

**PACD Southwest Region Meeting Minutes
Westmoreland Conservation District, Greensburg, PA
September 27, 2024**

Call to Order

Barb Peace welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:05 A.M.

Virtual and in-person participants: Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Chuck Duritsa, Westmoreland; John Dryzal, Cambria; Mike Roth, SCC; Emil Bove, Westmoreland; Phil Wilson, PACD; Jeff Pflug, Beaver; Rob Cronauer, Westmoreland; Jeff Werner, NRCS; Karen Books, DEP; Carl DeLuca, DEP; Ryan Furrer, DEP; Aeleen Evan, DEP; Heather Knupsky, Fayette; Erin Copeland, Allegheny; Denice Coleman, NRCS; Ray Gorman, Cambria; Lisa Snider, Greene; Nate Edwards, PACD; Dennis Beck, Cambria; Doug Beri, Indiana; Barbara Peace, Indiana; Ron Rohall, Westmoreland; Danielle Kalp, PACD; Dominic Degidio, Beaver; Mark Critz, PA Department of AG; Stephanie Jellison, DCNR; Len Lichvar, Somerset; Mike Doucette, PA Forestry; Jennifer Dann, Washington; Celine Colbert, DCNR; Heather Manzo, Allegheny; Karlin Lamberto, Allegheny.

Date of Next Meeting

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

Approval of Minutes

Barb Pace asked if there were any amendments to the minutes. Dennis Beck mentioned that he represented Cambria instead of Indiana. Phil Wilson took note and will make the change. No other amendments were presented.

Motion made by Emil Bove to approve the minutes from the previous meeting held April 18, 2024, as amended. Seconded by Jeff Pflug. Motion carried unanimously.

PACD Business and Report

Brenda Shambaugh mentioned that PACD is seeking a treasurer. The individual can serve two two-year terms. Brenda also discussed various openings for committees and other positions. Brenda then provided verbal highlights from her written report.

Proposed Policy from the PACD Legislative Committee

Brenda presented a proposed policy passed by the PACD Legislation Committee on July 1, 2024.

It was moved by Jeff Pflug and seconded by Doug Beri to approve the following proposed policy:



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

Motion carried unanimously.

John Dryzal asked a question about procedure, specifically that amended policies were not vetted across all other regions. Erin Copeland asked if voting could be done electronically. Brenda mentioned she would look into these items. Brenda then provided a verbal report:

- Legislative Report – The PA General Assembly has passed the state budget which included \$6.8 million in CDFAP funding for conservation districts for a total of over \$10 million dollars. Additionally, the budget fiscal code included a dedicated fund of \$50 million per year for the PA Clean Streams Fund.
- PACD Winter Meeting – The PACD Winter Meeting will be held virtually via Zoom. All six PACD committees will meet throughout January, with the PACD Executive Council taking place on January 30, 2025.
- PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference – The Westmoreland Conservation District will be hosting the 2025 PACD/SCC Joint Annual Conference July 16-17, 2025, with a tentative location of Seven Springs Mountain Resort. She mentioned that after the successful revamped 2024 conference, PACD is working with a small workgroup of interested members to continue the expanded offerings.
- Certified Planner Program – Thanks to the generosity of the SCC and NRCS, PACD has received funding for the Certified Planner Program and has hired six certified conservation specialists to assist conservation districts across the Commonwealth.
- Engineering Assistance Program (TAG) – With funding from DEP and NRCS, PACD continues the TAG program. She mentioned that similar to the Certified Planner Program, there are six technicians, and 2 engineers housed across the Commonwealth.
- Building for Tomorrow Leadership Development Program – The CliftonStrengths initiatives will be ongoing through April 2025 and all district personnel are welcome to participate. The Strategic Planning Grants program is currently accepting Letters of Intent for 2025. The 2024 New Manager Training will be held October 23, 2024, in State College. The Fall Leadership Webinar Series is scheduled for October through December. A 2025 Employment Law Seminar is scheduled to be held at three locations across the state in late February 2025.
- PACD Ag Plan Reimbursement Program – PACD has fully allocated the initial \$500,000 as well as the additional \$100,000 that was awarded to PACD for the Ag Plan Reimbursement Program. She noted that during the May meeting, the SCC approved continuing the program with \$1,000,000 over a two-year period and PACD will begin the new program as soon as the paperwork is finalized.
- 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.

- C2P2 Multifunctional and Conventional Riparian Buffer Program – PACD was awarded a C2P2 Grant from DCNR to continue the buffer sub-grant program. There is \$46,000 still available and a 50:50 match is required. Penn State’s Master Watershed Steward Program and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation’s Keystone 10 Million Trees Program will provide volunteer hours and trees for conservation district projects.
- Lawn Conversion Program – The money PACD was awarded for a \$100,000 C2P2 grant from DCNR to offer a Lawn Conversion Sub-Grant Program for Conservation Districts has all been allocated. She mentioned that PACD is pursuing additional funding.
- Education & Outreach – PACD has been using social media platforms to highlight conservation district activities and provides a messaging program districts can use to supplement their social media posts.
- Ag Boot Camp Training – One week of “Boot Camp” Basic Level training will be held in March 2025 in Union County, and two sessions of Level II will be held in April & May 2025 in Lebanon County. The application period will open in January 2025. She also mentioned an additional training, Intro to Conservation Planning, is set for November 19-21, 2025 in Lebanon County.
- SPEED Program – Brenda discussed the new program passed by the PA General Assembly commonly known as SPEED. The intent was to implement a faster permit processing program to provide permit applicants the opportunity to receive expedited review through DEP verified professionals.
- Chapter 102 Basic Technical Training – Chapter 102 Basic Technical Training will take place in person with a field component in May 2025. Specific dates and location are to be determined.
- Verbal Judo Workshop – Conservation district and DEP staff are invited to register for a Verbal Judo Workshop on October 16-17, 2024 at Toftrees Golf Resort in State College, PA.
- Pennsylvania Clean Water Academy (CWA) – PACD announced the hiring of Kelly Davidson as their Water Resource Trainer.
- Statewide NPS Education Office Activities – Brenda mentioned that DEP is no longer funding PACD’s long-standing Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Grant. As a result, PACD will no longer coordinate the 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting or the PACD Watershed Specialist Meeting. DEP will be taking over these duties starting in 2025.

Regional Information Sharing

- Allegheny – Erin Copeland asked for comments from other districts about fluctuations with permits. Erin mentioned that there is sometimes difficulty in getting Municipalities on the same page, so the district is going to be hiring a Municipal Engagement Manager funded by DCNR. Erin also thanked DEP for nominations to their board and they were working through the transition.
- Beaver – Jeff Pflug shared that they had recently revamped their educational programs and recently had a pilot and individual program approved as of yesterday. Jeff also mentioned they had recently completed a streambank project.

- Cambria – John Dryzal mentioned they recently held a Legislative Tour to a streambank project they had completed. Dennis Beck mentioned that they changed it up a bit from the usual Legislative Breakfast they do because it's important that legislators see the work that has been implemented. John thanked everyone for their help with the new ACAP funding and asked for input from directors about costs for the summer conference. Brenda Shambaugh mentioned that feedback is needed to help entice more people to attend.
- Fayette – Heather Knupsky noted that the district had their third annual Wild About Nature event and that approx. 1000 people attended. Heather also mentioned the district had recently hired a new resource coordinator. In addition, Heather mentioned they will be holding an E&S Workshop in the spring for consultants.
- Greene – Lisa Snider shared that the district had recently completed two ACAP projects and will have 3 more going out for bid soon. Lisa mentioned that they currently are down two staff members and have no Ag staff at the moment.
- Indiana – Doug Beri mentioned on Wednesday the district held a Jr. Envirothon for younger kids to get them more involved with environmental information. Doug mentioned that on October 5, 2024, the district will be holding their second annual Apple Festival from Noon to 5 PM. Doug mentioned they currently have an AMD treatment system under construction that cost approx. \$650,000.
- Somerset – Len Lichvar discussed their large wood addition project that is ongoing. Len mentioned that the project is designed to increase the wild trout population by adding habitat for them. Len also mentioned they recently did an electro-fishing event on Oven Run stream that is a direct tributary to the Stonycreek River. During the event they were able to find five different species of fish in a stream that had been dead due to AMD for over 125 years.
- Washington – Jennifer Dann shared that they would be finishing an ACAP project hopefully by the end of next week. Jennifer noted that they had recently started taking online payments for permits and other programs. Jennifer mentioned that they will be holding a fall conference at Mingo Creek County Park.
- Westmoreland – Rob Cronauer mentioned that they had recently held their annual meeting and gave out awards for conservation. Rob mentioned the district is celebrating their 75th anniversary this year. Rob also mentioned work is progressing toward cleaning up a 7000 Gallon Per Minute AMD discharge by acquiring property that a treatment system can be built on. Rob also mentioned they recently had their staff meet with local contractors on their project to help better understand their end of permitting and other processes. Emil Bove mentioned they are hoping to do a bike ride for the 2025 Joint Annual Conference and possibly hiking as well. Emil also mentioned that they are planning for a spring Pedaling for Conservation bike ride to be held in May.
- PACD TAG & Planning – Phil Wilson shared that they are continuing many projects in ACAP and doing some AMD work as well. Nate Edwards mentioned he had recently achieved his Level 1 Planner certificate, and he is currently working on his Level 2. Danielle Kalp mentioned that she has also been working on many ACAP projects and is available to be involved with projects.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Report (Handout)

Carl DeLuca provided the following report:

- Carl discussed some of the staffing changes as noted in the handout.
- The CAFO Winter Manure Storage and Reporting Reminder letter recently went out the week of September 9, 2024.
- DEP's Manure Management Plan Workbook and Short Form Course is now open on Clean Water Academy. The course provides an overview of the Manure Management (MM) planning requirements and reviews the content of the MM Plan Workbook and Short Form.
- The final PAG-02 General Permit was published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin on August 31.
- DEP is working on Chapter 105 permitting improvements and are updating procedures.
- Waterways Engineering and Wetlands, in collaboration with the Army Corps of Engineers, have created a series of training courses focused on wetland determinations that is set to release for DEP and conservation district staff by the end of September.
- Applications for Coastal Zone grants will be accepted from August 26 to October 15, 2024.
- DEP's Environmental Education Grants Program is accepting applications through November 15, 2024.
- Applications for Growing Greener and 319 Grants are in the final scoring stages. They are estimating 155 projects totaling around \$42 million.
- DEP has a new Grant Viewer on their website as of Monday, and it shows all completed projects dating back to 2016. They will be updating the Viewer with a story page and photos.
- The SPEED program (Streamlining Permits for Economic Expansion and Development) is designed to help expedite the permitting process. Karen Books reported that DEP has verified qualified people will provide initial technical analysis of permit applications and identify any deficiencies early in the process to help applicants submit a properly completed application. They are hoping to start the program in January 2025. Qualified people must be a Professional Engineer and will be vetted by DEP.

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) Report

Mark Critz provided the following report:

- The department and the farm bill have been fully funded. Currently Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation that has a state Farm Bill.
- Western Pennsylvania is hoping to have an animal Ag Lab operational by this time next year.
- Penn State University has a center that provides help to farmers with legal issues.

State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report (Handout)

Mike Roth provided the following report:

- The ACAP program has secured an additional \$35 million from the Clean Streams Fund.
- The new Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training (CACAT) housed at Penn State College of Ag Sciences continues to move forward with creating an ACAP Practice Approval System (PAS) to help build overall capacity to design and implement practices.
- The Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Roads (DGLVR) annual conference with SCC and the Center is being held in Dubois on October 8-10, 2024. An effort to seek an overall increase for funds for the program is currently underway.
- The state's Nutrient and Odor Management Program continues to grow, with over 1200 farms and nearly 268,000 acres subject to a nutrient management plan across the state.

- A new Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP) application cycle opened in early August and all \$13 million in tax credits were spoken for by September 1.
- The Sustainable Agriculture Board (SAB) has been appointed and will meet on October 4 to start the process of awarding \$1 million in EPA Most Effective Basin (MEB) funding to soil health, climate and sustainable agriculture projects in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- The new Ag Innovation Grant has initial funding of \$10 million and is administered by the SCC through the PA Department of Agriculture. The grant is designed to help farmers pay for advances in ag technology, such as robotic milking systems.

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

Jeff Werner and Denise Coleman provided the following report:

- Jeff described the Somerset County *Conservation through Conversion* project.
- Jeff discussed NRCS watershed programs and discussed the need to update dams to deal with today's higher rainfall events.
- Jeff talked about the launch of the Maryland and Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association RCCP Project that also involves Pennsylvania.
- USDA has announced Inflation Reduction Act Funding for its Agricultural Conservation Easement Program for 2025
- PA NRCS is adding foresters to their staff.
- Jeff discussed the Fiscal Year 2024 Farm Bill and gave an update on the programs.
- Denise thanked everyone for their help in implementing funds and working together.
- She mentioned NRCS will be tallying the ACAP money that was added to NRCS projects and the number of projects they worked together on.
- Over the past year, NRCS completed \$48.4 million dollars in work, hired 47 new staff members, and provided 47 training courses for conservation district staff and other agencies. Denise urged attendance at future training courses.

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Report

Saleen Colbert and Stephanie Jellison provided the following report:

- Saleen discussed staff expansion and the grants currently available.
- Stephanie discussed the C2P2 Grant and noted they have staff available to help with applications and information.

Adjournment

It was moved by Jeff Pflug and seconded by Doug Beri to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.