



**White River
Natural
Resources
Conservation
District**

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White River Junction, VT 05001
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**White River NRC D Board of Supervisors Meeting
February 11, 2026, 10 am - 3 pm
Hybrid**

DRAFT Board Meeting Minutes

☰ Holistic Context – White River NRC D draft Working Document holistic context, quality-of-life, and resource-based statements

Attendees:

Jennifer Byrne; Didi Pershouse; Willie Gibson; Abe Collins; Sabra Ewing; Michael Fernandez; Lauren Weston; Anna Hubbard; Kate Willard; Karen Ganey; Lyle Nicholes; Henry Harris; Jaiel Pulskamp; Alvina Risinger-Harvey, Bruce Howlett

Meeting Purpose

To establish a **holistic management context** for the District that will guide decision-making, define a shared **vision and mission**, and align board and staff actions with long-term community and land stewardship goals.

Key Discussions

1. Establishing Holistic Context

- Jennifer Byrne opened by emphasizing the need for a **clear management context** to guide all future policy and decisions.
- The District currently lacks a formal **vision and mission statement**, and this process is intended to develop both.
- The holistic context will serve as a **decision-making filter**, ensuring alignment with long-term goals and addressing root causes rather than symptoms.

2. Role of AI and Data

- Discussion on the use of **AI tools** to:
 - Support consensus-building
 - Process community input and data



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- Capture authentic language from participants
- Emphasis was placed on maintaining the **human element** while leveraging technology.

3. Introductions and Board Alignment

- Participants shared expectations, highlighting:
 - Desire for a **collective purpose**
 - Importance of **in-person engagement** for trust and cohesion
 - Interest in clearer alignment across board members

4. Holistic Management Framework

- Abe Collins introduced **holistic management principles**, including:
 - Defining the “whole” (people, land, economy)
 - Understanding **social, ecological, and economic systems**
 - Tools such as **planned grazing** and land-use planning
- Discussion included scaling these approaches to **watershed-level management**.

5. Decision-Making and Governance

- The group explored **holistic decision-making**, focusing on:
 - Identifying weak links in systems
 - Iterative and adaptive processes
 - Importance of **trust, reciprocity, and community participation**
- Examples included applications to farms, community systems, and district-wide planning.

6. Best and Worst Outcomes Analysis

- Participants identified potential **worst-case scenarios**, including:
 - Declining human and ecosystem health
 - Loss of local decision-making power
 - Workforce skill gaps and social inequities
 - Over-reliance on external funding and top-down control
- **Best-case outcomes** included:
 - Strong local governance and community engagement
 - Improved soil health and reduced flood impacts
 - Thriving local food and fiber systems
 - Resilient, circular local economies
 - Inclusive, democratic participation and partnerships



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7. Beliefs and Behaviors for Success

- Key values identified:
 - Local self-determination
 - Stewardship of public lands for public good
 - Lifelong learning and technical skill-building
 - Collaboration, trust, and resilience
 - Commitment to **holistic land management practices**

8. Vision, Purpose, and Quality of Life

- The group emphasized creating:
 - A **Statement of Purpose**
 - A **Quality of Life statement**
 - A **Future Resource Base statement**
- These should reflect **authentic language**, emotional resonance, and full group buy-in.
- AI may assist in drafting, but outputs must remain grounded in participant input.

9. Process Reflections

- Positive feedback on the **circle process**, including its roots in the Vermont Abenaki model of governance.
- Recognition of the need to balance **discussion with practical, hands-on action**.
- Strong agreement on the importance of a **shared vision** moving forward.

Decisions / Agreements

- Proceed with developing a **holistic context framework** for the District.
- Use AI to support drafting while preserving participant voice.
- Commit to refining a shared **vision, mission, and quality-of-life statements**.
- Align the **Conservation Action Plan** with holistic management principles.

Action Items

From Session 1:

- Email presentation slides and materials to participants

From Session 2:



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- Jennifer Byrne to:
 - Draft and distribute summarized meeting notes (~4 pages).
 - Develop **holistic context, quality-of-life, and resource-based statements**.
 - Compile notes from the session.
- Coordinate a **recurring meeting schedule** (proposed: every two months).
- Organize an **in-person social gathering** for continued relationship-building.

Next Steps

- Review and refine drafted **holistic context and vision statements**.
- Integrate outputs into the **Conservation Action Plan**.
- Continue building alignment through regular meetings and collaborative processes.

Adjournment

 Holistic Context – White River NRCD draft Working Draft **holistic context, quality-of-life, and resource-based statements**