

WCNRCD Board Meeting

August 22nd, 2024 6:30 PM

Geof Dolman's House: 301 Barrows Rd, Brattleboro, VT 05301

and over Zoom

Present: Cory Ross; District Manager; Isabel Bowman; Conservation Specialist; Heather Blunk; Agricultural Specialist; Linda Corse, Meg Kluge, Geof Dolman; Board Members

Zoom Participants: Pieter van Loon, Board Member, Phyllicia Moore; Assistant State Conservationist for Field operations and Olivia Carlson, Acting NRCS Zone Conservationist

Land Acknowledgement: We respectfully acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Abenaki People, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations.

Agenda Update: Discuss letter from White River NRCD

NRCS Updates:

- Olivia Carlson is working out of the Rutland office as the acting NRCS Zone Conservationist. Olivia has been with NRCS for 4 years and was previously working in Pennsylvania for a Conservation District.
- Phyllicia will continue to update and hear updates on the Local Fund Pool for this year and FY25.
 - Unless producers select specific fund pools, they will be ranked into the available funding pools.
 - Heather and the Emma Crew have been hard at work on this!
 - Locally led training coming up on the deliverables for the process.
- NRCS is still obligating FY2024 and will be done Sept 30, in time for the October board meeting.
- Early application cut off deadline is tomorrow. Producers who had previously applied and were unsuccessful will be deferred for the next round. Emma crew is following up on producers who applied past the deadline last fall. Helping to prepare producers for timeline expectations.
- Update for new hires from WCNRCD: Documents that Cory made were reviewed and tweaked. New hires who will work on NRCS work will be provided equipment and go through clearance checks. New hires who will not work on NRCS will be processed for clearance.
- CPA 52 training is coming on Sept 24. Includes NEPA compliance and environmental compliance.

Annual Meeting planning:

- Location: Scott Farm. This costs \$750. This includes tables, chairs, cutlery, dishes, kitchen use, cash bar with beer, wine, or cider.
- Date: Thursday, November 14

- Catering: Working with the Porch on pricing and availability. Anticipated \$3,000. Interested in mini appetizers: pork sliders, eggplant pizza, etc.
- Proposing to have 100 people attend.
- Keynote speaker: Potentially Leila Phillips of Beaverland. Pieter to reach out about the cost from past event. Ask Amanda from Cheshire CCD for speaker ideas. Also interested in pursuing DEI options including Rich Holschuh of the local tribe, Chief of VT Abenaki, Alli Lewis with VACD. We would make a donation to the tribe and comp travel costs
- Need: circular table cloths for tables that seat 8 people, music, cloth napkins, dessert, Conservationist of the year awardee (Potentially Drew Adams or Jolene Hamilton)
- If on theme with speaker, could set up stream table
- Advertising will start now
- Want to request donations on a sliding scale to offset the costs. Could do a mimic of what other groups do with if you are BIPOC, home owner, etc. here is a suggested price.
- Potential silent auction in the future. Horse riding, Blue Seal (formerly Achille Agway), Pieter lead forest walk, copy of speakers book
- Predinner event is visiting the Dummerston covered bridge stairs

FY 25 Workplans and Budget Revisions:

- Workplan is a required deliverable for NRCC. Initial grid is a breakdown of different positions. Then, each person wrote their own plan. Plans reflect what goes on throughout the year.
- Updated budgets notes any changes due to updated grants. Examples: Updated indirect amount with Essex county budget and Ellis Brook project on hold and was taken out.
- Interest in an investment policy to get better yield savings. Suggest checking with other districts for templates and where their funds are.
- Interested in getting a credit card. Current issue is getting an organizational card that is not associated with a person's credit. Jill has credit card for VACD and Cory will ask about this

Motion to accept revised budget was moved, seconded, and passed.

Update on Agricultural Resource Specialist hiring process:

- Interviewed 4 candidates, advanced three of those to second interviews. Interested in a zoom for candidate that may not be able to come in person.

DEI self assessment Session:

- Worked through DEI self assessment.
- A need for organized trainings to occur frequently held by outside partners and organizations. These should include a range of DEI topics.
- A need for staff to go into introductory DEI training. Need more DEI outreach training. The Community Needs Assessment training question needs more clarification. Staff have taken a variety of training opportunities but are unsure what this question means.

- Under other trainings, we were unsure of how related the trainings need to be to conservation.
- Action items: Collaborate with Lost River Racial Justice center, local Abenaki group, Winston-Prouty, Austine School to collaborate on developing our efforts. Include changes to workplans to include DEI efforts.

District Manager's report:

- Note that some of the same projects occur under multiple funders but are only billed to one at a time.
- Ellis Brook project is on hold. Parent agreement is over at this calendar year. Cory needs to schedule a visit with the son to discuss options.
- Increase in our in our finance balance. This is due to Cory placing a major emphasis on invoicing pre-summer to avoid lean summer financials.
- Wilmington buyout would likely become property of town but the state will determine what can be done with the land. The town may attempt to purchase the entire property for a variety of uses. If a buyout occurs, this will be 100% of pre-flood value which is a limited time opportunity.
- Farm Teams work with Ottawaquechee is a verbal agreement that southern half of their district is part of our agricultural area.

Next meeting will be September 19th

Letter from White River NRCD:

- Letter was sent to some supervisors and the Executive Director. The letter stated White River's concerns with VACD and NRCC. These include NRCC funding processes and VACD not following bylaws in the past year. White River NRCD is threatening to withhold dues from VACD if certain changes are not made. The letter also called in to question Jill's and Linda's actions while operating VACD.
- Once the board member have had the chance to read the letter, we may provide a response that would potentially clarify a few points.

Motion to go into Executive session was moved, seconded and passed. Executive Session began at 8:21 pm.

Motion to leave Executive session was moved, seconded and passed. Executive Session ended at 8:48.

Motion to approve annual performance review for Heather Blunk was moved, seconded and passed 3-0.

Motion to adjourn moved, seconded and passed. Meeting adjourned at 8:57.

Respectfully submitted,

Isabel Bowman