



2020 Annual Report

West Virginia
Conservation Agency



West Virginia

Conservation Agency

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On the Cover: An aerial shot of Upper Deckers No. 1 dam in Preston County from the summer of 2020.

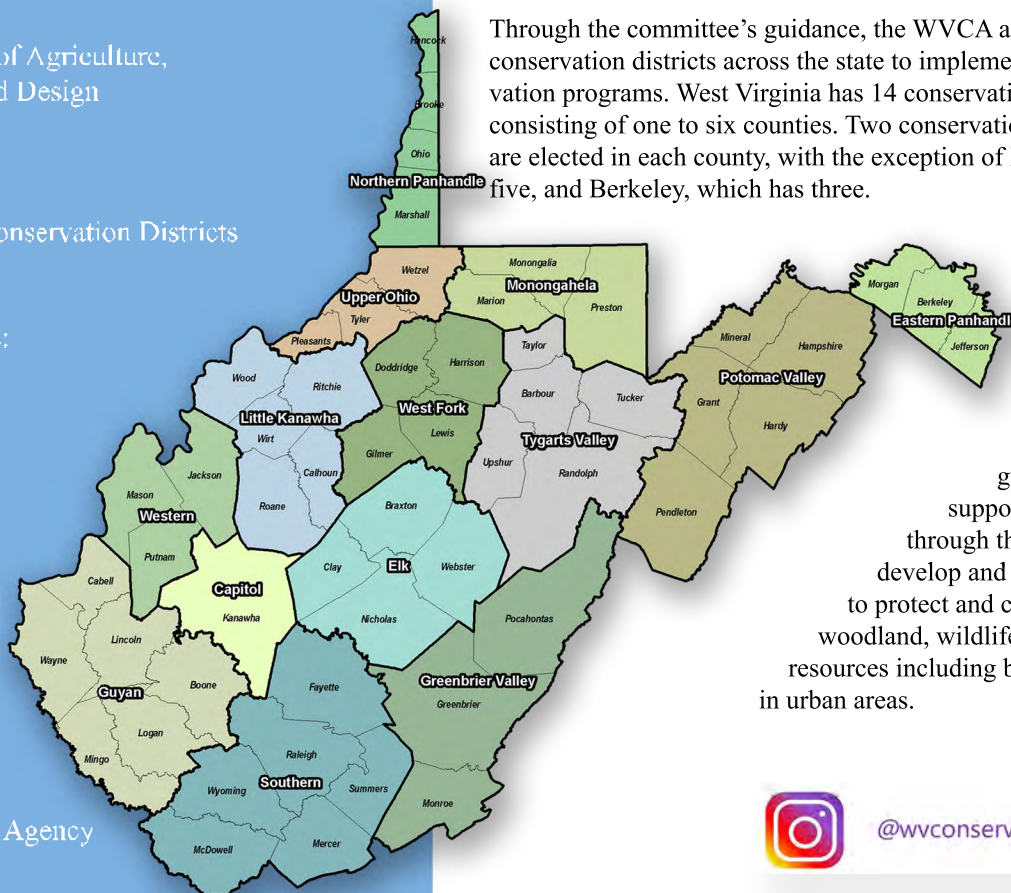


Introduction

The mission of the West Virginia Conservation Agency (WVCA) is to provide for and promote the conservation of West Virginia's soil, land, water and related resources for the health, safety and general welfare of the state's citizens. The State Conservation Committee (SCC) serves as the governing body of the WVCA.

Through the committee's guidance, the WVCA assists and works with conservation districts across the state to implement a variety of conservation programs. West Virginia has 14 conservation districts, each consisting of one to six counties. Two conservation district supervisors are elected in each county, with the exception of Kanawha, which has five, and Berkeley, which has three.

These local boards operate under the guidance and with the support of the SCC, through the WVCA, and develop and implement programs to protect and conserve soil, water, woodland, wildlife and other renewable resources including backyard conservation in urban areas.



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Watershed Maintenance

Key Figures (FY 2020)

\$1,014,596

Cost of maintenance and repairs to dams

1,060

Watershed dam inspections yearly

170

Dams considered “high hazard”

102

Dams are 50 years of age or older

\$90 million*

In flood protection provided to West Virginia each year

*(2019 price base)



*** There are 170 small watershed flood-control dams and 22 flood-control channels in WV.**

*** “High hazard” means failure of the dam could result in loss of human life and/or property.**

*** Nearly 60 percent of West Virginians (1.06 million) are benefitted by the flood-control dams and channels.**

Major rehabilitation of Upper Deckers

No. 1 dam completed in 2020



Top: The major rehabilitation of Upper Deckers No. 1 dam in Preston County as it neared completion in February 2020. Right and bottom right: The dam's plunge pool and outlet channel early in 2020.

The major rehabilitation of Upper Deckers No. 1 dam in Preston County was completed in May of 2020 and will provide a generation of residents downstream with flood-control protection and a dedicated supply of drinking water for customers of a local public service district.

The \$8.5 million rehabilitation of the previously earthen dam included the construction of a 420-foot-long roller-compacted concrete spillway and a new riser structure – substantially taller than the previous riser – that is nearly 29 feet tall.

The pool of water behind the dam was raised by 10 feet, which created a dedicated water supply to customers of Preston Public Service District 1 in the Arthurdale area.

The major construction project was required to bring the structure up to modern engineering standards and to correct some deficiencies.

This work will ensure the dam continues to serve its intended function for at least 50 years.

Upper Deckers No. 1 is one of 170 high-hazard, small watershed flood-control dams in West Virginia. The federal regulatory classification does not refer to the dam's structural integrity, nor does it mean the dam is in imminent danger of failure.

The classification simply means that human life and property could be lost if the dam were to fail. Major partners on the project included the Monongahela Conservation District, which approved major project decisions, with funding and technical expertise from the WVCA and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The Preston Public Service District 1 also provided project funding.

The agency also partnered with the Preston County Commission and with West Virginia University, which owns the dam site at the JW Ruby Research Farm.

“The project is an example of what can happen when local, state and national interests come together,” said Brian Farkas, executive director of the West Virginia Conservation Agency. “The dam was not in compliance

Operation & Maintenance Spotlight

Regular operation and maintenance (O&M) work on the states' 170 small watershed dams is essential to making sure the dams function properly. This spotlight features some of the work done in 2020 on three of the Patterson Creek dams in Grant and Mineral counties.



The above 'before' (left) and 'after' photos show the work done on Patterson Creek No. 48 to address a blockage of the trash rack, which left the pool artificially elevated for two years. Woody debris and vegetation also were removed, and erosion issues were corrected.



Some of the O&M work done on Patterson Creek No. 49 included the removal of sediment and vegetation from the outlet channel (shown above) to return the channel to as-built dimensions and restore proper water flow.



A 48-inch culvert was replaced on the access road to Patterson Creek No. 2.

Agricultural Enhancement

Key Figures (FY 2020)

The Agricultural Enhancement Program supports West Virginia's farm community with cost-share practices to reduce soil erosion, provide alternative water for livestock and improve the productivity of farmlands in the state's 14 conservation districts.

The program is administered by the conservation districts with assistance from the West Virginia Conservation Agency. Supported practices are determined at the local level. Financial and technical assistance are offered to implement best management practices.



113,111
feet of pasture
division fence

39,048
feet of exclusion fence

9,782
acres of lime spread

1,128
acres of nutrient
management

2,379
acres of frost seeding

762
acres of invasive
species management

Sleepy Creek restoration in Morgan County saves farmland and prevents erosion, pollutants in stream

A streambank restoration project on farmland along Sleepy Creek, near Berkeley Springs in Morgan County, was completed in October of 2020 and will prevent future erosion and loss of trees, as well as tons of sediment and pollutants from washing downstream.

“The landowners were experiencing a lot of erosion along their streambank, and losing land every year, so they wanted to find a solution for that,” said Kristen Bisom, a conservation specialist with the West Virginia Conservation Agency.

The Sleepy Creek Watershed Association teamed up with the landowners, Terry and Danise Edmisten, and realized that a stream restoration would be necessary to fix the problem.

“The goal of the project is to stabilize the streambank to prevent further erosion,” Bisom said. “There was over 600 feet of streambank that was experiencing a lot of erosion each year. By some estimates about 80 tons of sediment were being washed away into the stream each year.

“Along with that, there was nitrogen and phosphorous, which are two pollutants that we’re concerned with that were also getting washed away with the sediment,” she said.

Stabilizing the streambank prevents further loss of sediment and to prevent it and the pollutants from washing downstream. Sleepy Creek is a part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Rock revetments, vegetated soil lifts built atop the revetments and four j-hooks in the streambed were the significant structural pieces to the restoration project.

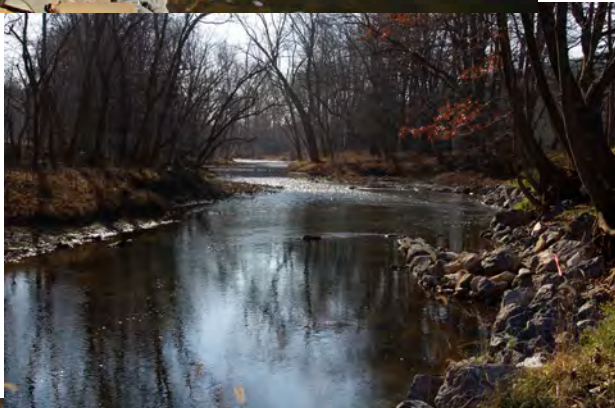
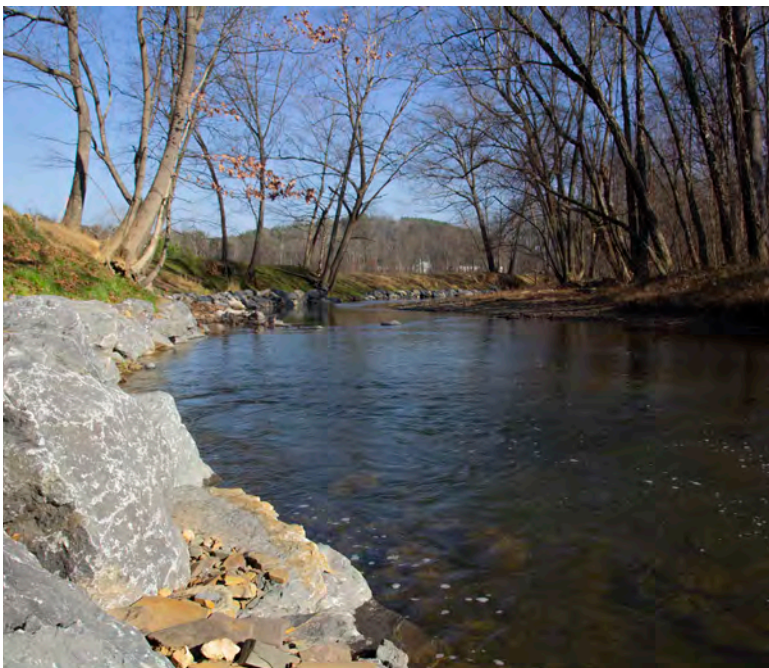
“The j-hooks are meant to divert water away from the streambank, which just means they’re going to keep that water from pounding up against the bank and washing away the sediment,” Bisom said. “They keep the water more in the middle of the stream where it’s meant to go.

“The rock revetments and the soil lifts on top are meant to stabilize the bank,” she said.

“The soil lifts are vegetated because one of the best things to keep soil in place are root systems, so we’ve got grass, shrubs and small trees in there, and as those grow, they’ll help keep those soil lifts in place. And the rock revetments at the bottom will help keep some of the stronger

currents from washing those away from underneath.”

Ninety trees were planted along the streambank to create a future riparian buffer. Volunteers with the Sleepy Creek Watershed Association and volunteers local to the area helped plant the trees in October, and then the project was completed. The planted trees will help stabilize the top of the bank.



See **SLEEPY CREEK** on Page 12

Restorative project benefits White Sulphur Springs

A walking trail, bridge and stream restoration in White Sulphur Springs that corrected significant damages caused by the flood of 2016 was substantially completed in 2020. The project was a partnership between federal and state agencies, including the West Virginia Conservation Agency.

The WVCA entered into a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which funded the project. The Agency took the lead on overseeing construction and coming up with a design for the stream restoration. The property is part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Fish Hatchery along Wades Creek.

Mike McMunigal, the Conservation Services Manager South for the WVCA, said damage from the 2016 flood took out tons of soil, damaged the walking trail and took out the old bridge crossing Wades Creek.

Through two phases of work, the project cost a combined \$293,136, McMunigal said.

The first phase was the stream restoration, while the second phase included the design and construction of the bridge, the walking trail and an educational component, including signs that will be put up soon.

About 2,000 feet of the walking trail was installed and paved on the site, he said.

Then-conservation specialist John Nelson, who is now a watershed technician with the WVCA, took a lead role on the project and the stream restoration.

To make the stream restoration a success, Nelson said a variety of structures were put in a 1,500-foot stretch of Wades Creek to help the channel flow properly, protect the streambank and prevent erosion.

WVCA and staffers with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service worked together on designing the stream restoration for Wades Creek, Nelson said.

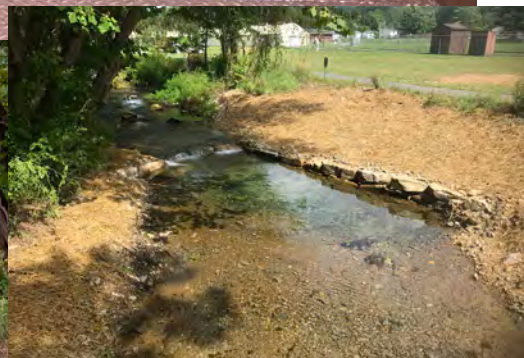
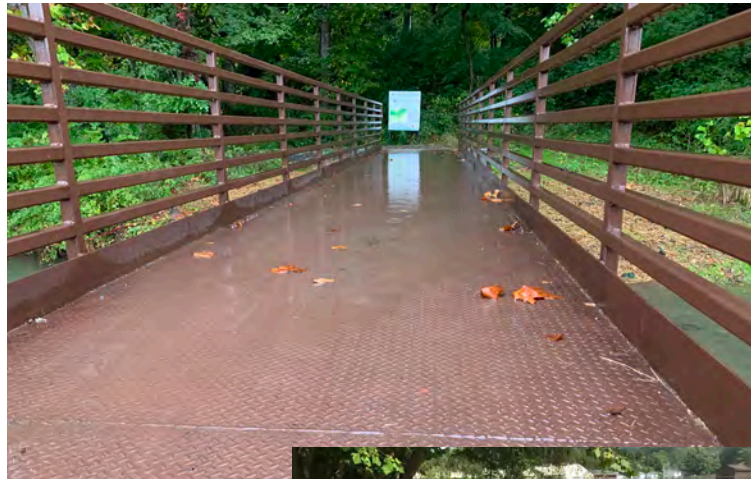
The structures included two single boulder vanes, two boulder j-hooks, one log vane j-hook, two log roller struc-

tures, and different areas along the creek with toe wood or a variation of toe wood, which help to protect banks and provide habitat for fish.

Boulder clusters also were placed in three or four spots to create small pools and enhance fish habitat.

Nelson said the construction also included excavation of the floodplain bench, which helped get the dimensions of the stream channel back and gave the water a place to go. "I'm pretty happy with what we got done," Nelson said. "It turned out well."

McMunigal added that signs that will educate the public about the restorative work on the site have been purchased but have not been



installed yet.

"It's projects like this one that make me want to get out of bed and come to work every day. Normally our projects are only seen by one individual landowner, but the Wades Creek project gave us a unique opportunity to address soil erosion and water quality issues by restoring a facility destroyed by the 2016 flood that is used by the entire community," said WVCA Conservation Specialist Dennis Burns, who was also involved in the project. "It also gave us the opportunity to educate the public every day as they walk along the trail and read the signs. Before this project was even completed, random people in the community walking their dogs or just out for a little exercise would stop by where we were working just to say thank you and ask about the function of the stream restoration structures. It's these kind of projects that help the general public understand the importance of what we do."



PHOTOS: Top and bottom left: The new walking bridge across Wades Creek. Bottom right: The stream restoration in progress.

Chesapeake Bay Program

Encouraging the use of voluntary best management practices to promote cleaner water in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in West Virginia.

	Federal	State*	Total
Eastern Panhandle	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$500,000
Potomac Valley	\$208,803	\$208,803	\$417,606
Back Creek Easements	\$54,100	\$101,418.60	\$155,518.60
Boydville, The Inn at Martinsburg Permeable Project	\$15,000	\$20,000	\$35,000
Sleepy Creek Stream Restoration	\$398,500	\$45,059.53	\$443,559.53



**State match includes in-kind contributions as well as salaries and other state expenses. The Sleepy Creek Stream Restoration was awarded during the state's FY19. The majority of the funding, however, was spent during state FY20. Also, this award did not require a 1:1 match because of WVDEP's banked match from wastewater treatment upgrades.*



Nonpoint Source Program Key Figures

Nonpoint Source Definition: Pollution that results from land runoff due to rain or snowmelt, and may include pollutants like fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides from agricultural lands and residential areas.

Project	Conservation District	Federal Grant	State Match	Total
Sleepy Creek	Eastern Panhandle	\$92,130	\$36,852	\$128,982
Anthony Creek	Greenbrier Valley	\$150,000	\$60,000	\$210,000
Pipestem Creek	Southern	\$117,663	\$47,065.20	\$164,728.20
Cherry Fork	Western	\$151,500	\$60,600	\$212,100
Nonpoint Source Program Base Grant	none - agencywide	\$68,000	\$27,200	\$95,200

Soil Tunnel Trailer

The Soil Tunnel Trailer is a centerpiece of the West Virginia Conservation Agency's outreach and education efforts. The soil trailer is an accessible mobile learning laboratory for children to learn about the many benefits of healthy soil.

Each year, the soil trailer visits schools and events across the state. In 2020, however, and because of the hands-on nature of the mobile lab, COVID-19 grounded the trailer for nearly the entire year.

In this downtime, Agency staff has focused on designing and constructing the second West Virginia Soil Tunnel Trailer, for which

we had received USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant funding in Fiscal Year 2019.

The second, and larger, Soil Tunnel Trailer is expected to be completed in 2022. It will allow the WVCA to better meet demand, reaching even more students across the state with this second mobile learning laboratory.



Outreach and Education

More than **40,100** people were exposed to the West Virginia Conservation Agency's outreach efforts in measurable ways over a year's time.

The outreach included direct mailings of seeds and information about agricultural best management practices, posts on Facebook, emailed brochures, flyers and messages, exposure at large events and participation at agricultural field days (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions). Educational videos, virtual teleconferences and sharing information about poster contests are other ways we sought to reach out.

Creativity was necessary in 2020, but the interest out there was clear. WVCA Outreach Specialist Aimee Figgatt noted that a surging, high number of West Virginians wanted to learn how to grow their own food in gardens in 2020.

Distribution of informational flyers like the one below became a good way to reach people during the pandemic, when face-to-face contact was much more restricted.

Also, while the 2020 West Virginia Envirothon event had to be cancelled, the WV Envirothon Committee has worked steadily over the past year to plan for the first virtual West Virginia Envirothon, which has been planned for April 2021.

The Envirothon is an annual competition for high school students. It tests the students -- who vying for college scholarships -- on aquatics, forestry, soils, wildlife and a current environmental topic.



REDUCE YOUR FOOTPRINT

PLANT A SEED, SAVE YOUR SOIL

CONSERVE WATER

TIPS TO REDUCE WATER USE IN YOUR HOME GARDEN



Install drip irrigation with timers. Always water the soil, not the plant! Harvest water with rain barrels and use safe practices. Add mulch as a weed block and moisture barrier. Plan your garden in blocks based on water needs of plants.

BOOST YOUR NUTRIENTS

COMPOSTING IS GOOD FOR YOU, AND THE ENVIRONMENT!

Composting food waste and other organics helps to reduce greenhouse gases while boosting the nutrients in your soils. Compost reduces and in some cases eliminates the need for chemical fertilizers and helps with water retention in soil.



BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

AVOID IMPROPER USE OF CHEMICALS



When using fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, always read and follow instructions properly for application. Failure to do so can harm the soil and decrease garden yields. Avoid applying near streams, wells, ponds, or just before rain is expected.

CONTROL SOIL EROSION

LESS DISTURBANCE, MORE BENEFITS

Raised bed gardening is a great way to control water and nutrient management, and prevent topsoil erosion. When gardening directly in the soil, always use a weed-block such as newspapers covered with straw -or ground cover planting- to protect your soils.



YOU CAN PREVENT POLLUTION FROM REACHING OUR RIVERS AND STREAMS BY MAKING SURE THAT THE RUNOFF FROM YOUR HOME AND GARDEN STAYS CLEAN.



FUNDING PROVIDED BY SECTION 319 NONPOINT SOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM.

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Across divisions and out in the field, WVCA responded to the COVID-19 pandemic

A devastating derecho windstorm in June 2012 helped prepare the West Virginia Conservation Agency for the challenges it faced in 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic changed work and daily life across the state, nation and world.

The storm, which at its peak knocked power out for more than 670,000 customers in West Virginia, led to a change in how the Information Technology division conducts its business.

“It usually takes something to happen for change to happen,” said John “JB” Brown, Director of Information Technology for the WVCA.

After the derecho, there was no power at the Guthrie headquarters for about a week, “and nobody could really do much,” said Chris Ellison, Information Systems Specialist with IT.

“We managed to get the email running but that was it, that’s all we had.”

“We had to physically pick up a [computer] server, pull it out of a rack to drive it across town to install it somewhere that was still working,” said Jay Crump, Information Systems Specialist with IT.

That taught a valuable lesson, he said. Brown said the lessons learned in 2012 helped IT operate largely “business as usual” when the pandemic changed the way Agency staff did their work back in March.

“When I say business as usual, Chris and Jay, they’ve been, for the past eight years, they’ve been used to the remote problems and remotings into people,” Brown

said. “And so, just with us not being able to go into Guthrie, IT’s been operating business as usual as far as remote [work].”

“So when the derecho hit, we’ve been preparing for an event like this ever since ... where people can work from home,” Brown said. “... This has been years

planning to get to where we were at when COVID hit. We can actually thank the derecho for putting a spark in it.”

Ellison said IT decided then to go with laptops across the agency.

“Because they’re not really all that much more expensive and we wanted people to be able to work

on the move,” he said.

After the derecho, IT got together and figured out where they wanted to be in case another event happened.

The key action that IT needed to take in March 2020 was to make sure Agency staff without a WVCA-issued cellphone had one, particularly the district’s administrative specialists, so that operations across the state’s 14

conservation districts could continue remotely.

Brown estimates there have been about 800 Skype meetings since COVID hit in March, and using Adobe Sign has allowed staff to sign documents remotely.

See **COVID-19 RESPONSE** on Page 11



TOP PHOTO: Conservation Specialist Kristen Bisom wears a mask while discussing restoration work on Sleepy Creek.

BOTTOM PHOTO: While in the field with a co-worker, Watershed Technician Will Simmons wears a mask.

COVID-19 RESPONSE from Page 10

Brown said WVCA Executive Director Brian Farkas has been willing to do what's necessary to adapt through technology -- and prepare for obstacles such as COVID before they present themselves.

"I have always believed that it is the function of government to provide services in times of crisis and need. To do that you must think of the unthinkable and then take steps to incorporate resiliency in future actions," Farkas said. "How we responded to a windstorm in 2012 set the stage for how the WVCA responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through investment in technology, and looking at new ways of delivering services, WVCA staff was able to keep the agency open and continue supporting the state's 14 conservation districts."

Jennifer Skaggs, the WVCA's Director of Conservation Services, said the division has ensured that contact information is clearly posted at office locations and calls are forwarded to cellphones so that communication with cooperators may continue.

Conservation Services has also increased use of social media to communicate with the public, she said.

Further, drop boxes have been installed at all district offices and the Moorefield WVCA field office, allowing paperwork to be submitted without having face-to-face contact.

Technology has allowed day-to-day business to continue successfully, Skaggs said.

"FaceTime has been used for verifications when necessary," she said, referring to an end process where conservation specialists speak with a cooperator to make sure a best management practice has been implemented.

"Skype has been essential for board meetings as well as meetings for staff within our division," she added.

Gene Saurborn, Director of Watershed Projects, noted that early in the pandemic, Gov. Jim Justice declared that flood control is essential work.

Regular dam inspections have continued, unabated, during the pandemic to help WVCA continue to pro-

tect people and property across the state. Watershed technicians and staff can easily maintain social distancing and other safety protocols during dam inspections.

WVCA watershed technicians, engineers and managers who meet with colleagues or contractors on dam sites during operations and maintenance work or during drilling and construction projects maintain proper social distancing and wear masks.

Saurborn added that in 2020, the Watershed division has continued, through planning and drilling work, to prepare for 2021 construction projects. That work has not been delayed, he said.

The division also has been able to finish up some bank stabilization work, which is part of the Emergency Watershed Protection program, in Randolph County, which was necessary after flooding in 2019, Saurborn said.

Chris Casto, director of administration with WVCA, said that Fiscal Operations has continued their operations with minimal visits to the office for paperwork and mail. Procurement has picked up at times with additional purchasing and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff.

"We have also tried to streamline processes with the use of Adobe Sign and direct mailing to employee offices or homes," he said. "Human Resources has moved to video/telephone interviews for potential job candidates. Orientation is being conducted remotely by recorded video and Skype meetings.

"We are currently moving to a new background check and drug screening process that will allow the job candidate to provide information online and schedule their drug screening time and location while cutting our wait time on background checks to potentially under a week," Casto said.

He said with the implementation of the Sage accounting and business management software, along with IT changes with SharePoint (an inter-office file-sharing Internet program) and iPhones, the District Fiscal Operations staff has operated from home without any major changes, other than going paperless.



The photos to the left and right show some of the work done by the West Virginia Conservation Agency in responding to flooding in the Alderson area of Greenbrier and Monroe counties in 2020.



UPPER DECKERS from Page 2

with modern dam safety standards, and the citizens in a portion of Preston County needed a reliable source of water. This project was able to provide flood protection for another generation as well as create a source of water to meet current needs and allow for growth.”

Art Mouser, a supervisor with the Monongahela Conservation District who has been involved with the project for years, said it’s been discussed ever since he was first elected as a supervisor two decades ago. He believes the new dedicated water supply has been a big improvement for local residents.



“The positive thing about Upper Deckers is it certainly improved the water supply of PSD 1,” Mouser said, adding that the major rehabilitation also “definite-

ly was an improvement to the structure and will give it a lot more longevity.”

“It was a collaborative effort among multiple stakeholders – Monongahela Conservation District, WVCA, NRCS, WVU and Preston Public Service District 1 -- to help the communities of Arthurdale and residents downstream,” said Gene Saurborn, WVCA’s Director of Watershed

Projects. “It improved the dam’s engineering while adding much-needed water supply for the Arthurdale community.”

SLEEPY CREEK from Page 5

The result of the work is a bucolic, eye-pleasing stream and streambank with newly planted trees and crystal-clear water flowing through the channel.

“It doesn’t compare to the ‘before’ picture,” said Chuck Marsh, president of the Sleepy Creek Watershed Association.

Marsh noted that the streambank stabilization was a long-term project – six years in the making.

To help cover the cost of the streambank stabilization design, the project received a \$47,000 Chesapeake Bay Technical Capacity Grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation back in 2016.

Marsh said that the project was a team effort along with the West Virginia Conservation Agency, the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection, the Eastern Panhandle Conservation District, and the Chesapeake Bay Program. It also benefitted from a “super contractor” who was very conscientious “in what he did and how he did it,” Marsh said.

That contractor was Secatello Contracting, LLC, out of Kearneysville.

“We couldn’t have been more pleased with them,” he said.

Greenway Engineering, LLC, also provided construction oversight.

“This was definitely a team effort,” Bisom said. “This project was started six years ago by Sleepy Creek Watershed Association, and they partnered with us, the West Virginia Conservation Agency, to get funding from the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection and the Chesapeake Bay Program to start construction on the project.

“The Eastern Panhandle Conservation District was also key to getting this project done since all of the funding and the work went through the board,” she said.

An added benefit of the project, according to Marsh, is the 22 acres of farmland on the property that the Edmistsens agreed to enroll in the Morgan County Farmland Protection Program. An easement was placed on the land that will restrict it from being used for development in the future. The acreage could be sold, but it must remain farmland.

Marsh said he would like to do similar projects along Sleepy Creek in the future.

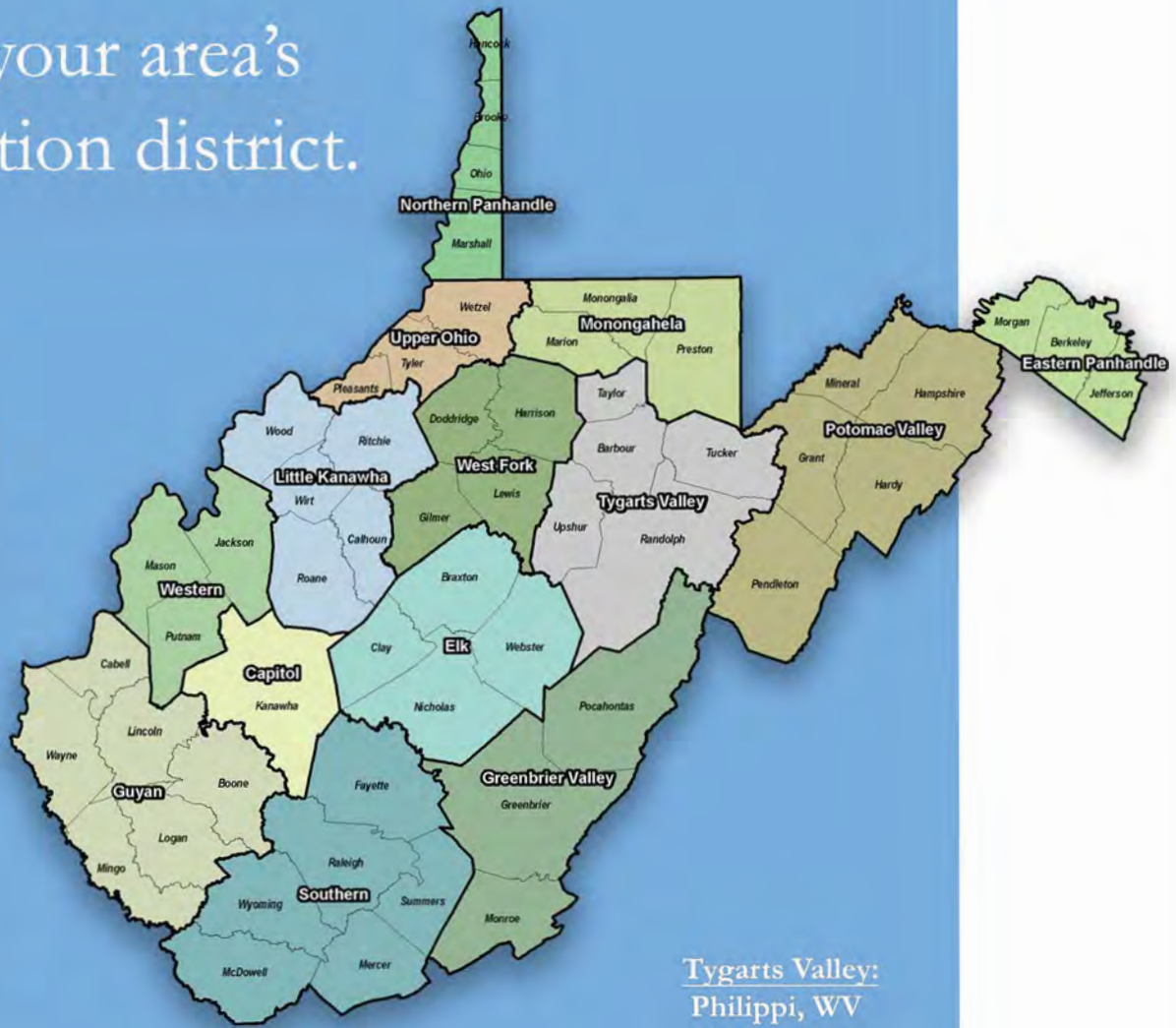
Scenes from Upper Deckers No. 1 dam



Clockwise from Top Left: The groundbreaking at the dam site in August 2017; WVCA Director of Watershed Projects Gene Saurborn (left) and Eric Neast with Gannett Fleming inspect the dam in April 2020; A worker crosses the roller-compacted concrete, which was under construction, in November 2019; the completed dam in October 2020; work being done on the new riser in December of 2019.

Questions?

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