Our Mission...  
Providing research, education, and outreach advocating use of environmentally sound principles and strategies where natural systems interact with things manmade.

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We're on the road to Coudersport, Potter County for the 2004 Annual Maintenance Workshop!

We are very excited to bring the Center's Annual Maintenance Workshop to north-central Pennsylvania. Our move from State College to Coudersport and the Potter County area gives us the opportunity to broaden our audience and customize the field demonstrations to workshop attendees. This year's workshop - including the first-ever program for township officials, road managers, and work crews - presents pipe installation and maintenance grading demonstrations and a problem-solving diagnostic on an identified worksite. Individual tracks are available for conservation districts and the DCNR Bureau of Forestry to address issues relevant to each group.

We thank the Potter County Conservation District, DCNR's Bureau of Forestry, and all of our advisors and collaborators on the Education and Outreach Workgroup for their time and hard work. We could not do the workshop without you!

See you soon at Potato City!

Congratulations!

Dave and Jean Creamer welcomed Samantha Leigh on May 4, 2004. She is happy and healthy (the jury's still out on Dave). We can't wait to meet her!
Drainage, drainage, drainage. The three most important rules in road maintenance. This statement is imprinted on the personal ‘hard drives’ of road maintenance personnel from Erie to Allentown and Aliquippa to West Chester. It is a true statement but widely misunderstood.

Water and soil. How complicated can it be? Water runs downhill, doesn’t it?

In the 2-day Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) Training, we use the statement from John Muir, “When you pick out anything by itself, you find it attached to everything else in the universe.” Water does run downhill...above ground. Below ground...now that is a different story. Water seeks the path of least resistance. Sometimes that path is down, sometimes up and sometimes sideways. Geology and soil type are huge factors in how water moves underground.

Drainage is not simple or easy. There are few if any hard and fast rules in accomplishing proper drainage. We all hear things like “keep the water off of, out of, and away from your road.” It sounds good, but how? Roads traverse all kinds of terrain; what works in one soil type doesn’t necessarily work in another.

Within the ESM Training we try to present strategies for surface water and subsurface water. It is safe to say that all of us are more comfortable with water on the surface, or above ground. Depending on the topography, dealing with surface water can be as simple as proper cross-slope on the roadway.

On sloping terrain, dealing with surface water becomes more complicated. Roads interrupt natural drainage patterns, both above and below ground. Above ground, surface water from the road and surrounding terrain is concentrated in roadside ditches. Below ground, water flowing through the soil can be interrupted by tightly compacted road base.

Road maintenance personnel are encouraged to believe that all road problems can be linked to water and drainage. The belief that recurrent road problems require more drainage leads to deeper and deeper ditches. It is within this maintenance practice of deepening ditches that the common misunderstandings about water become obvious. Subsurface water is often the cause of road surface drainage problems. Deep ditches will not control subsurface water in Pennsylvania’s heavy soils. The statement that the drainage needs to improve is true, it’s just that the strategy needs to change.

The most important role for conservation districts in developing work plans on projects is in analyzing drainage issues. Road maintenance personnel are conditioned to deal with water as if it were all surface water. Try to always talk about the difference between surface water and subsurface water and the role of soil type. If it is not your strongest area, get help. Every meeting in the field is a teaching and learning opportunity. You can teach about water and learn about roads! As the Dirt and Gravel Roads program matures, it is time to look harder at quality demonstrations. A well-developed work plan can solve certain cyclical maintenance problems forever. A successful project demonstration can overcome a lot of skepticism, especially as years go by and previously recurring problems do not return. Try it.

Since the winter newsletter update, the pace and extent of QA/QC assessment has picked up considerably. During the 8-month period from April - November of this year, the QA/QC assessment team will visit seven (7) of the eleven (11) largest county programs. In fact, the April - November QA/QC visits will involve counties that have received 30% ($8,465,444) of the total Dirt & Gravel Road Program allocation ($28.1M) since 1997.

To address the expanded program activity in bigger program counties, the QA/QC structure has been adapted to include more involvement of field reps (wherever possible) and more field review of completed worksites. These recent changes are working well and fine tuning of the process will, no doubt, continue in the future. It can truly be said that, by year’s end, the Quality Assurance/Quality Control process will have a broadbased and wide-ranging perspective on the status of Pennsylvania’s dirt and gravel road program.

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