

In attendance: Daton Fleury, Richard Noel, Brodie Haenke, Jeannie Bartlett, Wynea Buford, Phil Parent

**Minutes:**

10:08 Meeting called to order

Daton notes that he saw Phil on his farm on TV.

10:11 Minutes from 2/7/2019 approved.

Action items from 2/7/2019 reviewed.

Jeannie noted that she is now posting meeting dates and approved minutes on the website, under open meeting law.

10:16 Phil arrived and reported on meeting he'd been at in Brattleboro. Discussion of flooding in Nebraska and its possible impact on national beef prices. Phil and Jacques Parents' proposal that everyone gets paid a set price for their first million pounds, and beyond that gets paid market price, is getting put to a farmer referendum. Reports that a small farm is now reported at 500 cows. Reports that 1000 cow dairies were saying they felt they weren't reaching an economy of scale. Discussion of environmental impacts of large farms, damage to roads of daily heavy truck traffic.

10:23 Brodie reports on District activities. Brodie and Jeannie just finished a major report for our Ag-Clean Water Incentives Program grant from the Agency of Agriculture. The major metrics we're tracking are the number of farms we're reaching out to, the number of farms we're working with, and the number of management changes or conservation practices we've facilitated. Looking at changes our deliverables to measure the quality of work we're doing with more focus on number of changes made, rather than quantity of farms we're working with. Reflecting on what kind of technical assistance we can best provide.

District has improved our collaboration with NRCS recently, recognizing the expertise and resources that Soil Conservationists have.

10:28 District is working with producer on streambank failure. District staff's first time contracting an engineer. Phil noted that when he had to hire an engineer on a riverbank restoration (around 2004) he felt there was a void of choices for engineering services. Farmers Watershed Alliance assisted with that. Discussion of flooding, ice flows, and the need for ice flows to deposit in open areas. Supervisors shared experience that the 50-ft buffers being installed along rivers can block ice flows and cause dams, especially on major rivers that develop thick ice. Observation that the tree planting at Brownway has caused ice jams upstream.

10:45 Jeannie. The District has hosted three out of four grazing classes with UVM Extension. The focus of the class is to help producers lower their feed costs, improve soil and water quality, and improve their animal health. Most farmers in the class already have a pasture program set in place, but they could use additional assistance making the most out of their pastures. Supervisor mentions that one benefit of pasturing is increasing animal longevity, says the oldest cow on most farms are only 7 years old. Supervisor describes that this is because cows are being pushed in their early years to produce as much milk as possible in their first three lactations. Supervisor continues that cows are not meant to eat grain; they are foragers.

Supervisor expressed curiosity about spring thaw water quality data.

10:59 Richard reports that new Field Days contact is Andy LaRoque. Richard spoke to him this week and confirmed this May.

11:04 Discussion of proposal from Evan Fitzgerald to do design work for restoration of tributary to the Pike River. Supervisors ask if this project will be similar to the Bouchard two-tiered ditch. Brodie provided description that yes, it's similar, except on a steeper stream. Supervisors expressed interest in that kind of design. Supervisors ask where the funding is coming from. Staff confirm that the Agency of Agriculture is funding the design, via the District.

11:14 Richard makes a motion to approve contracting Evan Fitzgerald for designing streambank restoration project. Phil seconds. Approved.

11:15 Phil makes a motion to approve hosting an ECO\*AmeriCorps member for the 2019-2020 year. Richard seconds. Approved.

11:17 Discussion of roadside signs and where to place them. Question from supervisors on whether hayfields have to meet certain criteria, like having been a corn field previously, to get a Growing Grass sign. Staff confirmed that no, any visible field growing perennial grass can have a sign.

11:22 Reviewed financial report. Discussed that we have recognized revenue for work that hasn't been done yet and have other outstanding liabilities, so our balance represents more than we have in free cash. Phil makes a motion to approve the financial report as printed. Richard seconds. Approved.

11:25 NRCS update. Deadline for last round of EQIP was March 22, so we are done receiving applications this year. Received 137 applications from October 2018 through March 22 this year. So far 21 have been obligated, for \$401,000. Wynea anticipates that we will be completed with obligations in early June. NRCS is beginning to talk about CSP, the Conservation Stewardship Program, as a second step to assist farmers who are doing enhanced practices after likely working with EQIP. This program provides payments for practices that go above-and-beyond addressing problems. This program has not been utilized a lot in the past in Vermont, but NRCS is looking to use it more.

Wynea sat down with Jeannie and Brodie earlier this month to talk about how NRCS and the District can integrate better together.

Wynea attended the Northern Tier Dairy Summit earlier this week. About 250 attendees, and one of the better events she's attended. Over half of attendees were dairy farmers. A farmer from New Zealand spoke about his grass-based dairy there and in Missouri, where they don't have a winter. He analyzes his production per acre, not per cow. Reported on discussion of lowering production 10% nationwide. National policy break-out started a petition, "Dairy Together," for a dairy growth management program. Currently has 101 signatures. FSA would be the proposed program manager. Petition is available online and in hard-copy, to be submitted to the VT Farm Bureau. Another break-out session Wynea attended was about diversification: e.g. youngstock, quality hay, custom cover-crop seeding, and goat dairy. Jasper Hill Farms presented about their expansion and success. Next summit will be in two years.

11:40 Daton asked about status of wetlands and tile in the legislature. Jeannie reported to her knowledge.

11:42 Daton said he attended the legislative breakfast and met his two representatives for Berkshire.

11:44 Next meeting date set for June 6, 9:30-11:30 at the St. Albans NRCS Conference room.

11:46 Meeting adjourned.

Minutes recorded by Jeannie Bartlett.