

**PACD North East Region Meeting
Schuylkill County Conservation District, Pottsville PA
March 30, 2023**

Welcome and Introductions

Region Director Tom Herbert welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM.

In attendance in person and virtually: Jack Barnett, Wayne; Janet Creegan, DEP; Doug Deutsch, Wyoming; Kristina Heaney, Monroe; Tom Herbert, Luzerne and PACD; Jamie Knecht, Wayne; Michele Long, Pike; Susan Parry, NRCS; Jennifer Ramey, Susquehanna; Mike Roth, SCC; Melissa Seigfried, Schuylkill, Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Jenna St Clair, Schuylkill; Kelly Stagen, Pike and PACD; Jerry Stiles, Lackawanna; Chris Storm, Carbon; Craig Todd, Monroe, Josh Longmore, Luzerne, Jennifer Mathews, NRCS.

Set Date for Next Meeting

The group discussed dates for the next region meeting. The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, October 4, 2023, at the Lands at Hillside Farms in Dallas, PA, at 10:00 a.m.

Approval of the Minutes from the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were provided to those in attendance.

It was moved by Kelly Stagen and seconded by Jennifer Ramey to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on October 25, 2022. Motion carried.

PACD Business and Report:

Executive Director, Brenda Shambaugh provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- *PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference* – The PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference will be held in person July 19-20, 2023, at the Holiday Inn Harrisburg (Hershey Area) in Grantville, PA. Committee meetings will be held virtually before the event. The Chief of NRCS has been invited to speak.
- *Education & Outreach* – PACD made 355 social media posts over the past six months. In addition, PACD offers monthly messaging for districts to share on social media. The posts are based on holidays and observances such as National Water Quality Month, National Farmers Day, and Pollinator Week.
- *Ag Boot Camp and Introduction to Conservation Training* – There are two Basic Boot Camp training sessions planned, one in April and one in May, each with a virtual and in-person component. Level II training will also be held in April. Introduction to Conservation training was held in November 2022, and will be held again this Fall. Funding for these training courses is provided by DEP and NRCS.



- *Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Mini-grants* – The 2022-23 mini-grant round funded 32 projects from twenty-five conservation districts for \$60,000. The 2023-24 mini-grant application period closed in January. Thirty-seven projects were funded from twenty-eight conservation districts for over \$65,000. Funding for the mini-grants comes from DEP through an EPA Section 319 grant.
- *Leadership Development* – Matt Miller has been doing great work and is asking for further leadership development training ideas. A seminar series on Employment Law for Conservation Districts was held at three locations in February with over 80 district directors, managers, and partners attending. The 3rd Annual Conservation District Video Awards took place in February with Westmoreland taking home the trophy. Matt is currently planning a Spring Leadership Webinar Series in late spring/early summer, the Directors Breakfast in July, and the annual Management Summit and Pre-con in September in State College. Funding for this program is provided by the State Conservation Commission.
- *Clean Water Academy (CWA)* – Nick Yeagy has moved on to another opportunity, and PACD has hired Chris Grimsley to continue managing this program. Over 30,000 total courses have been completed in CWA, including 1,000 to date so far in 2023. He is currently working on training to help educate the regulated community in addition to district training. This program is funded through a grant from DEP.
- *Chapter 102 Technical Training* – Chapter 102 Topic-based Technical Training is upcoming in April. A series of three 1.5-day Verbal Judo training sessions is in progress. Basic Technical Training will take place in Harrisburg May 23-26. This training is funded through a grant from DEP.
- *2023 Virtual Conservation District and PA Agency Ag Meeting* – This event will take place April 3 & 6 and is organized by watershed, with April 3 for the Ohio, Erie, Genesee, and Delaware watersheds and April 6 for the Chesapeake Bay. This event is funded through a grant from DEP.
- *Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting* – Registration is open for this event, which will take place virtually in May and feature topics including low-cost streamflow monitoring and invasive species. Funding for this event comes from DEP through an EPA Section 319 grant.
- *Watershed Specialist Meeting* – This event will be held in-person on October 3-5 in State College. This event will likely alternate between in person and virtual. Funding for this event comes from DEP through an EPA Section 319 grant.
- *PACD Ag Plan Reimbursement Program* – This program is funded through a Growing Greener grant from DEP and began in September 2022. Since then, 92 applications have been approved covering 18,000 acres and 55 ag plans have been developed and entered into DEP's PracticeKeeper database.
- *Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Outreach* – In the last round, PACD awarded five county conservation districts \$12,645 to work with landowners to prevent pollution in our streams, lakes, and rivers. Projects will take place over the next six months. This program is funded through a Growing Greener grant from DEP.
- *Riparian Buffer Subgrants* – PACD coordinates two riparian buffer subgrant programs funded through grants from DCNR. PACD has about \$18,000 remaining in the first program, which is specifically for multifunctional riparian buffers and requires no match. PACD has about \$8,000 remaining in the second program, which covers multifunctional and conventional buffers and requires a 50% match.

- *Lawn Conversion Program* –PACD was awarded \$100,000 from DCNR to offer a Lawn Conversion Program to conservation districts. Training will be held in June and July. This is a new program, and more information will be forthcoming.
- *Invasive Species* – PACD has been awarded a federal grant from the USDA Forest Service to start a pilot program to work on invasive species, including plants and animals, both aquatic and on land. Districts outside of the northwest region cannot currently receive funding but can participate in meetings. In addition, the Department of Agriculture has announced a new grant program specifically for conservation districts performing work in cooperation with the Department's Spotted Lanternfly Program. Piper Sherburne has been re-appointed by the Governor to the Invasive Species Council and recommends that districts lobby their legislators for statewide funding to combat invasive species.

Legislative Update

- *Conservation District Week* – Conservation District Week is from April 23 to April 29 this year. Invasive species will be a priority. Districts are encouraged to invite their legislators to events on Thursday and Friday. If that is not possible, districts are encouraged to call or email their legislators during this week to give them an update on the good work they are doing. PACD has templates and other tools available at PACD.org.
- *General Assembly* – The Democrats have a slim majority in the House and the Republicans have a comfortable majority in the Senate. Both parties have chosen their leadership and committee assignments in each chamber.
- *Budget Update* – The Governor's proposed budget maintains increased funding in the DEP and PDA line items. Next, the House and Senate appropriations committees will hold budget hearings and the House and Senate leadership will work with the Governor's office to develop a state budget. Hopefully, the General Assembly will pass the budget by June 30. The PACD Ad Hoc Budget Committee will be meeting to develop a strategy for districts to use as they contact their elected officials. Districts are encouraged to thank their legislators. PACD has a meeting next week with Acting Secretary Negrin. Budget meetings have gone well so far.
- *Salary Survey* – Brenda thanked the districts who provided funding to help defray the cost of the salary survey conducted last year. She asked any districts who have not yet done so to consider contributing. The survey results can be shared with county commissioners to support additional funding for staff.

Regional Information Sharing

Each district highlighted three items to share with the membership.

- *Carbon* – Chris Storm reported the district hired a new ag tech and purchased all new computers. They held a pesticide use meeting and are working on three new DGLVR projects for about \$220,000.
- *Lackawanna* – Jerry Stiles reported the district needs an E&S tech. They recently finished a riparian buffer project with funding from CAP and PACD. They are also looking into a pollinator garden/lawn conversion project.
- *Luzerne* – Josh Longmore said the district is hiring two seasonal disease control positions. They have developed an ACAP draft policy and will be receiving applications in the spring.

They are in the process of a large Ag BMP construction project and another park project. They held a virtual E&S virtual workshop and will soon hold their Envirothon.

- *Susquehanna* – Jen Ramey reported they have a few construction projects and recently finished a manure storage project. They have 16 DGR projects and one LVR project utilizing \$2.47 million. They are beginning a no-till program and are fielding some E&S complaints.
- *Monroe* – Kristina Heaney said they held an Agricultural Day for high school students. They will be holding an Act 167 Bus tour on April 14. They held an NPDES workshop with Pike CD and approximately 175 people attended.
- *Pike* – Michele Long discussed their recently signed ACAP delegation agreement and timeline. They also signed a PCSM delegation agreement and will be updating their fee schedule. NPDES projects are ramping up this spring. They hired a new communications coordinator, and are looking for a new manager since Michele will be retiring.
- *Schuylkill* – Jenna St. Clair said they may change to an independent district, rather than a county district. They are utilizing CAP and ACAP funding. Porcupine Pat was the Grand Marshall at a recent St. Patrick's Day parade.
- *Wayne* – Jamie Knecht reported that they will be receiving their first ACAP allocation soon. The district has 35 landowners involved in nutrient management regulations. They have a large ag project in the county funded with state, federal and landowner funds. They will be purchasing a new no-till drill in July costing \$52,000 and will hold an earth mover workshop and a mushroom cultivation workshop.
- *Wyoming* – Doug Deutsch discussed ACAP, NRCS and DGLVR projects. They held a contactor/municipal workshop for 180 participants. They also held a forestry symposium and a conservation field day for 6th graders.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Report

Jaci Kerstetter and Janet Creegan provided verbal highlights from the DEP written report:

- *Administrative changes* – There is a new Governor, a new Secretary, and a new Deputy Secretary for Programs. Ramez Ziadeh is Deputy Secretary for Field Operations. Lisa Daniels is acting Deputy Secretary for Water Programs.
- *Cover Crop Initiative Program* – A webinar is being held April 5.
- *PCSM Manual Update* – The public comment period is open until April 28. Comments can be submitted to DEP's conservation district resource account.
- *Staffing updates* – Krystal Bloom is the new Chapter 102 Section Chief. Rachael Fish was introduced as the new North Central Field Representative.

PA State Conservation Commission Report

Mike Roth provided highlights from his written report:

- *ACAP* – ACAP has been a huge focus and 63 delegation agreements have been signed. The next round of ACAP funding is going out in July. They are working to help get more engineers hired at districts statewide, and to ensure all ACAP funds are spent.
- *Apprenticeship Program* – SCC is looking to establish an apprenticeship program for high school students interested in a career in conservation.
- *Budget* – The Governor's proposed budget includes \$6 Million for nutrient management and \$28 million for Dirt & Gravel Roads. A Chesapeake Bay task force is being established to analyze practices in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Soil Health is a big focus pursuant to the Sustainable Agriculture Act of 2001, supporting a change from conventional-till to no-till.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Report

Susan Parry provided verbal highlights from NRCS's written report.

- *Funding* – NRCS has received Inflation Reduction Act funding. EQIP funding will double next year to be \$25-26 million and will double again in 2025. Watershed grants are available to address legacy sediment and mushroom compost issues.
- *Philadelphia Office* – NRCS is opening an office in Philadelphia in June. It will house a soil scientist and district conservationist and will study heavy metals detection.
- *Retirement Cadre* – NRCS has created a Retirement Cadre program through the National Older Worker Fund aimed at retired individuals over 55 years old, former NRCS and PSU Extension employees, to offer on the job training on site inspections, I&Es, spot checks and other practices. Contact Charlie Hanner or Denise Coleman for more information.

Adjournment

It was moved by Jenna St. Clair and seconded by Jennifer Ramey to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 AM.