

MINUTES
ULSTER COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
5 PARK LANE
HIGHLAND, NY 12528
February 28, 2024

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by Chairman L. Tantillo at 9:00 AM. Directors Present: H. Litts, S. VanNostrand and J. Delaune. SWCD Staff in attendance: J. Wedemeyer - Exec. Director, T. Ferry - District Technician, Christine DeGroot - Program Assistant, A. Doan, A.W.S.M.P. Project Manager and B. Luskin, NYS Ag & Markets.

2024-2-1 Litts made the Motion, Delaune seconded, to go into Executive Session at 9:01 AM to discuss a particular employee. All in favor.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 9:20 AM.

No Motions were adopted, passed, or agreed to in Executive Session.

2024-2-2 Litts made the Motion, Delaune seconded, to have the District donate towards former Board Member Bill Wilklow's service. All in favor.

2024-2-3 Delaune made the Motion, VanNostrand seconded, to give Ferry a merit raise in the amount of \$3,000.00 and to have it be paid retroactive as of January 1, 2024. All in favor.

(Sam Roberts – NRCS, joined the Meeting at 9:21AM.)

1. STAFF REPORTS

Written staff reports were mailed and emailed to Board Members and B. Luskin prior to the meeting for review (attached to the filed minutes).

a) Work Reports

SWCD - J. Wedemeyer (see attached staff report)

Wedemeyer mentioned that the District had offered to pay up to \$7,500.00 in engineering costs for the Harrington covered barnyard project that went over-budget by \$800.00. The Board agreed to pay the difference since the landowner ended up spending double out-of-pocket of what was anticipated on his project.

The only change with the District's Personnel Policy is staff now receive paychecks via Direct Deposit.

2024-2-4 Litts made the Motion, Delaune seconded, to accept the District's Personnel Policy. All in favor.

2024-2-5 Delaune made the Motion, Litts seconded, to start the Junior District Technician position at a salary range of \$44,000.00 - \$47,000.00. All in favor.

2024-2-6 Delaune made the Motion, VanNostrand seconded, to accept Ulster County's Agreement for Professional Services. All in favor.

Robert Skinner submitted a proposal to the District to create a video that aims to capture the District's mission. It can be a powerful tool for outreach, education and advocacy. He will interview key staff members and feature footage of ongoing or completed projects in the field. The cost for producing a 2.5-3.5 minute video is \$3,000.00. Discussion followed. Litts suggested that the District contact Lisa Berger, Director of Tourism for Ulster County, as she may have money in her budget to pay for a portion of the video. **2024-2-7 Delaune made the Motion, VanNostrand seconded, to hire Robert Skinner and spend up to \$3,000.00 on a video showcasing the District. All in favor.**

2024-2-8 Delaune made the Motion, VanNostrand seconded, to the 2024 New York State Fair Booth Assessment invoice in the amount of \$100.00. All in favor.

(O. Velez-Juarbe – NRCS, joined the Meeting at 9:40 AM)

District Assistance with County Septic System Assessment Program – The County Executive's office requested the District's assistance to work on an Ulster County Septic System Assessment Program, to see if any systems are failing (tanks or leach fields). Wedemeyer told them it's up to the District Board to approve any staff to work on this. Litts suggested that the County pay a portion of the staff person's salary. Discussion followed.

(H. Litts left the Meeting at 9:45 AM)

(Work Reports continued)

- b) **SWCD – T. Ferry** (see attached staff report).
- c) **SWCD – C. DeGroodt** (see attached staff report)
- d) **AWSMP – A. Doan - Stream Project Manager** (see attached staff report).
- e) **O. Velez-Juarbe (NRCS)** – NRCS has received ~90 applications between three offices. Out of the 90, they have 12 pre-approvals for Ulster County and 12 for the other two offices. S. Roberts is working on the ranking.

Velez-Juarbe mentioned that he spends two days a week in the Orange County field office training the new employee and working on Orange County projects.

2. **NEW BUSINESS** – most discussed earlier in the Meeting.

e) **Additional Policy Adoptions: Code of Ethics and Breach Notification** – In order to meet our Performance Measures, the District has to have a code of ethics and breach notification in our policy (namely with personal and identifiable information).

3. **OLD BUSINESS** – discussed earlier in the Meeting.

4. **MINUTES APPROVAL** – January 2024 Minutes to be approved at next month's Board Meeting.

5. **FINANCIAL REPORTS AND ABSTRACTS** – to be approved at next month's Board Meeting.

6. **NEXT MEETING**

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 27, 2024 at 9:00 AM.

(Work Reports continued)

f) **B. Luskin (NYS Ag & Markets)** – The AEM Leopold Conservation Award has been announced. This award recognizes landowners who inspire others with their dedication to ethical land, water, and wildlife habitat management on agricultural land. The winning farm receives \$10,000.00 plus they get highlighted in a national publication and will have a video made of their farm operation. The deadline for applications is May 15, 2024.

Luskin mentioned that Performance Measures Part A money should show up in our bank account soon.

The NYACD's 2024 Legislative Day book was passed around for review. Ulster SWCD showcased several projects in it: A covered barnyard project for 60 head of cattle, a rotational grazing project where 7,500 linear feet of fencing was installed to improve grazing management on a beef and hog farm in the Rondout Creek watershed, the Elk Bushkill Stream Restoration Project, the District's local cover crop program and the District's No-Till Rental Program.

The Climate Resilient Farming (CRF) Grant Round 8 Request for Proposals may be delayed. Wedemeyer mentioned that the District will include the purchase of a 12-foot no-till drill in the CRF Round 8 grant proposal.

7. ADJOURNMENT

2024-2-9 A Motion was made by Delaune to Adjourn the meeting at 10:03 AM, seconded by VanNostrand. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine DeGroot
Program Assistant

JLW Activities January 17 through February 20, 2024

AEM: AEM Tier 4 – AEM closeout for covered barnyard project, T/O Marbletown. AEM Round 17 contract closeout. AEM Partnership – Assistance with EQIP signups. AEM Tier 4 – Assistance with irrigation system as-built, T/O Marlborough. AEM Tier 4 – No till drill rental assistance, T/O Gardner. AEM Outreach – Preparing presentation for CCE of Ulster County Beginning Farmer Series. AEM Outreach – working with UC Economic Development with ARPA funding. AEM Tier 4 – On Farm Secondary Containment planning, T/O Wawarsing.

Inventory and Evaluations: Assistance to Chris Hewitt, UC. Legislator regarding hemp fiber production in Ulster County. Jeff Crist, assistance with farmland to lease, T/O Shawangunk. Francis O’Donnel, T/O Marbletown – lime spreader rental recommendations, drainage assistance. Collin Heldron, T/O Wawarsing – Drainage and culvert assistance. Travis Hermace, T/O Esopus – Silvo-pasture seeding recommendations. Andrew Wong, T/O Rochester – pond and drainage recommendations. Ulster County DOE – assistance with Catskill Mountain Railroad herbicide application.

NYC DEP CAT 494: Assistance with laptop orders. Assistance and reviewed and approved Hubbell pay app for Elk Bush Kill stream restoration project. Completed FY24 Q2 capital and expense reconciliations. FY24 Q1 capital and expense recons (balanced to the penny), worked with Adam Trescott of DEP. Personnel protective equipment purchases for AWSMP staff and equipment expenditure spreadsheet. Hollow Tree Brook stream restoration project administration. Weekly check ins and in person meetings with A. Doan. Started working on FY25 plan of work and staffing plan.

Round 27: Practices relocation at Dave Dubois’ farm. Working with JESS engineering with the preliminary designs for Clarke and Dubois.

District Updates/Other Projects:

- Completed State Reporting -Part A Eligible Expenditures, Part B Conservation Projects Final Report, Part C Financial Assurances Project Final Report, Performance Measures Evaluation Report and Annual Report to the Treasurer
- Participating with Lower Esopus Stream Management Plan
- Ordered laptop for C. DeGroot, laptop is \$730 under budget
- Working on having insurance premiums reduced, 11.3 percent increase this year
- Travis and I have been monitoring the no-till drill in storage for rodent damage and applying peppermint oil
- Working with Margarete with County Quarterly Reports and invoice submittals for 2023 County funds
- Assistance with employees with NYS retirement and arrears, set up meeting with NYS to answer employees questions
- Updated Personnel Policy
- Submitted Part A Claim for Payment for \$60,000.00 for reimbursable personnel expenses through NYS
- Salary comparison analysis for district technicians and program assistants.
- Reviewed County Professional Services Agreement, provided Certificates of Insurance to County

TRF Activities – January 17, 2024 – February 20, 2024

AEM: Tier 5A – T/O Plattekill – finished up tier 2 summary and sent to producer. Tier 2 – T/O Rochester – working on Tier 2 summary. Tier 5A – T/O Marlborough – updated Tier 2 worksheets for producer to get into Grown & Certified program. Worked on organizing AEM files, hard copies, and digital files. Spent a lot of time getting documents together for AEM Round 17 closeout.

Part C Cover Crop Program: Reimbursed 3 farmers for additional acreage planted.

State cover crop rates have increased, should we increase our local program rates as well? Single species rate = \$83/ac (old rate \$70/ac) and multi-species rate = \$102/ac (old rate \$82/ac). If we increase the rates, should we increase the reimbursement cap as well? \$6,000 per farm would allow a farmer planting single species to get reimbursed for 72ac (previously the cap was 71ac).

Inventory and Evaluations: Lisa Livingstone – soil health questions. Look up info on Fibrous Hemp

CRF Round 6: Received soil health results from fall sampling.

CRF Round 7: No activity.

NYC DEP CAT 494: No activity.

Round 27: Visit to DuBois farm to look at new location for ag chem facility.

No-Till Program: Three users interested in using the drill for spring 2024. Checked on the drill to ensure no mice activity, everything is good so far.

Misc: Worked on soil group worksheets, 16 completed.

Helped Chris get the Quickbooks laptop setup.

Provided info for year end state reporting, reviewed reports before submission.

Received our total station back from Joe at Admar.

Registered for Water Quality Symposium in Syracuse March 12th – 15th.

Attended Farm Hub Water Quality meeting with Jake and Oscar.

Updated Facebook/Instagram, troubleshooted issue with new district website and Iphone being unable to view.

Christine DeGroot

Activities January 18, 2024 – February 21, 2024

District's 2024 Tree & Shrub Program - So far, 21 orders received. Order form can be viewed on our website and orders can be paid via credit card now. A new spreadsheet was created in excel to better track orders.

NYS Retirement – Working on sending NYS Retirement past salary information for all employees. All prior W2s on file were scanned and emailed to employees.

CAT-494 Contracts – Completed the two 2nd Quarter reports. Created new companies in Quickbooks for the two CAT contracts so monthly reconciliations can be completed.

Treasurer's Report – Completed and submitted the 2023 Treasurer's Report.

Internal Audit – Prepared financial packets for the internal audit.

Quickbooks Computer – With assistance from Ferry, the old District Quickbooks computer was retired and the new laptop is now being used for Quickbooks.

County Reports – Assisted with the 3rd quarter financial report that was sent to County of Ulster.

Training – Workplace Violence and Sexual Harassment Training completed as well as a NYS Retirement Webinar.

Ongoing- mail, bank deposits, bill payments/receipts, tree & shrub assistance, bank transfers, QB bank account reconciliations, supply orders, etc.

Updates February 2024

A. Doan – Stream Project Manager

- Administration
 - SWP-101 edits and coordination w/DEP
 - Reviewed proposed wetland changes and response from CWT lawyers
 - Put together SMP partners meeting presentation with Leslie
 - Completed annual SMP partners meeting
 - Participated in SWP-101 development with DEP
 - Coordinated status and next steps for CAT494 budget modification and FY25 planning

- Stream Management Implementation Program support- SMIP
 - McKenley Hollow SRP review meeting and follow up with Leslie
 - McKenley Hollow SRP meeting with landowner and Eric H. (Shandaken highway)
 - McKenley Hollow SRP additional outreach to downstream landowner
 - Reviewed Bonnie View Ave culvert proposal from SLR

- Assessment & Monitoring
 - Bedload sampling coordination/planning w/USGS and DEP
 - Site selection review and call w/DEP and A. Lent
 - Coordination w/Allison and Mark regarding SFI equipment and new Trimble hand held
 - Reviewed guide to Catskill stream geology
 - Participated in screening of Esopus video and Q&A panel
 - Coordinated with Allison on 2023 accomplishments and 2024 plans for inclusion in SMP partners meeting presentation
 - Weekly to daily check-ins with Allison and Mark

- Projects
 - Stony Clove SRP
 - No recent activities
 - Woodland Creek SRP
 - No recent activities
 - Panther Kill SRP
 - No recent activities
 - Elk Bushkill
 - Record drawing review/coordination with A. Lent
 - Live stake review/coordination w/A. Lent
 - Pay application coordination/review
 - Site visit with Allison and Jesse to evaluate stake discrepancy
 - Hollow Tree Brook
 - Tree evaluation w/SLR for engineered log jams
 - Landowner outreach
 - Meeting with B. Smith to review plans
 - Warner Creek Site 5
 - No recent activities

Continued on back

- CSBI
 - Summit bobcat repair/coordination w/technician and B. Taylor
 - Weekly to daily check-ins with Bobby
 - Coordination w/Beecher Smith about property access in Boiceville
 - Coordinated with Bobby on 2023 accomplishments and 2024 plans for inclusion in SMP partners meeting presentation

Meetings/Site Visits

- Town of Woodstock getting to know your SMP for new highway manager
- STRP site selection meetings w/DEP
- FEMA Esopus hydrology meeting
- Stream technical training development meetings (multiple)
- NYS retirement info session
- SAFARI
- Flood Hazard Mitigation Working Group
- Progress meeting w/JW (multiple)
- Stream Ecosystem Working Group
- DEP contract meeting prep w/ SMP partners
- Drone delivery/test flight
- SAP valuation Working Group meeting
- Esopus video screening and Q&A presentation prep meeting
- SAP meeting with Towns of Olive, Shandaken, Woodstock and Hurley
- SAP/LAP meeting w/ watershed partners and DEP
- Multiple check ins w/Bobby, Allison and Mark
- Multiple check ins w/Jake
- Site visit – fill dumping in Mt. Tremper from SAFARI
- Coordination meeting with Bobby for Boiceville CSBI project
- Environmental Planner check in w/Heidi and Leslie
- Project Managers meeting
- Weekly check-in call w/ Jake (multiple over period)

Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program

- Administration
 - Continued development of SWP-101 successor contract from DEP
 - Coordinated on status and next steps with CAT494 budget modification
 - All staff participating in development of 2024 technical field training: will be a two-day event to introduce attendees to fluvial geomorphology concepts and improve river observation skills
 - Participating in watershed partner discussion over DEP LAP and SAP programs
 - Participating in SAP working group focused on stewardship options for properties acquired under new program
 - Progressing computer upgrades

- Assessment & Monitoring
 - Began evaluation of site selection data and meeting with DEP to identify next stream restoration project for 2025
 - Continued data processing of 2023 field data related to collaborative project with USGS
 - Participated in Stream Ecosystem Working Group meeting to updated Research Assessment and Monitoring strategy
 - Received and tested UAV system and began planning for inclusion in 2024 field schedule

- Projects
 - Stony Clove SRP
 - No recent action

 - Warner Creek SRP
 - No recent action

 - Panther Kill SRP
 - No recent action

 - Elk Bushkill
 - Stormwater inspections on-going: alternating monthly between Allison and Travis
 - Processed revised pay application #1
 - Met with contractor to evaluate willow quantity and reconcile disputed amount

 - Woodland SRP
 - Invasive treatment planned for 2024

 - Hollow Tree Brook SRP
 - Coordinating with landowners on access
 - Completed tree evaluation with SLR
 - Coordinated/completed additional tree evaluation with DEP forester

- SMIP Projects Supported by UCSWCD
 - McKenley Hollow – reviewed proposed alternatives and met with landowner to evaluate plans
 - Bridge Street Bridge – Town of Shandaken submitted proposal for evaluation of Stony Clove and Main Street Bridge which will inform this design
 - Bostock Rd/Red Maple Culverts – Olive grant application accepted for funder and follow up completed.
 - Met with FEMA to evaluate issues with Esopus hydrology

- CSBI
 - Met w/Town of Olive to review/plan for Boiceville CSBI sites and progress project
 - Coordinating with herbicide applicator on treatment plan for JKW and mugwort
 - Planning for 2024 season
 - Reviewed Emerson interpretive walk sign panels

New York State Soil & Water Conservation Committee
Region 5 Report – February 2024
Submitted by: Ben Luskin – Region 5 Associate Environmental Analyst

NYS SWCC News

2023 State Aid to Districts – DUE 2/15: All 2023 annual reporting documents (State Aid, Treasurers Report, Annual Report, etc.) are now available on the SWCC SharePoint <https://nysemail.sharepoint.com>, under Resources for Districts – State Aid to Districts. All reports are due to the State Committee by **February 15, 2024**. Please contact ben.luskin@agriculture.ny.gov or your Regional AEA with any questions.

Payments and Blackout Period: We are approaching the Blackout Period for Fiscal Year 2023-2024. To have payments processed in a timely manner this winter/early spring, please email Claims for Payment (CFPs), the State Committee Coversheet, and any other required program reports by **Friday, February 23rd, 2024**, to the appropriate State Committee program manager and Maureen Irish (Maureen.irish@agriculture.ny.gov) Once the claim is approved by the program manager, they'll send an email with instructions for submittal to the Business Service Center. Please remember to only submit claims for payment for contracts that have been fully executed. Additionally, please note that this does not apply to State Aid to Districts/Performance Measure payments as those are processed separately. If you have any questions, please contact Maureen Irish or your Regional AEA.

AEM Base Program - Options for AEM Base Round 17 Payments: A reminder that the Final Report/Close Out package for Round 17 of the AEM Base Program is due to the State Committee by **February 29th, 2024**, (please upload files to your District's AEM17 folder on SharePoint and email your Regional AEA and Greg Albrecht once uploaded). AEM17 close out packages and their CFPs won't likely be paid until after the Blackout Period if sent after February 23rd (depending on the number of Districts submitting and needs for report updates). While it varies, that could mean delays in payments until July 2024.

Any District that would prefer a portion of their reimbursements made this winter/early spring could submit an AEM17 interim report and CFP to reimburse for technical assistance hours and testing services and/or a CFP for a 90% project payment (unless they've already been sent to us for all Tier 4 projects) for work performed during the AEM17 contract period (January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2023). Both are simpler reporting efforts/packages than the entire close out and can be reviewed, updated if needed, and approved for payment if sent by February 23rd.

Districts choosing this approach would then submit their AEM17 final report / close out package by February 29th with a final CFP that reflects all the prior amounts requested (including any interim report or project payment CFPs described, above). Please contact greg.albrecht@agriculture.ny.gov or your Regional AEA with any questions.

State Programs Advisory Committee Meeting: Please save the morning of **February 20th, 2024**, for the next meeting of the State Programs Advisory Committee (SPAC). This meeting will take place via Webex from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Further details and an agenda for this meeting will be sent out shortly. Questions can be directed to Bethany Bzduch (Bethany.bzduch@agriculture.ny.gov) or your Regional AEA.

February SWCC Meeting: The next SWCC meeting is scheduled to convene at **10:00 AM on February 27th**. Further details and an agenda for this meeting will be sent out shortly. **Reminder – participation at a SWCC meeting is eligible toward PM1, Part C of State Aid to Districts.**

District Operations Sub-Committee: The SWCC will be re-establishing the District Operations Sub-Committee to engage with SWCD partners on all matters relating to District Operations. We are tentatively planning to hold a meeting in April 2024 to start working on updating the District Operations Manual. As we prepare for an April meeting, we first need to develop a list of SWCD representatives. Ideally, we are hoping to find at least two SWCD representatives per CDEA Division that are willing to participate on this committee, so all regions of the State can be represented. Any interested candidate can reach out to Victor DiGiacomo (victor.digiacomio@agriculture.ny.gov) and Ben Luskin (ben.luskin@agriculture.ny.gov) by **March 1, 2024**.

AEM Leopold Conservation Award 2024: NYSAGM is partnering once again with the Sand County Foundation to present the AEM Leopold Conservation Award to recognize landowners who inspire others with their dedication to ethical land, water, and wildlife habitat management on agricultural land. New York's award recipient will be presented with the \$10,000 award provided by the Sand County Foundation, in partnership with the Department, American Farmland Trust, and Cornell Cooperative Extension. Formal announcements and application materials will be emailed to Districts the first week of February 2024. The deadline for applications is **May 15th, 2024**.

Tools and References Wiki Update: The Tools and References Wiki has just been updated for 2024. This is a useful resource for new employees to learn about resources used in New York State conservation planning and design and related fields. Check it out! <https://www.nyscdea.com/useful-resources/>

Statewide E-mail Distribution: The SWCC maintains separate e-mail distribution lists that are used to distribute information and notices to SWCDs, NYS SWCC Voting and Advisory Members, and other SWCC partners. If you would like an e-mail to be distributed, please send your request to Melissa Gordon (melissa.gordon@agriculture.ny.gov). In your request, please be sure to specify who the intended audience should be, and we will get it sent out to the correct distribution list.

New York State Grants Management Transition: New York State (NYS) has transitioned grants management activities that were previously performed in the Grants Gateway to the Statewide Financial System (SFS). SFS is NYS government's accounting and financial management system used to manage contracts and payments. Beginning January 2024, Grants Gateway will cease operations and entities with grant agreements must use the SFS Vendor Portal to perform business functions for grant programs. Grantees doing business with NYS will access SFS through the SFS Vendor Portal, <https://www.sfs.ny.gov/>. Training materials, including videos and step-by-step instructions for various topics on grants management-related tasks in SFS, are available within the SFS Vendor Portal. For questions or assistance using SFS, contact the SFS Help Desk at helpdesk@sfs.ny.gov.

2024 NCDEA Don Aron Scholarship Announcement: If you're thinking about expanding your knowledge and professional growth with college/university classes, here's a great opportunity for you. The NCDEA Don Aron Scholarship Award application is open to any conservation district employee or their immediate family member, along with a few other eligibility requirements. Applicants may request up to \$1,000 in assistance. Applications must submit all required documents to be eligible for review along with active/accessible contact information. Deadline to apply is **March 15th, 2024**. <https://www.ncdea.us/dascholarship>

Other Events

Webinar: Effectiveness of Nutrient Management for Reducing Nutrient Losses from Agricultural Fields: The US EPA Water Research Webinar Series will host a webinar to discuss two investigations focused on nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) and emphasizes the need for government agencies to work together to address potential economic losses due to implementation of lower fertilizer rates for water quality improvement. **February 28th, 2024 02:00 PM**
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_u_pA8zrgTPihqh7T-FWWpw#/registration

Other Funding

SOGL 2024 Funding Opportunity: The Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) program is soliciting proposals to benefit fish, wildlife, habitat, and water quality in the Great Lakes basin. The program will award up to \$10.6 million in grants in 2024 to improve and enhance: 1) stream, riparian and coastal habitats to benefit species; 2) water quality in the Great Lakes and its tributaries. Details about this funding opportunity are provided in the Request for Proposals. The submission deadline for **pre-proposals** is **February 14th, 2024**. <https://www.nfwf.org/programs/sustain-our-great-lakes-program/sustain-our-great-lakes-request-proposals-2024>