

# State Natural Resources Conservation Council

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

## **NRCC Meeting Minutes February 23, 2017**

### **UVM Extension Classroom, Barre**

**Present:** Marli Rupe (VT DEC), Alan Shelvey (South Central Union Rep), Corrina Parnapy (Winooski NRCD), Kerry O'Brien (NRCC Administrator, Caledonia County NRCD), Mike Middleman (VTAAFAM), Vicky Drew (NRCS), Jill Arace (VACD); Stephanie Mason (Northeast Union Rep); Bill Manner (Southeast Union Rep)

**Meeting Opened:** 9:35 Alan called the meeting to order.

### **Previous Meeting Minutes:**

Bill moved and Marli seconded to approve minutes from 12/1, motion was approved with one abstention from Mike since he was not at the meeting.

### **Discussion of meeting with Secretary of VTAAFAM Anson Tebbetts:**

Highlights included:

Overview of the Districts, NRCC and VACD and how we're funded

Our program focus on NMPs and RAP outreach

How we can collaborate better, communicate more strategically

Discussion of consolidation of AAFM grants to Districts into one through NRCC

### **Discussion of meetings still needed for NRCC/Districts introductions:**

New commissioner of DEC – Emily Boedecker and Secretary of ANR Julie Moore

UVM Extension Director Chuck Ross

Governor Phil Scott

Suggestion to send NRCC minutes to Secretaries

### **Roundtable updates:**

- Sodium Chloride Reduction Initiative (Winooski NRCD): September 29<sup>th</sup> Lake Champlain Watershed Road Salt Conference, focused on private applicators and on municipal entities – liability, BMPs, and science will be included.
- NRCS – Vicky shared that NRCS is under a hiring freeze with 8 vacancies in Vermont. Some state office staff have been redirected to help fill gaps. Students graduated in May are likely to be relocated in to WRJ to help fill workload needs in that area. 8 million has been pre-approved for projects so far out of 13 million available. An extra 2 million was spent outside of LCB than was planned. 70-85 farms are on backlog list for farmstead pool, awaiting CNMPs.
- Northeast SU: Stephanie – NEK Districts working together NVDA to conduct municipal road inventories, outreach and update DEC basin planning database.

- VACD – Jill shared packets that have been distributed at legislature and various meetings. LIS RCPP has agreement that supports NMP assistance, there was a conference with Districts on both sides of River and reps from Connecticut. Working on prioritizing LTP staff. RCPP is wrapping up second year, there is one more year of funding and are planning to bid on the next round. Legislative day was Feb 14th, with testimony in House Agriculture and Fish/NR committees, and Senate Ag. VACD is working on developing a NACD NE Regional meeting in August with 140 participants – food systems will be discussed as well as policies 1) Farm Bill, 2) Showcasing VT policies and program working together to achieve goals and 3) Plenary regulatory/non-regulatory role of Conservation Districts and how that's defined regionally. Secretaries will be invited to speak and US Reps and Senator Leahy. Tours will be provided. Dinner cruise on Ethan Allen. January 13<sup>th</sup> was Statewide Water Quality Partnership Meeting report, 180 people attended.
- Southeast SU – Meeting with Windham County tomorrow to bring together SU, improved cooperation between Districts was discussed
- VTAAFM – Mike reported that RAPs have been rolled out so their new focus is implementation. Trainings are occurring statewide. Train the trainer webinars will be provided for Districts and others to provide consistent RAP trainings. Secretary Tebbetts has been conducting listening sessions throughout the state. Launching the Environmental Stewardship Program, incenting farms with sound soil health /practices though recognition and discounts. To be eligible must be meeting previous AAPS and all RAPs. AAFM has shared request for applications at Farm Show, working on uploading application to website. Will be piloting in next couple of months. North Lake Farm Compliance Survey final report will be out at end of March. Question to AAFM to clarify when/if a round of inspections in North Lake are expected (according to CLF directive), and generally schedule of inspections.
- VT DEC – Marli reported that state budget is still up in the air, changes daily. Clean Water Fund was developed as part of Act 64 which included approximately 5 million year, and ends FY2018. Great deal of focus on funding when that expires. Discussion at state level of how EPA cuts would affect TMDL –but state still intends to keep the TMDL commitments as they are in Act 64. Treasurer's report included draft strategies to fund Clean Water Fund moving past FY18. The Gov's budget proposed about 25 million FY19-20. IF this occurs then DEC will be charged with spending as much as 12 million a year in capital dollars, so there is a huge need for prepared projects. Likely an increase in ERP funding available but still very uncertain until the end of the legislative session. DEC is discussing block grants to limit administration on additional grant funds. Another round of ERP is anticipated for this spring. Discussion at state of capital eligibility definition, generally to include design/project development, which is still getting discussed.

Jill indicated how critically important for legislators to be aware of how important design/project development is to preparing readied projects, critical to have non-capital dollars or capital dollars to include this. Institution committee members in particular should be aware.

### **Strategic Planning Objectives**

Kerry reviewed Strategic Planning objectives. It was suggested to reorganize the document to objectives and tasks. Corrina shared New York's strategic plan. It was suggested to invite New York to understand better how their Council funding structure is set up to ensure performance and core services of each

Districts, and how additional work/\$ is awarded to Districts. Kerry will reword based on feedback from Districts and NRCC and reconvene strategic planning committee

**AAFM Block Grant Discussion:**

AAFM is willing to consolidate 22 grants received from Districts last year into a single block grant with \$75,000 additional funds for management/director. We need to create plan to transition this into place in short order so District can get to work. Short term plan, intermediate and long term plans will be needed. Discussion of utilizing another DM in the short term to roll out grants. Discussion of pre-award costs being eligible so Districts can get to work while this is rolled out. Consult with attorney general is likely necessary. It was suggested that we request legal counsel from Thea and VTAAFM to discuss legal authorization to proceed. Question about whether it would be an interagency agreement rather than grant. Mike suggested there could be 25% provided up front but he will confirm, and potentially request more. Kerry will follow up on recent consult with Attorney General. Mike will prepare agreement over next couple of weeks.

Alan made a motion to approve concept of Clean Water fund block grant from AAFM, consolidating individual District grant awards, pending review of contractual, legal and logistical details, Bill seconded. The motion was approved.

**NRCS MOU:**

MOU is on hold with NRCS to make adjustments and is expected back by the end of March and then it can go back out for review/signature. Operational agreements are going to be restructured (not called operational agreements) so those are pending.

**Summary of Regional Planning Commission collaborative meeting:**

Jill, Kerry and Kim Jensen (Lamoille County NRCD) met with RPC leadership staff after a request from them to meet and discuss strategic partnership. RPC and NRCC are both written into Clean Water legislation authorizing contracts for Basin Planning activities which has impacted the way DEC can disperse funds. The meeting was introductory, understanding the tasks and roles that Districts and RPCs have within the Basin Planning processes and brainstorming ways to carve up the activities throughout the state. A list of tasks will be developed and regional meetings will be requested between NRCD and RPCs with guidance to discuss who is doing what locally.

**Next Meeting March 16<sup>th</sup> 1:00, The Annex Montpelier**

**Meeting Adjourned: 12:30pm**

**Finance Committee 12:30-12:45, Bill Manner, Jill Arace, Alan Shelvey, Kerry O'Brien**

The finance committee requested a work plan update from Kerry for additional tasks related to strategic planning, NRCC Director job description/hiring process, and block grant development, with budget update with expenses through February 2017.

