

MEETING MINUTES - CENTRAL REGION RC&D COUNCIL
Gladstone City Hall - Tuesday, July 5, 2011

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 10:04 am by Chairman Hampton Waring.

IN ATTENDANCE: Howard Haulotte-Delta CD; Hamp Waring Alger CD; Jaime Beranek-Marquette CD; Jerry Doucette-Alger Co Comm; Ann Hruska-Dickinson CD; Mike Quayle-Marquette Co Comm; Rhonda Gerlach-Menominee CD; Brian Bousley-Menominee Co Administrator; Dave Andersen-MSUE; Ernie Hoholik-Schoolcraft County; Darcy Rutkowski -UP RC&D Council

All members present introduced themselves as there were a few representatives who were attending the Central RC&D meeting for the first time.

RECOGNITION OF ERNIE HOHOLIK: Dave Andersen summarized the incredible history of service that Ernie Hoholik has devoted to the UP RC&D Council over many years. Ernie was honored for having served on the Central RC&D Council for most of the time that the Council has been in existence (since the early 1970's). He has also been one of the representatives of the Central Council on the UP RC&D Council for many years, and was a member of the Schoolcraft County Commission for 30 years. Ernie has been promoted to "board member emeritus" and will continue to attend as many meetings as his health will allow.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES: The agenda was approved (Andersen/Haulotte) with no additions. The minutes from the meeting of April 5, 2011 were approved (Quayle/Andersen) as written.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Treasurer Dave Andersen provided a written treasurer's report which summarized the income and expense activity in the checking account from October 2010 through July 3, 2011. The ending balance was \$542.58. He reported that he has received \$25 dues from 4 of the 6 conservation districts in the Central region. He has not received dues from Marquette or Menominee CD's yet.

BUSINESS ITEMS:

Elect Representative to UP RC&D Council: An election was held to replace Ernie Hoholik as one of the Central RC&D Council representatives to the UP RC&D Council. Jerry Doucette made a motion to nominate Hamp Waring, and the nomination was seconded by Dave Andersen. Motion passed. Hamp joins Dave Andersen and Howard Haulotte as representatives from the Central Region to the UP RC&D Council.

Update on Short-term changes: Darcy provided a short synopsis regarding the termination of federal funding for the RC&D program which occurred in April, 2011 and the effects this has had on the UP RC&D Council. The Council has obtained new office space in the same building that the UP Children's Museum is located (129 W. Baraga Ave, Marquette). The council has a 6 month lease for this space. She is still checking mail, email and phone messages at the former office on Commerce Drive. The Council does not have a new phone number or internet service yet, but that will hopefully be set up shortly. The new council email address has been distributed to all members and has been in use for approximately one month already. The Council has between \$60,000 and \$70,000 in savings to help sustain them during a transition period. The current R-I-UP grant will be completed before December 31, 2011. Approximately one-half of the Executive Assistant's salary is provided by grant funds and Darcy spends an average of 20-25 hrs/week coordinating this project. The UP Council has decided not to accept any new projects until after their September 13th strategic planning meeting.

Update on Long-term Vision for UP RC&D Council: Dave Andersen summarized the decisions made by the UP Council when they met a few weeks ago. They decided that each of the Regional Councils should meet in July or early August and should appoint three representatives to attend a strategic planning meeting in Marquette on September 13th (these 3 would be in addition to the 3 current representatives from each regional council). They hope to get input from each of the regional councils at this meeting and develop some short-term and long-term goals. The UP Council realizes that it will be challenging to continue operating in the same manner as they have in the past, especially trying to operate in such a large geographic area. The Council has access to The Grant Station website and newsletter and will be looking for grants that might help to support the Council activities in the future.

Appoint three members to attend September 13 Strategic Planning Meeting: Members present will check with their conservation districts to see who may be able to attend the strategic planning meeting. Tentatively, Ann Hruska, Jaime Beranek or Renee Leow, and Rhonda Gerlach will attend, and they will confirm their attendance with Darcy.

REPORTS

Alger Conservation District: Hamp Waring reported that they had a successful native plant sale and Teri Grout has been extremely busy with R-I-UP and EAB field work. She has also been assisting the Schoolcraft CD with their R-I-UP activities and doing invasive plant education and outreach in both counties.

Alger County: Jerry Doucette reported that the county is busy with the courthouse heating and cooling project and a notice for bonds went out. The public can provide input through July 18th. They hope to meld this with the current bond and get a competitive interest rate. They are also still having discussions with Schoolcraft and Luce counties regarding a possible regional jail. UPCAP is facilitating these meetings. All counties are struggling financially and changes to revenue sharing will make the situation worse over time. He will be attending the National Assoc. of Counties (NACO) in the near future, and also reported that Michigan Works is now charged with working with Veterans to help secure services for them in a more efficient manner. Alger County is looking at the NACO Drug Discount Card for residents. Jerry has been elected to the MAC board. He reported that North American Hydro Company is convening a meeting with FERC to discuss changes to their operations that may affect the Whitefish River Watershed. The boundary between the Lake Superior and Lake Michigan watersheds runs through that area.

Delta Conservation District: Howard Haulotte reported that their District is now managing the county parks and it has been a challenge since they were run-down, but they are beginning to get into good shape. They have also received the first grant in the country to update rural internet service, and that wireless project is taking place in Delta, Alger & Marquette counties. They are working on a non-industrial private forest landowner project which aims to inventory the timber that is available on private lands. The district is involved with private landowners who are taking advantage of a landowner cost-share program funded by GLRI which is working to create wildlife openings in the Whitefish River Watershed.

Delta County: No rep present

Dickinson Conservation District: Ann Hruska reported that they had a successful native plant sale (grew plants in CD). They also organized a R-I-UP workday at Fumee Lake Natural Area last week which was very successful. They hauled 15 truckloads of buckthorn and honeysuckle out of the area. They currently have one staff person doing 8 hrs/week of invasive plant control efforts. They have deployed 1600 EAB traps, and keep getting more reports of suspicious trees which MDA checks up on. So far – no EAB has been confirmed in Menominee, Dickinson, Iron, Gogebic and southern Ontonagon counties. Genetic studies are being conducted on the Eurasian water milfoil in the county and the district is doing a purple loosestrife bio-control project on the Michigamme River. They received \$2000 from WeEnergies to raise beetles (45 stock plants, 20,000 beetles). They are also involved in a deer habitat improvement project funded by the DNR (planting apple trees).

Dickinson County: No rep present

Marquette Conservation District: Jaime Beranek reported that the district had a fantastic tree sale and two native plant sales. The plants come from the Kinross Correctional Facility, and they are experimenting with plants from the Evergreen Nursery in Rumley. Leftover plants are planted in Trestle Corridor. They have completed successful garlic mustard pulls under the R-I-UP Project with 4th graders along the Iron Ore Heritage Trail. They have also worked with classes from Father Marquette Middle School, North Star Academy, and with at-risk youth through the Cedar Tree Institute. The district has an EAB program and all traps have been set out. Jaime made a presentation at the NMU garden conference on gardening with native plants, and also native pollinators in conjunction with presentations Teri Grout was making on R-I-UP. All UP conservation districts will be invited to a regional meeting on September 15th in Marquette. The district is also trying to participate in the “Big Tree Contest” where the biggest specimen of each native tree species is located.

Marquette County: Mike Quayle was attending his first RC&D meeting as the alternate for Marquette County. He indicated that he was a “Newbie” with a lot to learn about RC&D. He reported that the Marquette Board of Light and Power is in the process of replacing the damn on the Dead River that was destroyed during the flood several years ago. The work is progressing well and it will probably mean more campers at Tourist Park after the damn is built and the impounded water forms a lake rather than the stream that is now at that site. They are also working to restore damage at the mouth of the river which was created by the flooding.

Menominee CD: Rhonda Gerlach reported that she has been busy with R-I-UP work. She has been in touch with Vern Stephens to try to get information about some control measures for a landowner with an Autumn Olive problem on his property. She has scheduled some public meetings, and is attempting to work with the Road commission on invasive plant issues. Her efforts are limited by her limited hours of work.

Menominee County: Brian Bousley, Menominee County Administrator, attended the meeting to represent Menominee County. He reported that the commissioner that is assigned to RC&D meetings is a farmer and it is not a good time for him to get away from his farming. Brian reported that the airport re-use project is now underway.

Schoolcraft CD & County: No members were present from the Conservation District or county, but Dave Andersen reported that Teri Grout from Alger County has been working with the Conservation District on R-I-UP activities and the district is just “treading water” as far as keeping things going. Ernie Hoholik reported that the DNR Wyman Nursery and the Thompson Fish Hatchery are researching fish manure application rates, and application of manure to seed beds in the nursery, applying in an agronomic rate. This helps seedlings with their nitrogen requirements and also saves money.

MSUE: Dave Andersen reported that MSUE has been contracted to do forest inventory work (principally for Mascoma) to determine availability for sustainable harvest. 54% of the inventory is owned by non-industrial private landowners. Only a small percentage will put their forests up for timber sale – so the availability may not be as large as it could be. MSUE is also involved in biomass crop research (Dr. Minn-swiwtchgrass), and hybrid willows and poplars at the Biomass Utilization Center. Traxys is interested in 10,000 acres of hybrid willow. Dave also reported that the city of Ironwood and village of Ontonagon are both interested in looking at district heating. Bill Cook and Dave met with them. The MSUE re-organization is almost completed, it will be officially complete by 10/1/11. They will have a physical presence (educator level person) in all counties but Schoolcraft, and that county will hold another millage request this fall. They also want to maintain a 4-H program in every county. In June they laid off 67 professional staff and eliminated the county extension director positions.

USFS: No reps present, but Howard Haulotte reported that the Delta County RAC will hold a meeting on July 20th to approve the projects for RAC funding.

CUPPAD: No reps present

New Projects: The UP RC&D Council is not accepting any new project applications at this time.

Project Updates:

RRIP-IT-UP: Darcy reported that she spends a great deal of time facilitating this project. Partners are immersed in field work right now. The second annual UP-wide conference on invasive species will take place in Marquette on November 10th and a conference planning sub-committee will meet later this month to start the planning. She distributed a handout which detailed the accomplishments so far and we have met or exceeded all deliverables. We are also getting very close to our match requirement for this grant. Five demonstration projects are being installed across the UP and all five tribes are finalizing their invasive plant efforts to be completed with grant funds.

Manistique District Heating Plant: The feasibility study was just completed and reported a simple payback of investment in 32 years. There are currently 12 stakeholders and 19-37 buildings that could be tied into the system. They are working with a company who would build it, and then sell it to the stakeholders under a guaranteed performance contract where they would guarantee savings. They are still investigating the legal entity that would be authorized to operate the facility. They might be able to secure a USDA guaranteed loan or possibly a grant through

DOE or USFS. This would be the first project of this kind in Michigan, although district heating facilities are very common in Europe. Dave knows of three such facilities east of the Mississippi. If all goes as planned, the project could start as early as next spring. Dave also mentioned that MSUE is offering entrepreneur training called “The Road to Independence” in Alger County, two identical sessions on August 1st at 2 pm and 6:30 pm at the Extension Office.

Gladstone Marsh: Howard Haulotte said the project ran into a mess when the DNR turned over the property to the city – they didn’t turn over the entire piece of property. They don’t want to do invasive plant control on property that is not under their control. They are looking at various leasing options for the land in question. The conservation district would like to work with the DNR to purchase the property, and hopes to get a good deal because the property would not have many alternative uses.

Correspondence: None

Next Meeting: The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 pm (Andersen/Quayle) and the next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 4, 2011 at 10 am at the Gladstone City Hall.