

**PACD Legislative Committee
Video Conference Minutes
January 17, 2023**

Welcome and Roll Call

Chairwoman Donna Fisher welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

Committee members in attendance: Donna Fisher, Blair; Larry Kehl, Berks; Chuck Duritsa, Westmoreland; Mark Hamilton, Tioga; Thomas Herbert, Luzerne; Tabby Shah, Clarion; Kelly Stagen, Pike; Mary Burris, Lawrence; Adam McClain, Adams; Chris Strohmaier, Chester; Chris Thompson, Lancaster

Guests in attendance: Brenda Shambaugh, PACD; Dean Druckenmiller, Berks; Doug Deutsch, Wyoming; Doug Wolfgang, SCC; Holly Miller, PACD; Janet Creegan, DEP; Joan McCarty, Columbia; John Dryzal, Cambria; Molly Burns, PACD

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the July 12, 2022, meeting were provided for review.

It was moved by Kelly Stagen and seconded by Chris Thompson to approve the minutes of the July 12, 2022, meeting. Motion carried.

Changes in the PA General Assembly for the 2023-2024 Legislative Session

Brenda Shambaugh thanked everyone for attending and provided the following report:

- The House and Senate have been sworn in. The Senate has already begun meeting. However, the House has not met as the Democrats and Republicans disagree over who has the majority. There are three open seats, all of which have traditionally been held by Democrats. Putting those seats aside, the Republicans have a one-person edge. However, Democrats argue those seats give them the majority. There will be an election for the open seats in February, which will likely go to Democrats, giving the House a Democratic majority. Hopefully we will then commence business as usual, including choosing committee members, etc.
- We have not yet set dates for Conservation District Week because we know the Senate schedule, but not the House.
- There are nearly 50 new members in the legislature. Many may not be aware of conservation districts and the work you do. It is always important to meet with your legislators and develop that relationship. For anyone with new legislators, this is crucial. Set up meetings and follow up with an event if you can. For example, invite your legislators to your local Envirothons.

State Budget Update

Brenda Shambaugh provided the following report:

- Brenda distributed all 66 Highlights pages to legislators. Each legislator received Highlights for each county that falls in their legislative district, along with the white paper from the Ad Hoc State Budget Committee, and a link to the full document that includes all 66 pages.



- Brenda recommended districts follow up with their legislators in the next two weeks.
- The white paper is a district primer and shares conservation district challenges and solutions.
- The salary comparison project is going well, and the findings will be a great tool to support maintaining the current funding increase in the next budget.
- The secretaries presented budgets to the previous governor in the fall. However, there is new DEP secretary incoming, and Governor-Elect Shapiro has the opportunity to change things.
- Brenda has requested a virtual meeting with the governor-elect and will include district representatives in that meeting. She also sent information to the transition team.
- SCC Executive Secretary Doug Wolfgang reported he is hoping to meet with Acting DEP Secretary Richard Negrin sometime prior to the SCC Meeting on January 24, and offered to share information from PACD during that meeting, as well.

Review of Legislation PACD Monitored Last Session

Brenda Shambaugh reported on legislation PACD was monitoring during the last legislative session. She noted that everything reset at the end of the last legislative session. There will be new bill numbers for any items that are reintroduced.

- Third Party Review Legislation – It is very likely this will be reintroduced. Districts are concerned that opening reviews up to third parties might result in less rigorous reviews and even create the potential for a company to review their own plans.
- Expedited Review Legislation – Senator Yaw sponsored this bill in the last session. PACD’s main concern with this legislation is ensuring districts can choose whether or not to participate and can maintain any existing expedited review programs.
- ACAP – As everyone knows, this legislation was passed. The SCC is working to implement the program and will have an update at the January SCC Meeting.
- Definition of Pollution: Current law requires any spill be reported to DEP. This legislation creates a threshold below which a spill does not need to be reported. PACD opposes this bill.
- Growing Greener: This legislation was proposed in the hopes that federal funds would go towards this project. It did not move forward, partly due to ACAP, which uses federal funds to fund projects. The original sponsor is no longer in his seat. However, this could be reintroduced by another legislator.
- Fund for NPS Projects – This was incorporated into ACAP.
- Water Tax: This would enact a tax on public and private entities that use a large amount of water. This may be reintroduced but would be unlikely to move.
- On January 12, Brenda, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of DEP, Doug Wolfgang with the SCC, and John Cox with Turkey Hill, were invited to provide testimony at a Senate information session on ACAP. Brenda’s testimony focused on the importance of the district lines in the PDA and DEP budgets. She stressed the importance of maintaining funding levels in the state budget. Districts need these funds to become more competitive in the job market and improve retention of technical staff to work on ACAP and other projects. She also gave other examples, such as providing low-to-no cost rental equipment for farmers.
- Over 40 districts completed the salary survey, which we shared with the consulting firm to use for the salary comparison study. We hope to have the study results in time for Council and will be setting up a date and time for a presentation to review the results.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:53 a.m.