

Approved April 7, 2005

Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Council

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

Meeting Minutes February 2, 2005
Berlin Field Office

Attendance: Rick Hopkins, Dick Stone, Kerry Gemmett, Bill Manning, Marli Rupe, Abby Willard, Mary Beth Whitten, Andrea Boggs, Christen Kaiser, Fran Keeler, Mike Domingue, Ed Lewis, Jon Anderson.

Chair Ed Lewis called the meeting to order at 9:39 am.

Mike Domingue moved, that the minutes of the December 10, 2004 meeting be accepted as written, seconded by Christen Kaiser. The motion passed.

The new Agricultural Resources Specialists, Mary Beth Whitten and Andrea Boggs, were introduced to Council. They explained their territories and their new responsibilities that includes land treatment-planning responsibilities.

The Executive Secretary reviewed the status on the Medium Farm Operations (MFO) rules and Accepted Agricultural Practices (AAP) revisions. The MFO rules and general permit have been submitted to the House and Senate agriculture committee. They have 30 days to comment before the formal rules process can start and the public can make formal comments. The MFO **Rules** give the Agency the authority to run the program. The MFO **General Permit** will stipulate the specific requirements that farms will have to meet to be in compliance. The changes in the AAP's will address concerns that the Agency and field staffs have in implementing the program including: updating the requirements for buffers, nutrient management and disposal of dead animals. The AAPs will also be rewritten so that they will be part of a continuous and progressive water quality program, starting with AAPs to MFO to LFO.

The Farm Bureau, Green Mt. Dairy Promotion and St. Albans Coop are sponsoring a number of meetings across the state to have some discussion on the proposed MFO program. They are interested in having Districts work with them on promoting and conducting focus groups after the meeting. Those who are interested should contact either Bill Paine at Green Mountain Dairy Promotion or Art Menut at the VT Farm Bureau. It is very important to get information out on these new programs as soon as possible. ARS's can play a critical role in this.

There was discussion on the reporting requirements for the Winooski PI-566 contract. In order to meet the deliverables of the contract the Otter Creek ARS will have to log time completing specific tasks. How should Winooski request this information when Pam is not their employee? It was recommended that a formal agreement between the two Districts be developed and signed by both chairs. This should specify what needs to be done and how reporting should be made to Winooski NRCD.

There was much discussion on the increased number of District Technical Field Staff because of, the multiple funding sources, multiple deliverables and varying, and often overlapping

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territories. The need to coordinate these people and have Districts understand who is doing what and who to call for what service is critical to the success of these programs.

A motion was made by Mike Domingue that a sub-committee be established to look at the structure and administration of District field staff and develop a method of deliverables and accountability of these program. This should include; territories, reporting to Districts and grantors, and coordination of oversight. The committee should have representatives from Districts, the Council, District field staff, District Managers and agency representatives. The motion was seconded by Christen Kaiser and passed.

The Executive Secretary will coordinate this committee. February 17 was selected as a possible meeting date. Those members who volunteered to be on the committee are; Rick Hopkins, Christen Kaiser, Abby Willard, Judy Howland and Andrea Boggs. Additional member will be sought from the Otter Creek and Windham Districts as well at the Agency of Ag.

The District workshops have been scheduled for the end of March. Tentative dates and locations are:

March 22 Rutland
March 23 Franklin/St Albans
March 24 Waterbury
March 25 St. Johnsbury

Topics will include; Supervisors responsibilities, Legislative Action, how to work with the legislature year round and the new MFO program and changes to the AAP's. Information will be sent out shortly.

Partner updates

Rick Hopkins, DEC The State allocation of 319 funding from EPA has been cut by 13%, or approximately \$ 220,000, for the FY 05 federal fiscal year, (October 04 to September 05). This could effect the funding for the ARS program. It was discussed that VACD had an excellent meeting with DEC Commissioner Jeff Weinberg earlier in the year. It was agreed that it would be very useful to meet with him again and discuss the importance of the ARS program and its funding needs. Thomas Torti has been named as the new Secretary of ANR. Formally, he was Commissioner of Buildings and General Services. They are working on buffer guidance for ACT 250. There will be and Request For Proposals (RFP) for targeted watershed out the week of February 14. This is a regional and national competition, however VT has not received one in the past and may be a position to receive on. Contact Rick or EPA for more information. DEC is looking at the stormwater rule and is developing rules for un-impaired waters in its jurisdiction. This could have a major effect on agriculture. He recommended that Districts review any drafts carefully for its effect on their clients.

Marli Rupe, VACD Both Marli and Mike Domingue have been very busy working in the Legislature. VACD is developing working relationships with partners and legislatures by educating them on Conservation District activities and needs. She shared handouts that she is using with legislators. She has found that communication is key. She is working hard on keeping

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communication open and consistent among Districts, VACD and the Legislature. She is planning on attending Farm Bureau meetings on Thursdays at the State House and Friday meetings with state agencies and partners.

Supervisor Union Updates

Bill Manning, Northeast SU Essex is starting work on flood prevention on the upper CT River. They are currently lacking a supervisor. They are continuing discussion on the tri-district coordination among Orleans, Essex and Caledonia. Caledonia is involved in the number of continuing river projects and they are moving from stream assessments to project implementation in a number of them. They are becoming more involved into addressing invasive issues specifically in terrestrial situations. They have scheduled realtors' workshops for the spring.

Mike Domingue, Central SU Winooski is doing a lot of urban work in the Potash and Allen Brook. They have hired two new ARS's, which were introduced earlier. They have just about finished assessment work in the Browns River. The White River District has lost funding for it's summer camp program and is currently looking for a new funding source. They will be having their own tree sale this year.

Christen Kaiser, Northwest S. U. Franklin is looking into liability insurance for the District. Allen Hall would like to be up on the Council mailing list. Lamoille had their officer's elections and Christen Kaiser is the new Chair. They have established a new district rule that every supervisor must chair at least one committee. They are working on a developing a partnership with FSA for stream plantings. They are looking to develop a niche to fund stream restoration projects. They have Stream-Co willows for sale from their nursery is other Districts are interested. They are starting a new membership campaign and an adult continuing education program.

Marli Rupe Southwest S. U. Bennington continued working on two grant proposals for a "Phase one" (that is, Arcview- and orthophotographs-based) assessment of the White/Mill Creek watershed in Rupert; and re-doing our Phase one assessment of the Walloomsac watershed (with Dick Schlesinger, from the Hoosic River Watershed Association). They began to schedule storytellers for the third annual Yarns from Farms and Forests series - at the Bennington Museum on March 17, Burdett Commons on March 23, and the First Congregational Church in Manchester on March 31. Shelly continued to work with Scout Proft on our student-based oral history project. We've found lots of enthusiastic teachers, trainers, and people willing to be interviewed - but only four students so far. Shelly met with members of the Bennington Garden Club on their helping put on an invasives field walk and prevention presentation event at Hildene this summer. Shelly assisted the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance with a variety of projects. Using photographs and other items sent by my colleagues around the state Shelly created a display on VT Conservation Districts for the Barre farm show. Shelly went to Waterbury as a member of the Watershed Grants review committee and decided with others how to allocate about \$70,000 raised through the Conservation License plate program.

Poultney-Mettawee is in process of interviewing candidates for two positions, a nutrient management specialist and a nutrient management educator. They will be moving into a new office in the restored Stone Bridge Inn in Poultney. They will use this office as an outreach to the community and keep their office at Green Mt. College for administration and project management.

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Otter Creek S. U. Rutland NRCD is working with Vern Grebenger on maintaining small sustainable agriculture. Otter Creek is organizing their spring tree sale and a realtor's workshop. They need a new supervisor to replace Claire Ayer.

Fran Keeler, NRCS They have hired Pedro Ramos to fill the Deputy State Conservationist position. He is a District Conservationist from California and will start on March 20. They will be adding an engineer to the St. Albans and Rutland field offices and a Soil Conservationist in Morrisville. They have a final budget and the state is down \$1.5 million from last year. There were 213 EQIP applicants this year. It will require \$5.9 million to fund the 45 significant contributors and MFO's and the total state allocation is \$1.5 million short. The breakdown is:

- 213 Total applicants
 - 192 AFO's
 - 12 MFO's
 - 5 of these were Significant Contributors
 - 33 Significant contributors (non-MFO's)

Chair Ed Lewis recommended that Council have established permanent meeting dates that would not change. It was agreed that Council would meet for the remainder of the 2005-year on the 1st Thursday of alternate months. The following dates were established:

- April 7
- June 2
- August 4
- October 6
- December 1

Christen Kaiser made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mike Domingue. Motion passed.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jon W. Anderson, Executive Secretary NRCC