

Schuylkill River Stormwater Management Ordinance

Appendix F

West Nile Virus Guidance

This source is from the Monroe County, PA Conservation District who researched the potential of West Nile Virus problems from BMPs due to a number of calls they were receiving.

Monroe County Conservation District Guidance: Stormwater Management and West Nile Virus
Source: Brodhead McMichaels Creeks Watershed Act 167 Stormwater Management Ordinance 2/23/04

The Monroe County Conservation District recognizes the need to address the problem of non-point source pollution impacts caused by runoff from impervious surfaces. The new stormwater policy being integrated into Act 167 Stormwater Management regulations by the PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will make non-point pollution controls an important component of all future plans and updates to existing plans. In addition, to meet post-construction anti-degradation standards under the state National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting program, applicants will be required to employ Best Management Practices (BMPs) to address non-point pollution concerns.

Studies conducted throughout the United States have shown that wet basins and in particular constructed wetlands are effective in traditional stormwater management areas such as channel stability and flood control, and are one of the most effective ways to remove stormwater pollutants (United States Environmental Protection Agency 1991, Center for Watershed Protection 2000). From Maryland to Oregon, studies have shown that as urbanization and impervious surface increase in a watershed, the streams in those watersheds become degraded (CWP 2000). Although there is debate over the threshold of impervious cover when degradation becomes apparent (some studies show as little as 6% while others show closer to 20%), there is agreement that impervious surfaces cause non-point pollution in urban and urbanizing watersheds, and that degradation is ensured if stormwater BMPs are not implemented.

Although constructed wetlands and ponds are desirable from a water quality perspective there may be concerns about the possibility of these stormwater management structures becoming breeding grounds for mosquitoes. The Conservation District feels that although it may be a valid concern, municipalities should not adopt ordinance provisions prohibiting wet basins for stormwater management.

Mosquitoes

The questions surrounding mosquito production in wetlands and ponds have intensified in recent years by the outbreak of the mosquito-borne West Nile Virus. As is the case with all vector-borne maladies, the life cycle of West Nile Virus is complicated, traveling from mosquito to bird, back to mosquito and then to other animals including humans. *Culex pipiens* was identified as the vector species in the first documented cases from New York in 1999. This species is still considered the primary transmitter of the disease across its range. Today there are some 60 species of mosquitoes that inhabit Pennsylvania. Along with *C. pipiens*, three other species have been identified as vectors of West Nile Virus while four more have been identified as potential vectors.

The four known vectors in NE Pennsylvania are *Culex pipiens*, *C. restuans*, *C. salinarius* and *Ochlerotatus japonicus*. All four of these species prefer, and almost exclusively use, artificial containers (old tires, rain gutters, birdbaths, etc.) as larval habitats. In the case of *C. pipiens*, the most notorious of the vector mosquitoes, the dirtier the water the better they like it. The important factor is that these species do not thrive in functioning wetlands where competition for resources and predation by larger aquatic and terrestrial organisms is high.

The remaining four species, *Aedes vexans*, *Ochlerotatus Canadensis*, *O. triseriatus* and *O. trivittatus* are currently considered potential vectors due to laboratory tests (except the *O. trivittatus*, which did have one confirmed vector pool for West Nile Virus in PA during 2002). All four of these species prefer vernal habitats and ponded woodland areas following heavy summer rains. These species may be the greatest threat of disease transmission around stormwater basins that pond water for more than four days. This can be mitigated however by establishing ecologically functioning wetlands.

Stormwater Facilities

If a stormwater wetland or pond is constructed properly and a diverse ecological community develops, mosquitoes should not become a problem. Wet basins and wetlands constructed as stormwater management facilities, should be designed to attract a diverse wildlife community. If a wetland is planned, proper hydrologic soil conditions and the establishment of hydrophytic vegetation will promote the population of the wetland by amphibians and other mosquito predators. In natural wetlands, predatory insects and amphibians are effective at keeping mosquito populations in check during the larval stage of development while birds and bats prey on adult mosquitoes.

The design of a stormwater wetland must include the selection of hydrophytic plant species for their pollutant uptake capabilities and for not contributing to the potential for vector mosquito breeding. In particular, species of emergent vegetation with little submerged growth are preferable. By limiting the vegetation growing below the water surface, larvae lose protective cover and there is less chance of anaerobic conditions occurring in the water.

Stormwater ponds can be designed for multiple purposes. When incorporated into an open space design a pond can serve as a stormwater management facility and a community amenity. Aeration fountains and stocked fish should be added to keep larval mosquito populations in check.

Publications from the PA Department of Health and the Penn State Cooperative Extension concerning West Nile Virus identify aggressive public education about the risks posed by standing water in artificial containers (tires, trash cans, rain gutters, bird baths) as the most effective method to control vector mosquitoes.

Conclusion

The Conservation District understands the pressure faced by municipalities when dealing with multifaceted issues such as stormwater management and encourages the incorporation of water quality management techniques into stormwater designs. As Monroe County continues to grow, conservation design, groundwater recharge and constructed wetlands and ponds should be among the preferred design options to reduce the impacts of increases in impervious surfaces. When designed and constructed appropriately, the runoff mitigation benefits to the community from these design options will far outweigh their potential to become breeding grounds for mosquitoes.