

**PACD South Central Region
Video Conference Minutes
March 24, 2021**

Welcome, Introductions, and Roll Call

Region Director John Akers called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m. with a quorum present.

Participants: Adam McClain, Adams; John Akers, Bedford; Jennifer Kovacs, Bedford, Donna Fisher, Blair; George Duff, Cumberland; Glenn Kimmel, Cumberland; Carl Goshorn, Cumberland; Steve Taglang, Cumberland; Tia Kissinger, Dauphin; Eric Naguski, Dauphin; Karen Books, DEP; Sam Worley, Franklin; David Stoner, Franklin; Seleen Shives, Fulton; Celina Seftas, Huntingdon; Chris Snyder, Juniata; Chris Thompson, Lancaster; Sonia Wasco, Lancaster; Katie Doster, Lebanon; Randall Leisure, Lebanon; Erica Smith, Mifflin; Trevor Weaver, Mifflin; Charlie Hanner, NRCS; Scott Heckman, NRCS, Matt Miller, PACD; Elwood Blake, DEP; Lauren Brodbar, PACD; Molly Burns, PACD; Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Karl Brown, SCC; Bruce Holbrook, York, Shannon Wehinger, PACD

Set Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held virtually or in person on October 15, 2021. If in person, it will be held at the Cumberland County Conservation District.

Meeting with DEP Deputy Secretary of Water Programs

The region will meet with Deputy Secretary Aneca Atkinson on November 8, 2021.

Approval of Minutes from the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were provided prior to the meeting and displayed for review.

It was moved by Sam Worley and seconded by Eric Naguski to approve the minutes of the September 29, 2020, meeting. Motion carried.

PACD Business and Report

Executive Director Brenda Shambaugh provided highlights from her written report:

- *Staff changes:* PACD Director of Operations Lisa Jo Suhr retired in February. PACD Program Manager Amy Brown has moved into the Director of Operations position. Our new Program Managers is Holly Miller, formerly Sullivan County Conservation District Manager. We also have a new administrative assistant, Diane Young, who is helping Amy with bookkeeping in addition to her other duties.



- *Conservation District Week* will be taking place virtually April 18-24, 2021, which will coincide with Earth Day. Brenda encouraged everyone to participate in some way and shared information on resources available on the PACD website at www.pacd.org.
- *The upcoming budget* will hopefully be a full-year budget. However, it will be a very difficult budget year.
- *Boot Camp* applications are closed. Basic will be held in two parts. The online portion will be held April 12-15, 2021, and the in-person field training will be held August 2-4, 2021. The application period is closed. *Boot Camp Level II* will be held August 23-27, 2021, at the Keystone Conference Center at Fort Indiantown Gap in Annville and the Holiday Inn Harrisburg. The application period is closed, and 27 students were accepted.
- *Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Mini-grant Program*: In February, the districts were awarded over \$60,000 to complete 39 pollution reduction projects in 28 counties.
- *CREP Mini-grant Program*: PACD opened a short round of CREP mini grants to conservation districts to implement virtual educational and outreach activities that support and extend the work of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The new application deadline is April 9, 2021, and the grant amount has been increased to \$1,000.
- *Landowner Guide to Buffer Success* updates are almost complete. PACD will have 2,500 calendar-style guides available for distribution soon.
- *Native Plants and Pollinators Training*: NRCS offered free technical training to Pennsylvania's conservation districts on native plants and pollinators on February 18, 2021.
- *Riparian Buffer Sub-grants*: PACD is continuing to accept sub-grant applications to implement multi-functional riparian buffers, with \$388,608.00 still available and 19 grants implementing over 60 acres of buffers underway.
- *Building for Tomorrow Leadership Development Program* held the Virtual Staff Conference February 8-12, 2021, which had an average session attendance of 111 and concluded with the first annual Conservation District Video Awards. A February Board Leadership webinar series had an average session attendance of 34. The upcoming New Manager Training program will include online and in-person instruction. The Management Summit is scheduled as an in-person event for September 15-16, 2021, at the Wyndham Garden State College, with a follow-up Fall Leadership webinar series for directors and managers in October. Brenda thanked the State Conservation Commission for funding this program.
- *Clean Water Academy*: PACD continues to work closely with DEP to develop Chapter 102 and Chapter 105 eLearning courses for the Clean Water Academy. We have been working to address needs expressed by districts and will continue to do so. Brenda encouraged everyone to share any specific training needs they may have with Nick Yeagy at nyeagy@pacd.org.
- *Chapter 102/105 webinars* are taking place this spring. Details were provided in the packet.
- *The PA Invasive Species Council* continues to work with partnering agencies and stakeholders to develop a workable statewide invasive species program. While nothing has been finalized, PACD and several individual conservation districts continue to express the need for a comprehensive program to combat plant, insect, and aquatic invasive species. Several groups are looking to the conservation districts to administer regional programs if given the appropriate funding necessary to cover their costs. Please consider discussing the possibility of your district's participation with your board.

Brenda asked for feedback on the potential to hold an in-person meeting in July. Responses were mixed with some expressing willingness to attend, while others noted it may not be practical.

New PACD Engineering Assistance Program employee Lauren Brodbar introduced herself and shared a little bit of background.

Regional Information Sharing

Bedford – Jennifer Kovacs reported they are in their second year of CAP planning. They are working with the planning commissions and working closely with LandStudies. They have just developed an implementation funding phase to provide funds to their primary partners for stream projects and are also working on their third phase. They will be posting notices and applying for funding for their ag BMP projects. Their no-till equipment program is still active, primarily their green planter. They sent out a customer survey and there is a strong push for bigger planters, so they will be picking up a six-row planter that folds for easier delivery. PA Envirothon Coordinator Lorelle Steach will be retiring at the end of May and will be greatly missed.

Adams – Adam McClain reported their commissioners will be making a proclamation for conservation district week. They are holding their first in-person board meeting in April. They are holding their tree sale again this year. They are also hiring a mosquito borne disease control (MBDC) intern. They are prioritizing BMP installation through buffers, ag BMPs, and DGLVR. They are also working on new BMPs through their CAP.

Blair – Donna Fisher reported they are planning a tree sale with drive-through pick-up. She thanked her staff and nearby districts for their help. They are beginning on their CAP. For those in the Penelec area Donna has a contact, Bev Green, to do tree planting. The First Energy Green Team has a goal to plant 10,000 trees, so Penelec is planning to plant 1,000 in their area.

Cumberland – Carl Goshorn reported they received some conservation excellence grant program funding to implement ag BMPs. They will use a portion of the funding to hire an engineer. They are holding a drive-through tree seedling sale and their tree sale numbers are way up. They have exceeded the numbers from their last sale already and may exceed their pre-order. Their cover crop program is very successful. They give cost-share incentive to farmers to plant cover and leave it green until April 1. They give \$20/acre for conservation till and \$30/acre for no-till. Sixty-one farmers applied for over 8,200 acres this year and they cost-shared over 2,000 acres.

Dauphin – Eric Naguski reported they are partnering with Perry County on their CAP, with the planning commission taking the lead. Their DGLVR program is up and moving, and they are in the third phase of a four-phase project in the northern part of the county. They are beginning a floodplain restoration project in Armstrong Creek, working with LandStudies, and will be looking for funding next. They are also having their seedling sale and orders are very high.

Franklin – Dave Stoner reported they have been busy with solar farm projects. They are in the implementation phase of their CAP. Their ag staff are very busy, with over \$2 million in grants for BMPs and two years to implement. They are under spotted lanternfly quarantine. They have a 2,000-foot streambank restoration project out for bid that will begin construction this summer. They have started planning their annual summer conservation farm tour and held an ag industry meeting as part of their CAP to encourage promotion of BMPs.

Fulton – Seleen Shives reported that they are in a group with Blair, Huntingdon, and Cambria Counties for CAP planning, and they have hired HRG as their coordinator. They are in the midst of a 700-acre disturbed project for a solar project, which is in a limestone valley where most of their dairy farms are located. They have been working on design and permitting for a stream restoration project on an ag-impaired section of Big Cove Creek, in that same limestone valley, and are gearing up for the next phase.

Huntingdon – Celina Seftas reported they have been focusing on a rapid delisting strategy with Chesapeake Conservancy. They are working with four different farmers on streambank restoration projects. All four sites will have a riparian buffer planting. Two are in high quality and two are in impaired watersheds. They recently joined Juniata and others for an excellent meeting with Sen. Jake Corman. She encouraged districts to group up with other districts to meet with legislators.

Envirothon – Celina Seftas thanked Bedford for hosting the Envirothon Coordinator position for so many years. The position will be open to candidates statewide, so the Envirothon board treasurer may be reaching out to districts about hosting a coordinator. Celina encouraged everyone to update to the new Envirothon app, which was sponsored by their digital-first sponsor PSECU.

Juniata – Chris Snyder reported they are working on their CAP. As a small county they are lacking certain resources, so the district and planning office are carrying that project. They also have solar farm projects in the county. The governor recently announced a six-county project for solar arrays that includes Juniata. They hope to have more information on that soon. Their E&S workload is high already, so they are concerned about how to manage additional workload with solar projects. They have six applications for DGLVR projects and are working to finish out grants with outstanding projects that were delayed due to COVID-19.

Lancaster – They have nine openings and have been struggling with staff turnover. They are planning eight more projects using their CEG funding. As part of their strategic plan, they have been working with their ag impaired streams. The Clean Water Partners initiative has taken on their CAP management, though the district is very involved. Of their 700 miles of impaired streams, they have had two local tributaries delisted and they will be publicizing that soon. They have three more that are in the process of qualifying. They continue to face a challenge funding staff. They are currently managing 32 grants to help fund staff through project implementation. They are coordinating with their partners on the CAP. They are excited to be beginning a plain-sect manure injection pilot project, with private foundation funding for a horse-drawn injector.

Lebanon – Katie Doster reported they are in their first year of implementing their CAP and hired an in-house coordinator in the fall. They received funding from DEP for implementation. They are in the process of doing I&Es and design for two ag BMP projects, with the hope that they will be in construction by the end of the year. They are also working on a cover crop incentive program. They have a busy education and outreach season ahead with some virtual and some in-person activities. They also had very high tree sale orders. They are planning an in-person legislative roundtable with local legislators in an outdoor pavilion at a wetland preserve the district manages.

Mifflin – Trevor Weaver reported that he started in November and thanked everyone for their support. They closed out big NFWF and DCNR grants last year. The district has two big grant-funded projects going. They are continuing surface-water sampling in two impaired watersheds. They are partnered with Juniata and working with NRG on CAP development. They will be doing a tree sale using drive-up, pick-up, and delivery.

York – Bruce Holbrook reported that they are having a booming tree sale. Their new district manager, Jeff Hill, began yesterday. Jeff comes to them from the Lancaster Conservation District. Mark Kimmel retired on March 15 and is working part-time with Cumberland County Conservation District.

PA State Conservation Commission Report

Executive Secretary Karl Brown provided highlights from his written report:

- He thanked districts for their flexibility and adaptability over the past year.
- He encouraged everyone to consider incorporating virtual access to district board meetings to provide access to those who cannot normally attend.
- As of yesterday, all but three districts have submitted nominations for district directors. He thanked district staff and boards for their work during that process.
- All directors and many staff need to submit a statement of financial interest, and these are due no later than May 1.
- They have wrapped up their third round of Quality Assurance Quality Control visits for the Dirt, Gravel, Low Volume Road Program. He reminded everyone that April 16 is the deadline to meet program spending requirements. The 2020 annual summary report is online at the Center for Dirt & Gravel Road Studies website.
- They have appointed/reappointed several representatives to the Conservation District Advisory Committee.
- They adopted the *Conservation District Drone Utilization* policy on January 19, 2021.
- They are working on a policy on *Restrictions on the Appointment of Former Conservation District Employees and Other County, State and Federal Employees as Conservation District Directors*. The policy states that outgoing district employees must wait three years from their separation from the district to be appointed as a district director or associate director. There is the opportunity to request a case-by-case exception from the Commission.
- He provided details about the Conservation Excellence Grant (CEG) Program, which is administered by the Commission to implement Agricultural BMPs. It is active in Lancaster (\$1.75 million), York (\$1.25 million), Cumberland (\$1.154 million), Franklin (\$1.154 million), Bedford (\$750,000), and Centre (\$750,000).
- They just wrapped up their REAP tax credit application program. They have more applications than they can award, and those applications will be rolled to the next round. The Commission is now authorized to offer a 90% tax credit for certain high priority agricultural BMPs in watersheds covered by a TMDL for agricultural impairments. High priority BMPs include: riparian forest buffers, buffer maintenance, livestock exclusion from streams and supporting practices, stream crossings, cover crops, soil health BMPs, and other BMPs as determined appropriate by the SCC.
- The SCC is working to reestablish Agri-Link Program, which provides low interest loans to farmers to help them implement agricultural BMPs that are a part of an approved plan.

- The governor has proposed putting together a transportation commission to look at liquid fuels funding in Pennsylvania. The Commission is asking to be included in that process to represent the DGLVR program. Karl recommended districts be part of these conversations and ensure they are included in any proposed alternatives to the existing gas tax.
- Karl urged districts to be involved with the development of climate change BMPs through USDA and others, as there is significant overlap between ag BMPs and climate change BMPs, particularly as they relate to soil health.

PA Department of Environmental Protection Report

Water Program Specialist Karen Books provided highlights from her written report.

- The 2021 Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting is coming up May 19-20, 2021. This will be for district staff and other entities involved in 319 projects.
- EPA Region 3 Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management – Quality Assurance Program Plans (QAPP) Training will be taking place on April 13. Registration deadline is April 6.
- 2021 Virtual Conservation District and PA Agency Ag Meeting was held March 16-17. It was very successful, with 185 participants on Tuesday and at least 150 on Wednesday. Information will be on the Clean Water Academy soon.
- The Agricultural Energy Use Workshops began on March 18 and will continue Thursdays for the next few months.
- Individual permit applications will be accepted via ePermitting as of April 21, 2021. E&S permit applications will be accepted as of July 28.
- Everyone will need a Keystone login to import their Greenport account into the new Greenport. Karen will send out additional information.
- The Ag Plan Reimbursement Program will end April 1. The deadline to register a plan for this program is April 1, 2021. All plans must be registered by this date. They are not currently planning to renew this program.
- Karen noted it is good to hear that everyone is working on their CAP plans and encouraged anyone who needs additional assistance to contact their CAP coordinator at DEP.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Report

Assistant State Conservationist Charlie Hanner provided highlights from his written report.

- He introduced Scott Heckman, who took over for Barry Frantz as Assistant State Conservationist for Programs.
- NRCS continues to operate with one person in the office at a time, with others working remotely, and field work continues and has not slowed. He gave an update on where they are with contracts and programs.
- He shared a success story about protecting a Juniata farm despite the complications of working through COVID-19.
- Statewide Farm Bill Programs Status for FY2020: AMA 2018 had 25 contracts for a total of \$348,882; EQIP2018 had 456 contracts for a total of 22,576,802; RCPP-EQIP 2014 had 28 contracts for 1,931,830; and CSP and CSP GCI had 168 contracts for a total of \$6,242,715. Overall, there were a total of 677 contracts for \$31,100,232 on 104,441 acres.
- The Wetland Reserve Easement Program has been active in this region. They will be reviewing and ranking applications in May, though the application period is year-round.

- The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL566) – Repairs on Core Creek Dam in Bucks is in progress. They just wrapped up Hibernia Dam in Chester and will be starting on Beaver Creek Dam in Chester.

Assistant State Conservationist for Programs Scott Heckman introduced himself, told everyone a little about himself, and reported he is looking forward to continuing working with districts. He noted that the Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape Project was approved for \$9.9 Million through RCPP. Through this project, four state agencies and five conservancies will work together to permanently preserve agricultural and forestlands in the Kittatinny Ridge landscape. They hope to announce sign-up soon. All of the PACD South Central counties are listed in the project, as well as some outside the region.

PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Report

A written report was provided.

Adjournment

It was moved by Bruce Holbrook and seconded by Sam Worley to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:04 p.m.