

WCNRCD Minutes

Location: Geof Dolman's home 301 Barrows Road Brattleboro VT

9-12-22

Present: Cory Ross, Heather Blunk: Windham NRCD Staff; Linda Corse, Pieter van Loon, Meg Kluge, Geof Dolman: WC NRCD Supervisors; Joshua Allen and Phyllicia Moore: NRCS; Emily Nummer: VACD (via Zoom).

New Business:

1. VACD Ag Programs Update from Emily Nummer:
 - a. Emily is the Ag Programs Manager for VACD
 - b. She provided an overview of current and prospective ag programs that VACD is managing and opportunities for work for the districts now through 2024.
 - i. Ag-CWIP for outreach and ed related to water quality
 - ii. Pay for Phosphorous – opportunities for Windham staff to complete verification
 - iii. NMP – not applying for a new agreement at this time, because most eligible farms have an NMP at this point. Will rebid when there is an opportunity to rebid. Want to shift the focus of this program towards other soil health practices.
 - iv. Farm Bill Support Agreement – contract with NRCS. This work has been done by VACD technical staff in the past, but as districts are staffing up and increasing capacity, they are interested in taking over these roles. This is an opportunity for districts like Windham.
 - v. DEC RCPP – Technical Assistance and Outreach and Education for this program. Related to wetlands, land conservation, forestry and some other ag practices.
 - vi. RCPP Support –
 - vii. Soil Health Training – Franklin NRCD applied for these programs, which will include training for Windham Ag Staff.
 - c. District specific grants
 - d. Looking towards FY24 –
 - i. NMP – not continuing
 - ii. State of Vermont launching a soil health pilot program. Districts will be doing the technical assistance like the PFP Program.
 - iii. Increase in CTA Funding – Expected
 - iv. Increases in Farm Bill Funding – Expected
 - v. Between 2.0 and 2.25 FTEs split between district staff, likely to grow over the coming years.

2. NRCS Update

- a. Josh Allen update on his new position: Josh is the state outreach coordinator for NRCS. Will work with partners (district, UVM, NWTF, Vermont Fish and Wildlife) to strengthen and fortify partnership to better articulate to customers what opportunities are available. Will assist with recruitment and retention, visit colleges and high schools. Will also conduct outreach within each zone to help them develop individual outreach plans. Will govern the Earth team volunteer program. Josh is the contact for this program. Will help with customer outreach to make sure the end piece is not just for staff but for customers as well regarding conservation practices.
- b. Phyllicia's update: Was in DC last week as part of the New England Leadership Program. Met with National leaders, including Chief of NRCS, Terry Crosby. IRA will bring a lot of money to the region, on top of Farm Bill Funds. ~\$20 Billion to be distributed. Will come through the NRCS programs. Recruitment and retention will be key to get people in the door for these new positions. NRCS continues to seek GS-5/7 positions as well as GS-9/11 to replace Josh and is having difficulty finding qualified candidates. NRCS interviewing on Monday to replace Josh. More information about the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) rollout is expected in October. Nov 18 is the sign up date for EQIP. An earlier sign-up date should help get applications in and processed in time for obligation, and will help being ready for field season implementation. CSP Classic deadline is October 25th, for newer applications. Renewals are already in place. CSP is for producers who have already done EQIP. CSP is a five-year commitment, while EQIP can be one or two years. Farm Bill Support and potential for CSP and conservation districts being involved. Where NRCS needs assistance (South zone has 80 active CSP contracts) is with CSP. District staff would be more involved in field verification as opposed to contracts. NRCS could have as much as 0.25 to 0.5 FTE for CSP work, which will vary based on new applications.
 - i. Local Fund Pool is approved. Josh will be in charge of outreach for this, which can begin now. The November 18 deadline applies to this as well.
- 3. Windham Ag Services – Decided to hold this conversation over until October
- 4. DEI Training – Self-assessment tool for each district. This training is an opportunity to walk through the self-assessment tool. End result will include the creation of a DEI committee including supervisors and staff from across the districts. The evening session is better for most Windham supervisors.

District Manager's Report

Cory has been working with the Windham Historical Society on donating some of our old documents for preservation. Windham will be serving as a "test case" for addressing document retention for VACD. Cory has been in communication with Clare and Jill about requirements for retention.

Pieter asked if the High Meadows Fund project could be used to support invasives education. Cory said yes and agreed that this is a good idea. Cory is working on planning a workshop for the public about riparian planting projects. Josh would like to coordinate on this project and may be able to help the district connect with videographers at NRCS. Cory will follow up with Josh about this idea.

Plant sale orders have been submitted to Adams and Cold Stream. Many items were already sold out in August.

On-Going Items

1. FY 24 Appropriations Process
 - a. Action Circles would like each district to host a legislative event soon, either before the election (with all candidates) or after the election with just the elected officials. Linda offered Coarse Dairy Farm as a host location for this event. Heather mentioned The Boyd Family farm in Wilmington. The group agreed that an event after the election likely made more sense.

Secretary's Report

The board voted to approve the minutes from the August 10 meeting with corrections.

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

October 12, 6:30 PM at Geof's place or online.

Other Business:

Heather is planning to attend additional conservation planner training in Colchester later this month. She will need to be reimbursed for her travel and lodging expenses. **A motion was made to fund her travel costs consistent with the last time the district did this in August. Motion was seconded and passed.**

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted

Cory Ross