

**PACD South Central Region Meeting Minutes
Cumberland County Conservation District, Carlisle PA
March 14, 2024**

Welcome, Introductions and Roll Call

Interim South Central Region Director Sonia Wasco, called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m. with a quorum present.

Participants: Karen Books, DEP; Christina Dehoff, York; Carl Deluca, DEP; Katie Doster, Lebanon; Lori Glace, Juniata; Bill Erdman, Lehigh; Carl Goshorn, Cumberland; Charlie Hanner, NRCS; Charles Heberlig, DEP; Jeff Hill, York; Randy Leisure, Lebanon; Adam McClain, Adams; Arek Moczulski, PACD; Susan Parry, NRCS; Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Seleen Shives, Fulton; Jeff Sholly, PACD; Dave Stoner, Franklin; Sonia Wasco, Lancaster; Doug Wolfgang, SCC; Jaci Kerstetter, DEP; Donna Fisher, Blair; Amy Brown, PACD; Jennifer Lentz Kovacs, Bedford; Erin Trouba, Penn State Center for Ag Conservation Assistance Training.

Set Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting is to be held on Tuesday, October 29, 2024, at the Cumberland County Conservation District Office.

Approval of Minutes from the Previous Meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were provided for review.

It was motioned by Seleen Shives and seconded by Randall Leisure to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion carried.

PACD Business and Report

Executive Director Brenda Shambaugh provided highlights from her written report.

- Brenda introduced Eric Moczulski as a new PACD Certified Planner Program employee.
- PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference – Planned for July 17-18, 2024, at the Penn State Conference Center. Registration to open in May. Working to make it a good event and encouraged attendance.
- Motion from the PACD Ways and Means Committee – Brenda introduced the motion from the PACD Ways and Means Committee regarding a proposed \$500 voluntary donation as a short-term solution to existing financial shortfalls. It was also noted that this is separate from the \$75 increase to PACD dues for the 2024/25 year.

Sonia Wasco read the statement from the PACD Executive Board dated March 5, 2024, that was provided in the meeting packet and offered comments and clarifications. She stated that the projected budget shortfall is being reduced and that a meeting was held by PACD with the partners (SCC, DEP and NRCS) on March 1, 2024, with the commitment to meet



quarterly moving forward. She spoke on behalf of the Lancaster County Conservation District and stated that they appreciate and respect the work of PACD.

York County requested budget backup to present to his board if a donation is solicited. Response was that the current year budget numbers could be provided but the 2024/25 numbers will not be approved until July 2024. Cumberland County asked about the timing of the proposed donation. Response was that is up to the individual district. Adams County asked if an evaluation of existing programs was being conducted or planned. Response was that a detailed program evaluation is being conducted. Brenda noted that of the 25 PACD employees only 6 (4FT and 2PT) have a portion of their salaries charged to PACD.

Motion by Randall Leisure and Seconded by Adam McClain to support the motion from the Ways and Means Committee as written “The PACD Ways and Means Committee moved to recommend discussion for the potential of requesting a \$500 donation from the conservation districts to PACD as a short-term solution for the financial shortfalls currently existing.” Motion Carried. Jeff Hill (York) abstained from voting.

- Proposed Policies from the PACD Legislative Committee – Brenda presented two proposed policies from the PACD Legislative Committee.

1. Increase to Growing Greener Plus Grants Program Administrative Expense Limitation

The 5% ceiling on administration expenses for Growing Greener grants, which seemed feasible at the time it was passed, does not currently cover the actual administrative costs of implementing a Growing Greener grant. Reporting requirements are time-consuming, overhead costs have increased significantly, and restrictions on other funding sources have increased. PACD, conservation districts, and other organizations that rely on grant funding are struggling to cover administrative and overhead costs.

The Growing Green Plus Grants Program offered by the PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) funds projects aimed at reducing nonpoint source water pollution through local, watershed-based planning, restoration, and protection efforts. The PACD Legislative Committee supports legislation to increase the administrative expense limitation for the Growing Greener program to a minimum of 10% to better cover administrative expenses.

It was moved by Adam McClain and seconded by Randall Leisure to support the motion presented by the PACD Legislative Committee. Motion carried.

2. Voluntary Installation of Riparian Buffers

This policy is proposed in response to HB 1275, which would prohibit land development in riparian buffer areas within 100+ feet of certain waterways to mitigate flooding issues and water pollution. The proposed legislation includes an exemption for agriculture.

PACD recognizes the significant environmental benefit of riparian buffers along surface bodies of water. PACD supports education and incentives for voluntary installation of riparian buffers as opposed to legislation allowing administrative agencies of the Commonwealth and municipalities to require buffers along any body of water more restrictive than current law and regulation.

Discussion continued regarding the potential within the bill to allow for a designee of the Commonwealth or the Municipality and would that fall to the conservation districts for potential enforcement.

It was moved by Donna Fisher and seconded by Seleen Shives to support the motion presented by the PACD Legislative Committee. Motion carried.

- Legislative Report – Governor Shapiro presented his proposed 2024-2025 fiscal year budget to the PA General Assembly. The most notable portion of his proposal is the continuation of increased funding to the CDFAP in both the DEP and PDA lines. We still need to continue working toward a dedicated source of funding for the PA Clean Streams Fund.
- Education and Outreach –PACD uses social media platforms to highlight conservation district activities. PACD continues to develop a monthly shared messaging program so districts can supplement their social media posts.
- Ag Boot Camp Training – More opportunities are being presented. One Basic session, two Level II sessions, and two Introduction to Conservation Planning are planned.
- Invasive Species PRISM Subgrants – PACD has a Landscape Scale Restoration Grant from the USDA Forest Service to offer a PRISM (Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management) pilot program in northwestern PA. The grant allows PACD to provide subgrants for invasive species education and outreach events and on-the-ground treatment projects. PACD has been meeting with the NW conservation districts bimonthly to provide updates and discuss what is going on in each county. The districts have invited partners and community members to participate in advisory committees to help prioritize invasive species projects in their counties. If the pilot program is successful, it may be expanded.
- Certified Professional in Erosion & Sedimentation Control (CPESC) Training – PACD is co-hosting a Certified Professional in Erosion and Sediment Control (CPESC) Review Course at the Clinton County Conservation District in Mill Hall, PA, on September 10, 2024. The cost is \$380 for non-district participants and \$180 for conservation district staff. The deadline to register is August 30.
- Certified Planner Program –PACD has hired six certified conservation planners and nutrient management specialists with funding from NRCS and the SCC. The new staff are housed at the NRCS Technical Centers in Dauphin, Erie, Bucks, Indiana, Wayne, and Franklin Counties. All the hired staff are recent college graduates and will be working toward their certifications. The program is patterned after the TAG program.
- Clean Water Academy – Use of the Clean Water Academy (CWA) remains high. The CWA is home to 901 current and active courses covering a wide variety of important topics.
- Leadership Development –The Leadership Development Program held the 2023 Fall Leadership Webinar Series in November/December with 132 total attendees. Topics included identifying insurance gaps, financial issues, and website accessibility. In January/February the program held a three-part time management webinar series with ninety total attendees. A current series of workshops related to Strategic Board Development is being presented.

Regional Sharing

- Adams – ACAP is moving with applications being approved in March. Rusty Ryan, long term employee, is leaving in June 2024. Plans for district week include meeting with local Representatives and offering district highlights at a Commissioners Meeting.

- Bedford – Fully staffed with four ag team members. Cover Crop Incentive program in 2023 on 2,988 acres. Pay \$50/ac for multispecies and \$40/acre for single. ACAP construction projects are being piggybacked with EQIP. Providing 90% cost share on ACAP projects. Five stream restoration projects using CAP funds and working with Trout Unlimited (TU) and Western PA Conservancy (WPC). Their Auditor resigned due to their need for a Single Audit. Soliciting bids (26 proposals sent out) with limited responses.
- Blair – Using CAP for another stream restoration project with TU. Also using a local firm BluAcres to complete restoration designs, permits and oversight. Cover Crop Incentive using CAP and ACAP funds on over 3,800 acres. Developed a Riparian Buffer Incentive program like the Cover Crop Incentive Program using CAP funds. Limited success with the first round of applications currently being reviewed by staff.
- Cumberland – First ACAP project completed (manure storage and roofed HUA) in November 2023. The Cover Crop Incentive program started in 2006 using many different funding sources. 2023 had ninety-seven farmers for 9,000 acres. Pay \$20/acre or \$30 if no-tilled. Highlighted Cover Crop signage that was developed. Six signs were made to post around the county using the slogan from a local farmer “We love our soil, but we do not want to see it!”
- Franklin – Sam Worley says hello. Franklin completed an \$853,000 floodplain restoration project and \$1.8 million for a stream restoration project. Wrapping up a Dirt and Gravel Road stream crossing project. Receiving complaints related to a solar farm project on 750 acres. Working with the Ombudsman Program related to Food Processing Residual (FPR) use in the County. They used \$100,000 for a Cover Crop Program through ACAP.
- Fulton – Using ACAP for their first Cover Crop Incentive Program (patterned from Cumberland County) which will be funded for two years – 1,500 acres for \$41,000 with different rates for multi/single species and minimum/no-till. All ACAP funds allocated at their January Board Meeting. Purchased another no-till drill with CAP funds. Rented for 13,000 acres in 2023. Using \$125,000 in CAP funds to develop a plan at their proposed district campus to include demonstrations for water quality BMPs for farm and home. Convened a local work group and hope to have the plan completed in June 2024.
- Juniata – Short staffed. Conducting interview for three open positions this coming Friday. Solar farms are coming with no ordinances in place, and they are seeing plans for power lines (associated with solar farms). All ACAP funds have been allocated and two projects have been completed (one for hog and one for beef HUAs and storages). They have 150 acres preserved through the Farmland Preservation Program and fifteen farms on the list. CAP fund used for two stream and one wetland restoration project.
- Lancaster – Fully staffed at 42. Thanked PACD for the salary study that assisted in their determining salary adjustments. They made 7% increases in December 2022 and \$1,000 or \$2,000 increases and 5% in 2023. Discussion of duties of Grants Coordinator and stream restoration pre and post monitoring at 12 stations with nine sondes deployed. BMP Verification Coordinator – visit farm to do a third-party water quality assessment, then visit the farm to recertify projects. Working with municipalities on their stormwater programs to fund stormwater BMPs. Farmer’s fee can be reduced by having a site inspection and a plan (not counted as a Bay inspection). This is their 50th year for their Tree Sale. Their first female Board Chair, Sonia Wasco, was elected in January 2024.
- Lebanon – ACAP – completed twelve ag projects and two stream projects. First year of a Manure Injection Incentive Program with fourteen participating on 2,208 acres for \$44,160.

2024 rates will be \$40/ac in year 1 - \$30/ac year 2 and \$20/ac year 3. Allocated 4.9 million of ACAP or about 50%. Received 2.9 million in federal funds for farmland preservation. Eighteen farms are in process and fifteen are on the waiting list. Spring events include elementary, middle, and senior high Envirothons; Tire collection program (1,000 tires); Tree Sale - 235 customers for \$20,000; 10 Million Trees Program at 6 sites for 875 trees; and Rain Barrel workshops and painting contest for High Schools clubs with voting and distribution through a silent auction (7 clubs participating).

- York – Envirothons for grades 3 through 12 with nine hundred students participating. ACAP – 3 bid openings with over one million allocated. Looking to restructure their E&S Department to hire EIT's to support the watershed and ag programs as well as E&S duties. Participating in discussions for the Cuffs Run project associated with a proposed new hydroelectric dam on the Susquehanna.

Partner Reports

DEP – Carl DeLuca provided verbal comments related to the written document provided.

- Twelve million was awarded through Growing Greener Grants with 4.25 million to conservation districts.
- PA's Phase 3 WIP was selected to receive the 2024 Environmental Excellence Award.
- Provided Budget Testimony to the House Appropriations Committee.
- Highlighted activities completed by Jill Whitcomb, DEP BWRNSM Director, to include budget testimonies and permitting discussions, FPR workshops, ag permitting roundtable, capturing Game Commission projects in the model (completed with Oil and Gas Funds), EPA Crediting Task Force, and more.

DEP - Karen Books reported.

- DEP has worked with Penn State to develop a mechanism to “drag” the staff budget spreadsheet (budgeted and actual) into a database to allow for easier compilation and query of data. Staff are scheduling small group training courses to upload the information. DEP will be asking for additional information related to years of service, education requirements, and benefits packages.
- DEP is currently working to schedule the SC Regional Roundtable for Ag and E&S.

SCC – Executive Secretary Doug Wolfgang reported.

- They are busy distributing and tracking over 200 million dollars in funds.
- ACAP – fifty million committed to contracts with 1,300 applications and 17,000 contacts made regarding the program. Setting sites for dedicated funding through the Clean Streams Fund. Stressed the need for good before and after stories and photos. Working to have an ACAP Administrative Manual by the end of 2024. Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training is set up and HRG has been contracted to work to provide Engineering Job Approval to district staff.
- DGLVR Program – allocating \$28 million and there is an abundance of training opportunities provided through the Center for Dirt and Gravel Roads.
- Nutrient Management – 20.5 million in ARPA funds to the Clean Streams Fund for technician reimbursements and the Conservation Excellence Grant program.

- 10.5 million dollars included in the Governor's Budget related to Ag Innovations – looking to promote methane digesters.
- The Sustainable Ag Board is up and running. Emphasis on Climate Smart Commodities.
- REAP – thirteen million dollars of tax credits gone (allocated) in 2 weeks.
- The SCC has purchased a drone – looking for ways to use it.
- Noted the passing of Senator Noah Wenger at the end of February.

NRCS – Charlie Hanner reported in addition to the written handout.

- Field Teams are busy – his South-Central region (excluding Blair, Huntingdon and Mifflin) have committed 33 million total between EQIP, NWOI, RCPP and CC programs.
- Referred to the extensive training schedule provided.

NRCS – Susan Perry reported.

- Received six additional applications for Easement Applications through the Kittatinny Ridge Program.
- Accepting easement applications to support wood and spotted turtle habitats.

Center for Ag Conservation Assistance Training - Erin Trouba reported.

- The Center is participating in a Science, Environment and Conservation Career Fair on campus March 12. Provide her with position openings if you would like them to distribute.

Adjournment

Motion made by Seleen Shives and seconded by Dave Stoner to adjourn the meeting at 12:23 PM. Motion carried.