



Endless Mountains

Resource Conservation & Development Council

Mission Statement

Endless Mountains Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc. provides leadership to a diverse group of stakeholders in the sound conservation and stewardship of the region's natural resources. The Council promotes the rural quality of life and regional economic stability through organizational efforts, community education, technical expertise and project sponsorship.

Holistic Vision

The Council will strive to use the following guiding principles in the activities and function of Council to make decisions that are environmentally, socially and economically sound. We are committed to a path that will ensure the resources of the region and citizens of the Endless Mountains have a sustainable and healthy community to live, work, and pass on to future generations.

Quality of Life – Healthy, happy, humorous, family lifestyle with noble work, enjoyable leisure, and appropriate recreation.

Forms of Production – We will, not only Council but also as individuals, endeavor to make decisions that are economically, socially and environmentally sound.

Future Resource Base – Vibrant, green communities populated with healthy families, prosperous farms and businesses with high biodiversity, stable and productive soil, and clean water and air.

Endless Mountains RC & D Business Plan

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Current Conditions & Market Analysis

This plan looks at Critical Resource Issues across the region from three distinct resource based categories, identifies needs and lastly, potential projects to address them. Our committees continue to update, revise and improve our delivery of services; and are challenged to find funding from outside sources that enable us to put conservation on the ground in the form of outreach, support and projects tailored to our regional needs.

Endless Mountains RC&D undertook a market analysis of the region, to gain an understanding of our role in resource conservation and development. As always, when dealing with natural resources, the basic conundrum is: can we conserve (them) and develop/use (them) at the same time? Several concepts of resource extraction and utilization come up short, create conflict, and have impacts and dynamic unforeseen consequences. History clearly shows that our careless and heedless use of our natural resources, and the basic premise that those resources are a source of raw materials, has repeatedly gotten us into trouble.

In retrospect, we know more now and are starting to understand the dynamics of the systems we work in and how natural laws can NOT be broken. As we shift our thinking to recognize our natural resources as the *foundation of our life support system*, rather than simply raw materials, this creates opportunity to change the way we approach conservation.

The region is vast, largely rural, and very dependent on natural resources for sustenance, quality of life, and economic sustainability. Williamsport is the only one city located in the region, situated in Lycoming County. Bradford County has two urban centers, both much less populated than Williamsport. The remaining counties (Tioga, Susquehanna, Sullivan and Wyoming) are predominantly rural.

Many small farms and industries are located here. These farms and industries provide a livelihood for the citizens and are an integral part of the commerce of the region.

In addition, we are facing a rapid increase in resource extraction activity in the development of natural gas! Marcellus Shale has really changed the way we look at our six county region. Before Marcellus, we had high unemployment, low growth, and sleepy communities with little future of joining the global economy; almost

overnight, WHAM, the drillers arrived. We can argue the pros and cons till the cows come home (or are sold), but the facts are: we have unprecedented growth and expansion, impacts to our water, land and social fabric, with changes occurring that will reshape our communities far into the future. There are significant quarrying operations, primarily in Susquehanna County, which also fall into a landscape changing industry.

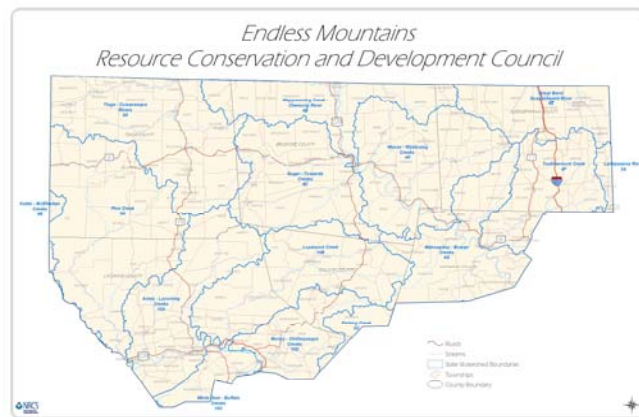
Council Structure & Focus

We have identified three major Goals, consisting of:

- ✓ Education – Awareness & Communication
- ✓ Conservation on the GROUND
- ✓ Utilization of Renewable Natural Resources as an Economic Engine.

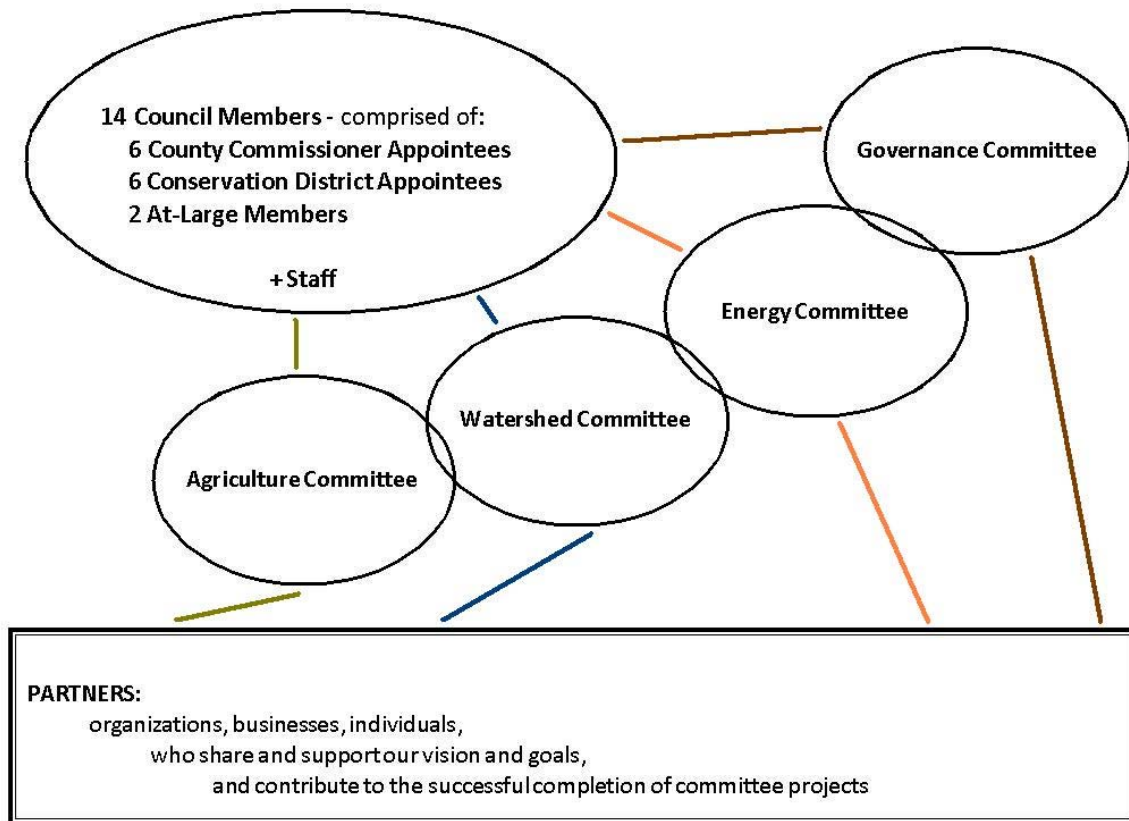
All of these goals are crucial to the future of the region - especially in light of the basic and cyclical boom/bust cycles that are an integral part of an extraction based economy. We must look beyond the boom and prepare for the future that no one can predict but many of us have the moxie to enable. We will explore the ways we can conserve our natural resources, utilize renewable, and improve the economic and social fabric of the Endless Mountains.

Our committees have provided input based on their experience, interest, capacity and needs of individual member county and conservation districts. However, we must look beyond individual member needs, and maintain regional perspective and focus.



The opportunity to work on issues and topics that we can't do singularly provide the greatest potential for success, and fills a need that can't be met at the local level. Our decision making protocol requires that a project must serve two or more counties, address resources on a regional level, and be scalable and replicable across RC&D regions.

Past experience has shown that this works; the synergies of leadership, partnerships and capacity building are critical with constrained funds, limited time, and volunteer effort.



We will maintain our current committee structure based on the four identified resource areas: Agriculture, Watersheds, Energy and Governance. There are opportunities emerging in all of these areas, and we can work effectively to engage partners and stakeholders to collaborate on much of this. We have a huge region, with many folks already engaged in these projects. Our intent is to find the niches and gaps in our region that our organization can fill, and facilitate a broader, more effective implementation across the region.

From past work and planning, we have identified critical issues for each of these four resource areas. In addition, the strength of our organization and functional capacity must be continually improved and adjusted as we grow and prosper.

Critical issues are detailed in the next section, along with a list of the current projects we are involved in (or have recently completed) in each area. Some projects defy easy categorization by resource area, because they overlap issue areas and address multiple criticalities. Furthermore, each project has its own rationale to tie into our holistic goal. Thumbnail sketches only are provided with this document, but as an example, we are including part of the rationale that lead to our newest, and perhaps most important, project:

Introducing WINGS

With the new focus on Natural Gas, there are several opportunities that have been identified that have great potential. Along with an extraordinary number of wells being drilled across the Endless Mountains region, there are and will be hundreds of miles of pipeline constructed in the near future. These linear corridors will provide the opportunity to put conservation on the ground (goal #2), educate the public on ecosystem function and wildlife (goal #1), and even utilize the activities and products through agro-forestry and wildlife as economic gains for landowners (goal #3) through the development of a project called WINGS (**W**ildlife **I**ncentives for **N**on-Game and **G**ame **S**pecies). This project puts wildlife habitat improvement projects on pipeline and electric line corridors. With support from the electric & gas industry, grants are made available to landowners to enhance the rights of way on private property.

This program is just being developed by the Energy Committee, and based on initial response from industry leaders, it has great potential to be a huge success and bring groups together which at times have been at odds to provide a lasting environmental improvement to these corridors. (See Appendix # for details)

Addressing the gaps

Along with WINGS and habitat improvement/enhancement on private lands, there is also an opportunity to develop a program for wetland mitigation banking. This project was explored several years ago (before Marcellus) but was set aside due to a perceived lack of demand and the complexity of banking. Since then, there has been a dramatic increase in need with the development of gas wells and pipelines, and we have several interested potential partners now that would share responsibility, ownership and implementation. This project will be coordinated and implemented by the Watershed Committee.

We will continue to partner with NRCS and others to implement our value-added and grazing strategies to improve the bottom line of agriculture producers. It is vital that we continue this work into the future to ensure the economic viability of agriculture and the secondary industries and activities it supports.

Resource Area Issues & Projects

Critical Issue - Watersheds

"Water is one of Pennsylvania's most precious resources. There are over 83,000 miles of streams, 4,000 lakes, 120 miles of coastal waters and 80 trillion gallons of ground water/aquifers in Pennsylvania. Maintaining the quality and quantity of this resource is critical to the economy and the survival of natural systems and habitats."

– *Lycoming College Clean Water Institute*

Opportunities:

- ✓ Providing education for stormwater and floodplain management
- ✓ Providing technical assistance for Watershed Organizations
- ✓ Targeted efforts in impaired watersheds located within our region
- ✓ Participating in State Tributary Strategies and implementation of the same
- ✓ Participate in efforts to restore biological communities to their native aquatic habitats
- ✓ Maintain and manage our healthy functioning watersheds

Current or Recent Projects:

Flood Summits/Proactive to Flooding - Flood Summits, demonstration projects, & publications providing education about stormwater and floodplain management issues to empower local decision makers to be more proactive to flooding

Chesapeake Bay Watershed Technical Engineers Contract Admin administer engineering service contracts in design and inspection phases for Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative (CBWI) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) programs.

Gaps:

Woodland Resource Adventure Camp A camp previously held from 1987 to 2010 in July for children age 12-16 to learn about the environment with hands-on experiences via a four year rotation of themes: Wildlife, Aquatics, Soils/Geology, and Forestry; was well received but currently lacking funds, so was dropped in 2011.

CSAW-Consortium for Scientific Assistance for Watershed - provided technical assistance on a variety of watershed and environmental improvement needs to watershed associations, lake management organizations, municipalities, and other organizations; lacking funds.

Critical Issue - Agriculture

Farms, and the communities that have grown up around farms, comprise the economic and cultural backbone of the Region. These farming communities face new and accelerating pressures from development, external economic forces, loss of support businesses, labor costs, lack of successors, a source of future farmers, local/state/federal regulations, non-farmer attitudes, bio-security concerns, energy costs, water quality issues and wildlife impacts.

Opportunities

Focus on water quality and the role agriculture plays in protecting and enhancing water quality is increasing. This is generated by the national emphasis related to “impaired waters” as seen in the TMDL initiatives, and the Chesapeake Bay Program and targeted goals. Such a focus will result in a sense of urgency for farmers not currently in compliance with water quality regulations to do so, and for farmers in compliance to do even more to take advantage of such programs as “nutrient trading”. Specific Region actions to take advantage of these opportunities include:

- ✓ Providing conservation and nutrient management planning assistance
- ✓ Providing technical and cost share assistance for BMP implementation
- ✓ Targeted efforts in regional impaired watersheds
- ✓ Acting as facilitator or broker for nutrient credit generation and trading
- ✓ Participating in State Tributary Strategies and their implementation

The changing climate in farm economics of the region and the nation, brought on by the increased energy costs, will critically impact region farms. Costs of electric and fuel for farm machinery will create a need for additional values to be added to locally produced products. Costs of transportation may create unique opportunities for diversified crops produced locally, thus off setting transportation costs. Specific Region actions to take advantage of these opportunities include:

- ✓ Promoting increased participation in the Region’s “Buy Fresh – Buy Local” program
- ✓ Seeking Value added opportunities for Regional farmers such as a “kitchen incubator”, Carbon Sequestration/trading.
- ✓ Facilitating the implementation of farm BMPs that increase profitability and decrease energy use, such as grazing and no-till practices.

- ✓ Alternative Energy.

Current Projects

Planned Grazing Training - A 6 session train-the-trainer course to provide new paradigm insights and tools for technical advisors for their use in developing holistic grazing plans with their clients

Organic Outreach & Technical Assistance - survey surrounding regions' ag producers to prioritize organic outreach needs; implement outreach efforts and targeted actions in response to those priorities.

Local Food Initiative - development of educational programming for teachers and general public to promote sustainable production of healthy and abundant food.

Healthy Kids Community Garden- Establish a community garden with participation from and learning opportunities for school age youth.

Agriculture Coalition - provide support for the formation of a coalition to sustain viability of agricultural enterprises in the region.

Weed Control/Wildlife Habitat Technical Assistance - host educational events, produce fact sheets on weed identification and management, provide educational and Technical Assistance to landowners.

Weed Control Wildlife Habitat DVD - a DVD produced for CREP and other landowners with information on CREP for Wildlife, Weed Lifecycles, Identification of Noxious and Invasive Weeds, Applying Herbicides, Sprayer Calibration and Weed Management in Riparian Buffers and Grasslands, Weed Identification and Management

Gaps

NE PA and Troy Grazing Conferences – In the past, EMRC&D has planned and hosted conferences to educate agricultural producers about innovative methods to increase profitability and reduce operational costs through value-added opportunities. A change in funding availability resulted in reduced staff time to coordinate these events. - However, they should be resumed in the future.

Value-added Dairy – EMRC&D should support a statewide effort to promote value added opportunities for the dairy industry. Moreover the Council should lead our own initiative in our region to provide value-added opportunities for dairy farmers through artisan cheesemaking classes. These classes were very well received in the

past, but have been put on hold due to loss of funding and staff. These classes should be resumed in the future.

Critical Issue - Energy

On a daily basis, the US consumes more petroleum products than all of Japan, China, Canada, Russia, Indonesia, India, and South Africa combined. In PA alone, we spend \$30 billion annually to purchase liquid fuels produced from outside of our borders. The increased costs of purchasing petroleum (increase of 82%) have created a hardship for consumers, and the environmental communities are reaching out for cleaner and renewable alternative energy options.

Opportunities

- ✓ Green infrastructure - education and demonstration projects
- ✓ Home-based businesses to reduce travel
- ✓ Grazing and Sustainable Agriculture. The Agricultural Committee has been involved and will continue to engage the farm community with this best management practice through workshops and funding sources.
- ✓ Alternative Energy:
 - ◆ Production of homegrown, renewable transportation fuels;
 - ◆ Fuels for Schools Program
 - ◆ Cellulosic ethanol
 - ◆ Alternative heating: Solar Heating/Fencing: Showcase current sites and seek future funding for proposed projects.
 - ◆ Wind Generators
 - ◆ Provide information on Existing Resources already in place

Current or Recent Projects:

Rotational Grazing Systems/Conversion to Grassland - provide solar/wind powered watering systems and conversion of crop or idle land into hay/pasture for rotational grazers.

Green Career Day - Career Day for 8th graders in Tioga, Bradford, Sullivan and Wyoming Counties; previously coordinated by EMRC&D, now by partners.

Gaps:

Fuels for Schools & Beyond, & Fuels for Schools Outreach -Statewide project promoting technical assistance, education and outreach and financial advice to public

facilities on alternative heating systems/feedstock such as wood or other types of biomass; on hold since loss of federal funds and reduction in staff.

Critical Issue - Governance

The issues facing the region across the boundaries and within them are significant in size and ever increasing. The category of capacity building and sustainability is a most important component of this business plan. The Council has taken giant steps in this regard, but more needs to be done. There are several important processes that will move us by quantum leaps forward. How we will implement our Holistic Goal and the Strategic Plan, what we will need to do, and how we will behave as a council and as individuals in the future, are paramount.

Opportunities

- ✓ Provide training to council members and staff
- ✓ Provide training on fund raising
- ✓ Targeted efforts in capacity building.
- ✓ Implementation of Holistic Management decision making skills
- ✓ Participate in efforts to fulfill the mission of RC&D
- ✓ Maintain and manage our regional conservation initiatives.

Current or Recent Projects:

Business Planning and Council Development - development of a business plan & other capacity building/development activities

Website Development - update and improve design, incorporate a newsletter

Gaps:

Newsletter - circulate a newsletter to promote awareness of the Council as a facilitator and resource in our 6 county region; currently a gap which is expected to close as the website technology is improved

Financial Plan

Funds required (dues and special projects explanation?)

Expected (general budget, individual grant budgets)

Projected (ideas for income – partner donors, fundraising?)

Closing Request

We cannot

- A) Do this alone,
- B) as volunteers,
- C) without commitment from our partners.

As we move from a state of dependency (NRCS financial support) to a state of interdependence (partners and volunteers working together) there will be challenges, frustrations and successes. Please consider what your contribution and support might be.

Appendices:

Ongoing Project Updates (or refer to a weblink?)

Annual Report (or link?)

RC&D orgs – state & national (or link?)

WINGS working draft

Website link: www.EndlessMountainsRCD.org