

## Listening Session before the Center for Rural Pennsylvania

### Testimony in regard to issues concerning stream cleaning in the wake of recent flooding across Pennsylvania

Good morning, my name is Darla Bortz. I am a Sullivan County Commissioner. I appreciate the opportunity that Senator Yaw has made available to our county to have our voice heard on the issue of the condition of our stream banks in the northeastern region of Pennsylvania. The residents of Sullivan County, as well as many in the northeastern region of our state, have settled in the fertile areas along the banks of our waterways. Many of our small villages lie along the Loyalsock and Muncy Creeks and their many tributaries. These residents have been robbed of acres of valuable land as the streams swell their banks and ravage their property. Not only have they lost valuable cropland, but in many cases, they have lost their livestock, out buildings, homes, and roadways to their property. I have had residents tell me of the amount of acres that have washed away, homes that have been lost where their entire life was swept away in a brief moment. They are frustrated with the fact that there is no help with their continual devastation.

I became a Sullivan County Commissioner in January 2008 and immediately was faced with the questions from several persons as to how they could get help with stream bank stabilization on their property. In 2009 I walked many stream banks with Randy Reibson and Corey Richmond from the local Conservation District Office. We would look at many sites that needed help, but in many instances ours and the home-owners "hands were tied" by rules and regulations from various government organizations. We utilized Growing Greener monies in areas where we could obtain permits until the program monies ran out. Many times the land owners would share the expense, but each instance was just a "band-aid" applied to a "large gaping wound".

Flooding and stream bank stabilization and stream maintenance is a huge problem that cannot be a "band-aid" fix here and there but a task of great proportion to dredging creek beds so water can flow within the banks of the streams. In many areas of our streams the creek beds are higher than the banks due to large deposits of gravel and boulders that have shifted down stream from continual flooding. We need a plan in place to repair our streams, dredge them so there is a stream bed and direct the water flow back into the bed. We then need a plan in place to continue to maintain the streams and the stream banks to avoid such extreme devastation as we have seen in Bradford, Lycoming, Sullivan, and Wyoming Counties.

I have lived along the Muncy Creek my entire life. I remember in the 1950s and 1960s the creek beds were maintained by the Department of Forest and Waters. Every 2-3 three years, depending on the amount of high waters and streams filling with gravel, the Department of Forest and Waters would hire local equipment operators to dredge the areas of Muncy Creek. The streams were cleaned and straightened by getting in the creeks and using bulldozers to push the rocks and gravel up the banks to maintain an

unobstructed waterway. This maintenance of our streams ended when the Department of Forest and Waters ended in 1970 (1923-1970). The Department of Forest and Waters was absorbed by the Department of Environmental Resources.

Within the Department of Forest and Waters and into the department of Environmental Resources there was the Division of Flood Control. This division was responsible for alleviating flood damage, providing flood control facilities, and providing flood protection assistance. The purpose of the bureau was to provide everything from engineering design, supervision, and construction to allocating funding. The Bureau also supervised stream clearance operations, channel restoration, and debris removal from streams throughout the commonwealth.

The earliest Flood Control Project that I could review from the bureau was following the flood of 1936. The last was the Agnes Flood of 1972. The Flood Damage Assessment Report released in 1974 indicated that approximately 300 miles of streams in Pennsylvania had to be re-channeled. I could find no recording of any stream maintenance since 1972. Ladies and gentlemen it is now 2012, 40 years since the last effort to manage our streams in Pennsylvania. We have experienced many severe storms since 1972, and it is time that we address these basic issues with our residents.

I ask; where is the division of Flood Control today. In 2009 I walked the Muncy Creek with the Army Corp of Engineers, Conservation District, Department of Environmental Protection, representatives from Senator Yaw's Office and many concerned citizens along the Muncy Creek and Loyalsock Creek. This trek was prior to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. The residents of Sullivan County have had huge concern of the condition of our streams for quite some time. They knew if there were any more substantial rains in our area, there would be more major flooding of our streams. The streams are out of their beds, the stream beds are higher than the banks, and the streams are, storm by storm encroaching properties. Land owners are losing there land acre by acre to the waterways.

After our tour of the Muncy Creek and a couple areas of the Loyalsock Creek, the Army Corp of Engineers informed us, in conversation, that there is really nothing that their division can do for the private land owner living along the streams. They appeared to be quite impressed with the damage they saw along the streams, but had no solutions to the problems. If the streams were doing harm to any public or government related structures, they may be able to offer some engineering assistance, but this is privately owned properties. The Army Corp did however tell us they would send a report of their findings, I have yet to receive any report. We were informed, by conversation that day, that if the Army Corp had done work on the Muncy Creek at any time there would have been a partnership with some organization to maintain the stream. The Army Corp had completed projects in the past on our streams and there had been a partnership was with the Army Corp of Engineers and the Department of Forest and Waters.

Property owners get frustrated when they approach our many government programs that are to help them, only to be told there are no answers or solutions to the problems that

face them every day. They look at their land that is filled with rocks and debris, the streams that have divided their fields, the loss of crops and cropland and wonder what they can do. Many of the rules and regulations that are in place today do not assist or protect our citizens, but frustrate them and penalize them when they do try to make corrections to protect and preserve their land.

We all realize that the storms of 2011 were exceptional storms, but forty years with no maintenance of our streams have contributed to this crisis that we face today. The time to correct this problem is now. There were study after study recorded in the Bibliography of Forest Water Yields, Flooding Issues and Hydrologic Modeling of Extreme Flood Events by the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (5/2007). These studies address the causes and the relationship between forests and waters. We must reinstate the Flood Division of our Environmental Resource Department and charge them with the task that they have been given. Create a plan to repair our streams and continue to maintain them as we did in years long past. This is an opportunity for all our agencies and local governments to work together to restore the waterways of Pennsylvania and make our citizens safe.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.