

**PACD South East Region Meeting Minutes**  
**Henning's Market, Harleysville, PA**  
**March 23, 2023**

**Call to Order**

Region Director Piper Sherburne welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m.

*Meeting participants:* Dean Druckenmiller, Berks; Gretchen Schatschneider, Bucks; Chris Strohmaier, Chester; Ed Magargee, Delaware; Kevin Frederick, Lehigh; Holly Kaplan, Lehigh; Jessica Buck, Montgomery; Dion Campbell, Northampton; Piper Sherburne, PACD SE Region Director/Berks; Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Karen Books, DEP; Robert Page, DEP; Shannon Davis, DEP; Charles Hanner, NRCS, Denise Coleman, NRCS, Doug Wolfgang, SCC; Brittany Moore, PACD TAG; Susan Parry, NRCS; Ted Veresink, Northampton; Jaci Kerstetter, DEP; Drew Foley, DEP

**Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on October 26, 2023, at 9:30 a.m. at Henning's Market.

**Approval of Minutes**

Piper Sherburne called for a motion to approve the minutes of the last meeting as presented.

*Motion by Chris Strohmaier and seconded by Jessica Buck to approve the minutes of the September 29, 2022, meeting as presented. 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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, House and Senate appropriations committees will hold budget hearings and 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.

### **District Information Sharing**

- *Chester* – The district office has been moved across the parking lot, saving \$30,000 per year in rent. They are keeping a virtual work model and are increasing electronic scanning. Their Stormwater Engineer position has been vacant since December, and they recently lost an Ag staff member of 15 years. NPDES work is way up from last year. The district and the county farmers are excited about ACAP.
- *Bucks* – The district has open positions. They just hired a new administrative professional, and a new Ag Tech just accepted an offer. A sixth E&S Technician position is in the works for lower Bucks. They just completed their Strategic Plan. Gretchen Schatschneider thanked Linda Mackey and Robert Page of DEP for their assistance with Level 3 enforcements. Two workshops are forthcoming: Stormwater, non-point source pollution, etc. and public works.

There have been positive changes in their board, including more diversity and adding associate directors.

- *Montgomery* – The district made an offer to an experienced E&S Tech yesterday. They had a difficult rollout of their adjusted fee schedule last November. Their Envirothon is April 27. They are up against their Dirt & Gravel spending requirement and a few projects are pending. Their no-till drill program re-started this week and has been a great asset. Their Ag Tech is trained on it, and the district is using a PACD mini-grant to make additional training available. Their Chapter 102 engineers presented to a group of real estate attorneys, focusing on NOTs. They are considering an engineering workshop for the regulated community. They are gearing up for ACAP, and their board wants to create an ACAP Advisory Committee.
- *Lehigh* – The district added three positions last fall: a conservation ecologist focusing on building a microplastics program, an MS4 coordinator, and an EIT. They have received their first ACAP application. They may adjust their fee schedule later this year and are updating their expedited review policy.
- *Delaware* – Last year was a banner revenue year for the district. They are buying an electric vehicle that will help the county maintain their sustainability grade. They are working with the county on a cloud-based electronic scanning policy and will be converting to electronic submissions. The third Christmas tree project is complete at Glen Providence Park, where used Christmas trees are being used to temporarily stabilize the park's streambank. Ed Magargee is retiring in January 2024.
- *Northampton* – The district is undergoing a reorganization. They lost an engineer but hired a new technician last October. They are probably vacating their ACAP program and having the county take it over. They are trying to get their staff more training.
- *Berks* – April is their big season for events. They are having decent response for their legislative event for conservation district week. They have many new legislators. Their staffing level is good. They recently added an Ag Tech for nutrient management, so they currently have six Ag Techs and five E&S Techs. Their office space is limited, and they are looking to increase it. They have 14 active ACAP applications right now.

## **NRCS Update**

NRCS provided the following update.

- *Activities* – A current activities list was provided.
- *Funding* – NRCS has received Inflation Reduction Act funding. EQIP funding will double next year to \$25-26 Million and will double again in 2025. The southeast region has \$8.6 Million preapproved in EQIP. Chris Strohmaier asked if PA can get cover-crop funding; NRCS might have to use EQIP money for cover cropping. An additional \$150,000 is available for the People's Garden Initiative, Applications will be accepted through April 21.
- *PWP Emergency Watershed Program* – NRCS is closing out 11 southeast region projects.
- *Philadelphia Office* – NRCS is opening an office in Philadelphia in June. It will have a soil scientist and district conservationist and will study heavy metals detection.
- *Urban Area Definition* – As of October 2023, NRCS is expanding their definition of an Urban Area for EQIP and AMA to include Reading and Lancaster.

## **Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Update**

Karen Books provided the following 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 will be 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. Shannon Davis is the new southeast region field representative.

### **State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report**

The SCC provided the following report:

- *ACAP* – ACAP has been a huge focus for the SCC. Sixty-three delegation agreements have been signed. The next distribution of ACAP funds is going out in July. They are working to help get more engineers hired in 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. Chris Strohmaier suggested recruiting from land-grant institutions in the Midwest.
- *Budget* – The 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.
- *Staffing* – The Commission is hiring ACAP staff. They have a vacancy for a farmer member and are seeking to increase diversity. Chris Strohmaier suggested reaching out to the American Mushroom Institute.

### **PACD Engineering Assistance Program**

Brittany Moore, Conservation Technician for the PACD Engineering Assistance Program office in Clarion, introduced herself.

### **Adjournment**

*Motion by Gretchen Schatschneider and seconded by Dion Campbell to adjourn the meeting at 12:32 p.m. Motion carried.*