

Windham County Local Workgroup Minutes

Tuesday, January 27th, 1pm

130 Austine Dr #300, Brattleboro, VT 05301

Hybrid Zoom

Present: Heather Blunk, Agricultural Resource Specialist, Cory Ross, Executive Director, Isabel Bowman, Conservation Specialist, Emma Gregg, Agricultural Resource Specialist, Abby Reed, WCNCRD Americorps, Sam Pierce, VLT Americorps, Emma Kuester, Soil Conservationist USDA NRCS, Brenna Christensen, Natural Resource Specialist USDA NRCS, Olivia Carlson Acting District Conservationist - USDA NRCS, Linda Corse, WCNCD Board Chair, Dana Rupert, Agricultural Business Outreach Coordinator, Rich Holschuh, Director of Atowi Project, David Erickson and Amy Louis Pfeiffer.

Zoom Participants: Kelly Stettner, Executive Director of ONRCD, Seren, Owing member of Giant Journey Farm and Board member for Rural Vermont, Marie Levett-Caduto, DEC

Survey review

- 88 responses
- Who we surveyed (similar to previous years, could click on multiple)
 - 75% Recreators
 - 70% Home Gardeners
 - 16% TSPs
 - 16% Farmers
- How long have you farmed or forested
 - 33% more than 25 years
- Name things you love about the community:
 - Preserved/less touched land
 - Conservation as a goal, not just for funds
 - People joining together for conservation even on a winter day
 - Farmers in Windham County on a smaller call, within the community and with the land
 - People observant of the world around us
 - Town road crews!
 - Forests
 - The people - kindness
 - Farms and food - access to organic and local food

- Top 3 land uses and water systems you are concerned about:
 1. Streams and rivers
 2. Forests
 3. Farms
- What resource issue concern you the most
 1. Invasive/introduced species
 2. Wildlife
 3. Ground water quality
- What are the biggest threat to your land and or business
 1. Introduced species
 2. Flooding
 3. Changing climate
 4. Taxes
 5. Development
- What are the barriers to achieving these solutions and addressing resource issues in your community?
 - ~ Funding
 - ~ Nostalgia (people resisting changes)
 - ~ Distrust of the government
 - ~ Vermonter convenience
 - ~ Organizational capacity
 - ~ What can organizations do to support people
 - ~ Help to connect people with resources
 - ~ Capacity for public to engage with all of the conservation groups
 - ~ Land stewards taking responsibility for their land
 - ~ Scale: Conservation groups can only go so far with assistance
 - ~ Need support for organizations, trying to help fill those gaps
- What is your vision for the future of our community?
 - With the potential influx of people and want to conserve with what we currently see - i.e. I moved in and want to learn about the plants on my property
 - Reclamation of public right to access lands
 - Preparing for 30 X 30 impact on land
 - More accessible housing
 - Fully bikeable paths
 - Reclaim old housing rather than using other land for this
 - Continue as is
 - Traffic patterns to adjust to more people

- Balance of keeping people safe and housed
- How representative is this survey within Windham County
 - ~ Difficulties with reaching everyone - variety of avenues have been used
 - ~ Low diversity in survey responses currently
 - ~ Could add zipcode or town information as a survey
- Results of this survey help inform NRCS practice funding
- NRCS is going to accept only one local fund pool proposal from each district
 - Still want to capture what the community needs - need to be more specific
- NRCS historically ranked against whole state, now competing across Southern zone - a little bit less competition
- Issues with engineers from NRCS
 - However partners are hiring engineers - so slowly improving on this
 - From the three fund pools
 - Time frame issue in terms of NRCS ranking deadlines
 - Process discussion - what happened on years past to understand where the funding went to
 - What were the outcomes
- Local Fund Pool

→ invasive species impact rivers - canopies which impact the underlying waterways

→ Last 3 proposals:

1. Forest Management plans
2. Forest Health
3. Small-scale Agriculture

→ New programmatic change

- 1 local fund pool could have the same budget and be more of an umbrella

~Nest practices to allow for our resource concerns to be addressed

→ Example: Have high tunnels as a primary practice, then practices associated with this (such as cover cropping) can be funded

→ Can deer browse be considered?

- NRCS has \$900/acre for exclusion fencing
- This would have to be built to NRCS standards, however the cost share has not been enough to cover the costs

~ Is this process truly democratic?

- We are including lots of technical expertise
- They contribute what they hear from site visits throughout the year, and during this process

- Water quality concern:

- Is the concern quantity? Well water? -Maybe get more details from future surveys

- From RAPs - lots of compliance with RAPs already for farmers

- Do producers need more access to funding?

- NRCS may not be able to address this concern

- Potential NWQI (National Water Quality Initiative)

- However NRCS can help address the other top concerns: invasive species, wildlife projects, soil health

- Of these concerns, the local fund pool can assist with those that are harder to get covered by other sources of funding

- New NRCS program: Soil health Regenerative Pilot program

- Additional practices that NRCS will pay for

→ How can we address stream invasives in a fund pool?

- Current payment plans make that difficult - these may be adjusted soon

- EX: saxtons river -knotweed projects ongoing but are often in the right-of-way

→ The local Fund Pool Focus could be on a forest management plan/forest health pool

- Brush management

- Wildlife practices

Meeting adjourned at 2:30pm

Respectfully submitted,

Isabel Bowman