



Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) Meeting Meeting Minutes | June 5, 2025 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

DEP Southcentral Regional Office – Susquehanna Room A/B and Microsoft Teams

Welcome & Introductions – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair

Bob Haines conducted a roll call of AAB members; 4 of the 9 voting members were present. A quorum was not established.

Members present:

Chair Jennifer Reed-Harry, Vice-chair Grant Gulibon, Lynn Dietrich, Matt Royer, Jill Whitcomb*, Mark Buckwalter (in for Tim Peters*), and Greg Hostetter*

Members absent:

Lily Guthrie, Bill Evans, Destiny Zeiders, Kerry Golden, Christopher Uhland, and James Gillis*

**Non-Voting Member*

Review & Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (Action) – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair

The April 10, 2025, meeting minutes were not approved as a quorum was not established.

Legislative Update – Destiny Zeiders, Lily Guthrie, Bill Evans

A legislative update was not provided as the legislative designees were not in attendance.

Public Comment – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair

No public comments were offered virtually or in-person.

Penn State Extension Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training (CACAT) – Jennifer Fetter, Director, Penn State Extension

Jennifer Fetter provided an overview of the resources and services offered by the CACAT. Jennifer addressed questions and comments from the Board.

Lynn Dietrich commented that it is good to hear about the expansion of agricultural engineering courses within the center.

Jennifer Reed-Harry asked if there were any courses within the ag engineering curriculum that would provide coursework for nutrient management planners and certified crop advisors. Jennifer Fetter advised that some of the current courses touch on soil and water planning.

Matt Royer commented that additional courses could be added to meet this need.

Sarah Xenophon mentioned a new apprenticeship program through Indiana County Conservation District for planner and ag techs.

Matt also noted that the Environmental Resource Management program through Penn State offers a certificate in Agricultural Conservation Stewardship, which includes coursework in soils and nutrient management.

Dirt and Gravel Low Volume Road Maintenance Program (DGLVR) – Steve Bloser, Director, Center for Dirt and Gravel Road Studies

Steve Bloser presented an overview of the DGLVR Maintenance Program, highlighting the resources and services it provides to improve rural road infrastructure while protecting water quality. Steve showcased a few successful projects funded through the program. Steve addressed questions and comments from the Board.

Justin Challenger noted that while some townships initially push back on the upfront cost of stream crossing improvements, they often recognize the long-term benefits after a major storm event. The enhanced structures offer better flood capacity, reduced maintenance, and longer lifespans, making them more cost-effective over time.

Jennifer Reed-Harry asked whether Pennsylvania is running out of gravel or low-volume roads to improve. Steve responded that while some townships may be nearing that point, there are still approximately 20,000 miles of gravel roads statewide. He added that identifying low-volume roads is more difficult, as it requires traffic counts—something townships must conduct to qualify for program funding.

Jennifer also asked about the source of in-kind contributions from townships. Steve explained that contributions could include money, labor, materials, or equipment, but participation in the program does not require an in-kind match.

Jennifer asked whether the Center provides training for PennDOT, Steve responded that it typically does not, but the Center does plan to engage PennDOT regarding the implementation of stream crossing structures that prioritize stream health.

Grant Gulibon commented on the Stream Crossing Technical Manual as a good example of the kind of streamlining that aligns with DEP's permit reform efforts under the Chapter 105 and 102 programs.

Jill Whitcomb expressed appreciation for Steve and the Center's efforts to train DEP Waterways Engineering and Wetlands staff. Jill echoed Grant's point, highlighting DEP's ongoing work to streamline permitting through updated sample drawings, increased automation, and pre-populated forms.

Pennsylvania Conservation Stewardship (PaCS) Program – Sarah Xenophon, Program Director, State Conservation Commission

Sarah Xenophon provided an overview of the Pennsylvania Conservation Stewardship (PaCS) Program, focusing on the resources, technical assistance, and certification it offers to support long-term conservation efforts across the Commonwealth. Sarah addressed questions and comments from the Board.

Jill Whitcomb expressed appreciation for the presentation and acknowledged DEP's role in the PaCS Program. She noted that PaCS verification helps streamline agricultural inspections required by EPA as part of the Chesapeake Bay Phase II Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP). Jill also recognized Kate Bresaw for coordinating the training materials, protocols, and procedures for the upcoming PaCS program launch webinar scheduled for July 29.

Jennifer Reed-Harry asked if there were concerns about funding for the three programs that were presented during the meeting.

Jill Whitcomb explained that DEP must match federal funding on at least a 1:1 basis. She noted that the Governor's proposed budget includes ten staff positions dedicated to working in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, with the goal of deploying funds at the local level as efficiently as possible. Jill added that while DEP cannot speak definitively on federal funding levels, the Department is closely monitoring developments in the federal budget process.

Justin Challenger added that Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) funding currently represents 70% of the Clean Streams Fund and is expected to remain at that level in the proposed state budget. Justin emphasized that this level of funding is essential to keeping the program operational. Justin also pointed out that funding for the Dirt and Gravel Roads program has remained flat since 2014, which limits its capacity due to rising costs.

Jennifer Fetter reinforced Justin's point, adding that current ACAP funding is approximately 30% lower than the original federal allocation, which will likely slow the pace of project implementation.

Jennifer Reed-Harry asked whether PaCS certification is transferable when a farm is sold. Sarah responded that the certification does not automatically transfer with the deed, as it is based on the farm's operational practices, which may change under new ownership.

Jennifer asked if PaCS certification will be like a label on a product like the "PA Preferred" label. Sarah stated that that is the vision for it to be a State-backed marketing endorsement.

Jill clarified that participation in the PaCS program does not affect CAFO inspections, as those are conducted separately under the NPDES CAFO permit.

Lauren Shaffer reiterated that the PaCS certification label will allow farmers to direct market their own products or other ag commodity corporations can also use the PaCS label if 75% of their product comes from PaCS-certified producers.

General Discussion/Agenda Topics Request – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair

Jennifer Reed-Harry announce that the next AAB meeting is scheduled for August 28, 2025.

Jennifer also suggested having an in-person only meeting where a Food Processing Residuals (FPR) site visit be added as part of the meeting.

Matt Royer suggested having Charlie White from Penn State present his Nutrient Managment research. Bob Haines asked Matt to coordinate that presentation with Charlie.

Justin Challenger and Jennifer Fetter offered an ACAP or CACAT site visit.

Grant Gulibon requested an update on the SPEED program once the program and data is established.

Jill Whitcomb suggested a Chesapeake Bay update for the August joint meeting.

Matt Royer announced a PA in Balance conference scheduled for December 8-10, 2025, in Gettysburg, Pa.

Justin Challenger announced the Dirt and Gravel Road conference for September 23-25 in Gettysburg, PA

Jennifer Fetter announced that the ACAP conference is scheduled for September 15-17, 2026, at the IUP conference center. Justin mentioned the collaboration between the Dirt and Gravel Roads center and CACAT on farm lane projects.

Sarah Xenophon mentioned the completion of the first rounds of grants with the Ag Sustainability Board with twenty eligible applicants and might be a good update for the Board.

Adjourn – Jennifer Reed-Harry, Chair

As a quorum was not present, no formal motion to adjourn was made. The meeting concluded at 3:02 p.m.

Next Meeting: Thursday, August 28, 2025, at 9 a.m.