

Natural Resources Conservation & Development Board
Meeting Minutes

Friday, September 9, 2011 at 9:00 a.m.

This meeting was held by teleconference.

Board members in attendance:

George Woodbury
Cheryl Thompson
Carol Kenley
Al Poindexter

Others in attendance:

Shana Joy, Executive Director, NRCDB	Ryan Stencel, Anchorage SWCD
Steve Hicks, AACD	Joni Scharfenberg, Fairbanks SWCD
Ken Marsh, AACD	
Joan Hope, AACD	

1. Call to Order – Determination of Quorum

It was determined that a quorum was present and the meeting was called to order by George Woodbury at 9:05 a.m.

2. Approval of Agenda

Agenda unanimously approved.

3. Approval of June 16, 2011 Meeting Minutes

Al moved to approve the minutes as presented; Carol seconded the motion. The motion carried.

4. Executive Director Report

A. Kenny Lake SWCD update – Shana attended a district meeting on August 4th. It was a good productive board meeting and there is energy to get the district functional again. The board addressed many of the DNR/NRCDB outstanding items with Shana at the meeting. The board discussed their district's boundaries and will continue those discussions at future meetings. Carolyn Weimer from the Wasilla district will help them get back on their feet administratively on a temporary basis.

1. The district may look for a local district manager in the spring.
2. The Kenai district does have a new district manager as well.
3. No districts are currently without a manager.

B. NRCDB website – Shana would like to get contractor quotes for upgrades of the NRCDB website. She believes that the work may be completed for approximately \$3,000. Shana clarified that the board does have the funds available to cover this expense; the board has approximately \$9,000 available that is not currently obligated. **Al moved that Shana solicit bids for the website work. Carol seconded the motion. The motion carried.**

- C. NASCA update – Shana participated in a board meeting in June. At this meeting, a discussion began as to how NASCA could help its membership conserve soil and water resources as the demand on these resources increases with the forecasted population growth by 2050. NASCA focuses on strengthening the partnership among the related organizations and networking among the membership at this point. Al is interested to hear what ideas NASCA comes up with on this topic.
- D. SWCD Supervisor Elections – the elections process for this year has begun with the cooperator lists due at the end of September. Shana will send out a message soon to the districts with firm dates/deadlines for this year’s process. Shana will send the master elections spreadsheet to the NRCDB members after this meeting.
- E. SWCD Annual Reports – due by September 15th. Shana would like to compile them together and make bound copies for legislators and others at the fall conference. Districts should put as much effort as they can into those annual reports. Al asked why AACD doesn’t do this any longer. Al said that Victoria Naegele had done them in the past. Steve clarified that AACD hadn’t had any funding to produce the report so Shana took it over which is better because it helps the NRCDB become familiar with the districts’ activities.
- F. SWCD Annual work plan format – Shana reported that she and Steve Hicks agreed that it is best to keep the current format. Al would like extra emphasis next year on all of the plans coming to the board in very similar format so that the board members can more easily understand and compare them.
- G. Employee vs Contractor – Shana noted that some information from the District Operations Manual and the Alaska Administrative Code on the difference between employees and contractors. Al commented on the last bullet of the information from the AAC and his concern that there may be an IRS issue. Shana replied that the difference in this situation is that the district managers are not state employees; they are AACD employees. So this bullet may not be applied as strictly to this instance. Shana has researched the subject and this is the sum of the information. Al will not request further research along these lines as long as the rest of the board does not have any further questions.

5. AACD Report

Steve Hicks and Ken Marsh met with Eric Veach and Joshua Scott from the Kenny Lake district recently. A temporary office space is available at the NRCS office; it shouldn’t be an issue that the office is not within the district boundaries. Carolyn will help with administration. Steve and Ken also visited the Salcha Delta and Fairbanks districts. They still plan to visit Kenai, Homer and Kodiak as soon as possible.

6. NRCS Report

A. Bob Jones, NRCS State Conservationist provided a report. Right now is a busy time of year, the end of the federal fiscal year is approaching. Field staff are trying to finish up contracts and practices for the year. This year was very successful for NRCS. About \$10 million was available this year for EQIP, WHIP, and Conservation Stewardship Program and the full funding was utilized into contracts. A back log exists for next years' funds. The high tunnel pilot program was very successful, almost 200 applications received on the Kenai Peninsula. 80 – 90 high tunnels were installed this year. Remote villages are participating in this program too and it has far exceeded expectations. The hardened trail practices have become popular in remote Alaska. The Under-Secretary of Agriculture visited recently and went with Bob to Hooper Bay for a broadened perspective of the landscape in Alaska. The Emergency Watershed Program has been implemented at Crooked Creek to clean-up flood debris and also in Petersburg with landslide clean-up. Bob plans to attend the regional NACD meeting in New Mexico later this month. In the coming year, the NRCS staff is likely to turn over at about 30% due to retirements and he'll be working on that transition.

B. Cheryl asked what the requirements are for high tunnels. Bob's reply: Anyone can apply for a high tunnel but it has to be in an area that has traditionally been cultivated. A flat rate is paid on a square footage for different sized structures. There was some discussion about whether or not heaters or fans can be installed in the high tunnels and whether or not newly cultivated land is eligible. The plantings have to be in-ground and last year, fans were allowed. There isn't any minimum or maximum size for the structures. There are several manufacturers who meet the specifications for the high tunnels.

C. Al clarified that the high tunnel program is part of EQIP and that a conservation plan is required. Bob said that a plan is required for the area of the property that is being utilized for the high tunnel but not necessarily for the entire property or farm. Al isn't sure that is being fully complied with.

7. Annual Work Plans

A. Upper Susitna and Kenai - **Al** thought that both plans looked very good and **moved to approve both work plans as presented. Carol seconded the motion. The motion carried.**

8. Memorandum of Understanding with Soil and Water Conservation Districts

A. Wasilla and Kenny Lake

B. **Al moved to approve the MOUs as presented. Carol seconded. The motion carried.**

9. Southeast Alaska Conservation District Formation

- A. George Woodbury reported that Gary Morrison hadn't had any luck with email contacts with the oyster farmers in the southeast area. Gary is willing to try and arrange an in-person meeting to get their signatures on the petition.
- B. \$2,000 was allotted (each) to Gary and Joan Hope to work cooperatively on the district formation project. Gary has not billed at all yet. Joan has billed very little so far. George will relay to Gary that he can go ahead and try and arrange the meeting.
- C. Joan Hope reported that add'l funds from the USFS were available to work on invasive weeds in Southeast Alaska which would provide an opportunity to continue cultivating cooperators, especially underserved areas. Folks who are already interested in invasive weeds are potential good candidates to be new cooperators and may provide a way to contact existing cooperators to sign the petition. Joan would like to continue working on this effort.
- D. There are enough cooperators signed up but the petition is the next step. About 12 signatures are already on the petition form at this point.
- E. Al would like to see the new district formed and would like to revisit the project at the next meeting and reevaluate the situation.

10. AS 41.10 Draft

- A. Shana went through the latest draft and noted the new changes that had been made – showing in track changes.
- B. The board discussed how to handle appointments to the NRCDB from outside an organized district (southeast and northwest Alaska seats). George stated that perhaps the Alaska district could remain in name only in order to accept cooperators for the purposes of appointments to the NRCDB. George feels that to have folks from around the state which is important, the Alaska district should continue to accept cooperators from outside the organized districts. Shana stated that there may be a way for AACD to assist with this process to avoid a perceived conflict of interest. There seemed to be general consensus from the board that this suggestion was acceptable.
- C. Al had a few comments regarding the draft.
 - 1. Al asked Bob if he had any suggestions for the statute as to how the districts and NRCS could work closer. Al explained his perspective on the relationship between NRCS and the local districts. Districts used to be involved in prioritizing the work of NRCS. Also, people wanting to sign up for NRCS programs had to become district cooperators first. Al said that people participating in NRCS programs now, are completely unaware of districts. Al would like to see NRCS talk more to landowners about the districts or a way to describe the relationship in the statute.

2. Bob stated that the only reason that NRCS provides local technical assistance is because an MOU exists between NRCS and the local districts. There used to be a closer relationship when NRCS only provided consultation services. When the Farm Bill was passed, and EQIP and WHIP were passed, it was no longer a requirement for a producer to be a cooperator with the local district, priorities shifted. The Farm Bill mandated that NRCS provide assistance. Bob suggested that this would be a good topic of discussion for a group meeting of the districts like the one coming up. Al feels that the purpose of districts is somewhat negated under these NRCS mandates and wonders how other states are handling it. Bob feels that districts around the country are struggling with the same situation but that NRCS is not the only partner that districts work with.
3. George asked about the existing MOU with districts. Bob clarified that there isn't any wording in the statute currently but the MOU does exist with the individual districts. George suggested an MOU between the NRCDB and NRCS that defines the relationship making it a statewide MOU. The local districts' MOUs with NRCS would not be negated in any way. Shana said that a new MOU to renew partnership relations between NRCDB and NRCS could be worked on to bring the working relationship closer. Al suggested that NRCS field staff could give a packet of information about districts to new contacts. Shana asked Bob for a copy of the current MOU between NRCS and districts. George asked for additional information for a future meeting.
4. Joni Scharfenberg commented that NRCS used to carry a cooperator sign up form with them and provide it to new contacts. Bob thinks that may still happen sometimes but isn't sure if all field staff are still carrying the forms with them.
5. Al suggested several small language edits to the statute including:
 - a. Add 'other natural resources' to the purpose of the chapter,
 - b. Add 'confirmed by the board' for the executive director position,
 - c. Board meetings should be quarterly at a minimum but face-to-face meetings should be optional,
 - d. Procurement section should be reviewed/verified to be sure it adequately addresses the issues districts face with procurement and inventory.

11. Fall SWCD Conference

- A. Shana has been working with Steve Hicks on the arrangements. Dates are October 14th and 15th. The agenda is not yet finished. Shana asked for NRCDB members to contact her who can participate/attend the conference so travel arrangements can be made. She also asked if the board would like to hold a meeting in conjunction with the conference as well. Al

suggested that a meeting be held during the conference to at least hear public comments on the statute and other issues.

12. NACD Conference

- A. It will be January 29 – February 1 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Shana will bring it up again once an agenda for the conference is available.

13. Board Comments

- A. Al thanked Shana for the detailed minutes and for a nice job overall. Al thanked the Fairbanks district for attending the NRCDB meetings and he highly recommends that other districts participate as well so the board can well represent all of the districts' interests.
- B. Cheryl spoke about the Nome garden tour and gave a website address of www.nomenugget.net for more information.

14. Public Comments

- A. Ken Marsh asked about the timeline for the statute revisions because AACD is planning to vote on the revisions as soon as possible. Al would like to vote on a final draft of the statute revision at the fall conference. AACD could then vote on the same document as well. Al would like to hear from AACD about the draft during the NRCDB meeting. Shana said that she just needs to review it thoroughly with the Department of Law for legal issues. Shana hopes to have a version for the NRCDB and AACD to consider by the end of September.
- B. Steve Hicks said that it was a great meeting.

15. Next Meeting

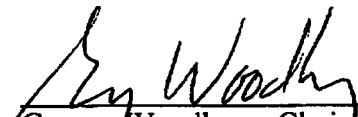
- A. In conjunction with the fall conference. Shana will work with the board to set a date and time.

Meeting adjourned at 10:37 a.m.

Minutes taken by:

Minutes approved by:


Shana Joy, Executive Director
NRCDB


George Woodbury, Chair
NRCDB