

**Testimony by Jim Shaner
Executive Director of the Beaver County Conservation District
To the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee and the Senate Local Government
Committee
March 3, 2015**

Chairman Yaw, Chairman Hutchinson and all the distinguished senators of both Committees; thank you for providing the Beaver County Conservation District with the opportunity to discuss the many benefits of Act 13. My name is Jim Shaner and I am the Executive Director for the District.

To be concise, conservation districts work locally to implement the Chapter 102 Erosion and Sediment Control Program on behalf of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and to implement Act 38, which provides the agricultural community with technical support and assistance in writing Nutrient Management plans.

The overall benefit of Act 13 to all the conservation districts is to provide a predictable, stable funding source. Conservation districts have historically received line-item funding through the state budget, via the Department of Agriculture and DEP, to reimburse us for the work we do on behalf of the state. Over time, this funding has decreased and then stagnated. This was a major concern for districts because costs to properly run the districts have risen, there has been no increase for inflation, and conservation districts have been asked to implement more and more complicated permitting programs. In addition, the districts complete all work on the Chapter 102 Program for the Department of Transportation at no charge. The lack of increase in the line-items meant that they were not sufficiently reimbursing the districts for their work performed on behalf of the state, and the funding from Act 13 has helped to close this gap.

In addition, this funding has helped the districts to fulfil one or two top priorities, including helping the residents of our counties economically through the environment. This is why, after filling the gap left by the line-items, the Beaver County Conservation District made it a priority to use Act 13 funds to benefit the citizens of Beaver County by creating two new programs, and helping to fund one existing program that had depleted it's source of funding.

The first of these is our Agricultural Operations Assistance Program. This is a reimbursement mini-grant program that shares the farmer's costs for small farm conservation projects. These projects may include, but are not limited to, streambank fencing, streambank buffer zones, spring development, manure storage areas, storm water management and control, and erosion and sediment controls. This program also provides funding to assist the farmer in obtaining nutrient management plans, furthering compliance with the Pennsylvania Clean Streams Law. The overall goal of the program is to help offset the costs of implementing conservation practices related to manure and nutrient management, which means cleaner water for the citizens of Beaver County.

Secondly, we created our Streambank Stabilization Assistance Program, a mini grant program that helps homeowners to stabilize streambanks located on their property. This is a matching grant, which requires the homeowner to provide in-kind services such as equipment, man power, and some materials (if available). Most of these projects use natural materials such as log vane structures, root wad placement, large stones located on the property, and native plantings to stabilize the streambanks. Our district provides the technical expertise and the balance of the materials to complete these projects. The goal of this program is to help protect water quality in Beaver County watersheds. It is available to non-profits

and individuals who have first or second order streams on their property and are interested in streambank stabilization, habitat improvement, establishing buffer zones, and natural stream restoration to mitigate erosion and sedimentation.

Thirdly, we are using ACT 13 to help fund our Arboretum Program. This program includes a nature trail and picnic shelter along with free educational programming coordinated by our Environmental Educator. Educational programs are put on once a month, spring through fall, with topics like maple syrup production, spring wildflowers, butterfly and moth habitat, amphibian and reptiles, and wild mushroom walk and identification. ACT 13 funds are used to obtain program presenters and cover trail maintenance costs.

Distinguished members of the Committee, thank you again for your leadership on this issue. The Beaver County Conservation District and all of the state's 66 conservation districts have greatly benefited from ACT 13 and as a result the residents of our great Commonwealth have benefited, as well. If we lost this funding, it would be a major blow to the districts, the economy, and the environment of Pennsylvania.

Again thank you, and I look forward to your questions.