

RI STATE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

17 Smith Avenue, Greenville, RI 02828

949-1480

MEETING MINUTES

August 6, 2009

9:15 AM

USDA NRCS Conference Room

Eric Offenberg called the meeting to order at 9:15.

In attendance were:

Eric Offenberg, Chair; Scott Marshall, RI DEM, Agriculture; Kristen Castrataro, URI Co-operative Extension; Dick Went, RIACD; Paul Dolan, Gina DeMarco, NRICD; Clarkson Collins, Harriet Powell, SRICD; Emerson Wildes, Dick Hart, Ron Mucci, ERICD; Pooh Vongkhamdy, NRCS.

I. Eastern District Board Election

A motion was made to accept Ron Mucci as a Director of the Eastern RI Conservation District Board: Harriet/Paul/unanimous.

II. A motion was made to accept the minutes of the March 26, 2009

meetings: Paul/Harriet: unanimous.

III. Financial Report

A motion was made to accept the July 31, 2009 financial report: Paul/Harriet: unanimous.

IV. Reports

ERICD: The Board voted to keep the office open for another month. An alternative meeting location will be tried.

SRICD: Tom Sandham has resigned and turned current files over to the Board. The Board would like to hire a replacement District Manager.

NRICD: A five year contract has been approved by Providence Water Supply Board for the Scituate Reservoir Watershed Education Program.

Contract for the development of lake management plans for two lakes has been awarded as part of a joint project with NRCS and RI DEM. Another joint project with NRCS and DEM dealing with bio-security and

nutrient management will begin as soon as agreements are signed.

The District's Annual Dinner is scheduled for September 11,

2009. NRCS: A written report was submitted. The staff has been working to meet deadlines for EQIP and FRPP and will obligate all funds available for these programs. In fact, there is a back log of EQIP applications that may be funded in the next round.

The plan for the Pocasset project is expected to be completed by fall 2009. If approved, the first task will be to purchase 7-8 houses and to restore the flood plain in the surrounding area. The project will total about \$30 million and will take 5-10 years to complete. There is \$2.4 million in stimulus funding for flood plain restoration in the West Warwick/Pawtuxet area.

RC& D: Written report submitted.

URI: Kristen is finishing the NRCS grazing plan and working with the Ag Collaborative funded by the van Beuren Foundation. She reported that an interim Dean has been appointed. Also SARE is restructuring its funding.

RIACD: Dick attended the NE NACD conference and later met with Congressman Langevin at his Washington office. The association has signed an MOU with the Ag Collaborative. The administrative fee is not as much as Dick had hoped. The Outreach grant with NRCS will be amended to extend the completion date. NRCS has indicated that future agreements will not be written with RIACD and Dick voiced concern over how the Association will get the funding it needs to continue to be viable.

Chair: The Economic Development Council is introducing a renewable energy program with NRCS to encourage renewable energy on farms. Combined state and NRCS funding may meet close to 100% of the investment required. Eric would like the District to be involved with energy and farm audits. Eric met with Mike Sullivan who views the Districts reorganization favorably. The Districts will need to justify level funding next year with results.

Old Business

A) FFOS: DEM has neither staff to complete an evaluation of the current method of determining recommended values for farms nor the funds to pay a consultant to do it. Funding will be requested from the Ag Collaborative since the FFOS program is a definite benefit to farmers.

RC& D is developing a format to create conservation plans for farms in the FFOS program. TSP's are needed for those landowners who are not working with NRCS and the Districts' role in that process needs to be determined. The TSP's would not be employees but consultants paid by the job. A pay structure needs to be established that will fund District administration of the conservation plans and that will ensure consistent fees for all farms.

Tax assessors will need to be trained on the new plan structure and Kristen indicated that SARE may be a source of funding for that training.

While the Ag Inventory agreement will reach a fair number of farmers this year, there needs to be outreach to all farmers in the state to educate them about changes to the program as well as outreach to forestry and open space landowners.

The FFOS subcommittee will meet to discuss the conservation plan format, the qualifications which will be required of TSP's, and the financial issues.

B) Ag Collaborative: A steering committee of 10 people has been established and it will make decisions as to how the funds from the van Bueren grant will be spent. Gerry Bertrand, Kristen Castrataro and Tom Sandham share executive director duties. Tom and Ken Ayars have veto powers over decisions. The collaborative is developing a 5 year strategic plan for agriculture in RI and projects that are funded will have to fit into that plan.

B) District Restructuring: A meeting of Directors from the 3 Districts was held to discuss options for restructuring. The options are: 1) no change, 2) complete centralization of administration and staff and 3) centralize administration while keeping District employees. After subsequent discussion the first option was eliminated and voting was split evenly between options 2 and 3. Eric will meet with Dick and Chip to determine how to meld the two options. In the meantime plans will begin to centralize administrative functions. Each District will contribute to administrative overhead. The goal will be to generate income from programs that will contribute to administrative system. There will be a need for publicity so the public will know how to contact Districts without local offices. Eric suggested an intern in each District to help with marketing and program outreach, Pooh may be able to provide a level 1 paid intern to assist the districts. Further outreach to local government will also be needed to increase their awareness of the Districts and the role they play.

A motion was made to adjourn at 11:30: Harriet/Emerson.