

**PACD North East Region Meeting
Zoom Webinar/Conference Call
April 3, 2020**

Welcome

PACD 1st Vice President Kelly Stagen welcomed everyone to the meeting with a quorum at 10:00 a.m. She explained that she was chairing the meeting for North East Region Director Chuck Gould, who was unable to participate.

In attendance: Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Audrey Wargo, Carbon; Michele Long, Pike; Kelly Stagen, 1st Vice President; Barry Frantz, NRCS; Jenna St. Clair, Schuylkill; Nancy DiFiore, NRCS; Doug Deutsch, Wyoming; Kristina Heaney, Monroe; Josh Longmore, Luzerne; Matt Miller, PACD; Karen Books, DEP; Jamie Knecht, Wayne; Fred Fiscus, DEP; Kristopher Abell, PISC; Shane Kleiner, DEP; Tim Ference, Luzerne; Jennifer Ramey, Susquehanna; Jack Barnett, Wayne; Karl Brown, SCC; Molly Burns, PACD; Jerry Stiles, Lackawanna.

Date of Next Meeting

The next PACD North East meeting will be held on October 2, 2020, at the DEP North East Region Office.

Date of Meeting with Aneca Atkinson

Brenda Shambaugh explained that DEP Deputy Secretary for Water Programs Aneca Atkinson is interested in meeting with each region to encourage and improve communication. The group determined that the North East Region would meet with Deputy Secretary Atkinson on October 28, 2020, at the DEP North East Region Office.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Kelly Stagen called for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting.

It was moved by Audrey Wargo and seconded by Jennifer Ramey to approve the minutes of the September 27, 2020, meeting. Motion carried.

Bylaws Change to Move Armstrong to North West Region

Brenda Shambaugh explained that the Armstrong County Conservation District would like to move from the PACD South West region to the North West region, so they are in the same region for both PACD and DEP. This will require a change to the PACD Bylaws.

It was moved by Tim Ference and seconded by Jerry Stiles to support a PACD Bylaws change to move Armstrong County Conservation District to the North West Region. Motion carried.



Brenda asked to hold discussion on the invasive species funding policy until after the presentation from the PA Invasive Species Council, as the presentation will provide information pertinent to the motion.

PACD Report

Brenda provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- *Clean Water Academy* – PACD’s Nick Yeagy is working hard to add new learning to the Clean Water Academy on an on-going basis.
- *Multi-functional Riparian Buffer Sub-Grants* – Funding is available, and we continue to accept applications.
- *Ag Boot Camp* – Basic will take place in two parts: in-class via webinar April 6-9, 2020, and in the field September 9-11, 2020, at the Dauphin County Agriculture and Natural Resources Center. Dates for Level II are pending.
- *102/105 Technical Training* – Basic will take place June 16-19, 2020, and Topic-based will take place September 16-18, 2020. Both will be held at the Wyndham Garden State College.
- *Fluvial Geomorphology Training* – Postponed until November 17-18, 2020.
- *Chesapeake Bay Education Office* – This office has been hosted by PACD for many years and has been discontinued by DEP due to funding cuts by EPA. As a result, PACD has discontinued the Clean Water Farm Award, the Manure Management Mini-grant Program, and hosting County Implementation Plans on our website. The 2020 Chesapeake Bay Program Conservation District and PA Agency Staff Meeting did take place through a different DEP grant. We are currently unsure about future meetings.
- *Leadership Development Program* – Brenda provided an update on Matt Miller’s program activities, including the recent regional director training sessions, which drew a total of 145 attendees. Matt Miller provided an update on the Records Retention for Conservation Districts webinar, which has been postponed indefinitely but will be rescheduled at some point in the future. He also provided information on the new weekly one-hour Managers Forum web-meetings, which will take place each Wednesday for the foreseeable future.
- Brenda reported that the in-person component of conservation district week, which will take place the week of May 3-9, 2020, will be postponed. She encouraged everyone to please take advantage of the template letters and materials on the PACD website at www.pacd.org and reach out to their legislators in lieu of meeting with them in person.

Presentation from the PA Invasive Species Council (PISC)

Kristopher Abell, PISC Coordinator, provided a presentation on behalf of the Pennsylvania Invasive Species Council. The presentation provided information about PISC, an overview of Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMA), how these might be coordinated in Pennsylvania, and examples of other, similar, coordinated activities.

Motion on Invasive Species Policy

The group discussed the motion and it was stressed that each district must be able to decide if they wanted to participate.

It was moved by Jenna St. Clair and seconded by Jennifer Ramey to support the following motion:

PACD encourages the PA Department of Agriculture and related agencies to develop a delegated agreement with conservation districts to provide funding and authority to battle invasive species.

Motion carried.

State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report

Executive Secretary Karl Brown provided the following report:

- Karl thanked everyone for participating.
- He reviewed a document tracking new dates for training opportunities that have been rescheduled. He noted that will probably be updated and redistributed again next week.
- He thanked districts for sharing their Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plans with Karen Books. The SCC is trying to help districts work through this process.
- Karl reviewed some resources for information related to COVID-19. He also urged everyone to sign up for the PA Nightly Bulletin, which PDA has been sending out every night and contains a lot of good information. He also encouraged everyone to review the updates sent out by the SCC, DEP, and others with guidance about various programs.
- He reviewed a draft document defining the new Conservation District Advisory Committee.
- He discussed the Draft Conservation District Drone Policy.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Report

Fred Fiscus provided the following report.

- Karen has received COOPs from all 66 districts and is updating the spreadsheet daily as updates come in. He specifically asked to please let them know if there are any furloughs and, if so, what programs that will impact and how. DEP will then work with each district to determine if and how this may affect their delegation agreement. There was some discussion about when and how to furlough staff and what resources may be available.
- He discussed the Fiscal Year Budgeting Spreadsheet for conservation district staff, which was approved by the commission in March and will take effect on July 1, 2020. Several districts have piloted the spreadsheet and had no major issues. To help offset the additional reporting requirement, districts no longer need to submit the CDFAP year-end Financial Statement. This spreadsheet will help demonstrate the ability of districts to leverage state and county dollars, confirm that districts are properly matching CDFAP funding for certain positions, and help the SCC and DEP gather regularly requested information.
- The SCC has established a Conservation District Financial Management Workgroup. The workgroup will oversee the development of an accounting and administrative procedures manual containing a standard chart of accounts and/or a comprehensive financial management system. Karen Books provided additional information on the group.
- Summer Kunkel is the new Acting Director for the DEP Office of Water Resources Planning.
- Fred also shared that he will be retiring on April 24, 2020.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Report

Nancy DiFiore provided the following report, referring to the PA NRCS Conservation Update for the Northeast Region:

- NRCS staff are either in the office or teleworking. They are still doing field work while maintaining social distancing.

- She discussed the Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) and a recent EWP project completed in Scranton.
- The Soil Survey is undergoing update on an on-going basis.
- They have begun the process of assigning Ecological Sciences Job Approval Authority (ESJAA) to those for whom it applies.
- They are taking nominations for the Leopold Award through August 1, 2020.
- She noted the FY 2020 Farm Bill Programs Allocations.
- NRCS has extended the application deadline for the Conservation Stewardship Program to May 29, 2020.
- Applications for the Agricultural Land Easement Program (ALE) and the Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE) are being accepted on a continuous basis throughout the year.
- NRCS is accepting On-farm Conservation Innovation Trial proposals through May 11, 2020.
- NRCS is accepting Regional Conservation Partnership Program's (RCPP) Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA) proposals through May 18, 2020.

Barry Frantz provided the following report:

- Barry Frantz reported that they are all working hard to fulfill program activities remotely.
- They are testing out their new conservation assessment ranking tool.
- They have significant workload to keep them busy. In addition to 2100 EQIP applications, they've received 380 or 390 CSP applications.
- The announcement went out for Pennsylvania's Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program. These grants provide up to \$75,000 per project and priorities include forest health, nutrient management, and urban conservation.
- The national CIG program for projects larger than \$75,000 should be announced soon.
- The next State Technical Committee meeting will take place on April 21, 2020, at 1:00 p.m.
- Ed Sanders, longtime EQIP program manager, retired at the end of March. Zenik Crespo from the Clarion office is temporarily filling in for that position.

Regional Discussion

Carbon – Audrey Wargo reported they have a site that has been receiving New York and New Jersey fill. It's causing countywide and now regionwide problems. They are doing the best they can without inspection capabilities.

Lackawanna – Jerry Stiles reported that county offices are still officially open. They have someone in the office every day. They are still receiving plans from engineers and staff are still able to review plans. There is not a great deal of construction happening, so that's affecting inspections. Their ag technician is working remotely as best as they can and is still delivering their no-till seeder on a drop-off basis, with any questions or discussion taking place via phone.

Luzerne – Josh Longmore reported that, looking at the new federal legislation, districts may need some additional counsel related to how it may affect them as government entities. For example, the additional two weeks of COVID-19-related sick leave may apply to local government entities. Jenna St. Clair from Schuylkill provided input from their county. Karl Brown noted they

are also looking at that question and will provide any guidance they receive. Brenda reported that she will check with the County Commissioners Association, as well.

Monroe – Kristina Heaney reported that this is her third month as manager. Their staff hasn't missed a beat in terms of work. However, they are concerned about the financial consequences for their educational program if this moves into May. They have five full-time educational staff. They have been working on a COOP just for their educational staff.

Pike – Michele Ulmer reported all their staff are working remotely. She is coming in twice a week to disseminate incoming mail and other needed information and materials to staff. They are not doing site inspections unless there is an emergency-level complaint. They have a meeting with their County Commissioners this afternoon.

Schuylkill – Jenna St. Clair has been working to keep their staff busy working remotely. They had a staff call yesterday and everyone seems to be adjusting well. She goes on maternity leave sometime in the next month, so their interim manager is taking over some of those duties to move things forward. They've had lots of decisions to make regarding upcoming events, whether to hire interns, etc.

Susquehanna – Jennifer Ramey reported that they are doing site inspections only in emergency situations. They're keeping in touch via conference calls and are working to process refunds from their tree sales and Envirothon. Most people are letting the district keep their donations and apply them towards other environmental education programs. They are still pushing forward with their local school districts on their scholarships.

Wayne – Jamie Knecht reported that she and their fiscal coordinator received essential government employee letters, so they've been going in periodically to keep things moving. They have five techs working from home full time. They are new but are doing very well. They have also been refunding for their cancelled activities. They are working on the COOP updates daily. They have a county COOP and a conservation district COOP.

Wyoming – Doug Deutsch reported their COOP is mostly unchanged. The commissioners voted to keep things steady today. They have been able to keep working well. The Clean Water Academy and other available webinars are great to keep people learning and working. Their Envirothon and seedling sales have been cancelled and they are addressing activities as they draw near.

Kelly Stagen thanked everyone, districts and partners, for responding so well to this situation and for all they continue to do for the North West region.

Shane Kleiner reported that they are having weekly calls with the districts to keep communication open. He and Carl DeLuca are available to help districts as much as they can. Any Growing Greener grants can be processed so please continue to send in reimbursements. The regional office as informed they are remote until the end of April unless informed otherwise. Most offices have phones forwarded to home, so they are accessible.

Adjournment

It was moved by Jamie Knecht to adjourn the meeting at 12:17 p.m. Motion carried.