



**White River
Natural
Resources
Conservation
District**

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White River NRC D Board of Supervisors Meeting

April 16, 2026, 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM

@ VT State University Randolph

Admin Conference Room 226

Or Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86509983898?pwd=TZPloJaFDVlasac2CNXpcqDQ8vGgix.1>

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Attendees: Kate Willard, Alvina Harvey, Pat Richardson, Jaiel Pulskamp, Sabra Ewing, Jennifer Byrne, Anna Hubbard, Didi Pershouse, Karen Ganey, Olivia Carlson, Emma Scott, Spencer Billings, David Blodgett

Welcome

- The meeting was called to order at 12:00 PM. Alvina Harvey welcomed attendees and opened the meeting.

Approval of Minutes

- The Board reviewed the January, February 10, February 11, and March meeting minutes.

Motion: Approve [January](#), [February 10](#), [February 11](#), [March Minutes](#)

Outcome: Approved unanimously.

Financials with Pat Richardson

Pat Richardson presented the financial report and budget updates.

- Some conservation districts are being charged lower workers' compensation rates for district managers.
- Current workers' compensation classifications through VLOCT categorize district managers similarly to police personnel, increasing costs.
- Contractors working with the District must certify that they carry their own insurance coverage.
- Prepaid expenses include website costs and nursery-related expenses.
- Farm equipment depreciation will occur over a seven-year schedule.

- Discussion occurred regarding whether conservation district employees could qualify under state workers' compensation rates.
- Jennifer Byrne cited a 1983–1984 statute that established conservation districts as state agencies for workers' compensation purposes.
- Claire Ireland is researching the current state workers' compensation rates for conservation district employees.

IRA Plans

The Board discussed retirement plan compliance requirements.

- The District is required to provide a qualified Simple IRA retirement plan.
- Employees had previously been enrolled in Roth IRA accounts, which functioned as savings accounts rather than qualified retirement plans.
- The Roth IRA accounts will be canceled and replaced with a qualified SIMPLE IRA.
- Employer matching contributions will occur quarterly.
- All employees are eligible, and associated costs must be included in future budgets.
- Since the account is new, enrollment does not need to wait for open enrollment periods.

Action Item

- Alvina Harvey signed paperwork. Pat will finalize and submit Fidelity paperwork and enroll eligible employees.

NRCS Updates

NRCS staff Dave and Olivia Carlson provided program updates.

Program Updates

- Four forestry plans have been submitted.
- CSP ranking deadline is May 8, 2026.
- Internal ranking sessions will be conducted collaboratively.
- Certified Conservation Planner Level 2 planners may complete their own plans through CPA-52 authorization.
- Dave was introduced as the North Zone Manager.
- Olivia Carlson was introduced as the South Zone Manager.

Discussion

- NRCS staff currently review and rank applications internally.
- Historically, conservation district supervisors reviewed and signed off on rankings.
- Grant information is not public until contracts are finalized.
- Public information includes recipient names and grant amounts after signing.

- Contract discussions involving individual applicants must occur in executive session.
- Conservation plans still contain signature lines for conservation districts.
- Board members expressed interest in becoming more involved in reviewing conservation plans, particularly CREP plans.
- Discussion emphasized holistic conservation planning and raised concerns about the heavy reliance on glyphosate herbicides and chemical-based conservation practices.
- Members questioned whether conservation funding could prioritize lower-cost ecological practices rather than expensive chemical-based projects.
- Concerns were raised about herbicide desiccation of cover crops and large-scale invasive-species spraying programs.

District Updates

[VLS Research Memo into Conservation District Easements](#)

- Emma Scott and Spencer Billings presented research regarding conservation district easements and associated legal considerations.
- Easement liability and enforcement considerations
- Potential startup and administrative costs
- Existing district easements, including Newbury and Kenna Farm easements
- Long-term governance implications

[VSU Update](#)

- **[Inquiry Letter to VTSU from White River NRCD](#)**
- Jennifer Byrne discussed ongoing conversations with Vermont State University regarding:
 - Langiman House retrofit opportunities
 - Red Schoolhouse
 - Orchard property
 - Farm property opportunities

Envirothon and Tree Program Updates

USVI Envirothon

- [USVI Envirothon](#) May 8th on St. Croix
- Anyone can attend
- The USVI Envirothon will occur on May 8 on St. Croix.
- Board members and the public may attend at their own expense.
- Additional fundraising is needed to support participation in the international competition in Mississippi.

Tree Program

- Free tree distribution and tree sale dates were reviewed.
- Approximately 6,000 free trees will be distributed to 15–25 farms.

Tree Sale Dates

- [Free Tree Planting / Tree Sale Dates](#)
- Norwich UU – May 3
- Royalton – May 9
- Additional sale planned for May 30
- The District will distribute “Char-Rock,” a soil amendment blend containing: Vermont “Black Lime”, Hardwood-sourced biochar, calcium/magnesium silicates, micronutrients, and elemental carbon. The potential carbon sequestration benefits of silicate rock dust applications were included.
- There are nuances and unknowns with the claims of high levels of carbon sequestration by the application of silicate-based rock dust minerals worldwide; this article covers the ranges with digestible degrees of detail:
https://www.newscientist.com/article/2517484-spreading-crushed-rock-on-farms-could-absorb-1-billion-tonnes-of-co2/?utm_source=nstee&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NSTEE_310326&utm_term=Newsletter%20NSTEE_The%20Earth%20Edition

Technical Service Provider (TSP) Update

- TSP ethics concerns were resolved.
- NRCS is revising the Memorandum of Understanding language regarding TSP participation.
- [TSP Ethics Issue Resolved](#)
 - Need to sign a new MOU with changed language

Internship Program

The Board reviewed the District's 2026 internship opportunities.

[White River NRCD Internships](#)

Reports

- WR NRCD Holistic Context

The Board reviewed the draft Holistic Context framework and discussed formalizing the District vision and planning process.

Action Item

- Board members will review three draft visioning options before the next meeting.
 - Formalize Vision & Holistic Context
 - [Holistic Context – White River NRCD draft](#)
 - Over the next month, review the three options for the summary

Reports Due

- **Local Working Group (LWG) Report due May 15**
- LWG Report due May 15
 - [Conservation Action Plan](#)
- VAWQP Report
- [Conservation Plan Report](#)

Potential VT Digger Article

- [Potential VTDigger Article on PFP](#)

Jennifer Byrne discussed a draft article regarding Vermont's Pay-for-Performance phosphorus program.

Discussion Highlights

- Concerns were raised that public stakeholder recommendations were ignored in funding decisions.
- Members questioned whether current phosphorus reduction programs adequately support holistic conservation goals.
- Concerns focused on large-scale corn production and chemical-intensive practices.

Public Banking Initiative

The Board discussed continued coalition building around public banking initiatives.

Proposed August Event Speakers

- Bank of North Dakota President Don Morgan
- Harvard Law School professor Christine Desan
- State Representative Esme Cole

Funding Opportunities

- Long Island Sound Futures Fund (LISFF) - Due May 19th
 - [White River Headwaters Project – LISFF Opportunity Summary](#)
- [Sanders CDS WFPO](#)
 - [SandersCDS2026.pdf](#)
- Private Funding
 - Cotyledon
 - [Canaday](#)
 - May 6th due date

AGCWIP Funding Concerns

- [AgCWIP funding updates](#)

The Board discussed concerns regarding:

- Unequal funding distribution among districts

- Lack of organizational coordination
- Some districts received substantial increases, while others received reductions
- The role of NRCC and AAFM in allocation decisions

Discussion Points

- Desire for baseline funding equity among districts
- Need for transparent and collaborative budgeting processes
- Concerns regarding VACD budget authority and communication

Action Item

- Draft a formal letter to NRCC requesting a more equitable and collaborative funding allocation process.

NRCC and VACD updates

- NRCC Website is live! <https://conservation.vermont.gov/>
 - Identified as a high priority by our District for many years, most recently in [our District's Policy Recommendations from 2024](#)
- Kate Willard appointed to NRCC for the Central Supervisory Union
- VACD Lobbying:
 - VACD removed our District Manager from their lobbyist's email list
 - Mortgage Restriction Language is likely to be removed from our statute this year ([Pulled from our District's Policy Recommendations from 2024](#))
 - VACD is advocating in the legislature for \$250k for a building for Orleans NRCD; they did not do a survey of all Districts' capital needs, nor offer to advocate for other Districts' buildings this year
 - The Districts' full \$912,000 ask is included in the Senate Ag Budget

Next Board Meeting Scheduled:

May 21, 2026 12

Adgered at 2:42

Tour VTSU Randolph Properties