Conservation Connections

Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District
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Quarterly District Newsletter **Spring 2003**

Calling all High School Science Students!

The Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District is seeking teams for the 2003 Erie County Envirothon this spring. If you are a high school student that enjoys spending time outdoors or is interested in the natural sciences, the Envirothon is perfect for you! Coordinated by the District, the Envirothon is an outdoor, hands-on natural science competition for high school students. Students team up to compete against other local schools in categories of soils, forestry, wildlife, aquatics, and a current issue topic. Prizes are awarded to top-scoring teams. To prepare for the challenge, a workshop is held at which local natural resource professionals give presentations on the various Envirothon topics. The Envirothon is a great opportunity to spend a day enjoying the outdoors while learning more about the environment.

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Hurry! - Tree and Shrub Seedling Sale Ends March 28

You can count on two things once March and the Spring edition of *Conservation Connections* arrives: the warmer weather is around the corner (hopefully) and the Conservation Tree and Shrub Seedling Program is underway. The District is offering a wide variety of deciduous and evergreen trees, conservation shrubs, wildflower seed mixes, and wildlife seedling packs. By planting tree and shrub seedlings you are not only helping to improve the landscape of Erie County but are providing: food and habitat for wildlife, windbreaks, erosion control, reductions to heating and cooling expenses, and protection of water quality.

Other items available include bluebird and bat houses and planting supplies like marking flags, fertilizer tablets, and tree shelters which can promote growth and protection for your seedlings. The order deadline is March 28 and the seedling distribution day is April 26 at the Erie County Fairgrounds. Order forms can be downloaded from the District website at www.ecswcd.org, you can pick one up at our office or call 652-8480 to have one sent to you.

District Assists With Historic Canoe Launch Rehabilitation at Ellicott Creek Park

Earlier in the 20th century a side channel connected at both ends to Ellicott Creek was constructed at the Casino Building in Ellicott Creek Park, Tonawanda, where park patrons could rent and launch canoes and similar passive recreational watercraft to enjoy a day of drifting on the calm waters of Ellicott Creek. Over time the maintenance efforts to keep the boat-launch channel clear of sediment ceased and the channel filled in with silts and noxious vegetation that rendered the boat-launch channel unusable.

The Erie County Department of Parks, Recreation and Forestry, knowing the District's expertise with streambank stabilization and natural resources conservation, approached the District in January 2001 to help plan and coordinate an effort to rehabilitate the boat-launch channel. The District provided meeting facilitation, regulatory permit preparation and engineering surveys and designs. "By partnering with the Soil and Water Conservation District we were able to get the project on the ground faster and cheaper than if we (the Parks Dept.) had to outsource the tasks that the District accomplished for us," stated Brian Grassia, Erie County Forester and Project Manager.

The overall project, which was completed by a partnership of Erie County-based departments and organizations, included the clearing of sediment in the boat-launch channel, construction of a timber crib wall along the Casino streambank, a gravel ramp for launching canoes, kayaks, and rowboats and improvements to the Casino facility including wood decks, stairs, railings, benches and upgrades to the building. All the wood materials for the project came from Erie County Forests and were prepared at the Erie County Forestry Saw Mill in Sardinia.

The District is pleased to be recognized by the Parks Department and other county departments for its abilities. The District looks forward to continuing its partnerships with Erie County for the conservation of Erie County's natural resources.

For more information about this project please see *News from County Executive Giambra* at www.erie.gov.

New Changes to Agricultural Assessments

Owners of eligible agricultural lands can apply for a partial exemption from real property taxes through the completion of an agricultural assessment. An agricultural assessment is limited to land used in agricultural production including cropland, pasture, orchards, vineyards, woodland and horse breeding operations as well as land set aside through the participation in a federal conservation program.

Some changes for 2003 agricultural assessments include a reduction in the minimum required size for farm operations which may now consist of 7 acres (previously 10) and average $10,000 in gross sales of farm products. Farm operations can qualify with less than 7 acres as long as the average gross sales are $50,000. Rented lands may also be included if the operator meets the above criteria and a long-term lease exists with the property owner. Please contact your local assessor for a determination of eligibility.

The Erie County SWCD provides assistance in completing soil group worksheets as part of agricultural assessments. Please make an appointment with us before visiting our office to ensure that a technician will be available to assist you. The information that you need to provide to the District to complete the soil group worksheet includes a copy of the most recent tax bill with the current section/ block/lot number (SBL), a tax parcel map or survey of the parcel with the current parcel acreage and knowledge of the agricultural production on the parcel. There is a $15 charge per parcel for soil group worksheets.

We recommend that you submit your agricultural assessment to your assessor 30 days before the May 1, 2003 due date. ♦

Envirothon

(continued from page 1)

The 2003 Erie County Envirothon will be held on May 1st at the Sugar Shanty and Sawmill facility at the Erie County Forest on Genesee Road in Sardinia. The winning team at the Erie County Envirothon earns the privilege of advancing to the New York State Envirothon to be held at SUNY Morrisville on May 28th and 29th, where they will compete against local Envirothon winners from counties throughout the state. Last year, Orchard Park High School's students won the Erie County Envirothon, and competed at the 2002 New York State Envirothon. The winning team at the New York State Envirothon qualifies for the Canon National Envirothon. At both the State and National levels, top-scoring teams have the opportunity to win college scholarships and other great prizes. As a nationally recognized program, participation in the Envirothon is an impressive addition to college applications. Call 652-8480 for more information. ♦

Invasive Plants

Now Spreading: *Shrub Honeysuckle*

There's nothing like the sweet fragrance of honeysuckle blossoms in Spring. Unfortunately, many of the varieties of honeysuckle shrubs (*Lonicera spp.*) that can be found in Western New York are exotic plants that are rapidly replacing native plant species.

Exotic shrub honeysuckles can be distinguished from native honeysuckles by their pubescent (hairy) leaves and their red or yellow berries. Native honeysuckles have blue or black berries. The shrubs are multi-stemmed, opposite branching and range in height from 6 to 20 feet. The opposite leaves are simple, oblong to elliptic and the paired axillary flowers are showy with white, yellow or pink corollas. The fruits are red, or rarely yellow, fleshy berries that are edible for wildlife.

The most common exotic honeysuckles, *Lonicera maackii, L. morrowii* and *L. tatarica*, are native to Russia or Asia, and were brought to the United States as ornamentals in the late 19th century. These shrubs have adapted to a wide range of soils and a variety of habitats. They have been found in disturbed areas such as urban forests, railroad and road rights-of-way, and in abandoned agricultural land, along streams and in fencerows. They will grow in full sun and in partial shade and demonstrate vigorous growth.

Honeysuckles usually leaf out before all other deciduous plants, quickly shading out native plant competitors. Shrub nesting birds such as robins and wood thrushes take advantage of the early leaf-out to nest in honeysuckles, and become easy targets for predators like raccoons because, unlike many other shrubs, honeysuckles lack thorns to deter the animals.

In areas where honeysuckles dominate, they provide winter food for birds however, the fruit has a low fat content and bitter taste. These shrubs reproduce almost exclusively by seeds, which are readily dispersed by birds, and short-term seed viability is high. There are no significant diseases or pests. There are no known biological controls of *Lonicera spp.*

Mechanical controls include grubbing or pulling seedlings for small populations, or repeated cutting for mature shrubs. Honeysuckles easily resprout from roots, therefore a combination of cutting each year before the plants produce seed, and subsequent removal of root systems, is recommended. Winter cutting should be avoided as it encourages vigorous spring regrowth. Prescribed burning annually for several years will inhibit new shoot growth, but should also be accompanied by removing roots.

In large stands herbicide applications may be necessary to control exotic honeysuckles. Glyphosate or triclopyr can be used as foliar sprays or cut stump sprays, and should be applied late in the growing season.

For more information on Shrub honeysuckles or other invasive plants consult: www.ipcnys.org, plants.usda.gov, or www.tncweeds.ucdavis.edu ♦

District Board of Directors Spotlight: Jeanne Z. Chase

Our newest District Board member is Jeanne Z. Chase, who has served as the Erie County Legislator in the 12th District since 1997. Legislator Chase chairs the Legislature's Public Safety Committee, serves on the Energy and Environment Committee and Human Services Committee and is Vice Chair of the Government Affairs Committtee.

Jeanne is a dedicated representative whose top priority is to improve the quality of life for all residents in her district by supporting lower property taxes, crime victims' rights and increasing the safety of area roadways and bridges.

In addition, Legislator Chase serves on the Board of Directors for Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Community Action Organization, and the Evans-Brant Chamber of Commerce.

Jeanne received her Bachelor of Science degree in Communication at SUNY Fredonia, and is a life-long resident of Evans, where she resides with her husband Rob and daughter Chelsea. ♦

Coming Events

March 28	DEADLINE for ordering Trees and Shrubs
March 29	Spring Organic Landscape Expo, Delaware Parkside Lodge, 8AM to 4PM, call 741-3372 to pre-register
April 10	Envirothon Workshop, Erie County Forest, Sardinia, call Megan at 652-8480 to register
April 19	Scajaquada Creek and Delaware Park cleanup, 9AM to Noon, meet at American Legion, 533 Amherst St., call 851-4370 for more info.
April 26	Conservation Tree and Shrub Seedling Program pickup, Erie County Fairgrounds, Hamburg
May 1	Erie County Envirothon, Erie County Forest, Sardinia, call 652-8480 for more info.

District Products and Services

Backyard Conservation Kits	$14.00
USGS Topographic Maps	$5.00
Erie County Base Map	$5.00
Bluebird Nest Boxes	$11.00
Bat Houses	$12.00
Wood Duck Nest Boxes	$23.00
Marking Flags or Fertilizer Tablets	10¢ ea.
Tree Shelters – 5 foot	$4.45
Tree Shelters – 3 foot	$3.25
Finder Pocket Field Guides	$4.00
Peterson's Flash Guides	$6.00
Bird Watcher's Digests	$3.00
Fish Management in NY Ponds (CCE #116)	$5.00

Please add 8% sales tax to above items

Technical Assistance: Erosion control, farm drainage, water quality, conservation planning, streambank restoration (please call our office for more information)

On-Site Evaluation and Pond Layout	$600.00
Soil Group Worksheets (per parcel)	$15.00

Use Barley Straw to Control Pond Algae

Exerpted from a fact sheet by Bryan Swistock, Extension Associate, School of Forest Resources at Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences

The Problem

Excessive algae growth is one of the most common problems occurring in ponds in Pennsylvania [and New York]. Traditional mechanical and chemical control methods are not always efficient, economical [or safe]. In recent years, the use of barley straw has become more common as an alternative method for controlling excessive algae growth. This method has been studied extensively by Dr. Newman at the Centre for Aquatic Plant Management in Great Britain. This fact sheet summarizes the use of barley straw based upon Dr. Newman's work and our experiences in Pennsylvania. When applied at the proper time and rate, barley straw has been a very successful algae control technique in Pennsylvania ponds.

How does it work?

Barley straw does NOT kill existing algae but it inhibits the new growth of algae. The exact mechanism is poorly understood but it seems that barley straw, when exposed to sunlight and in the presence of oxygen, produces a chemical that inhibits algae growth. Barley straw does NOT reduce the growth of other aquatic plants. In fact, in some cases aquatic plant growth has increased after barley straw applications because algae are no longer present to compete with the aquatic plants.

When should it be applied?

Barley straw is most effective when applied early in the year prior to the appearance of algae (fall through early spring). When applied to cold water less than 50 F it may take six to eight weeks for the straw to begin producing the active chemicals that inhibit algae growth. If the straw is applied to warmer water above 70 F, it may become effective in as little as one to two weeks. In any case, barley straw remains effective for approximately six months after application.

How much straw should be used?

The most common application is about two to three bales per surface acre of pond (or about 10 to 25 grams of straw per square meter of pond area). The depth of the water in the pond is not important. In ponds that are frequently muddy or those that have a history of heavy algae growth, two or three times this recommended dose may be required for the initial treatment. However, overdosing the pond with barley straw may cause fish kills because the straw deoxygenates the water as it decays. This is especially a problem if the pond is overdosed with straw during a prolonged warm spell.

How should the straw be applied?

The straw is most effective when applied loosely in cages or netting. It is best to anchor the straw packages to the bottom but provide a float to keep the straw near the surface of the pond where sunlight and oxygen are more prevalent. It is best to apply the straw at several locations around the pond and especially near the water source if a spring or stream feeds the pond.

A number of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in New York State have observed the results from barley straw application to rural ponds in their counties. To date, the general consensus of these districts is that proper application of barley straw significantly reduces the amount of planktonic algae growth. In cases where filamentous algae has been a problem, there has also been a noticeable reduction in algae growth but not as significant as planktonic algae reduction. Please contact the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District for more information. ♦

District Receives Grant for Scajaquada Creek Watershed Planning

The District has received a Watershed Assistance Grant from River Network, a national organization supporting the protection and restoration of rivers and their watersheds. Through an extremely competitive process, River Network and a committee of national advisors recently selected the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District as one of only 15 applicants to receive a Watershed Assistance Grant (WAG) in 2002. These grants enable organizations to build local watershed partnerships and advance local watershed restoration efforts.

The District has prepared the Scajaquada Creek Watershed Management Plan, a community-based effort that contains watershed management goals designed to protect natural resources and restore degraded conditions in the Scajaquada Creek Watershed. The District is working with municipal planners to develop and prioritize implementation strategies and present new technologies in natural resources protection and stormwater management. The District will also be holding workshops to present watershed protection practices to homeowners.

"We invite and encourage local government representatives to join us in the exploration and implementation of watershed protection strategies for Scajaquada Creek," stated Ellen Hahn Ilardo, Water Quality Technician for the District and chair of the Scajaquada Creek Watershed Advisory Council. David Kubek, Watershed Planning Specialist for the project added, "These cooperative efforts will bring about restoration of natural resources that will improve the quality of life for area residents far into the future."

River Network is a national, non-profit river conservation organization based in Portland, Oregon, dedicated to helping people understand, protect and restore rivers and their watersheds. River Network supports people working for river and watershed protection at the local, state, and regional levels, helping them build effective organizations and secure the resources and assistance they need. River Network administers the WAG program, funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

For more information contact: Ellen Hahn Ilardo at (716) 652-8480, ehahn@ecswcd.org; or Katherine Luscher (River Network), 503-241-3506 ext. 16, www.rivernetwork.org ♦

ATTENTION: Tree and Shrub Program Customers!

If you purchased seedlings in 2002 this will be your **last issue** of *Conservation Connections!*

To reduce costs and waste we are updating our mailing list. To continue receiving a free copy of the newsletter, ***call, email or write:***

Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District
50 Commerce Way, East Aurora, NY 14052
Phone: 652-8480 Fax: 652-8506
Email: ellen-hahn@ny.nacdnet.org

New Federal Stormwater Regulations

What is Stormwater Runoff?

Stormwater runoff is water from rain or melting snow that doesn't soak into the ground, but instead, runs off into waterways. It flows from rooftops, over paved areas and bare soil, and through sloped lawns while picking up a variety of pollutants on its way. As it flows, stormwater runoff collects and transports soil, animal waste, road salt, pesticides, fertilizers, oil and grease, debris and other potential pollutants.

What's the Problem?

Polluted stormwater runoff degrades our wetlands, lakes, rivers and other waterways. Transported soil clouds the waterway and interferes with the habitat of fish and plant life. Nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrogen can promote the overgrowth of algae, deplete oxygen in the waterway and be harmful to aquatic life. Toxic chemicals from automobiles, sediment from construction activities and careless application of pesticides and fertilizers threaten the health of the receiving waterway and may kill fish and other aquatic life. Bacteria from animal wastes, illicit connections to sewer systems, and faulty septic systems can make nearby lakes and bays unsafe for swimming, boating and other recreational activities.

What's being done?

Significant improvements have been achieved in controlling pollutants that are discharged from sewage and wastewater treatment plants. Across the nation, attention is being shifted to other sources of pollution such as stormwater runoff. Stormwater management, especially in urban areas, is now a necessary step in seeking further reductions of pollution in our waterways.

Pollutants in runoff enter our waterways in numerous ways and the best method of control is usually at the pollutant's source. Proper storage of chemicals, good housekeeping, and just paying attention to day-to-day activities in order to reduce the pollutant sources will help. For example, grass clippings and leaves should be composted or mulched and not swept into storm inlets.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and NYS Department of Environmental Conservation are increasing their attention in several ways. The new federal regulation commonly known as Stormwater Phase II requires permits for stormwater discharges from Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) in urbanized areas and for construction activites disturbing one acre or more. Regulated MS4s must develop, implement and enforce a stormwater management program designed to reduce the discharge of pollutants from their system to the "maximum extent practicable" and include six minimum control measures in their stormwater program.

The District has been preparing for the new regulation through the Regional Stormwater Phase II Coalition. The Coalition is preparing a "toolkit" of information to assist regulated MS4s in complying with the requirements. For more information contact Mary Rossi, Erie County Department of Environment and Planning, at 858-7583 or visit http://cfpub1.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater/swphase2.cfm ♦

Portions of this article were provided by Monroe County SWCD

County Plan of Approved Conservation Practices

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), State Conservationist , Joe DelVecchio, has released the 2002 "County Plan of Approved Soil and Water Conservation Practices for Section 175(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code." This generic plan is provided to allow farmers to deduct soil and water conservation expenditures which may not be included in a site specific conservation plan developed by or approved by the Natural Resources Conservation Service or a comparable state conservation agency.

The generic county plan approved by the State Conservationist consists of a list of commonly used soil and water conservation practices which meet a conservation need and are generally applied by farmers or conservation contractors with or without NRCS and/or Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) services. Non-depreciable soil and water conservation practices measures include: treatment or moving of earth; construction, control and protection of diversion channels, drainage ditches on non-wetlands, irrigation ditches, earthen dams, water courses, outlets, and ponds; windbreaks; fencing; cover and green manure crops; mulching; prescribed grazing; brush control and many other measures. Certain soil and water conservation expenses are not deductible even if included in a conservation plan. These include: expenses paid to drain or fill wetlands defined by the Food Security Act of 1985; expenses paid to prepare land for center pivot irrigation systems; and expenses paid to clear land.

Taxpayers are responsible for seeking appropriate professional guidance relative to the Tax Code as well as for certifying on IRS form 8645 that their section 175 expenses are based on the county plan or their farm-specific conservation plan. Copies of IRS form 8645 and the County Plan of Approved Soil and Water Conservation Practices are available at local USDA NRCS offices. ♦

All NRCS programs and services are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, or handicap. An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer.

Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District Staff and Directors

District Staff:
Cally Miklasz, Executive Secretary/Treasurer
Mark Gaston, District Field Manager
Brian Andrzejewski, Sr. Civil Engineer
Don Stribick, District Technician
Ellen Ilardo, Water Quality Technician
Chris Enser, District Technician
James Sroka, Water Quality Technician
Megan Gollwitzer, Program Assistant
Philip Mogavero, GIS Analyst
Vacant, Account Clerk Typist

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service:
John Whitney, District Conservationist
Michael Shinnick, Area I Ag. Engineer
Sarah E. Kron, Soil Conservationist

Directors:
Francis Gernatt - Chairman, At Large
Charles M. Swanick - County Legislator
Jeanne Z. Chase - County Legislator
Calvin Kohn - Grange
David Phillips - Farm Bureau
Darlene Vogel - At Large
Rosemary Bapst - At Large

District Board meetings are held at 9:00 AM on the second Wednesday of each month.

Office Hours:
7:30 AM - 5:00 PM Monday through Friday

Erie County Urges You to Recycle More... Compost Your Leaf, Yard and Food Waste!

The Earth Machine™ Compost Bin

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Pick Up at:
Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District
Conservation Tree and Shrub Seedling Distribution
Saturday, April 26 8 AM to 1 PM
Erie County Fairgrounds, Hamburg
For more information, call Mary Rossi at 858-7583

Return This Coupon Before: Friday, April 11, 2003

HERE'S HOW TO AVOID THE LINE... PRE-ORDER YOUR COMPOST BIN

1. Clip this Order Form below and mail in your check or money order to Norseman Plastics.

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April 26th **Erie County Fairgrounds**
Hamburg, NY

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City:_____ State:_____ ZIP Code:_____

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Mail to: **NORSEMAN PLASTICS, 39 Westmore Drive, Rexdale, Ontario M9V 3Y6 Attn: Bonnie**

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