

# MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 11, 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

Paul Dolan 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 – J. Eric Scherer, USDA NRCS;

Others –Tom Sandham, Eastern District, Ramona LeBlanc, State Committee  
Administrative Assistant;

## I. Reports

NRICD: Full report emailed. Recently, quarterly business bulletins dealing  
with environmentally friendly landscape practices were published.

Burrillville and Smithfield have signed agreements to participate in the  
Wetlands in My Backyard educational program funded by DEM. An  
agricultural inventory is set to begin in July with funding from DEM for a  
chicken inventory authorized and funding for a beef inventory from NRCS  
pending approval.

SRICD: Tom Sandham, with the approval of Eastern District's board, will act  
as interim district manager until such time as funding is available to hire a  
permanent manager. The whole staff will be laid off with the exception of  
Kris, who is paid only for billable hours. NRCS encouraged staff to apply for  
open positions at NRCS and also offered the use of vacant office space.

NRCS: Full report emailed. Farm Bill has passed but there are still issues to be  
dealt with, such as the fact that WHIP funding is limited to private lands which  
eliminates funding to fish passage projects. Work continues to get funding  
restored. Budget continues to be on a month to month basis. Funding for  
NRICD to work on ag inventory should be forthcoming and there is possible  
additional funding for the districts to work on manure management.

RC& D: Rhody Warm is up to 52 wool producers, with 2100 pounds of wool  
being used to manufacture 525 blankets this year. A PBS feature is being taped  
featuring Rhody Warm. The Farm Bill does not fund RC &D. The need to  
work with legislators to restore funding was acknowledged. RI's RC & D is a  
model of how organization can work with both Rhody Warm and Rhody Fresh  
as huge successes.

DEM: On June 18, a Narragansett Bay Watershed Restoration Grant meeting will be held. Budget hearings are beginning on 6/11 and Eric asked Gregg to find out what DEM requested for the districts in their budget. It is understood that there most likely will be a 50% funding cut in DEM's budget (as with all pass through funds) but Eric wants to get a schedule of hearings and try to testify to get funding increased.

ERICD: Full report emailed. Eastern's board agreed to let Tom manage Southern in addition Eastern. Details of the number of hours per week, hourly rate, etc are yet to be determined. Eastern will bill Southern but are willing to wait until their financial situation improves to get paid. Eric expressed his concern that Eastern, which floundered before Tom joined staff, not suffer from Tom's divided attention.

## II. Old Business

- A. FFOS Appointments: Ramona asked the districts to submit names of possible candidates for these positions. An email vote had been previously approved.
- B. CIG: The districts are waiting for an agreement with NRCS to be signed to begin a new round of work. A draft of the agreement was reviewed and a motion made to accept it and sign the final version: Harriet/Paul, unanimous.

## III. Other

- A. RIF Grant: The stipulations of the grant were reviewed and the SCC voted to accept the stipulations (Harriet/Paul, unanimous) and to administer the funds which will be used to raise the visibility of the districts. Chip Young will be asked to revise the scope of work to fit the grant amount. This will be separate from the PR campaign that NRCS was to work with the districts to develop.
- B. District Visibility: Tom is working on a project to add an "identity" to the three districts based on food security issues and he has two major sources of funding that he is seeking to secure to pay for the work developed under this identity. He further suggests that the RIACD become more active and act as an umbrella over the three districts as similar organizations have successfully done in Maine and Massachusetts. A stronger central organization lends itself to developing a single, identifiable image in the public eye. Also, because of its status as a 501 (C) 3 organization, more grants are available to RIACD.  
The boards of the RIACD, Eastern District and Southern District have discussed both the concept of developing a single identity and having RIACD assume a stronger role in the State and have agreed in theory that both are worth pursuing. Southern's approval was conditional on the fact that all three district's agree. Paul Dolan asked for a specific, written proposal to present to the board of Northern District. In the meantime Northern will discuss it in theory.  
A more active RIACD would require staffing and the idea of joining all the districts together while maintaining a separate board for each was again discussed. It was suggested that such a move would allow more funding dollars to go to programs rather

than organizational structure. With expected budget cuts, SRICD is in a very weakened condition and ERICD is dependant on a proposed grant to continue to function through the next fiscal year.

It was agreed that RIACD would meet again and develop the concept, get it on paper and create a strategy to present it to various agencies for funding. Northern District will hold a discussion at its next Board meeting. Tom noted that without the approval of Northern, neither of the proposals will work.

The SCC approved of continuing to develop and discuss both ideas. Eric will ask NRCS for staff help with grant writing when the time comes and to act as facilitator to develop an agreement between the districts.

- C. ERICD/SRICD Contract: A motion was made to informal accept the agreement between the two districts until a formal memo of agreement is presented; Paul/Gregg: unanimous.

Eric asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:20; Harriett/Paul, unanimous.