

**PACD South West Region Meeting Minutes
Westmoreland Conservation District, Greensburg, PA
April 21, 2022**

Call to Order

PACD Region Director Mike Price welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:05 A.M.

Virtual and in-person participants: Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Chuck Duritsa, Westmoreland; John Dryzal, Cambria; Ray Gorman, Cambria; Matt Golden, Washington; Karl Brown, SCC; Emil Bove, Westmoreland; Doug Beri, Indiana; Phil Wilson, PACD; Maureen Copeland, Allegheny; Ron Rohall, Westmoreland; Mike Price, Beaver; Greg Philips, Westmoreland; Jeff Werner, NRCS; Dana Drake, DEP; Aileen Evan, DEP; Kelly Stagen, Pike/PACD President; Karen Books, DEP; Christine Phillips, DEP; Jim Miller, DEP; Jeff Pflug, Beaver; Len Lichvar, Somerset; Jon Burgess, Allegheny.

Date of Next Meeting (10:05)

The next meeting will be held September 28th, 2022, at 10:00 AM, at the Westmoreland Conservation District office.

Approval of Minutes (10:10)

Mike Price called for amendments to the minutes. None were presented.

Motion by Chuck Duritsa and seconded by Jeff Pflug to approve the minutes of the September 21, 2021, meeting as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

PACD Business Report (10:10)

Brenda provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- *Conservation District Week* – Brenda thanked all district staff on a successful week long celebration. Many districts held legislative meetings or included their elected officials.
- *Invasive Species* – Brenda discussed the need for a statewide Invasive Species program and informed everyone that it appears the U.S. Forestry Service will provide funding for a pilot PRISM program. She mentioned that the governor's proposed Agriculture Department budget includes funding for the PRISM plan as well also combat the spread of the Spotted Lanternfly. She also mentioned that PACD has developed an Op/Ed on the need for the statewide PRISM program that was submitted to PennLive in Harrisburg. Partner organizations also distributed an Op/Ed to other media outlets around the state.
- *PACD Ag Plan Reimbursement Program* – Brenda announced that PACD was recently awarded a Growing Greener grant in the amount of \$500,000 from DEP to offer An Ag Reimbursement Program to Conservation Districts. There will be a 20% match required by



the landowner/operator or, in some cases, the Conservation District. Plans eligible for reimbursement are Manure Management (CH. 91), Nutrient Management (CH. 83), and Ag E&S (CH. 102). PACD is still waiting on contracts to be completed to announce the program to districts.

- *Communication* – Brenda mentioned that PACD constantly updates listservs and that if anyone wants to receive the Front Page newsletter or would like to be added to the director listserv to contact the PACD office.
- *Education & Outreach*– Brenda discussed that PACD released a public service announcement (PSA) on vehicle maintenance to prevent pollution. The PSA was released this past fall. Also, PACD has been utilizing social media outlets to emphasize conservation district activities. Also, starting in June 2021 PACD developed a shared messaging program so districts can supplement their social media posts and have a shared message across the state.
- *Clean Water Academy* – Brenda discussed that PACD continues to receive DEP funding to develop eLearning courses for the Clean Water Academy (CWA) focusing on Chapter 102 and Chapter 105. Also, Brenda mentioned that PACD awarded 4 mini-grants to districts (Berks, Lawrence, Northampton, and Pike) to create training videos on stormwater BMP's. Also, she mentioned that DEP Secretary Patrick McDonnell recognized the conservation district staff with the most course completions in 2021 during the awards section of the Staff Conference. Lancaster received the award for the district with the most completions and Jake Kennedy was awarded as the individual with the most course completions.
- *Ag Boot Camp* – Brenda announced that the Ag Basic Training Boot Camp Level 1 was successfully completed from April 4 to April 8, 2022 at the Keystone Conference Center, Fort Indiantown Gap in Annville, PA. Level 2 training will begin next week, April 25 through April 29. Also, she mentioned a conservation Planning program will be held in the fall of 2022.
- *Non-Point Source Pollution Prevention Mini-Grant Program* – Brenda mentioned in the 2021- 2022 mini-grant round, 60 projects were underway with a total of \$103,000 dollars awarded. A bonus round was held in November 2021 to use up the remaining funds in the grant, and 27 more projects were awarded totaling over \$60,000. The newest grant round opened in January of 2022 and 34 projects from 25 conservation districts were funded for over \$60,000.
- *Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting* – Brenda discussed that registration is open for the Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting which will take Place via zoom from May 18th -19th 2022. She also mentioned that the Chapter 102/105 training was held over zoom at the end of March.
- *Conservation District Watershed Specialist Webinar Series* – Brenda announced that the Webinar will take place October 5th -7th at no cost to districts. Registration will open in August.
- *Leadership Development* – Brenda mentioned that over 200 people attended the 2022 Hybrid Staff Conference held February 16th-17th. There were awards for best video presented as well as Director Training workshops. PACD is planning on having a spring Webinar series. Contact Matt Miller of PACD for more details.
- *Conservation Enhancement Program (CREP)* – Brenda announced that a second round of mini-grants was opened in January and extended to April 8th 2022. She mentioned there are still landowner guides available and to contact Holly Miller for pickup. There is also an electronic version available at CREPPA.Org.

- *Riparian Buffer Sub-Grants* – PACD is continuing to accept sub-grant applications to implement multi-functional Riparian Buffers. DCNR recently awarded PACD with a C2P2 grant to continue the buffer sub-grant program. Multi-functional and conventional Riparian Buffers will be eligible under the new funding.
- *Legislative Activity* – Brenda discussed all 66 districts developed a “Highlights Page” document that was distributed to all PA House and Senate members. She recommended that all districts keep meeting with legislators and highlight progress made by districts. John Dryzal thanked PACD for setting up meetings and that they are still doing a lot of work to get funding increased. John mentioned that districts were having to use local funds for the state programs. DEP was awarded a 25% increase in funding. Conservation Districts were only 1 of 3 lines that were not increased (Black Fly suppression was another line not increased). Chuck Duritsa asked about Stream Cleaning, Brenda discussed that the PA House Republicans wanted a package for stormwater control but the session dies on November 30th and there is no expectation for passing the package of bills. Kelly Stagan thanked the Ad/Hoc committee for all their work as well as the directors and staff as well.
- *Three-Year PACD Dues Schedule* – Brenda discussed the new PACD 3-year dues schedule having an increase in cost of \$130.00 for the 2022 to 2023 fiscal year and \$75.00 increase for fiscal year 2023 to 2024 as well as a \$75.00 increase for fiscal year 2024 to 2025. Jon Burgess asked about Allegheny County and Brenda discussed costs with him. Chuck Duritsa asked if any other regions had concerns about the cost increase and Brenda notified him that all other regions so far were on board. Jon Burgess asked if the increase was enough and Brenda replied that the financial increase looked to be enough.
- *PACD Joint Conference*- Brenda Announced that the PACD/SCC Joint Conference was going to be in-person from July 20th to July 21st at the Red Lion Harrisburg in Hershey, PA. The Executive Council meeting will be the only virtual part. No information has been sent out yet but will be soon. Brenda mentioned that the deadline for award nominations is April 30th.

Regional Information Sharing (10:55)

- *Cambria* – John Dryzal noted that their board is looking into local resources to be able to continue participating in state programs. The staffing and financial expenses were more than anticipated. The board is expecting to have to make some hard decisions. Also, Ray Gorman announced the retirement of their long time administrative assistant who has been with the district for more than 22 years. Ray also announced that on May 16th the district is starting work on some streambank projects and at Prince Gallitzen Lake. Ray also announced that their Envirothon is on May 5th and includes 13 teams.
- *Allegheny* – Jon Burgess noted that they recently held E&S workshops and were well received. Jon also mentioned a large farm project that was recently completed. The district recently hired a Director of Operations, and their new website is expected to be completed in September. Jon mentioned they would be continuing their Legislative outreaches.
- *Somerset* – Len Lichvar noted that all 4 of the Oven Run AMD treatment systems were recently completed and back online. Len mentioned that the district had hired an outside company to do a round of samples and that all systems are treating very well as well as treating more water. Len mentioned that the district set up an Oven Run trust fund for future maintenance on the systems as well as using it for match money for future grants. Len noted that there will be a re-dedication ceremony sometime this summer for the Oven Run systems. Len also noted that they have a few stream restoration projects underway as well as

completing a solar project consisting of 55 solar panels to power part of the county building they are housed in. Len also announced there will be a concert in September in Johnstown to help fund conservation projects. Brad Clemmenson has booked a band out of his own pocket and will be contributing proceeds for conservation projects in the area.

- *Washington* – Matt Golden noted that Todd Thornburg has recently moved on and that he was an interim director. He noted that their secretary of 22 years was retiring and that staff turnover was an on-going issue. He noted that 2/3 of their staff was new. He noted that they held a rain barrel workshop this spring that went well and that their Envirothon will be held next week.
- *Indiana* – Doug Beri noted that the conservation district procured 3 grants (USDA, PDA, and Keeping PA Beautiful Funds). He noted that the district is in the process of turning 2.5 acres of mowed area into a meadow land. He also noted that they were pursuing USDA grants for cover crops and other BMP's. He also noted the district hosted the Department of Agriculture secretary for a press conference. Doug mentioned that they will be holding a planning workshop on June 3rd to help plan for transitioning people into different positions. Doug also noted that they also see high turnover as well and are down 1 staff member currently.
- *Beaver* – Jeff Pflug noted that Beaver conservation district regained the Chapter 102 delegation last year. Jeff noted they had a much higher than expected permit workload and they held their Envirothon last week. They are continuing to hold outreach programs and they recently bought a new no-till drill to lend to farmers. Jeff noted that over the past 2 years staff turnover had been fairly low.
- *Westmoreland* – Greg Philips Thanked PACD for continuing to work on the funding increase for the districts as well as thanked Dana for her presentation at the Engineering Workshop. Greg mentioned they just completed a record quarter for review fees and that they are currently doing maintenance on 2 AMD systems. Greg also mentioned that they are looking into a revolving fund to deal with water quality, and that their board recently approved bids for 3 new projects. Greg mentioned they also are seeing a high turnover in staff and currently have 3 vacant positions.
- *DEP* – Christine Phillips noted that April 22 is the opening of the next round of Growing Greener Grants and it closes on June 24th.
- *DEP* – Jim Miller thanked everyone for their hard work and noted that they have some funding that could be available with fine money the Department has received.

Partner Reports (11:30)

State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report (Handout)

Executive Secretary Karl Brown provided the following report:

- Karl noted that Heidi Secord has been appointed Pennsylvania FSA Executive Director
- Karl mentioned that the Statements of Financial interests form is due on May 1st.
- Karl discussed the 2022 Conservation District Director Update.
- He discussed that Governor Wolf included \$3.5 million dollars in the proposed state funding to support the PRISM program.
- He discussed the DGLVR proposed stream crossing policy revisions. They received many comments and the districts should be receiving a final proposal a week before release.
- He Mentioned they have 22 visits scheduled for DGLVR QA/QC checks.
- He discussed the Conservation Excellence Program project
- He discussed the REAP tax credit program updates

- He gave an update on the Nutrient Management Program.
- He mentioned that the PA AG filed a civil action against a NM planner (Ms. Diane Comey) for people that have paid for goods and services and not received them.
- He discussed actions being taken on the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (Hi Path AI).
- He mentioned SCC is inviting farmers in 14 counties to participate in a BMP survey.
- He discussed Agrilink Loans for farmers (up to \$250,00 and interest 3 points below market)

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Report (Handout)

Karen Books provided information on the following topics:

- They are working on preparing contracts for the upcoming year, expected to be complete late May or early June.
- She reiterated that the Growing Greener and 319 Grants open April 22.
- The 319 NPS Annual Stakeholder Meeting will be held May 18th to May 19th.
- She discussed EPA Region 3 Animal Agricultural Assessment
- She discussed The Trenchless Technology Tech. Guide Document in the Chapter 102/105 programs.
- She discussed KEES Program updates.
- DEP hired a new conservation district field representative to be starting April 25th.
- Aileen Evans mentioned the Semi-annual Roundtable coming up on June 3rd.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Report (Handout)

Jeff Werner provided the following report:

- Jeff discussed the Conservation through Conversion project in Somerset County.
- He gave information about USDA offering Expanded Conservation Program Opportunities to help support Climate-Smart Agriculture in 2022.
- He discussed the CARP program to help farmers offset BMP installation costs due to high inflation.
- He noted the new Urban Practice Scenarios and FY 2022 Payment Rates.
- He discussed NRCS practices for dealing with Hi Path AI.
- He gave an update on the watershed programs and looking into updating aging flood protection BMP's

Other Discussion

Kelly Stagan thanked everyone for their hard work and all their efforts they put forth every day. Mike Price also thanked everyone for their efforts and hard work.

Adjournment (12:00 PM)

Meeting was adjourned by Mike Price at 12:00 PM.