

MEETING MINUTES - WESTERN REGION RC&D COUNCIL
USFS Kenton Ranger District Office – August 4, 2011

IN ATTENDANCE: Steven Siira-Keweenaw Co Planning Comm; Bob Larson-Baraga CD; Bill Menge-Baraga Co Bd of Comm; Barbara VanAlstine-Ottawa Natl Forest; Dave Harmon-Gogebic CD; Dennis Jacobson-Gogebic Co Comm; Anton Pintar-Houghton Co Comm; Bob Black-Iron Co Comm; John Pelkola-Ontonagon Co Bd of Comm; Kevin Manninen-WUPPDR; Ken Marshall-KBIC; Darcy Rutkowski-UP RC&D Council

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bob Larson at 10:10 am. The agenda was approved with no changes (Harmon/Menge).

MINUTES: The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as written (Black/Menge).

TREASURER’S REPORT: Darcy presented the Treasurer’s Report. The balance in the checking account as of July 31, 2011 is \$515.64 with no new activity since the last meeting. She has contacted Frank Wardynski by both email and phone message to ask him to return the checkbook and financial records, and so far he has not responded. John Pelkola will remind him to do this as he sees Frank. The report will be placed on file (Black/Pelkola).

BUSINESS ITEMS:

Update on Short-term changes (office space, phone, etc): Darcy provided a short synopsis regarding the termination of federal funding for the RC&D program which occurred in April, 2011 and the effect 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 has a new phone number (906-225-0215) and internet service is now in place. The new council email address has been distributed to all members and has been in use for approximately two months 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 council also received news recently that they will be receiving another grant in the amount of \$150,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to work with partners to “Eradicate Garlic Mustard in the UP”. 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: Bob Larson and Ken Marshall 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. Bob asked every member present for ideas to help sustain the council financially. One of the ideas presented was to sponsor a grant-writing training seminar in the UP (during the winter) and charge participants for this education. Many members present felt like grant-writing was something that was needed by the counties or districts they represent. Another idea was to sell flower bulbs (districts would sell the bulbs and share proceeds with RC&D). Holding a raffle was another idea for raising funds.

Appoint 3 members to attend September 13 strategic planning meeting: Dennis Jacobson and Bill Menge volunteered to attend the strategic planning session and they will join current UP Council members Bob Black, Bob Larson, and Ken Marshall on September 13 in Marquette. It is hoped another person will come forward prior to that so that the Western Region has full representation at the meeting.

REPORTS:

Baraga County: Bill Menge reported that the work at Pt. Abbaye Park is nearing completion. The county is working to find re-use possibilities for the old hospital.

Baraga Conservation District: Bob Larson reported that the district is running out of money and may close their doors in September.

Houghton County & Conservation District: Anton Pintar reported that the District sponsored a spotted knapweed pull at their Bete Gris Preserve and collected 8-9 bags. The Hills Creek Stamp Sand Remediation Project has been put out on bids, but all bids were rejected for being too high. Regarding the Pilgrim River Watershed Project, they are trying to get an easement along the river for access. A grant proposal has been submitted which was not funded. He also reported that the new transfer station in Atlantic Mine is almost complete.

Gogebic Conservation District: Dave Harmon reported that the district is collaborating with the Ottawa NF to do invasive plant work. They completed a garlic mustard pull on 6/16 at a park in Ironwood and had 10 participants (including 3 from the Ottawa) where 9 bags were pulled. Their R-I-UP field demonstration took place on July 19, with 6 district volunteers and four Ottawa employees. Glossy buckthorn was removed and stumps treated near the Montreal River. An interpretive sign will be coming at a later date to this site. Their road/stream crossing project is proceeding according to schedule and is funded by UPPCO. They were awarded a MiCorps grant to do volunteer stream monitoring and one of their volunteers attended training. They are now working on the QAPP for that project. They were successful in getting two proposals funded with RAC money – an invasive plant project and the Black River Narrows Project. They did tree planting at Washington Elementary in Bessemer and their soil erosion program is going well. District Administrator, Mary Powell, is resigning effective September 29, 2011. They are searching for a certified forester to do work for them.

Gogebic County: Dennis Jacobson gave an update on RAC Funds: They had \$400,000 to spend and all was committed and approved by the USDA (OTTAWA NF) for trails, upgrade of roads near Lake Superior, invasive species in Ottawa lakes, and boat launching improvements. Little Girls Point received a grant from the state to help them find potable water.

Iron County: Bob Black reported that there was a lot of turnover on the county commission and other county committees as a result of the last election. Bob is no longer able to serve on the Western UP DNR Citizen Advisory Council due to work conflicts, but he has been asked by the county board to continue to represent them at RC&D meetings.

Iron Conservation District: Gail Dalpra sent Darcy a message yesterday indicating that their chairperson, Jim Stewart had resigned from the CD board.

Keweenaw County: Steve Siira reported that the 20 year plan is progressing and the planning commission is holding meetings in the various townships to get their input. They are trying to determine which issues are county issues and which issues are township issues, although zoning is county-wide.

Ontonagon County: John Pelkola reported that the Conservation District is still in limbo – and at this time don't have a person working for them in the office. They have two open positions on their board as well. The County is struggling with their budget, and they have a new county clerk. They now have established ambulance service for the entire county which is being supported by a millage, with 3 vehicles providing service.

Ontonagon Conservation District: No Reps Present

MSUE: No Reps Present

Keweenaw Bay Indian Community: Ken Marshall reported that the new transfer station located at the industrial park will be completed within the year. They used funds from a wildlife grant they received to place game cameras all over tribal lands and are using the data collected to write management plans. They have been monitoring for 2-3 years. He is working with the county to create a recreational map which can be used for economic development purposes, and a baseline map for emergency response purposes. The recreational map can be sold at the tourist center. The tribe is renovating their campground. Two wind towers are now collecting data with a third to be installed. The Village of

L'Anse is losing business in the downtown area – 2 hardware stores, 1 bar, and 2 pharmacies have closed. There is the possibility that a computer company may be coming in.

USFS: Barbara VanAlstine reported that they had a 7 person YCC crew of 16-19 year olds this summer based in Kenton. The crew did work on trails, campgrounds, wildlife work, etc. and the USFS attempts to expose them to a variety of positions. The contract for work at Camp Nesbitt has been terminated, but the contractor has appealed the termination. This was being funded with stimulus funds. They have various GLRI projects underway, most of the contracts were awarded to local contractors. Their timber cut is now up to 50 million board feet for the fiscal year, and that matches their management plan targets for the first time since 2006 when the plan went into effect. On a purely biological basis, they could cut more, but there are many other factors to be considered.

WUPPDR: Kevin Manninen reported on some personnel changes that have occurred at WUPPDR. Jim LaMuth moved to Utah and a new employee has been hired to replace him. Their administrator has recently retired, and she was very good at what she did. There has been a rumor that all three regional planning and development districts in the UP might be combined and also that the Revolving Loan Fund might change. There is a lot of interest in bio-crops and in May a group from Europe visited Ontonagon County. WUPPDR sponsored a bio-crop (agricultural crops, not forestry) workshop last week targeted to landowners with 20 acres or more and 72 people attended. A Japanese group also visited the UP and they were looking at mining opportunities. They represented big Japanese conglomerates and they are interested in partnering with American companies. There is interest in using the White Pine mining facility for processing. There are 3 very good new prospects for businesses coming to Ontonagon County: a pellet plant, a bottling plant from Crystal Falls (bio-degradable bottles), and a potential buyer for the Maple Manor facility (customer service center for an insurance company). In Baraga county the Superior Supplier Network is starting to ramp up.

NEW MEASURES: No new project applications are being accepted 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 is meeting later this week 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, one in Iron County and one in Baraga County that are both demonstrating buckthorn control. The new grant funds (\$150,000) for eradicating garlic mustard in the UP will help continue the RRIP-IT-UP efforts. One of the partners which will be receiving a large chunk of funds is the Gogebic Conservation District.

Copper Country Recycling/Composting Project- Ken Marshall reported that he connected Bruce Petersen with a Wisconsin Planning Commission that is doing composting.

CORRESPONDENCE: None

The meeting was adjourned at 12:40 pm

NEXT MEETING: The next meeting will be held at 10 am (Eastern Time) on Thursday, November 3, 2011 at a location to be determined in Baraga County.