DRAFT

**Local Work Group Meeting**

**1/17/2025 1:00 pm**

**Brooks Memorial Library**

**Present:** Cory Ross (District Manager - WCNRCD), Isabel Bowman (Conservation Specialist - WCNRCD), Mae Masson (Agricultural Resource Specialist - WCNRCD), Linda Corse (Board Member – WCNRCD; Corse Dairy Farm), Marie Caduto (Watershed Coordinator – DEC), Emma Kuester (Soil Conservationist – NRCS), Amy-Louise Pfeffer (Executive Director – the Stone Trust), Michelle Simpson (Director – BEEC), Patti Smith (Naturalist – BEEC), David Erickson (Conservationist), Dana Ruppert (Forest Business & Farm Viability Outreach Coordinator – UVM Extension), Seren Dias (Giant Journey Farm)

**Zoom participants:** Kelly Stettner (District Manager – ONRCD), Olivia Carlson (Acting Zone Conservationist), Phylixcia Moore (Assistant State Conservationist – NRCS), Tony Duncan

WCNRCD = Windham County Natural Resources Conservation District

ONRCD = Ottauquechee Natural Resources Conservation District

DEC = Department of Environmental Conservation

BEEC = Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center

Land Acknowledgement

Introductions

Overview of locally led process and resource concern survey results:

* The goal here is to identify gaps in current knowledge: which local needs are not met in the current programming?
* The other goal is to identify priority resource concerns to produce a written document due March 17 (not sure) to present to the chair of the state technical committee, if deemed needed.
* Also something to consider, for the first time WCNRCD is writing a conservation action plan (“CAP”), which will be based on our natural resources assessment.
* Submitting local funding pool proposals could be used as RCPP pilots.

Resource concern survey:

* There were less responses compared to last year’s survey, probably because WCNRCD didn’t advertise on facebook/Instagram this time around.
* Recreators were the largest respondents.
* How do we get more farmers to respond to this survey for a better representation of the county’s land stewards? Farmers tend to be oversurveyed and we need to think of ways to include their voice in this survey.
* The deadline for the survey also caught us by surprise, and it is usually open in December where not much tabling happens. However, that would be a time where farmers are most likely to be available. Suggestion for having the survey open all year round.
* Most respondents were 55 and older, and mostly white.
* Among farmers, there was a decent breakdown of time farming, a third have 25 years and more of farming experience.
* Respondents chose the land uses most concerned they were most concerned about, their top five resource concerns etc.
* There is a discrepancy between the number of conservation practices that respondents need on their land, versus the number of practices they would chose to apply for a NRCS funding program.
  + There was a different response rate between each question because not everyone is a land steward/owns land.
  + How do you apply for funding for a specific conservation need? Who to contact
  + Municipalities can’t apply for NRCS funding.
  + Discussion on the availability of NRCS engineers. NRCS engineering funds need to be set aside to plan for an engineering need. Hiring a third party is hard because the NRCS still needs to review and probably redesign the project. Windham County engineering needs have to be clear and communicated. Maybe local fund pool can be used for it but needs to be verified.
* Fencing: deer is increasing concern for vegetable growers. There is NRCS cost share for exclusion fencing for forest lands but it is too expensive to be worth it on a small vegetable production. Double-stacked temporary fencing systems are available for deer management.

Basin plan overview from Marie Caduto, Watershed Coordinator with the Department of Environmental Conservation:

* Tactical basin plans list environmental issues that might be threatening water quality, local habitats etc.
* Basin 11 is West rivers Williams Saxtons and Basin 12 is Deerfield river and lower Connecticut. Both have lots of forested protective land cover. The rivers and streams are in pretty good shape. The tactical plans outlines how to keep it that way and identifies potential concerns.
* The Connecticut River has a high concentration of rare and threatened species and represents a big migration route. A lot of species start to migrate south from southern Vermont.
* Maple producers count as forest cover and do not have a lot impaired water quality at the moment.
* Some lakes have been polluted from the airflow pattern from the Midwest pollution from powerplants: acid rain and mercury almost exclusively. Our lakes are very acid, but the water quality has improved a little since air quality has improved from the 80s and 90s. There is nothing we can do about it.
* Broad projects happening in the basins can be found on project explorer on the DEC website.
* Currently working on reclassifying the Green River to protect it.

Review of last year’s local fund pool proposal:

* The 2024 forestry fund pool was $400k and the small-scale agricultural fund pool was $250k.
* Applications have not been ranked (the deadline is later), and some applications are not finished.
* NRCS staff capacity issue for forestry projects, which is being worked on.

Conservation coffee chat:

* Summary of conservation coffee chat held in December 2024, the resource concerns raised are similar to the ones raised in the survey.

This year’s local fund pool proposal – do we think we know what we need?

* NRCS wants more feedback from more farmers
* The district has been working with farmers to reduce nitrogen in the Connecticut river. We should look into why farmers don’t apply for help: they either don’t have time or assistance is not there for them at the time that they need it, a lot of turn-over from technical service providers means explaining the same thing over and over again.
* Adding wetland conservation? More practical in a forestry application.
* Water capture and use of roof runoff?
* Contour farming?