Conservation District Week

April 23-29, 2023

Thank You for Supporting the Commonwealth’s 66 Conservation Districts!

2023-2024 Budget

Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs. Districts work with landowners and local governments to help them manage and protect land and water resources on private and public lands. Each Conservation District is led by a Board of Directors comprised of local people from all walks of life, including members of the agricultural community.

Currently, conservation districts receive funding from a variety of sources, depending on the district and their county affiliation. One universal funding source, however, comes from a “Transfer to a Conservation District Fund” line in the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) annual budget and a “Transfer to the Conservation District Fund” line in the Department of Agriculture (PDA) annual budget. Prior to this fiscal year, those lines had not been increased since the 2004-2005 fiscal year. Fortunately, the PA General Assembly chose to significantly increase the 2022-2023 fiscal year budgets for the conservation districts to include a $6.8 million increase in funding. The total amount of funding this fiscal year is collectively $10.185 million. **Conservation districts (CDs) are appreciative for the significant increase and are strongly advocating that the increase be continued into the Governor’s and General Assembly’s proposed 2023-2024 state budget.**

The Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, Inc. (PACD), representing all 66 of the Commonwealth’s conservation districts, thanks members of the PA House and Senate for supporting the districts by providing the funds necessary to preserve and protect our Commonwealth’s natural resources through the state budgetary process.

**For conservation districts to serve their counties, they rely on state support to assist with conservation planning, project development and installation, ensuring critical conservation practices are put in place enhancing and protecting PA’s natural resources. To ensure that conservation districts maintain and increase current programs and services for local communities, PACD is respectfully requesting the Commonwealth’s 2023-2024 budget continue with the current allocations.**

Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP)

Utilizing federal funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act, the PA General Assembly passed a new program called the Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) to provide technical and financial assistance through county CDs. Technical assistance will be available for planning, design, and installation of conservation practices through the conservation district and local businesses. A total of $220 million establishes a Clean Stream Fund to reduce water pollution and improve soil quality, additional funding for the Nutrient Management Fund, support for stormwater management, and an allocation to the Keystone Tree program. **CDs support the continuation of this program.**

Invasive species

Pennsylvania’s diverse geography is home to thousands of different plant, animal, and invertebrate species. Unfortunately, not all these organisms are beneficial. Pennsylvania’s natural resources and economy are threatened by unwanted invaders in the Commonwealth – nonnative invasive species. Often, they are unintentionally introduced through the everyday activities of citizens – hiding in firewood, attached to boats and other gear, or concealed in merchandise. Once established, they have the potential to change Pennsylvania forever.

The Pennsylvania Invasive Species Council is developing a statewide program called Pennsylvania Regional Invasive Species Management or PRISM. The PRISMs would be locally based, made up of existing local organizations concerned with invasive species, such as conservation districts, conservancies, watershed groups, conservation groups and others. A PRISM would not only manage existing invasive species, but, perhaps more importantly, be on the lookout for new invaders so that they can be controlled and eradicated before they become a major economic and environmental problem.

**PACD supports the creation of a statewide invasive species program.**

In conclusion, conservation districts know that we work better when we work together with the administration and the PA General Assembly, reflecting values to strengthen the functions of the districts. To that end, the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD) represents all 66 CDs across the Commonwealth and is the collective voice for our membership. **As communications are sent to various legislative leaders, our partners, or other interested parties, it should be recognized that PACD is speaking for CDs as a collective statement.**