

**PACD South West Region Meeting Minutes
Westmoreland Conservation District, Greensburg, PA
April 18, 2024**

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; 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; Chris Phillips, DEP; Jessica Wolf, Fayette; Matt Gordon, Allegheny; Tim Peters, NRCS; Dana Flowers, Penn State Extension; Lindsey Kosloski, Greene; Nate Edwards, PACD; Carl DeLuca, DEP; Shane Kleiner, DEP; Dennis Beck, Indiana; Doug Beri, Indiana; Barbara Peace, Indiana; Sonia Wasco, Lancaster; Danielle Kalp, PACD; Aileen Evans, DEP; Ron Rohall, Westmoreland; Sandra Schmidt, Somerset; Kristy Scarmack, Somerset

Election of Southwest Region Director

Motion made by Emil Bove to elect Barbara Peace to serve as PACD South West Region Director. Seconded by Doug Beri. Motion carried unanimously.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held September 27, 2024, at 10:00 AM, at the Westmoreland Conservation District office.

Approval of Minutes

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

Motion made by Doug Beri to approve the minutes from the previous meeting held September 20, 2023. Seconded by Matt Gordon. Motion carried unanimously.

PACD Business Report

Brenda provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- The PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference is being revitalized and will be held at the Penn Stater Conference Center July 17-18, 2024. Registration will open in May.
- *State Budget* – Governor Shapiro presented his proposed 2024-2025 fiscal year budget to the PA General Assembly, which included level funding for the Conservation District Fund Allocation Program (CDFAP) in both the DEP and PDA lines. The PACD ad hoc budget committee will meet with legislators to emphasize the importance of maintaining this funding and the need for a dedicated source of funding for the PA Clean Streams Fund.
- *102/105 Technical Training* – Chapter 102 Basic Technical Training will take place in-



person with a field component May 20-24, 2024, at the Red Lion Hotel in Harrisburg, PA.

- *Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting* – Planning is underway for the Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting this May.
- *Conservation District Watershed Specialist Meeting* – The Conservation District Watershed Specialist Meeting will take place virtually in October 2024.
- *Education & Outreach* – PACD has been using social media platforms to highlight district activities and provides a monthly shared messaging program for districts.
- *Ag Boot Camp* – One week of Basic training and two sessions of Level II will be held in March/April 2024 with Intro to Conservation Planning slated for May 7-9, 2024. She thanked NRCS and the SCC for their support of the training program.
- *Legislative Update* – House Bill 1300 includes an additional \$150 million dollars for the PA Clean Streams Fund. Brenda explained the funding breakdown and how it affects the Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road program. 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.
- *Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Mini-Grant Program*– The 2023-2024 Nonpoint Source Pollution mini-grant application period closed in January. There were thirty-seven projects funded from twenty-eight conservation districts for over \$65,000 and the projects will be completed by May 2024. She mentioned that the 2024-2025 Mini-grant round is on hold pending approval for a budget change.
- *PACD Ag Plan Reimbursement Program* – PACD has been awarded an additional \$100,000 from the SCC for the Ag Plan Reimbursement Program, since the initial \$500,000 from DEP has been obligated. Once the paperwork is complete, PACD will approve additional plans and continue to pursue additional funding.
- *Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Outreach Program Office* – PACD is accepting applications on a rolling basis with over \$75,000 available to help landowners prevent pollution in our streams. PACD encourages conservation districts to work closely with PA CREP partners to offer education and outreach opportunities.
- *Riparian Buffer Subgrants* – The program funded by PENNVEST is now closed and funded thirty-one projects covering more than eighty-five acres of riparian buffers. The Riparian Buffer Subgrant for Conservation Districts program continues thanks to a C2P2 grant from DCNR. While multifunctional buffers are preferred, conventional buffers are also eligible. Approximately \$70,000 remains available and a 50/50 match is required.
- *Lawn Conversion Grant* – PACD was awarded a \$100,000 C2P2 grant from DCNR to offer a Lawn Conversion Subgrant Program for Conservation Districts. Approximately \$70,000 remains available. The goal of the program is to offer training and distribute funding to conservation districts for lawn conversion projects across PA. PACD held both an in-person and a virtual training. Applicants who did not attend either training session should watch the webinar recording on the PA Clean Water Academy website before applying.
- *Invasive Species* – PACD was awarded a Landscape Scale Restoration Grant from the USDA Forest Service to offer a PRISM pilot program in northwestern PA. PACD has been meeting the conservation districts in the NW area bi-monthly to provide updates and discuss what has been going on in each county. The districts have invited partners and community members to be involved in advisory committees to help prioritize projects in their counties.
- *Certified Professional in Erosion & Sedimentation Control (CPESC) Training* – PACD is working with EnviroCert to offer a CPESC review course at the Clinton County Conservation District in Mill Hall, PA on September 10, 2024. The review course is open to

anyone actively pursuing a CPESC certification. The cost is \$380 for non-district participants and \$180 for conservation district staff.

- *Clean Water Academy (CWA)* – The Clean Water Academy continues to grow in terms of course offerings, enrollments, completions, and new user registrations. The CWA is home to 901 current and active courses covering a wide variety of important topics. PACD is working with DEP to develop new eLearning courses with many new courses centered on issues relevant to Chapter 102 & Chapter 105.
- *Leadership Development* – Since the last region meeting, Leadership Development Manager Matt Miller held a Fall Leadership Webinar Series with over 132 attendees; a three-part time management webinar series with 90 total attendees; the 4th Annual Conservation District Video Awards presentation; five regional staff workshops on emotional intelligence with 95 total attendees and six regional Strategic Board Development workshops with 67 total attendees; and four team-building workshops. The CliftonStrengths teambuilding workshops for conservation districts initiative has now reached over 330 participants. Planning is underway for the 2024 webinar series, new manager training and the annual management summit September 17-19 at the Wyndham Conference Center in State College.
- *Motion from the Ways and Means Committee* – Brenda explained that PACD is experiencing a financial shortfall, and the Ways and Means Committee made the following motion to help address the issue:

The PACD Ways and Means Committee moves to recommend discussion for the potential of requesting a \$500 donation from the Conservation Districts to PACD as a short-term solution to the financial shortfalls currently existing.

Sonia Wasco explained that PACD has a reserve fund to cover the shortfall, and the \$500 donation would be used to replenish the fund. PACD is meeting with partners to find medium- and long-term solutions. Carl DeLuca noted that adjustments were made, but nothing has changed on DEP's end. Doug Beri asked if there were any policy changes that would keep another shortfall from occurring again in the future, and Brenda reported that PACD is not replacing our part-time bookkeeper, who is retiring, and is meeting with partners to explore other funding opportunities. Doug Wolfgang asked about the growth of PACD and Brenda explained that PACD has expanded grants and training sessions and continues work with SCC and NRCS. John Dryzal mentioned that PACD is the voice of the conservation districts, and the conservation districts are in essence a branch of PACD. Brenda asked for input on the motion and if anyone thought there should be any changes made. A discussion was held.

Dennis Beck made a motion to support the PACD Ways and Means Committee's recommendation. Emil Bove seconded the motion. Motion passed.

- *Proposed Policies from the PACD Legislative Committee (Increase to Growing Greener Plus Grants Program Administrative Expense Limitation)* – Brenda discussed with everyone that the 5% ceiling on administration expenses for Growing Greener grants seemed feasible at the time it was passed, however it is insufficient to cover the administrative costs of managing and implementing a Growing Greener grant. The PACD Legislative committee proposed the following policy to increase the administrative expense limitation to 10%:

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.

A motion in support of the PACD Legislative Committee's recommendation was made by Doug Beri. Jeff Pflug seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- *Proposed Policies from the PACD Legislative Committee (Voluntary Installation of Riparian Buffers) – The PACD Legislative Committee proposed the following policy 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:*

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.

A motion to support PACD's recommendation of voluntary riparian buffer installation was made by Dennis Beck. Doug Beri seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Regional Information Sharing (11:25)

- *Cambria – **John Dryzal** reported they held a successful tree sale over the last week. The district has a few events planned for Conservation District Week this year including tree planting and Envirothon. They have had success with the Ag Plan Reimbursement program.*
- *Allegheny – **Matt Gordon** reported the district recently posted a position for increasing tree canopy. The district has been working with municipalities to plant in abandoned mine areas and they wrapped up their 102/105 workshop in February.*
- *Indiana – **Doug Beri** reported the district works with the Growing for Good Health initiative that emphasizes gardening and uses and nutrition of vegetables. The district was awarded a \$3.7 million grant to construct a new trail starting in Homer City. They are looking at different ways to create recreational opportunities and will be holding a local workgroup meeting with NRCS to generate input and outcomes for more programs with the district.*
- *Fayette – **Jessica Wolf** discussed their third annual Wild About Nature workshop. They are undergoing staffing changes and are working to fill those positions.*
- *Beaver – **Jeff Pflug** shared they were able to reduce internal permitting processing time from 18 months to 6 months and recently held a tire cleanup. They have five ACAP projects this year, their Envirothon is coming up, and they have two new technicians.*
- *Greene – **Lindsey Kosloski** shared that the district recently held their Envirothon and have all their ACAP funding contracted. They still have an open position for a Nutrient Management Specialist and have a tire collection and road cleanup scheduled for May.*
- *Somerset – **Kristy Scarmack** shared that the district took on maintenance of four AMD treatment systems and is currently working on three DGLVR projects.*
- *Westmoreland – **Emil Bove** discussed the Pedaling for Conservation bike ride that will be held on May 9, 2024, to take place on the Coal & Coke Trail. **Rob Cronauer** mentioned the district's Envirothon is today, and they are applying for BAMR funding for several projects. The district is making a video highlighting ACAP to help promote the program to the public. Their engineer workshop was held over two separate days in late March.*

Partner Reports (11:50)

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Report (Handout)

- **Carl DeLuca** noted that they are working with the PA Game Commission on BMP's and the 2023 Non-Point Source Annual Report will be coming out soon.
- **Shane Kleiner** reported the Growing Greener and 319 grant programs will open for application on April 21, and close on June 21. He reiterated that there is a \$500,000 cap on grant awards. DEP is working on ways to recognize the hard work of conservation districts.
- **Jaci Kerstetter** discussed the transition of the staff budget and salary to an online website.
- **Dana Drake** reported the delegation agreements might be certified soon.

State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report (Handout)

Executive Secretary **Doug Wolfgang** provided the following report:

- To date, districts have reported over 1,300 potential ACAP applications with 588 of those applications approved for a total of \$58.2 million obligated to contracts with farm owners.
- The new Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training (CACAT) housed at the Penn State College of Ag Sciences continues to develop training and education.
- Herbert, Rowland, and Grubic Engineering Inc. (HRG) has been contracted to work alongside an NRCS engineer to provide job approval authority and oversight to districts.
- CACAT has developed a GIS system to enable quarterly reporting.
- Fifty-five conservation districts have signed delegation agreements for the Nutrient Management and Odor Management Planning program.
- Environmentally Sensitive Management training was held on March 20. They hold twelve training courses per year in various locations with 50 to 80 people in attendance at each.
- The Sustainable Ag Board has been officially appointed and met on April 5 to discuss the function of the board and projects that will potentially be funded.
- The Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP) continues to be oversubscribed with \$13 million in credits committed to practices and equipment within weeks of the last application round.
- The SCC helped coordinate a meeting with local officials last week on the feasibility of forming a Philadelphia County Conservation District.

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

- **Jeff Werner & Tim Peters** discussed a recent visit from the undersecretary of FPAC to announce \$1.5 million in RCPP funding.
- Jeff Werner talked about the success of the recent All Hands conference in West Virginia.
- Tim Peters discussed application eligibility for the NRCS Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) and some of the rules to be eligible for application.
- Jeff Werner discussed some Farm Bill Programs and some of the upcoming trainings.

Adjournment (12:25 PM)

The meeting was adjourned at 12:25 PM.