



State Conservation Committee

PO Box 2042 • Concord NH 03302-2042
nh.gov/SCC

November 19, 2020 - 9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Hosted by Zoom Conference

Members/Designees/Advisors present:

Dea Brickner-Wood, Moose Plate Grant
Coordinator
Scott Deblois, Coös and Grafton CCDs
Jennifer Gornnert, NH Department of
Agriculture, Markets & Food
Donna Hepp, Belknap and Carroll CCDs
Ted Howard, University of NH Agricultural
Experiment Station
Shawn Jasper, NH Department of Agriculture,
Markets & Food
Audra Klumb, Hillsborough and Merrimack
CCDs
Amanda Littleton, CDEA-NH
Dick Lutz, Rockingham and Strafford CCDs
Richard Mellor, NH Association of
Conservation Districts
Barbara Richter, NH Association of
Conservation Commissions
Becky Ross, State Conservationist

Lori Sommer, NH Department of Environmental
Services

Sabrina Stanwood, Department of Natural and
Cultural Resources
Amanda Stone, UNH Cooperative Extension
Pete Throop, Cheshire and Sullivan CCDs

Members/Designees/Advisors absent:

Jeffrey Holmes, Farm Service Agency
Betsey McNaughten, NH Fish and Game
Department

Guests:

Pam Gilbert, Grafton CCD
Whitney Lewis, Coös CCD
Matt Coughlan, Carroll CCD
Lisa Morin, Belknap CCD

Minutes Recorders:

Laura Angers, Merrimack CCD
Stacy Luke, Merrimack CCD

Hepp opened the meeting at 9:02 and welcomed the group.

Consent Agenda

Throop motioned to approve the minutes from August 20, 2020. Stanwood seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Districts, agencies, and organizations discussed the highlights of items on the Consent Agenda.

- Gornnert reported the Department will not be able to fund the Agricultural Nutrient Management grant next year. Commissioner Jasper reported the Governor has released funding to hire a contracted Executive Director, which allows the SCC to move forward with the plan.

- Ross reported she is looking forward to celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Conservation Districts and recognizing the importance of their work. Regarding Farm Bill funding, there are \$5 million dollars coming in next year, including opportunities to work with landowners. Last year, \$5.2 million went to 200 landowners and producers across state. Ross reported they want to look at the impact that Farm Bill dollars are having here in New Hampshire; some studies are old but show that Farm Bill dollars can be recycled 3-20 times in local communities. Ross is excited to see the rate of new/beginning farmers increase and NRCS will push to reach out to veteran farmers – but they do not want to leave experienced farmers behind. Staffing-wise, NRCS lost ten employees and hired 14 new in the fiscal year (including three pathways interns). The programs team at the State Office is at full capacity. Karen Dudley will retire in a couple of years. A few offices have opened up to allow customers to come in, which they may suspend; they want to make sure they are doing everything they can to keep everyone safe. Staff are also required to quarantine 7-14 days after gathering.
- Klumb reported that both Hillsborough and Merrimack counties continued gleaning through fall season, and that both counties participated in the strategic planning project. Klumb also pointed out that MCCD is working with the Contoocook farmers market and a couple others helping farmers as they transition to online sales for farmers markets this winter. HCCD has done similar things and is working on the fall bulb sale.
- Lutz reported that Rockingham is having easement issues, and that they are trying to raise funds to cover those. They are also working with SELT to see if they will take the easements. Lutz mentioned there is proposed legislation that is going to allow people to trade land or easements for easements. Strafford CCD has a new walk behind tractor that will be shared between the two counties.
- Throop reported that Cheshire CCD continues to be busy with variety of projects and collaborations. They ran the Local Work Group meeting in partnership with Sullivan CCD and a no-till vegetable production workshop at Stonewall Farm. Cheshire CCD is also working on: an IPM program with other districts and UNH Extension; the NH Farm Future Fund in cooperation with NHACD; a soil steam and high tunnel management program with Picadilly Farm, UNH Extension. The Monadnock Food Coop Farm Fund is launching its fifth year of grants and RFP for \$30,000 this month. Cheshire CCD did a Veterans Appreciation Month in partnership with 3 farmers markets, and they were able to give \$12,000 in vouchers to Cheshire County veterans. Throop did not have anything to report from Sullivan County.
- Whitney Lewis reported that Coös CCD is working with White Mountain Regional High setting up high tunnel for CTE students and with a local scientist to run a soil health workshop. They also did the fall bulb sale. Lewis reported that Coös CCD helped create a local 4-H club and is working on getting it going. They also did a demonstration with a 10-foot no-till drill in Columbia and are hoping to secure a grant for it in the future. Lewis is also working on: a podcast series with Wayne Saunders from Fish & Game, Dave Balkenham, and Andy Schafermeyer; creating a 4-part high tunnel series workshop with UNH Extension.
- Sommer reported that DES is working on getting proficient with virtual meetings. They are correcting errors folks have found on the website and encouraged folks to keep checking the status of rules. DES is doing a listening session with Don Kearstead on the rules surrounding restoration work and are trying to get folks' input on how to go about connecting with alteration of terrain permits. Sommer reported that the Land Resource Management position was recently filled; Phil Trowbridge will be starting in January. There are still many open positions, including the Bureau Administrator, and about 30% vacancy in the Wetlands Bureau. The 2020 grant round for the Aquatic Resource Mitigation program just finished up and 16 projects were approved: five restoration and 11 land conservation. DES is gearing up for the 2021 grant round; \$2 million will be available in the Seacoast region only. Sommer announced there would be an outreach session

on December 17th to reach out to folks to get them excited about other restoration and enhancement projects.

- Stanwood reported that DNCR welcomed a new director of Forests and Lands, Patrick Hackley. The Natural Heritage Bureau received permission to fill the data manager position and Amy Lamb accepted, which created a vacant position: Environmental Reviewer. They have submitted a waiver request and are waiting to hear if that will be approved. The Natural Heritage Bureau is working with NRCS on an orchid project and also providing technical assistance to NRCS to work with others.
- Stone reported that UNH Extension staff are still working from home. The students' last day on campus is tomorrow, and they will finish up the semester remotely. Over winter break, the majority of campus will shut down to save on heating buildings. There are about 200 retirements planned as part of the budget reduction). They are in the process of hiring a forester for Cheshire County to replace Steve Roberge. Stone reported that their new pollinators brochure is on the website and folks can request copies if they'd like them. UNH Extension helped run a program this fall with 3-4 people from local conservation commissions and people from other town boards meeting once month, which turned into virtual program. They are hoping to repeat it again next fall and will get in touch with Conservation Districts regarding identifying people in their counties who may be interested in participating.
- Richter reported that NHACC had a conference on November 7th in a virtual format. There was a learning curve but, overall, it worked well. There were 185 attendees and 12 workshops instead of 24 (they cut the day in half). NHACC is also working on a "Community Conservation Cohort" with Taking Action for Wildlife; they had to quickly adapt and create an online program. They established a nice foundation in September, continued through November, and will now be working with individual towns through April. The Shoreland Septic Study Commission, a legislative commission, released a report in November that focused on surface water quality and trying to develop a plan for both identifying failing septic systems and what to do when they are identified. A lot of recommendations came out of that report. NHACC also added a "Lunch and Learn" program this fall, a series of lunch programs with DES, and a grant program with UNH. Richter is also working with Lori Sommer on a restoration funding program. Richter also reported NHACC's strategic plan was completed this year, and that it's been a good experience to set the groundwork for what's to come.
- Howard reported that it is UNH's last week of live classes. The university will be going remote starting on Monday. Howard noted that the recent bump in cases was mostly coming off of the warm weather we had right around Halloween and an increase in social gatherings. The new Dean, Anthony Davis has arrived and took the helm on September 1st. He is still sorting out new duties and what he wants to do. It's possible that the new Director of the Ag Experiment Station, Anton Bekkerman, may become the new official designee. Howard reported that he will retire in June.
- Hepp reported that Belknap CCD did a series of one-hour conservation planning workshops on Tuesdays in October; they were taped and are available. The NHACD conservation planners helped with the program. Hepp says they are a good introduction, and please feel free to use them. In Belknap County, they started a pilot program and created a volunteer coordinator position for environmental stewardship and food assistance programs; this will include all food/conservation network partners. Hepp invited folks to send suggestions for good candidates. One highlight is the stream work they are doing in both Belknap and Carroll counties. Belknap CCD is doing stream assessments in Alton and Sanbornton with Trout Unlimited. Carroll County has completed two projects in Black Brook and Mason Brook with Tin Mountain. They are also collaborating with NH Fish & Game; their videographer is working with folks and they'll have video focusing in on the whole process for wood and stream projects and community engagement.

- Coughlan, Carroll CCD District Manager, added that the District has new Facebook and Instagram accounts, and they are trying to build their audience. Carroll CCD has a successful year of stream restoration and have another more than two miles planned for next year. They also reintroduced their bird house nest box program and are going to offer those for sale to the public. A local farm they partnered with will hang them and make them a part of educational walks. Coughlan also noted that this winter, they are looking for an area farmer who wants to work on something innovative and apply for the SARE partner grant when it opens in the spring.
- Mellor reported NHACD would be conducting its annual business meeting later today via Zoom. There is a dedicated meeting page on the website, with reports illustrating what Conservation Districts around the state have been up to. New officers will be elected at the meeting this afternoon. The two-person team of conservation planners is totally booked with clients, and NHACD is considering a third position for the grant year with consideration of necessary training and match requirements. They will look into it further before jumping in, but so far that program has been a success. Nate Green is the new Envirothon director; there is uncertainty surrounding the spring competition.
- Gilbert reported in addition to the report sent before the meeting, she is excited to partner with NH Fish and Game and Trout Unlimited on an ARM grant project.
- Littleton reported that CDEA was happy to work with Becky Ross for the Local Work Groups; they are looking to improve that process next year and get more input from local stakeholders. Littleton announced that 2021 is 75th year of conservation districts and the districts are rolling out programming and awards, to celebrate what conservation work looks like. She is excited to be doing the legacy awards and to bring community members into this work.

Conservation “Moose Plate” Grant Coordinator’s Update

- Brickner-Wood reported they will be rolling out marketing packages for the clerks; they will send bookmarks, registration holders, and do a “Name the Moose” contest later this winter.
- The Moose Plate project map will be rolled out tomorrow. She will send the link when it is released. The Moose Plate projects will be displayed by town and county. Stanwood added that this is a visual tool everyone can use, and that it shows amazing work done by Moose Plate program. Brickner-Wood emphasized the importance of asking for a photo and one sentence description of the project; it goes on social media and will now be added to the map as well.
- Stanwood reported that the current marketing contract ends June 2021.
- Brickner-Wood reported that the list of existing grants is now at its smallest before the new ones get posted; some are due in December and others are due in April.
- Brickner-Wood reported that next year, all grant paperwork can be signed and sent electronically, which will help both grantees and administration.
- Brickner-Wood briefly outlined the work that went into processing the 2021 grant cycle. They are currently awaiting approval from the Fiscal Committee. Money was allocated from a balance forward and from actual moose plate sales, which remain strong even during pandemic. This is the largest pot of money in eleven years (21 grants will be funded); there will be about \$90k left for a balance forward. All six project categories were represented, and the rationale for projects not funded was included.
- There will be a Looking Forward session around February 2021. There is a running tally of policy issues and suggestions; they will look into formatting the PDF to make it more user-friendly; they will also look at the cap on grants.

Review Moose Plate Grant Sub-Committee Grant Recommendations

The Grant Review Committee of the NH State Conservation Committee completed the review and assessment of submitted grant applications for the FY2021 grant round. The Grant Committee recommends to the NH State Conservation Committee Board to obligate a total of \$431,901.00 in SCC Conservation License Plate Grant funds to the twenty-one (21) applications listed below.

- 1) The Audubon Society of New Hampshire, \$23,534 Urban Habitat Restoration: A Community-based Approach for Wildlife & People
- 2) Belknap County Conservation District, \$15,552 Restoration of Hurd Brook and Alton Culvert Assessment
- 3) Bear Paw Regional Greenways, \$11,550 Barnes Conservation Easement
- 4) Town of Campton Conservation Commission, \$24,000 West Branch Brook Forest: Miller Property Acquisition & Conservation Easement
- 5) Carroll County Conservation District, \$22,500 Restoration of Linscott Brook
- 6) Town of Chichester, \$23,156 Valley View Conservation Area
- 7) Town of Durham, \$24,000 Wagon Hill Farm Sustainable Trail and Bridge Improvement
- 8) Five Rivers Conservation Trust, \$22,000 Pletcher Farm (Vegetable Ranch) Conservation Easement
- 9) Green Mountain Conservation Group, \$21,328 Microplastics in the Ossipee Lake System
- 10) Hillsborough County Conservation District, \$14,953 Siergiewicz Lot Reclamation and Wildlife Restoration Project
- 11) New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts, \$24,000 NH Conservation Planning Project
- 12) Rockingham County Conservation District, \$17,828 Gateway Enhancement Odiorne Point State Park, Coastal & Pollinator Habitats
- 13) Strafford County Conservation District, \$24,000 New Hampshire IPM Cost Share Demonstration Program
- 14) Seabrook-Hamptons Estuary Alliance, \$21,900 Hampton-Seabrook Estuary Management Plan
- 15) Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forest, \$15,000 Harvey Addition to Moose Mountains Reservation
- 16) Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forest, \$15,000 Nason Addition to Moose Mountains Reservation
- 17) Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire, \$20,000 Leighton Forest
- 18) The Nature Conservancy, \$24,000 Enhancing Ecosystem Services and Coastal Resilience at Philbrick Pond
- 19) Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, \$24,000 Pine Hill Community Forest Expansion Project
- 20) Upper Valley Land Trust, \$24,000 Putnam Farms Inc. - Hunter Meadow
- 21) Winnisquam Watershed Network, \$19,600 Winnisquam Watershed Plan - Public Outreach and Needs Assessment

Sommer made a motion for the Committee to accept the recommendations for Moose Plate Grant projects as presented by Brickner-Wood. Deblois seconded. All were in favor, none opposed, and the motion carried.

Brickner-Wood said the word would be out by Tuesday. There was a delay as they waited for funding to be confirmed. She added the disclaimer that it would be pending fiscal committee approval of the funding increase.

SCC Strategic Plan Discussion

- Hepp reported that the Sub-Committee has been carrying forward work on the SCC Strategic Plan. Since the August SCC meeting, the draft mission, vision, and values statements were shared and the Sub-Committee moved forward based on comments from that last meeting, mainly focusing on the vision and mission statements.
- The mission highlights agriculture as part of the state's natural resource conservation, and much of the language is pulled from the legislation. There were no suggestions.
- The vision is more aspirational and captures the agriculture and forestry efforts that the SCC addresses as a committee. There was a lot of back and forth in the Sub-Committee and discussion of what we want New Hampshire to look like, what the SCC's role should be, and where they see the Conservation Districts having a successful role in protecting the state's resources. Throop invited all to read, digest, and think about the statement and if there's a way to simplify or clarify. Hepp suggested the possibility of also adding more specific details (i.e. expanding the amount of land that's in agriculture, protecting prime agricultural soils, etc.).
- Hepp invited Committee members to submit comments to the Sub-Committee by December 4th.
- The Sub-Committee has not yet done any work on the Values. Hepp asked for input as the process continues, as these statements will be guidance to the Committee moving forward. Gornnert suggested that "increasing productivity" does not seem like a value.

75th Anniversary of the Conservation Districts

- Littleton shared details about the 75th Anniversary of the Conservation Districts and what is planned for the upcoming year.
- Gilbert explained the history of the Draft Proclamation and read the 50th and 60th anniversary proclamations. Littleton had combined elements of the two and reworked them to create a proclamation for the 75th.
- The Committee and NHACD need to approve the statement. The Committee also needs to select a date and a public gathering. The next SCC meeting in February was suggested.
- There was discussion of the process for feedback and edits, but it was ultimately decided that the Committee would vote on it today.
- Throop motioned to approve the proclamation as written. Sommer seconded the motion. Mellor added that it was on the agenda for NHACD's meeting later that afternoon. Throop amended the motion to add that it would be subject to input from NHACD. Sommer seconded the motion. All were in favor, none opposed, and the motion carried.

Executive Director Discussion & Decision

- Hepp reported that Commissioner Jasper had talked with the Governor, who indicated he was supportive of the SCC moving forward with filling the position. It's already in the Department of Agriculture budget, but it will be tougher to keep the \$30,000 in the budget if the position is not filled. Hepp asked for feedback and thoughts on moving forward with this position.
- Klumb asked if this person would take over the administrative role that MCCD is currently playing. Hepp said it would be discussed and there still may be administrative functions that someone else would need to help with. Luke added that the idea was the Executive Director may need assistance at the beginning and eventually it would transition to the ED having full control.
- Regarding salary, Hepp explained that Rick at NRCS had previously talked about matching funds for the position, and the salary level would be negotiable at this point. She clarified that this would be a contractor position, and that it could be advertised on the NH DAMF website. There

would need to be a panel in charge of reviewing candidates. Sommer suggested that work might include talking over interview questions. This work can be done while continuing to finalize the job description and while also doing outreach.

- Throop motions to move forward with outreach and filling an Executive Director position. Sommer seconds. All in favor, none opposed, and the motion carried.
- Throop, Gornnert, and Deblois expressed interest in joining the Hiring Subcommittee. Sommer offered to help with the questions, as DES does a lot of structured interviews.
- Mellor expressed concern about the timeline. Lutz said it would need to go through the Governor's Council. Stanwood added that it will need to go to the Governor's Council to approve and expend funds before moving ahead with interviewing. Brickner-Wood explained there is an appropriate line item for contracts, Operational Services, and that the SCC has to take action to fill in the revenue side. Hepp suggested asking Commissioner Jasper to dive into what the state requirements are. Gornnert recommended including Michelle on all emails to Shawn and suggested creating a flow chart or timeline so that it's clear to the Hiring Committee what needs to be accomplished.
- Luke stated that it has been about 11 years since the SCC last had an Executive Director.

Supervisor Appointments and Re-appointments

The nominations for appointment (Si Robertson, Merrimack) and re-appointment (Amy Bodwell, Cheshire and Audra Klumb, Merrimack) were presented.

Throop motioned to approve the slate of three nominees for Board Supervisor positions. Stanwood seconded the motion. Klumb abstained. All were in favor, none opposed, and the motion carried.

Other Business

- Richter highlighted the proposed bill relating to conservation easements (Amend RSA 477:46). It is a pre-bill, and Friday is the deadline to submit new bills. This one was submitted by Westmoreland Rep. Birch in Cheshire County. Richter reported that this amendment is meant to help a local farm in the area, that has a conservation easement from 1993 and is hoping to change some of terms of easement.
- Richter explained that because the language is open-ended, it opens a Pandora's box of issues and will have unintended consequences like affecting federal funding because it takes away the "in perpetuity" part of the easement, which could jeopardize the tax deduction status (this would negate all conservation easements and their deductibility if this is the language the state chooses to use). She also suggested that even if the Attorney General would stop amendments from happening, the landowners, towns, and land trusts would be frustrated, and it could erode the use of easements as a tool.
- Lutz asked about the cost of hiring a lawyer. Richter said they could be inundated with legal requests.
- Throop suggested that almost every conservation organization would not accept this proposal, and the Attorney General's Office and Charitable Trust Unit would have an issue with it (they review amendments). He added that the Attorney General's office has seven criteria, all of which must be met for an amendment.
- Throop suggested that the SCC needs to be sensitive in approaching this and emphasized the need to show support for farmers. He proposed working with the Representative to see if he would be willing to wait, get input, etc. If the SCC reaches out in a helpful manner, explaining that the interest of the farms is in mind and that the SCC can help reach out to some allies. The goal would be to put this in a study committee instead of introducing legislation right away.

- Throop motions to draft a letter indicating that the State Conservation Committee would be willing to assist in a study committee, that they want to support farmers, and that they have been working with easements for many years. Sommer seconded the motion. There was discussion about the timing of the letter (Thursday afternoon), who should put it forward (Cheshire County), and whether to include an indication that the SCC is opposed to the proposed legislation (remain objective and express concern instead). Hepp asked if all were in favor of her working with Richter to capture what was discussed as a group, to convey the offer of assistance and the concern that the objective can be met. All were in favor, none opposed, and the motion carried.
- Hepp will draft the letter and run it by Richter.

Hepp closed the meeting at 11:41 a.m.