

**PACD Executive Council
Videoconference Minutes
January 25, 2024**

Call to Order

President Dennis Beck called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

Roll Call

Secretary Charles Duritsa called the roll. Thirty-seven conservation district representatives answered the roll, which constituted a quorum.

Minutes of the Preceding Meeting

Secretary Charles Duritsa presented the minutes of the previous meeting on July 20, 2023.

It was moved by Cliff Lane (McKean) and seconded by Emil Bove (Westmoreland) to approve the minutes of the previous meeting as presented. Motion carried.

President's Report

President Dennis Beck thanked everyone for coming and noted that PACD is working on revitalizing the Joint Annual Conference.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Brenda Shambaugh provided a report on PACD activities.

- Brenda thanked PACD members for attending the meeting, PACD staff for their hard work, and the PACD board for their leadership.
- Ed Magargee, who has been with the Delaware County Conservation District for over 43 years, is retiring soon. We wish him all the best and thank him for his years of service.
- All 66 districts submitted their pages highlighting their activities over the past year. Highlights will go out to the general assembly, the Governor's office, and other partners.
- Conservation District Week will be held Sunday April 28 through Saturday May 4 this year. Each district is encouraged to reach out to legislators on the local level. Brenda will provide districts with template letters and other legislative tools to assist. Tools are also available on the legislative section of the PACD website.
- Chris Grimsley has been working hard on the Clean Water Academy, which is funded through DEP, and boasts a total of 35,000 all time course completions.
- Matt Miller has been busy managing the Leadership Development Program, funded through the State Conservation Commission. This winter and spring he is offering in-person and virtual learning opportunities for both directors and staff.
- Holly Miller is staff contact for the Ag Plan Reimbursement Program, which has been hugely successful. PACD obligated funds from the original \$500,000 Growing Greener grant very



quickly. The SCC is providing an additional \$100,000 and those funds have also been obligated, with additional applications on a waiting list.

- The CREP Mini-grant Program is open on a rolling basis. Please contact Holly Miller if you are interested.
- Holly has also been working with a private firm on a marketing project for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). A CREP banner was on display at the PA Farm Show Complex during the Farm Show and will continue to be displayed for one year.
- Holly also heads up the riparian buffer program, which provides funding for both multi-functional and conventional riparian buffers. A 50/50 match is required, but there are several options for match, including the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's 10 Million Trees program and the Master Watershed Stewardship program.
- The Lawn Conversion Program, funded by DCNR, is also led by Holly, and is now accepting applications.
- PACD has a grant with the U.S. Forest Service to host a pilot PRISM program with the districts in northwest Pennsylvania.
- Shannon Wehinger continues to promote districts through the weekly eNewsletter, social media posts, and press releases throughout the year. She also provides a monthly social media calendar, complete with images, for conservation district use.
- The Nonpoint Source Mini-grant Program continues to be successful.
- PACD provides many training opportunities through our various grants, including the expanded Boot Camp Basic, Level II, and Intro to Conservation Planning offerings, which are funded by the SCC and NRCS and coordinated by PACD's Shannon Wehinger.
- Molly Burns is working on Chapter 102 Basic Technical Training to take place this May.
- Molly is also working with DEP on the 319 Grantee Meeting to take place this May.
- The Watershed Specialist Meeting took place in-person in October for the first time since 2019. The 2024 event will take place virtually this October. Molly is the lead for this project.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Sonia Wasco thanked the conservation districts who have already submitted their dues payments. PACD has received payments from 48 districts, which represents over 72% of the total dues. The annual audit for FY 2022-23 is complete. PACD received the best result possible, which is a clean audit with no findings. The auditors presented the audit report to both the board and the PACD Audit Committee. If any of our members would like a copy of the audit, please reach out to Brenda Shambaugh or Amy Brown with PACD.

Treasurer Wasco presented the mid-year financial reports for FY 2023-24 and noted they were reviewed by the PACD Executive Board and the PACD Ways and Means Committee. She called for questions and received none.

It was moved by Sam Worley and seconded by Mary Burris to approve the Treasurer's Report pending audit. Motion carried.

NACD Report

NACD Director Ron Rohall provided the following report:

- NACD is working hard on the Farm Bill, a top legislative priority.
- PA is fortunate to have Cliff Lane representing the northeast on the NACD board. He

thanked Cliff for his work on behalf of Pennsylvania.

- Ron thanked PACD Leadership Development Manager Matt Miller for providing a phenomenal presentation on the PA Leadership Development program during December's Conservation Coffee. NACD is holding these sessions to highlight leadership development.
- NACD recently opened a new round of Urban and Community Conservation Grants with an April 1 deadline. PA has been successful in obtaining these grants, which require a match. Ron stressed that these grants do not only apply to large cities. Any community can apply, particularly historically underserved communities. There are also planning grants available to do an urban ag and conservation assessment.
- Ron reported that he will be joining PACD NW Region Director Cliff Lane from McKean and PACD 1st Vice President Emil Bove at the annual meeting in February.
- Annica McGuirk is now leading the NACD forestry program. Ron welcomed Nika Colley as the new NACD NE Representative. She is a recent graduate from Cornell University where she studied environment and sustainability and animal science.
- Nika thanked Ron for the introduction and introduced herself. She encouraged anyone who has need to reach out to her at nika-colley@nacdnet.org.

Cliff Lane reported the NACD Legislative Fly-in on March 20 is a terrific opportunity to lobby our legislators on key issues, including the Farm Bill. He also noted the 2024 NACD summer meeting will be held in combination with the Northeast Region Meeting August 11-13 in Boston.

New Business: Reports, motions, and resolutions from PACD Committees

PACD Conservation Committee

Chairperson Josh Longmore provided the following report:

- The PACD Conservation Committee met on January 25, 2024, with a quorum.
- Executive Director Brenda Shambaugh presented an overview of PACD's mini-grant and sub-grant programs and the new Certified Planner Program.
- SCC Executive Secretary Doug Wolfgang provided an update on ACAP.
 - The SCC has obligated about \$150 million through signed delegation agreements with districts. They are also working with Philadelphia, with a focus on urban agricultural conservation projects, and Philadelphia has increased momentum to create their own conservation district.
 - The SCC has received an estimated 700 applications, over 400 of which are signed contracts with farmers. Most ACAP projects will likely go in during 2024 and 2025. Based on this activity, PA expects to spend all allotted funds by the 2026 deadline.
 - The SCC is working to develop a compelling case for dedicated funding to continue ACAP once the federal funds expire. They are seeking testimonials and before and after photos to help with this effort.
 - He provided an update on the Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training through Penn State Extension. Penn State hired HRG to provide engineering services alongside an NRCS engineer on-staff.
 - The SCC is activating the Sustainable Agricultural Board to focus on soil health. This board has been on the books, but inactive, for about thirty years.

- The SCC is focused on implementing and obtaining continued funding for ACAP, climate and sustainability, and streamlining and simplifying processes and funding mechanisms while maintaining accountability.
- Throughout the report, Doug noted the importance of conservation districts to ACAP, other conservation programs, and conservation in PA.
- Justin Dula, DEP Director for the Office of Environmental Justice, reported on the DEP Environmental Justice Initiative.
 - He shared their updated environmental justice policy and noted they plan to work much more closely with conservation districts on this initiative.
 - He reviewed the environmental justice page on the DEP website and the online tools to help become more familiar with the policy.
 - The Environmental Justice Viewer tool has been updated based on new science and data.
 - Justin provided a brief live overview of tools available to help grant applicants and others determine and work with Environmental Justice Areas.
- The committee had no motions to bring before the council.

PACD District Employees Committee

Chairperson Jamie Knecht provided the following report:

- The PACD District Employees Committee met on January 12, 2024, with a quorum.
- Holly Miller, PACD Program Manager, provided a report and list of 2024 training opportunities coordinated by PACD.
- Matt Miller, PACD Leadership Development Coordinator, shared information on upcoming Leadership Development training.
- Attendees expressed their thanks for the training being offered to conservation district staff, especially ag boot camps and Chapter 102 training.
- Jamie Knecht indicated that she is stepping down as chairperson. Sandy Thompson will be assisting Holly Kaplan who will be the next chairperson for the committee.
- The committee had no motions to bring before the council.

PACD Education and Outreach Committee

Chairperson Laura Anderson provided the following report:

- The PACD Education & Outreach Committee met on January 11, 2024, without a quorum.
- The committee received an update on participation in the PA Farm Show and the Clean Water Academy.
- Nate Wardle from the PA Department of Health reported on their initiative to address the changing climate from a public health perspective. PACD is exploring ways to partner with the Department of Health to forward their goals.
- Erin Trouba from Penn State Extension's Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training introduced the Ag Conservation Stewardship Certificate Program, which includes job shadowing and may be an opportunity for conservation districts to help grow the agricultural conservation workforce at the university level. Erin also has materials for Ag Literacy Week which will be March 18-22.
- The committee had no motions to bring before the council.

PACD Legislative Committee

Chairperson Donna Fisher provided the following report:

- The PACD Legislative Committee met on January 17, 2024, with a quorum.
- Brenda Shambaugh reported that the fiscal code was passed. It did not include dedicated funding for the PA Clean Streams Fund, which PACD continues to support.
- The committee received an update on its proposed policy on fencing legislation, which went to the fall region meetings and will be up for a vote later today.
- The committee discussed HB 1275, which would prohibit land development in riparian buffer areas within 100+ feet of certain waterways in order to mitigate flooding issues and water pollution, with an exemption for agriculture. The committee's proposed policy supports education and incentives for voluntary buffers instead of requiring compliance. The policy will go to the spring region meetings.
- Brenda is looking into the potential for a broader policy that would support education and voluntary installation of best management practices in general, instead of legislation requiring compliance.
- The committee passed a motion proposing the Growing Greener administrative ceiling be raised to at least 10%. This is the general ceiling for federal grants. The 5% ceiling on administration expenses for Growing Greener grants does not sufficiently cover current administrative costs. Reporting requirements have become increasingly burdensome, costs have gone up significantly, and other funding sources are increasingly restrictive. PACD, conservation districts, and other organizations that rely on grant funding are struggling.
- Brenda Shambaugh provided an update on SB 689 and SB 690. SB 689 allows local governments to apply for a DEP continuing maintenance stream permit for a period of at least 10 years. SB 690 allows counties to address hazards within their streams by allowing for emergency maintenance permits in consultation with their district. Both bills have passed the Senate and are in the House Environmental Resources and Energy Committee. PACD already has policy supporting the legislative package where these bills originated.
- The committee had no motions to bring before the council.

PACD Operations Committee

Chairperson Emil Bove provided the following report:

- The PACD Operations Committee met on January 19, 2024, with a quorum.
- The committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.
- The committee also forwarded two proposed policies about Proposed Amendments to the Clean Streams Law. These were vetted by the PACD regions and will come before Council under New Business.
- The committee had no motions to bring before the council.

PACD Ways and Means Committee

Chairperson Sonia Wasco provided the following report:

- The PACD Ways and Means Committee met on January 18, 2024, with a quorum.
- The committee approved the minutes of the July 19, 2023 meeting
- The group reviewed a summary of financials for the first half of FY 2023/2024
- There was good discussion on current and potential future funding opportunities for PACD.
- They discussed some solutions to PACD's potential budget shortfalls. It was recommended that PACD research options for generating revenue and clarify grant guidelines with DEP.

There was discussion about the role of the Budget Ad Hoc committee in the process. It was also recommended that PACD look to the private sector for revenue and partnership.

- The committee had no motions to bring before the council.

New Business: Items from the Fall PACD Region Meetings

- **Policy on Proposed Amendment to the Clean Streams Law**

Brenda Shambaugh explained that five regions voted to support the original proposed policy from the PACD Legislative Committee, which was developed in response to proposed legislation to amend the Clean Streams Law to allow municipalities and administrative agencies of the Commonwealth to require streambank fencing for livestock. The PACD South West Region proposed an amended version of the policy, which supports allowing administrative agencies, but not municipalities, to require fencing along a stream. Chairperson Dennis Beck and Executive Director Brenda Shambaugh explained the voting procedures.

It was moved by Donna Zofcin (Forest) and seconded by Jack Hanish (Luzerne) to approve the following policy as presented:

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.

Motion carried.

Because the second policy would conflict with the one just adopted, it was not put to the vote but is included here for reference.

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.

Department of Environmental Protection Report

Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Nonpoint Source Management Director Jill Whitcomb provided the following report:

- She shared an updated organizational chart for the Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Nonpoint Source Management. She highlighted the conservation district background shared by many of the managers and staff and noted they have seven grant programs funded through various state and federal sources. She then provided highlights from her written report:
- Growing Greener grant awards were announced on January 5. Twenty-two grants totaling \$4,250,000 were awarded to conservation districts. The 2024 Growing Greener Grant Round is expected to open in Spring 2024 and DEP recommends anyone interested in applying

begin planning projects.

- On December 1 DEP announced more than \$19 million in 2024 Countywide Action Plan (CAP) Implementation Grants to county teams across Pennsylvania's share of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- DEP is introducing a pilot program to evaluate new procedures for streamlining the review of Chapter 102 Individual NPDES Permit applications and improving the quality of applications received. Jill stressed that the pilot program is optional, and the Department is looking to amend the delegation agreements so that interested districts can participate.
- DEP is offering more Chapter 102 New Hire Small Group Training Webinars in 2024. They are also offering a virtual Basic Technical Training session in the fall.
- On January 3, DEP hosted the 2024 Clean Water Progress Team Strategies for Success webinar, as a follow up to the fall 2023 Clean Water Gathering of state program and Countywide Action Planning (CAP) leaders.

State Conservation Commission Report

Executive Secretary Doug Wolfgang provided highlights from his written report.

- He thanked the conservation districts, agency partners, and PACD staff for all of their hard work and partnership efforts.
- The Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) is front and center for the SCC and they are in a good position with the program.
- The GIS financial tracking system is up and running and districts are currently updating to include projects that are already in the works.
- They have new nutrient management and ACAP staff on board.
- The SCC has received an estimated 700 ACAP applications, over 400 of which are signed contracts with farmers. Most ACAP projects will likely go in during 2024 and 2025. BMP data should continue to be entered in to Practice Keeper.
- He provided an update on the Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training through Penn State Extension.
- The nutrient and odor management programs are going strong. Pennsylvania is a national leader in nutrient management with 1,291 farms totaling 276,351 acres subject to an Act 38 plan, for concentrated animal operations (CAOs). Last year's budget included an additional \$22 million in administrative funds from the Clean Streams Fund (ARPA funds) to support technical and financial assistance.
- Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Roads Program funding continues at \$28 million per year. Five-year delegation agreements are now fully executed and effective as of FY 2023-24.
- The Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP) application cycle began on August 7, with \$13 million in tax credits available, all of which were committed by October. The program continues to be oversubscribed among producers, with over \$150 million in credits issued to date, benefiting over 3,500 farms.
- In recent years, the Agri-Link Low Interest Loan program for conservation practices subsidized seven loans totaling \$1.1 million. Discussions about how to expand the program are underway.
- The Conservation Excellence Grant (CEG) program continues to move forward with record funding this past year. The Commission earmarked \$3 million of the total \$7 million in funding for conservation projects that involve public-private partnerships. Proposals were approved for funding from Franklin and Centre County Conservation Districts, Alliance for

the Chesapeake Bay, and Lancaster Farmland Trust.

- The SCC has appointed the Sustainable Agriculture Board per the Sustainable Agriculture Act. Funding for grants to be administered by the board is being provided by the EPA's Most Effective Basin (MEB) program. The focus of the board will be to award grants for sustainable agriculture projects related to climate smart farming, innovative practices, and to create a statewide soil health program.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Report

Denise Coleman provided highlights from the PA NRCS FY 2023 Accomplishments.

- PA NRCS applied 44,360 conservation practices and enhancements in FY 2023.
- Funding by watershed: Ohio River Watershed - 326 contracts, \$18.4 million; Great Lakes Watershed - 11 contracts, \$864,217; Chesapeake Bay Watershed - 338 contracts, 19.1 million; Delaware River Watershed - 163 contracts, \$5.9 million
- She highlighted the investments on private working lands: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) \$29.3 Million; Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA) \$385,096; Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) \$11.5 Million; Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) \$3.2 Million, Conservation Technical Assistance 120,387 acres.
- She also reviewed the top conservation practices applied
- Ag Conservation Training has been expanded, with two sessions each of Boot Camp Basic, Boot Camp Level II, and Intro to Conservation Planning.
- The EQIP allocation has increased from \$29 million to over \$50 million. Of those funds, \$30 million is going to five-year contracts through the NRCS ACT NOW Cover Crop Program.

A discussion took place concerning future PACD dues.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:51 a.m.