

The Backbone of Conservation Assisting Private Landowners

Cayuga County Soil & Water Conservation District

Excerpt from the Annual Report 2002

Assisting Individual Homeowners

The Cayuga County Conservation District serves the community on an individual basis to solve natural resource issues. Cayuga County prides itself on maintaining a high standard for water quality, which has resulted in the implementation of the following projects.

Streambank Stabilization

With many miles of tributaries in or bordering Cayuga County, maintenance has become quite a daunting task. The biggest contributor of water pollution in the county is sediment. In order to protect not only our water, but also our valuable soil, every year the Soil & Water District completes hundreds of feet of streambank stabilization projects for various landowners and municipalities. The use of stone rip rap has been used on various projects this year with great success. Other “soft-engineering” techniques, such as fluvial geomorphology and filter socks, are also being researched to aid in the protection of our soil and water.

Septic Systems

The District assists homeowners and entire communities by performing dye tests to determine which septic systems are failing and polluting the environment. This year the bay front properties in the village of Fair Haven was due for its dye testing. Close to 190 systems were tested with only a 4% failure rate. This is a great opportunity to inform the public of the beneficial maintenance of septic systems and wastewater disposal. If maintenance is performed on a regular basis, homeowners will reap the benefits of lower maintenance costs and improved quality of the surrounding environment.

In addition to performing dye tests, the District also designs septic systems for private landowners. Our staff works with homeowners to determine their specific needs. A survey is completed and a design is drawn up. The system is then installed by a contractor. This year, the District completed about 20 septic system designs.

Water Main

Many residents of Cayuga county are now supplied with Municipal water. The Soil & Water Conservation District partnered with the Water and Sewer Authority to install and restore 10,400 feet of water mains. The water main extension first began on Potter Road in the Town of Throop, followed by installations on Turnpike Road, and ending on Centerport Road in Mentz. Construction was completed three weeks ahead of schedule.

Assisting Local Farmers

Ongoing technical support to farm owners and operators continues to be a high priority. Landowner assistance is provided beginning with the initial farm visit, continuing into the design phase, and lasting throughout the implementation of “best management practices” (BMPs).

Graze NY

The GRAZE NY Program continues to assist Cayuga County livestock producers with the design and implementation of rotational grazing practices. The numerous environmental and economical benefits associated with pasture management have allowed the GRAZE NY Program to expand and assist landowners in Seneca County in 2002. This expansion has been successful through cooperation with Congressman James Walsh, the Seneca County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service – Seneca Falls Field

Office. Our no-till grass drill was used to seed 321 acres of pasture this past year. The no-till seeding method not only increases the amount of vegetation, but it also helps to further reduce soil erosion by allowing landowners to re-seed their fields without plowing.

Barnyard Improvements

Barnyard improvements are always in the works at the District. Concrete pads, drip lines, and fencing have been installed to keep manure from contaminating storm water. Lane ways and drainage systems are also designed and installed by our employees to improve the overall quality of county farms.

Assisting Local Agencies and Organizations

By working with local agencies, we are able to extend our area of reach throughout the community. As the old saying goes, the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Our goals are shared by many organizations and governmental agencies, and when we join together we are able to enact change more effectively and to a greater degree.

Earth Week (Electronics Recycling)

In an effort to assist the community, the District partnered with Cornell Cooperative Extension and Cayuga County Planning to sponsor and host several recycling programs throughout the year. An example of one of these events was the Earth Week Electronics Recycling Day. Three hundred seventy households participated in the event, recycling 25,806 pounds of electronics and 504 propane cylinders. Other recycling programs sponsored by the Soil and Water Conservation District are Clean Sweep and Household Hazardous Waste Day.

Nontraditional Partners

The District also partners with local organizations such as the Owasco Lake Watershed Association (OWLA) with its weekly water quality monitoring of Owasco Lake and its tributaries. Through this cooperative effort, 33 sampling sites have been established to help improve the assessment of Owasco Lake's water. It is hoped that new sites will be established in the year 2003.

Aquatic Vegetation Control

In the Finger Lakes Region, tourism is one of the leading economic industries for the community. The harvester manages aquatic plant growth for the overall protection and enhancement of our waterways. This machinery is utilized to reduce the amount of invasive plants clogging the waterways throughout the County. One example of a nuisance plant is Eurasian Watermilfoil (*Myrophyllum spicatum. L*). This foreign plant species has no natural controls and grows in extremely dense stands, thus resulting in severely threatened natural lake environments. The growth is enhanced by the addition of sediments and nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus. The growth of nuisance plants discourages swimming, boating, fishing, and other recreational activities.

Critical Area Seeding

In 2002 the District, in association with the Auburn Department of Public Works and the State Department of Transportation, seeded numerous locations throughout Cayuga County. Hydroseeding stabilizes critical areas that have extensive soil loss, as well as beautifying recently constructed areas. In addition to county and state roadways, specific areas included Routes 5 and 20, where seed and mulch were applied to make the drive into the City of Auburn more aesthetically pleasing. Other examples include Emerson Park, Casey Park, & Hoopes Park. In addition to hydroseeding hand planting techniques were utilized to seed a total of 80 acres.

Tub Grinder

The tub grinder was used throughout the County for a total of 300 hours to recycle dead and downed trees. The grinder traveled to the Towns of Owasco, Sennett, and Elbridge in addition to other locations to collect entire trees, which were chipped and recycled into mulch that was used by the community.

New Technology

The District is constantly looking for new and innovative ways to solve common environmental issues. How can excessive cow waste be used for our benefit? How can we reduce odor at such a facility? How can we reduce streambank soil erosion without lining all the streams with rip rap? These are just some of the questions the District is beginning to answer.

Twin Birch Dairy Digester

Because water quality is a concern when handling manure, the District has embraced the science of a methane digester at Twin Birch Dairy. Digesters have numerous benefits ranging from improved water quality to odor management. Construction was started on an anaerobic digester for this 1,200 cow dairy in 2001. Currently the facility is working and digesting manure. Methane digesters separate methane gas from manure, producing a recycled manure compost and a nutrient rich liquid that can be applied to crop fields. The resulting methane gas can be used to produce electricity for the farm, thereby greatly reducing operational costs.

FGM

Fluvial Geomorphology (FGM), or the study of earth forms and shapes associated with streams, is a technique that the District undertook on a 4,000 foot stretch of Dutch Hollow Brook. We plan on using FGM applications as a natural approach to reduce stream bank erosion and the resulting sedimentation caused by frequent high water events. Potential Best Management Practices to be implemented can include riffle creation, root wads, slope stabilization, and bioengineering practices.

Information and Education

Arguably, there is no greater gift to a society than education. Assisting our community through educational programing is instrumental in ensuring the quality of our natural resources. The District works hard to assist young and old alike to learn more about our environment.

Boat Tour

A great way to enjoy the scenic environment is to take a ride on the River Otter Boat Tour. The guided tours along the Seneca River are designed to provide educational information regarding wildlife and local conservation efforts found throughout the area.

Envirothon

The Envirothon is an event for high school students to compete on various environmental topics. There are three levels of competition, the regional (which is county based), the state, and the national. At the national level, students compete for college scholarships. The Weedsport Team dominated the regional and state competitions, and then went on to place 6th in the Canon National Envirothon.

Conservation Field Days

Over 1,200 sixth grade students attended this year's Conservation Field Days. The Conservation District partnered with Cornell Cooperative Extension to organize three different "Conservation Trails," each with seven different environmental stations. Many volunteers came to lead small group activities relating to environmental concerns. Topics ranged from fire safety to water bug bingo. Students were encouraged to write a short paper on their favorite station, with the top three writers receiving savings bonds.

AmeriCorps

Introduction

Getting things done has always been the AmeriCorps mission. The crew works on a variety of projects ranging from construction to landscaping and beautification of public areas. A few of the crew's projects are highlighted.

Sterling Nature Center

The crew worked on many enhancement projects at Sterling Nature Center. This work entailed constructing a weather station and a storage barn. In addition, the crew installed windows and a stairway in the visitor center.

DEC Nature Trail

AmeriCorps worked aggressively with the Department of Environmental Conservation to design and construct a nature trail exhibit highlighting New York's flora and fauna at the state fairgrounds. The end result, consisting of a waterfall, wetland area, and other habitats, is located behind the DEC log cabin.

Log Crib

Camp Columbus is a summer camp run by the Seneca Cayuga ARC for individuals with special needs. Due to the deteriorating lake front property, the crew built a log crib structure to stabilize the bank and provide a walkway along the lake. This enabled campers easier access to the water and the beautiful surroundings.

Award

Through their outstanding work at Camp Columbus on the log crib structure and the construction of the playground, the AmeriCorps crew was awarded the Community Partnership Award. The award was presented by Seneca Cayuga ARC at a formal banquet on May 31, 2002 to a standing ovation.