

# State Natural Resources Conservation Council

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

## NRCC Full Board Meeting

March 12, 2019 – The Annex Conference Room, Montpelier

Present: Bill Manner (Southeast Union Rep); Marli Rupe (DEC Rep); Nina Gage (VAAFAM Rep); Jill Arace (VACD); Beth Moser-Duquette (Co-Chair, South Union Rep); Kerry O'Brien (NRCC Administrator); Susie Walsh Daloz (Ag Programs Manager); Somara Zwick (NRCC Business Manager); Tim Buzzell (Northeast Union Rep); Richard Noel (Northwest Union Rep); Holden Sparacino (Water Quality Programs Manager); Vicky Drew – On Phone (USDA NRCS);

**Meeting Opened:** Beth called the meeting to order 1:09pm

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

## Staff Updates:

- Kerry: Kerry has been supporting Holden in getting up to speed on programs (he is doing great!) and supporting Jill in the legislature. She is exploring alternative options for NRCC core funding as the VAAFAM cores service funding has been limited and an alternate source would be helpful. There is a new RFP out from DEC for Clean Water Block Grants, so she will be working with Holden to develop an application.
- Holden: DEC Block Grant in our current year has about \$65,000 remaining, and it has been extended through December. Holden has been accepting Trees for Streams applications from Conservation Districts, funding through three sources – DEC, Lake Champlain Basin Program, and Pur Project. He has been keeping up with bi-monthly Tactical Basin Planning reports and supporting Jill in the legislature. Holden has also been representing NRCC/VACD/NRCDs on the Vermont Clean Water Network.
- Somara: Somara just completed a FY19 Budget update, it was adjusted to reduce revenues anticipated due to the DEC Block grant getting extended through December. It was also adjusted to include new Trees for Stream funding, and an increase to PMNRCD for technical support. No other major adjustments. A new copy is available on the drive. The invoicing system between NRCDs, program managers, and Somara has been smoother as new procedures have been implemented. A question arose about the process for if/how NRCC board approves subagreements to Districts. Currently the board chair or co-chair signs all the agreements. Somara will check the financial procedures to see if this is explained.
- Susie: Susie discussed the Farm Show and our booth/presence there. There was good representation and materials were streamlined. 133 visitors were recorded that included 53 farmers. VACD helped convene the Agricultural Water Quality Partners Meeting for the third year. This is an annual meeting of agricultural water quality technical staff. There were 182 attendees. This year it did not include regional breakout groups since a round of regional meetings took place in the fall. There is a summary of these

meetings that Marli and Susie pulled together. A follow-up survey was provided, and helpful feedback has been coming in. Ag-CWIP reporting is coming up soon. NRCC thanked Jeff Farber for helping to organize the AGWQP meeting. Marli and Susie discussed tracking regional ag meetings. It was discussed that whether this is funded through Basin Planning funds or Ag-CWIP funds, that these should be tracked through nForm.

### **Legislative Update: Jill**

- New legislators this year, training and resources have been excellent. Statehouse is short-staffed on legal counsel, so bill writing is slow.
- There are many initiatives affecting natural resources and water quality, energy, and dairy industry.
- Clean Water Fund Legislation – this has been two-pronged, including how Clean Water will be funded, and how it will be organized and meet targets. Various revenue sources are under consideration – tax on purchases, estate tax, parcel fee, etc. “Crossover” is this week and bills will be selected, then no new bills will be introduced after crossover.
- Most of our attention has been on the part of S.96 that reorganizes clean water funding. Jill has summaries and testimonies that have been distributed on email and can be made available to NRCC full board or supervisors. The original legislation was introduced by Secretary of Agency of Natural Resources, Julie Moore, just before the legislature opened. Only 1.5 metric tons of phosphorus were reduced last year. The target is 213 metric tons per year. The goal and intent of the bill is to strengthen the mechanisms for meeting these targets. The legislation allocates Clean Water funding with targets to each basin, and the funding is proposed to be restructured and managed by a regional utility – which currently defaults to the regional planning commission, unless another entity petitions to serve as the regional entity.
- VACD/NRCC’s testimony has included:
  - Requesting more staff for DEC to they can better serve partners and meet these targets
  - Potential to achieve goals and strengthen targets through current system of central block grants through NRCC. This system is working and offers efficiency and accountability which is the goal of the legislation and does not require restructuring.
  - A lot of concerns about how this will include/affect the agricultural sector. This legislation addresses non-regulatory Clean Water funding and Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) create a challenge to discern between regulatory and non-regulatory practices.
  - Focus on impaired waters, so statewide support (Connecticut and Hudson) is limited

### **Member Updates:**

**Beth:** Green Mountain College is closing, where PMNRCD is currently housed. They are looking for space for 5 staff. Nursery will be moved near the Waste Water Treatment plant. Spring plant sale is coming up. Beth is hoping to better connect with Bennington NRCD to strengthen their supervisory union and communication.

**Bill:** Ottauquechee and Windham met together in January and will be meeting annually. Bill is now chair of Ottauquechee. Bill indicated he communicates with Windham before and after NRCC meetings and sends minutes to their board.

**Richard:** Gearing up for Tree Sale. Franklin has hired a new bookkeeper/accountant.

**Tim:** Orleans was awarded a grant for a no-till drill. Sarah Damsell has been asked to serve on the Nutrient Management Commission, is sponsoring a goGraze workshop, Tree Sale, and Conservation Field Days. Orleans has a new supervisor. Essex County is hiring a Conservation Specialist, supporting NMP updates and gearing up for Conservation Field Days. Essex County is suggesting more focus on Nitrogen in Clean Water legislation and focusing on phosphorus only.

**Marli:** Wetland bill is in the legislature, there are currently two versions. The legislation defines wetlands, and changes Class 2 wetlands regulations. In the past, a Class 2 wetland would be identified by a field visit. The legislation as proposed instead defines it. It also defines activities allowable within a wetland, and caps the permit fee at \$200 for water quality improvement projects (stream crossings, constructed wetland, etc.) Installing structures (manure pit or barn), would require a larger permit.

RAPs were changed to prohibit surface inlets to tile drains. Agency of Natural Resources would also like to see existing surface inlets removed. She distributed a handout and welcomed more outreach on this.

Ag Water Quality Partnership is going through a strategic planning process, expecting to broaden group and include more farms. Need more discussion about supporting ecosystem services and better supporting landowners.

Wispr Program has a significant amount of funding for Clean Water through the State Revolving Fund (SRF) and may be a potential funding source for NRCC. 50% of any planning efforts for municipalities can be funded through SRF, can provide good match for Stormwater Master Plans or other efforts. The SRF can provide interim financing for agricultural BMPs and they would have a year to pay it. So, this could provide a good opportunity for farm with BMP contracts to have funding up front to float until they receive payment. Marli is looking into more details.

**Nina:** Nina provided handouts including Inspection and Enforcement Summary; Education, Outreach, and Technical Assistance Summary; Financial Assistance to Farms Summary; 2018 Small Farm Certification Summary; Dairy Data summary; and WQ protections for Maple Producers. The SFO summary is showing a good number of farms with completed or developing NMPs, and she thanked Districts for helping support UVM NMP classes.

VAAFM has a new website – check it out, and **if you have links to VAAFM from your own website make sure to update them because they changed.** VAAFM is also working on launching the Partners Database – which will be a big change in reporting for everyone. VAAFM’s “BMP Program” name may be changed to Farmstead BMP, to clarify that its distinct from Farm Agronomic Practices (which are sometimes called BMPs). LFO and MFO annual report/certifications are coming up in the spring. Article from PMNRCD (Stefano) will be posted in next Agriview (thanks!), along with mortality composting article.

VAAFM Housekeeping Bill in Legislature – small changes to RAPs, including removing dates limiting cover cropping on floodplains after X date. Definitions of Critical Resource Areas under consideration, and Act 250.

**Vicky:** Ag Water Quality Partnership strategic planning – 30 people getting together in April to discuss and provide feedback on how we management nutrients at field scale, calculate benefits, edge of field monitoring, tile drainage, etc. Limited space but will record. NRCS still does not have a budget for the year, it was delayed due to the shutdown. NRCS has been recruiting and filling positions, currently at 60, would like to get up to 73, long term goal to 98. NRCS is on hold obligating new contracts because the new farm bill changed the way funding is allocated, hoping to clear up within a week or so. There are enough applications on file to obligate funds that are available. This is the last year NRCS will be committing 75% of funds to Lake Champlain, will be

meeting to discuss funding distribution and input will be appreciated. Farm bill dramatically increased funding for their easement program. USDA Secretary Sonny Purdue was in Vermont last Friday for a couple of hours to kick off sugaring season. Lots of discussion about payments to landowners for ecosystem services. Cooperative Working agreement that was drafted by NRCC committee was not approved and they have been waiting on a draft template from national office, which has now arrived. Vicky recommended reconvening subcommittee – they are supposed to be updated by the end of the year. NRCS has new outreach materials for Soil Health – Soil Health “Tunnel” – available for any District event! NRCS website has video summarizing their water quality work in VT “Faces of Vermont Agriculture.”

**Jill:** March 27<sup>th</sup> 10:30 – Noon - session with VACD and senate and house agricultural committee members in VT in Room 10. Susie shared that Strategic Watersheds are having public meetings again. RCPP program still up and running, about 35 farms enrolled this year. NACD New England meeting March 25 & 26<sup>th</sup> in Portsmouth, NH. VAAFM as convened a Nutrient Management Commission to determine recommendations that will likely end up in 2020 legislation. Sarah Damsell, Susie, Jill and others are participating.

**Other Business:**

Discussion about DEC’s tool to assess phosphorus reductions. NRCS will be trying DEC’s tool to better account for multiple practices on the same field. This was confused that DEC was producing a new tool (they have not). BMP scenario tool and BATT tool discussion – DEC will clarify the difference between the two.

**Meeting Adjourned: 4:00pm**

**Next Meeting: June 4<sup>th</sup> 1-4pm.**