

**PACD South West Region Meeting Minutes  
Zoom Webinar/Conference Call  
March 31, 2020**

**Call to Order**

PACD President Mike Price welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:09 a.m. He explained the South West Region Director position remains vacant.

*In Attendance:* Lisa Snider, Greene; Molly Burns, PACD; Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Matt Miller, PACD; Chuck Duritsa, Westmoreland; John Dryzal, Cambria; Todd Thornburg, Washington; Denise Coleman, NRCS; Fred Fiscus, DEP; Georgia Miller, Beaver; Kris Abell, PA Invasive Species Council; Karl Brown, SCC; Emil Bove, Westmoreland; Dave Rupert, Armstrong; Will Brogan, DEP SWRO; Doug Beri, Indiana; Phil Wilson, PACD; Heather Manzo, Allegheny; Ron Rohall, Westmoreland; Karen Books, DEP; Len Lichvar, Somerset,

**Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held October 5, 2020, at the Westmoreland Conservation District. Brenda Shambaugh will confirm the facility is available on that date.

**Date of Meeting with Aneca Atkinson**

Brenda Shambaugh explained that DEP Deputy Secretary for Water Programs Aneca Atkinson is interested in meeting with each region. The group chose to meet with Deputy Secretary Atkinson on September 23, 2020, at 10:00 a.m. at the Westmoreland Conservation District.

**Approval of Minutes**

Mike Price called for amendments to the minutes. None were presented.

*It was moved by Chuck Duritsa and seconded by John Dryzal to approve the minutes of the October 22, 2019, meeting as presented. Motion carried.*

**Election of Region Director**

Chuck Duritsa introduced Westmoreland Conservation District Director Emil Bove. Emil confirmed he is willing to serve as region director.

*It was moved by Chuck Duritsa and seconded by John Dryzal to elect Emil Bove with Westmoreland Conservation District as PACD South West Region Director. Motion carried.*

**Bylaws Change to Move Armstrong to North West Region**

Brenda Shambaugh explained that the Armstrong County Conservation District would like to move from the PACD south west region to the north west region, so they are in the same region for both PACD and DEP. This will require a change to the PACD Bylaws.



*It was moved by Chuck Duritsa and seconded by Todd Thornburg to support a PACD Bylaws change to move Armstrong County Conservation District to the north west region. Motion carried.*

Brenda asked to hold discussion on the invasive species funding policy until after the PA Invasive Species Council presentation, since it will provide information pertinent to the motion.

### **PACD Report**

Brenda provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- *Clean Water Academy* – PACD’s Nick Yeagy is working hard to add new learning to the Clean Water Academy on an on-going basis.
- *Multi-functional Riparian Buffer Sub-Grants* – Funding is available, and we continue to accept applications.
- *Ag Boot Camp* – Basic will take place in two parts: in-class via webinar April 6-9, 2020, and in the field September 9-11, 2020, at the Dauphin County Agriculture and Natural Resources Center. Dates for Level II are pending.
- *102/105 Technical Training* – Basic will take place June 16-19, 2020, and Topic-based will take place September 16-18, 2020. Both will be held at the Wyndham Garden State College.
- *Fluvial Geomorphology Training* – Postponed until the late fall. Dates to be determined.
- *Chesapeake Bay Education Office* – This office has been hosted by PACD for many years and has been discontinued by DEP due to funding cuts by EPA. As a result, PACD has discontinued the Clean Water Farm Award, the Manure Management Mini-grant Program, and hosting County Implementation Plans on our website. The 2020 Chesapeake Bay Program Conservation District and PA Agency Staff Meeting did take place through a different DEP grant. We are currently unsure about future meetings.
- *Leadership Development Program* – Brenda provided an update on Matt Miller’s program activities, including the recent regional director training sessions, which drew a total of 145 attendees.

### **Presentation from the PA Invasive Species Council (PISC)**

Kristopher Abell, PISC Coordinator, provided a presentation on behalf of the Pennsylvania Invasive Species Council. The presentation provided information about PISC, an overview of Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMA), how these might be coordinated in Pennsylvania, and examples of other, similar, coordinated activities.

### **Motion on Invasive Species Policy**

The group discussed the motion and it was stressed that each district must be able to decide if they wanted to participate.

*It was moved by Chuck Duritsa and seconded by Dave Rupert to support the following motion:*

*PACD encourages the PA Department of Agriculture and related agencies to develop a delegated agreement with conservation districts to provide funding and authority to battle invasive species.*

*Motion carried.*

## **State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report**

Executive Secretary Karl Brown provided the following report:

- Karl thanked districts for sharing their Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) with Karen Books. The SCC has been working to assist districts with their questions as they work through this process.
- Karl reviewed a document tracking new dates for training opportunities that have been rescheduled. It is being updated regularly and distributed to managers.
- Karl reviewed some resources for information related to COVID-19. He also urged everyone to sign up for the PA Nightly Bulletin, which PDA has been sending out every night and contains a lot of good information. He also encouraged everyone to review the updates sent out by the SCC, DEP, and others with guidance about various programs.
- He reviewed a draft document defining the new Conservation District Advisory Committee.
- He discussed the Draft Conservation District Drone Policy. There was discussion about the policy and Karl stressed that the SCC is not saying districts cannot use drones. Districts need to work with delegated and contracted programs to develop a thoughtful policy that addresses personal privacy issues, right to know, liability, and other issues. Denise Coleman with NRCS asked that the policy be updated to include disaster assistance.

## **Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Report**

Fred Fiscus provided the following report.

- Karen has received COOPs from all 66 districts and is updating the spreadsheet daily as updates come in. This information has been shared with DEP executive staff to keep them updated on district activities and needs.
- He discussed the Fiscal Year Budgeting Spreadsheet for conservation district staff, which was approved by the commission in March and will take effect on July 1, 2020. Several districts piloted the spreadsheet and had no major issues. To offset the additional reporting requirement, districts no longer need to submit the CDFAP year-end Financial Statement.
- The SCC has established a Conservation District Financial Management Workgroup. The workgroup will oversee the development of an accounting and administrative procedures manual containing a standard chart of accounts and/or a comprehensive financial management system. Karen Books provided additional information on the group.
- Summer Kunkel is the new Acting Director for the DEP Office of Water Resources Planning.
- He will be retiring on April 24.
- DEP South West Regional Watershed Manager Will Brogan reported that the Growing Greener grant application process is proceeding as planned. They are holding a call in April to discuss and narrow down the grant applications and are hoping to get the grant announcements out in a few months.

## **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Report**

Denise Coleman provided the following report, referring to the PA NRCS Conservation Update for the South West region:

- The Secretary of Agriculture has ordered NRCS offices to remain open. NRCS is staffing the field offices with no more than one person at any one time and are striving to continue field work while maintaining social distancing.
- She reviewed the Pennsylvania Bulletin providing information on spring and summer training opportunities and noted that many are available online.

- She then reviewed the NRCS Conservation Update for the south west, which begins with a success story from Westmoreland County.
- NRCS has extended the application deadline for the Conservation Stewardship Program to May 29, 2020.
- They are using a new automation system to rank and evaluate EQIP 2020 contracts, which are accepted through continuous sign-up.
- Applications for the Agricultural Land Easement Program (ALE) and the Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE) are also on continuous sign-up for Fiscal Year 2020.
- NRCS is accepting On-farm Conservation Innovation Trial proposals through May 11, 2020, as part of their Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program. There is a 1:1 match requirement. There is also a 10% limitation on administrative costs, which would not apply to technical assistance.
- Pennsylvania will continue to fund up to \$75,000 per project in Conservation Innovation Grants. They are looking at focusing on forest health, nutrient management, and urban conservation. That announcement will go out as soon as it's ready.
- NRCS is accepting Regional Conservation Partnership Program's (RCPP) Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA) proposals through May 18, 2020. Denise explained more about how this program functions and differs from the original RCPP.
- NACD technical assistance grants will also be coming out to fund ag technicians to do voluntary conservation work. That funding is provided to NACD by NRCS at the national level. Tioga, Northampton, Lehigh, and Jefferson were already in the program and have received funding for their projects. The call for new applications should be going out soon.
- NRCS received funding through the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program to do an 18-month Planning Study to address flooding along tributaries to Jacobs Creek in Westmoreland County.
- They are about to finish out their Emergency Watershed Protection program for this year. They had a large project in the north east and she thanked the northeast districts for their work on that program and DEP for funding assistance.

### **District Information Sharing**

Karl Brown asked how districts are handling their monthly meetings. Districts responded they are either currently holding their meetings electronically or are planning to in future. It was also asked if anyone was looking to lay off or furlough staff. District responded they had no concrete plans to furlough or lay off any staff at that time.

- *Allegheny* – Heather Manzo thanked her fellow district managers for communicating and helping each other in negotiating this situation. Allegheny's staff are working remotely, and they've been fortunate enough to have enough applications to keep their staff busy.
- *Washington* – Todd Thornburg reported they are still receiving and working on permit applications but are holding off on inspections unless it's an emergency.
- *Armstrong* – Dave Rupert reported that the district has no more than three people at the office at any one time. They can all retrieve information and do work from home. The county has furloughed all county employees through the end of April.
- *Beaver* – Mike Price reported that all district employees are working from home and at this time they plan to keep a full staff.
- *Somerset* – Len Lichvar reported they are open with limited staff in the office at any one time.

- *Indiana* – Doug Beri reported that their staff are working almost 100 percent remotely. No more than one employee is in the office at any given time.
- *Cambria* – John Dryzal reported that their staff can go in if needed, but on a rotating schedule. They are working remotely, and the county IT department has been hugely helpful. They are looking at using Zoom for their board meetings. They are committed to their tree sale but are trying to adapt it to align with new requirements.
- *Armstrong* – Dave Rupert said they had their most well-attended officials breakfast planned before they had to cancel. Their annual awards banquet went well and was well-attended. They are working to implement a naturalist program. They currently have four DGLVR projects and two agricultural BMP projects under construction.
- *Allegheny* – Heather Manzo reported they adopted Zoom for their board meetings. The district's conference call service crashed nationwide at the time of their board meeting, so they had a Zoom crash course for their board. She suggested that anyone interested in using Zoom look at Tech Soup, which currently has a 40% discount for non-profits, for which districts should be eligible. For uploading plans and other information, their DEP region office was able to share their FTP site. However, this presents some privacy issues, so they are currently testing a Google business account to take applications.
- *Westmoreland* – Ron Rohall reported they are also adopting Zoom and will be holding their board meetings using that platform.
- *Armstrong* – Dave Rupert reported that they cancelled their March meeting but will be using Zoom for their meeting in April.
- *Washington* – Todd Thornburg reported their full complement of staff is working, largely remotely, and he is still coordinating with board members to see what they are doing for their board meetings.
- *Indiana* – Doug reported that they have no DGLVR projects under construction and those that were scheduled are postponed indefinitely. They do have an agricultural project under construction. They are investigating how to receive permits via an FTP site or some other electronic means. They cancelled their tree sale and refunded orders. It wasn't very large, as it was only their second year. They have not cancelled their Envirothon yet and are looking to see if there can be an online version.

Brenda Shambaugh noted that PACD staff have been able to work remotely. Everything has been running efficiently and the office plans to continue with full staff.

Mike Price thanked DEP and NRCS and all the partners, as well as PACD employees, for keeping things moving, helping districts as they adjust to this situation, and for keeping districts up to date. He thanked the districts for doing what is necessary to keep working through this difficult time

## **Adjournment**

*It was moved by Dave Rupert and seconded by Chuck Duritsa to adjourn the meeting at 12:08 p.m. Motion carried.*