



**White River  
Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
District**

28 Farmvu Drive  
White River Junction, VT 05001  
www.whiterivernrcd.org  
whiterivernrcd@gmail.com  
(802) 369-3167

**Board of Supervisors Meeting  
June 12, 2024 8:30AM 10:00AM  
Join Zoom Meeting**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85179660790?pwd=b0o25dpARkFKYkZkGHpMoOM89yAfKa.1>

**+1 309 205 3325**

**Meeting ID: 851 7966 0790**

**Passcode: 028862**

Date: June 12, 2024

Time: 8:30 AM - 10:00 AM

**Attendees:** Alvina Harvey, Karl Thidemann, Jennifer Byrne, Jaiel Pulskamp, Niko Horster, Kate Willard, Didi Pershouse, Jill Arace, Linda Corse, Megan Fuerst, Phyllicia Moore

- [April](#) and [May](#) meeting minutes
- Program Updates
  - [84th Birthday Celebration TODAY 4-7PM](#)
    - [White River NRCC Confirmation Letter 1940.pdf](#)
- **Event Details:** The 84th Birthday Celebration of the White River NRCC is scheduled for today from 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM on the South Road in Green. The event commemorates the signing of the District into existence on June 12, 1940.
- **Activities:**
  - A giant tent is available on the green for the celebration, borrowed from a recent graduation event.
  - The NRCS Rainfall Simulator will be demonstrated.
  - Various soil stations will be set up, offering free lead soil tests.
  - Collaboration with the law school to facilitate soil tests around town.
  - Cake and music will be provided.
- **Attendance:** Alvina will attend the beginning of the event. A TV crew from Jam Junction Arts and Media (formerly CA TV) will film for a documentary. Representatives from the Forest Cemetery and Green Burial Cemetery will also attend with informational tables.



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### Climate Corps / Farm Force

- **Progress:** The Climate Corps initiative, also known as Farm Force, is moving forward with 12 members in Vermont and 11 members in the Virgin Islands. The program aims to become certified conservation planners through Ag Learn, an online federal training program.
- **Funding:** The budget has been doubled from the original proposal.
- **Start Date:** August 15, 2024.
- **Boot Camp:** Scheduled for September 10-18, 2024. Locations and housing are being secured.

### Regeneration Corps Merger

- [2023 Impact Report](#)
- **Background:** Regeneration Corps, a program focused on soil health, regenerative agriculture, and education from elementary to high school levels, is interested in merging with White River NRCC.
- **Staffing:** Karen Gainey, the only paid staff member, seeks full-time employment security.
- **Funding:** Regeneration Corps has funding through December, which may stretch further due to fewer paid staff members.
- **Potential Benefits:** The merger aligns well with existing grant money for education and would integrate well with Climate Corps/Farm Force training. Karen's expertise in education would be valuable.
- **Next Steps:** Further exploration of the merger. It is suggested to invite Karen and other key members to the next board meeting for a detailed discussion.

### Tree Nurseries

- **Donation:** 10 air pruning beds were donated by Yellow Bud Farm, along with numerous chestnut trees. Willie and Bruce will pick them up on Friday.
- **Distribution:** The beds will be temporarily housed at Willie's property. Six will remain with White River NRCC, while four will go to Bennington.
- **Planting:** Recently planted 220 persimmons, 60 yellow bud hickories, around 1,000 chestnuts, and 16 honey locusts, all thriving after recent rains.

### Mapping Hickories Project



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- **Partnership:** Collaboration with New Hampshire districts, another Vermont district, and Massachusetts to map yellow bud hickories across New England.
- **Goal:** Identify high-priority areas for harvesting and approach landowners for collaboration.
- **Legal Assistance:** A meeting with Fran Miller from Vermont Law School will take place to discuss legal assistance for drawing up lease agreements and easements.

### Staff Reviews & FY25 Budget

- **Training Coordination:** Extensive training coordination for staff, inviting other districts to participate.
- **Hiring:** An NACD grant was received to hire a part-time engineer shared with Windham and Bennington County Districts. This engineer will assist with light engineering work and train others in these practices.
- **Interviews:** The board is invited to participate in interviews for the new engineer position.

### Workshops

- **Dirt and Democracy Series:** The series kicked off on Sunday. The next session will be in two weeks, focusing on consensus.
- **Upcoming Workshops:** Dee Dee's next workshop is on July 12, with potential online sessions beforehand. Dates will be circulated soon.

### Next All-Hands Meeting

- **Date:** June 21, 2024.

### Advocacy Updates and Discussion

- [White River NRCD District Manager Advocacy Record 2020-2024](#)

### Didi:

- Encouraged participants to consider their role in advocacy, their relationship with VACD and Action Circles, and their current position.



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- Emphasized the need to listen and understand each other's perspectives to address misunderstandings.
- Prompted participants to share their thoughts on the current state of advocacy, testimony, and recent developments using "I" statements.

**Kate:**

- Expressed being relatively new to the topic and astonishment at the presented relationships between different organizations.
- Emphasized the need for cooperation and constructive interaction, suggesting mutual goals could be achieved through compromise.
- Acknowledged different districts may have varied perspectives and goals, stressing the importance of considering the broader context.
- Requested Meg share the outline she's working from and email it to the board for review.

**Alvina:**

- Shared her long-term involvement with the district and her dedication to improving conditions for farmers, soils, and Vermont through the Land Care Congress.
- Expressed interest in using the model of the Land Care Congress to help guide the work of the districts

**Linda:**

- Mentioned significant growth and reorganization within VACD, focusing on increasing supervisor participation.
- Noted some delays in the Governance Committee due to differing opinions on the role of Action Circles.
- Highlighted the need for policies and procedures and proper advocacy procedures for representing conservation districts.

**Niko:**

- Expressed concern about non-compliant behavior and procedures within the organization.
- Emphasized the importance of aligning business conduct with statutes and bylaws and achieving consensus among supervisors and boards.



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- Stressed the need for a well-considered process rather than external dictates from the Legislative Council and the legislature.

**Jill:**

- Highlighted the importance of focusing on key issues for legislative strategy and increasing funding for conservation districts.
- Emphasized the need for greater awareness of association advocacy and relevant training.
- Expressed belief that the effectiveness of the campaign strategy is the primary issue, not the action circles contract.
- Welcomed increased board supervisor participation and support for further involvement in committees.

**Jen:**

- Stressed the importance of focusing on strategy rather than simply hiring a lobbyist for advocacy efforts.
- Highlighted the significance of holistic approaches, such as engaging with the governor's budget and activating agency representatives.
- Shared a link containing written comments received after her testimony, emphasizing the need for a broader approach beyond solely increasing the bottom line.

**Carl:**

- Expressed discomfort with the use of the word "disinformation" in a letter from the Winooski NRCD.
- Emphasized the importance of presenting different viewpoints and discussing information rather than labeling individuals.
- Preferred a more specific and transparent approach to information sharing and policy discussions.

**Didi:**

- Expressed concern about the lack of democratic discussion and productive ways of handling information during a VACD board meeting.
- Highlighted the need for better ways to handle difficult conversations and previous experiences from the PES working group.



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- Emphasized the importance of addressing conflicts and potential outcomes of not resolving situations effectively.

**Discussion: Worst Possible Outcomes**

- Participants were asked to explicitly identify the worst possible outcomes before discussing the best possible outcomes.
- Concerns included the potential negative impact of not resolving issues, eroding democratic processes due to a focus on money in politics, and the risk of districts falling apart and losing progress.

**Linda:**

- Concern about statutory restrictions on district lobbying.
- District representatives can inform but not lobby at the State House.
- It is important to present a united front through the state association.
- Aim to prevent districts from falling apart and to continue building capacity together.
- Acknowledgment of potential disagreements.
- Emphasis on finding a way to move forward collectively.

**Kate:**

- Emphasized the potential negative consequences of districts operating independently rather than collaboratively.
- Working together under a unified leadership brings strength and greater effectiveness, even if it requires compromise.

**Niko:**

- Expressed concerns about manipulative and controlling actions taken by various parties in pursuit of financing goals.
- Emphasized the importance of protecting the environment and ensuring lobbying for funds does not marginalize the voices of constituents and district representatives.
- Feared that failure to resolve these issues may result in a loss of political agency.
- Expressed frustration about the lack of unity and collaboration among districts in the small state.
- Emphasized the importance of working together to seize current opportunities and build up the council as a recognized governmental organization.



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- Feared that without unity, districts would miss the opportunity to achieve their goals and function as disconnected nonprofits.

**Jill:**

- Noted that we are a small state.
- Expressed concern about the lack of unity and cooperation among districts.
- Emphasized the importance of working together to seize opportunities.
- Highlighted the need to build up the council as a recognized and effective governmental organization.
- Conveyed fear that failure to come together would result in missed opportunities.
- Warned that lack of unity could lead to a diminished role for the council.

**Meg :**

- Stressed the importance of messaging in the company's strategy.
- Emphasized not speaking on behalf of clients.
- Utilizes a comprehensive current story analysis to develop client-originated messaging.
- Gathers feedback on existing media coverage.
- Uses client input to create message frames and talking points.
- Ensures these are reviewed by clients.
- Highlighted the need for agreement on messaging when communicating with legislators at the State House.
- Warned against conflicting messages to avoid loss of power.
- Objective is to ensure unified messages about agreed-upon points.
- Advised against publicly sharing dissenting views to maintain power.

**Niko:**

- Expressed an understanding for Action Circle's strategic process but did not fully support its working principle.
- Raised questions about how to take direct action in urgent situations and address concerns in front of the legislature.
- Expressed concerns about potential government corruption and questioned means for individual representatives to address this within the Action Circles model.

**Kate:**



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- Cited the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition as an example.
- Noted the coalition's success despite competing goals of affordable housing and conservation.
- Highlighted the mutual non-attack agreement between housing and conservation organizations as a strength.
- Suggested that district differences are not as diverse and should allow for a united front.
- Recommended following the coalition's model for success.
- Mentioned a long association with various organizations and recent discussions to gather feedback.
- Expressed concern over the perception of Jennifer's testimony.
- Noted that it gave an impression of nefarious motives among the organizations mentioned.
- Stressed the importance of avoiding such damaging comments in the legislature.
- Emphasized the need to be cautious with personal opinions and ethical judgments in legislative discussions.
- Agreed that maintaining careful and united messaging is crucial, aligning with Meg's points.

**Jen:**

- Highlighted the need for a broader conversation about nefarious activities, particularly global corporate land grabs in Vermont.

**Didi:**

- Advocated for both individual district perspectives and unified action on key issues.
- Highlighted concerns from the Payment for Ecosystem Services group.
- Specifically mentioned crossovers between conservation and finance, and carbon markets.
- Raised questions about Vermont land management and the definition of conservation.
- Expressed hope for ongoing exploration of these issues.
- Emphasized advocacy for funding and ensuring funds reach districts directly.
- Acknowledged the districts' potential role in advancing ecosystems and communities.
- Appreciated efforts by Meg, Joe, Linda, and others in legislative advocacy.
- Stressed the importance of maintaining firm boundaries despite potential funding implications.
- Suggested building consensus among districts before proceeding further.





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- Urged urgency in response to the fast-moving pace of other groups.

**Linda:**

- Sought to convey discussions and initiatives related to sharing thoughts with the legislature on behalf of districts.
- Aimed to establish a resolution process with VACD to influence advocacy work conducted by NACD in Washington.

**Discussion: Best Possible Outcomes**

**Alvina:**

- Encouraged looking at the Land Care Congress as a model for better agriculture and communities.
- Emphasized skepticism about carbon credits as a solution.

**Meg:**

- Highlighted the importance of consensus in achieving goals and following a strategic approach.
- Emphasized support for the work of others and the upcoming decision to renew a contract following the action circles strategy.

**Jill:**

- Focused on achieving positive environmental outcomes in a thriving working landscape.
- Emphasized the need for conservation districts to have adequate funding and staffing, clear communication, and board approval for any district messaging.
- Discussed the lengthy process of raising concerns and proposing resolutions within the Governance Committee and training efforts of action circles.

**Other Discussion**

- Multiple speakers expressed support for Jennifer, noting she was acting within the boundaries of what was asked of her.



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- Acknowledged Jennifer's effective speech and expressed disappointment with the response from other districts.
- Emphasized Jennifer's right to speak and added their support for her.

**Action Steps:**

- Another meeting will be scheduled to discuss the issues that come up during the meeting.
- The next meeting won't be scheduled until the end of September.

**Close**

- Alvina made a motion to adjourn the meeting
- All voted in favor

The meeting adjourned at 10:30