

VENANGO CONSERVATION DISTRICT
PRISM PILOT PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
January 11, 2024

PRESENT

Committee Members: Bailey Kozalla, VCD Dale Kriner, USDA Natural Resources
Lisette Lane, VCD Ty Ryen, DCNR, Bur. of Forestry

Staff: Abigail Zerbe

I. Welcome/ Introductions

Lisette called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm by introducing everyone.

II. Public Comment

There were no members of the public present.

III. New Business

a. Review Program Guidelines

Lisette asked the group if there were any questions on the basic guidelines of the PRISM program. She referred them to their packets where the guidelines were included. There were no questions from the group.

b. Discussion on Need

Ty believed that the PRISM program was of great importance to Venango County. He relayed that he had found invasives on every property he had been on. Japanese Barberry and Multiflora Rose were the two most common invasives he had found, and they both were incredibly difficult for landowners to deal with on their own. He stated that cost sharing programs used to exist to treat invasive species. The programs were simple for both DCNR and the landowners to manage. However, those programs no longer exist. Ty asked Lisette if the Conservation District planned to do an advertising push and have a ranking system for grant applications. Lisette said that was the current plan.

Dale said he experienced issues with invasive species as well. He mainly came across invasives while working on forest management plans. All of the plans intended to implement invasive species control. At that time, there were about a dozen forest management applications for the NRCS field team to implement and about the same number of applications requesting updates.

Bailey expressed concern for aquatic invasives, especially around boat launches, trails, and trout stream access points where Japanese Knot Weed may be present. She suggested pairing PRISM efforts with PA Fish and Boat projects as they prioritize public access points. She also suggested inquiring at Two Mile Run Park about their dredging project as Hydrilla was running rampant in Justus Lake. She thought that PRISM could possibly help with the Hydrilla while the project was underway if something could be coordinated with the park.

The installation of new canoe and kayak launches were a concern for both Bailey and Ty, especially if Japanese Knot Weed was present. They expressed concern about the spreading of the seeds of the invasive species if it was not being destroyed properly.

c. Review Program Documents

Lisette referred the group to their packet. She said that much of the policy was adapted from DGLVR as it is very thorough. It was up to the group to custom fit it to the PRISM program as they saw fit. Under the "Purpose" section of the policy, the group saw fit to adjust the wording so that it better fit the mission of the PRISM Pilot Program. The edited portion of the "Purpose" section should read as follows:

The VDC PRISM Pilot Program Advisory Committee will assist the Venango Conservation District by managing invasive species that threaten Pennsylvania's economy, environment, and human and animal health by developing strong, diverse stakeholder partnerships; and by carrying out the Administrative, Educational, Contractual responsibilities of the Venango PRISM Pilot Program.

Under the "Members" section of the policy, Lisette reminded the group that they may appoint alternates from their organizations to attend meetings and vote in their place if they are unable to attend.

The group agreed that it was most convenient to hold committee meetings before VCD Board of Directors Meetings.

Under the "Finance" section of the policy, the group agreed that language about the 50/50 match policy should be included. Dale asked that language be included that the landowner be reimbursed only after a final certification and completion reporting is executed. Ty said that DCNR would be willing to conduct final certifications as long as they could fit it into their schedules.

Under the "VCD PRISM Pilot Program Equal Access to Funds Policy" section of the policy, Dale asked to expand the definition of "conservation plan" to include forest management plans, tree farm plans, and other plans landowners would be using to manage their resources. Ty suggested the language be changed from "conservation plan" to "Conservation Management Plan, including such plans as Forest Management Plans, Invasive Control Plans, Tree Farm Plans, etc."

Under the “Written Funding Criteria for Ranking Projects” section of the policy, Lisette drew the group’s attention to the suggestions put forward by PACD. She suggested the group establish their own ranking criteria based on what they felt was reasonable for Venango County. Ty’s main concern was that applicants would be scared away by an unrefined ranking system. He thought that it would be beneficial to streamline the process as much as possible. Everyone agreed to keep the “Required 50/50 match” and the “Acres Treated” items and to get rid of the “Multi-County” item as other counties were participating in the program and there was not much money to work with. “How Close is This Project to Similar Projects” was up for discussion as the group was unsure of the intent of this item. Under the “Applications for Funding” section of the policy, the group decided that they needed to wait until they had decided on ranking criteria to determine if a one-page application would suffice. They also determined that working capital would be required. One-year extensions may still be given as landowners may have to wait for the right season to treat the invasives.

IV. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:53 pm.