

**PACD South East Region Meeting Minutes
Henning's Market, Harleysville, PA
March 28, 2024**

Call to Order

Region Director Piper Sherburne welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM.

In-person participants: Dean Druckenmiller, Berks; Gretchen Schatschneider, Bucks; Chris Strohmaier, Chester; Karen Wilwol, Delaware; Michelle Wheeler, Delaware; Kevin Frederick, Lehigh; Holly Kaplan, Lehigh; Bill Erdman, Lehigh; Jessica Buck, Montgomery; Piper Sherburne, PACD SE Region Director, Berks; Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Grace Rhodes, PACD; Sonia Wasco, PACD; Dennis Beck, PACD; Karen Books, DEP; Robert Page, DEP; Shannon Davis, DEP; Carl DeLuca, DEP; Justin Challenger, SCC; Andy Myers, NRCS; Beth Sassaman, NRCS

Virtual participants: Jeffrey Keifer, Northampton; Jaci Kerstetter, DEP

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held at 10:00 AM on October 31, 2024, at Henning's Market

Approval of Minutes

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of the last meeting on October 26, 2023, as presented. Motion carried.

PACD Business Report

Brenda thanked everyone for attending today's meeting and provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference – The PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference will be held July 17-18 in State College. The agenda is currently being developed.
- What PACD Does for You – This document was reviewed.
- State Budget – The Governor's Office and General Assembly appear favorable to continue current funding level.
- Motion from PACD Ways & Means Committee – This committee is requesting discussion on a \$500 donation from each conservation district to address PACD's current budget shortfall. Motion made by Lehigh CCD to discuss. Montgomery CCD seconded.
 - PACD Treasurer Sonia Wasco noted that PACD is having quarterly meetings with DEP to discuss issues leading to shortfall, has a history of balanced budgets, operates with integrity and transparency, and faces a significant shortfall. She encouraged district support.
 - Lehigh asked why this stopgap move is occurring. PACD replied it is to address lower grant reimbursements (a revenue shortfall).



- Chester asked if future shortfalls will be addressed by increasing dues or more donations.
- Montgomery asked what will happen if not all districts make the donation. PACD replied that it would then tap into the reserve fund.
- Northampton asked how much is in this reserve fund. PACD replied that there is approximately \$160,000 in their reserve fund.
- Northampton asked for DEP's viewpoint. Carl DeLuca from DEP stated that the primers have not changed, they are just being interpreted differently than before, and that EPA and the Grants Center routinely audit his group.
- PACD appreciates DEP and their other partners working so closely with them.
- Lehigh asked about the possibility of shortfall recurring or increasing in future years.
- Bucks asked about any discussion of non-grant revenue streams. PACD replied this has been discussed and PACD is open to ideas.
- Lehigh expressed support for increasing training fees that PACD charges.
- PACD expressed appreciation for all the intelligent questions and discussion and urged the districts to support motions for the donations.
- *A motion to support the proposed motion from the Ways and Means Committee passed unanimously at 10:37 AM.*
- Proposed Policy on Growing Greener Grant Administrative Allowance – There is currently a 5% administrative fee for Growing Greener grants. *A motion was made to support the proposed policy to increase that fee to no less than 10%. Unanimously passed at 10:40 AM.*
- HB 1275 (Riparian Buffer Requirements) – PACD supports voluntary riparian buffers, rather than mandatory. *Motion to support the proposed policy supporting voluntary riparian buffers passed unanimously at 10:44 AM.*
- State Budget – The PACD ad hoc budget committee is working to meet with local legislators, especially during conservation district week. PACD will support meetings at the Capitol but recommends meeting with legislators in their local districts because of increased time and availability.
- Chapter 102 Training – Funded by a DEP grant and upcoming in May in Harrisburg.
- Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting– Virtual training to be held in May. Funded by DEP.
- Education and Outreach – PACD has made 155 Facebook posts, fifty tweets, and several Instagram and LinkedIn posts since September 2023. PACD social media is funded by dues.
- Ag Boot Camp and Level II Training – PACD is planning to have two sessions each, due to the high number of new district staff. The next Level II training is in May.
- Introduction to Conservation Planning – A session is planned in May and another in the fall.
- NPS Mini-grant Program – There are currently thirty-seven projects involving twenty-eight districts for over \$65,000 in grants. More funding is coming.
- Ag Plan Reimbursement Program – PACD received a Growing Greener grant for \$500,000 to provide funding for landowners needing an ag plan. The State Conservation Commission is providing an extra \$100,000.
- CREP – The mini-grant program has \$75,000 available. If interested, contact PACD.
- Riparian Buffer Subgrants – These are funded through DCNR. A 50/50 match is required.
- Lawn Conversion – DCNR awarded PACD \$100,000 for the Lawn Conversion Program. \$70,000 is still available.
- Invasive Species Pilot Program – This pilot program is going on in the northwest.

- New Certified Planner Program – PACD initiated this program in cooperation with NRCS and the SCC to develop and implement more conservation plans.
- Clean Water Academy – All-time course completions are now up to 37,000. New course emphasis is on PAG-02. If a district has a suggestion for a new course, please contact PACD. The Clean Water Academy position is 100% DEP-funded.
- Leadership Development – Matt Miller is frequently on the road conducting workshops. A Management Summit is being planned for September.

District Information Sharing

- *Chester* – District has been constantly busy with Chapter 102 work. A new district engineer is coming up to speed. Four retirements are coming in 2025. Their ag engineer left in January. They have an MOU with Lancaster for stream restoration projects.
- *Lehigh* – They have a case where a Chapter 102 permit was terminated, but the site wants to do approved BMP work. There is no mechanism for approval and, while they talked to DEP, there is no clear plan, and they are unsure if this is covered in the delegation agreement. They are due for a Legislative Breakfast. One ag staff person left in January, but they have added two. They recently had their first MS4 Conference for municipalities in four years.
- *Bucks* – They got funding for two or three Emerging Watershed training courses. Their Envirothon is April 24. They have four or five more ACAP projects, and 2 more Low Volume Road projects. Enforcement is going strong. They are clearing them out with help from the DEP SERO Waterways & Wetlands Operations Section. Their next legislative event is on May 16. There is a tree and shrub shortage at local nurseries.
- *Delaware* – District is working through personnel issues, such as Ed Magargee returning part-time. They want to add another Chapter 102 position. Their MOU for ACAP with Chester is working well. Their building's boiler recently malfunctioned and is being repaired, so all staff are temporarily working from home.
- *Montgomery* – Good things are being done with their ACAP funds. They have not increased their ag staff and do not have an ag Engineer, which creates challenges. They are using ACAP Technical Assistance for funding. The district is also busy with Chapter 102 work and has one technician vacancy. Their April Envirothon will be at Norristown Farm Park. They will have one summer intern.
- *Berks* – They will be hosting a conservation district celebration event on May 4, where they will dedicate their new Soil Water and Agricultural Education (SWAG) bus. They will be having a legislative event on June 14. The district is treating beech trees to prevent disease.
- *Northampton* – No district representative was present, but DEP Field Representative Shannon Davis reported their transition to an independent District is going well.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Update

- State Budget – DEP is having budget discussions with the State House and Senate. Chesapeake Bay is a big topic. Food processing residual is becoming a big topic.
- Nonpoint Source Program – This annual report is coming out soon.
- Chesapeake Bay – The program is trying to get their funding allocations to the districts more efficiently. The State is getting \$14 million from EPA. Jill Whitcomb will be presenting a Chesapeake Bay Progress Review.

- PAG-02 – There will be a webinar on PAG-02 changes on April 3. The updated PAG-02 has not been published yet.
- Southeast Region Roundtable – The southeast region’s summer roundtable will be on July 9 at Lower Perkiomen Valley Park.

State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report

- ACAP – \$58.2 million is in the system this year. The ACAP Annual Conference will be from June 4-6 at Toftrees in State College.
- Nutrient Management Program – The Nutrient Management Program has a new director.
- Dirt & Gravel – The Dirt & Gravel Program wrapped up a webinar series.
- Sustainable Ag Board – This Board’s first meeting will be April 5.
- Possible Philadelphia District – A recent meeting was held in Philadelphia to discuss the creation of a Conservation District.

NRCS Update

- New Office – NRCS has opened its new office in Philadelphia.
- Urban funding – They have greatly expanded their urban program funding. Not all has been used yet.
- Cover crop program – They will be carrying out a large cover crop program this year.

Adjournment

There was a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:15 PM. Motion carried.