

**PACD North West Region Meeting
Video Conference Minutes
September 25, 2020**

Welcome, Introductions, and Roll Call

PACD North West Region Director Cliff Lane welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order with a quorum at 10:05 a.m.

In attendance: Brenda Shambaugh (PACD), Nick Yeagy (PACD), Matt Miller, (PACD), Shannon Wehinger (PACD), Donald Koontz (Mercer), Karl Brown (SCC), Jeff Werner (NRCS), Lance Bowes (Venango), Cliff Lane (McKean), Tom McClure (Erie), Wendy Kedziarski (Crawford), Jill Whitcomb (DEP), Shaun Wessell (Jefferson), James Miller (DEP), Danielle Kalp (PACD), Tracey Crawford (Crawford), Lori Boughton (DEP), Mark Critz (PDA), Sandy Thompson (McKean), Karen Books (DEP), Pete Vanderstappen (NRCS), Heather Wilcox (Warren), Donna Zofcin (Forest), Kate Wehler (Elk), Evan DeLong (Elk), Dave Rupert (Armstrong), John Green (DEP)

Date of Next Meeting

The next PACD North West meeting will be April 8, 2021 via Zoom.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Cliff Lane called for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on April 22, 2020.

It was moved by Don Koontz and seconded by Tom McClure to approve the minutes of the April 22, 2020, meeting. Motion carried.

PACD Report

Brenda provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- On October 21 at 10am we will have a Skype meeting with Aneca Atkinson (DEP). Forward questions to Brenda.
- PACD interviewed four people for the Clarion TAG position and hopes to make a hire in the next week.
- She provided a legislative update on the 2020-2021 Budget, Third Party Reviewer Legislation, Statewide Expedited Review Legislation, and the Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program.
- She provided an update on invasive species.
- She noted that Chapter 105 modules are in development for the Clean Water Academy (CWA) and provided information on additional CWA training opportunities.
- Brenda discussed the Riparian Buffer Sub-grants available from PACD.



- Fluvial Geomorphology Training is set to take place virtually November 9, 10, 12, and 13.
- Matt Miller provided an update on Leadership Development activities and urged staff and directors to participate in these learning opportunities. Visit www.paleadership.org for information.
- Agricultural Conservation Training (Boot Camp) took place in a modified format and is scheduled for April 12-16, 2021, for Basic and April 26-30, 2021, for Level II.
- Two Chapter 105 webinars were recently held. Other 102/105 Technical Training is in process and more information will be available soon.
- Conservation District Watershed Specialist Webinar Series will take place virtually from 8:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. daily October 6-8, 2020.
- Danielle Kalp reported on the TAG program in the NW Region.

Regional Information Sharing

Each district shared items of interest from their county. Highlights included:

- *Armstrong* – Dave Rupert reported that they are working remotely one day per week. They have a limit of no more than 75% of staff in the building at one time. They are also limiting attendance in-person for board meetings. They are working on three roof protection projects under Growing Greener. Their fall tour will be held virtually for elected officials. A riparian buffer planting is rescheduled for October.
- *Crawford* – Tracey Crawford reported that the district is wrapping up a lot of projects and have most staff in the office and are open to the public by appointment. They created a new plat book which increased traffic to the office. Board meetings will be via Zoom. Their annual dinner will be planned as a virtual event this year.
- *Elk* – Kate Wehler reported that Dirt and Gravel Roads Program is rolling. They got 3-4 times the amount of applications than they can fund. They are deciding about how to hold the Envirothon program. They are busy doing site visits.
- *Erie* – Tom McClure reported they had a busy summer. The Headwaters Park improvement project is continuing. They partnered with the local tv station and are participating in a virtual screening of an Age of Nature program called “The Understanding.” They produced a 5-minute video talking about water. Tom will be a panelist for the event taking place October 7 at 7pm. The district is also working on a Coastal Resources Management grant through DEP with invasive species planning and workshops. Their environmental education program is continuing with the City of Erie School District. They are taking activities to the schools through nature kits instead of having the students visit the park this year.
- *Forest* – Donna Zofcin is in the office full-time. They were having board meetings outside but will be moving to the courthouse for colder weather.
- *Jefferson* – Shaun Wessell reported that their district is working in the office and board meetings are in person. The district is partnering with the local library to hold outdoor events. Dirt and Gravel Road projects are underway.
- *McKean* – Sandy Thompson reported their district is in the office. They are open to the public but are being cautious. Board meetings are in person but calling in is also an option. They created a COOP plan to follow for emergencies. They are planning to do a stream crossing workshop on October 23 and districts are invited. The district is giving first and second graders kits to carry out their tree program by the teachers this year. They completed an Ag BMP project, four Dirt, Gravel & Low Volume Road projects and are accepting

applications for the next round. They are working on fish structure projects, a streambank stabilization project, and two AMD projects. Sixty property owners had land treated for invasive species.

- *Venango* – Lance Bowes reported that his district is working from home, but a couple of people can be in the office at a time. They finished two streambank stabilization projects this summer. They have an Ag BMP project they are working to get started. Dirt and Gravel Road projects are moving forward and they have a grant round open for next year. Board meetings are back in person with social distancing. They are looking for new office space and will be moving in the near future.
- *Warren* – Heather Wilcox reported that their staff is back in the office. Board meetings are in person with a call-in option.

State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report

Executive Secretary Karl Brown provided the following report:

- Karl encourages districts to have a remote connection available for fall and winter meetings so field representatives and others can participate.
- The district director appointment process is underway. Speak to chief clerks and county commissioners about what vacancies you have and what you are looking for in directors to help with the selection.
- Budgeting spreadsheet is due September 30. Contact Karen Books.
- Audits are due December 31 to Karen Books.
- SCC is working on policies on drone utilization and former district employees being appointed as directors or associate directors. Both policies are out for a 45-day public comment period.
- Dirt and Gravel Road advanced funding is out to districts.
- 19 quality assurance visits were completed.
- ESM training is available remotely and in-person.
- Nutrient management regulations may be updated. A decision hasn't been made.
- Check that district nutrient management specialists' certifications aren't expiring.
- Conservation Excellence Grants expanded to Franklin and Cumberland Counties.
- REAP changes were discussed.
- Districts are encouraged to get their quarterly reports to SCC as soon as possible.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Report

Jill Whitcomb provided the following report:

- There was a reorganization in DEP. Jill oversees the nutrient management program (working with SCC), the conservation district section, and the watershed support section. She is working to be as consistent as possible across the state.
- DEP is pushing through batches of financial amendments for the next fiscal year.
- DEP is under a hiring freeze but requested an exception. Fred Fiscus's position will be priority to be filled before the conservation district field representative positions.
- Jill shared her contact information: jiwhitcomb@pa.gov; (717) 783-5205
- A handout was included in the packet showing all the available training modules on the Clean Water Academy.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Report

Jeff Werner highlighted items from the written report, including:

- There is a TAG vacancy in the Clarion office. Jeff thanked PACD for advertising and organizing the interview process.
- The job approval process hasn't been released and they are still working on them.
- Contact Jeff if you are having trouble contacting your local NRCS staff.
- Handouts were provided highlighting programs.
- NRCS maintained the same level of financial assistance as last year. In the NW region, \$9 million was awarded through 262 contracts including 193 EQIP projects.
- There isn't currently a RCPP in the NW region. Proposals are being accepted now.
- Pete Vanderstappen reported on the statewide engineering in the NW. They are in the design phase for the Rainbow Lake dam in Meadville. Connellsville Dam design is complete, and they anticipate spring construction.

Other Business

Lori Boughton (DEP) reported that a presentation on solar panel projects will take place Wednesday at 9am.

Mark Critz (PDA) reported that budget issues are coming because of COVID. He asked everyone to wear masks and socially distance.

Kate Wehler (Elk) reported that there will be a Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) training October 1 remotely. Kate will send the registration information via the manager's listserve. They have ninety-four attendees so far. The training will be half-day and credits are available. Link: <https://extension.psu.edu/erosion-control-in-our-forests>

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:51 a.m.