

May 13, 2010

House Budget & Finance Committee Hearing  
HB 2443 / Severance Tax  
Shawnee Inn

Testimony: Craig Todd, District Manager, Monroe County Conservation District

My name is Craig Todd and I am the District Manager of the Monroe County Conservation District. I have been an employee of the District for 28 years. I would like to thank the Budget & Finance Committee for traveling to Monroe County so that we can discuss the need for a severance tax on natural gas extraction as well as a percentage allocation of the tax to County Conservation Districts.

While the development of the Marcellus shale gas resource presents tremendous economic opportunities to our region, there is a corresponding potential of equal magnitude for short and long term degradation of our high value natural resources. These resources have and must continue to function and maintain our quality of life and our economies.

The rapid emergence of leasing and drilling activity found us ill prepared to deal with its associated regulatory, social and environmental impacts. State regulations enacted in the 1980's are woefully inadequate to deal with more recent technologies that have allowed exploration in the Marcellus shale to occur. We are playing catch up for many of the associated activities including drilling and fracking, water consumption, waste storage and treatment, air quality, ground water contamination and hazardous materials handling, not to mention impacts to our landscapes, roads and communities. Many of the recent problems are a direct result of an inadequate federal, state and local regulatory framework. It will take an enormous commitment of time and money to position ourselves so that we can responsibly benefit in a sustainable way from the development of Marcellus shale. I would be happy to discuss conservation district involvement in this after my testimony.

County conservation districts are an important part of our community's and region's conservation infrastructure. Conservation districts are subdivisions of state government created by the Soil Conservation District Act of 1945. Because the state's 66 conservation districts are governed by local boards and staffed by local professionals, we can craft our programs to address local conservation issues and needs. Monroe County has an abundance of the state's most valuable wetland resources, a part of the county has been designated by The Nature Conservancy as one of the "Last 40 Great Places" on the planet in need of protection, the last free flowing river in the east forms our easterly border, our water resources are special protection, and we have consistently been one of the fastest growing counties in the state.

In response to this, the Monroe County Conservation District's 17 employees include two wetland biologists, an agricultural conservation technician, a watershed specialist, a Pa. licensed professional engineer, three erosion control technicians and five environmental educators. Our programs include Level III state delegated erosion control and NPDES permitting programs, general permitting under Chapter 105, Act 167 stormwater planning, floodplain monitoring through DCED, conservation planning on our agricultural lands, dirt and gravel road program, county wide water quality monitoring program and an environmental education center that sees 25,000 students a year.