

**PACD North East Region
Video Conference Minutes
April 16, 2021**

Welcome, Introductions, and Roll Call

PACD 1st Vice President Kelly Stagen called the meeting to order with a quorum at 10:04 a.m.

In attendance: Andy Wodehouse, PACD; Audrey Wargo, Carbon; Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Doug Deutsch, Wyoming; Dave Taylor, Wyoming; Bob Robinson, Wyoming; Holly Miller, PACD; Jack Barnett, Wayne; Jack Hanish, Luzerne; Jamie Knecht, Wayne; Jen Matthews, Pike; Jenna St. Clair, Schuylkill; Jennifer Ramey, Susquehanna; John Motz, Monroe; Josh Longmore, Luzerne; Karen Books, DEP; Karl Brown, SCC; Kelly Stagen, Pike; Kristina Heaney, Monroe; Matt Miller, PACD; Nancy DiFiore, NRCS; Nathan Brophy, PACD; Peter Vanderstappen, NRCS; Shane Kleiner, DEP; Tim Ferrence, Luzerne; Molly Burns, PACD

Set Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place virtually or in person at 10:00 a.m. on October 8, 2021.

Meeting with DEP Deputy Secretary of Water Programs

The region will meet with Aneca Atkinson on February 23, 2022, at 9:00 a.m.

Approval of Minutes from the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the October 2, 2020, meeting were provided for review.

It was moved by Jamie Knecht and seconded by Jack Hanish to approve the minutes of the October 2, 2020, meeting. Motion carried.

PACD Business and Report

Executive Director Brenda Shambaugh provided highlights from her written report:

- *Conservation District Week* is taking place next week virtually April 18-24, 2021, which will coincide with Earth Day. Brenda provided an update on proclamations and activities. She 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.
- *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. Former Sullivan County Conservation District Manager Holly Miller has joined us as Program Manager. Our new administrative assistant, Diane Young, is helping Amy with bookkeeping in addition to her other duties.



- *Boot Camp* applications are closed. Basic will be held in two parts. The online portion took place this week (April 12-15, 2021) and the in-person field training will be held August 2-4, 2021. *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). That application period is now closed.
- *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. Funding is still available and 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 nyeagy@pacd.org.
- *Chapter 102/105 webinars* are underway 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 Andy Wodehouse and Nathan Brophy provided a brief update on what they have been working on.
- Nathan Brophy will be leaving the Engineering Assistance Program to take on the district manager position for the Northumberland County Conservation District.

Regional Information Sharing

Carbon – Audrey Wargo reported they are without a district manager right now, with Chris out on an extended medical leave. Luke Graver is helping Audrey Wargo in the meantime. She thanked everyone who has reached out to help. They have had a busy early spring for DGLVR projects. Chapter 102 has been very busy. They have two large hospitals under construction and PENNDOT is widening 443, which is a very busy section of road. They have a large warehouse project underway and another waiting in the wings. The poster contest is continuing. It will be virtual again and she thanked PACD for keeping that going.

Luzerne – Josh Longmore reported they are also very busy with E&S both residential and commercial. They are dealing with some expired permit issues. Chesapeake Bay CAP is in full spring and they have a stakeholder meeting coming up. They are partnered with Lackawanna and Susquehanna for the DEP grant. They have a consultant acting with Larson Design Group as coordinator and are writing three separate plans. They are going to have at least two schools participating in a virtual Envirothon.

Monroe – Kristina Heaney reported they have been busy with common plan violations as a Level 3 delegated district. They have been busy with their Act 167 stormwater plan modules. They are looking forward to conservation district week and Earth Day. They have a lot of events planned, including kayaking trips and a legislative breakfast. They had a staff kayaking trip recently. They have three staff who began in September who are working out very well. They will be hiring a new environmental educator. Things have been very busy, but also very successful.

Pike – Michele Long reported they have been dealing with common plan issues, as well. They are looking at Municipipay to take electronic payments and have been developing policy and working on implementation. They expect to begin using it in July or August. They have municipal workshops with DCED and DCNR this fall. They have begun water quality monitoring for the year, with macro sampling beginning this past week. They are looking to do a Japanese knotweed webinar and have good registration so far. Construction is very busy, and they have been receiving a lot of complaints and some common plan development issues. They just held their virtual Envirothon, and she thanked Jamie and the Wayne district staff for taking most of the burden for that. Pike has the spotted lanternfly, and they have been meeting monthly with Penn State Extension, DCNR, and the National Park Service. They are working on various routes to get information out to all municipalities and the public.

Schuylkill – Jenna St. Clair reported they have completed a project large floodplain restoration on Swatara Creek in Pine Grove. Construction is completed and they were able to see it in action in late December. The project took almost 20 years from inception to finish. They have other similar projects going on, as well. They have been busy with their CAP, which has been interesting as they are about half Bay and half Delaware. Their environmental education festival usually takes place in the spring. They were not able to hold it last year and are not going to hold it this year. They may hold a smaller-scale event.

Susquehanna – Jennifer Ramey reported they are working with the PACD Engineering Assistance Program on ag projects. Their 102 program is very busy. Their no-till program is

suddenly on the rise, with many rentals coming in. their CAP is underway with a stakeholder meeting coming up soon. They are receiving a lot of response for the CAP project. Their seedling sale will be taking place next week as a drive-through event. They are holding their Envirothon at Elk Mountain with five schools participating and social distancing and other guidelines in place.

Wayne – Jamie Knecht reported their 102 and 105 programs are very busy and they are not going to fill their E&S technician vacancy. They held their virtual Envirothon with eight teams from several school district. Their seedling sale is in process with over 6,000 seedlings ordered and a drive through pick up planned at the fairground. They are also under the spotted lanternfly quarantine and will be posting signs and working with the local visitors bureau to inform visitors and travelers. They received Growing Greener grant funding for a regional collaboration with neighboring counties to create nutrient management plans for eligible operations.

Wyoming – Doug Deutsch reported they have also been busy. Chapter 102 is ramping up, including work on a few projects that have been on hold for a few years. They have been helping DEP with Chapter 105 issues. They have a large manure storage project this year. DGLVR applications are coming in and grants will be awarded in May. They have helped Patriot's Cove with some stream permitting issues and continue to help them fulfill their mission goals.

PA State Conservation Commission

Executive Secretary Karl Brown provided highlights from a 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 on district director nominations.
- 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.
- 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, 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.
- There is legislative work going on with the Transportation Advisory Committee related to the gas tax. As you meet with legislators, it might be helpful to remind them that districts have a \$28 million interest in the gas tax for DGLVR program funding.

PA Department of Environmental Protection

Water Program Specialist Karen Books provided highlights from the DEP written report:

- Registration is open for the May 19-20, 2021, Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting for districts and other entities involved in 319 projects.
- Karen referred everyone to a link in the written report for the EPA Nonpoint Source Technical Exchange Webinar Series.
- 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. She encouraged districts to participate in offered training. E&S permit applications will be accepted as of July 28.
- Everyone will need a Keystone login to import their Greenport account. Karen is available to 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

Nancy DiFiore provided highlights from the NRCS written report.

- She congratulated Nathan on his new position and thanked him for the hard work he has done for the Engineering Assistance Program.
- NRCS is continuing to work through the pandemic challenges. Offices are still in lockdown with one person in the office at a time. However, telework continues and field visits continue, including engineering I&Es and planners out in the field.
- She reported on a golden winged warbler conservation project that is also benefitting a critically endangered bumblebee and wasp.
- Denise is on virtual detail to the national office. Pete Vanderstappen is acting state conservationist while Denise is on assignment, probably through mid-July.
- They are working to fund new agreements with PACD and Pheasants Forever.
- They are seeking applications for the Leopold Conservation Award by August 5, 2021.
- 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.

- They are busy ranking EQIP and AMA applications in the Northeast.
- They were able to acquire 99.93 acres for the Wetland Reserve Easement Program. That program has been in full-loan mode since 1996. It is continuous sign-up.
- NRCS watershed programs update – They are working on the Martin’s Creek Watershed in Wyoming and the Bentley Creek Watershed in Bradford.
- She highlighted some upcoming training opportunities.
- They are currently working through ecological sciences job approval authority certifications.

Acting State Conservationist Pete Vanderstappen greeted everyone and thanked them for their work.

PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

A written report was provided.

Activities Conclude

The meeting was adjourned at 11:42 a.m.