

**PACD North West Region Meeting  
PennWest Clarion University, Clarion, PA  
April 12, 2023**

**Welcome and Introductions**

PACD North West Region Director Cliff Lane welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM.

*In attendance:* Tom McClure, Erie; Trudy Alexander, Clarion; Hannah Bequeath, Clarion; Doug Wolfgang, SCC; Cassandra Daniels, PACD TAG; Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Susannah Harris, DEP; Danielle Kalp, PACD TAG; Jacob Kennedy, PACD TAG; Jaci Kerstetter, DEP; Jeff Werner, NRCS; Donna Zofcin, Forest; Mark Critz, PDA; Lori Boughton, DEP; Ian Harrell, Butler; Chuck Stowe; Jared Shippey, NRCS; Lisette Lane, Venango; Erin Wells, DEP; Tabby Shah, Clarion; Jane Moore, DEP; Gene Metcalf, Clarion; Heather Wilcox, Warren; Kate Wehler, Elk; Russ Braun, Elk; Holly Miller, PACD; Mary Burris, Lawrence.

**Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be hosted by Forest County Conservation District on September 27, 2023, at the Tionesta Church of God.

**Approval of the Minutes from the Previous Meeting**

Cliff Lane called for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting.

*It was moved by Donna Zofcin and seconded by Tom McClure to approve the minutes of the April 27, 2022, meeting. Motion approved.*

**PACD Business and Report**

PACD Executive Director Brenda Shambaugh provided highlights from her written report.

- *PRISM Program* – This is a pilot program for northwest PA funded through a grant from the USDA Forest Service. The program lead is PACD Program Manager Holly Miller. They are meeting with the northwest districts on April 20. The program will offer \$40,000 in education and outreach mini-grants and \$149,000 in invasive species management mini-grants. Invasive species management projects have no maximum funding request. PACD has until June 2027 to complete the project and it will roll out on July 1, 2023.
- *Conservation District Week – April 23-29, 2023* – Please let Brenda know if you are doing anything for Conservation District Week (contacting local legislators, etc.). PACD has templates on PACD.org and districts are encouraged to make a press release, send letters, make phone calls, or meet in person with legislators. Last year was a tremendous success in getting additional funding. Districts did an excellent job last year outreaching to legislators. The 6.8 million dollars is included in the Governor's proposed budget. Brenda encouraged



everyone to invite their legislators to events, including local Envirothons and project tours. The legislature will be in Harrisburg Monday through Wednesday, so contact them Thursday or Friday for local meetings and events.

- *Program Funding* – PACD appreciates the funding from partners for the many programs PACD administers for districts, including DEP, NRCS, DCNR, SCC, and others. PACD and the districts are fortunate to have this funding and we greatly appreciate it.
- *Education & Outreach* – Between August 2022 and February 2023 PACD had 355 social media posts. PACD Director of Communications and Education Shannon Wehinger also provides a monthly schedule of social media posts for districts to use across the state.
- *ACT Training* – ACT training is underway, including Ag Boot Camp Basic and Level II.
- *NPS Mini-Grant Program* – 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* – Leadership Development Coordinator Matt Miller coordinated the video awards in February. Westmoreland won, with Berks, Chester, and Pike next runners up. You can view the videos at <http://www.paleadership.org/>
- *Clean Water Academy* – Chris Grimsley is the program lead. He is always looking for ideas for new courses. There are new courses coming out in a few weeks. They are also working on courses for the regulated community.
- *Watershed Specialist Meeting* – This meeting will take place October 3-5 at Toftrees this year and will likely alternate between in-person and virtual from now on.
- *Ag Plan Reimbursement Program* – This program promotes the planning and implementation of best management practices. So far, the program has funded 150 plans. Farmers must provide a 20% match. It is the landowners responsibility to implement the plans. More information is available on the PACD website at [https://pacd.org/?page\\_id=69](https://pacd.org/?page_id=69). Contact PACD Program Manager Holly Miller with any questions.
- *CREP Education & Outreach* – Last spring PACD held focus groups to determine the best areas of the state for CREP program outreach. They developed a marketing plan with Water Words that Work. Contact PACD or FSA directly.
- *Riparian Buffer Sub-Grant Programs* – Funded by DCNR. Contact Holly Miller. The multi-functional riparian buffer program requires no match and has some funding available on a first come, first served basis. Our other riparian buffer program will fund conventional or multi-functional buffers with a 50/50 match.
- *Lawn Conversion Program* – Funded by DCNR. The program will begin in July. There will be a webinar and an in-person training in July. Sub grants are available for education and outreach and implementation. Check PACD.org for more information.
- Brenda thanked Cliff Lane and NACD for meetings at the federal level with G.T. Thompson, Sen. Fetterman, and Sen. Casey and talking about Farm Bill and Conservation Funding.

### **Regional Information Sharing**

- *Armstrong* – Building construction is expected to end October 1, but the end of the year may be more realistic. G.T. Thompson came to look at new building construction and a dairy farm tour–ice cream, cheese curds, etc. Local dairy farmers talked with him about the Farm Bill.
- *Butler* – The district received a CREP mini-grant to have a field day this summer. FSA reached out to them, so there must be interest. They are busy with ACAP and have two new

ag technicians (nutrient management and ACT). They are working to drum up interest in ACAP and are on track to spend everything as long as big projects don't fall through.

- Clarion – The group was introduced to board members Gene Metcalf and Tabby Shah. Tabby is on the PACD Legislative Committee. The group also met Education and Outreach Coordinator Hannah Bequeath. The district held a CREP workshop this spring with good turnout. Clarion County Park AMD treatment system revamp will be finished by the end of June with one-half-million dollars spent. There is a community event called the “Clarion Green Fest” to be held at the park at the end of April for education and outreach.
- Crawford – The district is busy with projects, tree plantings, etc. They are partnering with Stroud on no-till events/soil health issues. Their no-till planter will be delivered soon. Including the legislators in Envirothons and sending letters to the legislature is a good idea.
- Elk – The district is holding a streambank stabilization workshop tomorrow, focusing on permitting, practices that work with nature, etc. The workshop will begin at their office with a PowerPoint, followed by a tour of nearby stream crossing projects. Spotted lanternfly program planning is underway, and they are also working to combat buckthorn, which is the number one threat to PA hardwood forests. They are working with private and public land owners. They are working on the trash talk challenge, which gets conservation districts to host trash clean-ups for the trash-talking trophy. This event is live and ends in May.
- Erie – They have received one million dollars of Erie's ACAP funds. They are holding an Ag listening tour with the county called the Erie County Rural Revival, going to the four corners of the county to talk with farmers. They have held two successful meetings and have two more upcoming. The district received a DEP grant from the coastal zone management program to hold a summer camp/day camp called Explore Camp at the district and headwaters park in June. They are holding a Field and Forest program combining forestry and agriculture through a PACD mini-grant on May 20. Erie and Venango will be hosting the Northwest PA Forest Landowners Conference with DCNR.
- Forest – The ACAP funding is in. They started a DGLVR project this week and are still trying to hire a DGLVR technician, funded 50/50 through DGLVR and the county.
- Lawrence – ACAP is their biggest focus. They have 11 applications and 9 are heavy use areas. They have been added to the spotted lanternfly quarantine area. The Envirothon is coming up and they have tree sale pick up on Saturday. They held an event sponsored by the Farm Bureau on cloud-based farming or high-tech farming. Marla Brown is supportive of the ag community. People are concerned about train derailment.
- McKean – The district has started their ACAP application period. They have been doing education in schools, through the Envirothon, and adult education. They have five or six different programs through the PACD mini-grant. The district purchased a no-till drill and is planning a no-till demo day in the fall planting oats. Their manure management plan-writing workshop had nine individuals attend. They are planning a rain barrel workshop this Saturday and partnered with a local sanitary facility to help build and house rain barrels. The county commissioners will be proclaiming conservation district week. They have a seedling program and will hold a legislative luncheon at Kinzua Bridge State Park.
- Venango – Lissette Lane is the new manager. They have six new hires. They will be active during conservation district week through the local newspaper and social media.

### **Partner Report: PA Department of Agriculture**

Mark Critz provided the following report:

- PA leads nation in farms preserved and young, beginning farmers under age of 35.
- PA Farm Bill discussion – Only one in nation at state level. Seeing what works, what doesn't, additional needs, etc.
- East Palestine – They are talking with residents and advocating for agriculture for about a month. Fields and animals are being tested and the public is being informed. They are still going through testing as soil and water tests take about a month, but they are starting to see results coming back. Much of the media is assuming the worst and information is not always factual. PDA is trying to spread the truth to the public and is still waiting on data.
- Broadband development – Guidelines have just passed, and they will be putting out a program. PA could receive funding for broadband development.
- Highlights from the Governor's office – Shapiro views agriculture as a business/industry, which is an opportunity. The state is doing everything they can to be an asset/ally.
- Many birds were lost in the avian influenza outbreak. This is a major industry in PA. There is a recovery fund to help poultry farmers.
- Spotted Lanternfly – The department is preparing a response to invasive species and disease.

### **Partner Report: PA Department of Environmental Protection**

Lori Boughton, Erin Wells, Susannah Harris, and Jake Moore (new Watershed Manager) from DEP provided the following regional report:

- Erin introduced a new hire, Watershed Manager Jake Moore.
- Susannah Harris – Reported it has been a pleasure learning the position over the past nine months or so. She has toured the northwest districts to meet managers and staff and understand their priorities and what she can assist with. She would like to organize collaborative groups of districts for quarterly meetings, if possible, to share ideas and resources. The regional DGLVR meeting went well. New hire training is being planned, with a new guide for new hires as a starting point.
- Jake Moore – Growing Greener grant round will begin April 21 and close June 23. He is here to help and plans to do another round robin to visit districts and is looking forward to learning how he can assist.
- Lori Boughton – Lori noted that Jake knows a lot about grants and has experience as a project manager with many Growing Greener grants. She gave a shoutout to Clarion, Lawrence, and Jefferson for helping to review permits. ACT 167 money and guidance is coming. There should be enough money for each of the counties to renew their current plan or develop a new one. She thanked PACD for funding two engineers from Monroe to present at a municipality workshop. US Fish and Wildlife has moved the northern long-eared bat from threatened to endangered effective in March. Updated PNDI search permits may be necessary. She will send out more information to everyone. It is also on the bureau's website and FWS and army corps engineers also have information.

Jaci Kerstetter provided the following report from DEP Central Office:

- She noted it is great to see everyone in person.
- She took over administering the CDFAP program from Karen. Please feel free to contact her.
- They are happy to announce that they have all eight field rep positions filled and they are happy to have Susannah on board.
- They held a webinar with information for anyone wishing to begin a cover crop incentive program. This is available as a recording.

- The current Growing Greener grant round will open on April 21 and close June 23 with a maximum of \$500,000 per application. You can submit more than one application, if needed, for project phases, for example. More details are forthcoming.
- The PA Envirothon will take place May 17 in Indiana and more judges are needed.
- She has 10 boxes full of Ag E&S manuals.
- She reads the district quarterly reports and is impressed with all the creativity and work conservation districts are doing.

#### **Partner Report: PA State Conservation Commission**

Executive Director Doug Wolfgang provided the following report:

- Districts do an amazing amount of work.
- He is interested in learning how we can continue to improve upon the farm preservation program from a conservation standpoint.
- He is glad to see the success of programs such as REAP, CEG, Nutrient Management, DGLVR, and ACAP. It is great to hear that Erie is receiving support from the county. Funds are being distributed and need to be spent by 2026. They are working with partners to help ensure technical services are available.

#### **Partner Report: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**

NRCS staff provided the following reports.

- Assistant State Conservationist Jeff Werner (Clarion) discussed the requirements for the PACD TAG staff to assist with ACAP projects.
- Assistant State Conservationist for Programs Jarred Shippey provided the following report:
  - They appreciate the partnership with districts.
  - EQIP is moving full steam ahead.
  - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) funds will come out in the next few weeks.
  - They have a backlog of applications for the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Initiative, which is providing a significant increase in funds for forestry practices.
  - The Inflation Reduction Act rolled out in March included an increase for EQIP, targeted climate-smart practices, and CSP. These are all huge opportunities for farmers and landowners to get conservation work on the ground. They are projected to get more funds next year and he is looking forward to working with the districts.

#### **Partner Report: PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources**

A written report was provided.

#### **PACD Engineering Assistance Program (TAG) Update**

Danielle Kalp, P.E. reported they have several projects beginning construction. They are working on AMD treatment system updates, which are emergency repairs due to beavers. They also have ag and stream projects underway.

Cassie Daniels reported they are working with 11 out of 16 counties and have double the amount of I&Es due to ACAP. She is working with districts on Growing Greener projects.

Jake Kennedy reported he is working on EQIP and ACAP projects.

#### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:14 p.m.