

Essex County Natural Resources Conservation District Board Meeting

August 21st, 2025

Meeting was called to order at 12:45 PM

Board attendance: Tim White, Ursula Johnson, Chris von Alt; Bill Manning absent

District staff: Sam Mayne, Clara Fernandez Odell, Sean Willison

Public: Dave Blodgett (NRCS)

Opening remarks

All welcomed Sean Willison on board as the newest ECNRCD employee.

Approval of meeting minutes:

Chris moved to pass the May meeting minutes, Ursula seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Financials

- Ursula moved to pass the June financial reports, Chris seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Accomplishments/Updates:

- Clara gave an update about agricultural programming, with input on NRCS news from Blodgett
 - The NRCS application Deadline is 8/22/25, and approximately 15 applications have been submitted to date, about half through contact with the District. This is up from the numbers typically submitted in the past, which all were happy to hear. Current indications are that NRCS programmatic funding is likely to stay about flat this year but staff levels are lower.
 - Clara has been tabling at community events to increase connections, with a fair bit of success.
 - Clara has been soil sampling and assisting with fall cover crop planning
- Clara gave a nursery update
 - Ongoing maintenance and watering has been going well, and starts are surviving the drought, though there is some insect damage. Compost would be beneficial and Clara will invite the board for a weeding day soon.
 - Fall seed collection is beginning
 - Holdover stock from before Clara started will be sold to OCNRCD this fall
- Clara summarized the plan for an upcoming ECNRCD Conservation Field Day at Bill's farm
 - Brighton and Concord Schools 5th & 6th graders are joining, and Canaan may as well
 - Presenters will include Matt Langlais (County Forester), Jess Colby (NorthWoods), and Bill & Pat
- Sam gave update on all ongoing projects:
 - 6 plantings, 2 shoreline stabilizations, and a gully stabilization were all completed on lakes this spring and summer. There are remaining funds which Sam hopes to use on additional projects with approval from NRCC.
 - The tree plantings from this spring are surviving well, though vines have been challenging for the Forbes planting.
 - Campsite water management best practices will be installed at Maidstone State Park starting in September through a Clean Water grant

- T. J. Boyle is developing clean water designs on a private property on Maidstone and the Neal Pond, Shadow Lake, and Norton Pond Fish & Wildlife Access Areas.
- Having not received affordable bids for culvert replacement designs at Maidstone State Park, Sam and Sean will complete designs in-house and should be ready for construction next year. Chris suggested Sketch Up as a good software for creating simple 3-D designs.
- Designs for small wetland restorations are in progress and will be completed this fall. These would hopefully be implemented using State Clean Water grants next year.
- The culvert on Baptist Hill Rd and Mink Brook in Lunenburg will be beginning construction on Monday, 8/25/25. Final wetlands and historic review approvals were not smooth but were approved this week.
- After this summer's flooding, Sam will be pursuing additional funds to improve the stream crossing at the top of Walters Farm Rd in East Haven. The road at this culvert has been completely washed out 3 times in 3 years.
- Sam is in the early stages of working with the town on stabilizing a stream in Lunenburg that has become highly erosive since recent large storm events. The town is developing trails on this property. Tim suggested connecting the trails to the paths on the Gilman Farm.
- CISMA knotweed treatments are scheduled to begin 8/25/25
- The mycelium pollutant reduction project on Lake Memphremagog, for which ECNRCD is a fiscal sponsor and Bill Manning has been an active participant, was awarded at a reduced budget. Bill will be attempting to do additional fundraising but the project will go one with limited scope regardless.

Meeting Topic(s)

- The board discussed the agenda for the Tri-district meeting. All agreed meeting from 11 Am to 2 PM, starting at the nursery and moving to the Refuge building would be a good plan. Agenda items to be discussed included Walter Medwid's (OCNRCD) proposal to consolidate the NEK Districts to increase administrative efficiency, Bill's plans for a Sterling College NEK Scholar program including internships at Districts, and a review of actionable items from the consultants' report on improving efficiency at VACD/NRCC/NRCDs. Sam will circulate this agenda to the other Districts and Willie Gibson (Union Rep to NRCC).
- The board discussed the VACD contract with Action Circles and the approach to advocacy at the State House
 - VACD and Action Circles have made the suggestion to begin weighing in on policy bills separate from our funding request, and have begun doing so. This makes VACD a more known presence in the State House. They have asked that Districts establish a method for forming consensus quickly to take stances. They would avoid taking stances where there was internal disagreement and hot button issues. Action Circles suggested that VACD email a proposed policy stance to DMs, who would have the opportunity to state any strong disagreement. Sam asked whether the board wanted to allow him to use his judgement to speak for the District on whether or not to object to policies. All were okay with this approach, with Chris also stating that he would strongly like to see VACD/Action Circles communicate with all Supervisors when seeking input on a proposed policy stance. Sam agreed to forward requests to the board as they came and request that they be sent directly to board members in addition to DMs.

Other Business

- None

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held as part of the Tri-District Meeting at 12:00 PM September 17th in the conference room at the US Fish & Wildlife Service Silvio O. Conte Refuge Nulhegan Basin Welcome Center.

Chris made the motion to adjourn at 2:51 PM. Ursula seconded. Motion carried unanimously.