

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

State Committee Meeting

Crown Plaza
701 East Genesee Street Syracuse, NY 13210
Syracuse, NY
June 16, 2015

Meeting at a Glance:

- The Tree and Shrub Policy passed in April was amended to clarify that Districts should not sell species ranked Moderately Invasive or higher on the Invasive Species list. While Districts should consider and promote native alternatives, careful and monitored use of ranked species in specific conservation practices may be the best option.
- The Climate Resilient Farming Program was discussed. The \$500,000 budget allocation will be divided into \$100,000 for tool development and \$400,000 for a pilot RFP.
- The Farm Tile Drainage Revolving Loan Fund was discussed. More details will be forthcoming.

Present:

D. Stein, Chair; J. Dickinson, C. Colby, D. Brass, Voting Members; B. Steinmuller, Assistant Director; C. Frasier, B. Brower, S. Fickbohm, L. Lyons-Swift, G. Albrecht, G. Spitzer, SWCC; J. Lendrum, DEC; D. DeWeese, NRCS; PJ Emerick, CDEA, Orange County SWCD; L. Williams, Farm Bureau; E. Claypoole, Cornell Cooperative Extension; S. Wojtowicz, DOS; T. Sweeney, DAM.

Call to Order

D. Stein called the meeting to order.

Review/Approval of Minutes

D. Brass moved to approve the May 2015 minutes; seconded by C. Colby. Motion passed; carried.

Correspondence, B. Steinmuller

Reports, Newsletters and periodicals were made available.

There was a letter from the Orange County SWCD regarding their relationship with the local NRCS office. A meeting is scheduled with the District, State Committee, NRCS (local and state) to attempt to resolve the issue.

There was a letter from Alan Young of the Erie County SWCD regarding the recently passed tree and shrub policy and District use of mild to moderately invasive species for conservation purposes. This was revisited later in the meeting.

Staffing Update, B. Steinmuller

Ron Bush has a new role with the state as a CNMP specialist, and is continuing to work from the Syracuse area. He started June 15. Bethany Bzduch will be starting in a new role with the state as the AgNPS Program Manager (a back fill from when Brian became the Assistant Director of the State Committee). She will be relocating to Albany and will start in the new role August 3—at the evaluation meeting for the Round 21 grants!

There are other waiver requests in the queue. The SEA and AEA list will expire in 2017 when a new test takes place.

Climate Resilient Farming Program, G. Albrecht, G. Spitzer, S. Fickbohm

The new Climate Resilient Farming Program was discussed. The budget language is very broad, allotting \$500,000 to develop a “pilot climate adaptation program” consistent with the AEM framework. The current plan is to divide the money into a \$100,000 allotment for program and tool development and \$400,000 for a pilot RFP.

The \$100,000 will go to service contracts for the Upper Susquehanna Coalition and to Cornell for the development of:

- AEM Tier 2 information sheets regarding various elements of climate change adaptation and mitigation
- A GIS based tool that can determine areas that are most at risk for flooding and the best ways to attenuate those floods
- A Tier 3 planning protocol for water management on farms

The remaining \$400,000 will go towards an RFP for three funding tracks:

- Manure storage cover and flare systems—to reduce methane emissions from manure storages by 25 to 30 times while also nearly eliminating the risk of overtopping
- On farm upland, riparian, and floodplain water management systems—to create or enhance erosion and sediment control systems for intense storm or drought events
- Soil health systems—to enhance soil carbon and enhance resiliency in a drought or a flood

Discussion ensued regarding the new program. A regional approach was discussed, though the current plan is to have a state-wide RFP to expose all of the Districts to this area. The importance of integrating the climate change concerns into AEM was stressed, as was the importance of working with partners. Concerns were raised about the limited amount of funding; State Committee staff are seeking additional funding sources.

State Committee staff will continue developing program materials and will present at the CDEA meeting July 8, hold a webinar for District staff members, host a TAC meeting to discuss the details of the solicitation, and bring the RFP materials to the State Committee meeting in August for approval.

Any comments or feedback can be directed to B. Steinmuller, G. Albrecht, S. Fickbohm, or G. Spitzer.

Agricultural Non-Point Source Program, B. Steinmuller

Amendments for State Committee Consideration

Cortland County SWCD – Otselic River Watershed BMP Implementation– Round 17 – C701009

Request: Time Extension from 9/1/15 to 10/30/16

Reason: The last of four projects planned for completion under this grant is moving towards construction. The farm has consistently been working on implementing conservation projects on their farm. With construction imminent on cropland practices, having recently completed advanced nutrient management planning and planning an accompanying laneway improvement BMP to this proposed project, the farm is working diligently and forging ahead with the implementation goals. Recently, the farm also implemented an alternative water supply development out of necessity, a financial hardship the farm was not expecting. The BMPs as part of this project are important for the farm and planned for immediate implementation. Given the unpredictability of contractors, weather and other factors affecting construction, the SWCD board authorized a request for an extension to avoid potential loss of funding for this project. The landowner has re-committed to completing their project within the

requested time extension.

Note: Scott Fickbohm, Region 2 AEA, supports the time extension.

Previous Amendments: One change in budget

J. Dickinson motioned to approve the amendment, seconded by D. Brass. Motion passed; carried.

Cortland County SWCD – Lower Tioughnioga Watershed BMP Implementation– Round 17 – C701011

Request: Time Extension from 9/1/15 to 10/30/16

Reason: The last project planned for completion under this grant is moving forward. The farm was fortunate to receive several grants from various sources including AGNP, EQIP, and CREP, all within just a couple of years, to complete numerous conservation projects on their farm. This required significant re-prioritization and planning of several practices, as well as phasing of projects to make them affordable. The silage leachate control and treatment project is the last project planned for immediate implementation on the farm. Given the unpredictability of contractors, weather and other factors affecting construction, the SWCD board authorized a request for an extension to avoid potential loss of funding for this project. The landowner has re-committed to completing their project within the requested time extension.

Note: Scott Fickbohm, Region 2 AEA, supports the time extension.

Previous Amendments: None

J. Dickinson motioned to approve the amendment, seconded by D. Brass. Motion passed; carried.

Staff Approved Amendments

Erie County SWCD – Eighteenmile Creek/Lake Erie Direct Protection Project – Round 19 – C701112

Request: Change in Budget

Reason: In the Plan of Work, Overhead Expenses was placed into the wrong box – the value was placed in the box for "Overhead Expenses (When Using the Actual Rates), but should have been placed into the box for "Overhead Expenses (Derived from Using the Recommended Rates). This budget amendment will correct the error.

Note: Victor DiGiacomo, Region 1 AEA, approves the change in Budget

Previous Amendments: None

Farm Tile Drainage Revolving Loan Fund, B. Steinmuller

This year's budget included a provision for the establishment of a \$500,000 tile drainage revolving loan fund. The State Committee would be responsible for establishing a master servicing agreement and overseeing the program, though the loans would be granted through a banking institution.

A number of concerns and questions were raised:

- What would the roles of the Districts be? Which districts have technical expertise tile drainage?
- What would the role of the State Committee be? Would the Committee approve applications? How would concerns about credit and the capacity of the farm to repay the loan be handled?
- What would the interest rate on the loans be and how would that be decided?
- Concerns were raised about the water quality impacts of tile drainage in general:
 - Is tile drainage a “conservation or production practice”?
 - How could the concerns about water pollution from the outlets of the drainage be mitigated?
 - How would this impact compliance with wetland designations?
- What limits would be established for participation in the program? Participation in AEM?
- Would this conflict with SWCC/Districts implementation of conservation programs?

Creating a formal rule and regulation to determine and clarify these issues was discussed. This topic will be revisited regularly at future meetings.

Tree and Shrub Policy, B. Steinmuller

The tree and shrub policy that was passed at the April State Committee meeting has generated some discussion, particularly with regard to the statement that Districts should not “use, sell, or promote the use of” species ranked Moderately Invasive or higher on the invasive species list as published by the NYS Office of Invasive Species Coordination.

While the policy was intended only for tree and shrub sales, some Districts felt that the language was unclear, and would pose a problem when they use potentially invasive species responsibly and with proper monitoring in conservation contexts. The State Committee recommends that Districts research and consider native alternatives for conservation purposes, but also recognizes that with appropriate monitoring, the ranked species may be the best option available. Therefore, the State Committee decided to change the policy to remove the words “use” and “promote the use of,” simply stating that Districts should not sell to the general public, species ranked Moderately Invasive or higher.

D. Brass moved to clarify and amend the Tree and Shrub Policy to remove the words “use” and “promote the use of,” seconded by J. Dickinson; motion passed, carried.

Partnership Reports

CDEA, PJ Emerick

There were a number of updates from the Employees Association:

- The Division IV Representative seat remains vacant. This will hopefully be resolved at the July 8-9 CDEA meeting in Utica.
- State Committee staff will be joining the CDEA at the meeting in Utica on July 8th to discuss the Climate Resilient Farming program in greater detail.
- Also on July 8, though not in Utica, will be the next Operation Manual Update meeting. Thank you to everyone who has worked on this thus far!
- The Level 1 Technical Training will be August 3-7. It should be a great help for new technicians!
- The CDEA Conservation Skills subcommittee has met and started the process of planning the workshop for this year.
- The Envirothon went great. Thanks to all!

Cornell University, E. Claypool

Cornell University and Cooperative Extension have been working extensively on climate change issues.

There will be a [Dairy Environmental Systems and Climate Adaptation Conference](#) at Cornell July 29 – 31. Extension also recently established a Climate Resiliency subcommittee, and the Pro-DAIRY program also has an online course about the dairy industry and climate change.

DEC, J. Lendrum

There has been a recent hire in the Non-Point Source program. There have been some issues regarding a satellite storage siting near Watertown and the surrounding community.

Farm Bureau, L. William

The Farm Bureau is interested in and supportive of the efforts of the State Committee with regard to climate change.

State Committee, S. Fickbohm

The managers meetings went well, and developing the Climate Resilient Farming Program is exciting.

DOS, S. Wojtowicz

The Consolidated Funding Application is now open, and Districts can apply for Local Waterfront Revitalization grants as well as DEC's Water Quality Improvement Projects (WQIP).

NRCS, D. DeWeese

Pete Wright has officially retired. We will miss him and wish him the best.

There will be a soil health regional (Northeast) specialist housed in Syracuse. New York is fortunate to have access to this resource.

The pre-proposal phase of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program will close July 8. The announcement of selected pre-proposals will occur at the beginning of September.

State Committee, G. Spitzer

SharePoint is up and running well. Districts should continue to check it and use it. Any more invitations issued for the site will be done on an as requested basis.

NYACD, C. Colby

NYACD is concerned about the new WOTUS rule.

There is also some money available through the DEC for projects to protect the Genesee River, which is nice to see.

Meeting adjourned. Next meeting scheduled for August 25, 2015 in Albany. Future agenda items include more details for the farm tile drainage revolving loan fund and the climate resilient farming program.