

Important Information Regarding the Contents of this Document

Please note that the policies and information presented in this document are current through the date given below. The documents made available within the [Center's Conservation Districts web pages](#) are intended to serve as a guide for the policies set by each Conservation District. While these policies may in fact be current at the time of your viewing, it is strongly recommended to contact the relevant Conservation District for the most current version.

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Somerset County Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road Policies and Procedures

Background

In 1991, the PA Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU) first brought the problem of unpaved road runoff into the spotlight. Sediment is the largest pollutant to the Commonwealth of PA waters. 20,000 miles of publicly owned unpaved roads generate sediment and act as collectors for runoff pollution from adjacent land uses. Traditional maintenance has been to convey runoff and to deposit to stream by the quickest means possible which resulted in increased flood flows to streams and transports sediment and other pollutants into local waterways.

In 1993, a Task Force on Dirt and Gravel Roads was created to investigate, research, and document the significance of sediment and dust, as well as other forms of water pollution resulting from dirt and gravel road maintenance practices. This private-public partnership was comprised of nonprofit organizations, businesses, and local, state, and federal government agencies. Between 1996 and 1998, TU volunteers began identifying and assessing over 900 sites in protected watersheds statewide.

In 1997, Section 9106 of the PA Vehicle Code was enacted to establish the PA Dirt and Gravel Road Maintenance Program which provides a non-lapsing annual allocation to the State Conservation Commission and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

The purpose of the Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road Program (DGLVRP) is to create a better public road system with a reduced environmental impact using Environmentally Sensitive Road Maintenance Practices to reduce road runoff impact and sediment to local streams, while reducing long-term road maintenance costs. The DGLVRP provides local decision making and project control; local stakeholders education and training; simplified grant applications; and implementing long-term road and environmental improvements.

Roles and Responsibilities

State Conservation Commission (SCC) - The SCC administers the PA DGLVRP, determines statewide policies, allocates funds to conservation districts, and implements a quality assurance/quality control effort.

Somerset Conservation District (SCD) - The SCD administers and implements the program at the local level, accepts applications for funding, and awards grants to local road-owning entities. District staff is responsible for working with grant applicants to develop projects, project oversight, payment approvals, financial tracking and reporting, general administration, and works closely with the Quality Assurance Board (QAB).

At least one SCD QAB member must be ESM certified and maintain certification every five years. Also, Administrative Training is required, once every three years, for the staff person most directly responsible for program administration.

Quality Assurance Board (QAB) - The QAB is to act in an advisory capacity to develop and recommend to the SCD Board DGLVRP policies, develop application ranking criteria, and recommend projects for funding while assisting with the DGLVRP Administrative, Educational, and Contractual responsibilities.

The QAB is comprised of two, Board-appointed SCD members, one USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) member, and one PA Fish & Boat Commission (PAFBC) member.

Grant Applicants – Any state or local public entity that owns and maintains public roads is eligible to apply for program funding. The person in charge of work plan development and project implementation must attend environmentally sensitive maintenance (ESM) certification training within the past five calendar years to be eligible for program awards. ESM certified persons must be an employee or elected official of the applying entity.

Ineligible Entities – The DGLVRP cannot pay or provide funding to maintain roads owned by the federal government or by privately owned roads.

Penn State Center for Dirt and Gravel Road Studies (Center) – formally created in 2001, the Center addresses education, training, and DGLVRP technical assistance.

Policies

Quality Assurance Board Composition

The Somerset Conservation District QAB is composed of a Conservation District appointed Chairman (non-voting) and one voting member. Also, the PA Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) appoints one voting member and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) appoints one voting member. Voting members can assign alternates but voting members are limited to one vote.

Quality Assurance Board Rules of Conduct

The Chairman will be responsible for establishing the meeting agenda and running the proceedings. Voting members will establish policy for the program's operation and distribution of allocated funds consistent with Section 9106. The QAB will make recommendations to the Somerset Conservation District Board of Directors. All actions by the QAB will require that a quorum of the voting members be present. The Chairman will vote only in the event of a tie vote.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No SCD Director, QAB Member, or District employee shall, as a result of this Program, be permitted to obtain financial benefits for himself, a member of his immediate family, or a

business with which he is associated. This shall preclude the payment of normal salary and benefits to employees provided in their normal course of employment.

Non-Pollution Standards

PA Motor Vehicle Codes Section 9106(f)(7) requires QABs to adopt standards that prohibit the use of materials or practices that are environmentally harmful. The Statement of Policy 83.613(1)(b) formalizes that requirement. In response, the QAB has adopted standards prohibiting the use of materials or practices which are environmentally harmful or do not meet the programs' "non-pollution" standards. Compliance with all existing environmental laws is a condition of purchase under the contracting agreement between the SCD and the Municipality.

Equal Access Policy Statement

The QAB is committed to managing a program that increases the quality of the environment through sound road-maintenance practices.

To ensure equal access to the DGLVRP benefits and to eliminate bias and favoritism, all townships and boroughs will be:

1. Notified of funding available.
2. Given a list of the eligibility-required ESM training session dates and locations.
3. Notified when grant applications are being accepted and deadlines.

Project Ranking Policy

All townships and boroughs shall have access to the evaluation forms that are used to prioritize work sites. All submitted projects will be ranked in accordance with the current QAB Project Application Ranking System.

Low Volume Road Guidelines

Low Volume Road (LVR) is defined to include any road surfaced with asphalt, "tar and chip," bitumen, concrete, or other asphalt-like coating.

The focus of road projects in the LVR Program should be on similar Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance principles that have been used in the Dirt and Gravel Road Program. LVR projects must contain benefits to both the road system (improved drainage, reduced surface, ditch & bank erosion, smoother surface, more durable surface, reduced maintenance costs, etc.) and the environmental systems (water quality, stream quality, reduced storm water flows, improved air quality, increased infiltration). The balance between road improvements and environment benefits should be considered in the local project ranking criteria and funding decisions.

Resurfacing Paved Roads

The Somerset DGLVRP will only reimburse resurfacing expenses 20 feet along the road's center line from the limits of the subsurface drainage construction and must meet the following criteria:

1. Drainage issues must be properly addressed.
2. Base instability issues must be properly addressed.
3. Other necessary and appropriate issues such as bank stability, road entrenchment, vegetation, etc., must be properly addressed.

Surfacing Unpaved Roads

It is not the intent of the Program to encourage the sealing or paving of existing dirt or gravel roads and converting them to sealed or paved low volume roads. While eligible entities may choose to seal or pave a DGR project on their own at some future point in time, no Program funds will be utilized for the specific purpose of converting unpaved roads to paved or "tar and chip."

Reclaiming Paved or Sealed Roads to Dirt and Gravel Roads (DGR)

The program recognizes the value of converting poorly constructed or poorly maintained LVR into a high-quality DGR through full-depth reclamation or other similar processes. LVR or DGR program provides funding for these purposes.

Traffic Counts

Before an application can be considered, the applicant is responsible for providing traffic counts validating that the road has 500 vehicles per day or less consistent with State Conservation Commission and local policies. A LVR contract cannot be executed without the validating traffic count.

Existing traffic counts can be used to verify road eligibility for LVR funding. Existing data must have been collected within the previous five years and conform to the Program's Level 2 count protocol at a minimum. "Estimated" traffic counts that exist for many municipal roads cannot be used.

A traffic count survey cannot be conducted in a timeframe or manner that intentionally causes artificially low average daily traffic counts on a particular road segment. This includes, but not limited to, conducting a traffic count during summer recess for a school access road, or conducting a traffic count when access to a road segment is temporarily or partially restricted or reduced, or conducting a traffic count in any other timeframe or manner that intentionally causes low average daily traffic counts.