

State Natural Resources Conservation Council

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

Meeting Minutes

UVM Extension Conference Room, Berlin

April 22, 2015

Present: Linda Corse (NRCC Co-Chair, Southeast Union Rep), Jeff Carter (UVM Extension), Larry Hamel (Northeast Union Rep), Larry Kasden (Ottauquechee NRCD), Alan Shelvey (South Central Union Rep), Rick Hopkins (VT DEC), Michelle Gudorf (NRCC Co-chair, Northwest Union Rep), Kim Komer (Lamoille County NRCD), Kerry O'Brien (NRCC Administrator, Caledonia County NRCD), Mike Raboin (Central Union Rep), Ryan Patch (VACD), Jim Wood (NRCS); ON PHONE: Laura DiPietro (VTAAFM)

Meeting Opened: 9:35am. Linda called the meeting to order. Roundtable Introductions

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

Roundtable Updates from NRCC Reps:

Larry Hamel reported for NE supervisory union. Orleans County NRCD settling in with Leah Szafranski as new DM, there is a vacancy on the board. The Orleans County forester is now an associate on the board. She is largely focused on getting information about the District out to the area, and will be working collaboratively with Caledonia and Essex County NRCDs on the RCPP program.

Alan reported for South Central Supervisory Union. He shared stormwater projects they're working on, erosion control project, building a skidder bridge, installing buffer projects.

Rick reported for DEC. Ecosystem Restoration Program just had a deadline for accepting 2016 proposals. There will be a second round this year, perhaps a third. There will not be 319 funds available for grants. Watershed Grant 2015 awarded are getting contracts for selected projects. H.35 and S.49 legislation is getting discussed right now, Rick passed around a summary of the 143 page bill. After 4 years of effort, the Lake Champlain phosphorus-based TMDL is still undergoing development by EPA Region 1. Once it is complete, EPA will hold one or more public meetings to take comment on the draft TMDL before it is finalized.

Larry Kasden updated NRCC on Ottauquechee NRCD projects.

Jim Wood reported for NRCS. Expecting a lot of waste storage projects through EQIP and working to keep up with the engineering demands of projects. Emphasis on agronomic pool has increased, cover cropping, buffers, waterways etc. Nutrient Management is also a large focus. ACEP will be announced in May. NRCS is working with DEC and VTAAFM to follow state priorities with targeting watersheds and EQIP funds will also be targeted towards these efforts. NRCS cooperative agreements with VACD are helping fund Land Treatment Planners. NRCS also has a cooperative agreement with Fish and Wildlife for staff to help with the technical aspects of USDA programs focused on wildlife. Monitoring program going on for edge of field BMPs, looking at a variety of practices on small study sites.

Michelle reported for NW Supervisory Union. The NW Districts had a meeting together in March, with Vicky Drew. Grand Isle's DM resigned and their board is working with Michelle and Kim Komer and Jill from VACD to assist them with a strategy and recruitment process for new DM. There was discussion of more collaboration between Franklin and Gl. Lamoille County NRCD conducted a strategic planning session to discuss natural resource concerns in their District.

Mike reported for Central Supervisory Union. Winooski had a meeting with White River. White River NRCD received a grant for a no-till planter, and Winooski as an aerator for rent as well. It was discussed that these practices will be studied for the edge of field monitoring program. Winooski is having a large tree sale they are working on currently. Discussion followed about DEC requirements for grantees, which will now include Conflict of Interest Policies.

Jeff Carter reported for UVM Extension. Three Agronomists working in the field, conducting NMP classes and focusing on NMP updates. UVM Ext does a great deal of outreach and education with farms. He indicated that some District supervisors he's working with need more education and support. 60 people showed up for soil health workshop they recently put on. They've had coverage on Across the Fence. He agreed that reaching out to small farmers is very important. A farmer watershed alliance has formed in the CT valley, Ryan attended and shared resources.

Linda reported for Southeast Supervisory Union. They are very busy with the plant sale as well.

Laura reported for VTAAFM. The state of Vermont also has RCPP funding, which will support conservation planning and BMP implementation on conserved farms. They've been working with the legislature, and if funding permits, VTAAFM will be able to hire 7 positions. BMP and CREP rules will also be re-evaluated and updated. Current temp position in St. Albans Bay are reviewing NMPs, evaluating if there were set up correctly and following up with the farm on implementation. Enforcement process will be updated as well, particularly for farms that don't comply after repeated attempts to correct water quality violations. VTAAFM is very supportive of farms who are taking steps, and it is recognized how complicated these processes can be.

Districts Agriculture Programs Report

Ryan reviewed the ARS program accomplishments, including the objectives of the program such as education of AAPs, ground water testing, conservation planning and coordination of BMPs on farms. The program accomplishments from 2009-2014, 2700 farm visits were conducted, 962 Tier 2 visits. He discussed more details of the different Tiers of work with photos of projects, including components of Conservation Plans and implementation of BMPs.

Kerry shared the results of the AOI program. A final report was submitted to VTAAFM last Friday, Kerry will share the report with others. 106 small livestock farms participated in the AOI program, with 42 completing the 5-week NMP class. A total of 8799 acres were soil sampled, and the soil data results indicated that 14% of the fields sampled were excessive in phosphorus. Approximately 60% of the corn fields sampled were high in phosphorus. The soil data is independent of other factors such as slope, proximity to waterway and other data that would provide an assessment of how these data attribute to water quality. The AOI program was evaluated prior to the proposal to RCPP to discuss how it could be changed to improve the impact of the program.

Ryan shared the RCPP program, which provides 5-years of funding to a slightly modified version of the AOI program. Small livestock farms will continue to be the target audience. The program will still involve supporting NMP development on small farms, with a goal of 60 farms a year. Program goals include helping to reduce phosphorus and nitrogen on farms, assisting farm with EQIP program, assist farms with getting ahead of regulations, and providing follow up assistance to farms to ensure they implement the NMP. There will be regional staff leadership for the program and there will be increased Land Treatment Planning support which was a bottleneck for the AOI program.

NRCC District Capacity Building Subcommittee Update

The NRCC DCB subcommittee has been managing a 42,000 budget to increase Districts' capacity. Michelle presented a table that summarized the content and objectives of Districts capacity building grants. A consultant was hired to review and refine Districts surveys and reporting mechanisms.

Proposed FY 2016 Budget.

The state budget hasn't passed yet, but the NRCC budget for 2016 is based on an allocation of \$112,000. This budget would allow for \$7000 per District. Concerns were expressed about losing the capacity building funds, the professional development, and the administrative time. Jim suggested contacting Vicky to discuss funding from NRCS. Evaluating how we might be able to strategize with the \$7000 per District was also discussed. A long term strategy for NRCC needs to be discussed, particularly with the administrative position for NRCC that is needed long term. Finance committee will work to propose a budget once the state budget passes, and capacity building subcommittee will also review the budget. Kerry will email NRCC a final budget for approval.

Meeting adjourned 12:35pm.

Submitted by,

Kerry O'Brien, NRCC Administrator