

State Conservation Commission
Conference Call Notes
April 12, 2022
8:30 AM – 10:00 AM

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1. **Opportunity for Public Comment** – Members of the public may provide comments. Please limit remarks to 3 minutes or less.
2. **Agency Updates** – Agencies and organizations that are a part of the Commission are asked to provide brief updates from their organizations. DCNR, Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, Cooperative Extension, NRCS, DCED, PACD, PDA and DEP.
3. **AgriSafe Network (Mark Critz, Exec. Dir. Rural Development Council, PDA)** – Mark will provide information on the AgriSafe Network, a non-profit organization, representing health professionals and educators who strive to reduce health disparities found among the agricultural community. The mission of the Network is to support a growing network of trained agricultural health and safety professionals that assure access to preventative services for farm families and the agricultural community through the delivery of agricultural occupational health services. Additional information is attached.
4. *(Please Note ... Action requested on this agenda item.)* **Recommendation for Approval for Northumberland County Conservation District Building Project (Johan Berger, SCC)** - The Northumberland County Conservation District has begun the process to find a new office location for its operations and Environmental Education Center due to financial impacts surrounding rental arrangements for its current office space. The District has been offered a residential property adjacent to the Little Shamokin Creek Watershed Association property for relocation of its offices. Under current policy regarding powers and duties granted to the State Conservation Commission (Commission) under the Conservation District Law (Act of May 15, 1945, P.L. 217), certain matters require approval by the Commission or the Executive Secretary, as authorized by the Commission. When conservation districts enter into contracts, where the estimated project cost exceeds \$250,000, the conservation district must seek approval from the Commission to enter into such contracts. Johan Berger and Nathan Brophy, District Manager for the Northumberland County Conservation District will present a proposal regarding the District's building project requesting permission from the Commission to enter into appropriate contracts for completion of the project. Additional information is attached.

5. **FY 2022-23 REAP Program Guidelines Update (Joel Semke, SCC)** - Every year, the Commission staff reviews the REAP Program guidelines and solicits input from partners on how to improve the program year-to-year. The annual changes to the guidelines range from minor revisions that are intended to improve the administration of the program, to major changes that address what is eligible for REAP tax credits. Joel Semke will provide an update on proposed changes to the FY 2022-23 REAP Program guidelines on the April 13th conference call. These proposed changes will be presented to the Commission for approval at the May 2022 Commission meeting after a final legal and policy review. A memo outlining the proposed changes to the FY 2022-23 REAP Program Guidelines is attached.

6. **FY 2022-23 Conservation Excellence Grants (CEG) Guideline Revision Concepts Update (Eric Cromer, SCC)** – Similar to the REAP Program, the CEG Program is authorized to operate based “guidelines” issued by the Commission. Staff, in cooperating with participating conservation districts, has reviewed the FY 2021-22 guidelines and is recommending several changes including language updating the allocation of program funds that was recently adopted by the commission and several other minor modifications. Eric Cromer will present this information to the Commission. A memo providing additional information is attached. Final revised language for the guidelines will be presented for Commission consideration at the May 2022 meeting.

7. **Dirt, Gravel Road and Low Volume Program Allocation Update (Roy Richardson, SCC)** – Each year the Commission allocates state funding to county conservation districts under the Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Road (DGLVR) Program. These county allocations are “formula” driven and include “spending” requirements for districts that define their eligibility for funding each fiscal year. Commission staff anticipate presenting these DGLVR Program funding allocations at our May 2022 business meeting. Staff will review the process for this funding allocation and will update Commission members on the number of districts they anticipate will be eligible for DGLVR Program funding allocations in FY 2022-23.

8. **Proposed Update to Policy on Utilizing Technology to Facilitate Conservation District Business Meetings (11-15-11) (Karl Brown)** – In November 2011, the Commission adopted a policy regarding utilizing technology to facilitate conservation district business meetings. Given the significant challenges presented during the COVID pandemic for in person meetings and the dramatic improvements in telecommunication platforms, Commission staff is proposing this policy to encourage districts to consider adopting a hybrid meeting format to improve access to their monthly business meeting. A copy of the proposed changes is attached. Commission staff anticipate presenting this information to the Commission at our May 2022 meeting.

9. **Statement of Financial Interests (Karl Brown)** – *State Conservation Commission members are reminded that as “Public Officials” they are required to complete their Statements of Financial Interests forms as required by state ethics laws. Information will be sent to members in late February and members must complete these forms (online) no later than May 1st.*

Conservation District Directors are also considered Public Officials and most District Employees are considered Public Employees. Any Conservation district employee that meets one or more of the criteria in the definition below **MUST** fill out a Statement of Financial Interest. Completing a statement is not optional. It is required by law. For district directors and district employees,

