

# State Natural Resources Conservation Council

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

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## NRCC Full Board Meeting

Tuesday September 10th, 2019

1:00pm – 4:00pm

The Annex: 190 Junction Road, Montpelier

## AGENDA

<b>1:00pm: Open Meeting</b>	Rick/Beth
<b>1:05: Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes</b>	Board
<b>1:10: Staff Updates</b>	Kerry O'Brien Holden Sparacino Somara Zwick
<b>1:45: NRCS-NRCD Memorandum of Agreement Update</b>	Kerry/John/Vicky
<b>2:15: Agriculture Water Quality Partnership (AWQP) Coordinator Position</b>	Jill Arace
<b>2:50: Member Updates</b>	
• Supervisory Union Reps	Reps
• DEC Update	Marli Rupe
• AAFM Update	Nina Gage
• VACD Update	Jill Arace
• NRCS Update	Vicky Drew
• UVM Extension	Rep
<b>3:45: Other Business</b>	
- Plan Next Meeting	Open
<b>4:00: Adjourn</b>	

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

September 10, 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); Holden Sparacino (Water Quality Programs Manager); John Thurgood (USDA NRCS); Rick Hopkins (Co-Chair, Central Union Rep); Dan Lerner (UVM Extension Rep); Paul Wagner (South Central Union Rep); Vicky Drew (USDA NRCS)

**Meeting Opened:** 1:07pm. Rick called the meeting to order  
Roundtable introductions

**VAAFMM Update:** Nina provided an update from VAAFMM

- FAP (Farm Agronomic Practices) "season" at VAAFMM. They have received more FAP requests than funds, but 18,000 acres worth of practices are proposed
- CEAP Grant – Conservation Equipment Request for Proposals (RFP) is out, applications due November 1<sup>st</sup>. Innovative equipment emphasized, some examples of equipment are provided but not limited to the list. Funding farms of all different sizes.
- Currently reviewing Ag-Clean Water Initiative Program (AG-CWIP) proposals, and they've had initial meetings with applicants to discuss adjustments. Total request was \$2.8M, annualized at \$884,000.
- Nina provided the dairy data update for September. We've lost 25 farms since January; milk prices are rising slightly.
- Conservation Practice Survey: Nina discussed the interest in working with farms to complete these surveys to help better account for nutrient reductions by accounting for what farms are doing on their own.

**Previous Meeting Minutes:** Bill made a motion and Richard seconded to approve the previous meeting minutes as presented. The motion was approved.

## **Staff Updates:**

**Agriculture Programs Manager, Jess Buckley:** Jess recently met with VAAFMM to discuss modification of NRCC's Ag-CWIP proposal. Meeting in October scheduled to discuss VACD and NRCS staffing. Recent grant agreement for the NRCDs to provide wetland outreach work over the next two years. The goal of the agreement is to train Districts on the various resources for wetlands conservation to help better connect landowners to these resources. The other goal of the agreement is to bridge better connections between landowners and state and federal resources. The agreement does not have to do with current regulatory discussions around wetlands.

Jill acknowledged the hard work Jess Buckley did on behalf of NRCC and the Districts to pull together a statewide proposal to the Ag-CWIP program. Thank you Jess.

**Water Quality Program Manager, Holden Sparacino:** The FY2020 Tactical Basin Planning agreement is currently in the works. All the agreements related to Trees for Streams funding for the Districts have been finalized and RFPs for buffer projects expected this fall. The Design and Implementation Block Grant was just executed and a recent meeting took place to discuss changes in the new agreement. Project Development agreements for the first round were just released, there are remaining funds so another RFP will be released to Districts. A Financial site review took place between NRCC and DEC where internal controls were reviewed. DEC was pleased with NRCC financial management system and had no recommendations for changes. There is an open District Manager position in Windham County, the job description is on the VACD website. Holden has also been working on integration with Act 76 and will be attending a meeting tomorrow with DEC leadership.

**NRCC Business Manager, Somara Zwick:** Somara distributed and reviewed NRCC's Preliminary FY20 Budget. She also provided a list of active agreements with NRCC. There was a 25% increase in revenue from FY19. Bill made a motion and Richard seconded to approve the FY20 budget, the motion was approved.

**NRCC Administrator, Kerry O'Brien:** The NRCD's Core Service agreements were recently signed and executed for FY20, which includes capacity building support. The Conservation District Guidance Handbook was just printed and released, copies will be distributed through District Managers on Friday.

**State-level MOA:** Kerry outlined feedback from the NRCDs on the current draft of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between NRCS, NRCDs, VAAFM, ANR. Kerry will schedule a sub-committee to unpack the feedback from the Districts and discuss edits and next steps (Vicky, John, Jill, Kerry, Rick). Vicky indicated the goal is to have a final draft and signatures by the end of the year.

**VT Ag Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP) Update:** Jill discussed the background of the formation of the VAWQP, which was formed to promote improved communications among partners, provide improved technical and financial assistance to farmers, and accelerate water quality. Following a strategic planning process, it was recognized that the efforts warranted a staff person. Jill provided a job description. NRCC was the selected entity to house this staff person as many of the current partners are already serving on the board of NRCC. The current budget is \$375,000 (3 years) which includes a full-time staff person and stipends for partners at the local level. Funds are currently getting secured through the various partners. Bill made a motion and Marli seconded to support the position through NRCC. It was discussed to ensure the position was statewide. The motion was approved.

**Supervisory Union Updates:**

*Supervisory Unions were encouraged to communicate within their Unions prior to meetings, and asked to focus their reports for this meeting on agricultural coordination. Feedback is welcome from NRCC members on focusing feedback for future SUs each meeting.*

**Northeast Union, Tim Buzzell:** Tim shared that Orleans County NRCD provided extensive feedback on the question of agricultural coordination in her area and he suggested it be shared directly with NRCC. Essex and Caledonia County both shared that they're challenged by garnering public input (for local workgroups), they've opted to meet instead with ag service providers and FSA county committee.

**Southeast Union, Bill Manner:** White River is providing ag support for Ottauquechee. Windham County NRCD is seeking a new District Manager. Bill shared that Ottauquechee recently wrapped up an ERP grant for a stormwater project. He also shared that ONRCD received a letter from a company in England indicating copyright infringement on a photo used from google in their newsletter. The issue was resolved.

**South Central Union, Paul Wagner:** Paul shared that Otter Creek is having trouble getting a quorum at board meetings, UVM Extension is very active in their area. He indicated there is keen public awareness of the phosphorus problem and reliance on grants.

**Central Union, Rick Hopkins:** Rick indicated they discussed the value in the Supervisory Unions, getting more guidance on support and improving communication within their SU. He shared that Jennifer Byrne from White River NRCD and been active in supporting NMPs with small farms in her area, active with Lake Fairlee's greeter program, and good success with their no-till drill. Winooski NRCD is working on their strategic plan, particularly given the growth of programs. NMP work is active in Winooski following successful "kitchen table" talks. He recommended the author Edward Wilson and his writings on ecology and "half earth" model and noted the Edward Wilson Foundation is now in VT and is focusing on protection of the Winooski River. (google Edward Wilson "half earth" for more info).

**Northwest Union, Richard Noel:** Primary Ag coordination in Franklin County involves regular collaboration among partners and utilization of the Ag Partners Database. He indicated the Partners Database has been useful, but too early to tell if it's helping improve communication/coordination yet. He mentioned Grand Isle District and how they can better engage this District or perhaps merge with Franklin County NRCD. Franklin County NRCD is working on a dam removal project, soil testing, tile drain study, and stream water quality monitoring. They've just hired a new Americorps intern.

**ANR Update, Marli Rupe:**

DEC is working on renewing their RCPP grant and requesting another \$10 million to continue for another 5 years, continuing to support NRCS practices but with a deeper dive on cropping practices and incentives for farms. DEC is issuing a small grant round to support dam removals and other natural resource projects this fall. Alli Lewis is back from maternity leave and can respond to questions about DEC grants. DEC just went through a reorganization. There is a new division called the Water Investment Division, which includes CWIP, Facilities and Engineering, and Basin Planning. Watershed Management Division is still there and continues to include regulatory and permitting.

**VACD Update, Jill Arace:** VACD and NRCS conducted a Lean process this summer to discuss staffing and VACD integration in NRCS offices. They outlined some significant changes, which include expansion of Land Treatment Planners scope of work to include Conservation Plans, NRCS Soil Conservationist unloading contracting, and clarity for Zone Conservationist managing VACD and NRCS staff regionally. There will not be an VACD Annual Meeting this year because of the myriad of other partner meetings and technical trainings that are taking place, and the challenges with supervisory participation.

**NRCS Update Vicky Drew:** Vicky also referenced the Lean process and how they are looking forward to the changes taking hold and implementing new trainings. RCPP announcement is out. She encouraged applicants to think out of the box and indicated NRCS's openness to fund activities they haven't funded before. NRCS Chief Matt Lohr will be in Vermont 10/7-9<sup>th</sup> and they will be touring Addison and Franklin County farms. There will be a press event on 10/8 with the Chief and UVM Extension announcing a new study – NRCC and NRCDs encouraged to attend this event. New Farm Bill to implement next year and will involve changes and staff trainings. They are hiring various positions and making good progress. NRCS has obligated \$10 million through EQIP, they are hoping to obligate \$13.5 million. Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) has expanded and Soil Conservationist are working hard on these contracts. NRCS's longtime Program Assistant from the Northeast zone, Linere Silloway, passed away suddenly last week. Her service is scheduled for October 12<sup>th</sup>.

**UVM Extension, Dan Lerner:** They are seeking a coordinator for grazing and grass-based work to build capacity to organize and coordinate this work. They are also in the process of interviewing for a Forestry Watershed Coordinator, coordinating tree plantings in riparian areas. Dan discussed their new designation as a land grant institution and looking forward to the opportunities it affords.

**Next Meeting December 3, 2019: 1-4pm The Annex**

**Meeting Adjourned: 4:05pm**