

PENNDOT PARTNERS WITH ALLEGHENY COLLEGE ON ECO-ART PROJECT

(I-79 Meadville Interchange Project)

PennDOT is partnering with Allegheny College's Arts & Environment Initiative to create an "Eco-Art" project that merges Earth Art with best management practices in the environmental mitigation of stormwater runoff.

The project, "In Praise of Land & Water: Revisioning Stormwater on Federal Highways", is part of the I-79 Meadville Interchange Project, which includes replacement of the bridges on I-79 over SR 6/19/322, reconstruction of the I-79 ramps, widening of SR 6/19/322 and resurfacing of I-79 in the interchange vicinity. The College's contribution to the project will focus on transforming the areas within the cloverleaves into sculptural systems designed to filter and purify road runoff.

The concept for "In Praise of Land & Water" integrates aesthetic solutions with targeted environmental remediation of stormwater issues inherent at the project site. All of the stormwater from I-79 and the surrounding topography passes through the cloverleaves, and empties directly into Van Horne Creek, eventually making its way into the French Creek watershed, carrying road salts, oil and grease with it into this natural treasure.

The initial concept for "In Praise of Land & Water" had its germination in Professor Amara Geffen's environmental art courses at Allegheny College in Meadville. Amara and her students have partnered with PennDOT to beautify the SR 6/19/322 area since the late 1990's. The signart projects at the Crawford County Maintenance Office are the result of many years of collaboration.

Last April, an interdisciplinary team was assembled to move preliminary concepts forward into design and engineering development. The team consists of Amara Geffen, Professor of Art and Director, Center for Economic and Environmental Development, Allegheny College; Chris Brown, Landscape Architect with Derck & Edison, Inc., Steve Halmi of Diess & Halmi Engineering, and Angelo Ciotti, environmental artist. Artist Jackie Brookner participated in the early phases of the design development process.

The resulting designs include a series of sculptural check dams, infiltration pools and earth mounds that will serve as a national model for merging best environmental and art practices in addressing water quality issues along federal highways. This natural stormwater retention and infiltration scheme will also demonstrate creative reuse of the concrete from the demolished bridges and will feature native plantings. Motorists traveling on the newly reconstructed I-79 bridges will get a view of an environmental stewardship project that not only mitigates and protects, but also celebrates water as a vital natural resource.