Dirt & Gravel Roads 2009 Maintenance Workshop Wrap-up

The Center’s Annual Maintenance Workshop was held September 22-23 in State College. While attendance from State Agencies was low due to tight budgets and travel restrictions, Conservation District participation was good. A total of about 110 participants made the workshop a success. Highlights from this year’s Workshop include:

• Keynote speaker Dr. Rebecca Schneider from Cornell University shared her research about the impact of road ditch connectivity to streams in New York.
• Class sessions by Wade Brown, CDEG Engineers; Emily Rauchert, PSU Weed Ecology; Kevin Goldblum, PA 1-call; & Ethan Inlander, The Nature Conservancy.
• Field demonstrations of various ESM practices including conveyor belt diversions, broad based dips, and shallow pipe installations on local roads.
• A visit to Hawbaker’s Pleasant Gap Quarry to see how they produce DSA.
• A visit to several “classic” demo projects to see how they are holding up.

Workshop proceedings CD with this newsletter!
The CD included with this newsletter contains pictures, documents, presentations, and evaluations from the 2009 Maintenance Workshop. (also available online at www.dirtandgravelroads.com under education, workshops)

Congratulations to Warren County Conservation District for submitting the winning photo (left) at the Center’s 2009 Photo Contest held at the annual maintenance workshop. This year’s theme was a “Nice Road” photo and the winner was determined by voting from workshop attendees.
You have met the Center staff one at a time over the past 6 newsletters. Below is a summary of Center staff to provide a “big picture” overview.

Barry Scheetz  
Director  
In addition to his Center responsibilities, Barry is a Professor of Civil Engineering at PSU.

Steve Bloser  
Assistant Director  
Steve’s focus is on Center coordination, Program issues, the GIS system, education, research projects, and technical writing.

Dave Creamer  
Dave Shearer  
Tim Ziegler  
Field Operation Specialists  
Dave, Dave, and Tim divvy up all the “dirty work” at the Center including ESM trainings, presentations, research & demo project oversight, technical assistance, and more.

Kathy Moir  
Office Manager  
Aside from doing everything to keep the Center functional, Kathy also has a full time job keeping the boys in line!

DGRoads GIS update status

Background
The Dirt and Gravel Road Program utilizes a customized GIS Interface to track location, completion, and expenditures for over 17,000 road improvement projects. The Center received funding in late 2008 to begin upgrading the DGRoads GIS system to an open-source MapWindow Software. For more background information, go to (www.dirtandgravelroads.org, under resources, GIS).

Status
The majority of the “hard programming” of the new GIS has been completed. The DGRoads customized program is nearly fully functional. The major programming tasks yet to be done include development of the self-installation program, development of the “Project Manager” up-front interface to facilitate access to the program, and compilation of county data. Currently 6 Conservation Districts are part of a “beta testing” workgroup. These 6 districts have had a working version of the new DGRoads program for testing since June of 2009. The DGRoads program was also demonstrated and made available for testing by Conservation Districts at the Center’s 2009 Maintenance Workshop in September. Feedback from Districts who participated in these tests was positive.

Implementation Plan
Aside from the programming issues mentioned above, most of the work remaining to be done for the GIS upgrade is in implementation. Districts typically use the DGRoads system to submit their annual summary reports that are due January 15th each year. This year, Center staff will be VISITING EACH DISTRICT to insure their data is accurate and error-free for the transition to the new MapWindow DGRoads. During the visit, Center Staff will also remove the old Version of DGRoads and prepare Districts for the new MapWindow version to come.

Planned Timeline:
November – December:  
- Visit Districts to complete Annual Summary Report and verify data.  
- Complete programming.
January 2010:  
- Complete programming, installation packages, and data compilation.  
- Compile Annual Summary Reports.
February – March:  
- Targeted rollout of new MapWindow-based DGRoads.

Previous versions of DGRoads were given out on CDs. The new version will be made available for download online. This will reduce distribution costs and facilitate future software updates. CDs can still be made for any District with limited internet connectivity. The Center has tried to make the new DGRoads function similar to the old version to reduce the learning curve and need for training. Optional trainings will be held at some point after the software rollout for any District staff that wish to attend.

Districts can expect to be contacted about visits beginning in November. Feel free to contact Steve Bloser at the Center with any questions: 814-865-6967.
2009-10 District Allocations

2009-10 Dirt and Gravel Road Program Allocations to Conservation Districts will be late this year due to the prolonged State Budget delay earlier this summer. Allocations must go through the State Treasurer and Comptroller. We realize that many of you may have projects waiting on this funding. We will let you know immediately when we have an approximate date to expect the allocations.

Program Coordinator Vacancy

Mike Klimkos, former Dirt and Gravel Road Program Coordinator, retired from State employment in June. The State Conservation Commission is still working to fill the vacancy. The Center is working more closely with the Commission to address Program issues until the position is filled.

ARRA Stimulus Funding

The 2009 American Resource Recovery Act (ARRA) stimulus funding proved to be a large benefit to the Dirt and Gravel Road Program in many counties. Approximately 15 “Dirt and Gravel Road Related” projects were funded in this round of ARRA funding, totaling over $7,000,000! Initial feedback from PENNVEST is positive about the scope and progress of the Dirt and Gravel Road Projects. There is also a good possibility that there will be similar funding in the future, and additional Dirt and Gravel Road projects will be eligible. Additional information and a list of awards can be found on the PENNVEST website at (www.pennvest.state.pa.us).

Quality Assurance / Quality Control Effort

The QA/QC effort began visiting Conservation Districts in 2003. The effort was designed to evaluate how the Dirt and Gravel Road Program is functioning in each District, looking at aspects of program administration, functionality, and road project work. The first round of QA/QC visits to each District will wrap up next month. The Program’s “Policy and Planning” advisory group will be reviewing the process this winter to determine the future direction of the QA/QC initiative.

ESM Practices Going Nationwide

The Center has forged a partnership with the US Forest Service to create a “Field Guide” for Environmentally Sensitive Road Maintenance. The field guide will be based on the Center’s library of technical bulletins that describe individual Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance Practices. The Center will be modifying many technical bulletins to create a 8.5” x 5.5” ESM guide designed to be used in the field by road maintenance professionals nationwide. The USFS will add components to the guide where possible to make it more applicable on a national scale. Look for more information about this cooperative effort in the year to come.

Free Conveyor Belts

If you are interested in obtaining some free used conveyor belts for making diversions (see newsletter insert), please contact the Center (814-865-5355).
The two-day ESM training covers many aspects of road maintenance and focuses on practices to reduce maintenance costs and environmental impact from unpaved roads.

Have questions or want to schedule an ESM training? Want to receive future newsletters?

Contact Kathy Moir at: 1-866-No-To-Mud (1-866-668-6683)
dirtandgravel@psu.edu
www.dirtandgravelroads.org

Additional training dates are still available for 2010.
Contact the Center to register for a training, or to discuss hosting one (814-865-5355).