

**PACD South West Region
Video Conference Minutes
March 30, 2021**

Welcome, Introductions, and Roll Call

Region Director Emil Bove welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order with a quorum at 10:03 a.m.

In attendance: Richard Mowl, Washington; Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Charles Duritsa, Westmoreland; Emil Bove, Westmoreland; Greg Phillips; Westmoreland; Heather Manzo, Allegheny; Holly Miller, PACD; Janis Long, Indiana; Jeff Pflug, Beaver; Jeff Werner, NRCS; Jennifer Dann, Washington; Jim Miller, DEP; Karen Books, DEP; Karl Brown, SCC; Len Lichvar, Somerset; Lisa Snider, Greene; Mark Critz, PDA; Matt Miller, PACD; Michael Price, Beaver; Paul Irwin, Allegheny; Ray Gorman, Cambria; Ron Rohall, Westmoreland; Susan Marquart, NRCS; Todd Thornburg, Washington; Will Brogan, DEP; John Dryzal, Cambria; Molly Burns, PACD.

Set Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on September 21, 2021, at 10:00 a.m. If in person, it will take place at the Westmoreland Conservation District.

Meeting with DEP Deputy Secretary of Water Programs

The region will meet with Aneca Atkinson on October 13, 2021, at 9:00 a.m.

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 Chuck Duritsa and seconded by Heather Manzo to approve the minutes of the October 5, 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. Our new administrative assistant, Diane Young, is helping Amy with bookkeeping in addition to her other duties.
- *Conservation District Week* will be taking place virtually April 18-24, 2021, to coincide with Earth Day. Brenda encouraged everyone to participate in some way and shared information on resources available on 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, with an online portion April 12-15, 2021 and the in-person field training 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. A total of 19 grants implementing over 60 acres of buffers are 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 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.
- Brenda asked for feedback from the group about whether the July meeting should be in-person or virtual. The response was unanimous that, while everyone would like to meet in-person, July is too soon. It was suggested that we look at meeting in-person in January.

Regional Information Sharing

Allegheny – Heather Manzo thanked her fellow counties for sharing training opportunities. Allegheny has completed their strategic plan and have their report and priorities. They are now creating an action plan to achieve those goals. They have hired an assistant director, Erin Copeland, whose position is aligned with their strategic plan goals. They also created a new resource conservationist with a GIS focus. They finished up a four-year Growing Greener project in Montour Run. The South West PA Water Network is looking to work on the Ohio River Basin with a conservation focus. She invited anyone who is interested to contact her.

Beaver – Jeff Pflug reported they have been busy. They went through ranking for DGLVR and have approval to begin new projects. They will be busy with that program. They are hoping to have their delegation back in the next week or so and he thanked Allegheny and Washington Counties for helping to regain that delegation. Their no-till planter is busy, and they will be adding an ag lime spreader. They are remodeling their RV into an education center and hope to take that on the road in July. Their tree sale is also almost sold out and they will be working with someone who might be interested in a PACD riparian buffer grant.

Cambria – Ray Gorman reported staff is busy. They are currently working on their tree sale, which will take place in April, and have sold out of all their trees.

Greene – Lisa Snider reported they are working to reassess their roads for DGLVR and are just inputting that information now. The county will be constructing a centralized building at the fairgrounds for the district to use for equipment storage, meetings, and extra space. They are taking applications for their 2021 round of GRACE applicants.

Indiana – Janice Long introduced herself. She reported she was sitting in on the meeting for manager Doug Beri and had nothing additional to report.

Somerset – Lenny Lichvar reported they have secured \$1.1 million in federal pilot funds to put some much-needed projects on the ground. However, due to delays in obtaining those funds, they now have two AMD passive treatment sites to reconstruct/rebuild and two habitat improvement projects to complete by November 30. They finally calculated an increase in their E&S review fees, which was approved by their board. However, the board decided to delay implementing those fees. They have been working with DEP BAMR to design and construct an active system in the Shade Creek Watershed. However, that project is now being held up in court by the mining operation because they do not wish to stop discharges.

Washington – Todd Thornburg reported they are planning for their Growing Greener grant and are working with some non-profits on new grant submissions. Their no-till seeder is booked up and doing well. He thanked Allegheny for their help coordinating a recent workshop and thanked Beaver for opening their training to other districts. The district is busy with DGLVR and construction.

Westmoreland – Emil Bove reported they just concluded their spring engineers workshop. It was a four-part series with speakers from the Westmoreland district and DEP. In addition, presenters from the private sector discussed E&S and stormwater management for the Route 70 project. They had about 200 participants overall. They are also working on an Act 167 stormwater management plan. About 50% of their municipalities have adopted a version of the model

ordinance. The district is going to create short videos for homeowners and residents who will be directly affected by the ordinance. Greg Phillips reported they are finishing up their annual report and expressed pride in their staff and board. The district saw a 20% reduction in revenues and made equivalent cuts in spending. They are realigning their staff to better align with their strategic plan. They were awarded eight Growing Greener grants and they are working on several PENNDOT mitigation projects and a PACD riparian buffer grant.

Brenda noted that PACD is looking for farmers to participate in focus groups in the Ohio and Delaware river basins to help create a new education and outreach campaign for the PA Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). She encouraged everyone to please help spread the word.

PA State Conservation Commission Report

Executive Secretary Karl Brown provided the following 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 helping to get district director nominations in.
- All directors and many staff need to submit a statement of financial interest, which 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.
- The SCC 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*. According to the policy, 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.

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 about 185 participants on Tuesday and 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 is available to help if needed.
- The Ag Plan Reimbursement Program will end April 1 and DEP is not currently planning to renew this program. The deadline to register a plan for this program is April 1, 2021. All plans must be registered by this date.

Watershed Manager Will Brogan from the DEP Southwest Regional Office provided the following report:

- He noted there are three ninety-minute Southwest PA Water Network meetings coming up and encouraged anyone interested in taking part to let him know or ask their watershed specialist.
- DEP hosted an alternative restoration plan webinar with presenter Mike Morris for the district watershed specialists. Alternative restoration plans are TMDL alternatives.
- He is talking with Dustin Shull about a presentation on using citizen-gathered data and quality assurance criteria.
- He has been in touch with the watershed specialists, who are doing great work.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Report

Susan Marquart, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and RCPP Coordinator, reported on an RCPP project in the region:

- The Buffalo Creek Watershed Conservation Alliance is an RCPP project led by the Audubon Society of Western PA that encompasses Armstrong, Allegheny, and Butler counties.
- They will be conducting land management activities, implementing conservation practices, and purchasing easements.
- The project was funded for \$1,169,618 with partner contributions of \$1,163,815.
- Susan noted that this program is an excellent fit for district and encouraged anyone with questions to contact her at susan.marquart@usda.gov.

Jeff Werner, Assistant State Conservationist for Operations Western Pennsylvania, provided highlights from his written report:

- He began by providing an update on the Allegheny County Urban Soil Survey.
- Nominations for the Leopold Conservation Award are due by August 5, 2021.
- He reviewed the statewide Farm Bill Program Status for FY2020.
- He discussed the workings of the Wetland Reserve Easement Program.
- He provided an update on the Watershed Protection and Flood Protection Program Act (PL566), which is active in Washington, Westmoreland, Crawford, and Venango counties.

- He reported on training opportunities, which were outlined in a Pennsylvania Bulletin handout.
- There was a question about Source Water Protection funds under the new Farm Bill. Jeff reported on source water protection funding in the region. He will look to see if those funds are being funneled through the same program.
- He was also asked if the public can participate in the training sessions. Jeff responded that some of the training opportunities are internal and some may be open.

PA Department of Agriculture Report

Mark Critz provided the following report:

- He thanked Karl Brown for covering relevant Farm Bill programs during his report.
- The application period for the Urban Ag Grant Program closed on March 31 and they are reviewing applications.
- The application period for the Farm to School Program closes today and they will begin reviewing those applications soon.
- Cambria and Westmoreland have been added to the spotted lanternfly quarantine. They join Allegheny, Beaver, and Blair, who were already on the list. He noted it seems to be following the rail line, and he urged Somerset and Fayette counties to be on alert.
- As vaccinations move forward, they look forward to achieving fully open status. The Department has been working to keep the food supply moving.
- The Governor is heading a “Pick Up Pennsylvania” litter clean-up drive. He urged everyone to consider partnering with other organizations on this.

PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Report

A written report was provided.

Adjournment

It was moved by Heather Manzo and seconded by Mike Price to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:53 a.m.