

# MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 9, 2008

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 9:15 am.

In attendance were:

Eric Offenberg, Chairman;

Members –Harriet Powell, Southern District Representative; Paul Dolan,  
Northern District Representative; Gregg Cassidy, RIDEM Representative.

Advisors – Roylene Rides at the Door, USDA NRCS; Kristen Dame, URI  
Cooperative Extension..

Others – Tom Sandham, Eastern District; Gina DeMarco, Northern District;  
Ramona LeBlanc, State Committee Administrative Assistant.

### I. Minutes

Motion made to accept minutes: Paul/Harriet, unanimous.

### II. Financial Report

Motion made to approve the financial report: Paul/Harriet, unanimous.

### III. Reports

#### A. Chair

Eric and representatives from the districts met with Mike Sullivan, RI  
DEM, to discuss state funding of the districts in the new budget year. A  
cut of 50% is currently under consideration, but the funding can be  
increased by legislators. The SCC and the districts will have to have a  
presence at the budget hearings to lobby for increased funding. And the  
need to contact individual legislators is stronger than ever.

#### B. Districts/Advisors

Eastern District: (see emailed report) Particular mention was made of the  
Farmer's Market that the district is establishing, in partnership with the  
Town of Tiverton and the land trust.

Northern District: (see emailed report) A new Business Bulletin has been  
sent, featuring eco-friendly landscaping practices. Work has begun on

two contracts with DEM—a BMP project in North Scituate and a Wetlands program in North Smithfield and Burriville. Also the annual Poster Contest sponsored by PWSB is underway.

Southern District: Alicia has resigned and the process of finding a replacement is on hold until the budget questions are resolved. A grant of \$3000.00 from the RI Foundation that had been submitted by Alicia on behalf of the RIACD has been received. It is for the purpose of funding a publicity campaign to inform the public of the districts' presence and role in the state. The funds will be turned over to SCC to administer.

There is stormwater work available with the Town of Narragansett but there is concern that the district may be at a disadvantage since the work is being put out to bid.

Eric mentioned that the districts specialize in public outreach and that work might be available in that area with companies that are getting municipal grants which require outreach.

NRCS: The staff has obligated an additional \$1.1 million (\$800,000 in EQIP and \$300,000 in WHIP) and by doing so have balanced the budget for the local office. CIG funding has been restored and a written agreement with the districts is being drafted. The fish passage projects are more costly than expected (engineering/construction) but are proceeding. Omega Mill and Slater Mill will be started in July and four others will start this summer also. Either passage of a new Farm Bill or a 12-18 month extension of the previous bill is expected by April 18<sup>th</sup>.

URI: Most grants are nearing completion. Currently there is new funding from Food Bank/DEM and there are five other grant proposals pending.

DEM: A public hearing regarding proposed changes to the Narragansett Bay bond will be held on April 14. A new grant period begins in May for riparian buffers and nonpoint source pollution (319) projects with ranking to be held in the fall.

#### IV. Old Business

##### A. Outreach to Legislators

Districts have been actively contacting members of the legislature to bring the necessity of continued state funding to their attention. An attempt has been made to offer specific examples of the districts' work and to point out the funds that are leveraged through the districts.

##### B. FFOS

The FFOS subcommittee has met to begin reviewing the process of determining recommended values. Currently two seats (governor's appointees) are vacant. Each district is asked to suggest three candidates

for the posts. The names will be forwarded to Ramona who, in turn, will forward to members of the SCC. An email poll will determine 5-6 names to forward to the governor's office for consideration. The re-appointment of the three assessors who currently serve on the subcommittee will also be requested.

A motion was made to conduct the poll via email: Paul/Harriet: unanimous.

C. Governor's Appointments to SCC

It was decided to get the vacant seats on the FFOS subcommittee filled before seeking appointments to SCC.

D. SE & SC Handbook

The handbook is moving towards completion.

E. Ag Day

Tom will coordinate the presentation board and will be at the State House for the whole event. Several board members from Northern will also attend for part of the time. A folder of information about the districts will be distributed to all legislators that day. It will include a letter from Roylene that will explain the connection between NRCS and the districts. She will expound the point that unless the districts remain viable all the money NRCS funded projects bring into the state would be discontinued.

V. Other

A. Chip Young and Rudy Hempe will be consulted regarding publicizing the connection between the districts and the funds NRCS bring into RI.

Motion to adjourn at 10:40: Harriett/Gregg, unanimous.