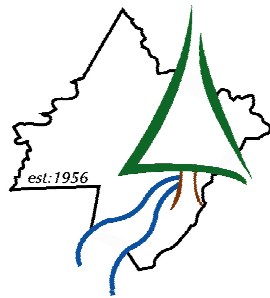


January 23, 2009



Conservation Horizons

Pike County Conservation District

Join the Debate

People, business, industries and communities require land and resources to make the products and provide the services that we have become dependent on in modern life. Historically, the American dream has included acquiring land to call one's own and the freedom to do with it as we please. Within our own state, some of Pennsylvania's natural resources have been altered and over time, in some extreme instances, destroyed.

Concern for the environment was not always a part of the decisions made by our forefathers. We now recognize that environmentally, everything is related to everything else. We are part of, and dependent upon, our habitat. Even today, however, decisions regarding the environment are not always based solely on ecology. Like the generations before us, we often make decisions based upon perceptions, beliefs and values. This leads to differing opinions and debate on many matters in life, not just on the environment. To modify an old saying, there are two (or more) sides to every story.

Debate usually occurs because of differences in people's values and beliefs. For instance, some people may feel that the protection of an endangered species is the most important issue. For others, economic well-being is most important — perhaps in supporting an industry that allows workers to keep their jobs. A scientist may have a different viewpoint than a sportsman. A developer may feel differently than an artist. Controversial issues, like those involving the environment, are rarely simple and limited to only one correct answer.

In a perfect debate, positions are based on facts rather than on opinions or personal feelings. However, in this imperfect world, rarely are there enough facts available to clearly define a solution to a problem. Most of the time, the best we can try to

do is make a decision based on an *informed opinion* — one that is based both upon our values and beliefs and the available facts.

Consider your own habitat and watershed. Have you seen articles in your newspaper or on your local television news regarding a debate involving a local environmental issue? What are the current environmental issues in Pike County? What facts are stated? Can you identify views that seem to be largely opinion-based? Talk to your municipal officials, parents, teachers and friends. What position, if any, are they taking on the issues? How do these issues affect you and the natural resources in your area? What is your stance?

As long as there is more than one opinion on an issue, there will be debate. We are fortunate in this country that we can express our views without fear of being threatened or punished. Most people realize that with freedom of expression comes a responsibility; choices should not cause harm to others. This same sense of responsibility can be applied to our decisions involving the natural world. If we harm or destroy habitat by misusing or abusing natural resources, many other plants, animals, and people are likely to suffer.

Since 2004 the Pike County Conservation District has been working with the Conservation Partnership on educational programs to provide a number of educational opportunities on the protection and enhancement of the natural resources in Pike County and the surrounding region. This year is no exception. The Partnership has grown to over 20 organizations that provide a variety of educational programs. For additional information or Partnership members programs please visit www.pikeconservation.org/Partnership.

(Excerpts from this article are adapted from the *Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, Pennsylvania Resources*.)

December Question: What percentage of world energy does the U.S. consume each year?

December Answer: 22.5%

January Question: How many acres of Pennsylvania are covered with lakes and ponds?