

WCNRCD Board Meeting
February 7th, 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 Resource Specialist; Linda Corse, Meg Kluge, Pieter van Loon, Geof Dolman; Board Members

Zoom Participants: Phyllicia Moore; NRCS Zone Conservationist, David Erickson; member of the general public

Proposal for Local Conservation Partner Coordination and Sharing Conference

- Nonprofit conservation sector isn't talking frequently -> often only at certain meetings
 - Often organizations have some disconnect, leading to dysfunction
 - Idea to create a space for building relationships/networking
 - Board is interested
- Want to include on-the-ground conservation groups
- Ideally an annual meeting
 - Attended by a board and staff member
 - Is this frequent enough?
 - Yes; just to get us started with as many people as we can get at one time
- Format thoughts:
 - Round table or informal gathering (With lightly guided conversations)
 - Certain amount of time (10-15 minutes) to cover what we are planning this year and discuss key challenges
- Who will be invited?
 - Partners who are missing from the conversation
 - Expand groups like farm teams
 - Ideally, create a database with information from these groups
 - However, databases are not often updated
- What area will this cover?
 - Windham county specific -> because we are people's first introduction to VT
- David quoted \$5,000 - \$6,000 (50 - 60 hours per year) to plan and facilitate this process
- Pieter involved in a forest round table held by the Vermont Natural Resource Council (Jamie Fidel)
 - Got grant funding to start it up
- Next step: reach out to partners to gauge interest

NRCS Updates

- Joseph Bondi Officially acting in south zone as Phyllicia's role
 - Plans to join next month's meeting
 - Up to speed on administrative work
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications were ranked this week by the Emmas and Heather
- Looks like all CSP funds will get spent

- However, announced a round two of CSP funding
- Reaching out to Travis about more funding, do we have capacity?
- \$1 million in CSP Inflation Reduction Act, in addition to normal CSP
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) will move into ranking phase
- Emma Gregg getting trained
- Phyllicia trying to get topics of interest for more training
 - Field Fridays to provide training open to partners
 - June to August, every Friday
 - Training on different topics
 - Sharepoint file used to document to provide training topics
- Increasing the number of certified conservation trainers to help fill in the gaps
- The Program Assistant (PA) in Brattleboro did not accept the role
 - The PA is a position that Vermont Association of Conservation Districts hires to help with NRCS work
 - Pattern in interviews - those who are selected are people who are people not likely to work out.
 - Overall, not felt heard in the interview process so far
 - Proposal by other district managers to have PAs, but aren't connected to districts. Maybe they could attend board meetings to take minutes
 - Phyllicia agrees that the relationship is needed
 - Need consistency in interviews:
 - Asking follow-up questions only to some people which is not in civil rights compliance

VACD and NRCC Updates:

- Supervisory unions (SU) disputes
- SU representatives of White River and Winooski Districts met for the first time
 - Both parties are not interested in remaining in the SU
 - Looking at possibly dissolving SU and divvying up the districts within the SU's
 - Might be difficult to get SU dissolved
 - Need more clarity on this
 - This would mean the SU will lose a seat at the council
 - White River (WR) interested in joining our SU
- Decisions need to be made based on the needs of the area
 - WR would be contiguous but a large part of the Connecticut
 - WR has a lot of Ag work, but doesn't work much in other conservation areas
- SU could possibly hire a district conservationist under statutes
 - Meetings were historically information sharing
 - Don't think that a new position should be the reason we change these groups

FY24 Q2 Reports

- Waiting on LISFF project invoicing based on partners
- \$14 typo under workshops
- \$145,000 in revenue
- Expected that \$260,000 in revenue 50% of the way through the year
- Waiting on the seasons to change for some work to start and payments to move
- Net is -\$5,607

- Total liabilities and equity as of 12/31: \$63,634
- Any concerns?
 - Often more funding from indirect payments, making it difficult to figure out financials
- Planned to have nest egg at the end of financial year but this may not happen

District Manager's Report

- Coffee chat was a success
 - Learned that we need more time for chatting - Maybe limit talking about what the district does as much
 - Want to hold multiple events in the future for more engagement
- Cory went to the statehouse Wednesday for a capital request
 - Met with new people and was able to share information about what the districts are
 - Districts need to get the house Agriculture and House Energy and Environment to recommend to the state for support
 - Testimony from Hillary, Emily Finnegan, and Sarah Damsell was presented at the statehouse on Districts
 - February 27th: advocacy day where the districts can have a display (and hopefully schedule testimony at the same time)
- Heather met with a goat farm to discuss stream crossing
 - Funding options: NRCS, state BMP, EQIP
- Cheshire County NRCD provides a grant to cover those who fall in between NRCS or state funding
 - Interested in having a similar fund in Windham
- Interest in having Mike Ghia speak at a future board meeting

Minutes

Motion to accept the January 10th meeting minutes was moved, seconded and passed.

Next meeting will be March 13th

Meeting adjourned at 8:19pm

Motion to go into executive session for personnel concern was moved, seconded and passed.

Motion to exit executive session was made, seconded and passed at 8:50 pm

Motion to award performance bonuses of \$1,750 to selected staff made, seconded and approved.

Motion to adjourn at 8:56, seconded and approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Isabel Bowman and Cory Ross