

## **WCNRCD Board Meeting**

April 10th, 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; Meg Kluge, Geof Dolman, Board Members.

**Zoom Participants:** Pieter van Loon, Linda Corse, Katie Morrison Board members; Cat Abbot and Kathy Urffer.

### **NRCS UPDATE**

- **FY 24 all of the Local Fund Pool Applications are ranked. We had 300,000 to award and had over 500,000 in applications.**
- **Two proposed Local Fund Pool Proposals. One will be forestry at \$400,000. Small Agriculture will be asking for \$250,000.**
- **The State Technical Committee (STC) will convene in April, and we will hear around July if our Local Fund Pools were awarded. August 23<sup>rd</sup> will be application cut off this year.**
- **Supported with documentation from TBP**
- **Heather will take lead on final report that goes to STC**
- **Waiting on the rest of preapprovals**
- **PA Start date, entered background check, hoping for mid-May.**

### **FERC CT River Hydro Relicensing Discussion (Kathy Urffer)**

CRC works on protecting and restoring the river.

- Working on relicensing of Bellows Falls and Vernon dams
  - § Reaching out to folks so they understand there is an opportunity to comment.
- 175 miles of dams
  - § 40 year long license
- Company has to mitigate for impacts of the dams AKA recreation, erosion control plan, conserve land
- Great River Hydro is now owned by Hydro Quebec.
- Comment period has been extended to May 22<sup>nd</sup>
- For the past 40 years they have been peaking, all day they hold water till 4pm to generate energy. They might do that again in the morning. Not a natural river flow.
  - § What is proposed is that water will be passed through all the time. Hoping to re-regulate the river. Hoping that by the time they get to Vernon it is a “natural flowing river.”
  - § What they settled on is inflow = outflow. Baseload facility. Target 1ft bandwidth, not supposed to go outside of that one foot. Cannot lower than

at most a foot but ideally 6 inches. Smaller amount of peaking within a specific number of hours in the month in correlation with spawning fish and things like that. Each peak will be maybe for two hours. Up ramp = gradual in most cases and down ramp= gradual in all cases.

- CRC felt like this was a win, but disappointing they were not going to do any other mitigation. Cultural resources, fish passage, Recreation and erosion not addressed.

- The agencies agreed to a 16 year timeline (they have 16 years to make upgrades).
- Recreation, fish passage, cultural resources, erosion were not effectively addressed in their proposal.
- Asked them what they were going to do for mitigation. They responded with a spreadsheet that included amounts they were going to spend on mitigation, which shows how little they plan to spend (relative to their revenue and profits).
- In the license application they had to submit 1 year of revenue; 2016 revenue for 3 facilities is almost \$28 million, with \$4 million profit. 2019 revenue is about \$33 million with 9 million profit. Total mitigation they're proposing to spend is \$877,000. They can clearly afford to spend more than this.
- In a previous licensing proposal, they proposed a bunch of mitigations that they never did.
- Not sure what's going to happen with erosion, would like an assessment of that.
- Not sure about nitrogen load.
- License is probably going to be for 40 years.
- Changes in the river (i.e. river levels) are pretty big, seems like research should be done on this system.
- Commenting: anyone can comment on impacts they're concerned about. Deadline for comments is May 22.
- FERC will issue an environmental impact statement, and will issue a license if requirements are met.
- CT River Hydro owns a lot of bordering land; should be responsible for things like invasive species control on the properties they own.
- FERC enforces these licenses; enforcement is fairly lax. FERC relies on complaints from outside parties, and doesn't do regular inspections or monitoring.
- Next steps: write a letter of comment from the board.
- We should hear from a representative from CT River Hydro also (which would provide an opportunity to have a discussion directly with them.)

#### **Plant Sale:**

- April 29-May 3 at Green Mountain Orchard, plan to be there 10am to 5pm.
- Need cardboard boxes and plastic bags without holes
- Looking for volunteers. Cory has contacted the high school; Katie will contact Putney School and Leland and Gray to see if they have students who can volunteer. Michael Auerbach runs the environmental club at the high school, it's possible they can volunteer.
- Katie will coordinate dispersal of leftover plants to local schools.

- Cory will share suggestions for the plant sale that the board will look over.

### **DEI Self Assessment: White Supremacy**

*This info is from the New England Food Sovereignty Network Habit Building Challenge.*

- Systematic racism in the food system and environment targets blacks, indigenous and people of color.
- Movement towards food justice and social justice: move from me to we.
- White: created by Virginia slave owners to distinguish Europeans from Africans. Creation of whiteness gave privilege to some while denying it to others.
- BIPOC: Explicitly leads with black and indigenous identifies.
- Privilege: Unearned social, political, economic power.
- White supremacy culture: system of social rules which evolved to center European and Western European cultures to determine how people should act and whose lives matter more.
- Watched a video about white privilege and being a white ally and discussed the video.

### District Manager Report:

- Recent statewide CISMA gathering was successful.
- Considering hosting an Americorps position: great opportunity for someone and could help us get work done. Could help with Japanese stiltgrass work and other projects.
- Looking for someone to do construction at the covered bridge project: replacing steps, rain garden, etc. It has varied work, and will likely be hard to get it done this spring. We've sent it to firms and posted it in the Reformer.

### VACD Update:

- Not looking very positive that we'll get as much money as last year, closer to \$500,000, had asked for \$3 million.
- NRCC is submitting a \$7.45 m proposal for a Congressional earmark on Monday, April 8. If funded, this grant would entail passing most funds on to the Agency of Agriculture to support a variety of farm development, transition, and resiliency grants through the agency's Agricultural Development Division.
- Meeting coming up on April 15, with the CT River Joint Commission, sounds like Sen Welch will be there. Cory will be talking about the watershed Nitrogen project.

### Next Meeting Date:

- Wed May 15 at 6:30pm at Geoff's.

**Respectfully Submitted, Katie Morrison**