

**PACD North West Region Meeting
Kinzua Bridge State Park, Mount Jewett, PA
September 21, 2022**

Welcome and Introductions

PACD North West Region Director Cliff Lane welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM.

In person attendance: Cliff Lane, McKean; Cassie Daniels, PACD; Sandy Thompson, McKean; Shaun Wessell, Jefferson; Tom McClure, Erie; Tom McFarland, Jefferson; Lance Bowes, Venango; Lori Boughton, DEP; Trudy Alexander, Clarion; Tabby Shah Clarion; Doug Beri, Indiana; Jake Kennedy, PACD

Virtual Attendance: Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Zenik Crespo, NRCS; Ian Harrell, Butler; Kate Wehler, Elk; Holly Laird, Armstrong; Donna Zofcin, Forest; Mary Burris, Lawrence; Eugene Metcalf, Clarion; Doug Wolfgang, PDA; Jaci Kerstetter, DEP; Eric Cromer, SCC; Kelly Stagen, PACD; Mark Fritz; Karen Books, DEP. Karl Brown, SCC

Date of Next Meeting

The next PACD North West meeting will be hosted by Clarion County Conservation District on April 12, 2023, at a place to be determined.

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 Shaun Wessell and seconded by Trudy Alexander to approve the minutes of the meeting on April 27, 2022. Motion approved.

Regional Information Sharing

Clarion- Trudy Alexander reported that they have hired an Education/Outreach Coordinator, Hannah Bequeath. They partnered with Penn State Extension and had a “Fun on the Farm” day that got local kids out to see a dairy, beef, strawberry and produce farm. She also stated that they are looking to wrap up there AMD treatment area and the dirt and gravel road stream crossing.

Venango- Lance Bowes provided updates on the French Creek Watershed Project that should be finishing this fall. The district has also been trying to hire a 102 and 105 position. They are also gearing up and encouraging people to apply for the ACAP money coming.

Jefferson – Shaun Wessell discussed that they are still trying to work on their aquaponics water project. The conservation district also paired with Penn State Extension and had a youth day camp that went well along with a grazing field day. They have more workshops planned.

Erie – Tom McClure provided updates on their ongoing construction projects. The conservation district has recently installed solar panels on their building which they are happy about. With school back in they have been promoting Envirothon. North East High School placed 2nd last year in the competition.

Indiana - Doug Beri discussed that they will be hosting a junior Envirothon next week for 7th & 8th grade students from the surrounding area along with home school teams to get kids interested and familiar with what the Envirothon has to offer. They will also be celebrating their 75th anniversary with an open house in two weeks. Thanks to a USDA specialty grant the district has had a successful year growing Hopps. The Hopps will eventually be turned into beer thanks to a local brewing company.

McKean – Sandy Thompson discussed the district's ongoing construction projects including Ag and AMD projects. The district will be holding a tour next week on BMPs that have been completed. The district has also provided the community with glass recycling containers. They are also looking into purchasing a no till drill.

Armstrong – Holly Laird reported that they have hired a Conservation Educator, Brooke Emmonds. The district is having a fall tour next week highlighting their projects and a banquet sometime in October as well. They are excited for the ACAP money.

Forest – Donna Zofcin provided updates on their ongoing construction projects including dirt and gravel road projects. They are working on purchasing a truck for the district and also hiring a dirt and gravel road technician.

Butler – Ian Harrell discussed they are finishing dirt and gravel road projects and getting ready to apply for more. The district would like to hire a E&S/Ag position. They are also looking into purchasing a drone for inter seeding. An employee at their office is working on getting certification to run the drone. The drone would be able to plant 15 acres an hour.

Lawrence – Mary Burris reported they have been advertising the Ag Tech position and have had great candidates. In October they are doing their QAQC and starting to line up ACAP projects.

Elk – Kate Wehler stated that 9/21/2022 is the Elk County Conservation Districts 60th birthday and they are planning a celebration for 9/22/2022. They just released a new addition of their newsletter the Elk Bugle. She gave an update on the dirt and gravel road project they have underway. Along with excitement about ACAP and how they have had three new farmers reach out to them about funding.

PA Department of Agriculture Report

Mark Fritz provided information on the 2019 Farm Bill. Stated it's nice we have a rapid response fund when farms hit a barrier. For example, this past year with the Avian Flu. Also emphasized that we are the only state that decided on their own farm bill.

DEP Partnership Report

Karen Brooks provided verbal highlights to her written report:

- Shane Kleiner is the new watershed manager.
- Suzannah Harris is the new field rep who took John Green's position. Karen asked districts to invite her to board meetings, send minutes/agendas, inform her of special events, executive

successions, executive nominations. Field reps can help with new director/staff organization, round table meetings, Envirothons, tours, workshops, and banquets.

Lori Boughton provided the following report:

- This is the first meeting without John Green. Would still like to plant a tree, etc. at the Envirothon in his memory.
- They have been having staffing issues. She introduced the new folks at their office.
- They will be hiring for a watershed specialist soon.
- A roundtable will be taking place at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, October 21, 2022, at the 4H building in Venango County. A potluck lunch is encouraged.
- The Growing Greener grants will be transitioning to the central office. They will finish out the 11 remaining grants but other grants moving forward will be from the central office.

PA State Conservation Commission Report

Eric Conner provided verbal highlights from the SCC written report:

- The REAP application opened up August 1, 2022 and will likely be gone by the end of 2022.
- Agri-link- can offer low interest rates up too \$250,00 and can provided farmers a lower interest rate by about 3%.
- CEG program is going well and was allocated in July.
- Seventy percent (70%) or \$154 million of the CSF is dedicated to ACAP. An additional ten percent (10%) or \$22 million of the CSF is dedicated to the Nutrient Management Fund for agricultural technical and financial assistance. This initial allocation of funds must be committed by 12-31-24 and spent by 12-31-26.
- The SCC is working to allocate available ACAP funds to districts; designate agricultural conservation Best Management Practices (BMPs) eligible for funding; and develop a training, education, and technical assistance program for staff performing program work.
- ACAP allows the SCC to use up to 4% administration or administrative purposes, and up to an additional 4% for contractual services needed to carry out the program.
- Conservation district duties and responsibilities for ACAP: accept and review complete applications within 90 days; enter into agreements with successful applicants; oversee agreements for the design and installation process; verify completion and certification of BMP; reimburse participants
- Conservation districts may use ACAP funds for: providing financial and technical assistance to ACAP participants; establishing procedures for submission, review, ranking and approval of applications; entering into agreements with applicants and ensuring applicants fully comply with BMP maintenance and other contractual requirements
- Eric emphasized that you have two years to spend the money. The goal is to have this money continue in the future. He encouraged others to submit ACAP comments by October.
- Karl Brown announced his retirement and introduced Doug Wolfgang who will start January 1, 2023.

USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service Report

Zenik Crespo provided verbal highlights of his written report as follows:

- Encouraged everyone to read the September Newsletter that was provided.
- NRCS had a great year for contracting including 54 EQIP Contracts totaling \$2.6 million.

- NRCS is very much looking forward in working with all the agencies with they new money coming out.
- There are finally more training opportunities available since COVID-19.

PACD Report

Brenda Shambaugh provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- All agencies are working well together and there are several training opportunities coming up in the future.
- *Cambria County Conservation District Motion* – The Cambria County Conservation District passed a motion for deliberation during the PACD fall region meetings. After all six regions have voted on the motion, it will come before the PACD Executive Board and ultimately be considered during the PACD Executive Council meeting in January 2023.

The Cambria motion reads: “Approve asking PACD to seek approval for each district to provide funding to PACD to hire a consultant to complete a salary comparison study. Completion of such a study would provide valuable data to back up why the funding is needed, going forward. Bob Davis made motion to approve moving forward with the salary comparison study. Second by Marty Westrick.”

This was put into motion agreeing/supporting the statement above by Cliff Lane, First by Lance Bowes and second by Tom McClure. Motion approved.

- *Statewide PACD Meetings* – The PACD Executive Board has decided to hold the 2023 Winter Meeting virtually. The PACD Executive Council meeting is tentatively set to take place on January 26, 2023. It was addressed if the districts like the option to attend virtual and it was agreed upon that it is a nice option in case they cannot make in person training.
- *Education and Outreach* – PACD has been utilizing social media outlets to emphasize conservation district activities
- *Ag Boot Camp* –Basic training was held April 4-8, 2022, at the Keystone Conference Center, Ft. Indiantown Gap, Annville, PA (Lebanon County). For the 2022 Basic training there were 32 attendees. Level II was held April 25-29, 2022, at the Keystone Conference Center, Ft. Indiantown Gap, Annville, PA (Lebanon County) and the USDA NRCS State Office, Harrisburg, PA. For the 2022 Level II training, there were 27 attendees (16 agronomy track, 11 engineering track).

The Intro to Conservation Planning will be held in November 1-3, 2022. This training is for those individuals who are planning to become a certified planner. PACD thanks NRCS and SCC for their continued support of these trainings and including conservation district staff. Ag Boot camp will be offered twice this coming year in 2023!

- *Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Mini-grant Program* – The 2021-22 Nonpoint Source Pollution mini-grant round concluded in May 2022. Eighty-six projects were completed by 49 conservation districts, reaching over 13,530 adults. The mini-grants totaled \$146,863. The 2022-23 mini-grant round opened in January. Thirty-three projects from twenty-five conservation districts were funded for \$60,000.
- *PACD Ag Plan Reimbursement Program* – Plans eligible for reimbursement include Manure Management (Chapter 91), Nutrient Management (Chapter 83), and Ag E&S (Chapter 102)

NRCS Conservation Plans may meet this requirement. Contact Holly Miller with any questions.

- *Riparian Buffer Sub-Grants* – PACD still has Riparian Sub-Grants available. For more information on these grant opportunities, please go to the PACD website (www.pacd.org) and select the Education tab or contact Holly Miller.
- *Lawn Conversion Grant* – PACD will be receiving a \$100,000 C2P2 grant from DCNR to offer a Lawn Conversion Sub-Grant Program for Conservation Districts. The goal of the program is to offer lawn conversion training to conservation districts and distribute funding to lawn conversion projects across Pennsylvania.

The program will be offered statewide. Lawn conversion practices include converting mowed lawn to upland forests or meadow. The plan is to follow the same format as the buffer sub-grants (first-come, first-served). Penn State's Master Watershed Stewards have agreed to provide volunteer time as match. CBF will be providing match in the form of projects and training to conservation districts. More information to come.

- *Invasive Species* – Still waiting on paperwork for this. More information to come.
- *Leadership Development* – The 2022 Management Summit was held September 13-15 at the Wyndham State College and attended by over 50 management staff from across the state. This event was very successful, thanks to everyone involved.
- *Legislative Activity* – In addition to the salary survey findings for our next state budget request, PACD is planning to change the format for the highlights pages. This year's highlights will provide a sincere Thank You to legislators and focus on what districts have been able to accomplish, or will accomplish, with the additional state budget funding. PACD is hoping each district will be able to highlight projects that would not have been possible without the increase in funding. Look for the new template soon.

The 2023 highlights pages will be distributed to all state legislators, the Governor's office, and partner agencies. PACD will encourage all districts to follow-up with their legislators and resend their page to local officials as part of the usual legislative agenda. PACD will also be developing and distributing a white paper explaining the conservation district history and mission, the potential programs administered by districts, and the necessity of partnering with related agencies. This document will also be distributed to all legislators and districts will be encouraged to use this legislative tool as well. PACD hopes for 100% participation again and encourages districts to hand-deliver their highlights pages to House and Senate members in their area.

- *PACD Engineering Assistance/TAG Program* – Everyone agreed with the new money coming out more employees would be helpful.

Activities Conclude

The meeting was adjourned at 12:22 p.m.