

Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Council

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

Meeting Minutes

January 21, 2014

UVM Extension Conference Room, Berlin

Present: Michelle Gudorf, Jill Arace, Kerry O'Brien, Bill Manner (Ottauquechee), Bridget Bowen, Alan Shelvey (Rutland), Norm Smith, Jeff Carter (on phone), Vicky Drew, Paul Wagner, Kim Komer, Jim Ryan, Kari Dolan (left at 2:00), Laura DiPietro

Meeting Opened: 1:00pm. Linda called the meeting to order.

Previous Meeting Minutes: Michelle moved and Jeff seconded to approve the previous meeting minutes as printed. The motion was approved.

Legislative Updates: Jill reported on bills in the legislature and items of interest ahead

Shoreland Protection bill: passed through House, in Senate. Real intent of this bill is to improve habitat. Water quality is part of this, but the intent is more toward improving wildlife habitat around lakes.

GMO labeling: In Senate

Bill to remove tax on Compost

New bill prohibiting littering in waters in the state

Act 138 bill. 586. – Water Quality Bill, includes quite a bit on small farms including livestock exclusion, certification, and several other items included recommendation of the agricultural working group. They are taking testimony on this bill, not sure it will get passed this year.

Discussion of Act 250 and the definition of prime Ag soils. Bill 448.

Bill including \$75K for Skidder Bridges

Governor's Budget Speech – proposing an additional \$1.1 million to ERP and a .9 million increase to VHCB.

Bill about Dams which removes the authority of NRCDs to register agricultural dams.

Updates from Kari Dolan, Ecosystem Restoration Program

ERP grant program – the governor has proposed an additional \$1.1 million to the program. The funds are still capital funds, so will support on the ground projects. 2014 ERP grants have moved to June of this year. ERP will be targeting money toward tactical basin plan projects and removing competition for

these projects. David Pasco will be the new grants administrator (replacing Heather) and he will hold trainings for applicants. The Lake Champlain TMDL – a public commentary effort was conducted and EPA submitted comments as well to reframe the efforts to clean up the lake. There are four bills in the legislative, one is 586 or the “omnibus” bill, presenting a comprehensive, multi-sector discussion but likely too large to pass. Two bills – House (600) and Senate (288) versions are intended to discuss funding, resources and administration and tasks ANR to produce recommendations for funding. If EPA were to administer the TMDL, they would apply very coarse and costly measures through the clean water act, and farms and municipalities would have to operate under a clean water act permit. ANR is working on administering a tactical basin planning approach, and implementing this plan by watershed. Kari discussed MS4 permitting, and including more municipalities to treat more volume of stormwater. Kari discussed streambank erosion as a significant phosphorus contributor and discussed questions about buffers. EPA is supportive of Vermont’s Rivers program and recognizes that managing a channel toward natural stability takes time.

Farm Bill – Update from Vicky Drew

Components of the bill are currently under discussion and include dairy provisions, and discussions about stabilization of milk production. Also points on compliance, commodity payments, and crop insurance. Also discussing food stamps, dairy pricing, etc. It is expected that it will take through the end of the month. NRCS will likely be combining programs, eliminating WHIP, and merging easement programs. Regional equity is being revised as well. NRCS is operating under the old farm bill. Transitioning to a new farm bill in the middle of the fiscal year will be a challenge.

Agricultural Outreach Initiative (AOI) 2014 – Updates from Laura

Laura described the re-framing of the program to better address gaps in service. The AOI will focus on nutrient management planning, especially since all farms will likely be required to have a NMP (bill in leg). Two ways to get an NMP – write it yourself with assistance from UVM Extension or hire a private consultant. This program would help provide soil and manure testing to gear up farms to write their own NMPs or enroll in other soil health initiative course. Discussions took place with UVM Extension to have AOI help boost enrollment in NMP classes and they were supportive. The program includes a tracking spreadsheet to summarize the aggregate results of the soil and manure testing. The program will also take the Conservation Practice Guide and make it web based. NRCC will also have a role in this program and participate – NRCC will have to approve the tracking spreadsheet, continue the discussion on AOI and gaps in service, review the 6 month and final reports and suggest changes. NRCC will also review general program development and outreach strategies for farms and provide feedback. Laura suggested NRCC may need conference calls to discuss this program. A survey form is also suggested for NMP classes or other soil health initiatives which NRCC would also review.

NRCC comments on current program, clarifications:

- AOI program targets small farms only that are don’t currently have an NMP

- Clarify that there is no double dipping in NRCS NMP programs and AOI, farms can hire us to do soil and manure testing independently of this program. Tracking will help limit this. Every farm in the state is eligible for Nutrient Management Planning funds CAP plan through EQIP.
- Training on targeting fields – which are high priority? Near barn yards? The fields with the best soil because they are visited most frequently. NRCS could provide the training, UVM would provide training on how to take a sample.
- Horse farms were discussed, and the idea of applying this program to permanent pastureland in addition to crop and hayland. The Grazing Management Plan would be the product of these efforts.
- There was a discussion about NMPs not including all pasture, and grazing management plans not necessarily including nutrients.

NRCC vote on AOI Program

- Laura moved to amend the AOI agreement to include grazing management and NMP, focus the priority on small livestock farms, to add language to ensure no double dipping with related state and federal programs, target up to 10 fields per farm for soil sampling and target fields with most frequent nutrient application, place no limit on # of manure sampling, and compile and report aggregate survey information back to NRCC. Jim seconded. The motion was approved.

Other business

Michelle will be planning a subcommittee meeting for the NRCD Performance and Reporting Standards, she will send an email. Goal is to have criteria in place by May for the next Base Allocation Agreement.

Michelle has invited a guest speaker for our next meeting – Jens Hawkins-Hilke, who provides assistance and resources to municipal planners to protect wildlife, forest health and habitat. He will be discussing forestland conservation and how NRCDs can work better with conservation commissions. NRCS will also provide a presentation on forestry programs. Michelle would like to recruit more supervisors to this meeting as well. March 11th at the VAST conference room. Vermont Woodlands Association will also be invited.

Rick Kirn is planning a statewide summit on AOP and culvert replacements.

Laura mentioned a training on river rules, ditch rules and floodplain rules on farms – training will be held for field people that will be talking to farms to help clarify these rules. February 10th at Aldrich Public Library in Barre in the Milne Room.

Meeting Adjourned: 4:05pm. Jim moved and Laura seconded, the motion was approved.