



# Caledonia County

## Natural Resources Conservation District

### **Caledonia County NRCD Board Meeting Minutes April 13, 2026**

Present: Emily Finnegan, John Drew, Willie Nickerson, Matt Langlais, Amber Reed (on Zoom), Curt Busto (on Zoom); Matt left at 12:40.

Open meeting – Willie opened the meeting at 11:40 am.

Approve February meeting minutes – The board reviewed the February minutes. John moved to accept the minutes, Willie seconded. Motion passed.

Emily review some of the documents in the board google folder, including the local fund pool proposal prepared by Taylor. Willie had a question about whether we were allowed to know which landowners were funded in the local fund pool from last year. Emily will follow up with Taylor.

Q1-Q3 financial review & update on work with Dave Dore – Emily provided an update on CCNRCD's work with Dave Dore of Structural Integrity, and the organization's financial position as of the end of FY26, Q3. In their most recent meeting, Emily and Dave discussed the future of bookkeeping at CCNRCD. Emily proposed keeping many of the tasks that have historically been done by a contract bookkeeper. Dave is willing to take on a retainer-type contract, where he is available to answer more complicated questions, and Lina Smith, a VACD/NRCC employee, would be available for Quickbooks-specific troubleshooting. Emily and the board are comfortable trying out this division of responsibility and level of oversight. The board suggested that Emily begin to keep track of the hours she spends doing the list of tasks that feasibly could be done by a contract bookkeeper. Matt suggested that CCNRCD consider undertaking a sort of desktop financial review (perhaps every other year) that is not an audit, but is audit-like, to make sure we are following proper policies and procedures.

Emily reviewed the Profit & Loss by project spreadsheet (FY26 Q1-Q3) in the board google drive folder, and also went through the written narrative.

Amber asked a question about conservation district awards under AG CWIP. Emily explained that conservation districts submitted their budgets to VACD, and VACD submitted a proposal to VAAFM that was over the budget limit (set by VAAFM). In the past, NRCC has submitted a proposal on behalf of conservation districts that was over the VAAFM-set budget limit, and districts were able to work it out amongst ourselves how much to cut from each district budget. This time, VAAFM cut each district budget on their own, and as a result many districts' budgets were changed significantly. CCNRCD was awarded what they requested, with the exception of a \$15,000 stipend for a pilot program.

Amber asked if CCNRCD had thought about applying for a LISFF grant. She went to a presentation about this funding source, they are encouraging organizations working in northern Vermont to apply. Emily said that Cory was interested in applying, but that CCNRCD had never considered being an applicant.



# Caledonia County

## Natural Resources Conservation District

Emily reviewed CCNRCD's current understanding of the agricultural funding landscape, particularly as it relates to funding to do NRCS planning work.

Treasurer – Emily brought up the vacant treasurer position. Willie would like to see if we can find a person with a significant financial background (i.e. a banker) to be CCNRCD's treasurer. Matt has a specific idea of someone to ask, and will follow up with that individual.

Prior to the next agenda item, Matt asked a question about the position of conservation districts on Act 181. He had heard that conservation districts had "taken a position" on Act 181. Emily clarified that the only decision that had gone through the consensus process was testimony given by Michelle Monroe in support of delaying the implementation of Tier 3 and the "road rule." There was a brief discussion of Act 181 and the reasons that some folks are not in favor of it. Emily explained that part of VACD's strategy in the legislature this year was to get more involved in policy discussions, and they are still figuring out what that looks like.

Section 125 Plan – Emily would like to hire Northeast Benefits Management to write a Section 125 cafeteria plan for CCNRCD. This will allow us to offer an HSA account to employees through CCNRCD (rather than having the employee set up the account on their own). The board agreed that we should pay Northeast Benefits Management to write this plan, and start HSA contributions from CCNRCD at the beginning of the next fiscal year (July 1 2026). Emily confirmed after the meeting that an organization does not need a Section 125 plan to offer pre-tax contributions to a retirement account (which CCNRCD is already offering).

Plant sale review – Emily reviewed board member responsibilities at the NEK Plant Sale on Saturday May 2.

Willie provided an update on the meeting he attended where Arrowwood Environmental presented a natural resources assessment they conducted of the Knob property in St. Johnsbury.

Project updates – Emily provided brief updates on the list of projects below:

- Jackson Dam – Emily is working on developing a 30% design scope of work with SLR & regulator input; SLR will be under contract for some of this work, paid for with funding from a partner's USFWS partners agreement
- Weir 4 construction bid to be released today
- Stannard culverts – contractors chosen & sub-contracts signed
- Watershed grant – Karina received a VT watershed grant to do workshops with the VT Herp Atlas folks related to vernal pools and wetland conservation
- National Stream Restoration Conference – Emily will be giving a presentation with colleagues related to collaboration on dam removal projects; conference is in Nashville at the end of August, Emily plans to use the \$1000 per employee we typically budget for professional development opportunities, plus an additional support grant



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## Natural Resources Conservation District

Our next meeting is scheduled for Monday June 8<sup>th</sup> from 11:30 to 1:30. John will confirm that this day and time still works for him.

Willie mentioned that he is doing culvert replacement design work for Essex County NRCD; he resolved his conflict of interest related to his position with NRCC.

Willie closed the meeting at 1:24 pm.