

**National Association of RC&D Councils
Board Meeting, February 27-28, 2010
Washington, DC**

Meeting Notes

New England Region Delegate Jim Sipperly and I attended the Board Meeting of the National Association of RC&D Councils in Washington DC at the end of February in advance of the NARC&DC Leadership Conference. Following are notes from the meeting:

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Ed Miller reported that the structure of Treasurer's Reports would be modified to show commitments and budgeted expenditures for National Association staff and offices relative to income projections. The total budgeted expenditures for the National office are approximately \$570,000 for 2010. The current-year budget includes a \$200,000 income line-item based on an NRCS cooperative agreement that has not yet been signed. If the cooperative agreement is not signed this year, the Association will need to deplete virtually all of its cash reserves to maintain staff and office expenditures as scheduled. A version of the budget was also presented assuming no new cooperative agreement. The Board voted to approve the budget with the cooperative agreement figures, operating on the strong assurances of staff that NRCS would be signing the cooperative agreement within the next two months. The Board also approved the extension of the auditor's contract for one year, with the intention of re-bidding the audit contract at the end of the year, and approximately every three years henceforth.

President's Report: President Smith-Freeman reported on her meetings with NRCS following the President's FY 2011 budget announcement that terminates the RC&D Program. She stated that NRCS Chief David White continues to support the RC&D Program, while supporting the President's budget and stated that he had confidence that RC&D funding would be restored once again through the Congressional budget review process. She also stated that the Performance Improvement Team (PIT) is making good progress with input from NARC&DC staff, and has been well-received by congressional staff. The current PIT criteria are based very heavily on Circle of Diamonds criteria. She then discussed cooperative agreements with NRCS and Forest Service, both of which should be pending and signed very soon. She also believed that it was possible to pursue a cooperative agreement and longer-term partnership with Rural Development.

President Smith-Freeman then discussed a proposed response to the President's budget, which terminates the RC&D Program. She restated the decision of the Board to approach congress with a request to restore the program to level funding at \$50.7 million for FY 2011. The Agriculture Appropriations subcommittee needed letters of support from all congressional offices by the second week of March, and a "dear colleague" letter should be available shortly. She also discussed the need to outreach to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) who ultimately makes recommendations on program funding to the White House. The Shenandoah RC&D in Virginia is working on a tour opportunity for OMB staff and congressional staff to see RC&D projects on the ground and get a better idea of how the federal support translated into local activity. First Vice President Jeannette Jamieson stated that our approach with OMB should be as important as our communication with Congress, and it may be worthwhile to take a more

strongly political approach to addressing opponents to the RC&D program at OMB. She reminded the Board that President Obama signed letters of support of the RC&D Program while he was a Senator.

President Smith-Freeman stated that she had initiated a conference call with past RC&D Presidents Joe Cantu, Reggie Skains, and Sharon Ruggi, and intended to use these leaders as resources for the Board and for congressional outreach.

Executive Director's Report: E.D. John Haugen reported on the state of the National office, which had been dramatically affected by both recent weather conditions in Washington DC and by the recent illness of Education Director Donna Hunter. These circumstances put the staff in a mode of high activity because of the upcoming Leadership Forum and the announcement of the RC&D Program termination. It is hoped that after the Leadership Forum, the staff would be able to regroup and focus on trainings and congressional advocacy. To that end, the twin goals would be: 1) restoration of funding for FY 2011 through congress; and 2) long-term program support through congress, OMB, and the next Farm Bill.

He discussed several training sessions held by National office staff, including sessions in New York State, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Colorado, Montana, and with the Navajo Nation. He and Deputy E.D. Andy Gordon were continuing to pursue NRCS and Forest Service cooperative agreements, and are confident they will be signed shortly.

He stated that the NARC&DC newsletter, the Catalyst, has gone digital and has been distributed via email lists, saving the Association substantially in printing and mailing costs. Dues to the Association, even in the down economy, have been coming in better than expected, with approximately \$40,000 in dues still pending.

Legislative Priorities: The Board discussed the current status of RC&D funding, with Co-legislative liaison Bob Harbison taking the lead in focusing on getting local legislators to sign on to a "dear colleague" letter in support of the RC&D Program to be directed to the Agricultural Appropriations subcommittee. E.D. John Haugen also placed RC&D funding in context of other key legislative priorities in Washington, including health care (taking up much of the discussion), cap-and-trade (probably dead), the jobs bill (approximately \$15 billion, with \$13 billion in tax credits), debt reduction, potential tax reform, and other projects. He also expressed the possibilities that one or both houses of congress could flip party majorities in the November elections. First Vice President Jeannette Jamieson stated that in light of party-line votes on the current year's budget, we should hold representatives feet to the fire on opposing the program or supporting the program.

Strategic Plan Update: John Guskowski of Connecticut led a brief discussion about updating the Strategic Plan, focusing on identifying the key action items for each of the major goal areas. In light of the President's budget proposal, the following items from the Strategic Plan (revised through November 2009) be prioritized:

- 1d) Create fact sheets on RC&D accomplishments – to be developed through State Presidents and coordinated by the National office- specifically identifying job creation and other national priorities by Council, State, and Congressional District.

- 2d) Expand the National website to become a clearinghouse of projects that highlight local councils – to be developed by National office staff with consultation with John Guskowski and other members of the Board. The focus here is on improving communication between Councils and from local members to the National Association.
- 3j) Set up tour for OMB – John Guskowski recommended that President Smith-Freeman establish an ad-hoc committee to develop a strategic approach to “selling” the merits of the RC&D Program to the OMB. To be coordinated by National office staff.
- 4) Increase Circle of Diamonds participation – working with NRCS PIT team, increase outreach and compliance with Circle of Diamonds program.

The National Board approved of the proposed prioritization from the Strategic Planning Committee.

Bylaws and Policies Updates: Olga Walter of Maryland provided an overview of proposed changes to NARC&DC bylaws and policies, which included clarification of board member terms and election of board member positions, the allowance of teleconference/electronic meetings, notification of meetings, clarification of the NARC&DC awards process, and travel policy in the event that the Board President is unable to attend meetings. Revisions were approved by the Board. All Board members completed and signed Conflict of Interest disclosure statements.

Committee Updates: The **Underrepresented Task Force** reported on recent publications, and indicated that they would be increasing outreach efforts to women and youth in agriculture, and intertribal communications. The **Energy Committee** reported that it would be initiating partnerships to conduct farm energy audits in Iowa and California, and was developing an updated Biomass Feasibility Tool. The **Awards Committee** announced the winners of the 2010 NARC&DC awards to be given out at the Leadership Forum. Jim Sipperly of Connecticut made the request that along with winners being honored, the nominees from each region should also be noted during the awards ceremony.

Update from NRCS and Forest Service: The National RC&D Board received three visits from USDA officials during their Board meeting. Craig Dcrickson, the NRCS Deputy Chief for Financial Assistance and Community Development, visited with the Board on Saturday. Craig is Deputy Chief of the divisions that include the RC&D Program. He highlighted USDA Secretary Vilsack’s priorities of local, healthy foods, health for children and families, sustainable systems, biofuels, sustainable and renewable energy sources, and rural broadband initiatives. He described NRCS Chief White as being keenly interested in getting programs and conservation on the ground in effective ways. He expressed interest in seeing that the pending cooperative agreement between NRCS and the NARC&DC was signed soon, and advised the Board to make additional efforts to demonstrate to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) exactly the ways in which RC&D programs meet Secretary Vilsack’s priority areas.

Anne Dubey, NRCS Director of RC&D and Community Assistance Division, visited with the Board on Sunday. She updated the Board on the actions of the Performance Improvement Team (PIT) seeking to establish criteria for “Meritorious Councils.” The national survey had good response rates, with approximately 90% of respondents looking favorably on the draft criteria. State Conservationists and Program Managers had been kept closely informed of progress, and she was optimistic about this level of improvement in communications. One of the key focus


areas of PIT was to clarify the issue of leveraging resources. More training and clarification on how to determine local leverage of federal assistance will be provided to Councils and Coordinators in the coming months. It is anticipated that final approval of the PIT criteria will occur in April, with “rapid assessments” of current Council status occurring by June, and full assessments of Councils will begin in September. Prior to the announcement of the President’s FY 2011 budget, Anne and NRCS staff had met with House and Senate Agriculture Committee staff members, who were very favorably impressed by the draft PIT criteria. Anne also stated that she would be working closely with National Board staff to ensure that the next cooperative agreement would be signed soon.

Paul Rees, the Director for Cooperative Forestry from the US Forest Service also visited with the Board on Sunday, and immediately expressed his deep support and appreciation for the RC&D Program. He stated that the Forest Service would be interested in continuing cooperative agreements for program delivery with RC&D following the conclusion of the current agreement. He also presented a number of Forest Service initiatives that may be of interest to RC&D Councils. These included the Forest Legacy Program, the Forest Stewardship Program, and the Urban and Community Forestry initiatives, each of which had been given larger budgets in the current year. The Forest Service will also be looking to support woody biomass projects, including community wood-to-energy projects and forest-biomass-to-energy projects, as well as community forests and open spaces. They will also be increasing their community focus on landscape-scale conservation. This will build on a current effort by State Foresters to conduct forest assessments in all states.

Board Leadership Elections: The final order of business at the Board meeting was to conduct elections for President, First Vice President, Treasurer, Co-Legislative Liaison, and At-Large Board member. Jeannette Jamieson of Georgia ran unopposed for First Vice President, and was reelected to that position for a second term. Ed Miller of Wisconsin ran unopposed for Treasurer and was reelected to that position for a second term. Robert Harbison of Alabama ran unopposed for co-Legislative Liaison and was reelected to that position for a third term. G. Peter Kea of Hawaii was elected to his second term as At-Large Board member. In the election for Board President, Jim Sipperly of Connecticut defeated Joan Smith-Freeman of California. Joan had served for the past two years as National Board President, and Jim will now begin his first two-year term. This means that Joan Smith-Freeman will exit the Board, and Jim becomes an At-Large member, creating a vacancy in the position of Delegate from the New England Region.

The Board adjourned on Sunday afternoon at 4:00 p.m. and agreed to hold its next meeting on June 12-13 in Washington, DC.

Respectfully Submitted,



John Guskowski
Eastern Connecticut RC&D
New England RC&D Association President