

Natural Resources Conservation & Development Board
Meeting Minutes
Saturday, October 20, 2012 at 1:00 p.m.

This meeting was held at the Embassy Suites hotel in Anchorage and by teleconference.

Board members in attendance:

George Woodbury
Cheryl Thompson
Carol Kenley
Bernie Karl
Al Poindexter

Others in attendance:

Shana Joy, Executive Director, NRCDB
Ed Fogels, DNR Deputy Commissioner
Ken Marsh, AACD/ Upper Su SWCD
Chris Flickinger, Kodiak SWCD
Joni Scharfenberg, Fairbanks SWCD

Kerry MacLane, Southeast SWCD
Heidi Chay, Kenai SWCD
Joan Hope, AACD
Ryan Stencel, Anchorage SWCD
Bret Burroughs, Anchorage SWCD

1. Call to Order – Determination of Quorum

It was determined that a quorum was present and the meeting was called to order by George Woodbury at 1:07 p.m.

2. Approval of Agenda

Shana added two agenda items: a letter from AACD to be added under item 5 on the agenda, Joni Scharfenberg would like to address the board before she has to leave to catch her flight - following item 3 on the agenda, and a proposed FFA resolution - following item 8 on the agenda. Al requested that in the future, reports and action items be separated out and also old and new business be listed appropriately as well. **Bernie moved to approve the agenda as amended; Carol seconded the motion. The motion passed.**

1. Approval of August 15th, 2012 Meeting Minutes

Bernie moved to approve the minutes as presented; Carol seconded the motion. The motion passed.

2. Joni Scharfenberg addressed the board:

She apologized for the lateness of the FY13 annual work plan which has now been submitted and the FY12 annual report is almost complete. Her district has been struggling these past few months but she is getting caught up. Joni provided a few maps of a proposed expansion for the Fairbanks district – an agenda item for the next NRCDB meeting. Al asked how many acres the Fairbanks SWCD is looking to add to their district – Joni replied that she doesn't have that information off hand but they are looking at a watershed approach and including communities they are already working in.

3. Executive Director Report

Agricultural Research Station closure: Shana reported on what she had learned so far regarding the closure of ARS. A recent informative article was provided and she reported that comments on the closure were provided to the Commissioner's office by the Division of Agriculture but she could not locate any letters that originated from the Commissioner's office on the topic. The closure of Alaska's ARS does not make sense; every other state in the U.S. still has an operating research station and many states have several stations. The research that was conducted in Alaska was unique to our conditions and valuable in the face of climate change.

Cheryl offered that she had spoken with Steve Seefeldt, a former researcher at the ARS, said that the station was very expensive to run and that the closure was a budget decision. Research that Steve had started before the closure has not been finished – herbicide break-down in the soil.

Ed Fogels commented as well. There was a lot of discussion with the Governor's office and Congressional delegation about the closure, in opposition to it. The research gap left behind has been acknowledged and 2 horticulture positions were added to the Division of Agriculture to help fill some needs. Increasing the research capabilities of the Plant Materials Center may also help. It was thought that approximately 12 scientists had staffed the ARS with about a \$25 million budget. That hole must be filled – perhaps by beefing up the university – but it is not clear at this point how it will be filled.

Bernie commented that Senator Stevens would not have allowed the ARS closure and that there are more likely to come. He agrees that the university will likely have to fill the research gap and that the state should stop taking federal dollars, and get the remaining land due us because it's only going to get worse. He believes that we need to do something instead of just talking about it.

Al asked Ed, what can the NRCDB do? To whom should a letter be addressed? Every other state still has an intact research station, we're at the forefront of climate change, some states even still have numerous stations – a selection of stations in other states could have been closed to save that \$25 million. Ed pointed out that the NRCDB is tasked to advise the Commissioner and the Governor and that the NRCDB should keep the message out there about how critical that research was to agriculture in Alaska.

Bernie thinks a letter should go to the DNR Commissioner and the Commissioner should include \$25 million in his next year's budget. Alaska is a resource state! That money should be provided by the state and the NRCDB should help make that happen. The university should have some oversight but DNR Division of Agriculture should have control because the university's overhead is way too high, at 54%. Bernie would like Al to write the letter.

Al moved that the NRCDB should direct Shana to write the letter to the Commissioner and would also like to send a second letter of protest of the ARS to the Congressional delegation. Carol seconded for discussion.

Discussion: Bernie would like to see all the former ARS facilities turned over to DNR. Ed believes that the facilities have been turned over to the university but not the responsibilities it would seem. Jeff Smeenk (Palmer SWCD) had written a grant to do research on rhubarb which has kept the germplasm bank of rhubarb intact for now based on the research under the grant. That does not address the rest of the bank for trees, berries etc...

Al amended his motion to include that the facilities be turned over to DNR and that a pitch for an additional land grant be made in order for the state to fill the research gap without further federal support.

Discussion: Ed pointed out that where the research happens is less important than the benefits of the research itself. How is it important to the farmer? The NRCDB needs to provide input into this letter. George offered that the state might pay for the research needed if the federal government would offer more land to the state. Al asked Ed – the state has now received all but 5 million acres?

Ed clarified that the SOA entitlement is 105 million acres; all but 5 million has been received to date. This happens in two steps: land selection and tentative approval. The land has not been surveyed or patented yet but the SOA has full management authority over it and can do whatever the SOA chooses to do. There was some discrepancy regarding a comment that Bernie heard from Senator Murkowski and an amount of land still unsurveyed. Al called for the question. Shana repeated the motion as amended to the board.

The motion passed.

Shana also offered that the SWCD elections are underway for this year. The first board meeting of the Southeast SWCD was October 8th. Both she and George Woodbury attended that meeting. She is encouraged that the board members are motivated and have some great ideas to get started with. The Resource Development Council's annual conference is November 14-15th in Anchorage. If any board members are able to attend, please let Shana know before November 2nd for registration purposes.

Ed pointed out that the Alaska Miners Association convention is occurring in November as well in Anchorage and it is a great place to find out everything going in with mining in Alaska. George said the Alaska Forest Association meets in November as well.

4. AACD Report

Shana read aloud a letter received from AACD. Bernie questioned some budget conversations he heard during the AACD board meeting earlier; Ken Marsh pointed out that the Wasilla SWCD board member, whose questions Bernie referred to, had missed a few board meetings and so was not aware of information and board actions that had been conducted previously. Al asked if AACD had a dollar figure in mind. Ken replied that an exact amount had not been determined yet but an AACD budget committee had been appointed and could provide a figure and documentation to the NRCDB by the next Friday, October 26. Budget preparation is ongoing at this time with the Governor's office and departments so it is important to get a letter out right away. **Bernie moved that the board make a request to the DNR Commissioner for \$1.2 million in FY14. Cheryl seconded the motion.**

Discussion: Ed offered that the Governor's budget will be released by December 15th and there is opportunity after that to amend it. Al asked if that number was realistic. Ed replied that is hard to say – departments have been instructed to hold the line. There aren't any other department requests for \$1.2 million at this point and the conversation needs to happen that this request is for SWCDs and should not be pulled from other department budget areas. Bernie feels that it is important for the NRCDB to help DNR drive that conversation and increase the overall pie just a little bit. Shana repeated the motion.

The motion passed.

5. Fairbanks FY13 Annual Work Plan

Shana has reviewed the plan and it is complete according to the District Operations Manual. **Al moved to approve the plan. Bernie seconded the motion.**

Discussion: Al commented that Fairbanks is working on Elodea projects and so is Anchorage; he hopes that collaboration is happening to avoid duplicative efforts. Al still does not understand why the NRCDB is approving work plans; it doesn't matter. For this plan, it was submitted very late and probably most of the work has already been done. There are no consequences for doing the work or not – no follow up on the work plans. There is no purpose to this exercise. The plans are guesstimates and change throughout the year and no approvals are required there. Bernie said that plan approval is for accountability of public money; so the board knows what is going on. He further said that if they don't submit a plan in on time, the district should lose the next year's entire state funding. Fairbanks had some very extenuating circumstances this time and submitting late isn't their habit but they should have to be responsible. Shana pointed out that the NRCDB did chose to change the structure of the FY13 cooperative agreement to disperse funds at the end of the fiscal year after

reviewing district performance. George thinks that the NRCDB has an obligation to be informed of what the districts are doing and this is probably the best way to do so; it's a very important function and allows the NRCDB to try and do a credible job. Bernie still feels that withholding \$2,500 is no consequence but he is willing to see how the current fiscal year ends and review district performance.

The motion passed.

6. Upper Susitna SWCD Boundary Expansion

It is before the board to approve/disapprove of the proposed new boundaries. Shana explained the provided map. Bernie asked how many acres is the expansion area; he estimates approximately 985,600 acres from the map. Al asked why this new proposed boundary was not following watershed boundaries; Ken Marsh responded that the new boundary encompasses more of the watershed than they covered before and about as much land area as the district felt it could provide services to at this time. There are very few potential cooperators in the new area. Al asked where on the map is the Susitna-Watana hydro project location and questioned the district's motives for expanding to encompass that area. Ken Marsh responded that assisting with the project development was one reason for the district's desired expansion but not the only reason. Ken also stated that potential cooperators in the area were notified via the proper public notice procedures for the 2 meetings held by the district discussing the expansion.

Al feels that the proposed dam and its potential negative effects are the likely reason the district wants to expand and is it the district's view to oppose the dam. Ken Marsh responded that is absolutely not the case. Bernie commented that the point should be to provide services to more cooperators but with few potential cooperators in the new area; he doesn't understand the reasoning. Ken believes that some water survey work has been done by the board in the proposed area. Al asked about district capacity to do work in this much larger area? Ken pointed out that this area has been unrepresented by an organized district and that his district could expand to do the work if expansion is approved. Ken stated again that there is no desire to block the hydro project rather it was the district's desire to volunteer to assist and take on the responsibility. Bernie pointed out that the Upper Susitna district can still pursue grant projects in this area utilizing the Alaska SWCD to do so. Al referred to comments he heard the day before regarding the hydro project and its potential negative effects. Al would prefer that the district take a look at their boundaries from a watershed perspective and perhaps look to encompass the entire drainage. Al admitted that he really hasn't had enough time to really review the information provided and he'd like to take the matter up again at the next meeting. Carol applauded the Upper Su SWCD for taking up an expansion because the Alaska SWCD is no longer active and that encouraged the organized districts to expand or new districts to form to cover those areas. Carol also feels that the whole watershed should have been considered even though there aren't cooperators now in that area. Cheryl agrees with Carol and asked if there were any roads in the proposed area. The Parks Highways is there and more roads will go in with project construction of course. Shana will work with the DNR cartographers for a better map of the proposed expansion and more information. George would like a better explanation of what the district might be able to do to enhance the hydro project or protect against harm rather than focus on impacts only.

Al moved to postpone boundary expansion of the Upper Susitna SWCD to the next meeting. Bernie seconded. The motion passed.

7. Statute Working Group Report

Shana provided an update. A SWG meeting was held yesterday and it was productive, focused on the other identified issues besides receiving/spending money. The Governor's office tentatively approved serious drafting of a new statute by the Dept. of Law but a draft is not available yet. A new idea arose that is defining a 'quasi-state agency' as a soil and water conservation district and/or looking at districts as a form of local governmental entity as they are referred to in the Roosevelt model law. Another idea was looking at creating a foundation in conjunction with AACD to help with money flow.

Al is extremely frustrated with the Dept. of Law and he does not think they are serving the NRCDB in the best interests of the state. **Al moves to recall or cancel the rewrite project if we have not received a proposed draft from Law by the next meeting date. Carol seconded for discussion.**

Discussion: Ed clarified that the Dept. of Law generally advises informally and verbally. He has worked in DNR for about 20 years and has spent a lot of time recently working on the SWCD history and issues; every Deputy Commissioner before him has started into it and hasn't gotten anywhere. Ed firmly believes that the statute working group has done more to clarify the situation than anyone before even though it is slow and frustrating. It is not something to take lightly but the NRCDB should keep pushing. Carol does think that the process needs to continue even if it is slow. Ed also pointed out that adequate time must be given to review and perfect a draft once provided.

The motion failed.

Al moved that the Dept. of Law and DNR take a serious look at defining a 'quasi-state agency' and its special powers pertaining to soil and water conservation districts and also that the Dept. of Law take into consideration that the model law describes districts as subdivisions of the state such as municipalities. Perhaps language for municipalities could be adopted for soil and water conservation districts and solve some of the funding problems. Carol seconded the motion.

Discussion: Al pointed out the structure in other states of SWCDs is similar in some ways to counties or municipalities. Shana thinks these are valid ideas and questions for the Dept. of Law.

The motion passed.

8. FFA Resolution

Al presented and read aloud a draft resolution he prepared. He pointed out that Alaska has the fewest number of participants and programs and is dying without support from the Dept. of Education. A prior Homer High School student is now running for national office within FFA; what an accomplishment for an Alaska student to become a national officer! **Al moved that we approve the resolution and send it to the Governor, Commissioners of Education and DNR and the legislature. Bernie seconded the motion.**

Discussion: Four of Bernie's employees are FFA graduates and they're the best employees in the world. Carol strongly supports FFA and it's not just agriculture; it could fill a valuable niche in this state that isn't being utilized. The national convention does concentrate a lot on agriculture however their natural resource segment is very, very strong and we're not using it in our schools. This state is not working effectively in natural resource education in our schools and that is what is funding our state. We're importing a lot of skilled people because we don't teach the kids here what is there and what they can do. When Al took second place in the national competition it was a huge deal that would have been statewide news anywhere else. The national FFA will get behind an Alaska program and be supportive. Rain Reynolds represented FFA at the banquet and participated in FFA in California; he didn't have a chance to make the state team there because it is so competitive. Alaska is missing out. National FFA sent a trainer to Alaska recently and only 4 teachers could attend. Bernie recommends that instead of going to energy conferences, the legislature should attend the national FFA convention. They'll come away with a different view.

The motion passed.

9. Scott Paper Award Discussion

Several ideas were received from districts as to how the funds could be spent. DNR is in the process of accepting the money from NASCA. The money can be used for multiple projects. One suggestion was purchasing fruit trees. About 1/3 of the districts responded with ideas/suggestions. Bernie would like to reward the districts that responded. Al is not certain that the districts that didn't respond are prepared. **Bernie moved**

that the districts that responded should receive the money divided up among them. The NRCDB needs to show leadership and reward the districts that put forth some effort. People will be more inclined to do the work next time around. Cheryl commented that it was not just the districts that won this award for Alaska; the board has no clue who got on their computers and pledged to use the Scott products. Cheryl doesn't think it should be restricted to only the districts who responded. Carol agreed with Bernie that she doesn't want to force the other districts to come up with a plan and then review project proposals. Cheryl would like to see trees distributed statewide and the districts could be part of the distribution. Shana clarified how the money came to the NRCDB – through NASCA for implementation through districts. Al asked the Southeast SWCD, since they were just formed, if they had any ideas for using the funds. Kerry MacLane responded that the Salmon in the Trees program could be expanded with the funds. George pointed out that Salmon in the Trees comes across as anti-timber industry in Southeast Alaska.

The motion passed.

10. Board Comments

Bernie said that this was one of the better meetings in a long time and he appreciates the way it was handled. Bernie thanks Shana for her work.

11. Public Comments

Heidi Chay from the Kenai SWCD is thankful for the Scott Paper funds and it will go a long way towards their Schoolyard Habitat program. Ed remarked that there has been a lot of effort going into invasive plants and elodea projects and there will be some statewide initiatives coming soon probably. It is a great niche for districts to fill. Bernie is appalled at the elodea infestation in Chena Slough. Bernie thinks there should be a use for that vegetation – animal forage. There was some discussion about an underwater mowing machine and suction dredging; visibility is very poor for underwater work. Apparently elodea can survive fairly saline conditions too. Ed is very supportive of districts receiving funding for invasive weeds projects.

12. Next Meeting Date and Location

The next meeting will be determined in November.

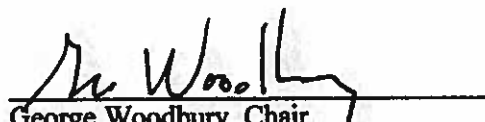
Carol moved to adjourn. Bernie seconded. The motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 3:17 p.m.

Minutes taken by:

Minutes approved by:


Shana Joy, Executive Director
NRCDB


George Woodbury, Chair
NRCDB