

Chairperson Commissioner Sherene Hess called the meeting of the Indiana County Conservation District to order on Tuesday, May 20, 2025, at 9:30 am at 435 Hamill Road in Indiana. Other Directors present were Craig Andrie, Janis Long, Barbara Peace, Aaron Simpson (virtually) and Gregg VanHorn. Directors absent: Cindy Rogers

Also present: Tammie Robinson – Office Administrator, Brooke Russick – Conservation Program Manager (Dirt/Gravel Low Volume Roads), Mackenzie Marbain – Conservation Program Specialist (ACAP), Blake Mauthe – Conservation Program Specialist (Educator), Rebecca Caldwell– AmeriCorps, Doyle Freeman, and John Somonick-Associate Directors, Stephen Campbell – Penn State Extension (PSE), Ariel Coleman– USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Nathan Edwards – PACD Conservation Planner/Indiana NRCS field office, Bill Rogers and Dorothy Rogers.

#### PUBLIC COMMENTS - none

Peace moved to approve consent agenda items including accepting minutes of the previous meeting as presented, treasurer's report to be filed subject to audit, correspondence, DEP delegated programs reports and staff reports, second by Simpson, motion carried.

VanHorn moved to pay the bills as presented, second by Andrie, motion carried with Simpson abstaining.

#### DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DELEGATED PROGRAMS REPORT

Two erosion and sediment control plans were reviewed, and four Chapter 102 site inspections were conducted.

#### ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR REPORTS - none

Somonick reported that the Solid Waste Authority will be getting a new scale. The building suffered minor damage from a recent hailstorm.

#### FIELD REPRESENTATIVE'S REPORT

Null submitted a written report prior to the meeting.

#### COOPERATING AGENCY REPORTS

Edwards reported one high tunnel, one cover crop, two heavy use areas, and one forestry plan application were approved for contracting for approximately \$300,000. NRCS is continuing to take Environmental Quality Incentives Program applications. Inflation Reduction Act applications have currently been paused. Neither Indiana nor Westmoreland Counties received preapproval for the Conservation Stewardship Program. They have received no easement applications. Continuous sign up for the Conservation Reserve Program has opened. Field office staff are participating in on-going program training. Edwards is working on Farm Service Agency compliance, with Coleman conducting field site visits.

Campbell reported that pesticide applicator testing will be offered in Butler County May 22. These exams will also be available in Greensburg and Kittanning. The Butler County Extension office is offering a short course for the pesticide applicators exam June 16 and 17. Extension is offering an equipment demonstration for novice operators on July 8 in Rock Springs including harvest equipment and hay equipment. PSE is exploring a forest focused pasture walk in Butler in cooperation with their equine specialist. A manure management workshop may be held in Indiana County. Campbell is doing weekly slug updates on the PSE field crop news. Campbell put out a deer management article in cooperation with the PA Game Commission. PSE is trying to get cover crop fact sheets updated by the end of May. A program process development meeting to plan out

programs for the next 3 years took place. A drone workshop for cover cropping is in the planning stage.

COMMITTEE REPORTS - none

OLD BUSINESS - none

NEW BUSINESS

No nutrient management plans are currently under review. No plans were presented for approval.

No donations were received.

Peace moved to approve new cover crop program incentive payment rates of \$45/acre for minimum till and \$50/acre for no-till, second by Andrie. The question was posed on an acreage/operator cap and none have been imposed at this time, but there is a program-wide cap of \$10,000 that was set aside for the project. The motion was put to a vote, motion carried.

VanHorn moved to approve the new ACAP committee structure of a non-voting chair – Marbain; NRCS representative – Ariel Coleman with her alternate to be decided; voting members Aaron Simpson with his alternate Barbara Peace; and Dustin Heeter with his alternate Nathan McNutt, second by Andrie, motion carried.

Andrie moved to approve a contract extension for the Barry Pugh ACAP17-2024 project to June 15, 2025, second by VanHorn, motion carried.

Peace moved to approve a contract amendment for the Shannon Ashbaugh ACAP10-2024 project for an additional \$999.99 to cover engineering fees, second by Andrie, motion carried.

The request for a 50% cash advance for the Ron Davis ACAP 2402 contract to an escrow account was withdrawn.

Peace moved to approve the People, Parks & Community Foundation Grant Resolution for the Canopy Trail and Walkway Grant application, second by Long, motion carried.

Peace moved to approve receipt of a grant award for the Agriculture Conservation Technician Apprenticeship Program from PA Department of Labor and Industry in the amount of \$399,316.52, and authorize entering grant contract, second by Long, motion carried.

VanHorn moved to approve receipt of a grant award for Indiana County Environmental Futures: Education for Water, Climate, and Environmental Justice grant from PA Department of Environmental Protection in the amount of \$10,180.00, and authorize entering grant contract, second by Andrie, motion carried.

VanHorn moved to approve hiring Rebecca Caldwell for a temporary part time position at the end of her PMSC AmeriCorps Term for up to 33 hours per week at \$15 per hour to end on August 2, 2025, unless extended by mutual agreement of both parties, second by Andrie, motion carried.

Peace moved to approve hiring Jacob Henretta and Hailey Wittkopp for temporary part time positions for up to 33 hours per week at \$15 per hour, starting May 23, 2025, and ending August 2, 2025, unless extended by mutual agreement of both parties, second by VanHorn, motion carried.

Peace moved to approve the Delaware Valley Heath Trust (DVHT) 2025/2026 rate quote, second by Andrie, motion carried.

Peace moved to approve the DVHT Resolution, second by Long, motion carried.

VanHorn moved to approve the DVHT Agreement and Addendum, second by Andrie, motion carried.

Peace reported that many Pennsylvania Conservation Districts are struggling to maintain staff and Indiana County has done a great job at being supportive of the staff, providing good salaries and health benefits, other benefits that has made us successful in retaining staff.

#### DISCUSSION

Robinson reported 25 teams competed at the 2025 Indiana County Sr. Envirothon. The Homeschoolers for Christ Co-Op. earned 1<sup>st</sup> place, Marion Center's Bee Hive Five earned 2<sup>nd</sup> place and Penns Manor's The Wild Ones earned 3<sup>rd</sup> place via tie breaker.

Peace reported PACD hosted 29 participants at ag boot camp. Clean Water Academy training courses are all available online. A Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program partnership training was hosted with 89 participants on the first day and 74 on the second and approved funding for 55 plans on 5,724 acres. A \$500,000 Community Conservation Partnership grant application to the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources was submitted. The PACD/SCC joint annual conference will be held at Seven Springs Mountain Resort in July. Every director was asked to contribute an Indiana County item or idea to be included in a basket being donated for the annual basket raffle. Additionally, the monthly Indiana County Farm Bureau meeting will be held June 3 at 6:00 pm at the Indiana mall. Edwards questioned the status of the PACD/NRCS relationship with regard to conservation planners. Peace reported a partner meeting was held, and everything is moving forward even though funding is uncertain. Funds are currently frozen, so PACD is applying pressure, but also pursuing other options because they want to see the program continued.

The next Conservation District Board of Directors meeting will be held Tuesday, June 17, 2025, at 9:30 am at 435 Hamill Road, Indiana, PA 15701. VanHorn moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:15 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Tammie L. Robinson  
Administrative Assistant