

State Natural Resources Conservation Council

An Agency of State Government, Serving Vermont's 14 Conservation Districts

NRCC Full Board Meeting

Tuesday December 3rd, 2019

1:00pm – 4:00pm

The Annex: 190 Junction Road, Montpelier

AGENDA

1:00pm: Open Meeting	Rick
1:05: Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes	Board
1:10: Staff Updates	Holden Sparacino Jess Buckley Somara Zwick Kerry O'Brien
1:45 Agriculture Water Quality Partnership (AWQP) Coordinator Position Update	Jill Arace
2:00 NRCS-NRCD Memorandum of Agreement Update	John/Kerry
2:15: Member Updates	
• Supervisory Union Reps	Reps
• DEC Update	Marli Rupe
• AAFM Update	Nina Gage
• VACD Update	Jill Arace
• NRCS Update	Vicky Drew/John Thurgood
• UVM Extension	Dan Lerner
3:45: Other Business	
- Plan Next Meeting	Open
4:00: Adjourn	

NRCC's mission is to advance conservation and water quality efforts in Vermont by providing strategic guidance and operational support to Conservation Districts, contribute a local perspective on state conservation policies, and facilitate the sharing of information among members and partners.

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NRCC Full Board Meeting

December 3, 2019 – The Annex Conference Room, Montpelier

Present: Bill Manner (Southeast Union Rep); Marli Rupe (DEC Rep); Nina Gage (VAAFMM Rep); Jill Arace (VACD); Kerry O'Brien (NRCC Administrator); Jess Buckley (Ag Programs Manager); Somara Zwick (NRCC Business Manager); Tim Buzzell (Northeast Union Rep); Richard Noel (Northwest Union Rep); John Thurgood (USDA NRCS); Rick Hopkins (Co-Chair, Central Union Rep); Dan Lerner (UVM Extension Rep); Vicky Drew (USDA NRCS)

Meeting Opened: 1:04pm. Rick called the meeting to order

Previous Meeting Minutes: Bill made a motion and Marli seconded to approve the previous meeting minutes as presented.

Staff Updates:

Update from Holden (provided by Kerry): Applied for 2020 DEC Woody Buffer Block Grant this week, this would focus on non-LCB areas of the state as LCBP grant will fund plantings through 2021 planting season. Application was about \$70k, for 13.5 acres. Project Development not included in RFP like last year, will be a separate RFP. Working to get the 2020 Basin Planning agreement in place. Have not received an updated draft for the 2020 amendment from DEC yet, but will be reaching out to DEC to get status update. Receiving interim reports from Districts for Project Development activities, a small amount of funds remaining from 1st and 2nd round RFP to districts so there will be an additional round early next year for any remaining amount. Working on closing out Design/Implementation 2018 block grant: 4/22 projects are currently open, rest have submitted materials and/or billed for services. 2019 block grant: early/1st round applications are now in, we have set up a review committee with WUV/RPCs where we will review each other's' projects. Good communication between DEC and other grant recipients (WUV and RPCs) as this grant gets underway. Applications mostly from Districts but have had a handful of inquiries from external organizations. New finalized statewide Conservation District logo. Working on annual report - draft by the end of the month.

Holden and Giana Petito from Winooski NRCD have been representing Districts at Act 76 to support process.

Update from Jess: Districts have been working on reporting to Ag-CWIP. Two years of reporting in a 4-year agreement, it's 57% complete. Additional funds have been awarded to amend the next two years of work. Jess also working on getting 2020 RCPP agreement out, as well as agreements for wetlands outreach. Training coming up in December for Conservation Districts on work planning (GANTT charts, etc.).

Update from Somara: Just finalized October financials at the last Finance Committee meeting. NRCC's financial position is stable and on target with our budget projections. Somara is working to get Bill Manner signed up as an authorized bank signature since Beth's departure from the board. Somara will be retiring at the end of June and will be supporting the transition of a new staff person.

Update for Kerry: Kerry is working with Jill to prepare a job description for a new Finance Manager that will be shared between NRCC and VACD. The position is expected to be full time and help support financial

management but also play a role in Human Resource support for the Conservation Districts. Recruitment will begin in January and hope to have the position in place by the end of February. In addition, a Communications/Administrative Assistant position is also getting considered for next year to support VACD and Program Managers.

Ag Water Quality Partnership Coordinator position update: Jill reported the recruitment process is underway for this position, 27 applications were received and 3 have been selected for interviews. Interviews are next week. Funding for this position is shared among NRCC, VAAFM, VACD, DEC, LCBP, USFWS, and NRCS. Hire date second week of January. **March 10th is the Ag Water Quality Partnership Annual Meeting, Norwich University.**

NRCS-NRCD Memorandum of Agreement Update: The agreement was edited through the subcommittee and submitted to NRCS Grants and Agreements. They were fine with edits but they developed a new template amending our edits that needs to be reviewed. John summarized the new additions to the MOA template. There will be a second agreement which will codify the sharing of resources between each NRCD and NRCS. NRCDs that do not desire an exchange of resources will not need to sign. The intent is still to have the state-level MOA signed by all. Discussion about inclusion of State of Vermont in agreement. Next step: Subcommittee will meet to prepare a new draft. Kerry will prepare bullets of progress. Expectation is three more months will be needed.

NRCS is receiving guidance from their National office on vehicle use and are interested in putting more liability on Districts. It was discussed that Districts have adequate insurance to cover this. The MOA committee will review this. Jill requested that the NRCD-level agreement templates also be reviewed at the MOA meeting.

Supervisory Union Updates:

Richard - NW Union: Franklin County NRCD was awarded a tile drainage monitoring contract. Stream Restoration project is underway on a tributary to Rock River, reducing 450 lbs of phosphorus. Franklin County NRCD is conducting wetlands outreach, has reached 19 landowners. Dayton Fleury retired from the Franklin Board. Rick and Jill met with Grand Isle NRCD and they have just hired a new program manager, Emily Porter-Goff.

Rick – Central Union: Winooski is recruiting a new Supervisor to their board. Winooski was experiencing cash flow issues and is working with NRCC to resolve and working towards securing a line of credit. They are working on town allocations from 6-7 towns in their District. Consultant has been hired to develop their strategic plan. They are working on celebrating their 80th year.

Bill – SE Union: Windham County NRCD has hired a new District Manager, Cory Ross. The two Districts will be meeting together soon. Ottauquechee NRCD will be hosting a legislative cocktail hour.

Tim – NE Union: Orleans County NRCD discussed their required supervisor election legal notices that are required each year. They discussed advertising more broadly in AgriView and other publications. There was a suggestion that NRCC help support this. Essex County NRCD was awarded two large contracts in May from DEC and is experiencing slow processing time for agreements. Caledonia County NRCD is supporting the development of the Basin 14 Basin Plan, including the Wells and Stevens watershed in Caledonia. Ticklenaked Pond is impaired for phosphorus within the Wells River basin, so Caledonia is working with their Basin Planner to continue monitoring this watershed and follow up on action items.

DEC Report – Marli: An update was released about grants through the Clean Water Initiative listserve. DEC Woody Buffer Block Grant committee is meeting next week. DEC is in the last year of a 5-year RCPP grant and were offered the opportunity to renew that. DEC is assisting Audobon with an RCPP application for River Corridor work. Marli recognized the concerns with the DEC Business Office – DEC is not able to add state employees, which is challenging considering the increase in funding and need to manage that. There will be a new position filled in the Business office soon, but this was only possible because a position was lost elsewhere. If any District has direct concerns with delays with a specific agreement, please contact Marli. There is a DEC stakeholder group led by Neil Kamman to develop language for the Clean Water Service Providers which will need to be in place by November 2020. There is a Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) workgroup that is working to develop guidance for how the state can provide this.

VAAFM Report – Nina: VAAFM is working through Ag-CWIP agreements. They are supportive of the Conservation Districts doing regional coordination work and more project development on farms. They are partnering with UVM on pasture work and engaging Conservation Practice survey work. There is currently an emergency statewide exemption for spreading on snow statewide, with guidelines, through December 15th. This is in response to an increase in precipitation and early snow. VAAFM is working on final touches on their RCPP application to NRCS, focus is innovation and partnership on whole farm nutrient balance and precision feed management. CEAP grant requests came in at 2.6 million, reviewing these over next two weeks with grants out by end of January. There is a report forthcoming from the Secretary of Administration regarding agriculture intersect with Clean Water Service Providers. If anyone would like to advertise in AgriView, contact Nina.

VACD Update – Jill: Jill acknowledged Sonja Howlett, Nina Gage, and Jess Buckley in their support for the Ag WQ Partnership Coordinator work. VACD provided a letter of support for VAAFM's RCPP proposal. Franklin County NRCD is submitting a proposal to RCPP in partnership with Agrilab Technologies to support composting, building on phosphorus innovation challenge. VACD has hired two Program Assistants to support NRCS and a Conservation Planner. There is a workgroup focused on farmland conservation to discuss conservation easements and the intersect with Clean Water funds.

NRCS Update – Vicky: In concert with the statewide manure spreading exemption, NRCS sought a waiver of their requirements that prohibit this under the 590 standard. They have received word this will be granted. Today is the deadline for RCPP, expecting a total of 4 proposals. NRCS will be ranking by March. Farm Bill is still up in the air. They were allowed to continue their programs in 2019, but they don't have this authority in 2020. CSP regulations are out for public comment. They will not be able to process applications until rules are out but are continuing to accept applications. NRCS has a new assessment and ranking tool called CART (Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool), which will dramatically change how applications are processed. EQIP budget is \$3 million short of last year. TA budget will be 1.2 million which is down from 3 million. Expecting a very lean year unless things change. CIG supported on farm conservation trials were announced last week, UVM Extension was selected for cover crop work. New soil conservation in Brattleboro office. New engineer in Middlebury office starting in January. Many positions are open.

UVM Extension Update – Dan: Heather Darby was awarded a national CIG grant to develop improvements to cover crop function so it doesn't sacrifice yield. There will be funds for 30 participating farms for trials and compensation for risk. Joshua Faulkner received two grants for monitoring as well. Focusing on grass-based agriculture with support from VAAFM. UVM Extension is participating in Farm Show in January. Large program/events will start in the new year, no-till cover crop symposium, Hops, Hemp, Organic dairy, etc. UVM Extension has reconfigured their programs after a strategic planning process and will now be redesigning the

way they report the work they do. They will also be overhauling their website. New president of UVM. Working toward hiring a Forestry staff person focused on riparian areas – working with existing partners, grant writing.

Next Meeting: Suggestion for NRCC next meeting to focus on deeper discussion of programs. Suggestion to include in-depth review of legislative reports.

Next Meeting Date: March 19th 1-4pm

Adjourned: 3:50pm