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County and Stakeholder Partners Press Forward on Chesapeake Bay Challenge

The last few months have seen a flood of activity from County staff, Commissioners and community stakeholders as Lycoming County moves into the implementation phase of its Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy (CBTS), a creative and proactive response to state mandates faced by the county's seven wastewater treatment plants. Rather than leaving each plant and its ratepayers to fend for themselves, the County Commissioners and the Planning and Community Development Department worked with expert consultants during 2008 to design a program to meet the county's fair share of the Chesapeake Bay cleanup requirements at a lower cost, while reaping local environmental benefits and keeping dollars flowing through the local economy. That program, which employs the concept of nutrient credit trading, is now underway in 2009.

The first major task was forming the Advisory Committee and three Work Groups that have been designed to facilitate stakeholder input into the County's work, advising the Board of Commissioners and staff on all aspects of this project. The Advisory Committee has met in November and January and will continue to meet bimonthly throughout 2009. It is comprised of 23 members from a cross-section of community interests, including farmers, conservation agencies, legislative representatives, business, local government, DEP, and more. Commissioner Jeff Wheeland chairs the Advisory Committee with assistance from co-chair Robert Yowell of DEP's Northcentral Regional Office. The Advisory Committee provides a top-level review for the entire program and also helps to provide outreach and education about the CBTS throughout the County.

The most active work group to date has been the Point Source Work Group, which includes representatives from the boards, staff, and engineers of all six of the county's municipal wastewater authorities. Chaired by Christine Maggi-Weigle of the Lycoming County Water and Sewer Authority, this group has met monthly since November. The Point Sources are indispensable to the design of a program that will meet real-world needs, since they are the potential purchasers of nutrient credits. Through the Point Source Work Group, shovel-ready infrastructure projects were identified and grant applications were made in February to obtain funding from the Pennsylvania H2O Act.

County staff assisted two municipalities with the preparation of their applications, and Deputy Planning Director Bill Kelly wrote a professional and comprehensive County Introduction for the use of all applicants.

The Non Point Source Work Group represents the generators of nutrient credits – the farmers, watershed organizations, urban stormwater interests and others who will have the opportunity to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) that reduce nutrient pollution, creating credits that can be bought to offset Point Source discharges. This Work Group, chaired by Mark Davidson, head of the Lycoming County Conservation District, includes more than forty members from across the County. It has met in January and February and plans to meet bimonthly. The work group's most pressing charge in 2009 is to work with DEP to begin the process of identifying, verifying, and certifying home-grown nutrient credits within Lycoming County.

The Economic Development and Finance Work Group is the newest of the three, having only met once in January, but its task is just as crucial to success: It will help the County determine the optimum mechanism for nutrient trading within the County. Members represent several County departments, wastewater authorities, local businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, the banking industry, and more. It will also work to ensure that the CBTS program is attractive to future economic development interests, providing a flexible option for compliance. Additional members and a chairperson for this group are currently being sought.

County staff has been hard at work preparing proposals and grant applications for funding to help “prime the pump” of both credit generation and a credit trading bank. After making a pre-proposal, the County was invited to submit a full proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in the amount of \$600,000 from their Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund. If successful, this grant will pay for installation and certification of BMPs such as streambank fencing, floodplain restoration, no-till and cover cropping, and riparian buffers. The Lycoming County Conservation District would be the primary recipient of these funds. Additional requests for funding have been made to PA DEP and DCED to provide for the staff and consultant costs associated with setting up the credit trading program.

Commissioner Jeff Wheeland and Environmental Planner Megan Lehman have begun a “roadshow” across the County, presenting a PowerPoint slideshow to civic organizations and the public about the Chesapeake Bay challenge and the County's innovative response. If you know of a group or organization who would be interested in hosting a presentation, please contact Megan Lehman at mlehman@lyco.org or call her at extension 2115.

Photos from the December 10, 2008 Point Source Work Group Meeting:

Below: Wendy Walter of Williamsport Sanitary Authority talks with David Walters of Larson Design Group.



Below: Representatives from all six municipal authorities in Lycoming County attended the meeting.



Photos from the January 23, 2009 Non Point Source and Economic Development Work Group Meetings:

Below: Commissioner Jeff Wheeland and Ann Smith of DEP participate in the first Non Point Source Work Group meeting.



Below: Commissioner Wheeland speaks to the Economic Development and Finance Work Group.



Below: Bill Kelly, Deputy Director of the Planning Department, speaks at the Economic Development and

Finance Work Group meeting.



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