

Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Council

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

NRCC Meeting Minutes February 5, 2013

VAST Conference Room, Berlin, VT

Present: Jeff Carter UVM Extension, Chair; Laura DiPietro VTAAFM; Vicky Drew NRCS; Linda Corse SW NRCD Supervisory Union; Justin Kenney Winooski NRCD; Pamela Stefanek VACD Agricultural Resource Specialist and Otter Creek NRCD; Jill Arace VACD; Paul Wagner Otter Creek NRCD Supervisory Union; Larry Hamel NE NRCD Supervisory Union; Michelle Gudorf NW NRCD Supervisory Union; Kim Komer Lamoille County NRCD District Manager; Jim Ryan VT DEC; Kerry O'Brien Caledonia County NRCD and NRCC Administrator; Rebecca Purdom VT Law School, Consultant; Dana Ruppert Windham County NRCD.

Seven voting members of NRCC are present.

Meeting Opened: 9:15am Jeff called the meeting to order.

Introductions and Check in

Highlights: Laura updated the group on ag water quality meetings and goals as a state - Small farm compliance, Nutrient Management Planning on all farms, Livestock Exclusion. Vicky Drew discussed a MOU with 8 partners to improve coordination on water quality - Cross training, communication, data sharing, and coordination of activities. She also discussed the Certainty program –designing assurance for farms that they have done enough to comply – regulatory predictability. Linda expressed concerns about maintaining simplicity in regulations. Justin from Winooski NRCD is busy with stormwater programming, he now has two staff people and two interns. Pamela reported about farm show, information for beginning farmers . Jim sitting in for Rick Hopkins, reported on White River Basin plan and Better Backroads shift to Vtrans. Jill is in the legislature, and reported that White River NRCD has a new project manager. Paul supported livestock exclusion, discussed predictability and consistency of farming regulations. Larry discussed the difficulty in getting NRCD supervisory union reps to come to meetings, and expressed the need to relay information from NRCC meetings to supervisors. Michelle is working on climate change issues. Kim is working on farming outreach and workshops, LID. Kerry is working on stormwater projects in Hardwick, flood resiliency efforts and buffer programs.

Previous Meeting Minutes: Linda moved and Michelle seconded to approve the previous meeting minutes (12-11-12) as printed. The motion was approved.

Financial Statements: AOI existing contract was granted an extension, with a progress report due in March and a final due in September. Linda moved and Michelle seconded to approve the financial statements as printed. Some state budget discussion followed. The motion was approved.

There were no additional administrative updates from Kerry.

Planning Session, facilitated by Rebecca Purdom

Jeff provided background on why we decided to invite Rebecca to this meeting at this time – discussing where we see NRCC in five years.

Rebecca provided context of recognizing the overlapping areas of NRCC, VACD/Districts, Agencies and trying to maximize the shared goals.

What can/should NRCC do?

1. Share information from agencies to Districts and back (getting back to effective feedback from landowners)– communication to the appropriate audience. Need for specifics, how to translate the information from NRCC to work at the District Staff level. Determining the appropriate guests at NRCC meetings.
2. Making Project implementation happen – making agency goals relevant and practical
3. Direct agencies to understand implications of local programming – what works and doesn't work. Landowner feedback is essential – agencies need to hear from private landowners, costs and impacts. Districts may need to systematically assess needs and send information back to agencies.
4. Identify issues – planning for statewide priorities
5. Pursuing Resources and Admin– Currently NRCC asks agencies for funding. Statute indicates that NRCC as a state agency would communicate directly for funds with the legislature. Right now there is not a mechanism for it. According to statute, NRCC should file funding request with budget and management. Who does this? Currently VACD goes to the legislature. Private fundraising by NRCC could also occur.

What does NRCC do well?

1. It keeps fighting to exist – finds leadership to pull through, fears losing funding allocation and ability to harness powers as a state entity
2. It encourages District activity and growth – maintains collaboration and support
3. Continues in spite of some systems being broken, relies on engaged people
4. Harnessing self-starting District Managers, engaged supervisors
5. Offer Districts credibility as partners with state agencies

Summaries of thoughts

1. Suggestion of NRCC existing as its own line item instead of being within the VTAAF budget, to cover liability issues and for fairness to other organizations (UVM Extension). Concerns of vulnerability if it exists without the protection of being within an agency budget.
2. Lack of process to allocate increasing funds to NRCC
3. Develop base level of services/deliverables for Districts - certainty
4. Clarity of purpose and process, roles needed
5. Discuss and examine connections to Conservation Commissions

6. Making the meeting purposeful for all members

Next Steps: Honing in on mechanisms to get to where we need to go, open up statute. Discuss the real changes. Suggestions that statutory changes may be necessary, or perhaps NRCC could address changes without the statutory changes? Suggestion was made that a representative be allowed (statutorily) from each District rather than unions – or perhaps a rep can go anyway.

Other Business: None

Next Meeting: May 21st. Agenda will continue planning sessions with Rebecca. Will also need to include a budget agreement with Laura. Finance committee needs to meet and develop budget prior to this meeting.

Meeting adjourned: 12:05pm.