

Virginia Association of RC&D Councils
2011 Annual Spring Meeting Draft Minutes of Business Meeting
Wednesday, April 27, 2011 and Friday, April 29, 2011
Blacksburg, VA

(see items in bold for follow-up action required)

Welcome and Opening Remarks: Chuck Shorter, New River-Highlands RC&D Council (NRH), greeted attendees at the opening of the VARCDC Spring Meeting on Wednesday, April 27. He called on Bob Martin, New River-Highlands RC&D Council Chair, who welcomed the group to Blacksburg. He described the general area of southwest Virginia and mentioned some of the history of the area.

VARCDC Business Meeting – April 27, 2011

Welcome and Roll Call: Chairman Bill Smith officially called the business meeting to order at 1:14 PM. Joan Comanor, VARCDC Secretary, called the roll of Council delegates (voting delegates were identified) and other attendees (see attached list).

The following items were discussed:

Committee Reports: (many of which are available on VARCDC website (www.varcd.org)).

Annual Meeting/Training: copy of report provided.

Awards: no one available to provide a verbal report; annual awards will be presented this evening

Budget: copy provided. Treasurer Judy Lyttle noted that some councils have not paid their dues. She said she would be happy to accept checks during the meeting. Judy briefly reviewed the FY 2010 budget and expressed appreciation for Coordinator Patrick Vincent's assistance.

Forestry: copy provided. Committee Chair Lou Brossy introduced Dave Richert (NRH), Joe Lehnen (Shenandoah) and Pat Murphy (Old Dominion) of Virginia Department of Forestry who are assisting Councils. He briefly highlighted key upcoming events included in the committee report.

Legislative: copy provided. Committee Chair Joan Comanor acknowledged all the good work of Committee members, Council members, and others in trying to save program funding. She mentioned that we need to decide if we will try to fight for restoring funding for FY2012 by the end of the meeting.

Nomination/Elections: no one available. Copy provided. The report noted that the following individuals had been elected to serve as 2011-13 officers of the Virginia Association of RC&D Councils, effective this evening at the awards banquet:

Chairman – Steve Pope, Tidewater RC&D Council

Vice Chair – Joan Comanor, Shenandoah RC&D Council

Secretary – Judy Lyttle, South Hampton Roads RC&D Council

Chuck Shorter – New River-Highlands RC&D Council

Bill Smith will become Immediate Past Chair, and also continue to serve on the Executive Committee.

Public Relations: no one available. Copy provided.

NRCS Update:

Bill Smith then welcomed Jack Bricker, NRCS State Conservationist, who described NRCS' contingency plan for program shutdown. Jack referenced the conference call he held with Council chairs about 3 weeks ago and a similar call he held with Coordinators. Jack mentioned that Ray Dorsett is also present at this meeting and is available to help answer questions and aid in the transition. He mentioned that NRCS RC&D staff had been temporarily assigned to other duties as they adjust to this; he has never been involved with closing down a program, and he is also having to deal with Watershed Programs that were not funded. NRCS is committed to help find permanent positions for all affected staff. He asked for questions and following is a brief summary of that discussion.

- Will RC&D office equipment be available to Councils as excess property (non-capitalized equipment)? A: they will be looking into that with NRCS national office (NHQ).

-What is meant by "paid through end of month" for existing leases— is that April or May? A: end of April

-What is the status of the \$8700 each Council received (2010 RC&D carryover funds)? Will that money remain? A: NHQ has required all unobligated funds need to be returned. Will have to handle this on a case-by-case basis – some councils already have contracts. Ray said they are reviewing national guidance but the contracts with Councils have a provision that if no funds are available, the contract is void. He said they will try to honor those that Councils had already under contract obligation. Jim Sipperly, National Association of RC&D Councils (NARCDC) President, commented that these funds are FY2010 funds and NARC&DC is questioning whether that is legal to use past year funds to close down this year operations. He mentioned that non-Circle of Diamonds councils received about \$4500 to use to improve Council performance.

-One participant stated, "In our area, our word is our bond," and is concerned that would not be honored as an obligation. A: Bricker said he is sympathetic but has to follow national rules.

-Some Coordinators may be willing to donate personal time to continue working with Councils, will that be a problem? A: Jim Sipperly, NARC&DC, is looking into NRCS' position which is that it is prohibited as a conflict of interest.

-Bill Smith mentioned to the Congressional staff representatives at the meeting that he hopes they gather from this discussion the level of commitment of Councils to continue as we work through the transition; he expressed thanks for the invaluable work of Coordinators. He asked about accessing Council files which are on NRCS computers. How can we be assured that Council project files are available to Councils? A: Bricker said copies of e-files will be provided and all hard copy files will be given to Councils, and that RC&D staff would be available to help with this.

-South Centre Corridors representative reported they bought a portable hard drive and had copied all their files and now have their information in their possession.

- What about allowing the transfer of the RC&D phone number to Councils? A: Bricker said this was possible, to Barbara Williams, IT; send request to Ray Dorsett who will forward it to their USDA IT coordinator, Barbara Williams.

- What happens if a Council dissolves – where do the records go? A: Bricker stated this should be addressed in Council bylaws, and also you should check IRS regulations. You need to make sure an orderly process followed.

- What about the status of 2012 funding? A: Bricker commented the RC&D statute is still in place, Congress has taken no action on 2012 yet; conceivably there could be program funding provided in future years. Jim Sipperly (NARCDC) stated that NRCS still needs RC&D Councils to help deliver programs; he speculated that the program will be 'reinvented'. In the meantime, NRCDC will fight for 2012 funding;

-An attendee commented that all we lost are the coordinators, not ourselves. Right now we have a tendency to think sky is falling, however, there is more than 1 department in the federal government, it is up to us to look for new opportunities.

-Ray Dorsett commented that NRCS should continue to be viewed as a conservation partner.

-A final comment was that the winds of politics can and will change; the federal government walked away from us, but we should not walk away from them. We may be facing a tremendous opportunity.

Chuck Shorter pointed out the Spring Meeting sponsors listed on the back of the program agenda and thanked them for their support for the meeting, breaks, awards banquet, lunch on Thursday, and the Thursday evening tour/dinner.

NARCDC President Jim Sipperly: Jim said he always feels he is with family when attending an RC&D meeting anywhere. He thanked Bill for inviting him. He observed there is a strong Southeastern RC&D Association, strong state associations as well as individual Councils. He briefly described the origin of his Council's name (Kings Mark), as an example of the local heritage each Council represents. Everyone has been working very hard to save program. He acknowledged the VARCDC letter that listed all Council members and their sponsors, and he circulated to others to use as a format. Jim speculated that OMB, USDA folks viewed that the RC&D program was not a good fit for NRCS; NRCS Chief commented that RC&D should be reinvented. Jim believes there may be a 'master plan' in play and said we should keep Councils going. NARCDC wants to know what our needs are; it has developed a survey to be distributed to Council chairs and posted on the list-serve. He said it is very important that all Councils fill it out to help them sort out priorities of how they can best serve us. He said that NARC&DC has been working with the Department of Defense (grant proposal pending); the Int'l Code Council approached NARCDC for help re western fire-wise program (grant proposal pending). They also have a CIG grant to work with Councils serving low income areas. He said we should do whatever it takes to survive and NARCDC will be fighting for 2012 funding. NARCDC is asking for legal ruling regarding the question about volunteering by the RC&D Coordinators. He observed there are lots of questions to be addressed as the transition is underway. He said the

NRCS Chief has asked State Conservationists to provide him with a plan for how NRCS offices can have 90% coverage in the field; that may provide RC&D opportunities. The NARCDC national staff is available to provide some help; we should contact Andy Gordon re legal, contractual questions. House Ag appropriations staffer Martin Delgado was the person who put us in for elimination. NRCS Chief and USDA support the program, but 2012 proposed funds were taken out by OMB. We need to remain positive and do better job explaining our story. He then responded to questions from attendees as follows:

-Given the financial situation, we will need to be selective in what dues get paid. Jim said that NARC&DC is reducing its space, and has funds to continue for at least 18 months. NRCS hasn't done best job in administering the program, because we don't fit traditional conservation. NARCDC is going after other opportunities. He said they will consider reducing national dues. They intend to use the survey results to help focus their efforts.

-What is the future of the Circle of Diamonds? A: That will continue (he briefly gave the background of program) and said 247 Councils has qualified for the Circle of Diamonds and 14 applications were pending. He mentioned that water, jobs and energy are 3 major problem areas nationwide and we should consider the role we can play in those.

-What help can NARCDC provide with lobbying for key program funds? A: They have limited lobbying ability (can only use dues income for lobbying). They can help Councils as long as it is consistent with mission. They are looking at NARCDC bylaws, and consider going after corporate partnerships and other federal agencies. That would have to be approached carefully and thoughtfully.

Bill Smith called for adjournment of the business meeting at 3:15 pm to be resumed on Friday (motion by Ray Rosenberger-Eastern Shore, seconded by Edwin Long-Eastern Shore, passed unanimously).

Following are unofficial notes from the discussions that followed.

Where do we want to go from here? The group then participated in brainstorming sessions, addressing a number of topics the rest of the afternoon and the following morning. The group was assisted by facilitator Bobby Whitescarver. Notes from the session were compiled and will be distributed to each participant and available from the website, www.dogsinthecradle.com, for the next month.

Council Member Responsibilities: Andy Gordon, Deputy Executive Director for NARC&DC, joined the meeting for Thursday and provided additional information and described in some detail the services available from the national association office. Andy distributed the Guidebook for RC&D Directors-Sustainability and Fundraising publication. He encouraged folks to use NARC&DC's website which is being updated (see the website, www.rcdnet.org), where future publications will be posted. A relatively new service is webinars on specific topics for individual Councils as well, rather than just offering training at state or regional association meetings. He then discussed Legal Responsibilities of a Board Member, and responded to attendees' questions.

VARCDC Business Meeting, Friday, April 29

Becoming Sustainable: Jessica Simmons, Southeast Michigan RC&D natural resources specialist, discussed her Council's activities, since their area was never designated (e.g., applicant area). They organized the Council in 1996 under the assumption they would never be designated. Their 7 county RC&D Applicant Area is both urban and rural, and their projects reflect the diversity of the people, geography, and setting. 47% of Michigan population is in their area, which provides great opportunities for partnerships, but they need to make sure they are not duplicating efforts. Detroit has US's highest poverty rate at 36% in 2009. Jessica is their only staff person and was hired in 2004. They also had an NRCS DC serving as liaison. They have an active Executive Committee, and quarterly Council meeting, an annual legislative breakfast. The Council developed a board restructuring plan in 2008-9. They looked at Huron Pines RC&D Council for a model, which has 9 at-large members as their Executive Committee. Other Board members included traditional soil and water district and county representatives; ironically Huron Pines did not recommend their operating model. Their Executive Director recommended, "One board, with people who really want to be there and can offer their time, talent, and financial support is the way to go." SE Michigan developed a model for board member selection that included a range of skills, geo/demographic representation, funding and business expertise, fundraising, finance/business operations, public relations/marketing, administration/personnel management. Funding/business skills include identifying potential donors, grant knowledge (sources), connectivity (in-kind services). Geographic/demographic representation included urban, rural, age, ethnicity, gender, public/private, nonprofits, and community organizations. They used a matrix of desired characteristics to assess existing members and identify voids. They made decisions about the number of members and clearly stated the number of hours required from each potential member. Also stipulated each member was expected to make an appropriate personal donation to the Council annually. They worked with a nonprofit consultant who was invaluable. Final structure includes a board, a supporting organization advisory committee (no leadership or decision-making authority; that group includes the soil and water, county organization reps), a citizen advisory committee (individuals with an interest in work of Council), and staff. Board will meet bimonthly. Committees will include 5 standing committees – Executive, Finance, Fundraising, Marketing & Outreach and Audit. These are focused solely on council operations. They can also establish other committees that focus on potential project subject areas. By law changes included allowing voting by email, board term limits, quorum guidelines, etc. They hope to hire a part-time Executive Director via a capacity-building grant in the near future. Jessica responded to numerous questions from attendees and agreed to provide a copy of her power point presentation which went in depth to the process her Council used to restructure their operations. She also presented an overview of her specific forestry projects, primarily focused on utilization of urban tree wood, due to emerald ash borer outbreaks. (See their websites www.urbanwood.org and www.michiganwoodenergy.org for specific information about these projects.) Jessica's presentations are available on www.dogsinthecradle.com.

VARCDC Business Meeting: New VARCDC Chair Steve Pope reconvened the business meeting at 11:15 am on Friday, April 29.

Old Business: Steve called for approval of the minutes of the Fall 2010 VARCDC meeting (minutes were posted on the VARCDC website). Motion by Ray Rosenberger (Eastern Shore), seconded by Edwin Long (Eastern Shore), approved unanimously.

New Business: The date for the next meeting will be established. Bill Smith (Black Diamond) moved that VARCDC continue in its present form, until it is necessary to adjust. Edwin Long (Eastern Shore) seconded the motion, motion carried unanimously. Jerry Walker (Tidewater) stated his address is VARCDC's current address for our corporate registration information; he is willing to have it continue. Motion by Bill Smith (Black Diamond), seconded by Carlyle Wimbish (Old Dominion), passed unanimously, to use Jerry's address (John H. Walker III, P. O. Box 156, Locust Grove Lane, Walkerton, VA 23177). Carlyle Wimbish (Old Dominion) moved to share information from this meeting with NARCDC, seconded by Susan Adams (Old Dominion), passed unanimously. Chair Steve Pope brought up concerns expressed over the past couple of days about continuing council membership in the Southeastern Association. Carlyle Wimbish (Old Dominion) moved to not use VARCDC funds to send a VARCDC representative to the upcoming Southeastern Association meeting. Bill Smith (Black Diamond) seconded. In discussion, the concern was expressed that this action may be premature until individual councils and even the regional associations decide their future. Bill Smith mentioned that changes were pending in the operation of the Southeastern Association and encouraged us to not abdicate our voice in both the Southeastern and on the National board. He strongly objected to dissociating from the Southeastern Association at this time. Carlyle Wimbish then withdrew his motion, and Bill withdrew his second. Steve then asked that attendees return to their Councils and have a discussion and decide if they are getting benefits of their membership in the Southeastern. He expressed skepticism that appropriate change will occur, but he will reflect the will of the VARCDC. It was mentioned we do receive value at regional meetings (especially the 1 hosted by New River-Highlands a couple years ago). In the future, the Virginia attendees should do homework and make sure that their representatives have valid proxies and are at the business sessions to cast votes. Bill Smith briefly reviewed changes that have been made in Southeastern operations and some of the concerns that have caused the past problems. Jerry Walker observed that with the change in circumstances, VARCDC should re-consider obtaining nonprofit status. Steve asked the group if we wished to move up our fall meeting in advance of the Southeastern meeting; after some discussion, the group preferred to keep the schedule the way it has been operating. It was requested that Councils be notified in advance of the Southeastern meeting about the need for proxies so their representatives will be available for voting on decisions **(Judy Lyttle, VARCDC Secretary, will work with Chairman Steve Pope and follow-up).**

Steve then called on Council representatives to provide updates on efforts underway in individual councils to adjust to the loss of NRCS funding. South Centre Corridors' representatives had left Thursday evening; all other Councils provided brief reports.

Steve encouraged everyone to be optimistic. We should continue to be a light that shines in behalf of RC&D. We need to be realistic as we move forward, but hold on to our passion. Look around our communities and identify needs and ask how our RC&D Councils can continue to be part of the solution. Focus on what we can do and just do it!

Carlyle mentioned the Virginia Rural Summit dates are September 12-13 in Glen Allen and encouraged Steve to consider attending. He observed that VARCDC helped create the Virginia Rural Council.

The group expressed its appreciation for Chuck Shorter and New River-Highlands Council, and especially Gary, Becky and Karen for being excellent hosts, providing instant notes from the brainstorming sessions (especially Karen!!!) and organizing a terrific meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:10 PM on motion by Jay Hubble (New River-Highlands), seconded by Mo Lynch (Tidewater), passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Comanor, VARCDC Secretary

VARCDC 2011 Spring Meeting Attendees: (voting delegates identified by * below)

Susan Adams, Old Dominion*
Jack Asbury, New River-Highlands*
Jim Atwell, New River-Highlands
Carolyn Baker, Black Diamond*
Charlie Becker, Va Dept of Forestry
Jim Boland, Shenandoah*
Gary Boring, NRCS-New River-Highlands
Dan Bowling, New River-Highlands
Stacey Bradshaw, South Centre Corridors*
Jack Bricker, NRCS State Conservationist
Lou Brossy, New River-Highlands
Jean Burks, Black Diamond
Joan Comanor, Shenandoah*
K D Cook, NRCS-Black Diamond
Drew Densmore, US Senator Mark Warner staff representative
Ray Dorsett, NRCS Ass't State Conservationist
Karen Doyle, New River-Highlands
Andy Gordon, National Association of RC&D Councils Deputy Executive Director
Angie Hall, Congressman Morgan Griffith staff representative
Susie Hampton, Old Dominion*
Steve Hermansen, New River-Highlands
Jay Hubble, New River-Highlands*
Jerry Ingle, Black Diamond*
Edna Justus, Black Diamond*
Daniel Lee, South Centre Corridors
Joe Lehnen, DOF-Shenandoah
Edwin Long, Eastern Shore*
Maurice (Mo) Lynch, Tidewater*
James Lyttle
Judy Lyttle, South Hampton Roads*
Bob Martin, New River-Highlands*
Linda McAllister, South Centre Corridors
Phillip McClellan, Map Tech (Sponsor)
Teen McCullough, Rural Retreat Elementary School (award winner)
Lynn McKinney, New River-Highlands
Winnie Morris
Eugene Morris, Old Dominion
Gina Mull, Old Dominion
Patrick Murphy, DOF-Old Dominion
Don Philen, New River-Highlands
Steve Pope, Tidewater*
David Richert, DOF-New River-Highlands
Ray Rosenberger, Eastern Shore*
Nancy Rosenberger

David Rundgren, New River-Highlands
Chuck Shorter, New River-Highlands*
Joan Shorter
Jessica Simons, Southeastern Michigan RC&D forester (speaker)
James Sipperly, National Association of RC&D Councils President (CT)
Bill Smith, Black Diamond*
Ed Stoots, Va Department of Forestry
Julia Terry
Sam Terry, New River-Highlands
Patrick Vincent, NRCS-South Centre Corridors (award winner)
Jerry Walker, Tidewater*
Jeff Walker, New River-Highlands
Joe Wentz, Black Diamond*
Bobby Whitescarver, facilitator
Mary Kay Whitmer, Old Dominion
Jo Wimbish
Carlyle Wimbish, Jr., Old Dominion*
Nancy Smith, Black Diamond
Jim Kern, Map Tech (sponsor)
Amy McCoy, Map Tech (sponsor)
Shannon O'Reilly (sponsor)