

**PACD North West Region Meeting Minutes
Elk Country Visitor Center, Benzette, PA
September 12, 2024**

Welcome and Introductions

PACD North West Region Director Cliff Lane welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:07 AM.

In attendance: Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Cliff Lane, McKean; Kate Wehler, Elk; John Hallenburg, Erie; Tom McClure, Erie; Carl DeLuca, DEP; Shane Kleiner, DEP; Justin Challenger, SCC; Susannah Harris, DEP; Susan Parry, NRCS; Sandy Thompson, McKean; Donna Zofcin, Forest; Shaun Wessell, Jefferson; Jeff Werner, NRCS; Don Koontz, Mercer; Jay Russell, Mercer; Trudy Alexander, Clarion; Mark Critz, PDA; Jake Moore, DEP; Mary Burris, Lawrence; Josh Ferraro, PACD; Danielle Kalp, PACD; Cassie Daniels, PACD

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be hosted by Lawrence County on April 17, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

Approval of the Minutes from the Previous Meeting

Cliff Lane called for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting.

It was moved by Kate Wehler and seconded by Donna Zofcin to approve the minutes of the September 12, 2023, meeting. Motion approved unanimously.

PACD Business and Report

Open PACD Executive Board and Committee Positions

PACD is looking for interested individuals to fill several open positions on the board. There is an open position for Treasurer which must be filled by a district director. There are also openings for PACD committees, which can be filled by a director or associate director.

Proposed Policy from the PACD Legislative Committee – Cliff Lane introduced the policy proposed by the PACD Legislative Committee at their meeting on July 1, 2024.

PACD recognizes the significant environmental benefit of protecting our Commonwealth's natural resources through Best Management Practices (BMPs). PACD supports education and incentives for voluntary installation of BMPs.

It was moved by Kate Wehler to approve the policy as written and seconded by Mary Burris. Motion carried unopposed.



Brenda and Cliff reported the policy is to keep conservation BMPs voluntary rather than mandatory. This policy would cover future legislation on BMPs in addition to the recently proposed legislation on streambank fencing. Further discussion was held on the anticipated effects of the policy on the districts.

Brenda provided highlights from her written report:

- Legislative Report: The PA General Assembly passed the state budget which included dedicated funding for conservation districts and the PA Clean Streams Fund.
- PACD Winter Meeting: The PACD/SCC Winter Meeting will be held virtually.
- PACD SCC/Joint Annual Conference: The 2025 PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference will be in person and planning has already begun. It will be hosted by Westmoreland at Seven Springs.
- Certified Planner Program: PACD received funding from the SCC and NRCS for a Certified Planner Program. Brenda introduced Josh Ferraro, one of the PACD staff covering the NW area funded under the program.
- Engineering Assistance Program (TAG): PACD continues the TAG program funded by DEP and NRCS to provide engineering technical assistance to the districts. There are eight (8) TAG positions – currently there are two (2) open positions.
- Building for Tomorrow Leadership Development Program: Brenda discussed the various Leadership Development Programs offered and encouraged the districts to participate. The events have dynamic speakers and are very informative. If more information is needed, please contact Matt Miller at PACD.
- PACD Ag Plan Reimbursement Program: The original grant has been fully allocated. With the success of the program, SCC approved \$1,000,000 additional funding over two years.
- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Outreach Program Office: PACD is wrapping up the CREP funding mini-grant program for education and outreach.
- C2P2 Multifunctional and Conventional Riparian Buffer Program: PACD was awarded a grant from DCNR for a buffer program. The program requires a 50:50 match. The Penn State's Master Watershed Steward Program and Chesapeake Bay Foundation provide easy ways to come up with the match. Contact Holly Miller at PACD for more information.
- Lawn Conversion Program: PACD received a grant from DCNR for a Lawn Conversion Program. The total funding is committed. Since the program was so popular, PACD is seeking additional funding opportunities.
- Invasive Species: PACD received a grant from the USDA Forest Service for a pilot program in the northwest region. The grant provides invasive species education and on-the-ground treatment. The project is meant to gather information in hopes of potentially implementing a statewide program.
- Education and Outreach: Shannon Wehinger of PACD provides outreach on multiple social media platforms and shares a monthly social media calendar with the districts.
- Ag Boot Camp Training: Several boot camp training sessions were held this year. One remaining session of Intro to Conservation Planning Training will be held in November.
- SPEED Program: The PA General Assembly passed a new program commonly known as SPEED. Brenda deferred to DEP to discuss this during their report.
- Chapter 102 Basic Technical Training: The training took place in May with good participation. Funding was provided through DEP.

- Verbal Judo Workshop: The Verbal Judo Workshop will be held in October. The Workshop is provided through a grant from DEP that will provide training on conflict resolution.
- Pennsylvania Clean Water Academy (CWA): PACD has hired a new Water Resource Trainer, Kelly Davidson. Kelly will be continuing efforts in developing the CWA.
- Statewide NPS Education Office Activities: DEP is no longer funding PACD's Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Grant.
- Brenda closed her report noting PACD provides many programs for the districts. PACD's mission is to benefit its members. Any suggestions on future programs or assistance that PACD could provide are welcome and appreciated.
- Cliff Lane added his appreciation for district participation in the PACD meetings as it provides two times a year to discuss and understand what PACD provides.
- Kate Wehler expressed an interest in advanced training for Chapter 102 and in-person training. She noted the webinars are helpful but would benefit more from in-person training on the new changes.

Regional Information Sharing

- Elk – Kate Wehler noted the district has completed their first stream crossing under the new Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road Program (DGLVR) rules. Elk County purchased a no-till drill that has been very popular and heavily in use. She noted their Forestry Days were a success. They are also hosting Career Days to provide education on conservation careers.
- Erie – Tom McClure noted the district has been working on ACAP projects, including stream stabilization, manure storage facilities, and access roads. Erie owns the 70-acre Headwaters Park and received a DCED grant for a pocket park. The Erie Envirothon team received eighth place at the national competition. The district has allocated all their PRISM funds.
- McKean – Sandy Thompson discussed the district's multiple conservation BMP projects funded through ACAP, EQIP, DGLVR, and Growing Greener. They will be hosting their annual BMP tour in November. They will also host a DGLVR Tour. The district partnered with surrounding counties for erosion control and the PRISM project. Sandy also discussed their invasive plant treatments that they partnered with a native plant giveaway.
- Forest – Donna Zofcin noted all their ACAP funding has been allocated. They are working with the local schools to do an elementary Envirothon day and started a Facebook page.
- Jefferson – Shaun Wessell discussed their PRISM project, which included educational events featuring grazing and hiking, and their fish habitat project. The district also hosted their second women's camp that provided conservation education. They received a grant from the Fish and Boat Commission for fishing and fly-fishing reactivation.
- Mercer – Jay Russell discussed the district's participation in the PRISM project, which includes an advisory group, treatment, a boat tour for invasive education, and technical assistance for invasive treatment. He discussed their successful project for treatment of four acres of Eurasian water chestnut, their low volume road projects, and conservation projects including ACAP and a Growing Greener Grant application for bank stabilization. The district is also working to use grants to fund an education building.
- Clarion – Trudy Alexander discussed the conservation projects they are working on, including ACAP and Growing Greener projects. They are partnering with Jefferson on a PA Fish and Boat Commission R3 Education Grant project. The district has also discussed funding a designated staff person to address abandoned mine lands with Jon Smoyer of DEP.

- Lawrence – Mary Burris discussed the district’s ACAP projects and their first DGLVR stream crossing under the new rules. Mary discussed the district projects in the park. They are holding a field day to advertise the no-till drill they are purchasing. They are still working on an alley project for a pocket park. She also discussed an adult nature camp.
- PACD Certified Planner – Josh Ferraro discussed his first six months in the Certified Planner Program, where he has been learning and training to write conservation plans. Since he started, he has written six plans independently.
- PACD TAG – Cassie Daniels discussed the various projects the northwest TAG team is working on, including ACAP, Growing Greener, and EQIP projects. Danielle Kalp discussed the changes to the construction season with the introduction of the ACAP funding.

Partner Reports

PA Department of Agriculture (PDA)

Mark Critz reported that, while PDA has not normally been a funding agency, there is funding available since the passing of the PA Farm Bill. The Department has produced a guide to PA Farm Bill funding, which he shared with those at the meeting.

Brenda Shambaugh added there is \$50 million dedicated for the Clean Streams Fund. Mark noted he is also on the Rural Development Council and the Hardwoods Development Council, two groups that could be helpful partners for the districts.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Jeff Werner discussed the distributed Pennsylvania NRCS Conservation Update:

- He discussed the highlight project, noting NRCS staff has dealt with supply chain challenges.
- The NRCS Watershed Program is helping to rehabilitate the 80+ flood control dams built by NRCS in the 1950s-80s.
- The NRCS Easement Program will assist with agricultural land and wetland reserve easements.
- The PA Farm Bill Programs have provided unprecedented funding for conservation.
- Real-time water-quality monitoring will assist with monitoring in-stream water quality in five select small watersheds in Pennsylvania.
- Jeff reviewed existing technical assistance locations in Pennsylvania and open positions.
- Jeff also discussed the EWP program including eligibility and how to apply. Districts can sponsor EWP projects.
- Susan Parry discussed the provided 2024 Fall-Winter Training Opportunities handout. She also noted the Easement Program is helping provide public access to private land for fishing opportunities. She discussed NRCS funding expansion to help with Urban Ag projects.
- Jeff added NRCS is advertising for a district conservationist position that will add a position for the Pittsburgh Area.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

Carl Deluca discussed the distributed DEP handout.

- He noted the personnel updates. Carl is now the Acting Bureau Director.
- Packets for DEP’s Manure Management Plan Workbooks are available, including through the Clean Water Academy.

- The new SPEED Program is intended to assist with DEP permits. The comment period is now open, and Carl asked the districts to provide any feedback as soon as possible. The SPEED program will not affect expedited review since SPEED is during the pre-review process. It should not change district review times or fees. SPEED is meant to help improve application quality for the review process.
- Carl discussed the PAG-02 General Permit deadlines and noted the permit course is available in the Clean Water Academy.
- He also discussed Chapter 105 permitting improvements. The Chapter 105 Wetland Determination Training is set to open for DEP and PACD staff by the end of September.
- Coastal Zone Grants and DEP's Environmental Education Grants are now open.
- Susannah Harris announced that she will be changing positions in DEP and will no longer be acting as the Conservation District Field Representative. Until the vacancy is filled, please contact Ron and/or Karen in Susannah's office. The position will be filled as soon as possible. Susannah is nearly finished with the training manual for conservation staff and will be sending it to the approval process before moving to her new position.

PA State Conservation Commission (SCC)

Justin Challenger discussed the distributed SCC handout.

- The state budget included \$40 million for ACAP. A portion of the ACAP funding will go to support the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.
- The Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training is moving forward with an approval authority process to make ACAP projects easier for districts to implement.
- The annual DGLVR conference will be held in Dubois October 8-10, 2024. DGLVR policy will be reviewed next year.
- The Nutrient and Odor Management Program received 10% of the Clean Streams Fund.
- The Sustainable Agriculture Board will meet on October 4.
- The Ag Innovation Grant program is funded and will help agricultural innovation in Pennsylvania.
- Efforts are underway to form a Philadelphia conservation district.

Adjournment

Cliff Lane called for a motion to adjourn. *Motion to adjourn was made by Donna Zofcin and seconded by Tom McClure. The meeting adjourned at 12:33 PM.*