

# State Natural Resources Conservation Council

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

## **NRCC Full Board Meeting**

September 11, 2018 – 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); Richard Noel (Northwest Union Rep); Rick Hopkins (Co-Chair, Central Union Rep); Tim Buzzell (Northeast Union Rep); John Thurgood (NRCS); Alan Shelvey (Southeast Union Rep)

**Rick called the meeting to order 9:30am, Roundtable introductions**

### **Program and Budget Updates**

- Kerry reviewed the developing Tactical Basin Planning agreement for FY19. The current agreement expires in September 2018. A few changes with the FY18 agreement include the removal of project development funding (a separate funding source will be set up for this that NRCC will need to submit a proposal for); More emphasis on regional coordination including agricultural and other water quality sector workgroups, outreach, technical assistance and project prioritization, and monitoring activities.
- The FY19 Capacity Building activities have been finalized, an agreement with NRCS has been executed for \$20,000, with \$20,000 matching funds from NRCC/VAAFAM. Capacity building activities include communication technology upgrades for the Districts, improved regional coordination, trainings for local workgroups, financial management, human resources and other topics
- The core services agreement has been executed with VAAFAM for \$112,000
- Somara shared budget updates that included confirmation of the revenues from Core Service agreement and Capacity Building. FY2017 - \$242,000 in expenditures, FY2018 had \$394,000 in expenditures, increase of 63%.
- Tim shared that they'd like to see improved communications between the Districts and NRCC/VACD to have more opportunity to participate in contract development. The communication technology upgrades will support this, but it was suggested this be addressed at a DM meeting or training.

### **Previous Meeting Minutes**

Bill made a motion and Beth seconded to approve the previous meeting minutes (6-26-18) as presented. The motion was approved.

### **Water Quality Program Manager position:**

The job description for the Water Quality Program Manager position was reviewed. This position would manage NRCC's non-ag programs and be set up similarly to Susie's position. It will begin as a half-time position, salaried with benefits, employed by VACD – with the hopes to become full time in 2019. Suggestion to add "monitoring" to the position description to capture support for that activity. Suggestion to add a descriptor for "water quality" to be clear that it doesn't include groundwater. Suggestion to include more about how we have ag and non-ag programs managed by NRCC, more details on coordinating with Ag Program Manager. Suggestion that there might be too much detail and acronyms, may consider zooming out to the big picture so we're not scaring

off people who may not be as familiar with all the details. Suggestion to add content creation to the description. There is confidence that we can fund the position with our current budget projections through 2020. Advertising is through Craigslist and Seven Days. UVM, Castleton, Green Mountain College and Sterling were recommended as places to advertise as well. Discussion of LinkedIn and Indeed. Kerry will share the final job description which can be shared. Alan made a motion and Richard seconded to approve moving forward with recruitment for the position. The motion was approved. Kerry, Susie, Bill and Jill will be on the hiring committee for the position – Marli or Ethan (Marli will ask Ethan) will attend final interviews if possible. The position will be advertised within a week and likely include interviews in late October.

### **Recruitment of UVM Extension back to NRCC board**

Discussion of reaching out to UVM Extension. Suggestion to think about who the right person is to join the board, considering the size and breadth of UVM Extension and their work. Suggestion to talk with Chuck Ross or Dan Lerner first, and discuss the changes to NRCC in budget and scope that would benefit their return. Kerry drafted a letter but a more informal approach (talking, phonecall) was discussed. It was agreed to email the letter, include a request for meeting or phonecall and the date and invite to the next meeting, copy Rick.

### **VT DEC Update from Marli**

Marli discussed the Agriculture Regional Workgroups she is planning with Susie, which came about as a directive from the Ag Water Quality Partnership meeting last winter. There are a series of dates in October around the state. Focus is to gather service providers in ag and other Natural Resource field to discuss coordination, existing workgroups, needs and next steps in the region, with an extra hour at the end to discuss specific farms as appropriate. The invite list can be forwarded but Marli and Susie would like to track participants.

Clean Water Board is working on the final budget for FY20, with another meeting expected for September but a date has not been date set. Ecosystem Restoration grants deadline was yesterday. Stay tuned to DEC's grants website – all are encouraged to read funding policy and manual. Webinar is on DEC's website. Please reference resources BEFORE calling or asking DEC for questions, as they are typically answered already in resources. DEC budget is reduced this year – not as much money for Block Grants.

Governor Scott issued a “phosphorus challenge” to solicit innovative ideas or technologies to reduce phosphorus in the State. There were 12 applicants who gave presentations.

Public comment period during the summer for Wetlands permit. If a farmer was doing a project that impacted wetlands, a permit was required. Farmers need outreach on this permit – not enough awareness and permit applications that have come in are not getting granted. DEC is continuing to discuss this with VAAF, a lot of work to firm this up, clarify and simplify statute and rules. Challenge is not all wetlands are mapped, and delineation is challenging. Only about 4-5% of the state is wetlands. Proposed changes to statute will be presented before the end of the year.

Algae blooms in Lake Carmi have been reported. Last year the lake turned over in September, hoping that doesn't happen this year. Legislature designated Lake Carmi as a Lake in Crisis. Public comment period on this designation and strategy took place this summer. Aeration technologies have been introduced to oxygenate the lake, a lot of monitoring and expense for this (\$1.6 million).

Senator Leahy secured \$4 million for Lake Champlain. Funding from this was secured for wetland restoration, Farm Agronomic Practice (FAP) program, engineering and CREP positions at VAAF, and ANR is reintroducing a

BMP (Best Management Practice) challenge to incent farmer to try practices and compensate them for the trials. Potential role for NRCDs in coordinating farms to try BMPs through this funding.

### **VAAFAM Update from Nina**

VAAFAM is working through process for tile drain rule revision. There has been one meeting so far, expecting two more. Farm numbers are diminishing, started with 796 dairy farms beginning this calendar year (average from 2017), there are 712 now – with the most losses in Chittenden, Orleans, Franklin and Washington (spreadsheet handed out).

This was a unique weather year, very dry – lots of irrigation – pumping a lot of water from rivers to water fields. There is a webinar dialoguing about water withdrawals – how to know how much to withdraw and when farms should know about when they exceed allowable amounts and need to apply for a permit – procedures needed for this.

Grant rounds coming up including second year of Capital Assistance Equipment Program – funding innovative equipment on farms – no-till, irrigation systems, etc. Eligible equipment is listed – more info in upcoming Agriview. Working Lands grants due.

VAAFAM is gearing up for “reporting” season and working with DEC ahead of the legislature. Partner Database is in final stages of development with Stone Environmental, will be a good tool for reporting. Ag-CWIP has concrete reporting measures which will also help.

Marli mentioned that Kevin King will be coming to next year’s Ag Water Quality Partners meeting and discussing tile drains and spend a couple of days here to do workshops with farmers. This will be February 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>.

### **NRCS Update from John**

NRCS developed new operational agreements for computer use for additional NRCD staff. Vicky was supportive, but it was projected that it would not be supported by Grants and Agreements. Informal individual MOUs have been happening instead – for example, Franklin County NRCD asked for two additional computers and office space and presented a scope of work (ag water quality) and a 50/50 match. Conversations are underway for PM, Bennington and Rutland who will be sharing an ag staff person. NRCS is still challenged by not having space, very limited. A new office management structure through FPAC (Farm Service Agency and NRCS) may change shape of this discussion at any point. NRCC thanked John for the effort to accommodate additional NRCD staff.

End of federal fiscal year is coming up Sept 30, NRCS is doing well with spending obligated funds. NRCS received approval to staff up to the level of 70 people, hiring freeze lifted (handout with staffing updates). Usajobs.gov for any listed positions, questions contact John. Federal employees held Diversity Day on Sept 6<sup>th</sup>, District Managers were invited.

### **VACD Update from Jill**

Jill provided staffing updates, there were several departures of VACD staff - many to partnering agencies. There is a pause in rehiring to reconsider many positions and discuss with partners, but recruitment is expected for St. Albans and Middlebury. VACD and Conservation Districts annual meeting is set for October 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> at the Middlebury Inn. October 24<sup>th</sup> will be concurrent staff and supervisor meetings – with everyone (partners) coming together for dinner and keynote speaker. October 25<sup>th</sup> will be a meeting for full group and tours in the afternoon. Conservation District Handbook is in final editing stages and will be ready in time for annual meeting and supervisor training. There will likely be an update on the Farm Bill at the meeting (if passed by then). Government rate offered at the Inn.

### **Supervisory Union Updates**

Richard - Franklin County still active with posting signage for field practices, which is going well. Signs are available for free.

Alan – Otter Creek Basin Plan is underway, Rutland has 6 construction projects. Alan is stepping down from NRCC and will be working on having a supervisor from Otter Creek join NRCC.

Bill – Ottauquechee is in the middle of implementing a construction project through ERP – he discussed cash flow issues and potential to set up lines of credit for projects.

Rick – White River has hired a conservation specialist who is working with farms on NMPs, BMP outreach and education – they are also doing soil sampling ahead of the NMP class in January. Winooski has hired a conservation specialist (Kristen) replacing Holly. They've just hired a new District Manager, Giana Petito, who is starting on Monday September 17<sup>th</sup>. Corrina (former DM) has accepted a position with State F&W.

Beth – Farm meetings were held to discuss needs, updates with diverse farm types. Sadie is new nursery manager with Poultney Mettowee. Working with Rutland to share an ag-position.

Kerry (for Tim) – Supervisory Union annual meeting in NEK (called Tri-District) held in August, toured dam removal project and discussed Ag-CWIP work plans. NEK Districts still active with Road erosion inventories. Orleans working on RAP quiz phase 2. Essex active with Lakewise assessments and projects.

### **Other Business**

NRCC thanked Alan for his service to NRCC! 😊

Act250 Commission survey out to determine future of Act 250.

John mentioned the agreement with VACD to help with strategic watersheds – Susie is doing this work.

**Next Meeting:** December 11<sup>th</sup> 1:00-4:00pm The Annex