

WCNRCD Board Meeting
April 12th 12:30 PM Held at Geof's House and over Zoom

Present: Cory Ross; District Manager; Heather Blunk, Ag Outreach Specialist; Isabel Bowman, Conservation Specialist; Board Members: Meg Kluge, Geof Dolman, Linda Corse

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

NRCS update from Phyllicia Moore

- Getting through applications for EQIP and CSP Pre approvals.
- Local fund pool. Several got funded, however they hoped more would have gotten funded. Next year how can we award points more heavily for those who have been waiting two years for funding. \$136,000 dollars is allocated to projects with a \$10,000 in case things need to be adjusted in contract. Working towards getting producers' signatures.
- Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) RCPP internal deadline April 14th.
- Trying to get help in the office. Handed a job offer to someone. Hopefully they are in the first week of June.
- Preparing for Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding
- Tri-Farmers alliance meeting. Conservation Stewardship Program(CSP) and CSP assist (agency of Ag) . April 21st for CSP with NRCS.
 - Focus on Agriculture Land with focus on climate smart mitigation
- State office is going to host a meeting for the Local Fund Pool. No major changes are happening but some things might change after that meeting.
- A pathways intern in Rutland planning to start soon and have that pathway rotate in South Zone offices.

Plant Sale Planning

- 216 orders more than last year (As of April 12th)
- Tree planting Monday of Tree Sale, May 1st. Heather Will be at the Orchard Monday to help get organized.
- Volunteers?
 - Master Gardeners
 - Katy for students
 - Abbie Corse (fingers crossed)
- Early perennial storage debate
- Use tape for check in table
- Have a same day sale table

Short- Term Leave Policy

- Modern Insurance Agency
- 6 weeks at 60% of what you make
- \$ 3,205.80 a year for this insurance for our current three employees. We can build this into our billable rate. There will be a lag time however.

Motion to approve group disability payments was moved, seconded and passed.

- Cory might look into other companies.
 - The Richards group is an insurance company in town.
 - BEEC might offer it
- This will take effect July 1st 2023 so we can budget into next year.

Cost of Living Adjustment to District Pay Scale

- 5.9% from February-February to start July reflects cost of living adjustment to start FY24

District Managers Report

- Logos
 - Moving forward with version 3 (page 36 of board packet) and the original redrawn
 - Subsequent versions will include black and white options
 - Version 3 edits:
 - Move the farm section up, change mountain profile, have snow/white on mountain tops instead of green, have water meander behind the hill on the right, add buffer strip, use bald eagle as the bird, use deciduous trees.
 - Original edits:
 - Change the barn to Version 3, use deciduous trees, have only one bird - a bald eagle, remove beige colored circle outline, use one color of blue for the river, have edge plants/trees and horizontal crop rows.
 - We will send back our comments and have a draft for the next board meeting.
- District Employees salaried instead of hourly
 - Cory is comfortable doing that. It's not a cost change to the district. It's more so for the department of labor laws. This will allow employees to bank time and use it as comp time as opposed to getting paid time and a half. Cory's employee agreement would need to be amended.
 - How much comp time can you build. Is 40 hours reasonable? Cory will think about it.
 - Will need to amend pay and benefit policy if we go to salary.
- Tree plantings
 - Mill brook April 28th
 - Withal May 1st
- Watershed grant funded. Vermont River Conservancy (VRC) and Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC) and Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and Brattleboro Commission. This will be paired with stilt grass work. This will help map invasives.
- Starting to work on hiring greeters. All want to come back. Just need to hire one new one.
- Long Island Sound Futures Fund Grant (LISFF) is moving at turtle pace.

FY 24 Appropriation

- The House gave us one time funding of 1 million dollars. That is the lowest amount we will receive.

- We continue with the senate and need to focus on receiving ongoing appropriations. 3 million would be nice but we want to keep going. If awarded one time appropriation it is suggested to use it to fund “ongoing” items which would be a gamble.
- Cory met with 3 senators, two from Windham and one from Bennington. All went decent. Made good progress.
- Just waiting and seeing right now.
- Bobby Starr (senate) will hope to quietly add it to the budget. Hoping it will go through unnoticed.
- 1 million is the floor. How do we then divide that between 14 districts? NRCC will make that final decision. VACD will have meetings also and the reps will go to NRCC on the same page.
 - Everyone get base amount (to fund DM) then should there be a deliverable requirement
- Statutes are possibly going to be opened in the house
- Our board thinks (for 1 million distribution) a hybrid model of set payment to all 14 districts and then distribution based off of a model or size or something. Proportionally makes sense. Everyone gets a base amount, how do you divide up the rest of it.

MINUTES

Motion to accept the March meetings minutes was moved, seconded and passed with correction

Motion to go into executive session was moved, second and passed

Board voted to approve payment out of retained earnings of leave benefit to Heather Blunk, who is going on short-term medical leave prior to new policy taking effect. Employee will receive benefit payment consistent with what would be provided under new short-term leave policy (60% of pay for up to six weeks).

Next meeting is May 10th at 6:30pm

Meeting adjourned 3:30

**Respectfully submitted,
Heather Blunk**