

WCNRCD Board Meeting

October 9, 2024 6:30 PM

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

Present: Cory Ross, District Manager; Meg Kluge, Linda Corse, Katie Morrison, Geof Dolman, Supervisor; Isabel Bowman and Mae Masson, Conservation Specialist, Heather Blunk, Ag Resources Specialist, Garrett Manchester, Americorps Member.

Zoom Participants: Pieter van Loon, board supervisor; Cat Abbott, grassland bird conservation; Olivia Carlson, acting district conservationist south zone, NRCS.

NRCS Updates (Olivia Carlson):

- Locally led presentation - Travis Thomason (state conservationist) would like to come down to do a virtual or in person meeting to talk about what he's thinking.
- Start date for program assistant is pending.
- There is new eligibility date for producers; will be standard operating procedure to make that process streamlined.
- Everything has been obligated. Did a breakdown for contracts that have been obligated.
- For EQIP in Windham County:
 - 21 contracts, total of \$997,100.
 - 3 CSP contracts, \$68,607.
 - 1 RCCP contract, \$22,500.
 - 1 easement was funded, \$132,500.4
 - AMA contracts, \$78,320,
 - Local fund pool, FY24, \$274,905.
 - EQIP Practices include: Brush management, forest stand improvement, early successional habitat, structures for wildlife.
- She will look for the cap for the CSP Conservation Stewardship Program - \$200,000 . She'll also look for local fund pool numbers for the last few years so we can look at trends.

Proposed Revisions to Pay and Benefit Policy:

- First change reflects the fact that we now offer health insurance.
- Second change says that 3% matching for 401K plan is separate from the 20% of income for health insurance.
- For now Cory will be managing the 401K plan; ideally in the future districts would have 1 person across the state managing these plans.

- At the state level they're examining potential efficiencies. One possible efficiency is to align policies like these across the state.

*Motion to amend Windham NRCD Pay and Benefit Policy as outlined in the board packet.
Motion approved.*

Annual Meeting Planning:

- 6 people registered so far. Need to get more folks registered.
- Nov 14, 5-7pm, At Scott Farm.
- Dinner, music, silent auction, door raffle.
- Keynote speaker: Vern Grubinger, From Field to Planet: A Continuum of Conservation.
- Will try to get as many legislators there as possible.
- Other places to advertise: farm supplies, vet offices, public libraries, town offices, Conservation Commission, Putney Mtn Association, Windham Regional Woodlands Association, Food Connects, Green Mtn Conservancy
- Need people to bake - random desserts, will bring sign up sheet to next board meeting.
- Table cloths
- Centerpieces: pumpkins.
- Beverages: Maybe Andrea will donate cider (and a couple pies?)

DEI Assessment:

- Staff went to the Sowing Seeds conference. Keynote speaker was Caroline Finney, who wrote *Black Faces White Spaces*. Doesn't feel comfortable walking in the woods as a person of color in VT. There also was a workshop about Clemmons Farm (oldest black farm in VT), and an accessibility workshop focusing on trail accessibility.
- Potential workshops that WCNRCD could host include:
 - thinking about accessibility in nature and the experience of people of color in the outdoors, in the woods, demystifying the experience of spending time in the woods for POC.
- Often organizations put one time funding/efforts into DEI, positive that we're revisiting this each month. Some criticism of DEI work: it can be othering; can be lip service. Are there ways to support people of color to feel more comfortable spending time in the woods and help them to be more comfortable working with agencies such as NRCS, WCNRCD, etc.
- Monthly board meetings - not accessible at Geoff's for folks with physical disabilities.. Zoom is one tool that makes the meetings more accessible. Geoff suggested having a ramp for the front door.
- Other ideas:
 - Hosting events for certain groups.
 - Host a leadership program for NACD positions (for supervisors not employees).

District Manager's Report:

- It's Pieter's term that's up, hoping he'll run again. Petitions due November 5. Term will expire Dec 31, 2029.
- Long Island found Study Conservation and Management Plan - do we want to comment as a board?
 - Proposed change - they'll fund more than just nitrogen related projects in the Connecticut River Watershed. Seems like if that's the case then we should fund it.
 - The program is related to forest health in Long Island Sound. Linda can't remember the name, but thinks they're looking for more statewide efforts.
 - CRWP - Connecticut River Watershed Partnership: Upcoming conference - regional group discussing work in Connecticut River, Isabel will discuss Long Island sound project.
- At Sowing Seeds conference there was a focus on the 30 by 30, 50 by 50 initiative (the goal of the State that 30 percent of Vermont's total land area shall be conserved by 2030, and 50 percent of the State's total land area shall be conserved by 2050). They broke into subgroups, had a case study, one of which focused on Townshend.
- Plant sale - plants are ordered.

Secretary's Report:

- July 10 Minutes
- Sept 19 Minutes

Motion to approve minutes.

Motion approved.

Other Updates:

- VACD - doing a review process with consultant. Cory has had 1-on-1 meeting with them. Jill has announced plan to retire. Vicki Drew - on executive committee, leading that process. Emphasis - need to get stuff in writing, who is involved in what, who will vote on the hire, etc. Cory will be a non-voting member on the hiring committee.
- VACD annual meeting is happening Nov 19 and 20 at Lake Morey. Nov 20th is the official board meeting, and includes lunch with awards; it's unclear - should staff be there? Not clear; Linda will get clarification about that. Trying to structure it 'a la carte' - I.e. if staff can only go for one day that will work out. Would be great for supervisors to go also.

Next Meeting:

- Wed Nov 6 - location TBD.
- Travis (state conservationist) wants to come to talk about the locally led process.

- Dec meeting: Dec 11 at 6:30pm.

Motion to Adjourn at 8:38pm.

Motion Approved.