



RHODE ISLAND STATE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 15, 2007

9:15 AM

USDA NRCS Conference Room

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Eastern RI
Conservation District

Northern RI
Conservation District

Southern RI
Conservation District

Director
RI Department of
Environmental Management

Governor's Appointee

ADVISORS

Coastal Resources
Management Council

RI Association of
Conservation Districts

RI Resource Conservation &
Development Area, Inc.

RI Statewide Planning Program

RI Department of
Transportation

RI Water Resources Board

URI Cooperative Extension

USDA Farm Services Agency

USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Services

Eric Offenberg called the meeting to order at 9:20 am.

In attendance were:

Members – Eric Offenberg, Governor's Appointee; Harriet Powell, Southern District Representative; Paul Dolan, Northern District Representative; Gregg Cassidy, RIDEM Representative.

Advisors – Roylene Rides at the Door, USDA NRCS; Kevin Nelson, Statewide Planning.

Others – Alicia Lehrer and Patty Tanalski, Southern District; Gina DeMarco, Northern District; Tom Sandham, Eastern District; Richard Coombe, Regional Assistant Chief, NRCS.

Roylene introduced Richard Coombe, Regional Assistant Chief – East of NRCS. He is impressed with Roylene's work: the energy she has brought to the area, her outreach efforts, partnership with various RI agencies, and the Activity Report. He is interested in RI's EQIP program and fish passage work. He said that we can still get nationwide conservation programs off the ground, and it is important for all agencies to work together. He also expressed interest in working with the private sector to build partnerships in that realm.

Agenda item added: Item "A" under IV. Old Business – Harriet added NACD conference and greater district exposure.

I. Minutes

Motion was made to accept the June 13 meeting minutes. Harriet/Norm: unanimous.

II. Financial Report

Bad news from the state: districts are funded but with a significant cut. There is a \$1,200 payment from the NRCS CIG program in the account that will be distributed to districts for their work on that program. Directors insurance is more expensive. Motion to accept report. Harriet/Gregg: unanimous.

Reports

III. Chair

A. FFOS Land Valuation Committee. Separation of powers took away SCC's ability to make appointments for this and other committees. Now governor's appointees; no positions filled as of yet. Need to have full group of appointments in order to move forward. We can make suggestions, but not recommendations, for committee members. Harriet sent suggestions to Deb Smith in governor's office. She will follow up.

B. Districts/Advisors Reports

1. SRICD - See report. Alicia outlined the Livestock Inventory/Rapid Watershed Assessment project to Richard Coombe. She reported that during the livestock survey process they learned that most farmers have not heard of SRICD. Ask Alicia about NACD proposal items.
2. NRCS –Roylene reported that as per Activity Report, distributed at last meeting, things have been very busy. This year RI farmers and landowners were allocated \$8.1 million statewide for conservation cost share practices on their land. All goals will be made this year for the first time in RI. They thank the districts for their work on running the CIG program, funding for which has been cleared and obligated; results will soon be announced. Roylene is formulating best way to announce results, and will talk to districts.

At the regional meeting Roylene told other state conservationists what districts in RI are doing. NRCS is changing process for program applications– moving up application deadline to November 1, ranking deadline to December 1, and allocation of funds will be announced by February 1. This plan will allow time for backup plans.

Eric suggested that the districts let farmers know of the new timetable, which will help districts. He also requested that in Jackie's portion of the NRCS activity report there be a breakdown by district. Alicia reported that there will be workshops around state to assist people with the process of application for CIG funding.

3. ERICD - See report emailed prior to meeting. Tom reported on the huge problem with invasives, multiflora rose, etc., which is the biggest need in Eastern District. Need to think out of the box to get more help to ERICD. Richard Coombe noted that there is a pilot program in West Virginia to deal with multiflora rose. He talked about developing a nationwide program for invasives, since they are a major issue across the country.

Tom also explained details of a program to lessen the Canada geese population, e.g., egg oiling. Lots of volunteers needed over a broad regional area and efforts must be consistent over years in order to reprogram subsequent generations of geese to migrate again. Tom will call for another meeting with Geese Peace as to how to start program in RI.

Tom presented an example of working with a farmer to solve a problem. Tom

can solve farmer problems quickly because he knows them; going to DEM would take forever. He wants to continue helping farmers but it is time consuming. Funding is needed for Tom to continue, as he is now putting in volunteer time.

Eric wants reports to present to Roylene so she knows what districts do - districts do so much technical assistance but no one knows us. Harriet suggested phone book listings for all districts; can do now because all have private phones. Eric says we are in a crisis situation and is glad Richard is here so he is aware of problems.

4. RC&D – Norm discussed planning for the regional RC&D conference Oct 18 - 20 in Narragansett. They are trying to draw people to RI, give field trips that will “show off” RI: Rhody Warm and Rhody Fresh; area of upland conservation; Newport, especially to see state champion trees there, and plants not found elsewhere in Rhode Island.
5. NRICD - The report was emailed to the committee prior to the meeting. Eric asked about technical assistance. Gina said that there is one FFOS application in, and she is trying to recruit this farmer for NRICD board.
6. State Planning – Kevin. Working on designating growth centers in RI . Will examine comprehensive plans for each town, which must comply with state guide plan. Would like to make state plan less cumbersome. They will be sending out an RFP for examination of solid waste in RI. Eric suggested that the districts can do outreach on these projects; could make presentations.
7. RI DEM – Gregg announced another round of Habitat Restoration Grants for riparian buffer restoration. These grants could be matched by EQIP. Geese Peace efforts may be funded here?

IV. Old Business

- A. RC&D Agreement for SE&SC Handbook. No discussion.
- B. CIG Program – discussed in district and NRCS Reports above.

V. New Business

- A. State Committee Annual Report is due Sept. 30 to secretary of state. As NRICD hopes to get administrative assistant by end of Sept, SRICD will take over compiling district reports, etc. for State Committee Report. Wendy had put together a statement on FFOS, but instead of that we will add a statement that we continuing to use last years' figures.

VI. Other

- A. Harriet reported on a discussion at the NACD conference that the districts are the best kept secret in the country, and to focus on increasing their visibility.
- B. Eric would like the districts take turns in coming up with district reports every month, then can forward to NRCS. Jeanne could use them to get word out via ProJo. Districts would set format out with Jeanne and highlight district work that month. Eric suggested using four hours a month on this. Eric asked Roylene if districts can

access Jeanne Comerford. As public affairs specialist, she has good contact with the Providence Journal and has had articles published about NRCS/partnerships' projects. Roylene wants two articles a month in ProJo on 2 different subjects. One of the topics will be NRCS and one can be district or other partners.

- C. Roylene announced there will be another CSP training signup – Tom planning on attending training.
- D. Tom - Sakonnet - work with state planning on event? Landowners coming to districts talking about conservation plans.
- E. SRICD letter to SCC re: allocating extra southern funds to districts despite previous resolution. Eric wants funds set aside for permanent funding for district facilities as voted for previously, however he understands the needs with the unexpected budget cuts. Motion to specifically allocate extra funds to three districts for operating costs. Norm/Harriet unanimous.

In the future, Eric wants districts to look into own housing. Wants districts to have line item in next budget to do this: long-term preservation of districts. Work with AT&T for listings in phone book. Wants extra funds targeted for this; Eric amended motion as above.

Alicia said that the Farm Bureau wants us to partner in a RI agriculture center on Rte 2. This could be new permanent location for SRICD.

- F. Tom said that he needs more funding to work more: he is down to 14 hours per week to run office; administrative assistant also down. He volunteers the rest of his time, and has to say no to farmers. He is looking into Homeland Security as a source of funding: RI produces only 3% of our food; what would happen in food emergency? Are there any funds available to preserve land for farming, and where to get food to stockpile? Districts working on a lot of projects, but need to present larger issue.

Motion to adjourn at 11:15 am: Harriet/Norm. Unanimous.