**WCNRCD Board Meeting**

March 5, 2025 6:30 PM

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

and over Zoom

**Present:** Cory Ross, District Manager; Meg Kluge, Linda Corse, Katie Morrison, and Geof Dolman, Pieter van Loon, board supervisors; Isabel Bowman, Conservation Specialist, Heather Blunk, Ag Resource Specialist.

**Zoom Participants:** Phylicxia Moore, NRCS State Conservationist; Garrett Manchester, Conservation Assistant; Mae Masson, Ag Resource Specialist; Michelle Monroe, VACD Executive Director; Olivia Carlson, NRCS Acting District Conservationist for South Zone.

**Introductions:**

* Michelle Monroe: replacing Jill as director of VACD.
  + She has done a lot of work in flood control; interest in healthy soils and climate mitigation; as a journalist covered a lot of water quality and ag topics.
* Olivia Carlson: acting district conservationist for south zone region in VT.

**NRCS Updates:**

* Asked Eric Winchester for FSA updates - programs coming down the pipe: dairy farms - can sign up for coverage; March 31st is the deadline. Farms can apply to NAP program, for cover crop - deadline is March 20.
* Certain fund pools will need to be evaluated for climate smart terminology. Will continue work as usual and will pivot as needed. The sign up period for the organic transition initiative is happening now. Program can help with certification costs.
* CSP renewals are up; next date is April 18; there are currently 2 producers in Windham County.
* Other updates: waiting on guidance from national headquarters. Moving forward with processing payments, will make modifications as needed.
* Pivoting as needed. Everything is changing, by the hour. Trying to maintain focus on the conservation work and service to producers.

**Draft Letter to Legislative Delegation:**

* Letter, inspired by the NACD, summarizes the history and importance of conservation districts and urges legislators to continue to support NRCS funding.
* Board looked over letter.
* NACD - sent report from the survey they asked districts to do.
* Goal - keep DC aware of how funding changes are impacting farmers.
* Edits:
  + Add our address;
  + Sign it ‘on behalf of tWindham County NRCD board’ and then list our names.
* *Motion to send letter as amended. Motion approved.*

**Draft Community Engagement Plan:**

* Overview of demographics: mostly white, speaking English at home, drive to work
* Crops: hay, corn, apples, (pasture isn’t included in this stat)
* Add animal head count?
* Farm definition: $2000 in income annually
* Add: info from the survey: how farmers get information.
* 2025 Natural resource survey:
  + 76%: 55+ years old
  + Not a lot of folks - in their 30s
* Question: are the survey responses a representative sample?
* A lot of the respondents are gardeners, recreational use, maple and other.
* Supports needed:
  + Stipends for events and workshops (just ag workshops) — this is offeredneed to be advertised better.
  + Communication related: better advertisement for events, email alterts, etc.
* Natural Resource Concerns: - outcomes very similar
  + River corridor integrity
  + Rural forest health/ habitat fragmentation
  + Climate change resiliency
  + Pollinators and wildlife habitat.
  + etc
* Community Engagement Planning:
  + Social Media: has been going well
  + Instagram:
    - Improve engagement - work on aesthetics, to make sure things are flowing, and show stories through imagery.
    - Less fragmented, more focus on design.
    - Number of accounts has been increasing.
    - Reels - sometimes - sbring in 2x as many eyes.
    - Consistent posting and themes.
    - Goal: # of followers at 350 by August 2025.
    - Accounts reached up to 694 by August 2025.
  + Youtube:
    - Harder to reach folks
    - Adding webinars - good place where folks can revisit workshops.
    - Goal: subscribers increase to 50; webinar watfch time to 50% of video.
    - Reelz - could go onto youtube as shorts.
    - Create short versions of longer webinars etc.
    - Mini documentary - 10 min - give the district a face and a voice.
  + Facebook:
    - Hosting site for interconnectivity, a lot of groups;
    - Add more storytelling: write ups of the work we’ve done. a little more text heavy combined with photos, put news out there.
    - Great for volunteer opportunities
    - Advertising events.
    - Goal - up to 365 accounts reached by August 2025
  + Schools:
    - Schools could benefit from a complete kit or lesson plan
    - Game related to invasive species
    - Surveys post implementation to get feedback.
    - NACD has materials also; they do a theme every year (“May the forest be with you.”).
  + Producers:
    - Continue to partner with producers, connect them with supports
    - Schedule/calendar
    - At least 6 partnered workshops each year.
    - Continuing to expose communities to programs etc in those communities.
    - Goal: 6 workshops by end of 2025
  + Municipal Partners (road crews):
    - Development of pamphlet -guidance for dealing with invasive species.
    - Compile target invasives
    - Goal: finish guide by May 2025.
  + Still in development: district communications

**Draft Conservation Action Plan**

* + Priorities:
    - Extreme weather
    - Threats to forest health
    - Threats to wildlife habitat
    - Limitations in management of urban and subburan spaces for people and wildlife
    - Threats to surface water quality.
  + Suggestions: Fund Pool
    - Forest management plans
    - Pollinator habitat plans
  + Forest Management Plan
    - Value parcels smaller than 25
  + Forest health: $400,000
    - Funds practices related to forest health; related to logging, water quality, invsasives
  + Small scale agriculture $400,000
    - Ten acres or less
    - Mimicked NRCS urban farm fund pool
    - Providing food to communities
    - Culturally appropriate food for immigrants
    - High tunnels
    - Low tunnels
    - Mulching
    - Cover crop
    - Raised beds
  + Can only ask for 5 practices.
  + Thoughts: local concerns might be more supported.
  + Using more politically correct terms (like extreme weather instead of climate change)
* Other points to share w/NRCS:
  + Shortage of engineering staff at NRCS is a prob
  + Smaller parcels - fall through the cracks;
  + For NRCS projects: if we could apply on behalf of others it would be easier.
  + Deer pressure - we should allow exclusion fencing to allow forest regeneration.
* Actions:
  + Seek funding to hire an engineer to work for the district.
  + Outreach and technical assistance invasive species and water quality.
  + Work with partners to locate and map invasive species and plan mgmt i the future
  + Work with landowners, neighborhood associations - join applications for financial and tech assistance
  + Develop fund pool proposals to address key financial assistance and tech assistance needs not well addressed by statewide funding pools
  + Provide low-cost native plants and planting advice to the public.
  + Sourcing native plants locally
  + Restoration and protection projects throughout Windham County
  + Work with partners to identify best mgmt practices for reducing nitrogen loss from farms in the CT river valley.
  + Provide outreach and water quality testing on targeted ct river direct tributaries potentially impacted by ag runoff.

**Updates - Federal Funding and Policies:**

* No update so far.
* American Farmland Trust RCPP - federal gov currently isn’t paying on that agreement; ours is focused on soil health, hopefully it’s safe.
* Right now cash flow is good into May.
* VT joined with a letter regarding DEI - that it’s good work and the fed gov can’t not fund us if we do DEI work.

**Strategic Planning Update:**

* We now have a contract in place with Momentum.
* Will do a poll regarding timing and when folks are available.

**Update on Hiring Process:**

* Invasive species tech jobs - stiltgrass position, greeter and water chestnut work, still fully funded
* Admin assistant position - hasn’t been posted yet but want to post it now.
  + Discussion about whether we should go ahead to hire for admin assistant. Leaning towards hiring someone now, a lot of work for them to do. Will go for it.
* Invasive species positions: Meg avail for interviews if needed
* Admin assistant position: Meg and Geoff avail for interviews.

**VACD Updates:**

* Planning Jill’s going away gathering.
* VACD can make 2 more payrolls before something needs to change. They’ve applied for doubling the line of credit.
* Wanting to create a baseline about: what all the districts should be able to do/services to provide; council could put some conditions on funding.
* Consultants presented recommendations: included a list of challenges with various possible solutions to each (most aggressive, moderately agressive, and least aggressive). Want to present all of this to the districts.

**Monthly Report on District Activities:**

* Guilford Visitor Center
  + May-Oct: Set up 3 dates to table outside the center. We would sell coffee and baked goods as a fundraiser.
  + Time: 7am-6pm; Thur, Fri, Sat or Sun. Shifts;
  + Also will need volunteers to help make baked goods.
* One time funding from NRCC: a printer, a computer, office chairs, financial consultant - figure out better system for the books; logo and promotional materials, trailer, canoes.

**Next Meeting:**

* April 23rd (just before Plant Sale)
* 6:30 at Geoff’s.

**Future Agenda Items:**

* Mae’s probationary performance review is due.

*Adjourned at 9:08 pm*