

**PACD South West Region Meeting Minutes
Westmoreland Conservation District, Greensburg, PA
September 20, 2023**

Call to Order

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

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; Jeff Pflug, Beaver; Rob Cronauer, Westmoreland; Jeff Werner, NRCS; Jaci Kerstetter, DEP; Dana Drake, DEP; Ryan Furrer, DEP; Jim Miller, DEP; Heather Knupsky, Fayette; Yuri Plowden, NRCS; Matt Gordon, Allegheny.

Election of Southwest Region Director (10:05)

Motion made by Chuck Duritsa to nominate Emil Bove to be the SW Region Director. Seconded by Ray Gorman. Motion carried unanimously.

Date of Next Meeting (10:08)

The next meeting will be held April 18, 2024, at 10:00 AM at the Westmoreland Conservation District office.

Approval of Minutes (10:10)

Emil Bove asked if there were any amendments to the minutes. None were presented.

Motion made by Chuck Duritsa to approve the minutes from the previous meeting held April 19th, 2023. Seconded by Jennifer Dann. Motion carried unanimously.

PACD Business (10:10)

Legislative Committee Motion

Brenda explained the policy process for new attendees, and she mentioned that at the last PACD Legislative Committee meeting held in June 2023, a proposed policy was passed and will be considered at each fall PACD Regional meeting. A final vote on the policy will be held at the January 2024 Executive Council meeting. The proposed policy reads:

PACD recognizes the significant environmental benefit of streambank fencing, in a pasture used for grazing, to restrict livestock access to the stream. PACD supports education and incentives for voluntary installation of streambank fencing as opposed to legislation allowing administrative agencies of the Commonwealth and municipalities to require fencing along a stream.



Brenda asked for input on the policy and if anyone thought there should be any changes made. A discussion was held.

Chuck Duritsa made a motion to amend the motion to the new wording agreed upon. The new wording read as follows:

PACD recognizes the significant environmental benefit of streambank fencing in a pasture used for grazing to restrict livestock access to the stream. PACD supports education and incentives for voluntary installation of streambank fencing. PACD is in favor of allowing administrative agencies of the Commonwealth to require fencing along a stream. PACD is opposed to allowing municipalities to require fencing along a stream.

Emil Bove seconded the motion. The motion to amend the wording passed unanimously.

Matt Gordon made a motion to support the amended version of the original motion. Ray Gorman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

PACD Report

Brenda provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- DEP Policy on Conservation District Chapters 102/105 – Brenda discussed with everyone the email from DEP Deputy Secretary Bevin Buchheister concerning conservation district responsibilities for the Chapter 102/105 agreements. A discussion was held, and the general consensus was that everyone would like something in writing from DEP to answer the questions that were asked. Brenda mentioned that she would follow up with the districts after she receives Jaci Kerstetter’s follow-up.
- PACD Winter Meeting – Brenda informed everyone the 2024 PACD Winter Meeting will take place virtually. She also mentioned that the PACD Executive Board would like input about whether the membership would prefer the future Winter Meetings to be held in-person or virtually. A discussion was held, and the general consensus was to keep the Winter Meeting virtual as well as making the summer meeting more of a conference that would move each year to different parts of the state. There was support to put a planning committee together to gather more information.
- Legislative Update – Brenda mentioned that the PA House of Representatives will return on September 26th 2023 and the PA Senate returned to Harrisburg September 18th 2023. She mentioned the Senate passed two fiscal code bills in August, but Senate amendments to these bills have not been considered in the House. She mentioned House Bill 1300 and that it includes an additional \$150 Million Dollars for the PA Clean Streams Fund. She explained the breakdown of the money and how it affects the Dirt, Gravel, and Low-Volume Road program. She mentioned that in the bill, money was taken from the State Game Commission for the funding. A discussion ensued, and there was support for the ACAP program to be supported with dedicated funding. There is a link provided for everyone to view the bill as it currently is written.
- Education & Outreach – Brenda mentioned that PACD has been using social media platforms to highlight conservation district activities. She discussed the shared messaging

program that districts can use to supplement their social media posts and gave a list of the amounts of messages posted to date.

- Ag Boot Camp – Brenda mentioned that this year there were five weeks of Agricultural Conservation Technical Boot Camp training that took place. She noted that the next training is planned for April and May in 2024. The application period will open in January. She also mentioned an intro to Conservation Planning training is planned for October 31st to November 2nd, 2023 for people planning on becoming a certified planner. She thanked the NRCS and SCC for their support of the trainings and for including conservation district staff.
- Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Mini-Grant Program– Brenda mentioned that the 2023-2024 Nonpoint Source Pollution mini-grant application period closed in January. There were thirty-seven projects funded from 28 conservation districts for over \$65,000.
- PACD Ag Plan Reimbursement Program – Brenda mentioned that the PACD Ag Plan Reimbursement Program has been a great success. She mentioned there is only approx. \$110,000 left of the \$500,000 Growing Greener grant that was awarded. She mentioned that she has reached out to DEP to see about more funding.
- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Outreach Program Office – Brenda mentioned that PACD has approx. \$80,000 still available for CREP mini-grants and is accepting applications for up to \$3,000 to implement educational and outreach activities that support and extend the work of CREP. She mentioned that six projects have been completed this year, totaling approx. \$10,227.
- Riparian Buffer Sub-grants – Brenda mentioned that PACD has two Riparian buffer programs available for conservation districts. The *Multi-functional Riparian Buffer Sub-grant for conservation districts* program sponsored by PENNVEST still has approx. \$18,000 available and must be used by the end of the year. There is no match requirement for this program. A total of 43 grants implementing over 137 acres of buffers have been awarded funding from this program since 2018. The *C2P2 Multi-functional and Conventional Riparian Buffer Program* has been continued due to a C2P2 grant from DCNR awarded to PACD. While multi-functional buffers are preferred, conventional buffers are eligible as well. There is approx. still \$85,000 available and there is a 50/50 match required.
- Lawn Conversion Grant – Brenda announced 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 conservation districts and distribute funding to lawn conversion projects across PA. She mentioned there was a webinar training held over Zoom on June 20th, 2023 and an in-person training held at the Sunset Golf Course in Middletown on July 11th, 2023.
- Invasive Species – Brenda mentioned that PACD was awarded a Landscape Scale Restoration Grant from the USDA Forest Service to offer a PRISM pilot program in northwestern PA. Brenda mentioned that over the past few months, PACD has been meeting the conservation districts in the NW area and the Governor’s Invasive Species Council to help develop the program and promote it in the NW region. She also mentioned all but 2 of the districts in the NW region are participating and the program is looking for support of a statewide invasive species program.
- Leadership development – Brenda mentioned the 2023 Spring Leadership Webinar Series was held in June with over 180 conservation district personnel attending five webinar sessions. She mentioned that in August, the Strategic Planning Grants program began accepting Letters of Intent for districts that are interested in funding or other support for strategic planning projects in the upcoming year. She also mentioned that a Fall Leadership

Webinar Series is planned for November and December with sessions on insurance, financial issues, and website accessibility. Planning has begun for 2024 Regional Staff Workshops as well as Regional Director Workshops.

- Clean Water Academy – Brenda mentioned that the Clean Water Academy is continuing to grow in terms of course offerings, enrollments, completions, and new user registrations. She mentioned that a highly anticipated new Chapter 105 training program on wetland determination is being developed as are several Chapter 102 training programs.
- 102/105 Technical Training – Brenda mentioned that Basic Technical Training will take place in-person in May of 2024. PACD will forward additional information as soon as its available.
- Fall Communication Series – Brenda mentioned that PACD is working with SEP to provide an in-person only fall communications series in State College that will offer Verbal Judo on October 12th – 13th 2023 and The Art and Science of Deception: Detecting Deception and Getting to the Truth on either October 25th or October 26th 2023.
- Conservation District Watershed Specialist Meeting – Brenda mentioned the Conservation District Watershed Specialist Meeting will take place in-person October 3rd through October 5th, 2023 in State College, PA. October 3rd is a special training for new watershed specialists hired after October 2018. Registration is open through Friday September 22nd, 2023.

Regional Information Sharing (11:25)

- Westmoreland – Emil Bove and Rob Cronauer discussed the Pedaling for Conservation bike ride that will be held on October 12th, 2023 to take place in Murrysville. They mentioned that there was a contract awarded along the bike trail for a stormwater facility. They are hoping to get more involvement with the general public. They also mentioned that there had been no turnover since the last meeting, and they recently added additional staff for the ACAP program and an AmeriCorps employee. They mentioned that at their annual awards reception held last week that Hedin Environmental and a local farmer were both recognized for awards. They have also made some recent changes to the facility.
- Cambria – Ray Gorman mentioned they recently held a legislative tour this year which is a change from the legislative breakfast that is usually planned. Ray mentioned they met at Prince Gallitzen State Park and took a boat ride showing the work done for shoreline protection and fish habitat. He mentioned that there were no staff vacancies currently and they were fully staffed. John Dryzal mentioned that he recently attended a Farm Bureau event and Solar Farms were brought up. People were concerned about the loss of land from Solar Farms and were considering some type of impact fee directed to the farmland preservation fund. Cambria CD had a booth at the Cambria County Fair to showcase projects.
- Allegheny – Matt Gordon discussed the recent \$8 million grant that was awarded and he mentioned that since NRCS is doing Urban Soil Mapping USDA Chief Terry Crosby will be coming to Allegheny County and they are planning a media event. He also mentioned they held their 102/105 workshop virtually this year and are taking comments into consideration for supporting in-person or supporting virtual workshops in the future.
- Washington – Jennifer Dann mentioned that at the end of July, Washington county opened social media accounts for the conservation district. She also mentioned that a recent ACAP project bid came back almost double the estimate and had to be re-bid. Also, she mentioned that the board recently approved the purchase of a 10' no-till seeder and the used one they currently own will be up for sale. The district has made it to 2 years without any tech position

turnover and they have been working with the board to give raises thanks to the PACD salary survey information.

- *Beaver* – Jeff Pflug shared that they were working on revamping their education program at the district and have recently finished 4 DGLVR projects in the past 4 weeks. He also mentioned that Ag preservation and the district have been working together on projects recently. ACAP project applications have been submitted and the district ranked all applications.
- *Fayette* – Heather Knupsky shared that the district had recently presented their DGLVR program at the county fair and had good feedback about it. She mentioned that they are working on the second round of their Ag Program reimbursement for Lime to help farmers. She also mentioned that they recently held their Wild About Nature event with over 1,000 visitors, and that the district board has recently voted to seek the Chapter 105 Delegation.

Partner Reports (11:55)

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Report

- Dana Drake noted that they recently held a roundtable on September 8th and received good feedback on different items. She also mentioned that their Project Upstart is working to help to make the Chapter 102/105 permitting programs more efficient.
- Jaci Kerstetter mentioned that any emails sent to the agency to the local DEP representative should also include a CC to Carl DeLuca and Karen Books as well.
- She mentioned that new CAFO information has been published in the bulletin on the DEP website.
- She also mentioned that the Manure Management manual is currently out for comments and people can make their comments online with the EComment tool.
- Jaci informed the group that there will be a Chapter 102 training coming up and also that a Watershed Specialist training will be coming up during the fall.
- She also mentioned that Environmental Education grants are now open, and that people must apply through their regional resource representative.

State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report (Handout)

Executive Secretary Doug Wolfgang provided the following report:

- Doug mentioned that sixty-six conservation districts in PA have signed the delegation agreements with 137.2 million dollars in funds committed.
- Doug mentioned that they are working with the state to find dedicated funding for the ACAP program.
- He mentioned that they have been working with the Tech. Assistance Center in State College and are hoping to have an engineer in place soon.
- He noted that currently there are 66 conservation districts with signed delegation agreements for the Nutrient Management and Odor Management Planning Program.
- He mentioned that the Staff and Center are gearing up for the annual DGLVR conference to be held in Scranton Sept. 26th to the 28th.

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

Jeff Werner & Yuri Plowden provided the following report:

- Jeff mentioned that they are currently working to address the staff shortages in the SW region of PA as well as across the state.

- Jeff also mentioned that they are doing work with more urban Ag projects and have recently opened a new center in Philadelphia.
- He mentioned that NRCS's financial aid programs are always changing and are working to keep up with the changes.
- He gave an update for the 2023 training schedule.
- Yuri gave an update on the progress of the Surface Mine Soil Survey
- Yuri also mentioned that they are also working with the Allegheny Conservation District to gain access to farms for their Urban Soil Survey Update.

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) (Handout)

Brenda Shambaugh noted that DCNR provided a written report.

Adjournment (12:30 PM)

Motion to adjourn was made by Chuck Duritsa at 12:30 PM. Ray Gorman seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.