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New York State Soil & Water Conservation Committee
10B Airline Drive, Albany, NY 12235 -- Telephone (518) 457-3738

STATE COMMITTEE MINUTES

July 17, 2012

SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, NY

Present

G. Proios, D. Stein, D. Brass, J. Dickinson - Voting Members; B. Steinmuller, Assistant Director; R. Murphy, SWCC; J. Clifford, SWCC / Dutchess Co. Conservation District; R. Rausch - DA&M; D. Pettit - USDA NRCS; J. Lieberum, CDEA; B. Wohnsiedler - Jefferson Co. Conservation District; J. DeHollander, C. Dorn, Oswego Co. Conservation District; L. Telega – Cornell CALS/CCE; K. Roberts, DEC; President Neil Murphy, R. Davis, T. Tolland, T. Volk, SUNY ESF.

Call to Order: G. Proios, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 10:15. Introductions made. President Neil Murphy welcomed the SWCC back to the SUNY-ESF Campus and provided a brief summary of the sustainability initiatives currently underway at the college.

Woody Biomass/ReEnergy Presentation – Tim Volk

Tim Volk gave a presentation on the collaborative efforts between SUNY ESF, USDA-FSA and the private energy company ReEnergy to grow; harvest and market fast growing willow as an energy crop. The USDA is investing \$4.3 million to encourage the growth of shrub willow as a renewable energy fuel in central and northern New York. Critical to the project is collaboration between ReEnergy and SUNY ESF, which will offer an outreach program to educate local government officials, agricultural leaders, farmers and landowners about the opportunity to grow willow. The willow will be grown on marginal farmland throughout a nine-county region and used as fuel for biomass-to-energy facilities that are operated by ReEnergy Holdings LLC. Over the 11-year life of the project, it is expected that almost 400,000 green tons of biomass will be produced and used in the ReEnergy facilities.

The funds will be made available from the USDA's Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP). BCAP will provide up to 75% reimbursement of willow establishment costs and annual rental payments for the 11 year term of the program.

Discussion ensued regarding the potential role of Districts in the project area to assist FSA in getting the word out to producers and providing assistance to NRCS to determine suitability for eligible land to be enrolled in BCAP.

For more information, please contact the SWCC for a copy of Professor Volk's complete presentation.

Green Infrastructure on SUNY ESF and the greater Syracuse Area – Tim Toland

Tim Toland gave a presentation on the green infrastructure initiatives underway on the campus and in the City of Syracuse. Green infrastructure practices are a key component to stormwater management programs across the country. Designed to mimic and restore natural ecosystem functions to facilitate stormwater infiltration, GI has many other ecosystem service benefits such as habitat improvement, energy savings, and greenhouse gas sequestration. The City of Syracuse, including SUNY ESF are leaders in the planning, implementation and evaluation of GI in the region and beyond. Toland made a presentation on the many individual practices on campus and in the city that function as a system to infiltrate and treat stormwater including, but not limited to, porous pavement, green roofs and gardens,

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and water collection and recycling facilities.

Discussion ensued regarding the potential for Soil and Water Districts to provide services to communities in the design, and installation of green infrastructure practices. SUNY ESF expertise in this effort to demonstrate and quantify the environmental benefits is an excellent intersection between academic research and the Conservation District implementation of these effective practices across the state.

For more information, please contact the SWCC office for a copy of Professor Toland's complete presentation.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Update – V. Greene, USDA-FSA

V. Greene updated the Committee on the CREP addendum to make eligible all 11-digit watersheds in the Upper Susquehanna River Watershed and the Lake Champlain Basin. The proposal submitted to FSA by the Committee last August, has been reviewed and accepted by USDA-FSA Headquarters. The amended agreement is currently at the Department of Agriculture and Markets' office for review. It is expected to be approved shortly. When this addendum is fully approved, all watersheds in the TMDL basins of Lake Champlain and the Upper Susquehanna River will be eligible for CREP participation. Streamside conservation, including limiting livestock access and establishment of herbaceous and forest buffers, has a high rated environmental benefit in the TMDL models.

Discussion ensued regarding the missed opportunity to amend the CREP agreement to include the cultivation and harvest of woody biomass on CREP enrolled land. This request was never made of USDA because of the challenges in developing the necessary environmental impact statement that was estimated to cost approximately \$20,000. President Murphy of ESF told the Committee if they are still interested in submitting the request, the College may be able to help with the development of the environmental review.

V. Greene distributed a map with the eligible watersheds indicated once the final agreement is signed and a chart summarizing current CREP participation across the state (*available upon request*).

Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Worksheet Review and Approval – B. Steinmuller

B. Steinmuller distributed copies of the four updated AEM Worksheets for SWCC review and approval. The worksheets were developed by a partnership of interagency and academic experts and reviewed by the SWCC's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) before final consideration by the full Committee. All of the Committee, including the Voting Members, was provided copies of the draft worksheets in advance of the meeting.

Upon introduction of all worksheets, D. Stein asked the members if there are any final comments, edits, corrections, or additions. There were no additional corrections made at the meeting.

D. Stein moved to approve the Pasture Management Tier 2 Worksheet; seconded by J. Dickinson. Motion passed; carried.

J. Dickinson moved to approve the Stream and Flood Plain Management Tier 2 Worksheet; seconded by D. Brass. Motion passed; carried.

D. Stein moved to approve the Forest Management Tier 2 Worksheet; seconded by D. Brass.

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Motion passed; carried.

D. Brass moved to approve the Soil Management Tier 2 Worksheet; seconded by D. Stein. Motion passed; carried.

Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program Round 19 RFP Review and Approval – B. Steinmuller

Before B. Steinmuller distributed copies of the Round 19 RFP, Rating Sheet, and attachments, he asked that any farmers or District's personnel in the room that plan to apply for Round 19 grants please recuse by leaving the meeting room. The President of the Conservation District Employees' Association is permitted to remain in the room and participate in the discussion via the State of New York Ethics Advisory Opinion No. 03-09.

B. Steinmuller distributed copies of the draft Round 19 RFP, Rating Sheet, Planning Requirements, and Screening Tool for Roofs and Covers of Heavy Use Areas, Barnyards, and Feedlots. B. Steinmuller told the group that documents were drafted with the policy direction given by the Committee at the May 2012 monthly meeting. B. Steinmuller provided a brief summary of the changes made to the Round 19 RFP and Rating Sheet and discussed the accompanying documents. B. Steinmuller asked the Committee to review the changes made to confirm that they were made following the policy direction given by the Committee at an earlier meeting. B. Steinmuller reminded the group that the Round 19 release should be made by late August to early September, after the Department conducts its final review of the material. The Committee reviewed all of the necessary documents.

D. Stein moved to approve the Round 19 RFP, Rating Sheet, and Screening Tool; seconded by D. Brass. Motion passed; carried.

The recused meeting participants were asked to reenter the meeting at this time.

State Aid to Districts Update – Jennifer Clifford

B. Steinmuller introduced Jennifer Clifford to the State Committee. Ms. Clifford was hired by the Dutchess County SWCD to provide services to the State Committee, specifically in the State Aid to Districts programming area. J. Clifford is originally from Western NY, but started her Conservation District career in the Las Vegas, Nevada area, gaining progressive experience first as a technician working her way up to the Manager of the Conservation District of Southern Nevada. J. Clifford will be responsible for coordinating and managing the State Aid to District Program, including developing guidance documents, soliciting program reports, calls for projects, etc. J. Clifford provided a brief summary of her background and an outline of the projects that she is currently working on. One of the projects is a comprehensive outreach document summarizing all of the Part B Conservation Project Financial Assistance projects for 2011. J. Clifford distributed a draft for review and comment. The report should be completed and reproduced for the upcoming Northeast National Association of Conservation Districts (NE-NACD) conference in Corning.

B. Steinmuller discussed with the group the program changes that could occur with the passage of the amendment to permanently raise the Part A reimbursement cap from \$30,000 to \$60,000. The State recognizes the critical services provided locally by Conservation Districts and this change positions Districts with the opportunity to earn increased State reimbursement to enhance their capacity to implement conservation at the local level.

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The new law would take effect immediately and Part A reimbursement will be based on eligible expenditures made from January 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012. EPF funding provided under the current approved budget increased the appropriation for the State Aid to Districts Program from \$3 million to \$3.5 million. Upon review of the associated law, regulation, projected performance of Districts, and available appropriation, we know that there will be impacts to the Part B, Conservation Project Financial Assistance, and Part C, Performance Measures, funding. Under Section 11-a, funds are paid first under Part A, then Part B and lastly, Part C until the funding is gone. If all the payments are made under Part A, then the available appropriation may not be able to support Part B and C funding this Fiscal Year.

Although Section 11-a requires that Part A funds be paid first, the normal reimbursement and financial assistance package including Part B and Part C will continue under its normal application and reporting cycle. Additional details will be provided with each solicitation. It will be important to read through additional memos on this subject and keep an open dialogue with SWCC staff.

Specific information has been provided to the Regional Associate Environmental Analysts (AEAs) to assist Districts in understanding how the increased funding cap may affect the State reimbursement levels. Districts are encouraged to contact their regional representative to gain greater perspective regarding how this adjustment to SWCD Law affects their District.

Discussion ensued regarding the potential impacts to the Part B and C programming levels. J. Lieberum advised the group that the CDEA is concerned with the potential break in available funding for Parts B and C and advised the group that even a temporary suspension of the additional state funding for these levels, will prove difficult to start them up again. B. Steinmuller agreed and reiterated the importance of continued reporting for Part B and C in order to continue momentum for these program levels.

AEM Strategic Planning and Base Program Evaluation – Rachel Murphy, SWCC Intern

B. Steinmuller introduced Rachel Murphy to the group. Rachel is a third year student at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). R. Murphy is the State Committee's summer intern who is responsible for evaluating the funding accomplishments of Districts through the AEM Base (ABF) and AgNPS Programs. R. Murphy is evaluating numerous datasets to draw conclusions of AgNPS program demand, growth, and quality as a result in investing in Districts through the ABF Program. R. Murphy distributed an interim report analyzing data available from the top earning Districts from Round 10 through 18. This report also included the watersheds that have received the highest concentrations of funding from the same time period. The goal of the research is to determine if a link exists between ABF and AgNPS funding and the successful implementation of conservation and best management projects. R. Murphy's last day with the Division is on August 15, 2012. The report will be finalized by that date and additional information will be made available to the Committee at a later meeting.

Partnership / Advisory Reports / Public Comments - All

Voting Member - G. Proios noted to the Committee that work in Suffolk County continues on the causes, effects, and solution to the "Brown Tide" problem that intermittently plagues the coastal waters, closing down shell fishing, recreation and other uses.

CDEA – J. Lieberum advised the Committee that the CDEA is finalizing the selection for the 2013 Water Quality Symposium. They are reviewing the returned bids and the Double Tree in Syracuse is a potential site to host the event.

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J. Lieberum also discussed a recent column from the Capital District's Times Union written by columnist Fred Lebrun regarding the flood response from the 2011 disasters. The column included acknowledgement of District efforts to restore natural resources and rebuild communities with environmental sustainable principles.

NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets – R. Rausch told the Committee that a new First Deputy Commissioner, Jim Bays, has just started with the Department. Rausch also explained that J. Ziehm will be leaving the Department to pursue another opportunity at the end of the week.

CCE – L. Telega advised the group that CCE will be exploring various agricultural economic opportunities through the State's CFA process. Areas that will be focused on include: high tunnels, cooling sheds, and group feeding and housing of calves.

DEC – K. Roberts noted that the DEC is working with the EPA on the development of NPS Success Stories. These success stories highlight delisting of waterbodies from the 303D List of Impaired Waterbodies. The Tonawanda Creek and the efforts of Districts through AEM are candidates for a 2012 Success Story.

USDA-NRCS – D. Pettit told the group about a National Air Quality Task Force Meeting that will be convened in Syracuse on July 31st – August 2nd. The taskforce is chaired by Chief White and the meeting will include various tour stops and panel discussions. A public announcement is expected to be made later this week.

The Meeting convened at 2:15 pm.

Next Meeting – September 18, 2012. Location: Days Inn and Suites, 160 Holiday Way, Schoharie, NY 12157.

An audio-cast of this meeting is available at the Department of Agriculture and Markets website: www.agriculture.ny.gov.