

# **Welcome A “Board”**

*(Some information and tips for new  
conservation district directors)*



***Article I, Section 27  
of the Pennsylvania Constitution***

***- The Environmental Rights Amendment***

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*(Adopted May 18, 1971)*

*“The people have a right to clean air, pure water,  
and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and  
esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania’s public  
natural resources are the common property of all the  
people,  
including generations yet to come. As trustee of these  
resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and  
maintain them for the benefit of all the people.”*

# Welcome "A-Board!"

Welcome and congratulations on your appointment as a conservation district director! You have joined nearly 500 Pennsylvanians and more than 15,000 other leaders of conservation district programs and services across the United States committed to the stewardship of our natural resources at the local level.



In Pennsylvania, conservation districts are subunits of state government created by county resolution. The Commonwealth has 66 conservation districts, each led by individuals who believe that decisions affecting our natural resources are best made by the people closest to those resources – the people in the community.



As a conservation district director, you are a public official that will represent and protect the needs and interests of the public through your actions and decisions. You'll be at the helm with your unique knowledge, experience and interest in natural resources and you'll be looked to for guidance and to add valuable expertise to your conservation district team. More importantly, you are being entrusted with the power to administer state and local programs; receive and spend public funds; educate the public on environmental issues; and much more. The citizens and the natural resources of the Commonwealth are counting on you and are pleased you've come aboard.

Your new role as a conservation district director is an important one. Your main responsibilities will include:

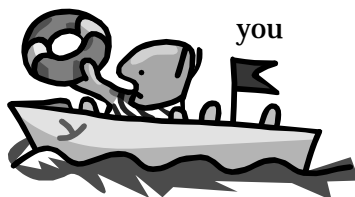
- setting and scrutinizing the district's mission and overall strategy to achieve it;
- supporting management and staff, and assuring they function efficiently and responsibly. They represent the district to the community on a day-to-day basis;
- selecting, evaluating and supporting the district manager and making sure a valid selection and evaluation process is in place for other district staff;
- developing and conserving the district's resources—both funds and property;
- serving as a bridge and buffer between the district and its customers and partners; advocating for the district and building support in the community.

The good news is that Pennsylvania has some of the most effective conservation districts in the country with professional and knowledgeable staff willing to support you in your new role. A network of local, state and national conservation partners are also available to help. This booklet was designed to help you get started.



## HELPFUL HINTS

There are a variety of ways you can use your time and talents to be successful in taking on your new responsibilities.



- Attend and participate at monthly board meetings;
- Ask questions. Most likely you are not the only one who would like clarification, and it is a friendly reminder to staff that the public may need more information as well;
- Offer your expertise to assist district staff with programs and projects;
- Meet with staff that administer programs of interest to you to find out program goals and discuss how you can help;
- Serve on committees where your knowledge and experience can contribute to district programs or operations;
- Be open and honest in communications with your fellow directors and with district staff;
- Communicate your needs and expectations to your fellow directors and your staff and ask what they need from you; and
- Carry your Director Handbook and Annual Program and Budget Book to board meetings. They can be valuable references to you both inside and outside meetings.

## WHERE TO START?

It's important to remember that you can't learn everything at once. Individuals who have been involved with conservation districts for years are still finding new opportunities for learning and growth.



As a start, during the next six months, try to find time to do the following (*you can use these pages to track your progress*):

Sit down with the District Chair and the District Manager to hear what your conservation district is all about. Topography, demographics, and past and present resource use influence the specific goals of each conservation district.

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Schedule some one-on-one time with your District Manager to find out specifics about the Board-Manager partnership and see which roles you'll need to play.

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Meet with district staff. Maybe you can schedule a brown bag lunch together and have some informal discussions about their program responsibilities and goals.

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Meet with your district's Conservation District Field Representative. Your "Field Rep" supports a region of between six and twelve conservation districts and can give you a broader picture of what conservation districts do and how they function.

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Read Act 217 of 1945 – Pennsylvania's Conservation District Law. A copy is included in your Director Handbook. Pay special attention to Section 9, which describes the powers of conservation districts.

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Ask for copies of your district's annual goals and objectives, annual report and long-range strategic plan. These documents will give you a picture of what the district is all about and what they are trying to accomplish.

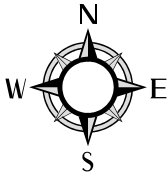
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Ask your District Manager and fellow directors about regional and statewide meetings and opportunities for training on specific aspects of the conservation district. Create a personal training outline (referred to as an Individual Development Plan) to have a written reference of your progress.

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## **MORE HELPFUL INFORMATION**

Keep in mind that you are not alone.

1. For more information about your conservation district, talk to the following individuals:
  - Your fellow directors and associate directors.
  - Your district's professional staff.
  - Your Conservation District Field Representative.
  
2. For more information about the “big picture” of conservation districts, try these websites:
  - **www.PACD.org** - This is the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts' (PACD) website. The PACD serves as the collective voice of Pennsylvania's conservation districts and represents districts at the state and national levels.
  - **www.pascc.state.pa.us** - This is the website of Pennsylvania's State Conservation Commission. The commission provides oversight and support to Pennsylvania's conservation districts for the implementation of conservation programs in an efficient and



responsible manner. The commission also administers the state Nutrient Management Act Program and oversees the delivery of the state's Dirt and Gravel Road Maintenance Program.

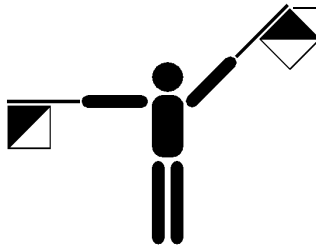
- **www.nacdnet.org** - This is the website of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). The NACD is the national voice of America's 3,000 conservation districts.

## TELEPHONE NUMBERS TO HAVE ON HAND

Conservation District Manager: \_\_\_\_\_  
(office): \_\_\_\_\_  
(home): \_\_\_\_\_

District Board Chair: \_\_\_\_\_  
(home): \_\_\_\_\_

Conservation District  
Field Representative: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Common Acronyms used at the Conservation District**

ACT 217	Pennsylvania's Conservation District Law
ACT	Agriculture Conservation Technicians (district staff)
BMP	Best Management Practice
CD	Conservation District
CDFAP	Conservation District Fund Allocation Program
DCED	Department of Community & Economic Development
DCNR	Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
DEP	Department of Environmental Protection
E&S Plan	Erosion and Sedimentation Pollution Control Plan (E&S Technicians work in the district's erosion control program)
FSA	Farm Service Agency (USDA)
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GP	General Permit
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NACD	National Association of Conservation Districts
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NPS	Non-Point Source
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA)
PACD	PA Association of Conservation Districts
PDA	PA Department of Agriculture
SCC	State Conservation Commission
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load (federal water- shed conservation regulations)
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture



# **Notes and Things I'd Like to Accomplish**



## **PA District Director Duties**

1. Be familiar with Act 217, the Conservation District Law. Know the powers, authorities, responsibilities, and limitations placed upon you by the law.
2. Attend regular and special meetings of the district board.
3. Accept the responsibilities of any office to which you are appointed. Serve on committees and present reports on their accomplishments and activities.
4. Assure that the actions and policies of the district and its employees remain within the limitations of the Conservation District Law.
5. Set local policy to reflect the balanced need of the community you represent.
6. Act as a district representative in communicating district action, policy, etc. to your local community.
7. Develop, set and implement personnel policies for the hiring and supervision of district staff.
8. Enroll landowners as cooperators with the district.
9. Attend state, national and other conservation meetings on behalf of the district to stay current with conservation issues and programs. Represent the feeling of your board as a whole, not just your personal feelings.
10. Pursue funding for district programs and initiatives.
11. Develop an annual budget, assure fiscal responsibility and provide financial statements.
12. Develop a working relationship with county government, legislators, agency officials, local municipal and county officials, and organizations that do or could cooperate with the conservation district.
13. Stay informed on conservation issues in your county and be familiar with important laws, policies, and programs.
14. Be familiar with district programs and activities. Be positive, innovative, and action-oriented.