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Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Council

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

The Conservation Council's mission is to advance conservation by providing; strategic guidance and operational support to Conservation Districts, providing a local perspective on state conservation policy, and facilitating the sharing of information among members and partners.

Meeting Minutes

April 11, 2005

Vermont Association of Snow Travelers Conference Room
Garvey Road, Berlin VT

Attendance: Rick Levite*, Dick Stone*, Rick Hopkins*, Fran Keeler, Pedro Ramos, Abby Willard, Marlin Rupe, Bob Drachman, Christen Kaiser*, Mike Domingue*, Ed Lewis*, Mary Beth Whitten, Andrea Boggs, Phil Benedict, Abbi Pajak.

*Connotes voting Council member.

The meeting was called to order at 9:48. The Executive Secretary thanked everyone for their patience and flexibility in dealing with the change of meeting location.

The minutes of the February 2nd meeting were reviewed. They were corrections noted by Rick Hopkins and Fran Keeler.

Christen Kaiser moved that the minutes be accepted as corrected. This was seconded by Mike Domingue and the motion passed

The Executive Secretary will correct the minutes and get them on the NRCC web site and e-mail them to District Managers and Council members.

The Executive Secretary asked for clarification of who is the official representative from the Otter Creek Supervisory Union. It was determined that Richard Stone was the official representative and Bob Drachman was the alternate. It was made clear that both were welcome to attend all Council meetings.

The Council discussed the MFO rules and changes in the AAPs. The federal court case has not changed the direction of the VT program in any major way. It is hoped that farmers that enroll to be covered by the general permit will not need a federal NPDES permit. The reasoning is that by meeting the conditions of the VT general permit the farm will not have a discharge and therefore will not need a NPDES permit. The issue of smaller farms that will need protection was brought up. To address this issue smaller

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farms (>200 milking cows) can apply for coverage under the MFO program. This will give them the same legal protection as MFO's in regards to NPDES permits.

Ed Lewis wanted Council to discuss how Districts should be involved in the outreach and education program on Ag water quality programs. There needs to be greater effort made on coordination among Conservation Districts, UVM Extension and VAAF&M on education and outreach. Marli Rupe informed Council that Steve Kerr (Secretary of Agriculture) would like to set up a meeting, after the legislative session, to look at this issue. This issue has been critical in the legislature this year. The Senate Ag Committee has asked directly what Districts need to get the job done. Marli Rupe, speaking for Districts and VACD, said that with the increased number of technical assistance people in the field and the varied capacity of Districts across the state, some sort of "coordinator" would be helpful. This person could coordinate requests from farmers, assist in the development and management of a farm data base, provide direct assistance to Districts in program development and implementation and develop partnerships with other agencies and organizations. There is currently no funding available for this position. Mike Domingue would like to have information directly from Districts on what role they would like to play. One of the problems is that what exactly is needed, what methods are effective in getting the information to farmers, is not clear. Public meetings do not appear to be the most effective way to reach the farming community. The Council should give Districts some sort of list of possible activities. There will also need to be some funding needed for certain activities. Marli Rupe offered to help develop a survey tool that Council could send to Districts. The Executive Secretary will assist Marli with the development and mailing this out to all Districts.

Mike Domingue made a motion that Marli Rupe, with assistance for the Executive Secretary, will develop a survey on methods of outreach and education on Ag water quality issues and different levels of participation. This will be mail to District Chair and Managers for their comments and returned to the Executive Secretary. Christen Kaiser seconded this and the motion passed.

The District Employees proposal was discussed. The Executive Secretary introduced the proposal as an excellent way to continue implementation of the Council's Strategic plan. Kerry Gemmett presented the proposal for District Employees. The idea is to raise the professional standard for all Districts. The employees were discussing concerns about their boards and decided to try to quantify their discussion. A survey tool was developed to look at three areas; Board meetings, Board involvement, and Financial management. Only district employees completed the survey. The employees did an excellent job of initiating and analysis. The results show variability from District to District but the need for improvement across all areas. This information led employees to

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developed the following proposal. District managers were asked to discuss this with their boards for feed back. Most boards were in favor of the idea presented and the general focus in the proposal. The proposals is given below

District Employees Professional Development Proposal

District Employees are proposing to Council a one-year focus on District Operations Development and Training, as a component of Council's Strategic Plan. Themes from the District surveys are presented below and include specific items to consider when developing a plan of action for improving District operations.

Board Supervisors

- *Involvement in District projects and program development*
- *Fundraising for District*
- *Communication with District Employees*
- *Conducting effective Board meetings*
- *Recognizing roles, expectations and responsibilities*
- *Discussion on rotating board seats, term limits*

Staff

- *Developing strategies to communicate with and involve Board*
- *Formulating action items at meetings*
- *Delegating District responsibilities*

Board and Staff

- *Developing short and long-range work plans as a District*
- *Financial management trainings for supervisors and staff*
- *Developing strategies to communicate more effectively with each other*
- *Board meeting agenda development*

IV. Deliverables (suggested approaches, guide)

- ***Updated Supervisor Handbook***

District Employees would like Council to prioritize a Supervisor handbook and revisit orientation strategies for new Supervisors

- ******NRCD-specific VANPO Workshops for Supervisors and Staff******

District Employees are asking Council to work with VANPO in developing a workshop or conference specific to District supervisors and staff

- ***Council-sponsored training sessions***

DE's requesting regular training for Board and Staff addressing specific items in this review throughout the 1-year focus period. Visit individual board meetings

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- *Updated Job Description for Supervisors (included in handbook)*
DE's request Council to revisit job description for Board supervisors addressing responsibilities and expectations for new and old Supervisors

There was some discussion as to the involvement of District Boards and Supervisors in the development and discussion of the proposal. It may not have been discussed enough at the District level. While Council is in favor of the ideas, it would like to have Districts review it and report to Council on their thoughts and ideas.

Mike Domingue motioned that the District Employee's proposal be sent to Districts and Supervisors for review and have comments sent to the Executive Secretary. These comments will be brought to the Council at its next meeting in June. Christen Kaiser seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The Executive Secretary discussed the 319(h) funding for the ARS program. The National EPA 319 budget has been cut 13% this fiscal year (federal FY 05). This cut has translated to a 5.5 % or \$12,000 cut in the VAAF&M allocation from DEC. The ARS program will be cut \$ 6,000 for this year. This will be absorbed in training and other area so that we do not have to cut hours. Any additional cuts in the budget will result in a reduction in hours for ARS's. We are currently looking or additional funding.

The Land Treatment Planner grant was discussed. The program has been approved by the administration and Districts have been approved as sole source grant recipients. There currently is \$ 100,000 in NRCS dollars, \$ 50,000 in cash from VAAF&M and \$50,000 in program match from VAAF&M. The VT funds are from the state ICM program. The proposed locations of ST. Albans, St. Johnsbury and Middlebury, were discussed. The need for additional technical assistance in the southern part of the state was presented very clearly by members from Windham and Rutland NRCDs. It was agreed that the southern part of the state often gets short shrift for both technical and financial assistance for farmers. It was also agreed that the resources available were well short of the number of farms needing technical assistance. We all need to be looking for additional resources for technical assistance. However, we need to move forward this year with the current mix of funds and the proposal that was developed in December. The Council and Districts will look at the mix of funds and technical needs to see if adjustments or reallocation of funds need to be made next funding cycle.

Phil Benedict made a motion that the priorities for farm selection in the Land Treatment Planning grant be revised so that a high rating will be given to any farm that has received funding, from any source, for nutrient management work. Christen Kaiser seconded the motion and it passed.

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Mike Domingue gave the VACD Legislative Report. Mike wanted everyone to know that Marli is doing a "Great Job" as VACD Legislative Representative. She is keeping everyone informed with weekly legislative updates, which is e-mailed to every District managers and Chair. If you would like to receive it, please send your e-mail address to Marli. She would also really like to here from Districts and individual Supervisors about and legislations issue, especially if you have had any conversations with legislators.

Partner Updates

NRCS Fran Keeler The state office has made offers to individuals for all positions that they were trying to fill. They are still waiting to hear back from some individuals. They are working at allocating all program funds before the mid year review. They have extending WHIP applications until the end of April.

ANR Rick Hopkins The White River Basin Plan has been petitioned to the Water Resources Board for review all water section classifications. The reviewing is being requested for all biological determinations and town needs. The 319(h) competitive grants have been all allocated this year and Districts again did well.

UVM Extension Rick Levitte He is currently working with the Southern Districts on farm viability program. They are trying to leverage funds to get more people in the field. There is a major need for additional education to farmers on nutrient management. Extension can coordination with District on this. There need to be greater cooperation so we don't duplicate efforts. There is also a great need to get information from farmers back to the decision makers as well.

Supervisory Union Updates were not discussed due to lack of time. Supervisory Union representatives were asked to submit written reports to be placed in the minutes. Those received by April 15, 2005 are included in these minutes.

Otter Creek Supervisory Union submitted by Bob Drachman. Rutland has received approval for the installation of several glass display cases in the Diamond Run Mall for exhibits and posters related to agriculture and conservation issues. Several partners have expressed interest in preparing such materials. Solicitation of funding for the cases and their installation has just begun. Newly elected Associate Supervisors include Rick Golder, Diamond Run Mall Manager, Mark Skakel, Director, Conservation Program, Rutland High School, and Hilary Solomon, Watershed Studies. Funding obtained and work begun on lengthening and adding information signs to the Diamond Run Nature Trail. Mark Skakel and his students have completed much of this work. During the past 4

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years a Food Waste Composting Project on a Tinmouth farm diverted more than 400 tons per year of food waste collected from super markets and restaurants to a useful soil amendment for the farm. Rutland partnered with the Rutland Solid Waste District in this effort. The project is currently being relocated to another farm. The Rutland District Manager organized a highly rated land use work- shop for 35 Realtors. Several applicants were turned away due to space limitations. A nascent website for District, agriculture, and conservation information is gaining new life from our District Manager who is being trained with new software for adding to and modifying files.

A recent long range planning session was held with 12 of our partners. Many suggestions made will be included in the District long-range plan. Face-to-face sharing of conservation information was considered quite useful. Order forms have been sent to interested parties for our spring tree and trout sales. Nanci McGuire recently attended and is an active member of the Vermont Envirothon Steering Committee. Both Districts continue to work closely with ANR' s watershed planner, Ethan Swift, on the Otter Creek Basin Planning Council. Rutland submitted a proposal to the ANR LaRosa Lab. for processing water quality samples from the upper O. C. Smokey House Center will join in this effort. Hilary Solomon assembled data, collected by volunteers last summer from 12 sites, on the Upper O. C. and reported on the observed water quality. She was also funded to complete stream bank assessments in the same areas. These data continue to be analyzed and a brief summary was submitted to the Rutland Herald newspaper.

Respectfully Submitted

Jon W Anderson
Executive Secretary NRCC
April 15, 2005