

# Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Council

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

## Meeting Minutes

June 2, 2005

### Vermont Association of Snow Travelers

Berlin, Vermont

Attendance: Ed Lewis\*, Dick Stone\*, Dave Stevens\*, Rick Hopkins\*, Fred Humphrey\*, Mike Domingue\*, Marli Rupe, Kerry Gemmett, Tamara Stevens, Phil Benedict\*, Louise Calderwood, Tessa Chadwick (acting VT State Conservationist), Pedro Ramos, and Jon Anderson.

(\* Denotes voting members)

Ed Lewis called the meeting to order at 9:41.

Introductions were made.

*Mike Domingue motioned that the Council minutes of April 7, 2005 be accepted as presented. This motion was seconded by Rick Hopkins and passed.*

The Executive Secretary reviewed the FY 05 budget (see attached spread sheet). This included the budget as allocated by the legislature, the expenditures of Council and Executive Secretary. There was discussion on ways to reduce the advertising costs for elections. The council is obligated to place official legal warnings in "papers of record" for the availability of petitions and the notice of elections. The Executive Secretary will work with the Secretary of State and look at ways to reduce these costs.

Mike Domingue asked how can level funding cover the increased time and costs Districts are putting in on ag water quality issues. It was mentioned that the Governors "Clean and Clear" funding program would be a good place to look for additional funds. The increased communication among the Agency of Ag, ANR and the Legislature has helped secure this additional funding.

The Executive Secretary brought up the current status of the 319(h) funded portion of the ARS program. The national cut in 319 programs has resulted in a \$6,000 cut in the ARS program. The current contracts, as written, which end in November 2005, will be short that amount. Should the Council approve the use of the reaming District Grant funds of \$3,247 to fill this void? It was discussed that there may be some savings from having the Winooski position vacant for 3 months. The Executive Secretary did not have those figures at hand, but could easily get the

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information from the concerned Districts. It was generally agreed that this would be an appropriate use of these funds.

*Mike Domingue made the motion that the remaining \$ 3,247 be used to support the ARS program, if a detailed examination of the budget shows that the contracts will be short funded for this cycle. Fred Humphrey seconded the motion and it passed.*

The Executive Secretary reviewed the Councils strategic plan. The plan was written and approved in 2003 and will end this fall. There are still some items that are not completed. Those are listed below.

Supervisors Orientation

- Annual Workshops
- Curriculum for District Use
- Self Assessment Tool for Supervisors (started)

Handbook

- Partially completed

Personnel Advisory Committee

- Purpose and function

District mentoring

- Are multiple District projects a better goal that will achieve the same purpose?

Database of partners and contacts

- Define and create

\*QuickBooks

- Update all Districts to 2005 Pro for non-profits
- Buy one and multiple licenses to save funds

(\*Added as an updated item by the Executive Secretary)

He compared this to the recommendations made by the District Employees, which is listed below:

Updated Supervisor Handbook

- Orientation strategies for new Supervisors
- Methods for short and long range planning

NRCD specific VANPO or other professional workshops and Council sponsored trainings sessions for Supervisors and Staff:

- Fundraising
- Effective staff and board relations
- Effective Board meetings
- Recognizing roles, expectations and responsibilities

Updated Job Descriptions for Supervisors

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- Clear requirements
- Clear expectations of time and talents

It was recommended that the Chair establish a committee to develop a work plans for the next year that incorporates the unfinished items in the Council strategic plan and items in the employees' survey. It was also recommended that the committee have a number of employees, Supervisors and at least one Council member on it. Mike Domingue volunteered to serve and Ed Lewis will ask Bob Drachman and Roger Rainville to serve as well. The Executive Secretary will work on getting District Employees on the committee.

The Council discussed the need to update the strategic plan. It is scheduled to end in December of this year. It was agreed to review and update the plan at the October 6<sup>th</sup> meeting. This will take most of the meeting, so the agenda should be as clear as possible. It was suggested that we get an outside facilitator to assist us. Beth Ann Finely was suggested. The Executive Secretary will follow up and make all arrangements.

Fred Humphrey brought up the discussion that the Council might get better attendance if the per diem rate was increased to greater than \$50 per day. This may increase incentive to attend Council meeting. The Council per diem is set by statute in Title 32, Chapter 15, § 1010(b) at \$ 50.00 per day. Districts can supplement this with their own funds. It was pointed out that the cost should not be passed down to Districts with their limited resources. The loss of this knowledge and intelligence from high turnover is much greater than the financial costs to Council. If this is a big issue for Council they may want to look at changing the legislation that controls this next year.

Marli Rupe reviewed the Education and Outreach survey. She only received 5 responses from Districts. The results are summarized below:

- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>1. What is the priority in your District for working on outreach and Education with the local Ag community</b>        | <b>4.67</b> |
| <b>2. Prioritize the following means of outreach:</b>  |             |
| <b>a. District staff person's time</b>   | <b>4.0</b>  |
| <b>b. ARS Staff time</b>   | <b>4.83</b> |
| <b>c. Supervisors donated time</b>   | <b>2.83</b> |
| <b>3. Would you spend District funds on education and outreach</b>   | <b>4.17</b> |
| <b>4. Would you support the use of remaining Council grant funds, allocated directly to Districts, for this purpose?</b> | <b>4.33</b> |

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There was agreement that the Districts should play an important role in education outreach related to Ag water quality. The Council and Districts should take a lead role in Secretary Kerr's upcoming meeting on educational outreach. Chair Ed Lewis recommended that this be included in the year-long strategic plan being developed by the recently developed strategic committee.

The need for increased coordination on the Conservation District field staff is becoming a source of concern. We will soon have 4 ARS's and 3 LTP. There are hired by 5 different Conservation Districts and funded by 4 different sources. There needs to be an understanding among all Districts and NRCS field staff on the role these individuals play. The Executive Secretary stated that he had started to arrange a meeting for the ARS staff for June 23 and that meeting could be expanded to include this topic. After discussion some of the topics to cover and individual to include was determined. They include:

- Outreach for technical assistance
- Job descriptions and duties
- That the LTP work for all Districts (housing does not represent territory)
- Communication between all parties (How?)
- How and who will coordinate these efforts. (Abby Willard has become the default coordinator and it's not her job.)
- District Managers and Supervisors
- ARS's and LTP's
- NRCD DC's
- NRCS staff office staff; Jim Wood, Bob Sylvester, Ann Hilliard, Pedro Ramos
- Agency of Ag: Matt Kittredge, Abbi Pajak

Marli Rupe, Jon Anderson and Pedro Ramos will work on arranging this meeting.

Fred Humphrey invited all Council members and Districts to the annual "Strolling of the Heifers" in Brattleboro on Saturday June 2<sup>nd</sup>. The parade starts at 10 am with activities, crafts and other "stuff" following on the common. It's a great way to promote local agriculture and the rural economy.

NRCS update, Pedro Ramos. The US House has raised the NRCS budget for FY 06 to the current years levels, which is good news. They will be starting to write contribution agreements for next year (starting in October of

2005) soon. If the agreements are greater than \$ 100,000 they will need to be approved by Headquarters.

NRCS Tessa Chadwick acting state conservationist The CSP sign-up was lower than expected with only 12 applications submitted in the CT river/West River and the Otter Creek. The program demands a lot from dairy operations for the funds received. The rumor about the new farm bill is that conservation programs will be looking more to a “green payment” approach with a reduction of commodity payments. The environmentalist would prefer this. However many commodity groups are saying they can’t make it without payments. Only time will tell. Judy Doerner has been selected as the new State Conservationist for NRCS. She is currently the State Conservationist for R.I. and will start on September 4, 2005.

There will be a 4 state (ME, NH, VT and MA) turf field course on July 29 in Mojalocky N.H. All are invited.

NRCS has hired 6 students to work this summer; 3 engineering technicians, 2 conservation planners and 1 software technician. They have also hired a Soil Conservationist in St. Albans and Rutland. They are in the process of selecting the CSP Watersheds for next year. The dedication of the Pomainville wetland restoration is on Friday June 3, 2005.

ANR/DEC update Rick Hopkins. The White River water classification and typing petition that was sent to the Water Resources Board has been approved. This supports the Departments original classification system that was submitted with the basin plan. It also supports the classification of 2A of all water associated with agriculture. The Governor has submitted two (2) environmental grants to EPA. One is on the Lamoille River to remove an old R.R. line that would open up the flood plane. The seconded is on the White River to accerate the riparian protection on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> branch.

Respectfully submitted,

Jon W. Anderson, Executive Secretary NRCC