

## **VT State Technical Committee Meeting**

***January 22, 2020, Colchester Vermont***

### ***Attending:***

Vicky Drew, NRCS	Jeff Faber, VACD
Obe Racicot, NRCS	Alli Lewis, VAWQP
Joe Buford, NRCS	Ben Gabos, VAAFM CREP
Wynea Buford, NRCS	Phil Wilson, VAAFM CREP
Amy Overstreet, NRCS	Brittany Cole, VACD
John Thurgood, NRCS	Laura Ranker, DEC
Marian Jordan, NRCS	Diana Butler, VT RWA
Phylicia Moore, NRCS	Liz Royer, VT RWA
Marybeth Whitten<NRCS	Jeff Carter, UVM Extension
Wendy Wilton, FSA	Kent Henderson, FNLC
Nina Gage, VAAFM	Kaitlin Hayes, VAAFM
Ryan Patch, VAAFM	Dave Thompson, General Public
Carissa Stein, NRCS	Paul Hemlin, VT F&W
Marli Rupe, DEC	Jill Arace (phone), VACD
Chris Smith, USFWS	Kathleen Warner (phone),
Jess Buckley, NRCC	Keith Thompson, VT FPR
Laura DiPietro, VAAFM	Kira Jacobs, EPA
John Austin, VT F&W	Meghan Giroux, Interlace AgroForestry
Tom Berry, Senator Leahy's office	
Eric Perkins, EPA	
Jake Jacobs, UVM Extension/RMA Contractor	

**Vicky Drew, VT NRCS State Conservationist, welcomed the attendees.** Distributed a funding comparison (see attachment). We are funded at levels far less this year than we have in the past, particularly in EQIP. Awaiting final allocations. Hoping to have it soon. On the technical assistance side, we are very low on EQIP as well. If that doesn't change, we will be stretched thin. Great job last year selling CSP to customers. It's a program that farmers should participate in if they are eligible. As an example, dairy farmer in Northern VT is receiving money for pollinator planting and activities they were doing already—funds for ongoing stewardship work, but per CSP, they have done more (that contract is \$ 40000). Remember CSP as an option when talking to farmers about conservation program options.

**HIRING**-it has improved since last meeting. We have 27 positions we advertised or are in process of filling-4 filled. 4 left to advertise. Some students position but most permanent positions. If you know of folks that would be interested, including a management analyst here in the state office, let us know. Program analyst, engineering tech in St. Johnsbury and Pathways recent graduate for GIS work left to be advertised. Lots of opps.

**-New ranking tool will be used.** Won't have as many funding pools. Working on addressing issues that the new tool poses, and we are working with headquarters.

**-Legislative Update, Tom Berry, Senator Leahy's office--** adopted FY 20 appropriations bills in December and avoided shutdown. Dairy business innovation center, which VAFFM secured, one of three in country, stood up for 3 years, \$500,000. Maple grants, Vermont does very well and is good for research and marketing. Could include work on forest management, invasive species, etc. National ag law partnership, at VT Law School, they work nationally, but also a local clinic, we want them to work with main ag sectors in Vermont. The law clinic is well funded this year and could assist farmers with legal help. This could help with land access issues, etc. Water quality, the EPA line for Lake Champlain work is at 13 million dollars and Great Lakes Fishery funding is at 9 million. Highwater mark for both programs. ANR will have 6 million toward TMDL implementation. Helping line up priorities for FY 21 for Senator, so reach out to Tom with priorities. Lake Memphremagog, they have \$500,000 through VT Fish and Wildlife.

- **WENDY WILTON, FSA-CRP** enrollment. Good news that VT land is eligible to enroll in CRP/CREP. However, one more notice is expected that will address if any VT land is subject to the 25% reduction in Soil Rental Rates. Wilton has proposed to program staff in DC, along with Secretary Anson Tebbetts, this doesn't apply in VT b/c our law asks for perennial vegetative buffer with 25 foot limit. A closer reading of VT law should allow us to apply CREP without the reduction, but still waiting on the notice. I was given verbal direction from DC that with the notice coming out, it would be up to us to work with the state and figure out if it works with CREP. Put a lot of pieces in place. Thanks to NRCS, Joe and Toby, they helped us establish statewide implementation cost which we needed for implementation on CREP, established soil rental rates, but still waiting on the official notice, before we know if it will be impacted by a reduction and follow up with Phil and Ben at the state. Are applications coming in? Ben Gabos said yes, there are interested landowners. But no enrollment yet. People can sign up but the whole manual is empty. Encourage everyone to get folks enrolled. Drew said NRCS will be promoting EQIP, and we should do the same thing with CREP. Wilton said she wants to know about the final soil rental rates before we give them an idea of an estimate for what they would get paid, which is expected very soon and should not impact the efforts to interest landowners in the program. Discussion arose about forest buffers and the 25 foot restriction—the argument has been put forth, but still waiting on answer. Chris Smith asked about CRP pilot program on state lands? Kim Peck retired at the end of last year, and we have hired a new program specialist, who starts in February (Eileen Powers) and will be getting up to speed. Until then all CREP questions or concerns should be addressed to Wendy Wilton or Julie Jacque at FSA.

**-Lake Champlain Initiative 2015-2019, Obe Racicot.** In 2014, USDA Sec Vilsack announced a special Lake Champlain 45-million-dollar project to target funds to priority watersheds. We are still looking at P reductions, but we will look at summary of preliminary financial info. Based on funding pools, the attachment highlights preliminary results. In 2015, we had \$8.3 million. Explains accounting methodology for funds. Based on our preliminary accounting we reached our goal, and the outcomes still need to be measured. Over 5 years, thousands of practices planned. We are very close to our goal of allocating the 45 million. Tom Berry congratulated the conservation partners for this tremendous work.

**-Jake Jacobs, UVM Ag Risk management project—**We have been funded by targeted state funds, but we are in our final year now. However, there is still funding for outreach and education. I am pleased that some funds have been secured to create a regional New England based program at UVM.

**-Clean Water Report to Legislature, Ryan Patch, VAAFM-PowerPoint** presentation highlighting [VT Clean Water Initiative 2019 Ag Performance Report](#) and update to LC TMDL implementation progress. Clean Water Initiative projects are marked with signage. This report goes further than ag, includes all sectors that have clean water obligation to improve outcomes. This report will focus on ag and the target audience was the VT State Legislature. \$138 million awarded by state of VT agencies to clean water projects from 2016-2019. 11,490 acres improved through conservation, with nearly \$1 million invested by VT farmers. This also included compliance stats, including 1,240 farm visits, 115 enforcement actions. Farm numbers in Vermont--34 large, 114 medium, 310 small. The report also examines cost effectiveness of state clean water investments. Each watershed has a summary. 16.4 metric tons of total P reduced across state (36,000 pounds) achieved by clean water projects that support TMDL using federal state and regulatory programs funding. Largest share of this is NRCS funding at 66 percent. Emily Bird is the VAAFM contact for the report. Laura DiPietro said they could provide data and stats about farms, practice implementation, etc. so reach out to them if needed. These promising P reduction numbers were achieved during a time of historically low milk prices, Marli Rupe added. Amy Overstreet also noted that a group of ag and natural resource communicators has formed (*ANRCE, Ag and Natural Resources Communicators for the Environment*) to help amplify a cohesive message about the cumulative impact of the partnerships efforts to work with farmers and we are crafting an annual report and talking points for leaders to help spread this good news. We hope to share the annual report at next week's Farm Show. Discussion arose about updating charts/graphics/data as the ag sector contribution decreases.

**-Resource Conservation Update, Joe Buford, NRCS-Practice Payment Schedule- Letter received from UVM, NW zone (Heather Darby/Jeff Sanders) expressing concern on NRCS payment schedules.** Joe Buford distributed guidance from NRCS on development of FY 2020 payment rates. Joe asked the group if they knew where the payment schedules are located? Answer: It's in Field Office Tech Guide (FOTG) Section One. January 31 is the deadline to have all practice payment change requests in to our national office. After that date, no changes will be made. If you are interest in looking at comparison of practices, you can email [Joe](#) to request more info. Joe explained how these payment rates are developed. Vermont develops the scenarios, but the economist develops the specifics. They want to know, "Do you really need all those scenarios in Vermont?" We must confirm with them how many times the scenario has been used in the past 5 years, b/c if it isn't used often, it cost too much to maintain it. There will be a push to reduce the number of scenarios that we have. Where we don't offer a scenario, you use the closest available practice scenario that does exist. Waste storage facility was highlighted. There may be reductions in this practice. If there are concerns, please contact Joe. Laura D requested to see a listing of potential practices that could be impacted by reductions. Practice payment schedule will be released soon. Drew suggested looking at 10-15 top practices that Vermont NRCS implements, look at the ones that will have the highest reductions, focus on these, and share this list with VAAFM, so Joe will focus on agronomic issues.

**LUNCH BREAK at 11:40 a.m.**

### **NRCS Conservation Programs Update, Obediah Racicot**

Stakeholder Presentation on the 2018 Farm Bill.

- We will work under current Interim rules until the Final Rules are published.
- CART Update:
  - o Workflow will look considerably different.
  - o Deployment will be on 01.23.2020.

- Joe Buford (SRC) is overseeing the Conservation Assessment part and Obe Racicot (ASTC-P) is overseeing the Ranking Tool part of CART.
  - The 2020 sign up schedule is in flux; we don't have a last sign-up date at this point.
  - NRCS can always take applications from landowners.
  - CSP is Priority #1 by the Chief and the goal is to be obligated no later than 06.30.2020.
  - There will not be multiple sign-ups; we anticipate only one this year.
  - Discussion was focused on how to rank applications; if they are equally weighted, do we want to it to be more weighted by location?
  - Discussion on targeting Lake Memphremagog or CT River vs Lake Champlain.
- VT looking to prioritize the top six Strategic Watersheds and source water protections
    - May have to shift personnel based on resources needs.
    - **ACTION:** Obe to create LC Segments in coordination with VAAFM
    - Priority: Offer Urban High Tunnels
    - Priority: Soil Health
      - See how it shakes out in 2020 and review in 2021.
    - Discussion on prioritizing which type of conservation plans will get done first.
      - Lots of CAPs offeree under RCPP and some are under-utilized.
    - Discussion on having two different funding pools:
      - **ACTION:** Obe to set up two pools: one for Ag and one for non-Ag
  - Obe reviewed the CSP Regulatory Changes and EQIP Regulatory Changes
    - Available as a hand-out.
  - VT will develop a Top 10 Practices list that will receive 90% cost share:
    - Cover Crop was listed as one of the top ten.
    - Reminder of practices to consider are: Nutrient Management, Riparian Forest Buffer, Tree & Shrub Planting, Fence, Stream Crossing, Aquatic Organism Passage, Grassed Waterway, Diversion, Forage and Biomass planting, Lined waterway or outlet, No-till, Prescribed Grazing, and Animal Trails and Walkways.
    - **ACTION:** Vicky will take comments under advisement and with Joe Buford develop the list.
  - VT will develop a Top 10 Source Water Areas
    - Standards include Practice numbers 355, 351, 595, 393, 391, 386, 340, 561, 328 and 590.
    - **ACTION:** After much discussion Vicky will take comments under advisement and with Joe Buford develop the list.
  - CIG has been revamped and will be offered in 2020.
    - Joe Buford presented the changes
    - Available as a hand out
    - VT needs to identify four priority resource concerns.
    - **ACTION:** VT will announce full of amount of CIG, no CAP.
      - Set the 2020 funding levels of no less than \$10k and no more than \$500k
  - EQIP Incentive Contracts was reviewed.
    - Still accepting comments via the Federal Register
    - This is separate from regular EQIP contracts
    - Will have to identify three priority areas
    - Handout is available
  - ACEP Regulatory Changes were reviewed
    - Handout is available

- RCPP 2.0:
  - We have received four applications
  - Reviews the RCPP review process
  - Deadline to accept applications is 01.31.2020

**Next Meeting is April 8, 2020 at 9:30**

Adjourned at 3:00 PM.