

**State of Vermont**  
**State Natural Resources Conservation Council**  
PO Box 231  
Waitsfield, VT 05673  
[vacd.org/nrcc](http://vacd.org/nrcc)

### **NRCC Board Meeting**

Thursday, February 27, 10:00 AM

Location: The Bennington Room, Davis 3 Building, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, 1 National Life Dr, Montpelier, VT 05620, USA

Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81961595335?pwd=CV3TQR5VfaS4ydhqrWqpNap3MMasDJ.1>

Meeting ID: 819 6159 5335

Passcode: NRCC25

Dial in: 1-929-205-6099

Meeting held in person and remotely via Zoom:

### **NRCC Voting Members:**

Rick Hopkins - Board Chair, Central Union Rep, Winooski NRCD

Linda Corse - Southeast Union Rep, Windham County NRCD

Richard Noel - Northwest Union Rep, Franklin County NRCD

Willie Nickerson – Northeast Union Rep, Caledonia County NRCD

Alan Shelvey, South Central Union Rep, Rutland NRCD

Brian Vargo – Southwest Union Rep, Bennington NRCD

Nina Gage - Vermont Agency of Agriculture Rep, Food and Markets Rep

Marli Rupe – Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Rep, Agricultural & Water Quality

Roy Beckford - Extension Director-University of Vermont

### **NRCC Non-Voting Board Members:**

Travis Thomason - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Rep

### **Attendees:**

Board members: Rick Hopkins, Central Union Rep & Board Chair; Nina Gage, VAAFM Rep; Marli Rupe, Vermont ANR Rep; Linda Corse, Southeast Union Rep; Roy Beckford, UVM Extension Rep; Travis Thompson, USDA NRCS Rep.

Other Attendees: Laura DiPietro, VAAFM; Cory Ross, DM Representative, Windham NRCD; Sarah Damsell, DM Representative, Orleans NRCD; Jess Miller, NRCC/VACD Grants & Finance Manager; Clare Ireland, Administrator, NRCC; Emily Nummer, Agricultural Program Manager, VACD/NRCC; Alli Lewis, VAWQP Coordinator; Julia King, Communications Manager, VACD/NRCC; and Katy Langenhorst, ECO AmeriCorps, VACD.



## **AGENDA**

- Welcome
- Review and approve December meeting minutes (Rick) – 5 minutes
- Impact of Executive Orders and Changes to Federal Funding (Clare) – 30 minutes
- Grant Proposals, Approvals, and Updates
  - Core Services One-Time Funding - Update (Clare) – 5 minutes
  - DEC Grant Updates (Lina) – 5 minutes
- Break – 10 minutes
- Statute & Admin Updates
  - Update on NRCC Statute Committee (Rick & Clare) – 5 minutes
  - State Insurance Coverage for NRCC and NRCDs (Clare) – 5 minutes
  - Approval of Finance Policy and Procurement Policy (Clare) – 5 minutes
- Supervisory Union Rep Updates – 20 minutes
- Partner Updates – 20 minutes
- DM Rep Report – 15 minutes
- Other business, as required

## **Welcome & Introductions**

Introductions were made, and the meeting was called to order at 10:00 am.

## **Review & Approve December Meeting Minutes**

Linda made the motion, seconded by Nina to approve the meeting minutes of December 18, 2024. After a call for a vote, all were in favor.

## **Impact of Executive Orders & Changes to Federal Funding**

Clare reported that in general, because Council holds mostly state grants it has a lower risk. The impact to NRCC is mostly felt through the impact to VACD, to districts, and to partners. Clare outlined those impacts:

### **Impacts to VACD:**

VACD has a total of Farm Bill Support (IRA): \$745,126 on hold

RCPP Technical Assistance grant (IRA): \$300,000 on hold

VAWQP Coordination through LCBP: \$120,000 on hold, but notified agreements are going forward soon

Envirothon through USFS: \$5,000 on hold

### **Impacts to Districts:**

Essex County NRCD, Fish passage culvert replacement (BIL): \$1,193,875 uncertain

Franklin County NRCD, Trout Brook reservoir dam removal (BIL): \$116,987 uncertain



Winooski NRCD, Culvert replacement in Washington, VT (BIL): \$300,000 on hold  
Winooski NRCD, Road improvements in Hinesburg, VT through LCBP: \$192,000 on hold  
Poultney Mettowee NRCD, Nursery Organizational Support (BIL): \$20,000 on hold  
Poultney Mettowee NRCD through LCBP: \$60,000 uncertain  
Grand Isle NRCD, Organizational support through LCBP: \$12,000 uncertain  
Grand Isle NRCD, Education & Outreach through LCBP: \$2,000 uncertain  
Windham NRCD, Reducing Nitrogen loss from CT River Agriculture through NFWF: \$373,646 uncertain  
Windham NRCD, Japanese Stilt Grass Early Detection Rapid Response through USFWS: \$63,400 uncertain  
Rutland NRCD, Organizational Support through LCBP: \$19,977 uncertain  
White River NRCD, Climate Corps: \$400,000 cancelled  
Bennington NRCD, Climate Corps: cancelled

**Impacts to NRCC:**

Trees for Streams through LCBP: \$174,978 uncertain  
Trees for Streams through NFWF: \$88,275 uncertain

Total Cancelled: \$400,000  
Total On Hold: \$1,682,126  
Total Uncertain \$2,285,138

Roy Beckford asked what “uncertain” versus “on hold” or “cancelled” meant. Clare explained that on the chart, “cancelled” means that there has been a stop work order issued or some other kind of official notification of grant termination received. “On hold” indicates grants under which grantees have been told that payments are “frozen” or that invoices cannot be submitted at this time. “Uncertain” indicates that no payment is being made under the grant, but it’s unclear why due to lack of communication from the funder or conflicting communications.

Cory added that both Windham and Rutland have agreements with American Farmland Trust to do conservation planning work and have been notified that the federal government is not paying.

Clare noted that ultimately the risks are passed on to the lowest level i.e. districts and contractors. This means many small organizations are left holding the bag, with the potential risk of compromising their ability to make payroll. NRCC is looking at ways to expedite payment of district invoices to help with cashflow and is working with partners to see if additional support can be offered.

**Grant Proposals, Approvals, and Updates****Core Services One-Time Funding-Update**

Clare reported that Council released \$100,000 in one-time funding prioritizing needs for compliance with Open Meeting Law, financial management best practices, ADA law, and OSHA rules. Thirteen of the fourteen districts applied and were awarded between \$1,000 to \$15,000. There is approximately \$6,500 left which will be reserved as we assess the need to help districts with items stemming from the federal executive orders or government shutdown.



### **DEC Grant Updates**

The Design and Implementation Block grant that has been open since 2019 has closed out. \$2.6 million has been awarded to support 110 projects. This had been replaced by the Enhancement Development Design and Implementation Block grant, and approximately \$1 million has been sub-granted to date. A new RFA is being released for \$1 million.

The Project Development grant has supported the development of 230 new projects.

### **Statute & Admin Updates**

#### **Update on NRCC Statute Committee**

Clare reported the committee members have been identified but a meeting time has not been established yet. Questions about how new open meeting law rules apply to districts have been submitted to the Secretary of State's office, but no response has been received.

#### **State Insurance Coverage for NRCC and NRCDs**

AOA will be developing a list of questions to go to districts to be used to get districts insured through the state. It is anticipated that this coverage will be less expensive and have more appropriate coverage for districts than offered by private insurers.

#### **Approval of Finance Policy and Procurement Policy**

Because there was no quorum, this was postponed to the next meeting.

### **Partner Updates**

#### **NRCS, Travis Tomason**

- USDA & NRCS priorities are not known yet under a recently appointed secretary.
- The pause on IRA funds for producer conservation delivery contracts has been lifted.
- Ready to start obligating general EQIP and CSP.
- Moving ahead with locally led conservation framework.
- All employees are physically back in the office with no impacts to partners.
- Lost probationary employees and currently in a hiring freeze.
- The administration is directing all agencies to reduce work forces.

#### **VAAFM, Laura DiPietro and Nina Gage**

- They have a new joint Ag/River Engineer in the Middlebury NRCS office
- The Clean Water Budget is going through process with no anticipated problems.
- Avian influenza continues to be a concern
- Nina noted upcoming deadlines for FAP (April 3rd) and DMP (May 1st)
- Meetings to develop Vermont based policies and ideas to support and continue to innovate in the dairy industry across the state.
- There are several different Current Use bills in the legislature.



- All funding under the Clean Water Initiative program that goes to NRCC is state funding and in a good place right now.
- A new round of AgCWIP will be released this fall.

#### **DM Rep Report**

- Working on locally led (local working group meetings, public forums, etc.) If districts are going to do this well on an ongoing basis, they will need more funding to continue this work.
- Guidance of what minimum services each district should do. Districts are currently spread too thin.
- Cory served on the hiring committee for the new VACD Executive Director.
- Sarah discussed the need for a subcommittee to talk specifically about programs to offer guidance on district work.
- Emily added that AgCWIP is filling gaps for the locally led work.

Clare noted that NRCC and VACD personnel are stretched pretty thin with legislature in session, the federal issues, and a number of staffing changes. She also noted the new VACD Executive Director will be coming on board soon.

Clare discussed how Core Funding is distributed now and if one FTE per district goal is reached, how that funding could be allocated in the future, taking into account other metrics (i.e. acreage or population per district, farms per district, district performance etc.)

#### **Supervisory Union Rep Updates**

Linda noted VACD is struggling to find new supervisors to work on committees, and she noted she is very concerned about the damage being done with all the federal changes.

The meeting ended due to loss of internet connection and lack of quorum.

The next board meeting is scheduled for May 28, 2025.

