

**PACD South East Region
Video Conference Minutes
March 25, 2021**

Welcome, Introductions, and Roll Call

Region Director Piper Sherburne called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. with a quorum.

Participants: Dean Druckenmiller, Berks; Piper Sherburne, Berks; Gretchen Schatschneider, Bucks; Christian Strohmaier, Chester; Ed Magargee, Delaware; Karen Books, DEP; Kevin Frederick, Lehigh; Jessica Buck, Montgomery; Janet Creegan, Northampton; Nicholas DiPaolo, Northampton; Dion Campbell, Northampton; Ted Veresink, Northampton; Charlie Hanner, NRCS; Susan Marquart, NRCS; Matt Miller, PACD; Linda Mackey, DEP; Molly Burns, PACD; Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Jeff Sholly, PACD TAG; Desiree Henning Dudley, DEP, Karl Brown, SCC; Nick Yeagy, PACD.

Set Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on October 28, 2021, either virtually or in person.

Meeting with DEP Deputy Secretary of Water Programs

The region will meet with Aneca Atkinson on March 23, 2022.

Approval of Minutes from the Previous Meeting

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

It was moved by Ted Veresink and seconded by Ed Magargee to approve the minutes of the October 1, 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. Our Program Manager, Amy Brown has moved into the Director of Operations position. Holly Miller, former Sullivan County Conservation District Manager, has joined us as Program 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, Annville, PA, and the Holiday Inn Harrisburg. The application period is closed, and 27 students were accepted.
- *Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Mini-grant Program*: In February, Pennsylvania's county conservation districts were awarded over \$60,000. With this funding, thirty-nine pollution reduction projects will take place in twenty-eight 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 a total of 19 grants underway implementing over 60 acres of buffers.
- *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 nyeaagy@pacd.org.
- *Chapter 102/105 webinars* are taking place this spring.
- *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.

Piper Sherburne provided an update on her work with the council. She asked districts to let her know if they would consider stepping up to host a regional invasive species area. It was suggested to consider RC&D as host. This would help revitalize the RC&D, use an existing structure, and involve the districts without putting the burden on any one district.

Brenda Shambaugh asked for input on holding an in-person July conference. The feedback overwhelmingly supported holding the July meeting virtually.

Jeff Sholly reported he is keeping busy, with several projects in-process, including a stacking shed for calf manure and composting, and a roof stack pad and two grass waterways with stone outlets.

Regional Information Sharing

Bucks – Gretchen Schatschneider reported they have expanded their office and have construction going on. About half of the renovations are completed. They will have space for their new ag technician and one or two more E&S technicians and their DGLVR administrator. They are involved in a wetland restoration project related to a NRCS flood control dam in a heavily-used county park. The conservation pool is completely full of sediment and they have done 25 years of work in the watershed to try to minimize the NPS pollution. They are funded for a dredge project, habitat improvements, and education. They are hoping to hold their Fathers Day fishing derby in June, outside with social distancing. Their 60th anniversary is this April. They have received a commendation from the PA Senate and are expecting one from the PA House. They also received a flag from their Federal Representative.

Chester – Chris Strohmaier reported they have lost two-and-a-half staff since COVID began, including their part-time front desk staff and an ag and an urban position. They do not plan to fill the part-time position. They are one of the pilot counties for the Bay Phase II. They will be completing their initial 100 visits by this summer and then will begin 100 follow-up inspections to ensure that plans are implemented. They partnered with Berks and Schuylkill on the EP grant for the CAP. The process is slow because it must go through the local governments. Chester is still waiting for county approval.

Delaware – Ed Magargee reported they worked with Bucks to hold a webinar for HOAs. They worked with a Friends group in one of their local county parks, where a dam project above the park led to significant erosion and the stream almost breached into the pond. They used large Christmas trees, which they saved and installed. They hold a festival of lights at the park. Ed created a sustainability/annual report video that is posted on their YouTube channel. They are trying to fill an open position. They have had one person test positive for COVID, but because staff are largely working remotely, the rest of the office is still in business.

Montgomery – Jessica Buck reported they worked through the RC&D Council to hold a virtual stormwater maintenance workshop for HOAs and property management companies. It had about 170 participants and included proper short and long term operation and maintenance and compliance with NPDES permits. They are spearheading an aquatic invasive species project. They are partnering with their parks department to provide education outreach and signage. They have some ag workshops planned and are hoping to do some outdoor workshops this summer. Their no-till drill rental program is more and more popular, and they are promoting meadow establishment for municipalities using the drill. They have had a lot of TA requests for their watershed specialist and are identifying potential projects. They may be partnering with other organizations on some urban ag infrastructure grants through PDA. They are at full staff. With

new staff coming on, they have really appreciated the Clean Water Academy and other online training opportunities.

Lehigh – Kevin Frederick reported they received their first ePermitting application two weeks ago and things are going well. They are going to be creating a field inspector position for 102 in April, primarily focused on NOTs. They are hoping to have that position filled by June. They have a lot of expired permits from pre-2010 regulations and are now running into expired permits from post-2010 regulations. They are also going to be working on a work-from-home policy in April to allow people to work from home post-COVID. They are mostly working from home now and are hoping to continue that, as they have had great success with it. They had a virtual rain barrel workshop that went very well. It was a mini-grant through the PACD 319 grant from DEP. They have two grants for streambank and buffer projects that will hopefully be underway in April. Coca Cola donates rain barrels for their workshops.

Northampton – Dion Campbell reported he is the new district manager and started on February 22, 2021. They have Act 48 training for teachers coming up in the fall. They will be doing their Envirothon virtually in April. Their Karst geology committee is gearing up and getting involved with a cement plant and roadway projects. They held a team-building event with the Bushkill Creek conservation group to do live plantings on a streambank with erosion issues. Ted Veresink thanked the other district managers and Linda Mackey from DEP for helping to train Dion.

Berks – Dean Druckenmiller reported they are celebrating their 75th anniversary and are planning an event for this summer. They have a drive-through seedling sale on April 15 and are seeing increased orders. They have five new staff in the last six months, one E&S, one MBDC, and three ag positions. They will be adding another seasonal MBDC position. They received several grants last year that will be reaching the implementation stage.

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.
- He thanked district staff and boards for their work helping to get nominations submitted for district directors.
- 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*. If you have been employed by a district, you cannot be appointed as a director for

the first three years after your separation from the district. 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 next year's 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 the 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.

PA Department of Environmental Protection Report

Water Program Specialist Karen Books provided details 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.

Conservation District Field Representative Linda Mackey provided the following report:

- There is a Southeast regional roundtable on the morning of April 19. It will include an agricultural component and an agricultural breakout. She will work to ensure that everyone has the time they need.
- Linda urged district staff and directors to consider participating on the SCC Conservation District Advisory Committee and to reach out to anyone else who might be a good, qualified, addition to the committee.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Report

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

- 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.
- The handout begins with a success story about a Chester County mushroom grower who improved water quality in White Clay Creek by installing BMPs through the RCPP program.
- They are rolling out some new RCPP projects including “Ag BMP Implementation in the Chesapeake Bay” in the South East.
- He reviewed 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 in obligated funds on 104,441 acres.
- The Wetland Reserve Easement Program has been active in this region. The application period is year-round. However, the next round of ranking will take place May 30.
- The Delaware County soil survey continues and will continue into 2021.
- The Watershed Protection and Flood Protection Program Act (PL566) projects include Core Creek in Bucks, which is in progress. They just wrapped up Hibernia Dam in Chester and will be starting on Beaver Creek Dam, also in Chester.

Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships Susan Marquart provided the following report:

- Berks was selected last year to receive funding for a new RCPP project. The program requires significant match. For this project, NRCS will be providing \$2.2 million and the partners contributed almost \$2.3 million. They will be working on the Little Swatara and Conestoga Creek portions of the Bay Watershed.
- NRCS expects to have an RCPP Classic round sometime this summer. If you think you might be interested in a potential project, please reach out to potential partners and contact Susan.

PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Report

A written report was provided.

Adjournment

It was moved by Chris Strohmaier and seconded by Gretchen Schatschneider to adjourn the meeting at 12:11 p.m. Motion carried.