

**PACD South West Region Meeting Minutes
Westmoreland Conservation District, Greensburg, PA
September 28, 2022**

Call to Order

Region Director Mike Price welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

Virtual and in-person participants: Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Chuck Duritsa, Westmoreland; John Dryzal, Cambria; Ray Gorman, Cambria; Jennifer Dann, Washington; Karl Brown, SCC; Emil Bove, Westmoreland; Phil Wilson, PACD; Erin Copeland, Allegheny; Ron Rohall, Westmoreland; Mike Price, Beaver; Greg Philips, Westmoreland; Jeff Werner, NRCS; Dana Drake, DEP; Aileen Evan, DEP; Kelly Stagen, Pike/PACD President; Karen Books, DEP; Christine Phillips, DEP; Eric Cromer, SCC; Danielle Kalp, PACD; Matt Gordon, Allegheny; Yuri Plowden, NRCS; Eric Cromer, SCC; Jim Cowell, Greene County.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held April 19, 2023, at 10:00 AM, at the Westmoreland Conservation District office.

Approval of Minutes

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

Motion by Emil Bove and seconded by Chuck Duritsa to approve the minutes of the April 21, 2022, meeting as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

PACD Business Report

Brenda provided verbal highlights from her written report:

- *Cambria County Conservation District Motion* – Brenda discussed the Cambria County Conservation District motion for PACD to hire a consultant to do a salary comparison study. The completion of the study would provide valuable data to present to legislators on why the increased funding is needed going forward.

John Dryzal and Ray Gorman discussed different ways to approach keeping the money now that they have the increase. Emil Bove asked if SCC or DEP were putting together any type of employee cost report. Karl Brown indicated the SCC is working on it. Brenda mentioned she is currently working on compiling different types of needed information, and that the consultant will be independent. Greg Philips mentioned he would like to see staff turnover rates. Brenda mentioned that they found a 20% turnover rate during the last study conducted. Kelly Stagen stated that that last set of data was very compelling to the legislature and fully supports another study.



Ray Gorman made the motion to support Cambria County's request for PACD to hire a consultant at a maximum amount of \$500 cost per conservation district. Emil Bove seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

- Statewide PACD Meetings – The PACD Executive Board has decided to hold the 2023 Winter Meeting virtually. She mentioned the PACD Executive Council meeting is tentatively set to take place on January 26, 2023 with committees to take place virtually between January 1, and January 20, 2023. The PACD Executive Board has asked all regions to discuss the 2023 Joint Annual Conference format & location.
- Education & Outreach – In June 2021, PACD developed a shared messaging program that districts can use to supplement their social media posts (Facebook & Instagram) and have a shared message across the state.
- Ag Boot Camp – Basic Boot Camp was held April 4-8 2022 with 32 attendees, and Level II Boot Camp was held April 25-29 2022 with 27 attendees at the Keystone Conference Center at Fort Indiantown Gap in Annville, PA. Intro to Conservation Planning will be held November 1-3 2022.
- Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Mini-Grant Program – The 2021-2022 Nonpoint Source Pollution Mini-grant round concluded in May 2022. There were eighty-six projects completed by 49 conservation districts reaching over 13,530 adults. The mini-grants totaled \$146,863. The 2022-2023 mini-grant round opened in January and thirty-three projects from twenty-five districts were funded for \$60,000.
- Clean Water Academy – The Clean Water Academy has had approx. 26,000 course completions with conservation districts accounting for roughly half of this figure with around 14,000 completions collectively. Conservation districts also have 410 training program completions. PACD continues to work with DEP to develop eLearning courses for the Clean Water Academy focusing on Chapter 102 and 105 topics.
- PACD Ag Plan Reimbursement Program – PACD was awarded a \$500,000 Growing Greener grant from DEP to offer an Ag Plan Reimbursement Program to conservation districts from 2022-2024. A 20% match will be required from the landowner/operator or the conservation district. Eligible plans include Manure Management (Ch. 91), Nutrient Management (Ch. 83), and Ag E&S (Ch. 102).
- Riparian Buffer Sub-grants – PACD has two Riparian buffer programs available. The Multi-functional Riparian Buffer Sub-grant for Conservation Districts program still has approximately \$40,000 available with no match requirement. A total of 40 grants implementing over 126 acres of buffers have been funded through this program since 2018. PACD also offers the Riparian Buffer Sub-grant for Conservation Districts program, funded by a C2P2 grant from DCNR. Multi-functional buffers are preferred, but conventional buffers are also eligible. This program has \$95,000 available and a 50/50 match is required.
- Lawn Conversion Grant – Brenda announced 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 PA.
- Invasive Species – An iMapInvasives training was offered to conservation district staff on June 28 2022. There is a recording of the training available. Please contact Holly Miller if

interested. PACD was also awarded a Landscape Scale Restoration Grant from the USDA Forest Service to offer a PRISM pilot program in northwestern PA.

- 102/105 Technical Training – Chapter 102/105 Basic Technical Training will take place in-person with a field component May 23-26 2023 at the Red Lion Harrisburg-Hershey in Harrisburg, PA.
- Section 319 Virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting – The Section 319 virtual Watershed Planning and Implementation Meeting took place via zoom May 18-19, 2022. Details for the 2023 session are in development.
- Conservation District Watershed Specialist Webinar Series – The Conservation District Watershed Specialist Webinar Series is underway October 5-7, 2022, at no cost to districts.
- Leadership Development – The 2022 Management Summit was held September 13-15 at the Wyndham State College with over 50 management staff from across the state in attendance. A Fall Leadership Webinar Series is scheduled for late October and early November and Letters of Intent for the 2022-2023 Strategic Planning Grants program are being accepted through December 2, 2022.
- Legislative Activity – In addition to the salary survey findings for the next state budget request, PACD is planning a change to the format for the highlights page. This year's highlights will focus on thanking legislators and sharing what districts have been able to accomplish with the additional state budget funding. PACD will also be developing and distributing a white paper explaining the conservation district history and mission, the programs administered by districts, and the need to partner with related agencies.
- PACD Engineering Assistance/TAG Program – Brenda asked if there is interest in expanding the TAG program. The general consensus from the district representatives attending the meeting was that there would be a benefit to expanding the TAG program.

Regional Information Sharing (11:10)

- Cambria – John Dryzal shared that the district is in the process of figuring out workload due to the ACAP funding coming in. John also mentioned that Cambria County Conservation District has placed close to a million dollars of conservation projects on the ground over the past year. John also mentioned that shoreline work is continuing at a Prince Gallitzen State Park lake and that Fish & Boat commission are helping with the project. Ray Gorman mentioned that at their booth at the Cambria County Fair they had quite a few people stopping by and showing pictures of Spotted Lanternflies they found.
- Allegheny – Erin Copeland shared that the district has launched a new website that is a little easier to use, she also shared that the fee schedule launch will take place soon and that they are finishing up a few projects, notably one in Findley Township and Montour Run.
Greene – Jim Cowell mentioned that they had over 50 projects that were mainly lime and fertilizer ag projects for their farmers and that they are currently working on a few dirt & gravel road projects.
- Washington – Jennifer Dann shared that she is now the new manager of Washington County Conservation District. Jennifer announced that Alexis Blake is moving into the watershed specialist position. She mentioned that the district was able to increase salary for staff

without having to hire any extra people. She announced that the district will have 3 workshops coming up in the near future.

- Beaver – Mike Price shared that Beaver Conservation District recently held a pasture walk that over 45 farmers showed up for which is up from the usual attendance of 10 or so. He also mentioned their Mobile Education Center is now in use and being asked for by people interested in conservation.
- Westmoreland – Greg Philips reported the district is in the process of finishing up their latest fundraising campaign. He also mentioned that during their last board meeting that 3 new projects were awarded to contractors. Greg mentioned that they are spraying 10 acres in the community park for invasive species, and that they now have 6 new employees on staff.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Report

Karen Books provided the following notes on her written report:

- The new Chapter 102 inspection report is out, and districts are expected to begin using it by October 3, 2022.
- The NPDES PG 13 draft permit goes out October 1, 2022, and districts are asked to comment.
- The new field representative for the DEP Southeast region will be on board in a few weeks. Karen explained some ways field representatives can be of help to conservation districts.
- The Chesapeake Bay office has been re-organized and is now the Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Non-point Source Management.
- Dana Drake reported they held their Conservation District Roundtable meeting last Friday (September 23, 2022) and announced another will take place on May 5, 2023. She also announced that the Southwest office will hold a virtual training on October 21, 2022.
- Christine Phillips announced that DEP grant numbers show they awarded around \$66 million in projects and 35 grants to the Southwest region. Christine mentioned there was still \$17.8 million available to be awarded. She also noted instructions to forward PracticeKeeper to the conservation districts.

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

Jeff Werner provided the following report:

- Jeff mentioned that they had a successful and well attended Ag Progress Days for 2022.
- He gave information that USDA was investing nearly 18 million dollars in Partner-Driven, locally led Conservation in PA. The 17.8 million dollars was awarded through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).
- He discussed some of the FY 2022 Farm Bill money breakdown.
- Jeff gave an update of some of the EWP/Watershed programs and projects going on.
- He mentioned some of the upcoming trainings and localized workshop meetings.
- He mentioned there was a Web Soil Survey update upcoming
- Yuri Plowden mentioned there will be an annual Soil Survey refresh on September 30, 2022.
- Yuri also mentioned there was a request to review soil classes not designated as prime farmland.

State Conservation Commission (SCC) Report (Handout)

Karl Brown provided the following notes on his written report:

- New director appointments are currently underway.

- Karl reviewed some changes in SCC personnel and noted he will retire at the end of this year.
- Eric Cromer is currently working on the ACAP funding paperwork and how best to administer it. ACAP is part of the Clean Streams Fund and all ACAP money must be committed by December 31, 2024, and that all money must be spent by December 31, 2026. ACAP money will be handled similar to that for DGLVR projects. The comment end date will be October 21, 2022.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 12:40 p.m.