

# St. Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES For September 13, 2007

Board Members Present: Robert G. Andrews, Jr., Edwin Hadlock, Frederick Morrill, Clark Decker, David Martin, and Thomas Nichols, who arrived late.

Staff Present: Dawn Howard, Katie Maloney, Aaron Earl, Raeanne Dulanski, and James Pullano, NRCS.

The meeting was called to order by Robert Andrews at 7:32 PM.

*Clark Decker made a motion to accept the minutes of the July 12<sup>th</sup> meeting as written. Fred Morrill seconded the motion and all were in favor.*

Fred Morrill questioned the change in Health Insurance cost between July and August. The decrease was due to a change in the insurance coverage required by law relating to mental illness.

*Fred Morrill made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Reports for July and August 2007. David Martin seconded the motion and all were in favor.*

### **Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) – Jim Pullano.**

- Greg Hayes has been offered and accepted an opening at the Police Academy in Albany. He resigned from the NRCS to participate in the six month program and upon completion Greg will become a State Trooper. This is a career opportunity that Greg had been waiting for and one he did not want to turn down. The NRCS appreciates all the conservation accomplishments Greg was part of in St. Lawrence County and we wish him success in all his future endeavors.
- At this time it is unknown whether Greg's position will be filled in St. Lawrence County. The decision to fill the position is associated with the NRCS restructuring, a workload staffing assessment and the needs of a collective St. Lawrence/Champlain watershed team. More details will be forthcoming as restructuring is implemented.
- The Canton Field Office met or exceeded all performance goals by program in fiscal year 2007. Implementation goals were accomplished in association with building future programs and periods without full staffing. There is still a large administrative workload associated with contract management that needs to be completed by the end of current year 2007 and practice construction is still underway.
- The new Farm Bill is currently under development in Congress and it is unclear as to whether it will be completed in 2008. Additionally, as of October 1, the USDA will not have a budget which will impact how some programs are administered. It is probable that a Continuing Resolution will be authorized to finance the USDA until a budget is finalized.

- The St. Lawrence/Champlain watershed team is scheduled to meet on October 4<sup>th</sup> in Malone. The purpose of the meeting is for members to discuss and make recommendations on the FY 2008 EQIP, including local input for the rankings. In time the team will be collectively delivering all programs. The team will be tasked with considering concepts outside county boundaries, which breaks from the tradition of NY NRCS, but is necessary for the watershed model to successfully materialize. The team presently consists of 7 field office staff members operating out of the Canton (2), Malone (2) and Plattsburgh Field Offices (3) and 1 team leader based out of Albany (Marilyn Stephenson).
- There was discussion on the existing NRCS vacancy and the board questioned how the district would be affected by restructuring, potentially less NRCS staff and potential commitment for existing staff to work outside St. Lawrence County. The district needs to prepare for the future and the anticipated needs of the St. Lawrence County public. “Is the SWCD staff able and ready to handle the increase in requests that may result from the NRCS changes?” Jim indicated that the watershed team approach is not intended to reduce service to St. Lawrence County residents, rather the objective is to more efficiently utilize staff, while reducing overhead costs, and more effectively delivering programs and services. Robert Andrews asked that as Jim learns more, to please keep him and the SWCD up to date with changes to the NRCS.
- The USDA is offering on-line professional development courses to Soil and Water Conservation District employees and Board of Directors under Ag-Learn at no cost. There are over 2500 courses grouped into four collections: Business Skills, IT Professional, Desktop/End user Skills and Legal Compliance/Federal Government. Courses can be assessed from any location with an internet connection. To take advantage of this training resource, districts can contact eAuthHelpDesk@ftc.usda.gov or call (800)457-3652.

**Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) – Dawn Howard (In addition to written report)**

- Employee Manual is not ready yet. Currently working on reading it over again to verify that policy information is correct and easy to understand. Would like the staff to review and then present it to the Board to take home and review. We have waited this long for the Manual and now that we are close to completion, we need to make sure that everything is correct.
- Cornell Cooperative Extension called the SWCD with a grant proposal that they would like to partner on. However, there was very little notice. We were called the morning that the grant was due. Little information was available and it would have required a large time investment for Forester Aaron Earl that he currently does not have, so the offer was declined.
- Clark Decker’s term expires at the end of the year. Clark indicated he would like to be reappointed.
- The NYACD Division III representative position is up for reelection. Tom Nichols is currently the representative. The Board was asked if anyone else wanted to run for this position and no one did.
  - *Clark Decker made a motion to support Tom Nichols as Division III Representative. Fred Morrill seconded and all were in favor.*
- The Board was also asked if there were any resolutions that they would like to present to the NYACD. A resolution that is being currently worked on by another county concerns getting Engineering Assistance from a source outside of NRCS. Fred Morrill asked about a resolution in support of an Aquatic Invasive Species bill. Dawn Howard said that she would draft a resolution for the Board to review.

- NYACD annual meeting is taking place October 28<sup>th</sup> through the 30<sup>th</sup> in Owego. The Board was asked if anyone would like to attend. Tom Nichols and Dawn Howard will be attending.
- A bill for Farm Bureau dues was received in the mail.
  - *Fred Morrill made a motion to renew SWCD membership to Farm Bureau. Dave Martin seconded and all were in favor.*
- Training (Note that the following were all budgeted for):
  - Annual AEM Update, November 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> for Dawn Howard and Katie Maloney.
  - CMNP Phase Three Training, first week of October for Katie Maloney.
  - Conservation Skills Workshop, third week of October for Katie Maloney and Aaron Earl.
  - CCA Training December 4-6<sup>th</sup> for Katie Maloney.
  - Administrative Conference Training, October 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> for Raeanne Dulanski.
  - Farm Safety Day Coordinator Training, October 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, for Raeanne Dulanski.
    - *Ed Hadlock made a motion for the SWCD to continue coordinating the Farm Safety Day. Fred Morrill seconded and all were in favor.*
  - *Fred Morrill made the motion to approve all trainings presented for the continuing education of the SWCD employees. Clark Decker seconded and all were in favor.*
- The Ag and Farmland Protection Board is currently working on a grants for two programs:
  - Ag plastic recycling – This is a repeat of the previous program. Robert Andrews reported that an application for a different grant from St. Lawrence County and two other county Cooperative Extensions was presented for a two year project to have ag plastics recycled. A portable ag plastic compressor/baler would travel around and put ag plastic into small compressed bales of plastic.
  - Updating and passing out a new SLC Ag Directory – Robert Andrews asked the Board to take a look at the current ag directory and see if they know of any other ag business that can be added. Andrews explained that with St. Lawrence County being so big, it is hard to know all the little ag businesses in all towns. A copy of the draft list can be received from Dawn Howard.
- Intern:
  - New intern started Monday, September 10<sup>th</sup> and worked Tuesday; however, he has not been back. Currently in contact with the intern's academic advisor.
- Last year's RIBS reimbursement that has not been paid for by Ag and Markets for DEC will be paid directly by the DEC. A new voucher was submitted to the DEC for that money. This year's RIBS is scheduled to be completed October 30<sup>th</sup>, and we are to voucher the DEC direct again for reimbursement.
- Development Authority of the North County has money available for farmland drainage loans. SWCD is sending out a press release as well as making copies of the application available at this office.
- Round fourteen Ag Nonpoint Source grant application has arrived. Discussion was held on potential projects. Priority was given in order of the Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan proposal, then the Digester proposal.
  - Resolution number 07-1, authorizing participation by the St. Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District in the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program created pursuant to section 11-b of the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Districts Law. Whereas, the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee has issued a Request for Proposals inviting Soil and Water

Conservation Districts or groups of Districts acting jointly to submit proposals for funding under Round 14 of the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program; and whereas, funds are available for projects that consist of activities that will reduce, abate, control, or prevent nonpoint source pollution originating from agricultural sources; and whereas, the St. Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District has determined that certain work, as described in its applications and attachments, (the "Projects") are in the public interest and consist of activities that will reduce and/or prevent nonpoint source pollution from agricultural sources; now, therefore, be it resolved by the St. Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District Board: 1) That Dawn C Howard, Manager, or such person's successor in office, is the representative to act on behalf of the District's governing body in all matters related to State Assistance under Round 14 of the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program. The representative is authorized to make application, execute the contract for State Assistance, submit project documentation, and otherwise act for the District governing body in all matters related to the Projects; 2) That the District agrees to fund its portion of the cost of the Projects as provided in the application; 3) That one (1) certified copy of the Resolution be prepared and attached to the application for funding under Round 14 of the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program; 4) That this resolution take effect immediately.

- *Fred Morrill made a motion to approve the SLC ag non-point source grant proposals. Ed Hadlock seconded and all were in favor.*
- The \$6,000 project request has been received from SWCC. Dawn Howard may have to complete three of these in the next few months, for 2006, 2007 and 2008. The current plan is to write these first on dry hydrants, then drainage and wetland/pond work. The Board concurred. Dawn originally thought the \$6,000 was to have been based on special requirements and the \$12,000 for projects. No word on the \$12,000 request yet.
- There has been correspondence from NRCS relating to the rent issue.
  - The first letter that was received stated that the rent expense was going to be \$25,406.86 for St. Lawrence County SWCD.
  - The second letter states that SWCD and NRCS need to sit down and do an Operational Agreement (aka rent agreement).
  - There has been talk that the rent figures may change, ie charge SWCD for 150 square feet per employee and not charge for the common areas that NRCS would have to have with or without SWCD employees located with them. \$14,000.
  - No word on start date: Three year implementation schedule.
- RC&D has started the process to hire a new coordinator.
- SWCD's plan is out front now and is for sale. The sale must be a sealed bid process. We are currently getting the bid paper work ready.
- Aaron Earl, Conservation District Forester reported:
  - Cutting on Area 12 sale has not been started. Timber harvester is going to wait until he has completed jobs in other wetter areas. Area 12 is a dry location.
  - Aaron has been marking Area 23, a 90 acre hardwood area that was suffering from severe Tent Caterpillar damage after stress from the 1998 ice storm. This sale is a damage, salvage, improvement and seed tree cutting.

- Management plans are 35% complete, which is 12 parcels. This fall the plan is to get out and complete as much inventory as can be done on all parcels, while the weather is good instead of developing a plan from start to finish before starting the next one.
  - YCC worked on Area 20 doing boundary line clearing, and on Area 4 doing timber stand improvement thinning. YCC crews thinned out Scotch Pine to give more room for Red and White Pine to grow. Aaron had three sets of before and after photos that were passed around to show the Board YCC's work. It was a good project that the kids enjoyed.
  - Judy Drabicki is the new DEC Region 6 Director. She has made a SLC Public Lands Forester her number one need for Region 6.
  - Discussion followed on why Area 23 hardwood was going to sale at the current time, when hardwood prices are down. It was explained that because of the damage this area has experienced, waiting for prices to increase would result in nothing being left but firewood.
- Raeanne Dulanski, Conservation District Secretary/Assistant Treasurer gave her report:
    - Budget Review went very well.
    - Raeanne has been working on the Employee Manual. She made the corrections that Mary Rutley had recommended at the last meeting and has been going through looking for other corrections or questions that may have been missed.
    - Raeanne has been able to go out in the field with Katie Maloney and help her with soil sampling.
    - SWCD has a fish sale currently under way. Ending date is September 28<sup>th</sup>, with pick-up being October 12<sup>th</sup>.
  - Katie Maloney, Conservation District Technician gave her report:
    - AEM to EQIP – Two plans need completion out of twelve.
    - AEM to EQIP TOO – Soil sampling was started the first week of August. Six farms are left to sample out of seventeen that were on the list. There are currently 154 bags of soil downstairs. All bags have to be re-bagged and sent to Cornell Lab for analysis. Raeanne Dulanski has been helping when she is available.
    - RIBS – There are only two months left of sampling this season.
    - YCC – Completed placing signs at 13 out of the 21 sites that we have left. Only these 13 were approved to have the Aquatic Invasive Species signs. The other 8 site areas still need to be contacted.
    - Robert Andrews asked how many CMNP's have currently been done for farms. James Pullano estimated that over the last three years about 30 have been given to farmers. (Not counting CAFOs).

**NYACD** – Thomas Nichols reported:

- Last week was the most recent meeting.
- If Tom runs for a position on the executive committee, a new Division representative may be needed.
- There is an engineering resolution being worked on. “Where do SWCD's go for engineering help?” If we go to an outside source for engineering, then NRCS will figure that SWCD's no longer need their help and it will not be offered. Do we look for grants from other sources for engineering assistance?

- NRCS restructuring plan may be restructured again.
- Rent is going to be held off one year and then phased in over three years. NRCS may wait for the next Farm Bill before they act on the rent issue.
- A resolution was presented by Niagara County to oppose the restructuring plan in general. Tom asked if we are going to oppose the plan, then what are we going to propose in its place?
- There is a possible source of grant money that NYACD is learning about. They are checking into the credibility of the funds.
- NRCS may make 7 or 8 areas instead of three areas that were originally given as the plan, but they aren't sure yet. There is a lot of questions still remaining concerning this plan and a lot of confusion currently.
- FSA is closing offices.
- Dawn Howard shared with Tom that RD is also closing offices.
- St. Lawrence County SWCD needs to come up with an item for the raffle/silent auction at the annual meeting in October.

### **General Discussion**

- Robert Andrews brought up the idea of SWCD building its own building and having the three USDA agencies rent from SWCD. Discussion followed.
- Tom's opinion is to try and negotiate the rent cost with the landlord.
- Discussion on NRCS workload and changing roles. Will the SWCD be able to handle the extra workload? How can we address the workload?
- Fowler sawmill was discussed. There were stormwater violations that DEC is following up on.
- Pete Barney will be retiring in November from Cooperative Extension.
- Bill VanLoo is leaving Cooperative Extension around the same time.
- Fred Morrill shared that Governor Elliot Spitzer will be at Canton College in the near future.

*Clark Decker made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:16 PM. Fred Morrill seconded and all were in favor.*

**Next meeting will be held November 15<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 PM at the St. Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District office.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

Raeanne Dulanski  
Secretary/Assistant Treasurer