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NYS Soil & Water Conservation Committee

10B Airline Drive, Albany, NY 12235 – Telephone (518) 457-3738

STATE COMMITTEE MINUTES

April 19, 2011

Present: D. Aubertine, Commissioner, Ag & Markets; G. Proios, D. Stein, D. Brass, C. Colby, J. Dickinson, Voting Members; B. Steinmuller, Asst. Director; R. Brower, C. Frasier, Nancy Lawler, V. Weston, SWCC Staff; J. Rusnica, J. Moody-Czub, Ag & Markets; B. Silvestri, Schenectady SWCD; Judy Littrell, NYACD; C. Mural, NYFB; D. DeWeese, NRCS, P. Kaczmarczyk, DOH; J. Lieberum Warren SWCD & NYSCDEA; D. Tuxill, NYS DEC and B. Wohnsideler, Jefferson SWCD.

Call to Order: G. Proios, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 10:05 am.

Review and Approval of Minutes:

Chuck Colby moved to approve the March minutes as presented; seconded by David Brass. Motion passed; carried.

Correspondence

B. Steinmuller asked for direction from the Committee regarding a memo from Robert Sanford of the NYS Fish & Wildlife Management Board (FWMB), indicating that the Spring State FWMB Meeting has been scheduled for April 29, 2011. Discussion was held regarding the time factor and the reduction of staff and cutbacks. G. Proios said that he would recommend using his own judgment on this issue. Discussion ensued about setting up a District calendar with all events and meetings held across the state, possibly accessible by email. It was concluded that C. Frasier would attend the meeting on April 29, 2011.

A Letter was also received from E. Schreiner, Oswego Co. SWCD, commending Barb Silvestri on the fine work she has done providing districts with promotional tools and marketing ideas.

Introduction of Commissioner Aubertine

G. Proios introduced Commissioner Darrel J. Aubertine. The Commissioner welcomed the opportunity to speak to the group and answer questions. He noted that people do not have a full appreciation for the work that the Soil and Water Conservation Districts perform in the State, making farms more prosperous and establishing good working relationships with the farmers. The Commissioner added that within a short time he would like to meet with members of the State Committees to discuss agricultural and other issues that are critical to the partnership. C. Mural, NY Farm Bureau, asked the Commissioner what his priorities were for the department. He answered that the budgetary issues that New York is facing is one of the major hurdles the department has. There are many issues that need to be dealt with. He added that we are uniquely positioned for setting a road map for farmers -- one that would lead to a more prosperous and environmentally sustainable farming community in NYS. Commissioner Aubertine noted that another goal of the Department, and one shared with the Committee, will be raising the profile of agriculture in NYS.

Environmental Protection Fund and State Budget and Staff Updates

B. Steinmuller presented a chart showing the EPF voucher payments disbursed to the counties as of March 31, 2011. The payments totaled \$3,571,827.28. The EPF Fund basically stayed intact in the SFY 2011-2012 Budget – level with last year's budget. The Ag Nonpoint Source line item was reduced from \$13,297,000 to \$13,000.00. B. Steinmuller noted that the Department had a 3.1% cut across the board.

B. Steinmuller noted that Rich Lewis retired as of March 30, 2011 and Les Travis will be retiring in early July. B. Steinmuller has been temporarily assigned to cover the Southeast Region. M. Latham and B. Steinmuller have been working with Human Resources on the need to backfill positions as recent retirements have occurred and others are pending.

There will be a staff meeting on May 5th in Syracuse. The agenda includes a discussion on where the team needs to provide vital staff support and how the staff will work to collectively set priorities for the coming year.

AGRICULTURAL NPS ABATEMENT& CONTROL GRANT PROGRAM

April 19, 2011 State Committee Meeting

STATUS OF ROUNDS 1-16

Of 580 contracts, 163 are active, 5 are pending (Round 16 projects) and 393 are complete. 19 contracts have been cancelled during the life of the program. Since January 2010 to date, 61 projects have been closed out. An additional 5 projects have been completed since the March 2011 Soil and Water Conservation meeting.

ROUND 17 UPDATE

Round 17 awards may be coming out soon. The press release has been drafted and award letters are ready for the Governors' office to authorize the release.

ROUND 18 TIMELINE

Before discussing the Round 18 RFP, B. Steinmuller asked if there are any District employees in the room, with the exception of the President of the NYSCDEA and/or any Voting Members, that plan to apply for Round 18 AgNPS funds. J. Dickenson, D. Stein and B. Wohnsiedler recused themselves from the discussion and left the meeting room in accordance with Ethics Advisory Opinion No. 03-09.

The timeline for the development and release of the Round 18 (SFY 2011-2012) Agricultural Nonpoint Source (NPS) Abatement and Control Program Request for Proposals was reviewed and key policy and procedural issues related to the release of the new RFP were discussed. A draft RFP will be presented to the Committee for review at an upcoming Committee meeting.

TAC – TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE – AEM UPDATE

B. Steinmuller told the Committee that the TAC met on March 8th to discuss efforts underway with AEM/EBM Tier 2 Worksheet revisions, training/District capacity and Round 18 RFP development. B. Steinmuller advised that the draft RFP and AEM Worksheets will be available for State Committee consideration in May or June.

NYCDEA PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Jim Lieberum, the newly elected President of the New York Conservation District Employees’ Association, outlined the diversity of Conservation District programs, as well as joint priorities and opportunities to work with the Committee and Department on building District capacity, identifying sources to offset costs and strengthening technical assistance to landowners and communities.

USDA-NRCS FEDERAL BUDGET AND PROGRAMS REPORT

Dennis DeWeese, Acting State Conservationist for USDA-NRCS, briefed the Committee on the ongoing federal budget deliberations and spending cuts to the agency. He noted that the scope and depth of the cuts have not yet been fully analyzed. He added that the 2012 Farm Bill discussions at the Congressional level have not yet filtered down to the state offices, but he speculated that the Federal budget proposals will most likely impact the priorities in the 2012 Farm Bill. D. Stein noted that technical assistance is needed for the farmers. EQIP received more money, but WIP received less.

DISTRICT AND AEM OUTREACH UPDATE

B. Silvestri noted that the Communications Workshop she presented was a success. There were 40 attendees. She provided an update on outreach and communication efforts currently underway, including the results of an economic stimulus study conducted with select Conservation Districts across the State, regarding how Ag NPS and other state EPF dollars multiply District’s county appropriations and provide economic stimulus to the local economy. This information will be utilized in several ways. She added that 90 to 95 percent of the District’s budgets are being spent on services and jobs. Barb noted that districts are looking at sharing costs with neighboring districts in order to lower costs. P. Kaczmarczyk, DOH, added that loan rate for environmental use is currently 3%, where non-environmental use is almost 5%.

ANNUAL PLANS OF WORK

B. Steinmuller announced the following Annual Plans of Work for approval:

Broome	Chautauqua	Chenango	Columbia	Fulton	Hamilton
Lewis	Oneida	Niagara	Onondaga	Otsego	Schenectady
Tioga	Ulster	Washington	Westchester		

David Brass moved to approve the Annual Plans of Work; seconded by Chuck Colby. Motion passed; carried.

ADVISORY MEMBER/PARTNERSHIP REPORTS/PUBLIC COMMENTS – AII

P. Kaczmarczyk, DOH, reported that the DOH budget cuts resulted in 2.5% less money available to the municipalities in the revolving fund. USGS will be affected – there will be shut-downs at water quality gauging stations. He brought up the topic of dual-use wells. Currently there are no laws NY State prohibiting the use of dual-use wells.

R. Brower, Ag Mkts, attended a Lake Champlain Steering Committee meeting. Their budget went from \$11 million down to \$1.4 million. There are just enough funds to cover employee’s salaries. There are no Congressional Earmarks for this year, next year and possibly the following year.

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J. Littrell, NYACD, noted that there are three pieces of legislation that NYACD has supported and is monitoring. They include:

- Adding Invasive Species and Education Programs to SWCDL
- Adding the NYS Committee on the EBM Council
- Revitalization of Waterfront Grants for Districts

B. Wohnsiedler, Jefferson SWCD, noted that they were making preparations for Earth Day events, which is Friday, April 22nd, and added that presently they are looking for a Technical Assistant.

C. Frasier spoke about the upcoming Saratoga County farm tour which will be a part of the New England Interstate Pollution Control Commission (NEIPCC) Annual Conference on May 17, 18th.

D. Tuxill, DEC, spoke about the well contamination in Genesee and Broome County; they are working with the farmers on that. The Districts are also working with DEC and the farmers on these issues.

B. Steinmuller reported that the Manager's Meetings held in Batavia, Ray Brook, Cortland and Millbrook were well attended. The AEM Base Program was discussed including the Year 7 rollout. Valuable feedback was given by the District participants on what State Committee assistance they value the most.

B. Steinmuller noted that at the next month's meeting there should be an update on the 590 and also information about the ground water contamination issues.

B. Steinmuller provided additional information on the Department's SFY 2011-2012 budget. Funding for Cornell Pro-Dairy was restored at a reduced amount; the IPM Program, the Farm Viability Program, and tractor rollover programs have also been restored. For the July Meeting, Steinmuller told the group that a two day meeting may be planned with a tour of projects in the Chemung and Schuyler Counties region. It was brought up that maybe the Committee could meet at Cornell in the fall.

Next Meeting – scheduled for *Thursday*, June 23, 2011 at the Cayuga County SWCD Office, Auburn.

Meeting adjourned at 2:20 PM.

Due to an equipment failure the audio-cast for this meeting is not available.