

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, October 10, 2007

9:15 AM

USDA NRCS Conference Room

Eric Offenberg called the meeting to order at 9:30 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;

Others – Alicia Lehrer, Southern District; Gina DeMarco, Northern District; Tom Sandham, Eastern District; Kristen Dame, URI Cooperative Extension.

I. Minutes

Eric asked if it had been decided at previous meeting which District would go first in rotating publicity campaign. The discussion but not a schedule was included in the minutes. It was agreed that SRICD will go first in October, ERICD in November and NRICD in December then continue to rotate. Chip Young will be able to assist under a contract he has with RC &D.

Motion was made to accept the August 15, 2007 meeting minutes.

Harriet/Gregg: unanimous.

II. Financial Report

Eric noted that no expenses for administrative assistant had been recorded for

August and September. The work for that period had been split between SRICD and NRICD and an invoice from SRICD in the amount of \$892.50 had been received; NRICD had not submitted an invoice.

Since the amount budgeted for this period was \$600.00, Eric sought an equitable way to compensate each District for their time while staying within the budget. Eric suggests that each District bill at a rate of \$30.00 per hour. Gina indicated that previously, NRICD had billed out at actual cost (\$22.09/hour for Administrative Assistant); she, personally, had about 15 hours spent on SCC work during August and September but had not planned to charge her higher hourly rate. Alicia said that the \$70.00 hourly rate SRICD had invoiced was based on actual expense. Eric suggested that SRICD receive \$400.00 for work completed and NRICD receive \$200.00.

Motion was made to post \$600.00 to expense report of August and September.

Harriett/ Gregg: unanimous.

Motion to accept report. Harriet/Gregg: unanimous.

III. Reports

A. Chair's Report

Eric noted the new format of NRCS's report. He complimented Roylene on the changes and made particular mention of the better commentary by the conservationists and the breakdown of activity by District. He would like each District to use the new format as a model for their own reports.

B. Districts/Advisors Reports

1. ERICD - See report e-mailed. Tom announced that a celebration of Ted Comerford's life will be held at Sunset Farm in Narragansett on October 20 from 2-6 pm. He noted the impact of the loss of Ted on the District and indicated that it is a very difficult time as most of the other Board members are already overextended and currently there is no one to fill the vacuum that has been created. He is looking for an active Board Member to serve on the State Committee but most have scheduling conflicts. He is hopeful that Suzanne, owner of Newport Equestrian, might accept but he is somewhat concerned that she is new to the District. Since he so actively involved in the projects within the District, Tom would feel more comfortable if nominees were presented by Board members rather than by him. He is waiting for a response from his Board. Alicia suggested using this as an opportunity to increase the diversity of the Board by specifically looking for nominees who would bring different experience and perspective to the Board. Eric is concerned that momentum would be

lost within the District if this issue is not addressed quickly. He suggested turning to NRCS for suggestions and as a vehicle to promote interest in the Board to people they work with within the District.

Tom will be at the Wood Expo on October 14th with a slide show presentation and a booth highlighting the CIG program.

ERICD's Annual Meeting will be held at Newport Vineyards and will include a tour/wine tasting and dinner; tickets are expected to be about \$20.00. Date is to be determined, but November 13 seems likely.

2. SRICD-See report e-mailed. Several Board members' terms have expired, but there is no issue of legality since they serve until replaced. Motion was made to appoint Steve Delpozso, Harriet Powell and Rudi Hempe for another 3 year term. Paul/Greg: unanimous.

An Art Show & Auction will be held on October 28th. Some of the entries can be previewed on the District's website.

The Annual Dinner will be November 6 at the Johnson & Wales Radisson

and will feature food prepared by university chefs and students with an emphasis on food donated by area farms. A documentary, "Making of a Meal," is being filmed for presentation at the dinner.

Peter Ginaitt will be recognized for his service. It was suggested that a picture by Sal Mancini (local to the Warwick area if possible) be presented by all 3 Districts and the State Committee. Paul Dolan will look into purchasing the picture. Southern District will probably

make an individual presentation as well. The question was raised if Peter might be asked to serve on SRICD Board or on the State Committee.

3. NRICD-See report e-mailed. There have been some changes to the District's Board. Paul Dolan is now Chair, Marc Tremblay is Vice-Chair, Jean Lynch has stepped down to Associate Director and Dick Went will join Board as a voting Director. Later in meeting, motion was made to appoint Norman Hammond to a new 3 year term on the Board and to appoint Dick Went to the Board. Harriet/Greg: unanimous.

The District is working with DEM to develop an outreach and education program for landowners in the District with properties in wetland areas to deal with issues of encroachment and native species vs. invasive species. There is no signed agreement yet but it has been determined that the District's role will be strictly outreach/education and the DEM would be responsible for enforcement and detection of encroachment. There will be no cost share involved. The question was raised why DEM is working only with NRICD on this issue and Gina said that the northern part of the state has more issues in this area and that, if this is only a one year project, there is the hope that Providence Water would be interested in continuing it in

some form as part of the Scituate Watershed Education Program. Eric wondered if the other Districts might work with CRMC on similar projects but Tom raised the concern that CRMC has a negative

reputation with landowners. Eric said it was a good opportunity for outreach and that perhaps CRMC could take a backseat. Alicia raised concern based on Hunt River that the Districts should educate only and not be associated with enforcement.

NRICD's Annual Dinner will be held on November 2 and will feature value added projects.

Ways of the Woods Truck Museum will be at the Scituate Farmer's Market on October 13 from 9-12 as part of a presentation being sponsored by NRICD, Providence Water, SNEFC with support from Scituate Conservation Committee, RI Chapter of American Foresters, RIFCO, Scituate Lions Club and Foster Conservation Commission.

4. RC&D – Conference to be held October 18-20. Copies of agenda were distributed. To date, 60 people have signed up (usually have about 120 attend). A raffle and silent and live auction will be held. Rhody Warm continues to get good publicity throughout State. They will exhibit at SRICD's Art Show. New blanket design will be available soon and orders are now being taken.

5. RI DEM – Nothing to report.

6. URI Cooperative Extension- A grant proposal is pending to extend a bobolink study being conducted in Jamestown throughout State. The project is interested in developing a market for farmers to "sell" environmental/conservation practices, primarily creating breeding grounds for native birds. Also of concern is managing invasives in

the grassland habitats. The researcher is primarily an economist, but he does have a strong concern for the environment.

7. NRSC-See report e-mailed. Roylene has found the new format of NRCS report to be an effective way to inform public about activities at NRCS. She had lots of praise for her staff for several reasons: NRCS' budget was completed 2-3 days ahead of deadline and the staff has been very responsive to a December 31st deadline to have as much EQIP funding obligated as possible.

Funding for EQIP is available only through December 31, 2007. The new Farm Bill, expected to be passed in the new year, would re-fund the program but is expected to include changes. It is expected that the income ceiling will drop from \$2.5 million to \$1 million and that there will be a \$60000.00 limit per program with a \$250, 000.00 limit per individual. Further, any EQIP applications not funded by December 31st would have to begin process again under new guidelines. There is no funding for any programs besides EQIP and CSP and there is no movement in Congress to refinance. Any WHIP applications that have an agricultural element will be reviewed for possibility of funding through EQIP.

Roylene is asking partners for ideas on how to get the funds obligated. She has \$3.5 million but it is a use it or lose it program. Any funds not allocated will be lost. At this point NRCS has no backlog of applications.

NRCS is streamlining the process, determining financial eligibility up front, so if one applicant drops off the list, the next applicant can just

move into that space. NRCS will be at the Wood Expo accepting applications. A meeting will be held on October 16th and Roylene is hoping partners will join her to brainstorm about how to publicize this program.

NRCS has limited spending to the bare minimum and is limiting travel to mission required only. If all of the funds available are not allocated, Roylene is concerned about staff cuts.

Tom had a few suggestions for possible sources of applications; he is working with several people on Water Quality Restoration and the current application process is so problematic, people are abandoning it. He suggested going through DEM Ag for permit instead of DEM Wetlands to speed up the process and if there is an agricultural element, then try to fund it through EQIP. He also mentioned Stay at Home Parents in Agriculture.

IV. Old Business

A. RC &D Agreement for SE&SC Handbook- Talking to EPA to join in process. Even though there are changes likely to be made, there is a need to update the handbook now. Motion made to put on next Agenda. Harriet/Paul: unanimous.

B. CIG Program – Tom will make presentation at Wood Expo as discussed earlier in meeting. Tom presented CIG at meeting of Small Acreage Farmers and has approached Animal Science Department at URI about making a presentation at the next department heads

meeting. NRCS should send letters to 2006 contracts notifying them of the change to District management. The Districts need copies of the 2007 contracts to begin work. A meeting with the Districts will be held on November 14 at 10:00 in Roylene's office.

C. Annual Report-filed with Secretary of State. Copies of report will be printed in booklet format and distributed with a cover letter from Eric to state officers and legislators.

D. Governor's Appointments to State Committee & FFOS-Harriet spoke to people in Governor's office; if appointments are made and no Senate approval is needed, process should be fast. Names can be submitted but not recommended. Point raised that those approached before should be contacted to see if they are still interested. Harriet suggested Eric be asked if Governor's office should be approached again about appointments to State Committee if no Senate approval needed. She feels the need to pursue this since there is a threat of no quorum in cases where several people are unable to attend meetings.

FFOS Subcommittee: need to clarify who is on subcommittee, when meetings are held, how are recommended tax figures gotten out to tax assessors. Wendy will be asked for clarification. State Committee has power to approve recommendations.

V. New Business

A. Rotating Publicity Campaign-SRICD will use its Art Show as a

vehicle to publicize District activities in the month of October. Alicia will coordinate with Michelle at NRCS. Jeanne will be returning on November 1 and will continuing working on this campaign. ERICD will develop something for release in November and NRICD will handle December. The rotation will then continue every month.

VI. Other

A. Next meeting to be held December 12 at 9:15. Paul Dolan will not be able to attend.

Motion to adjourn at 11:30am: Harriet/Paul: unanimous.