

**PACD North West Region
Video Conference Minutes
April 8, 2021**

Welcome, Introductions, and Roll Call

Region Director Cliff Lane called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. with a quorum.

Participants: Tracey Crawford, Crawford; Eugene Metcalf, Clarion; Wendy Kedzierski, Crawford; Karen Books, DEP; Kate Wehler, Elk; Tom McClure, Erie; Donna Zofcin, Forest; Shaun Wessell, Jefferson; JoAnn McCready, Lawrence; Cliff Lane, McKean; Sandy Thompson, McKean; Blaine Puller, McKean; Matt Miller, PACD; Mark Critz, PDA; Molly Burns, PACD; Cassie Daniels, PACD; Danielle Kalp, PACD; Holly Miller, PACD; Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Diane Young, PACD; Lori Boughton, DEP; Karl Brown, PACD; Jeff Werner, NRCS; Lance Bowes, Venango; Heather Wilcox, Warren; Ian Harrell, Butler; John Green, DEP.

Set Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place virtually or in-person on September 30, 2021, at 10:00 a.m.

Set Date for Meeting with Deputy Secretary for Water Programs

The virtual meeting with Deputy Secretary Aneca Atkinson will take place at 9:00 a.m. on January 12, 2022.

Approval of Minutes from the Previous Meeting

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

It was moved by Gene Metcalf and seconded by Tom McClure to approve the minutes of the September 25, 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. 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.
- *PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference* will take place virtually this July. We are hoping to have the 2022 Winter Meeting in person.
- *PACD Awards* deadline is April 30, so please apply to us by then.
- *PACD Engineering Assistance Program* employees Danielle Kalp and Cassie Daniels provided a brief update on what they have been working on.

Regional Information Sharing

Cliff asked everyone to provide their office status, whether working virtually or in-person.

Butler – Ian Harrell reported they are holding their board meetings with some attendees socially-distancing in person and some virtual. The office is on a hybrid schedule, with staff alternating to reduce the number of people in the office at one time. It has been difficult to work as much from home as they have gotten busier. They are approved for a part-time administrative support position and have someone working 20 hours per week through a staffing service to see how things go. They worked with Allegheny and Washington to hold a virtual 102/105 training with one-hour sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays in February. They are holding a wrap-up at the end of the month. They do not have any slowdown with development and are very busy.

Clarion – Eugene Metcalf reported they have also been very busy. The district is meeting virtually until more people are vaccinated. They moved to a new office this year, which required employees to help pack and move. However, they are mainly teleworking. They plan to purchase a no-till drill and create a rental program like Clearfield's. They have projects underway, including remediating acid runoff on a county park. They have a new director on the board who will be doing additional outreach, which should be helpful for the district.

Crawford – Tracey Crawford reported they have been working using a hybrid model and will continue doing that until more vaccinations are completed. The board meetings have been virtual and next week will be their first hybrid, with some in-person and some online. They are hopeful that this will be successful, and everyone can hear what is going on. They are looking forward to breaking ground on ag BMP, streambank stabilization, and DGLVR projects, as well as tree plantings. Their tree sale is next week. She introduced Crawford director Wendy Kedzierski and thanked her for participating.

Elk – Kate Wehler reported that staff are back in the office, can stay separated and socially distanced, and are taking other steps to maintain safety. Board meetings have been virtual, but they have an in-person meeting in April immediately following their in-person DGLVR quality assurance board (QAB) meeting. They are holding a hydroponics/aquaponics workshop through a grant from local community foundation and everyone who attends will be able to take home a garden. Once you have the garden, you just need to buy plants every year and purchase fish as needed. It is sustainable, so the garden will work in classrooms and homes for years. They are holding the workshop socially-distanced in a warehouse with masking. Response was overwhelming. For Earth Day and conservation district week, they are doing an “Artists for the Earth” project where artists can enter their upcycled art for a chance to win a prize. It includes elementary, middle-school, and college-adult categories.

Erie – Tom McClure reported they have been holding their board meetings as hybrid or in-person and alternating schedules for staff in the office. They had a water line leak last September and should have a new floor and new ceiling tiles next month. They are oversold on many items for their tree sale. They partnered with the Lake Erie Arboretum in Frontier Park for their ReLeaf program that aims to plant a tree for every resident in Erie by 2025, or 275,000 trees. They are looking for projects with schools, municipalities, and landowners to get trees in the ground through the 10 Million Trees program. They have a streambank stabilization project lined up on a Lake Erie tributary working with vineyards through the Vines program. They have DGLVR projects coming up. They also have ag BMP projects. They are working on a DCNR C2P2 grant for a trail expansion project for headwaters park.

Forest – Donna Zofcin reported they had their first in-person board meeting this month. They held a virtual QAB meeting thanks to Shawn at Jefferson. They are working with the PA Conservancy on a streambank fish habitat project and have DGLVR projects coming up.

Jefferson – Shaun Wessell reported staff have been back in the office since last May. The board is meeting in person with agency representatives and others attending via Zoom. The office is closed to the public and open by appointment only. They are holding several litter pickups and an outdoor event at the local library on pollinators and other issues. In late April they have a virtual logging project with neighboring districts and SFI. They are busy with construction.

Lawrence – Jo Ann McCready reported they had their first in-person board meeting yesterday. they provided the option to call in and it went well. They also had a QAB meeting yesterday. NRCS did not attend. The courthouse opened to the public this week but had very little traffic. They have worked virtually for over a year with one person in the office per day. For ag projects, they are working in Slippery Rock Creek Watershed and the Sugar and Honey Creek Watersheds. They are also working on DGLVR projects. They finished a dry creek in the south side community garden in New Castle. They are working with the mayor and other partners to plan a green alley project to connect Zemelli park with an old Rite Aid building that is being converted to a recreation center. They are holding a virtual earth day celebration. They finished up their photo contest. They are holding a drive-through tree sale and sales are through the roof.

McKean – Sandy Thompson reported they have been working in-person since last May. Staff have individual offices and have been following safety protocols. Board meetings have been hybrid. This year, they have five acid mine drainage projects, two streambank stabilization fish enhancement structures, four DGLVR projects, two aquatic organism stream crossing projects funded through NFWF, one ag BMP project, and are treating plants for invasive species. Their Envirothon will be virtual. They are holding a My Growing Tree program with first and second graders using kits. They are holding a poster contest, virtual rain barrel workshop and an E&S workshop for landowners. They will be holding virtual Envirothon Awards during conservation district week and have a legislative meeting planned with other districts. Their resource specialist was recently approved by the Governor to be a member of the Invasive Species Council representing the Allegheny Invasive Plant Management Area. She is also on the Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) subcommittee.

Venango – Lance Bowes reported they are holding hybrid board meetings. Only one staff person works in the office at a time. They are going to be moving their office and are working with a design architect before lining up a contractor. Their seedling sale is coming up and sales are about average. They completed the first part of the DGLVR quality assurance process and have a site visit next week. DGLVR projects are gearing up. Their ag technician is finishing up an ag grant from the Northwest Commission. They received two Growing Greener grants, one for \$226,000 for ag BMPs in French Creek and one for \$19,000 for a small streambank stabilization fish habitat improvement project in a local township.

Warren – Heather Wilcox reported they have been working in-person since last April and board meetings are largely in-person as well. They just completed their first-ever art contest. They are moving forward with all their summer educational programs in-person. Their DGLVR program is very busy.

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.
- Most districts have submitted nominations for district directors. He thanked district staff and boards for their work on that.
- 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 highlights from her written report.

- Section 319 meeting is coming up May 19-20, 2021. This will be for district staff and other entities involved in 319 projects.
- The 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.

- 2021 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. Training is planned for April 21.
- Everyone will need a Keystone login to import their Greenport account into the new Greenport. Karen can help if needed.
- Watershed Specialist grant information went out and those applications are due by May 1. Please contact your advisor or Jennifer Ritter in the grants center with any questions.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Report

Jeff Werner, Assistant State Conservationist for Operations for Western Pennsylvania, provided the following highlights from the handout:

- He highlighted a success story highlighting the Happy Hill Farm run by the Evans family. This is a great example of how an initial visit led to continued work with the landowners.
- Leopold Conservation Awards nomination deadline is August 5.
- He reviewed a summary of accomplishments with the Farm Bill programs.
- The Wetland Reserve Easement Program is available. If districts know of any interested landowners with marginal land or land that could potentially be restored to wetlands, please get in touch with the field office to set up a visit.
- NRCS is working on dams in Crawford, Venango, and Mercer.
- A bulletin of upcoming training sessions was provided. Some are geared toward the public and some are for more specific audiences.
- Denise Coleman is still in Pennsylvania, but is on detail, so Pete Vanderstappen is Acting State Conservationist.

PA Department of Agriculture Report

Western Regional Director Mark Critz was unable to provide a verbal report due to technical difficulties.

PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Report

A written report was provided.

Activities Conclude

The meeting was adjourned at 11:46 a.m.