Conservation Crier

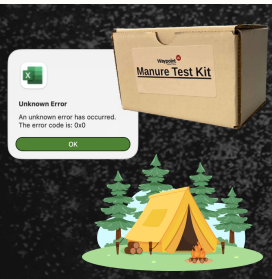
Fall 2026 Newsletter



Lancaster County Conservation District



CONSERVATION Oddities & Curiousities



Where Curiosity Meets Conservation

As autumn settles across Lancaster County, the changing landscape offers a perfect reminder of why conservation matters here. From rolling farmland and historic barns to streams, woodlots, wetlands, and the communities that have shaped this region for generations, there is so much worth protecting—and plenty that can surprise us along the way. Conservation isn't always about big or obvious things; sometimes the most interesting stories involve an unusual find, an unexpected species, a curious landscape detail, or a unique conservation planning challenge that makes even seasoned professionals stop and take notice. In this newsletter, we're looking at some of the oddities, surprises, and lesser-known stories that turn up in the field of conservation work in Lancaster County.

A **curious scavenger hunt is afoot** in this fall newsletter edition; take a careful look at the spooky and odd items that occur in the district's day-to-day operations. Find the items in the scavenger hunt above in the title block. A key is found at the end of the newsletter.

Important, but Curious, Announcements

Investing in Curious Minds

Make a difference in 24 hours with ExtraGive

Click Conservation Foundation of Lancaster County on Friday, November 20, and support Conservation District programs including Watershed project and monitoring, Lancaster County Envirothon: grades 3-12, and the Lancaster County Youth Conservation School. Your support can help the Conservation District meet a goal of $17,000.

Visit www.extragive.org to learn more.



Annual Watershed Forum – Registration Open for Inquisitive and Curious

Want to learn more about local action plans in watersheds throughout the county?

Registration is open for the 2026 Lancaster-Lebanon Watershed Forum! The forum will be held Saturday, November 7, from 8:30 am - 12:00 pm at Elizabethtown College.



Photo from Lancaster-Labanon Watershed Forum in 2024

Hosted by the Lancaster County and Lebanon County Conservation District watershed departments, the forum is a free event (registration required) for watershed organizations, volunteers, practitioners, teachers, and students (high school and beyond) to learn and collaborate. This year's event will feature presentations from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and Stroud Water Research Center.

Register here by Friday, October 30. Hope to see you there!

Strange Stories, Curious Discoveries

The Weird Little Bugs at the Bottom

As summer ends and fall settles into watersheds, conservation professionals head into local streams to conduct an important part of water-quality monitoring: macroinvertebrate sampling. Macroinvertebrate samples pass on valuable information about the condition of the entire aquatic ecosystem, as they form an important part of the stream food web and respond to changes in water quality and habitat. Examining which organisms are present provides a much clearer picture of stream health than a single water sample.

One of the greatest advantages of macroinvertebrate monitoring is that these organisms live in the stream for an extended time. A single water-quality sample describes conditions at the moment of collection. Macroinvertebrates, however, have been exposed to the stream's conditions over weeks, months, or even longer. These communities, therefore, provide a more comprehensive picture of environmental conditions over time.



Photo of a Hellgrammite

Why is fall an ideal time to sample macroinvertebrates? Stream flow conditions are usually low and stable, ensuring sample collections are without high-water turbulence washing away specimens. Macroinvertebrate populations also reach peak biomass after growing through the spring and summer months. The data collected can help evaluate whether conservation practices and stream restoration projects are improving aquatic habitat, identify streams that may be experiencing environmental stress, and track changes in watershed health over time.

Next time you're walking along your local creek, take a closer look! Beneath the rocks and among the leaves is a community quietly recording the story of that stream. Macroinvertebrates may be small and a little scary-looking, but the information they provide is a powerful tool for understanding, protecting, and restoring the health of our waterways.



Photo of macroinvertebrate sampling

~Article written by Grace Chamberlain

The Road Less Paved

The Lancaster County Conservation District's Dirt & Gravel/Low Volume Road (DGLVR) Quality Assurance Board (QAB) met September 2, 2026, to review one Dirt & Gravel Road application and two Low Volume Road applications submitted during the grant round.

The QAB recommended awarding a contract to the following municipalities for their DGLVR projects in 2026.

Municipality	Road	Proposed Solution
Rapho Twp	Johnson Mill Road #4	Enhancing streambank stability through riprap installation to protect the roadway from erosion
Rapho Twp	Buckwalter Road	Replacement and enlargement of 2 cross pipes, improve inlet for another cross pipe, and install a new cross pipe to improve overall drainage from the road
Lancaster City	Grove Lane	Install permeable pavement and an infiltration trench in the alley to reduce stormwater runoff in efforts to mitigate combined sewer overflow events

In addition to voting on applications, the QAB voted to 1) make some minor edits to the QAB local policy regarding staff involved in the program, and 2) amend the Mill Rd. (Earl Twp.) Low Volume Road contract includes an additional $8,000 due to cost overruns regarding paving over the installed stormwater pipes. The QAB board approved the three applications in their entirety, which were brought to the District Board of Directors and approved.



Photo of a DG/LVR project site

~Article written by Matt Kofroth

Where Did the Ground Go?

A portal to another dimension or a natural phenomenon? Despite their otherworldly appearance, sinkholes are a native feature of Pennsylvania's landscape. Areas prone to sinkholes are known as karst topography. In Lancaster, karst areas are especially common in the limestone valleys of the north and central parts of the county. Rainwater, which is slightly acidic, can easily dissolve karst limestone bedrock. When this happens, cavities open and the surface collapses to form a sinkhole.



Spooky! A sinkhole located in a stormwater management facility.

Sinkholes are considered a serious geologic hazard and have been giving Lancastrians a scare for years. They can lead to property damage, pollute groundwater, and affect public water supplies. What might seem like an oddity has become increasingly common as agricultural areas hiding

karst landscapes have been developed into the urban and suburban areas seen today. Human activities like well drilling, altering stormwater runoff, and land development all increase the likelihood of sinkhole formation. Property owners can do their part by consulting with their local municipality and/or Lancaster County Conservation District (LCCD) before starting an earthwork project. **If an existing sinkhole is encountered, the PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) recommends that you:**

1. Restrict access to the hole.
2. If the sinkhole poses an imminent threat to people or property, contact local police or emergency responders. Advise them if the hole is near utility lines or in a roadway.
3. Take photographs for documentation, but do not get too close to the edges of a sinkhole.
4. Do not allow unauthorized or inexperienced people to investigate the sinkhole.
5. Never go down into a sinkhole or attempt to fill the hole yourself.
6. If you suspect that a sinkhole may be related to pumping from a nearby quarry, or another DEP-regulated activity, call the DEP District Mining Office or Regional Office serving your county. If no mining or other regulated activity is suspected, you can report sinkholes to the Pennsylvania Geological Survey at (717) 702-2017.
7. If you are working on a construction site permitted by the LCCD, contact the E&S team member assigned to your area.

Don't let sinkholes bring you down! For additional information, go to the Department of Environmental Protection's sinkhole resource page.

~Article written by Ava Lang

What Lurks Below: The Hidden Danger of Manure Pits

Liquid manure storage may seem like a spooky, scary pool on the surface, and it's because it can be. Uncovered liquid manure storage ponds, pits, and tanks are typically built of reinforced concrete with a chain-link fence around the top to prevent accidental access. Most often, these liquid manure storage areas are on dairy farms, and sometimes at swine or duck raising facilities. However, these liquid manure storage areas pose threats to farm employees. Liquid manure storage areas tend to have a crust on top that looks solid at first glance, but it is not stable. The crust acts as a 'cap', holding back deadly gases. One of the most common gases is hydrogen sulfide, which can overcome a person faster than they can respond to safety. Other gases present are carbon dioxide, ammonia, and methane. Hydrogen sulfide sometimes has a rotten egg-like odor. All the gases are colorless and mostly odorless, making gases difficult to identify. These gases all have debilitating side effects. Each type of gas can cause general discomfort, headaches, nausea, and dizziness. Hydrogen sulfide can quickly reduce a person's sense of smell. For this reason, a person may think the gas has dissipated; yet, without a sense of smell, the ability to react to high levels of non-detectable gases further deteriorates response strategies.



Photo of a manure storage facility

When working around liquid manure storage areas, especially at the start of agitation, the crust is broken up and releases a large volume of toxic gases. Agitation is just like shaking a bottle of soda and opening it. Safety guidelines for working around liquid manure storage can be found below:

- Always keep children away from liquid manure storage areas.
- Always make sure other people know when you will be agitating. They should be aware in case of an emergency and stay away from the area.
- Consider wearing a mask while working around the pond, pit, or tank.
- Ensure that the fence around the storage is in good condition, with posted signs about hazards and toxic gases,
- If you must go inside the pit, wear a safety harness. Otherwise, stay out of the pit. Always keep any gates padlocked shut when not in use.
- Be extra careful if gypsum (a.k.a. calcium sulfate) bedding is used. Gypsum increases the amount of hydrogen sulfide that is produced.
- If someone falls in, do not enter the pond, pit, or tank to attempt to rescue them. Call 911 immediately.
- In 2025, there were 6 deaths at a dairy farm in Colorado. 5 of those deaths were secondary victims attempting to rescue one another. 3 of the victims were family members.

As the fall harvest continues, farmers will spread manure more frequently, preparing their fields to plant winter wheat and additional cover crops. Accidents in and around manure storage areas happen more often. Use extra caution and don’t rush when working with liquid manure.

Work safe today, see your family tonight.



Photo of a manure storage facility

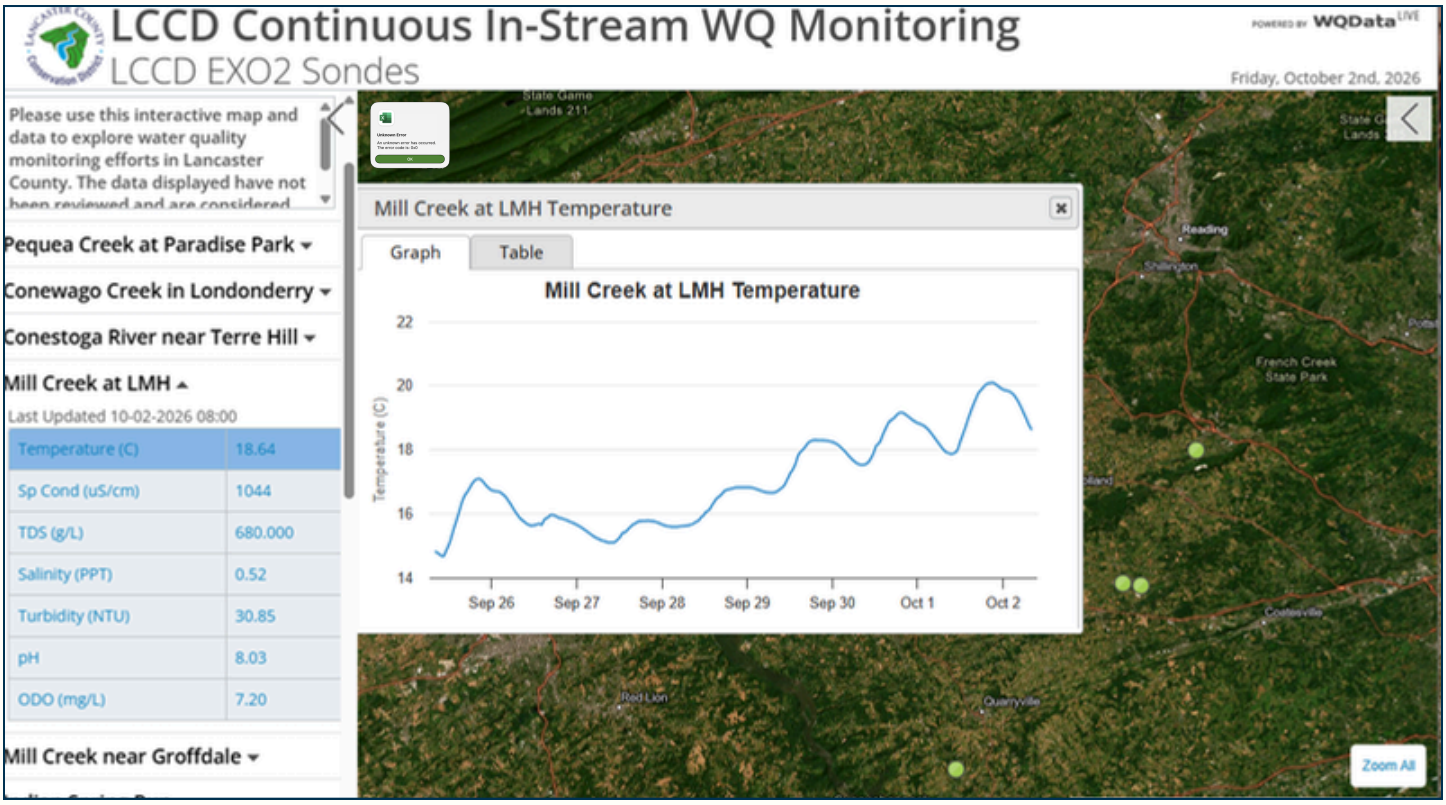
~Article written by Lauren Brodbbar & Shelly Dehoff

Good Things Are Happening Out There

Water Quality Public Portal Available

There is always something interesting to discover about water quality monitoring programs in Lancaster County. Now, you can explore this data for yourself. The Conservation District's new **online portal** gives anyone access to real-time water quality data from 16 continuous in-stream monitoring units located throughout the county. These monitoring units collect data every 15 or 30 minutes, around the clock—including water temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, salinity, and other water quality indicators. The result is a fascinating window into the never-static chemistry of our streams. What might seem ordinary at first glance can reveal surprising patterns: seasonal shifts, unusual changes, and trends that emerge over the course of a year. With this new portal, the Conservation District—and anyone curious enough to look—can explore both the expected and the unexpected in Lancaster County's waterways.

There's always another oddity to uncover. Why not take a look and see what the data reveals?



Screenshot of WQ Public Portal

CAP Program

A busy CAP year is more than meets the eye. Behind the numbers are nearly 30 projects completed this summer—thanks to the enormous collaborative efforts taking place across Lancaster County every day.

Over the past year, **$5.9 million** in CAP dollars helped put agricultural best management practices (BMPs) and stream and floodplain restoration projects into action throughout the county. Here are a few BMP highlights:

- 4 acres of wetlands and floodplain planted and restored
- More than 2,900 feet of stream habitat restored
- Nearly 16 acres of riparian buffers planted
- More than 45,000 square feet of roofed heavy-use areas installed
- 17 new waste storage facilities built and installed



Photo of roofed heavy use area from a 2025 CAP project installed in 2026

Each number tells a bigger story. These may be different projects on the landscape; they have something in common: they help reduce nutrient and sediment runoff reaching local streams while protecting the natural resources in Lancaster County for years to come. Check out our **CAP Program Storymap** for more information.

~Articles written by Noelle Cudney

BMP Verification

Animal mortality facilities are on-farm spaces designed to handle routine animal mortalities, quietly managing a part of farm life that county residents don't see. These facilities are not typically intended for catastrophic losses. Instead, they provide a controlled place for common disposal methods such as composting and incineration/gasification. Keeping mortalities on-site saves operators time and off-farm transport expenses while also helping limit disease spread and maintain a healthier environment for the animals that remain. The benefits of these curious facilities are more than meet the eye. Many are fitted with roofs or covers to keep rainwater from mixing with mortality compost, helping prevent nutrients and pathogens from reaching surface water. Proper on-farm disposal can also improve air quality by reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with transportation and other disposal practices. In the strange but practical world of agriculture, the mortality facility reminds us that even the most unusual corners of a farm can serve an important purpose.

Highlight

Since his start in 2025, Colin Wiest, the District's BMP Verification Coordinator, has verified over 3,200 individual BMPs in Lancaster County!



~Article written by Colin Wiest

Young Minds, Wild Discoveries

Boredom Never - Curiosity is Around the Corner

It's not too early to think about summer. Applications open in January for the 48th Lancaster County Youth Conservation School. Conservation School is an educational, week-long residential field school for 14-16-year-old students who enjoy the outdoors and are interested in natural resources, agriculture, or environmental science. Save the date: July 25-30. 2027.





Photos from 2026 YCS

In 2026, students completed a study project supporting the historic Ephrata Cloister by designing native plantings, trails, and signage to expand their audience and encourage new ideas that feature the landscape, telling the story of the uniquely preserved community.

2027 will bring a new opportunity to develop learning projects and activities for a new class. Explore https://lancasterconservation.org/youth-conservation-school/ to learn more.

~ Article written by Sallie Gregory

Conservation District Chapter 102 Responsibilities Regarding Data Center Plan Reviews

On August 18, Governor Josh Shapiro signed Executive Order 2026-05, making his Governor's Responsible Infrastructure Development (GRID) Requirements applicable to data center development in Pennsylvania. These requirements place guardrails on data center development in four key areas: energy affordability, transparency and community engagement, workforce and economic development, and environmental protection. The Order requires developers to adhere to the GRID Requirements to receive relevant sales tax exemptions and timely reviews of relevant state permits.

In Pennsylvania, construction and development of data centers are governed by a variety of ordinances, regulations, and rules involving a variety of local governments, state agencies, and regulatory entities. The district administers one section of PA regulations known as Chapter 102. This section lays out rules that developers must follow to minimize erosion and sedimentation loss during construction and stormwater runoff after construction. Projects that disturb 1.0 acre or greater are required to submit a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit to the district. The district Erosion and Sedimentation (E&S) department members review these submissions to ensure they are adequate. Once construction begins, staff conduct inspections to ensure permit compliance throughout the project life. As with all earthmoving activities, the E&S

Team will work to ensure that data center development follows Chapter 102 regulations to protect our local water resources.

To track the permitting status of data center projects throughout PA, visit the Data Center Permit Tracker.

~ Article written by Adam Stern

Meet the Curious New Faces of Conservation at the District

Isaac Carachilo

Isaac Carachilo is a new Watershed Resource Technician at the District. He earned a B.S. in Environmental Science (Program of Emphasis: Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences) from Juniata College in 2024 and is currently pursuing an M.S. in Ecology at Penn State University. As an undergraduate researcher at Juniata College, Isaac quantified and classified microplastic contamination among aquatic heterotrophs and assessed the ecological effects of a culvert replacement on a central Pennsylvania tributary. As a graduate research assistant at Penn State, he utilized gene expression analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of riparian buffers in reducing stress in brown trout. In his current role, Isaac oversees riparian buffer projects and outreach, conducts biological and chemical stream monitoring, and administers the Dirt & Gravel and Low Volume Road Program. In his free time, Isaac enjoys fly fishing, hiking, canoeing, and spending time with friends/family.



Jordan Miller



Jordan Miller recently joined LCCD as a Watershed Resource Technician. In May, I graduated from Lock Haven University with a B.S. in Environmental Geoscience and a minor in Geography. While in college he played on the men's soccer team and had the opportunity to intern with the Schuylkill Conservation District as a field intern as well as the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources as the sustainability and climate intern. In addition to his job at the district, Jordan works as the director of goalkeeping for East Penn Rush in the evenings. In his free time, he also loves to bible study, workout, hike, travel, and spend time with family and friends.

Jennifer Sparks

Jennifer Sparks is the new Finance Assistant at the District, here to assist Stacey and the Administration Department in any way she can. She is a 2011 graduate of Penn State University where she received a Bachelor of Science in Business Management and Marketing. Previously, Jennifer worked as the General Manager at Colony Park Lanes and Games in York. She has twin girls that keep her busy in her free time, but she loves bowling in leagues and tournaments to relax and unwind from the chaos that life brings.



Pedro Texidor



Pedro Texidor is a new Agriculture Compliance Specialist at the District. He comes to this District with two BS degrees in Environmental Science and Health Information from Southern New Hampshire University. He has also served PA National Guard and US Army for 6 years. In addition, he has held previous positions in restaurant management, as well as working with the Plain Sect as a roofer.

Erika Faulkner

Erika Faulkner is the Network Coordinator for Lancaster Clean Water Partners. She is a 2020 graduate of Dickinson College where she received a B.A. in Environmental Studies & Political Science, and a 2025 graduate of Vermont Law and Graduate School, where she earned a Master of Climate and Environmental Policy (MCEP). Previously, Erika worked at Vermont Natural Resource Council as a Community Organizer & Registered Lobbyist and at Vermont Energy Education Program as their Program Access AmeriCorps, before deciding to return home to Lancaster County. Outside of work, Erika volunteers as the Asst. Artistic Director for the Long's Park Art Festival and helps around her dad's Candle Shop in Lancaster City. In her free time, she enjoys making art and exploring nature.



Michael Mantooth

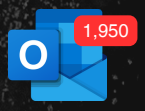


Michael Mantooth is the Director of Projects at the Lancaster Clean Water Partners. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 2021 with a Bachelor of Arts in Native American Studies modified with Design Engineering. Michael is deeply passionate about clean water initiatives, domestic agriculture investment, food sovereignty, and his tribal community work. In his free time, he enjoys running around outdoors, trying new foods, and exploring Lancaster County.

Oddities & Curiosities Scavenger Hunt Key

Did you find all of the hidden objects in the newsletter?

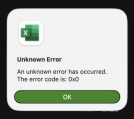
Scavenger Hunt Key



Overflowing Outlook inbox
Administration



Camping tent
Education Dept.



Excel error message
Data & Analysis Dept.



High-vis & safety gear
E&S Dept.



Macroinvertebrate sample
Watershed Dept.



Manure test kit
Agricultural Dept.

- **Manure Test Kit** - Hidden in “What Lurks Below”
- **Macroinvertebrate Sample** - Hidden in “Weird Little Bugs”
- **Safety Cone and Gear** - Hidden in “Where did the Ground Go?”
- **Tent & Camping Gear** - Hidden in “Young Minds, Wild Discoveries”
- **Excel Error** - Hidden in “Good Things are Happening Out There”
- **Overflowing Outlook Inbox** - Hidden in Watershed Forum Article

Linktree YouTube

What’s Around the Corner?

Mark Your Calendar for Adventure

Click on an event to learn more!

- 2026 ExtraGIVE! - Nov 20th
- Lancaster-Lebanon Watershed Forum Registration Form - Nov 7th!
- Board Meetings (first Wednesday of the month)
- WQVC Meeting January 2027
- LCCD Watershed Events & Plantings

LANCASTER COUNTY
Conservation District

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