



**White River
Natural
Resources
Conservation
District**

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White River NRCD Board of Supervisors Meeting

August 20, 2026 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM

In person: **28 Farmvu Drive, White River Jct, NRCS Conference Room**
or Join Zoom Meeting:

https://us02web.zoom.us/join/48A7xfM5RIOt_V0USdPNnw

APPROVED Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Alvina Harvey, Anna Hubbard, Jaiel Pulskamp, Jennifer Byrne, Kate Willard, Sabra Ewing, Didi Pershouse

Welcome & Check-In

- Welcomed attendees. Several members shared personal updates

Approve [July meeting Minutes](#)

- Motion maker: Alvina
- Second: Anna
- Question raised: Inquired about when the previous meeting ended (confirmed it ran late)

Voting Results

- Motion passed unanimously
- No objections or abstentions recorded

NRCS Updates

Application Deadlines & Program Status

Critical Deadline

- Deadline Date: September 25, 2026
- Fiscal Year: FY 2027
- Programs Covered: EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program), CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program), and related NRCS initiatives

Application Landscape Shift

- Historically: Programs were undersubscribed (low demand)
- Current Status: Programs now oversubscribed (high demand, limited funding)
- Implication: Need stronger, higher-quality applications submitted by deadline

Required Documentation

- Form 1200 is the official application form
- Accurate outreach language requires NRCS approval before distribution

CEMA 216 Soil Testing Program

Components

- Includes 3 distinct soil tests
- NRCS rolled out this program contingent on districts conducting these tests

Funding Challenges

- Technical Assistance (TA) covered by AgCWIP grant
- However, money is not available for Zone (TZ) operations
- Financial risk: District considering covering lab fees upfront with expected NRCS reimbursement
- Estimated cost for 10 farms: \$5,000–\$10,000 in lab fees
- Goal: Farmers should not deal with invoicing complexity

Outreach Barriers

- Leadership changes at NRCS creating new barriers
- Need specific language approval from NRCS for all outreach materials
- Difficulty supporting technical assistance without signed contracts in place

District Updates

Public Banking Congress Recap

- Overview
 - Vermont Public Banking Congress held at Vermont Law School
 - Video recap, photos, and cartoon artwork being compiled
 - Processing notes to establish clear coalition-building directives
- Next Steps
 - Offering space every two weeks for recurring coordination meetings
 - After note processing, will have clear directive for coalition building
 - Need fundraising to support the initiative
 - Suggestion to involve Public Banking Institute for additional support
- Assigned Actions:
 - Jennifer Byrne to prepare comprehensive recap package for attendees and interested partners
 - Include edited video, photos, cartoon artwork, and processed notes
 - Set up bi-weekly virtual or in-person meeting schedule

Farm Force + Cedar Circle Teen Farm Fellows Wrap Up

- Farms assisted: Broad Acres Farm, Plenitud Farm, Snow Organics, Root 5 Farm, Wild Earth Farm
- Activities Completed:
 - Tree planting across multiple sites
 - Trail work maintenance
 - Permaculture design implementation
 - Just completed a recent tree planting activity

Xerces Grant “Free Trees for Livestock Farmers” Final Report

- \$100,000 from Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
- 3 Seasons (Spring 2025, Fall 2025, Spring 2026)
- 5,420 trees and shrubs
- 2,250 tree guards and other planting materials
- 22 acres of trees planted in agroforestry/pollinator systems
- 42 livestock farms in the Connecticut River Valley
- 11 Farm Force volunteer planting days
- Build spatial map showing approximate locations of 42 assisted farms
- Save map as permanent record
- Develop photo slideshow materials

[Community Engagement Plan Guidance Document](#) released by ANR & the Environmental Justice Advisory Council and Interagency Committee

- Community Engagement Plan Guidance Document released by ANR & Environmental Justice Advisory Council

Compliance Requirements

- LURB sits on the interagency committee
- Federal funding recipients must demonstrate compliance with Civil Rights laws

Upcoming Events

- [CEMA 216 Training](#) @ VTSU Randolph September 10-12
 - Dates: September 10–12, 2026
 - Location: Vermont State University, Randolph Campus
 - Agenda:
 - Day 1: Soils 101 fundamentals
 - Day 2 Morning: How to conduct soil tests per NRCS standards
 - Day 2 Afternoon: Walk to SREC lab, general discussion on lab practices
 - Featured Presenter: Abe Collins presenting ideas throughout workshop
 - Training Focus: Explaining test results clearly to farmers
 - Financial Risk: District taking on some risk for CEMA 216 soil testing

- Payment Model: District pays lab fees upfront; reimbursement expected from NRCS
- AgCWIP Agreement: Covers soil test costs
- Meeting with Trainers: Already conducted; logistics confirmed
- Farm Force Fridays 9/4, 9/18, 10/2, 10/9 w/ VTSU & VLGS students
 - Partners: VTSU & Vermont Law School Green Sports students
 - Documentation Needed: Flyer with host farm name and town address for each brigade
 - Distribution: Send to board members for coordination of attendance

- 8/22 Tree Planting @ VTSU with Plant Club student group

VTSU Location Update

- Nothing to report

Open Applications

- NBRC Catalyst Grant Letter of Interest due 8/21
- Farm to Plate Workshop proposal submitted 8/13

Board Bylaws and Policies

- Current Status
 - No formal bylaws currently in effect
 - Staff can provide draft bylaws for board review
- Questions for Board Consideration
 - Does the board want formal bylaws?
 - Is there anything specific to include?
 - Alternative option: Guidance document rather than binding bylaws
- Benefits Discussed
 - Provides clarity and stability for district operations
 - Helps identify gaps and improve practices (per Speaker 8)
 - Clear protocols for decision-making
 - Defined communication channels between board and staff

[Basin 14 Tactical Basin Plan Comments](#)

Process Overview

- DEC (Department of Environmental Conservation) pays district for participation in plan review

- Implementation work also compensated
- Conservation Districts explicitly listed in state law as entities supposed to be consulted

Key Agency

- DEC operates under ANR (Agency of Natural Resources)

Current Limitations

- Review process is internal, not public
- Board needs clarity on whether input can still be submitted
- Asking: What are the next steps? Can the board still weigh in?

Strategic Importance

- State law requires writing of basin plans
- District work needs reflection in the plan for future grant eligibility
- Expressed frustration: Constantly reporting on own activities without financial compensation
- Concern: Had not heard about White River Basin plan update from 2 years ago; not involved in that process

Strategic Position on Conservation Programs

Critique of White River Plan

- Pay-for-performance program not well-suited for this district
- Only 5% of funding goes to their counties
- Frustration expressed about program design

Success Story Highlight

- 40 farm teams active over past five years
- Strong recommendation to include this work in tactical basin planning
- Emphasized: Need for suite of programs, not single-program reliance

Non-Chemical Approach Work

Lake Conservation Strategy

- Non-chemical approach to invasives control
- Goal: Reduce chemical dependency in lake work
- Importance of being included in tactical basin planning
- Inclusion allows for future grant applications

Involvement Gap

- Speaker 5 questioned: Why hadn't they heard about the White River Basin plan?
- Updated two years ago without district involvement
- Need their input in future planning cycles

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan Comments

Background

- Plan presented at previous board meeting
- Intern from Vermont Law School helped organize and create outlines

Public Comment Opportunity

- Next round of public comment coming up
- Submit comments by end of month
- Letters should not be confrontational but ask substantive questions

Overlapping Jurisdiction Concerns

Territory Overlap

- District overlaps with many of the same towns as the regional plan

Core Question

- Have they incorporated district's information?

Land Use Map Consequences

Zoning Categories Creating Issues

1. Rural Conservation Areas – New designation category
2. Zone Acreage Problems – Classification affects what landowners can do

Critical Distinctions

- If landowner classified as ag or forestry: Certain activities permitted
- If zones labeled rural conservation: Sets up completely different regulatory framework

Operational Implications

- It matters which lands will be farmed vs. which will be conserved
- What happens if land qualifies for both agriculture AND shows ecological benefit?

Automatic Review Protocol Problem

Protocol Mechanism

- Automatically triggers review at rural conservation designation
- If land deemed "too ecologically functional": Cannot farm it
- This creates tension between conservation goals and agricultural practice

Vermont Conservation Design (VCD) Tool Concerns

Original Purpose vs. Current Use

- Originally developed for ecological planning
- Now being used for land use designation (beyond intended scope)

Agricultural Analysis Gaps

- VCD inconsistent with agricultural analysis
- Should consider importance of agriculture beyond just "prime ag soils"
- Potential negative impact on farming and conservation efforts

New Land Designations Created

- Rural Agriculture and Forestry
- Rural Conservation
- Could restrict farming activities depending on interpretation

State Law Alignment Issues

Relevant Statutes

- Act 59
- Act 181
- Act 250 jurisdiction creates overlapping requirements

Legal Framework

- If project falls under Act 250 jurisdiction, regional plan must be guided accordingly
- Regional plan must align with local municipal plans per state law

Requested Actions

1. Review plan against current law
2. Distinguish regional policies from local policies
3. Address implications of towns/municipalities taking away local decision-making authority
4. Create clear process for correcting underlying data or classifications

Substantive Questions to Raise:

- Meaningful participation guaranteed?
- Reclassification without due notice?
- Rural business restrictions?
- How to balance ecological function with agricultural use?

VACD & NRCC Representative Updates

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD) Board Changes

Bylaw Amendments Under Consideration

- Changes to voting rights procedures
- Changes to accounting system (new financial tracking)
- Proposed clause allowing choice to kick out districts that don't pay dues

Dues Payment Enforcement

- Districts required to pay dues to maintain voting rights
- Non-paying districts cannot vote
- Some districts currently in arrears
- Proposal being considered to formally remove delinquent districts from membership

Recent Board Meeting Experience

Atmosphere Concerns

- Uncomfortable tone during recent meeting
- Some backtracking occurred after initial positions stated
- Felt accusatory to some participants

Consulting Group Engagement

- Folder exists containing final report from consulting group
- Consulting group hired to help resolve conflicts
- Report was supposed to help with ongoing issues
- Not all board members have seen the report yet

Written Correspondence

VACD Letter Status

- Letter already submitted to Michelle (VACD representative)
- Letter should be shared with all VACD board members
- Attach latest copy to email distribution
- Use reply-all to ensure all managers and board members can review

Proposed Resolution

- Michelle would like to come to a board meeting to discuss further
- Topics to cover: Action Circles, dues, and related concerns
- Action: Arrange Michelle's invitation to next district meeting

Transparency & Communication Issues

Information Sharing

- Need transparency and information sharing with district members
- Avoid rumors and misunderstandings through proper communication
- Ensure all members have seen the letter before discussions proceed

Next Step:

- Alvina to send letter to VACD board

Adjourn: 2:29 PM

Meeting minutes compiled from recording and notes by Jaiel Pulskamp