

Windham County Natural Resource Conservation District Minutes

Wednesday, October 6, 2021, 6:30 pm

Zoom Meeting

Present: Linda Corse, Katie Ross Morrison, Pieter van Loon, Geof Dolman: board supervisors;
Cory Ross: district manager; Phyllicia Moore, District Conservationist for the South Zone, NRCS

Financial Update:

- We were in the red for this quarter but are on track for spending for this fiscal year (hard to break things down quarterly because of how grant payments come in etc).
- The only area of concern: profit and loss by class, there were a couple of unclassified things, not big expenses but would be nice to get those classified. Mileage, for example, is showing up as unclassified.
- Current visitor policy at the NRCS office: clients just need to follow CDC guidance of masking and following social distancing, other visitors soon will need to show proof of having received a covid vaccine.

Statehouse to Farmhouse Event:

- Statehouse to Farmhouse Recap: Hosted it at Reboop Farm: 7 people plus some legislators came. In the future will try to hold it not during Sept and not on a Sunday.
- Heard a lot of feedback – don't feel like they're getting support at state and federal levels (UVM Extension, etc). Would like to develop NRCD's role in being a liaison between farmers/producers and resources.
- Ashlyn and Abraham are interested in hosting an NRCD breakfast, to help spread the word about what we do.
- Linda and Cory attended watershed partnership conference, thinking about how to connect farmers with services.

NRCC Meeting Update:

- One thing they want to do is seek input from landowners and producers, Linda pushed for it being a field day, more likely to get people to come.
- Agency of Ag talked about BMP funding that is available, those funds often don't get used.
- Jen from White River talked about their farm teams concepts: offer service for producers so district can be coordinator for all the farm's ag services, make it easier for producers to connect with services. Cory would like to do this too, need to figure out how to get it funded. Also talked about need for more flexible core funding.
- Ryan Patch was supposed to be part of the meeting but it ran long, there were links in the minutes about the climate council and the ag subcommittee. Abby has concerns that Windham County hasn't had a voice in this process. It supposed to be done and finalized by the end of the year. Linda encouraged us to read up about this online and get involved if possible.
- They were talking about improve the process for onboarding supervisors, are going to have a separate meeting on that topic.
- Funding requests – core services will be doubled, which should help. Districts appropriation letter proposal (put together by district managers) need to come from supervisors, prob won't be time for it to happen in this budget.
- District Manager appropriations letter needs to be shorter, clarify what we want and why. This has been a discussion for a while now, not just about salary etc but about the districts scope and how to reduce turnover among district managers.

District Manager's Report

- Cory attended stream table training in October, which was paid for through an NRCC grant. Have been hearing feedback about road crews needing stream table training also.
- Phosphorus grant (to help producers document phosphorus reduction practices): VRCD is going to submit an application on behalf of all of us. Agency is going to do the outreach, and find farms, and then the district will provide the services. Hopefully it will include money for training. This could also be a dry run for carbon banking. Grazing won't be considered in this program because it's too variable so couldn't find a useful metric. Will be for certified small farms and bigger.
- How is this related to nutrient management plans? Uses a different data system than nutrient management plans. How are the reductions going to work? Cory isn't sure.

-Dummerston Covered bridge access erosion gully and rain gardens at Brat Farmers Market are 2 good projects to add to our workload, pending funding.

-Visited a landowner who has a dam on her property, excellent candidate for removal so should be able to get funding. Our district hasn't done a dam removal, would be good to be able to do this type of project, hopefully project can move forward.

Phylicia's Update, NRCS South Zone:

-In the south zone: over 100 contracts were obligated; \$1.2 million obligated; in Windham county 22 contracts were obligated, a little over \$400,000. Josh is pretty busy with new applications and requests.

-It hasn't been quite decided how the program schedule is going to go for FY'22, but it will be a little more upfront. They're expected to get their budget within the next week or 2, which will help plan program schedules. Prob not as many program rounds as in the past; now maybe 1 or 2 rounds for the next fiscal year; there should be updates in the next week or 2. The state has decided not to go forward with fund pool proposal (south zone only ones who had a proposal), will give us time to refine the proposal and the district could also have their own fund pool proposal.

-Local workgroup timing can be challenging, it is difficult for producers to be involved in July. Should keep that in mind, try to gather information throughout the year so we have that when workgroup happens even if producers can't make it. It would be nice to get back to a well-attended, meaningful local workgroup.

-She sent out a civil rights checklist, something to look at and then discuss at a future meeting. Needs to get done within the 1st two quarters. January might be a good time to look at that.

Minutes:

Motion to approve the June and September minutes; motion approved.

Future Agenda Items:

-Youth board member

-Nov: Ag outreach/ Ag programs; thoughts about Windham county, who's not being reached, how we can better reach them.

Upcoming Meetings:

-Will we meet in person? Indoors? Would like to be in a bigger space. Lilac Ridge and Austine School (where UVM extension offices are) are both possibilities. Putney School could also probably be an option but Bratt is more central which is esp preferable in winter.

Nov 8 – location TBD.

Dec 8 -