestock enter. The animals can still pull the blanketing from under the roots and ingest the material.

Landowners involved in projects currently in the planning stages should make any company performing work on their land aware of their livestock and the intent to graze areas after their work has completed. Other controls can be used where the blanketing is to be placed. Landowners can and should request alternative controls that are safe for livestock. Companies should be able to fulfill these requests without any complications.

For more information, call the Conservation District at 724-852-5278, or e-mail gccd@co.greene.pa.us.

The 2015 Appalachian Grazing Conference will be held on March 13-14, 2015 at the Waterfront Place Hotel and the Greater Morgantown Conference and Convention Center in Morgantown, WV. The Theme of the conference will be, "Dollars & $ense of Grazing." Early registration for the two-day event is available until March 5, 2014 and costs $100. Registration for the two-day event after March 5, 2015 costs $125. Single-day registration is available for either day and costs $100. For more information, contact Laurel Rush at 724-852-5278.

How Do Your Pastures Rate?

By: JB Harrold, NRCS Grazing Specialist

The Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Grazing Lands Technology Institute have developed a tool evaluate your pastures. It is called the Pasture Condition Score. The Pasture Condition Score is a systematic approach to check how well a pasture is being managed and what areas may need improved. Since pasture sites vary and climates vary the tool is better used to evaluate your pastures under your management. The Pasture Condition Score is not a tool to compare your pastures to everyone else's pasture. It is a tool best used to find the weak areas in your pasture management scheme.

By rating some key factors common to most all pastures, pasture condition can be evaluated and the primary reasons for a low score can be identified. Once the reason or reasons for the low score are identified, management can be adjusted if needed to improve the pastures. For the Pasture Condition Score to be most useful, scoring should occur at several points throughout the year and over the course of many years. Pastures change throughout the year, so comparing a May pasture score to a September score may not be very useful, but comparing May scores over several years of several pastures could help identify some management shortfalls. Pasture Condition Scoring is like soil sampling, take several data points over the pasture to get a representative sample. Avoid poor areas, troughs, gates, trees, etc.

Ten pasture indicators are evaluated and scored on a scale from one to five; one being the lowest score, five being the highest score for a total of 50 available points. These indicators include desirable plant percentage, plant cover, plant residue, plant diversity, percent legume, plant vigor, livestock concentration areas, soil compaction and erosion.

Pasture condition scoring is a good tool to help identify weak areas in your pasture management scheme. Pasture condition scoring yields the best results when completed during several times in the grazing season and comparing those like points over several years. Also be sure to pick areas that best represent the pasture you plan to evaluate.

If you need technical assistance contact your local Conservation District. For more information and to obtain the Pasture Condition Score Guide visit:
ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/GLTI/technical/publications/pasture-score-guide.pdf
For the Pasture Condition Score Sheet visit:
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1044237.pdf

The Southwest Regional No-till Conference

will be held on January 28, 2015 at the Fred Rogers Center in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. For more information, contact Laurel Rush at 724-852-5278.

Alpha Natural Resources 4th Annual Tree Planting Day

Conservation District staff members Zach Basinger and Lindsay Kozlowski participated in Alpha Natural Resources' 4th annual Tree Planting Day. One hundred and fifty students from five school districts planted nearly 1,000 potted plants and trees, live willow cuttings, 2,500 pine trees provided by the Pennsylvania Game Commission, and 50 oak trees from Carmichaels Area School District's native green house. In addition to plantings, students installed four duck boxes and 10 blue bird boxes provided by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

This was a fantastic opportunity for Industry leaders and government agencies to work together to make a profound difference in the environment of Greene County and in the lives of the students who participated in the event. Events like this foster environmental awareness that will enable these students to make informed decisions as adults. They also boost self-esteem, provide a sense of accomplishment, and teach the importance of teamwork, communication, and personal responsibility.

The Greene County Conservation District thanks Alpha Natural Resources for their commitment to fostering environmental awareness in Greene County students.

Soil Health Field Day at Rich Burd Farm

By: Dennis Thorne,
NRCS Soil Conservationist

Rich Burd farms nearly 1,400 acres in Georges Township, Fayette County, using no-till conservation practices to produce corn and soybeans. This 244-acre farm has been in the Burd family for quite a while, as it was purchased by Rich's father in the 1960's and then by Rich himself in 1992. Rich graduated in 1973 from Penn State University where he studied agronomy. Rich Burd has farmed professionally for over 40 years, making this a premier farm for a Soil Health Field Day.

Rich faced the issue of improving soil health over time, while maintaining soil health as he demanded production all at the same time. No-till farming has allowed him to sustain and improve production for more than 40 years of use.

Rich has been no-till farming ever since Mr. Durazio came to his farm and did some no-till planting. The next year, Rich's father purchased an Alice Chalmers no-till planter, and it has been the way to go on the Burd farm ever since. Rich showed the crowd his no-till equipment and shared some great knowledge he has accumulated over his years of no-tilling. Rich says, "No-till is a mindset" because it takes time to build organic matter levels in the soil. You must prepare the land first, followed by weed control and having a good planter. No-till planting is not a cure-all and doesn't work well alone; a good rotation of soybeans and corn is needed as well as sharing knowledge with those around you.

Using the no-till method helps Rich maintain healthy soils because a minimal amount of soil is disturbed to plant the seed. Only disturbing a small amount of soil allows the soil to maintain structure and makes it harder to erode compared to a tilled soil. This all benefits the environment by not separating, transporting, and depositing soil and nutrients in local waters. It also benefits the farmer by maintaining fertility that is on site while adding to it with plant residues.

Pierce Willson from the Fayette County Conservation District organized the Field Day and demonstrated the use of a soil probe and soil penetrometer. JB Harrold, Grazing Specialist from USDA NRCS, operated and explained the rainfall simulator. Byron Hawthorne and Joel Meyers from the PA No-Till Alliance explained different no-till equipment and its effectiveness.

Effectiveness of Fall Liming

By: Laurel Rush, Agricultural Technician

Applying lime to pasture and hay fields in the fall is one of the simplest management decisions to make. Increasing soil pH can increase forage yields and palatability, with relatively low cost to the producer. Appalachian soils tend to be acidic; liming neutralizes acidity in the soil. A more neutral pH allows nutrients like phosphorus, calcium, and magnesium to be more available for plant uptake. While plants will adapt to soil pH, they definitely perform better in an optimum range.

Soil testing is the most reliable way to determine your liming needs. The County Cooperative Extension Service can provide you with soil sampling bags. By providing some basic background information such as soil type and what crop you are trying to grow, the lab will be able to provide you with a report of your present soil needs. Recommendations are not intended to neutralize all of your soil acidity, only to provide for optimum plant growth.

The quality of aglime is regulated by Pennsylvania state law. Aglime materials must be labeled to include the following:

- Identify the source material
- Show the total calcium and magnesium percentage by weight
- Show classification by particle size
- Identify the minimum Calcium Carbonate
- Equivalent (CCE) value
- Show the Effective Neutralizing Value (ENV)
- List the Minimum Moisture Content
- List the Dry Weight Analysis

A 2% tolerance is allowed for the minimum CCE and fineness values; all other values are allowed a 10% tolerance.

Potentially, there are also some industrial by-products that can be used for liming. Care should be taken to identify what you are spreading on your fields. Some by-products may contain high sand content or hazardous elements which could contaminate your soils.

Lime application and soil testing should be done on a 3-year cycle. Depending on the size of your farm, this can be done in a reasonable rotation to spread the cost out. Liming changes the balance of your soil, so it is important to make sure that you are not adversely affecting your crops.

Order your lime in late summer for your fall application. Lime is usually broadcast when fields are dry, which makes getting a machine across our steep hillsides easier. Winter rains will provide the soil moisture that lime needs to become active.

Investing in lime for your pastures and hayfields will give you the best return in forage production for a relatively small monetary investment.

Lime Spreader Rental Program

Have you tested your soil recently?
Do you have a pasture or hayfield that needs lime? Do you have a minimum 50 HP tractor?
Rent our 2 Ton Wet Lime Spreader.
For more information call:
724-852-5278

References:

Article: Liming – *Your key to better pasture next spring.* By Rick Blanke, CPSSc, King Conservation District, Washington.

Publication: Agronomy Facts 3, *Soil acidity and aglime*. By Beegle and Lingenfelter, 1995, Penn State Cooperative Extension, State College, Pennsylvania.

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

Blue Spruce Needlecast Disease

By: Bill Wentzel, Retired Forester

What happened to the Colorado blue spruce in Greene County? Did you notice this past summer that many of these trees lost their needles and some have even died? The problem is a fungal disease called Rhizosphaera needlecast. It is a disease that affects mostly Colorado blue spruce. Infection typically begins in the lower branches of the tree, a damp area which favors fungal growth.

Infected needles first appear purple, then brown, and finally drop from the tree. Rain splashes the spores (sources of infection) onto healthy needles and helps the fungus spread to other parts of the tree. In a severely infected tree, branches will have new, green needles on their tips and purple, brown, or even no needles further back on the branch. The wet weather we've been experiencing the past two years has created conditions which enable the disease to thrive. I've not seen the blue spruce so badly affected in many a year.

While you can't reverse the damage from this disease, you can control its spread. Recommended management of Rhizosphaera needlecast consists of the following measures: (1) Mulch heavily under the tree, (2) Rake up and dispose of as many infected needles as possible to get rid of the source of the fungus disease, (3) Apply a fungicide containing chlorothalonil, and (4) water the tree during extended day periods.

Colorado blue spruce is a beautiful tree in any setting. Be aware that it is not a native to this region of the country and, as such, is susceptible to several spruce diseases (Rhizosphaera needlecast and Cytospora spruce canker).

This tree species grows much better in places with cooler climates and moist, well-drained soils. The hot summer months combined with the heavy clay soils found in Greene County is a source of significant stress. And blue spruce trees under environmental stress tend to experience more serious disease problems.

Rhizosphaera needlecast affecting blue spruce. Image courtesy of USDA Forest Service - North Central Research Station Archive, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Becky's Recipe Box

Pumpkin Gingerbread

Ingredients:

- 3 cups sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 4 eggs
- 2/3 cup water
- 1 (15 ounce) can pumpkin puree
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves
- 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Lightly grease two 9x5 inch loaf pans.

2. In a large mixing, combine sugar, oil and eggs; beat until smooth. Add water and beat until well blended. Stir in pumpkin, ginger, allspice cinnamon, and clove.

3. In medium bowl, combine flour, soda, salt, and baking powder. Add dry ingredients to pumpkin mixture and blend just until all ingredients are mixed. Divide batter between prepared pans.

4. Bake in preheated oven until toothpick comes out clean, about 1 hour.

Recipe found on Allrecipes.com, (http://allrecipes.com/Recipe/Pumpkin-Gingerbread/Detail.aspx?evt19=1), Accessed 9/25/2014.

Southwest Pennsylvania Woodland Owners Association Upcoming Schedule

The Southwest Pennsylvania Woodland Owners Association (SWPWO) was formed in 2000 as an organization of individuals dedicated to sound woodland management practices. It continues to promote these values through education and outreach. Events are open to both members and the general public and there is no cost for participation in events. For further information, please visit the SWPWO website at http://busybeaver.cs.pitt.edu/swpwo/

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 12, 7:00 p.m. — ***Carbon Credits Forestlands***

Along with Al Steele from the USDA Forest Service, we will briefly explore forest carbon markets and take a look at what forest carbon markets are, why they were created, and the current status of markets in the US. We'll discuss some of the debates concerning carbon markets, how market advocates have attempted to address them, and how these responses affect how forest carbon projects are developed. *Greene County Fairgrounds, Building 10, downstairs.*

November 15, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. — ***Inventory Techniques for Your Woodlot***

Going out into the woods and taking a look at some of the field measurements/inventory related information which may be necessary to participate in carbon markets. The workshop will be structured in a way that will allow landowners, or groups of landowners, to determine if forest carbon markets are something they'd like to investigate further. *To be determined.*

Another Update on the Emerald Ash Borer

By: Bill Wentzel, Retired Forester

You may recall that in last summer's district newsletter, I wrote an article on the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) insect. To review a bit, the EAB is a half-inch long metallic green beetle. Larvae of the beetle feed under the bark of ash trees. It is a foreign, invasive insect first identified in North America in Michigan in 2002.

To give another update, this past summer, I observed many dead and dying ash trees, especially in Washington County and to a lesser degree in Greene County. The EAB has definitely arrived! You may also have noticed the affected trees along I-70 throughout our neighboring county to the north and along I-79 from Washington to Pittsburgh. Next summer, you will see more trees affected by this insect here in Greene County.

An adult Emerald Ash Borer feeding on an ash leaf. Image courtesy of Leah Bauer, USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station, Bugwood.org

The EAB is an enormous threat to our urban, suburban, and rural forests. It kills both stressed and healthy trees and is so aggressive that ash trees may die within 2 to 4 years after they become infested. Since its arrival in the United States, tens of millions of ash trees have been lost to this insect pest.

Symptoms of EAB infestation may include: (1) tree crown dieback with dead branches near the top of the tree, (2) epicormic branching with leafy shoots growing out from the trunk, (3) bark splits exposing "S" -shaped larval galleries underneath, (4) woodpecker activity, and (5) "D" -shaped holes in the bark made by the adult beetles as they exit the tree.

Unfortunately, there is little that can be done to stop the inevitable spread and death of the many ash trees found in the forest and urban areas of Greene and surrounding counties. There are several insecticide options available to treat ash trees in urban situations. However, they can be expensive and sometimes not effective. This is true because our native trees have little resistance to this invasive pest. As was in the case of the Gypsy Moth insect (with success), efforts are now underway to find potential biological control agents of the EAB. Since 2007, ongoing releases of several stingless wasps show some promise as a long-term management strategy, and efforts to find additional biological agents continue.

Evidence of larval Emerald Ash Borer activity. Image courtesy of James W. Smith, USDA APHIS PPQ, Bugwood.org

Greene County
Conservation District

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Greene County Conservation District

Promoting Soil and Water Conservation in Greene County Since 1956

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.

Providing Technical and Financial Assistance to Landowners

Streams, wetlands, drainage ditches, even wet, soggy, and marshy areas are valuable resources but can be difficult for landowners to manage on their own. It's easy to become frustrated and think of these areas more as a nuisance than resource. Greene County Conservation District is here to help you with technical and financial assistance in managing these areas.

The Conservation District currently offers grants of up to $1,000 to offset costs of implementing water quality Best Management Practices (BMP). Implementing BMP is the best way to manage these areas for maximum benefit to you the landowner while at the same time ensuring better water quality for you and your friends and neighbors throughout the larger watershed. Here are some examples of BMP that the Conservation District can offer technical and financial assistance with:

- Streambank stabilization projects
- Riparian buffer plantings
- Aquatic habitat enhancement structures
- Farming conservation practice installations

Individual landowners, homeowners, civic associations, school- and scouting- based organizations, sporting associations, and locally based environmental organizations are urged to apply soon as grants are offered on a first-come, first-serve basis and must be approved by the Conservation District Board of Directors. Contact the Conservation District for more information, to schedule a site visit, or to apply for grant funding.