

Major Changes in store for PA Dirt and Gravel Road Program Municipal Fact Sheet

Feb 2014

Program funding increased from \$4 million to \$28 million annually!

Paved low traffic roads are now eligible for funding too!

Summary for municipalities:

- Additional funding expected to be available starting in July of 2014.
- Funding available for paved (& tar-and-chip) roads with less than 500 vehicles/day.
- Program still focuses on water quality, simple applications, and local control.
- Training certification still required to apply for funding, and valid for 5 years.
- 6 Regional trainings to be held in 2014, see below.
- Contact your Conservation District for county-specific details.

6 Regional ESM Trainings in 2014: You must be ESM certified to apply for funds!

Applicants must have been certified through the Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) training with in the past 5 years to apply for funds. Six regional ESM trainings with a capacity of 200 attendees each have been scheduled for the first half of 2014. If you have attended the ESM training (or Annual Workshop) since 2011, please do not register for these trainings so we can accommodate new municipalities and those whose certification is expiring. Please note that due to expected demand, these training will be larger and may require more travel than normal.

Dates and Locations:

March 26-27: Reading April 22-23: St. College
April 30-May 1: Greensburg May 6-7: Wilkes-Barre
May 21-22: Wellsboro June 17-18: Titusville

Course is free, but registration is required, no walk-ins allowed if training is at capacity.

For more details, to download a registration form, or to register online, visit the “edu/training” page of the Center’s website: www.dirtandgravelroads.org.
Direct link: http://www.dirtandgravel.psu.edu/edu_training/esm_course.html

Are you new to the Program?

The Program is administered through the State Conservation Commission (SCC) in Harrisburg. The SCC provides funding to Conservation Districts in each county. **After attending a two day ESM training**, municipalities can apply to their Conservation District to fund road projects. Road projects focus on environmental and economic benefits such as reducing stream pollution and reducing long term maintenance costs. More details: www.dirtandgravelroads.org (select “PA Program”).

If interested, you should:

- Familiarize yourself with the Program using the online information at the link above.
- Contact your local Conservation District.
- Register to attend one of the ESM training courses above if interested in applying for funds in 2014.

Previous experience with the Program?

Except for the funding increase and the eligibility of paved roads, much of the Program remains the same. **Municipalities still need to attend the two day ESM training**, apply to the Conservation District for funds, and complete the road work. Projects remain focused on environmental improvements. **ESM training course certifications remain valid for 5 years** and are needed for both the unpaved and paved portion of the Program.

If interested you should:

- Determine your eligibility status. A complete list of everyone currently certified is on the Center’s “[edu/training](#)” page described above.
- Register for an ESM training above if needed.
- Consider your road projects that could be applied for under the Program.

While the principles of the Dirt and Gravel Road Program remain the same, there are many questions brought up by the changes made by House Bill 1060. Please note that advisory groups are currently meeting to address many of these issues, and we still have many unanswered questions at this stage. Below is a summary of some of the issues, but **NO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS HAVE BEEN MADE YET.**

Funding Allocations

When will funding be available? Funding will most likely be available for FY 2014-15 beginning in July of 2014. If this is the case, Conservation Districts would most likely receive their funding advances in the Fall of 2014. This would mean many projects could be ready to hit the ground for the 2015 construction season.

How is the funding distributed? For FY 2014-15, the funding will most likely be distributed as \$20 million for “traditional” Dirt and Gravel projects, and \$8 million for **paved** Low Volume Road Projects. The allocation each County receives will depend on a variety of factors such as length of roads and identified stream impacts. Conservation Districts have established criteria to rank municipal applications for funding. Note that other public entities such as Game Commission, County, and State roads are also eligible to apply.

Dirt and Gravel Roads

How will this funding increase affect traditional Program projects? Obviously a funding increase of this magnitude means that more projects can be funded in each county. Less obvious though, is that it may alter the type and scope of projects that can be funded. Many Conservation Districts have been scaling back projects in recent years as inflation has eroded away at their buying power. With this new funding, some Districts might consider funding larger projects, or funding more complex or comprehensive projects that were previously not within their budget. This will vary between Conservation Districts across the State.

Low Volume Roads

Can the Program fund the re-paving of a currently paved or tar-and-chip road? Currently unknown. Project focus remains on drainage and environmental improvements. Purchase of asphalt or tar-and-chip might become an eligible expense as part of a larger drainage project. Guidelines for this are still under discussion.

Can the Program fund the paving of a currently dirt or gravel road? Currently unknown. Project focus remains on drainage and environmental improvements. The conversion of unpaved roads to paved roads is NOT the purpose of this Program. While it might become permissible under some circumstances, guidelines for this are still under discussion.

What is the training requirement to apply for Low Volume Road funding? It is expected that the training requirement for the Program (both Dirt and Gravel, and paved Low Volume) will remain the same. **In order to be eligible to apply for funding, the applicant must have attended the two-day Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance training described on the front within the past 5 years.** Anyone who has attended the ESM training within the past 5 years will retain their eligibility to apply for funding (for either Dirt and Gravel, or Low Volume Roads) for the remainder of their 5 year certification life. Due to time constraints, ESM trainings in 2014 will have little to no new information related to paved roads compared to previous trainings.

Local Control

One of the main principles of the Dirt and Gravel Road Program since it began in 1997 is “Local Control”. This local control philosophy established guidelines at the state level, but leaves a large amount of freedom for those running the Program at the County level to customize the Program to fit their local situation and needs. As a result, many of the questions that applicants may have (such as funding priorities, local policies, application deadlines, etc.) will vary around the State. **For this reason, it is important to contact your County’s Conservation District to be aware of these local policies and priorities.**

Contact information for all Conservation Districts: <http://pacd.org/your-district/find-your-district>

PSU Center for Dirt and Gravel Road Studies: www.dirtandgravelroads.org - 814-865-5355