

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 17, 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 – Michael Moorman, USDA NRCS; Nancy Hess, RI SPP; Eugene
Pepper, RI DEM.

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

Paul Dolan called the meeting to order at 9:19.

I. Minutes

A motion was made to accept the minutes for the April 9, 2008 meeting:
Harriett/Gregg, unanimous.

A motion was made to accept the minutes for the June 11, 2008 meeting:
Harriet/Gregg, unanimous.

II. Financial Report

Year-to-date expense report and revised budget reviewed; projected expenses
exceed current legislative grant.

III. Reports

NRICD: Full report distributed. Annual Dinner recently held (100 in
attendance) at Addieville Farm East. A rain garden has been completed in the
village of North Scituate and will be part of a walk and talk tour that will also
feature the site of a BMP that is scheduled for completion by October 31. A
livestock inventory funded jointly by NRCS and RI DEM has begun. RI DEM
sponsored wetlands project is also proceeding with the distribution of two
brochures dealing with wetland issues. Board elections are upcoming and
several Providence County residents have expressed interest in joining the
Board. Current Board hopes to diversify members as majority of current
members have a forestry background.

SRICD: Harriett reported that the district is in the black (although money is still owed for salaries for two weeks). Financial situation remains critical. A problem that has arisen from the closing of Southern's office is that fact that applicants for the FFOS program are finding it difficult to get their applications signed. Harriet will address this issue at the next SRICD board meeting.

ERICD: Tom is working on a pilot program to use fish oil and seaweed as fertilizer. Without further grant funding, the district office can only remain open until the end of a fiscal year. If a pending grant is finalized, it would keep the district viable for an additional 18 months.

Chair: With this year's cuts in state funding and the probability of further cuts next year, the SCC needs to develop a strategy for the survival of the districts. The RIACD is taking steps to stabilize and strengthen itself, but it is the SCC, by state law, that oversees the districts. It must set goals, develop and implement a plan that will allow the districts to continue. Further discussion later in meeting.

RIACD: Contracts have been signed with NRCS for 1) Lake Management Plans to develop a strategy for the treatment of aquatic invasives in northern RI lakes and to develop a treatment plan for two lakes and 2) Cooperative Conservation Outreach plan that will assist the NRCS in outreach to 2008 Farm Bill qualified agricultural operations and in providing follow up to existing Farm Bill program participants. Both contracts include a 15% administrative fee. RIACD proposes that they use that money to cover operational expenses and pass any surplus on to the districts.

NRCS: Full report emailed. The rules of the new Farm Bill are still being set. Anticipated funding includes \$2.9 million for EQIP, \$4.2 million for WHIP, \$3.4 million for FRPP and \$15 million for regional equity. This funding carries a % for operational funds but even if all funds are obligated, RI NRCS will still be \$400,000 short.

Mike Moorman was optimistic about publication of the rules by 9/29; with a November 1 sign up deadline (possible extended deadline) the help of the districts will be needed to publicize. The Farm Bill reinstates funding for Cooperative Conservation Partners Initiative which sets aside a percentage of funding for partnership programs.

RC& D: Participation in 13 events reached approximately 720 people. Grant received to convert rejected Rhody Warm wool into mulch. RI Coverts has continued to meet and Narragansett Indian church burial ground project is going well. The possibility of moving RDC into R C & D until the economy improves has been discussed.

DEM: Eric raised the question that there might be work available and funded at DEM that could be outsourced to the districts. Further discussion later in meeting.

IV. Old Business

- A. FFOS: SCC approval of three candidates for appointment by the governor has been received and a letter with those recommendations will be sent to the Governor's office. Assessors currently serving wish to continue on subcommittee and the Governor will be asked to re-appoint them as well. Gregg suggested that a training workshop for assessors is needed and Eric asked him to explore possible sources of funding.
- B. CIG: Agreement recently signed. Project 60% complete. NRCS has been billed and payment will be split between the districts.

V. New Business

A. Annual Report: Due to be filed by 9/30, Ramona is waiting for reports from ERICD and SRICD to complete.

VI. Other

A. Status of the Districts

Throughout the meeting, the question of the viability of the districts and the effect of current budgetary constraints on them was discussed. Questions raised: Are 3 separate districts viable? Could there be a single umbrella organization instead? Would this cut down on expenses? Can each district maintain its own board under a single entity?

Each district has a unique character, there is a need to keep diversity without duplicating.

Plan developed to send a letter to Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs of RI DEM and other state agencies to see if there is any work that they are too short staffed to do that the Districts could do instead. Examples of how each district has worked with government agencies will be included. A draft will be circulated via email for comment.

Directors insurance will be examined to see if the current four separate policies can be combined into a single policy. If the list of activities that the SCC is responsible for is pared down, would that save money? Are we duplicating or over-insuring?

Each district, at its next Board meeting, is to discuss and list current and future commitments, financial status and strategy for the upcoming years. They should look at what is funded, how it funded, and what work they want to undertake.

This information will be forwarded to SCC for inclusion in a brainstorming meeting to be held on October 29th. That will be an open ended meeting which all SCC members and advisors should attend. Any district Board members that wish to attend will also be welcome. At least one director from each district should attend.

Existing agreements with NRCS over the last several years should be reviewed to see if there is similar funding available in 2008 Farm Bill.

Preliminary ideas should be emailed to Ramona to forward for review before 10/29 meeting.

B. Governor's Appointee

Eric Offenber, due to extensive travel overseas for work, will need to resign as Governor's appointee to the SCC. He is willing to continue until a replacement is selected.

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

