

WCNRCD Board Meeting

October 11, 2023 6:30 PM

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

Present: Cory Ross, District Manager; Heather Blunk, Agricultural Resource Specialist; Linda Corse, Meg Kluge, Geof Dolman, Katie Morrison: Board Members

Zoom Participants: Pieter van Loon,; Board Member, Phyllicia Moore; NRCS Zone Conservationist,

NRCS update from Phyllicia Moore

- HR is moving very slowly in terms of looking for a new employee in Bratt. In the meantime they are sending some assistance for forestry work.
- Josh has taken another position. In the meantime Trevor will be filling in. No timeline for new hire.
- Retreat Meadows visit tomorrow (10/11). Area was totally flooded, they have decided to no longer farm that area and are taking a look at it to decide how it might be used in the future. They're thinking of doing something related to wildlife conservation. Joe will be in the area and likely will be able to make it.
- Ira funds will have more of a focus on Climate Smart Ag activities. A new list has been sent out with activities that are being considered as Climate Smart.
- Looking for feedback about things NRCS need to focus on or need more attention for funds through Act Now. Feedback from Heather is that farmers are excited about low tunnels and refurbishing structures. NRCS doesn't tend to support structure projects, but possibly connecting projects to runoff mitigation. There isn't necessarily a deadline for this feedback.
- On Nov 7 Heather is meeting with Westminster farmers; they feel like their voices haven't been heard, so various agencies are meeting with farmers to hear their needs and hopefully offer help.
- Next in-person staff meeting will be Thur Nov 19.
- NRCS is supposed to get a program assistant, hopefully that will happen soon.

Ag Programming Discussion:

- AGCWIP Funds - Workshops, Outreach and Education: Agency wants to fund more FTEs for outreach work. (right now we get .3 FTE total). We will apply and likely get more funding. They want this work to have a climate specific focus. Application due in December. (Previous AGCWIP grant focused on water quality and soil health).
- 538K Local Work Group: Hoping to get a bunch of money for local working groups. NRCS said no, they gave some money to do it as a pilot, there will be a competitive process for these funds.
- Farm Bill Support: VACD has a ton of money that will be spent over several years. A portion will be available to districts.
- Staffing: It's likely we'll be able to add another staff person in the next year. In terms of developing the position, Cory will first talk with Isabel and Heather to find out what they want to do.
- Questions from Jill: The group discussed and responded as follows:
 - *What do we believe our core services in the agricultural field should be?*
 - Program navigator - helping folks identify and navigate various services that are available.

- Being a voice for small producers: finding out what they need and helping amplify their voices.
- Not clear whether we can use this money to hire someone to help with forestry work. In the past they haven't really considered forestry to be ag. Would be nice for the district to hire someone who can do forestry work.
- Would be nice to get agroforestry covered under ag funding.
- Need funding for invasive species work.
- Travis has funding to put together a group to standardize the working group process.
- Soil sampling
- Nutrient management planning.
- Workshops, pasture walks
- Technical assistance
 - Getting another local extension agent in this area would be nice (someone to help with grazing, feed, etc)
 - Perhaps contract with someone local.
- Business planning assistance.
- Scholarships for business planning, etc? Do we want to be a funder? I.e. help landowners with conservation practices, etc.
- Can we use this \$ for tasks that are currently covered by other funding (such as core services) to free up other funds.
- Windham County has a lot of diversified small scale farming that isn't covered by NRCS - it would be nice to find a way to fund practices on these farms.
- *Are you willing to expand ag services?*
 - Yes.
- *What is the role of conservation districts in the constellation of ag services in VT?*
 - Program navigator
 - Setting the agenda in terms of local ag needs.
- *What do you see the role for the district going forward?*
 - More people, more money to address issues.
- *How much NRCS work are you willing to do?*
 - NRCS can't hire and retain enough staff to do their work.
 - Once Heather is a certified planner it will be easier to train others.
 - In the future - the district could use 2 staff who are each doing some conservation planning and some outreach work.
 - How do we stitch together 2 full time ag people? Do we hire someone to do some forestry work too?
 - The answer to this question depends on what type of work they want us to do.

Associate Supervisors

- The current list of associate supervisors isn't up to date.
- Maybe we should divide the list into folks who are more involved and those who aren't involved but who can still be listed as resources.
- Do we want to rewrite a job description?
- Do we want to add new members? i.e. David Erickson;
- ***Meg will look at the statutes and see what it says about associate supervisors.***

Supervisor Elections

- Geoff's term is up, he is running again.

Financial Reports

- Report includes income sources, income by type of work, percentage of total income by specific project, staff time by funding area - biggest area is administration (which includes grant writing, meetings, payroll, etc), all of that time isn't funded. Should we separate out grant writing? Professional development? Project meetings?
- Right now we have a lot of smaller projects. Goal - fewer grants covering more work.
- District budget has increased from ~\$60,000 to ~\$275,000 from '20 to '23.
- There still are cash flow concerns. A bigger core services agreement would help with this.

District Manager Report

- Ripsower: This is a machine that supposedly can build 1 foot of topsoil per year. It's a custom built piece of equipment - injects fertilizer, seed, has discs, etc. At this point there isn't proven research to show that it produces results. A lot of experts in the state don't support this, so there doesn't seem to be a need to host workshops at this time.

Annual Meeting Planning and Potential Conservation Award Recipients

- Cory reached out to Janet Boyd. She's on the board for the Old School Community Center in Wilmington, it could be there. She knows a potential musician.
- Tom Grasso is a potential speaker.
- Hopefully Janet Boyd will speak about experiences with flood.
- Mon-Thur, 5-7pm -> good time if you want to get legislators there.
- Week of Nov 13th?
- General RSVP.

VACD Updates

- VACD had hired Action Circles, an advocacy group. Sept 7 - Linda and Cory participated in a workshop where they discussed the future vision for the districts.
- Linda read the resulting Storybook Ending document of this vision.
- Geoff's point - this sounds good as long as districts can maintain their individuality.

Minutes

- September minutes approved.

Next meeting will be Nov 8, 6:30 pm at Geoff's

Motion to adjourn the meeting was moved, seconded and passed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40

Respectfully submitted,

Katie Morrison