

**PACD South West Region Meeting
Westmoreland Conservation District, Greensburg, PA
April 19, 2023**

Call to Order

Emil Bove welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM.

Virtual and in-person participants: Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Chuck Duritsa, Westmoreland; John Dryzal, Cambria; Ray Gorman, Cambria; Jennifer Dann, Washington; Doug Wolfgang, SCC; Emil Bove, Westmoreland; Phil Wilson, PACD; Erin Copeland, Allegheny; Ron Rohall, Westmoreland; Jeff Pflug, Beaver; Rob Cronauer, Westmoreland; Jeff Werner, NRCS; Jackie Kerstetter, DEP; Aileen Evan, DEP; Lisa Snider, Greene; Anna Zalewski, DEP; Nick Rossi, DEP; Ryan Furrer, DEP; Mark Critz, PA Department of Agriculture; Jim Miller, DEP; Doug Beri, Indiana; Denise Coleman, NRCS; Dennis Beck, Cambria; Matt Gordon, Allegheny

Election of Southwest Region Director (10:10)

Emil Bove offered his services to be the SW Region Director. There were no objections.

Date of Next Meeting (10:15)

The next meeting will be held September 20, 2023, at 10:00 AM, at the Westmoreland Conservation District office.

Approval of Minutes (10:15)

Emil Bove called for amendments to the minutes. None were presented.

Motion by Chuck Duritsa and seconded by Doug Beri to approve the minutes of the September 28, 2022 meeting as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

PACD Business Report (10:20)

Brenda provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- *PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference* – The PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference will take place July 19-20, 2023 at the Holiday Inn Harrisburg in Grantville, PA. Registration will open in May.
- *Conservation District Week* – Conservation District Week is April 23–29, 2023. Districts should try to include elected representatives in any outreach events or meetings they hold.
- *Education & Outreach* – PACD has been using their shared messaging program to out messages on social media that all conservation districts can include in their social media posts. To date there have been 355 social media posts. The posts are based on Holidays and observances that help highlight conservation district efforts to help the environment.
- *Ag Boot Camp* – Agricultural Conservation Technical Boot Camp training took place this



spring. A second Basic Boot Camp training will be held May 1-5, 2023, at the Keystone Conference Center at Fort Indiantown Gap in Annville, PA. An Intro to Conservation Planning training was held last fall from November 1-3. The training was for those individuals that are planning to become a certified planner. There were 24 participants that attended including 12 conservation district staff from 10 different counties.

- *Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Mini-grant Program* – The 2022-23 mini-grant round funded 32 projects from 25 conservation districts for \$60,000. There was also a 2023-24 mini-grant round. The application period ended in January. Thirty-seven projects were funded for 28 conservation districts for over \$65,000.
- *Leadership Development* – The 3rd annual Conservation District Video Awards (CONDIVA) presentation was held on February 16, 2023. The CONDIVA trophy for highest scoring video submission from 2022 was awarded to Westmoreland Conservation District, with runner-up trophies going to Berks, Chester, and Pike. A seminar series on Employment Law for Conservation Districts was held at 3 locations February 21-23, 2023, and was attended by over 80 district directors, managers, and partners. A webinar to follow up on questions was held on March 15, 2023. Planning is underway for a Spring Leadership webinar series sometime in the May/June timeframe, the Directors Breakfast during the PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference in July, and the annual Management Summit and Pre-con scheduled for September 12-14, 2023, at the Wyndham Garden in State College.
- *Clean Water Academy* – Brenda mentioned that the Clean Water Academy has had approximately 30,000 course completions with about 1000 of those occurring in the first two months of 2023. The two groups responsible for the most course completions are conservation districts and DEP, comprising 53.5% and 23.6% respectively. A new training program for the regulated community is in development. If anyone has any questions, please contact Chris Grimsley at PACD. Chris has been on staff since January.
- *102/105 Technical Training* – Two sessions of Chapter 102 Verbal Judo for Conservation Districts took place in March with a third session scheduled for early April. Verbal Judo is a law enforcement tactic used to deescalate loaded verbal interactions. Chapter 102 Topic Based Technical Training will take place virtually April 12, 2023. Chapter 102 Basic Technical Training will take place in-person with a field component May 23-26, 2023, at the Red Lion Hotel Harrisburg-Hershey in Harrisburg PA. Registration will close on May 12.
- *Virtual Conservation District and PA Agency Meeting* – The 2023 Virtual Conservation District and PA Agency Meeting took place as two half-day sessions on April 3 & 6. This year's meeting covered topics for all Pennsylvania watersheds.
- *Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting* – The Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting will take place over Zoom May 22-23, 2023. Registration is now open.
- *Conservation District Watershed Specialist Meeting* – The Conservation District Watershed Specialist Meeting will take place in-person October 3-5, 2023, in State College, PA.
- *PACD Ag Plan Reimbursement Program* – PACD was awarded a Growing Greener grant in the amount of \$500,000 from DEP to offer an Ag Plan Reimbursement Program to conservation districts from 2022-2024. The program opened on July 12, 2022. There is still approx. \$340,000 still available for plan reimbursement.
- *Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program* – CREP mini-grant applications are being accepted on a rolling basis. So far this year five county conservation districts have been awarded \$12,645 for projects. PACD finished the CREP marketing campaign with Water Words That Work, LLC.

- *Riparian Buffer Sub-grants* – PACD has two Riparian buffer programs available. The Multi-functional Riparian Buffer Sub-grant for Conservation Districts program sponsored by PENNVEST still has approximately \$25,000 available with no match requirement. A total of 43 grants implementing over 137 acres of buffers have been awarded funding from this program since 2018. The Riparian Buffer Sub-grant for Conservation Districts program is funded by a C2P2 grant from DCNR. Multi-functional buffers are preferred, but conventional buffers are also eligible. There is about \$8,000 still available and there is a 50/50 match.
- *Lawn Conversion Grant* –PACD was awarded a \$100,000 C2P2 grant from DCNR to offer a Lawn Conversion Sub-grant Program for Conservation Districts. The goal of the program is to offer lawn conversion training to districts and distribute funding to lawn conversion projects across PA. The plan is to offer virtual and in-person training for conservation district staff in June & July. June 20 is the tentative date for the webinar training and July 11 is the tentative date for the in-person training. There is a 50/50 match for the program.
- *Invasive Species* – PACD was awarded a Landscape Scale Restoration Grant from the USDA Forest Service to offer a PRISM pilot program in northwestern PA. A meeting will be set up to discuss the program with NW conservation districts soon in hopes of beginning the program on July 1. Piper Sherburne was recently reappointed to PA's Invasive Species Council.
- *Legislative Activity* – With most of the special elections across PA completed, the Democrats have acquired a slim majority in the House and Republicans have a comfortable majority in the Senate. Governor Shapiro recently addressed the PA General Assembly to present his proposed budget, which maintained funding amounts for the conservation district line in both the PDA and DEP budgets. It will now move to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to hold budget meetings. After that, House and Senate Leadership will work with the Governor's office to develop a state budget and could pass the budget by June 30.
- *PACD Engineering Assistance/TAG Program* –Phil Wilson reported he is currently working on three AMD projects and eight ACAP-funded agriculture projects.

Regional Information Sharing (10:55)

- *Cambria* – John Dryzal thanked Brenda and PACD for doing the salary study for the conservation districts. John also thanked NRCS for helping train Ag staff. Their board voted not to accept the nutrient management agreement. John shared some information about the Victor #10 AMD pipeline project and the challenges involved. He mentioned that shoreline work is continuing at a Prince Gallitzen State Park lake and that the Fish & Boat commission are helping with the project. John was recently able to meet with Rep. Dallas Kephart. Their recent tree sale Generated approximately \$47,000 and had 350 orders.
- *Allegheny* – Erin Copeland & Matt Gordon shared that the district has recently wrapped up some outreach and webinars in the first quarter of 2023. Gift bags were sent to attendees. They recently held a public works workshop with 30 municipalities and over 54 attendees at the meeting. Their PracticeKeeper data is being mapped to show project progress in GIS.
- *Indiana* – Doug Beri shared that the district has 33 teams registered (165 kids) for the county Envirothon. They awarded their first ACAP grant just yesterday. The district is currently building a new greenhouse using a USDA grant. The Illinois Association of Conservation Districts recently called him and wants him to speak at their conference.
- *Westmoreland* – Emil Bove and Rob Cronauer talked about the recent Engineer Workshop held in March and that the turnout went well. Greg Philips has retired, and Rob is now the Westmoreland Conservation District Manager. The district has eight people on staff with less than one year of experience and turnover continues to be an issue. The district is looking to

add additional staff for the ACAP program. The district was approved for five Growing Greener Grants for project implementation.

- *Greene* – Lisa Snider reported they had over 24 applicants for the grant program they were involved with and that two Growing Greener Ag projects will be implemented this summer. Their watershed specialist recently resigned, and the district was given permission by the board to hire two ag staff.
- *Beaver* – Jeff Pflug shared that 1,400 tires were collected and disposed of under their West Nile grant. They also have a record breaking Envirothon coming up soon.
- *Washington* – Jennifer Dann thanked the SCC for all their work in reviewing ACAP applicants. The district is starting their own ag enhancement program. The district was recently spot checked by the DGLVR program and everything went well. They filled three large dumpsters full of trash during their recent garbage cleanup.

Partner Reports (11:35)

PA Department of Agriculture (Handout)

Mark Critz provided the following report:

- PA now leads the nation in farmers under the age of 35.
- PA is a leader in certain commodities in America such as mushrooms etc.
- The PA rapid response program for invasive species is looking for areas to improve.
- The PA Department of Ag is working with more organic farmers at the moment.
- The Department is in the process of analyzing solar power usage on farms.
- The PA Smart Initiative is currently helping train the future workforce in Agriculture.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Report

- Jackie Kerstetter noted that they held a webinar on April 5 for the cover crop initiative program.
- A new round of Growing Greener grants will be coming up soon. The maximum allowed per Growing Greener Grant will be \$500,000, but you can apply for multiple grants.
- A draft of new Chapter 102 issues can be viewed online, and comments are welcome.
- Annual reports are in the process of being submitted.
- Ron Rohall asked if DEP plans to compile the annual reports so districts can view them.
- John Dryzal asked if the districts can be notified about different funding sources (Federal/Non-Federal) for future projects. He also asked if guidance is available when applying for grants, such as if one grant or multiple grants are needed.

State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report (Handout)

Executive Secretary Doug Wolfgang provided the following report:

- The agency is looking to add regional engineers across the state to help with ACAP.
- They are looking to add a plan manager, as well.
- As of March 13, 61 districts have signed delegation agreements and a few others have approved the delegation and are awaiting signatures.
- The ACAP Center Subcommittee continues to discuss the center and expanding the Boot Camp trainings.

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

Denise Coleman and Jeff Werner provided the following report:

- Jeff mentioned that they are currently in the midst of Fiscal Year 2023 contracting and approvals for applications
- NRCS Technical Assistance is available for ACAP projects as long as EQIP is also involved in the project.
- They talked about the CSAF Mitigation activities list and some of the projects involved.
- Denise noted that IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) money can only be used for the current list of practices.
- They are currently running approximately \$50 million dollars in programs across the state.
- The EQIP program will double (up to \$100 Million) next year and double again (up to \$200 Million) the following year.
- They are looking to add manure storage covers to the list of practices to reduce methane.
- They are working with the SCC to add five engineers across the state. These engineers will be considered federal employees.
- NRCS and the SCC are working with PACD to add planners, as well, with a 50/50 salary split between NRCS and the SCC.

Adjournment (12:45 PM)

Motion to adjourn was made by Emil Bove at 12:45 PM. Motion was seconded by Doug Beri. Motion carried unanimously.