**Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP) – Northwest Regional Coordination Meeting Notes**

Thursday September 23rd, 2021

**Attendees** (\*Indicates Zoom participant)

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFM)

* Brittany Cole ([Brittany.cole@vermont.gov](mailto:Brittany.cole@vermont.gov)), Water Quality Specialist
* David Wardrop ([David.Wardrop@vermont.gov](mailto:David.Wardrop@vermont.gov)), Water Quality Specialist
* Andrew Mitchell ([Andrew.mitchell@vermont.gov](mailto:Andrew.mitchell@vermont.gov)), Ag. Engineer
* Brodie Haenke ([Brodie.Haenke@vermont.gov](mailto:Brodie.Haenke@vermont.gov)), WQ Program Coordinator
* Connor Steckel ([Connor.steckel@vermont.gov](mailto:Connor.steckel@vermont.gov)), Water Quality Specialist
* Luke Hughes ([Luke.Hughes@vermont.gov](mailto:Luke.Hughes@vermont.gov)), Inspector

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

* Liza Lemieux ([Eliza.Lemieux@usda.gov](mailto:Eliza.Lemieux@usda.gov)), Program Assistant
* Lauren Gibson ([Lauren.Gibson@usda.gov](mailto:Lauren.Gibson@usda.gov) ), Soil Conservationist
* Jimmy Young ([James.Young2@usda.gov](mailto:James.Young2@usda.gov) ), Soil Conservationist
* Carissa Stein ([Carissa.Stein@usda.gov](mailto:Carissa.Stein@usda.gov) ), Soil Conservationist
* Tucker Malone ([Tucker.Malone@usda.gov](mailto:Tucker.Malone@usda.gov)), Soil Conservation Technician
* Sarah Larose ([sarah.larose@usda.gov](mailto:sarah.larose@usda.gov)), Soil Conservationist\*
* Jill Mullican ([jill.mullican2@usda.gov](mailto:jill.mullican2@usda.gov)), Soil Conservationist\*

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD)

* Meryl Braconnier ([Meryl.Braconnier@usda.gov](mailto:Meryl.Braconnier@usda.gov)), Conservation Planner
* Holly McClintock ([Holly.McClintock@usda.gov](mailto:Holly.McClintock@usda.gov)), Program Assistant
* Aaron Thomas ([Aaron.Thomas3@vt.nacdnet.net](mailto:Aaron.Thomas3@vt.nacdnet.net)), Conservation Planner\*

VACD/Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC)

* Molly Varner ([molly.varner@vacd.org](mailto:molly.varner@vacd.org)), Communications Coordinator/Project Manager for Grand Isle County NRCD
* Emily Nummer ([emily.nummer@vacd.org](mailto:emily.nummer@vacd.org)), Ag Programs Manager

Lamoille County Conservation District (LCCD)

* Daniel Lee ([lccdworkinglands@gmail.com](mailto:lccddirector@gmail.com)), Outreach
* Peter Danforth ([lccddirector@gmail.com](mailto:lccddirector@gmail.com)), District Manager
* Emily Porter-Goff ([emilylccdedu@gmail.com](mailto:emilylccdedu@gmail.com)), Education and Outreach Coordinator

Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP)

* Alli Lewis ([alli.lewis@vacd.org](mailto:alli.lewis@vacd.org)), Coordinator

Franklin County Natural Resource Conservation District (FCNRCD)

* Lauren Weston ([lauren.weston@usda.gov](mailto:lauren.weston@usda.gov)), District Manager
* Kate Wettergreen ([katherine.wettergreen@usda.gov](mailto:katherine.wettergreen@usda.gov)), ECO AmeriCorps

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VT DEC)

* Danielle Owczarski ([danielle.owczarski@vermont.gov](mailto:danielle.owczarski@vermont.gov)), Watershed Planner
* Karen Bates ([karen.bates@vermont.gov](mailto:karen.bates@vermont.gov)), Watershed Planner
* Brock Freyer ([brock.freyer@vermont.gov](mailto:brock.freyer@vermont.gov) ), Wetlands Scientist\*
* Rebecca Pfeiffer ([rebecca.pfeiffer@vermont.gov](mailto:rebecca.pfeiffer@vermont.gov)), Northwest Regional Floodplain Manager\*
* Clarice Cutler ([clarice.cutler@vermont.gov](mailto:clarice.cutler@vermont.gov)), Environmental Analyst, CAFO Program\*
* Kevin Burke ([kevin.burke@vermont.gov](mailto:kevin.burke@vermont.gov)), Environmental Analyst, Stormwater Program\*

Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP)

* Colleen Hickey ([chickey@lcbp.org](mailto:chickey@lcbp.org)), Education and Outreach Coordinator\*
* Katie Darr ([kdarr@lcbp.org](mailto:kdarr@lcbp.org)) Citizens Advisory Committee\*

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)

* Stacy Cibula ([s.cibula@vhcb.org](mailto:s.cibula@vhcb.org)), Agricultural Program Director\*

University of Vermont Extension

* Susan Brouillette ([susan.brouillette@uvm.edu](mailto:susan.brouillette@uvm.edu)), Program Manager

Vermont Farm Service Agency (FSA)

* Heather Mateja ([heather.mateja@usda.gov](mailto:heather.mateja@usda.gov)), Lamoille County Executive Director\*

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

* Chris Smith ([chris\_e\_smith@fws.gov](mailto:chris_e_smith@fws.gov)), State Coordinator for Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

Lauren Weston begins meeting with a brief welcome and then introduces Alli Lewis.

Lauren forgot to hit record for the beginning moments of the meeting, supplementary information from Alli Lewis provided after the event for recording purposes.

**Alli Lewis, Program Coordinator 0:00-2:50**

0:00 – Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP) has the collective vision that Vermont will be populated by farms that are vibrant, robust, and sustainable. Who steward their land to improve water quality and wildlife habitat for the benefit of their farms, connected ecosystems, the public, and for the general good of Vermont.

0:42 – The purpose and mission of VAWQP is to improve agricultural water quality in Vermont by coordinating partner efforts to provide education, technical and financial assistance to the farming community.

0:55 – The three main overarching goals are:

* To improve water quality and wildlife habitat on all engaged farmland owner’s and operator’s properties
* Deliver technical and financial assistance in the most efficient and effective manner
* Provide the best service experience possible for those participating in the programs

1:15 – Foundation of Collaboration in the 1619 agreement that includes VAAFM, VT DEC, LCBP, VACD, UVM Extension, USFWS, VHCD, FSA, and NRCS. Additional partners outside the 1619 MOU.

2:08 – Purpose of the MOU is to promote greater and more efficient cooperation and coordination among partners in Vermont to address water quality concerns.

**Alli Lewis, Program Coordinator 0:2:50-12:56**

2:50 - Alli Lewis explains the 1619 General Guidance including a [handout](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Tpw7bzqH0OCwtH97sRQmM0bPsygiI0YB/view) outlining the main points.

* Under the 1619 General Guidance, farm information/personally identifiable information cannot be shared with partner outside the MOU. There are rules and policies in place, using Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and VHCB as examples for how those partnerships can work.
* VAWQP partners can share among themselves non regulatory information for the purpose of “providing technical or financial assistance with respect to the agricultural operation, agricultural land or farming or conservation practices.”
* Many of the organizations within the VAWQP have some level of regulatory capacity and not all staff are regulatory. Importance of getting to know one another and understanding of roles and organizations.
* Regulatory staff in many cases can be an information resources and want to be involved, just be aware of the information sharing policies.
* Any questions on 1619 can be directed to Alli Lewis.

5:08 – Collaborative Structure of VAWQP- Leadership team consisting of commissioners, secretaries, and organization leaders; they provide policy direction and meet twice a year. Steering committee is open to everyone interested in joining, it meets monthly to share updates and a focus presentation. VAWQP Coordinator’s (Alli Lewis) main role is supporting the partnership Regional Teams, the group attending this meeting. In addition, there are Subcommittees, Work Groups, and a Communications Team that works on internal and external communication, quarterly press releases, and newsletter.

8:12 – 5 Year [Strategic Plan](https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2020/WorkGroups/House%20Agriculture/Clean%20Water%20Initiative/W~Vicky%20Drew~Vermont%20Agricultural%20Water%20Quality%20Partnership%20Strategic%20Plan%202019-2024~1-28-2020.pdf) available on the [website](https://vtagcleanwater.org/) along with the [2020 Annual Report](https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/e813da0e-9b81-4820-9389-2496672fef01/downloads/VAWQP%20Annual%202020%20Final.pdf?ver=1626973314645). There are six strategic objectives:

* Build a stronger collaboration (Alli Lewis, VAWQP)
* Identify, connect, share, and coordinate research and learning across VAWQP partners and others (Dan Lerner ([daniel.lerner@uvm.edu](mailto:daniel.lerner@uvm.edu)), UVM and Eric Howe ([ehowe@lcbp.org](mailto:ehowe@lcbp.org)), LCBP)
* Utilize research and learning to evaluated, adjust, and innovate on specific practices and tools across partners (Obe Racicot ([Obediah.Racicot@usda.gov](mailto:Obediah.Racicot@usda.gov)), NRCS)
* Ensure training of staff across partner organizations (Nina Gage ([Nina.Gage@vermont.gov](mailto:Nina.Gage@vermont.gov)), VAAFM)
* Create consistent, coherent, meaningful messages for Partner staff, farmers, and the public (Amy Overstreet [Amy.Overstreet@usda.gov](mailto:Amy.Overstreet@usda.gov)), NRCS)
* Align Tactical Basin Planning and prioritization efforts and ensure effectiveness of jointly targeted watershed strategies (Marli Rupe, DEC)

10:14 – Tools and Resources including [vtagcleanwater.org](file:///\\AIOVTSTA3FP1.USDA.NET\VTSTA\Shared\NRCS\DISTRICT\VAWQP%20Regional%20Coordination\First%20Meeting%20-%20Sept%202021\vtagcleanwater.org); VAWQP SharePoint – launched at the regional meetings and will include files and calendar of events. Participants will receive log in information in the future; Partner database – to communicate projects happening on farms; VAWQP Newsletter – monthly: Lunch & Learn Webinars; and other trainings as needed

12:18 - Role of participants in regional coordination meetings are to be a representative of your organization, to actively listen and participate, convene information to and from your organization to best enhance the efforts of regional coordination, and to strive to branch out and/or strengthen relationships and collaboration with the VAWQP.

**Lauren Weston, Regional Coordinator 12:57-16:31**

12:57 - Alli Lewis is the statewide coordinator, Lauren Weston is the regional coordinator for the Northwest Region that includes Grand Isle, Franklin, and Lamoille Counties. Lauren Weston is the District Manager for the FCNRCD. Questions about the partnership can be directed to her or to Alli Lewis.

14:18 - There was an initial virtual planning meeting in June 2021 that determined the format of today’s meeting. Please share your thoughts on what is working and improvements to the meeting structure for the future.

15:37 -Introduction of organizations that have signed onto the MOU and their staff/representatives including names, agency/location, position, and brief score of work.

**Alli Lewis, VAWQP 16:22-16:31** (no additional introduction)

**Stacy Cibula, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board 16:31 – 27:40**

16:31 - Stacy Cibula is the Agricultural Program Director for the VHCB. Started last October, the focus of this position is primarily working with land trusts to conserve farmland, providing funding to purchase development rights. Other elements include water quality.

18:28 - Background on VHCB, it is a quasi-state agency, they are not state government but receive state funding support. Established in 1987, dual goal of affordable housing and land conservation. Primarily a grant making entity that works with housing coalitions, land trusts, and non-profits across the state. Vermont Land Trust (VLT) is the primary partner for farmland conservation projects along with Upper Valley Land Trust, Stowe Land Trust, along with other organizations. Partnership with NRCS, through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) funding.

20:59 – Water Quality program areas include:

* Farmland Retirement Program - works on restoring land that has been used for farming, but for various reasons is better suited for restorations of wetlands and floodplain forest. This program has only been around for 2-3 years and projects are often very complex, supporting 1-2 projects per year. Hope for this program to grow, and a potential option if you are working with a landowner interested in conserving their land.
* [Farm and Forest Viability Program](https://www.vhcb.org/viability) – Providing business support for farmers and foresters including business planning services, technical advisors, and others. Involved with response to Horizon Organic farm cutoff in the state. Liz Gleason ([Liz@vhcb.org](mailto:Liz@vhcb.org)) is the contact person.
* [Water Quality Grants Program](https://www.vhcb.org/our-programs/vermont-farm-forest-viability-program/grants/water-quality-grants) – Pays up to $40,000 per project to help farmers make infrastructure improvements on their farm to help improve water quality. Often used alongside other funds including EQIP or BMP. Can pay for new manure pits, upgrading barnyards, purchasing no-till equipment, and other things with a direct correlation to water quality. One or two grant rounds per year, next one is early 2022.
* VHCB is designated as the Clean Water Service Provider for the Memphremagog Basin.
* Just hired a Clean Water Program Manager starting in the next few weeks, they will oversee the non-regulatory water quality projects in the basin under Act 76.

**Heather Mateja, USDA Farm Service Agency 27:40 – 33:15**

27:40 - Heather Mateja represents Lamoille and Orleans County, offices in Morrisville and Newport. She oversees the Programs Side of FSA, including conservation, price support, disaster assistance, and maintaining of farm records. Farmers often go through FSA for records needed for USDA programs. FSA is a large part of the farm economy, including CFAP (Coronavirus Food Assistance Program) which put out over $80 million into the farming community over the last two years in Vermont. [Dairy Margin Coverage Program](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/dairy-margin-coverage-program/index) (DMC) which helps with low milk prices, people have to buy into the program, essentially insuring their milk prices. This program has put out $18 million to Vermont dairy farmers, and most farmers are in this program. ~90% of dairy farmers participate, enrollment is in the fall.

30:43 - Conservation and Water Quality; CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program) partnered with the state, but FSA holds the contracts. 331 contracts statewide, encompassing 2,100 acres of riparian buffers.

31:48 - FSA provides loans where other banks may not want to take the risk, especially for people starting farming, at low interest rates. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) will hopefully pay off some of this debt for minority groups, will likely be significant for Vermont.

**Sarah Larose, NRCS 33:15-36:52**

33:15 – Sarah Larose is a Soil Conservationist with the NRCS in the Northwest zone which includes Franklin, Grand Isle, and Lamoille counties. Provides technical and financial assistance to landowners through programs such as the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip/) (EQIP). EQIP is most widely used program and it is voluntary. [Conservation Stewardship Program](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/) (CSP) utilized more as farmers have stepped up to the plate to address resources concerns. This program is a 5-year potential financial assistance contract, farmers are getting paid for their current level of stewardship with additional practices and enhancements to address resources concerns. NRCS is looking into climate resiliency, how to buffer against increased storms and drought periods as part of this program. Introduction of additional NRCS Staff.

**Jimmy Young, NRCS Soil Conservationist**

36:52 –Soil Conservationist in the St. Albans field office. Works with dairy farms, although recently more forestry and wildlife.

**Tucker Malone, NRCS Soil Conservationist**

37:23 –Soil Conservationist in the St. Albans office.

**Lauren Gibson, NRCS Soil Conservationist**

37:35 –Soil Conservationist working in the Northwest zone.

**Liza Lemieux, NRCS Program Assistant**

37:49 –Program Assistant in the Saint Albans office. Primarily assists customers with the application and contracting process for the financial assistance programs.

**Carissa Stein, NRCS Soil Conservationist**

38:00 Soil Conservationist in the St. Albans office. Mainly working on EQIP applications and can field questions about the online application.

39:00 - Lauren Weston notes that there are additional NRCS staff that were not able to attend the meeting today but will hopefully be available to join future meetings.

**Meryl Braconnier, VACD Conservation Planner 39:50-43:45**

39:50 - VACD Technical Staff are in each of the NRCS field offices in each zone. In the Northwest zone, tech staff include Meryl Braconnier; Aaron Thomas ([aaron.thomas3@vt.nacdnet.net](mailto:aaron.thomas3@vt.nacdnet.net)), Conservation Planner; Holly McClintock ([holly.mcclintock@usda.gov](mailto:holly.mcclintock@usda.gov)), Program Assistant; Lauren Newman ([lauren.newman@vt.nacdnet.net.net](mailto:lauren.newman@vt.nacdnet.net.net)), Cartographic Technician and founder of the VACD Drone Program). They work alongside the NRCS Staff to develop and implement conservation plans on farms and provide technical and financial assistance working through state and federal programs like EQIP and RCPP (Regional Conservation Partnership Program). Projects range from forestry, cropland, to farmstead and all link back to water quality through soil health, erosion prevention, and mitigating runoff.

* Holly McClintock manages applications and contracts
* As partner employees they have flexibility to help in other projects including, UVM Extension on [Nutrient Management Planning Course](https://www.uvm.edu/extension/nwcrops/soil-health-and-nutrient-management) (NMP) and help farms write Land Treatment Plans (LTP). In addition, Lauren Newman and Izzy Bazluke (Elizabeth.Bazluke@vt.nacdnet.net) were able to create the VACD Drone Program.
* Similar to NRCS Staff in scope of projects.

**Molly Varner, VACD Communications Coordinator and Grand Isle County NRCD Project Manager 43:45-52:10**

43:45 - Brief overview of Conservation Districts work individually, together, and how they are connected to the partnership. There are 14 Conservation Districts in Vermont, the Northwest zone is represented at the meeting today by Lauren Weston (Franklin County), Peter Danforth (Lamoille County), and Molly Varner (Grand Isle).

* Conservation Districts are non-regulatory, local government entities.
* Work with landowners, farmers, communities, and partner organizations to conserve and protect Vermont’s natural resources.
* Established in 1939 through the Vermont Soil Conservation Act
* Scope of work varies based on local concerns
* Protect water quality and conservation concerns through four main categories: agricultural, forestry, watershed protection, and urban conservation
* Activities that fall in each of those categories are: monitoring and assessments, technical assistance, coordination of financial assistance, planning and design, project implementation, education and outreach
* Most funding is through grants, there are two state level organizations that support conservation districts;
  + State Natural Resources Conservation Council – state agency, local perspective, facilitate info sharing
  + [Vermont Association of Conservation Districts](https://www.vacd.org/) (VACD) - support staff for districts, non-profit membership organization, includes tech staff Meryl outlined, and support staff for districts; ag programs manager (Emily Nummer), water quality programs manager (Holden Sparacino – [holden.sparacino@vacd.org](mailto:holden.sparacino@vacd.org)), communications coordinator (Molly Varner), executive director (Jill Arace – jill.arace@vacd.org), finance manager (Clare Ireland – clare.ireland@vacd.org)

48:20 – Ag and Water Quality – work with farmers on education and technical assistance to balance water quality and farming operations. Assist with nutrient management plans, conservation plans, reading through technical and financial assistance programs. Can assist with implementation of conservation practices. Collect soil, water, manure samples. This partnership facilitates information sharing that can benefit farmers. Many Conservation Districts are involved in Nutrient Management Plans (NMP), in partnership with VACD Technical staff and UVM.

51:07 – Natural resources conservation and restoration including riparian floodplain, streamside buffers, [Trees for Streams program](https://www.vacd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TFS_Resource_Guide-2015.pdf), lake watershed action plants, tactical basin planning, dam removal, culvert upgrades, and more.

**Emily Nummer, VACD/NRCC Agriculture Programs Manager 52:10-53:07**

Support agriculture programs for districts, grant management, technical and financial assistance, training and capacity building, support strategic planning, liaison between state/federal and districts.

**Peter Danforth, Lamoille County NRCD District Manager 53:07-56:50**

Project areas include watershed-based work, stormwater, floodplain and stream restoration, aquatic organism passage (AOP), lake assessments, lakeshore BMPs, farm equipment rental, nutrient management planning, river corridor and wetland easements. Outreach to schools and libraries, nature center, summer camp, interactive trails,

**Dan Lee, Lamoille County NRCD Conservation Outreach Coordinator**

**Emily Porter-Goff, Lamoille County NRCD Education and Outreach Coordinator**

**Lauren Weston, Franklin County NRCD District Manager 56:50-1:01:40**

54:00 - Near complete turnover of staff at FCNRCD in the last year, Lauren Weston taking over from Jeannie Bartlett, Brodie Haenke now working for VAAFM, two new staff in October, new ECO AmeriCorps member Kate Wettergreen. Currently doing many program referrals for farmers including BMP & EQIP, rivers projects including dam removal, floodplain and in-stream work, redoing natural resources assessment for Franklin County with UVM class NR 206, aquatic organism passage, roads/stormwater. Partner with organizations outside this MOU including [Friends of Northern Lake Champlain](https://www.friendsofnorthernlakechamplain.org/), [Missisquoi River Basin Association](https://www.mrbavt.com/), and [Franklin Watershed Association](https://www.franklinwatershed.org/about.html). This past week led a Bioblitz with students in St. Albans.

1:00:12 – Districts are unique and can provide assistance on projects outside of your organizations scope of work, please reach out.

**Kate Wettergreen, Franklin County NRCD ECO AmeriCorps Member**

**Chris Smith, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1:01:40 – 1:08:11**

1:01:40 – Chris Smith leads the habitat restoration program in Vermont called the [Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program](https://www.fws.gov/northeast/EcologicalServices/pdf/partners/vt_2011_pffw_program_final.pdf), serves on the VAWQP Steering Committee, and serves on the new employee orientation subcommittee.

1:03:00 – How the U.S. Fish and Wildlife fits into the VAWQP – works with others to conserve, protect, enhance, restore fish and wildlife for the continuing benefit of the American people. Essex Junction office established in 1991, through the Lake Champlain Special Designation Act. Most work is with farmers on habitat for fish and wildlife species, while also providing water quality benefits. Partner with private landowners and organizations through the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/conservation-reserve-enhancement/index) (CREP) with FSA, [Wetland Reserve Easement Program](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/vt/programs/easements/) with NRCS, and [Trees for Streams Program](https://www.vacd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TFS_Resource_Guide-2015.pdf) with NRCDs. Fish biologists who focus on aquatic organism passage and connectivity, dam removal.

1:05:54 – Staff includes Andrew Milliken ([Andrew\_milliken@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_milliken@fws.gov)), Complex Manager; Katie Kain ([Katherine\_Kain@fws.gov](mailto:Katherine_Kain@fws.gov)), Fish and Wildlife Biologist; Ryan Crehan ([Ryan\_Crehan@fws.gov](mailto:Ryan_Crehan@fws.gov)), Wetland Biologist; David Rojek ([David\_Rojek@fws.gov](mailto:David_Rojek@fws.gov)), Biological Sciences Technician.

1:06:52 – What connects us to VAWQP are projects with dual benefits, retired farmland that isn’t a great fit for agriculture can be great fit for restoring wetlands with habitat for fish and wildlife along with water quality.

**Rebecca Pfeiffer, VT DEC River Corridor Floodplain Protection Program 1:08:11-1:18:00**

1:08:11 – Program provides technical assistance to towns for floodplain work, regulatory work, and planning, technical review and comments for Act 250, issue permits. Agriculture is one of the areas permits are issued for development in floodplains and river corridors.

1:11:11 – [Flood Resilient Communities Fund](https://vem.vermont.gov/flood-resilient-communities-fund) (FRCF), partnering with Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) to manage this ARPA funding. First round funding applications due October 29th, 2021 with future funding in January/February 2022. Main purpose is look at watershed resilience in the face of climate change, project include reducing future flood risk, improving landscape resilience, flood damaged property buyouts, preservation of vacant parcels, natural resource projects. First round of funding is $5 million and hope for additional funds in the future. Funds are not tied to TMDL or phosphorus reduction.

1:13:36 – Introduction of staff not present:

Chris Brunelle ([Chris.Brunelle@vermont.gov](mailto:Chris.Brunelle@vermont.gov)) is the Stream Alterations Engineer for the Northwest Region. Does stream alteration permits, drainage networks on farms may be covered under the general permit but be in touch with drainage over ¼ square mile.

Staci Pomeroy ([staci.pomeroy@vermont.gov](mailto:staci.pomeroy@vermont.gov)) is the technical personal to contact when developing projects looking at state funding, on the ground review of river floodplain restoration projects, river corridor easements.

Marli Rupe ([marli.rupe@vermont.gov](mailto:marli.rupe@vermont.gov)) chief of the Agriculture Water Quality Section, in the Water Infrastructure Investment Division. New [Climate Council website](https://climatechange.vermont.gov/) and draft plan is due on December 1st, 2021. Payment for ecosystem services work group has started back up, it is chaired by the AAFM but most of the partners in the room are represented. Contact your local person for updates if you want to know more.

**Brock Freyer, VT DEC Wetlands Program 1:18:00-1:22:07**

1:18:00 – Brock Freyer is District Wetland Ecologist for Franklin County, Grand Isle, and three towns in northern Chittenden County. Wetland scientists identify plant communities, soil types, hydrology features to determine if a wetland is present. Work regularly with landowners, farmers, developers, etc. to avoid and minimize wetland and buffer impacts, and permitting. Lots of overlap between wetlands and other natural resources, work with NRCS and other ANR Agencies. Outside of regulatory work, sits on the dam removal task force and advisory board for Act 76 work, the Pay for Phosphorus program.

**Kevin Burke, VT DEC Stormwater Program 1:22:07-1:29:12**

1:22:07- Currently serving as co-interim program manager with Christy Witters ([christy.witters@vermont.gov](mailto:christy.witters@vermont.gov)). Padraic Monks, former manager is now in the DEC Facilities Engineering Division as Finances and Loans Program Manager.

1:23:20 – The creation of impervious surfaces of 1 acre or more, expansions and redevelopment that are or will have 1 acre or more of impervious surface, are regulated under state regulations. Construction activities with 1 acre or more of earth disturbance, are regulated under federal requirement that they are delegated to implement. On farms this is generally construction of manure storage and new barn/structures, farm field runoff is out of their jurisdiction. Regulate industrial facilities, can include log or rail yard, manufacturing facilities.

1:25:09 - Creating Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans. Regulate larger municipalities through the MS4 program. In Franklin County, St. Albans City and Town are under the [Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) General Permit](https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/stormwater/permit-information-applications-fees/ms4-permit). Communities that do not fall under MS4 are regulated under [Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP)](https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/stormwater/permit-information-applications-fees/municipal-roads-program). Jim Ryan ([Jim.Ryan@vermont.gov](mailto:Jim.Ryan@vermont.gov)) is contact for Municipal Roads, working on mapping roads, plans for corrections. Other program is [Transportation General Permit (TS4)](https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/stormwater/transportation-general-permit), which is similar to the Municipal Roads, and covers VTRANS roads and airports.

1:27:05 - Review Act 250 projects and Section 248 through public utility commission, mainly solar projects but also wind and gas. Taylor Flanagan ([Taylor.Flanagan@vermont.gov](mailto:Taylor.Flanagan@vermont.gov)) is contact for St. Albans areas for compliance strategies and inspections.

1:28:05 – Operational permitting for retrofits of three-acre sites that pre-date stormwater regulation to meet Memphremagog and Lake Champlain TMDLs.

**Clarice Cutler, DEC Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) Program. 1:29:12-1:33:54**

CAFO is a relatively new program that is comprised of Chip Gianfagna ([Chris.Gianfagna@vermont.gov](mailto:Chris.Gianfagna@vermont.gov)) and Clarice Culter, a regulator who is not part of the 1619 agreement but collaborates on corrective action for farms with discharges. Happy to discuss high level or hypothetical situations at any time. Areas of overlap are farm inspections, MOU between ANR and VAAFM that when a farm is applying for or amending a [Large Farm Operations (LFO)](https://agriculture.vermont.gov/lfo) permit, they can attend. Medium CAFO general permit that is still in draft form, [updated draft online](https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/stormwater/docs/Agriculture/MediumCAFO_DraftGeneralPermit.pdf). Will be scheduling another stakeholder meeting, encourage to attend or reach out with questions/concerns.

**Brodie Haenke, VAAFM 1:34:38 – 1:38:31**

Previously worked at FCNRCD and Missisquoi River Basin Association, now working at the VAAFM with the water quality program. VAAFM Staff Introductions:

**Connor Steckel, VAAFM Water Quality Specialist** – Inspections in the Missisquoi watershed identifying resource concerns on farms and then work with partners and engineering staff to address those concerns to help farms navigate back to compliance.

**Brittany Cole, VAAFM Water Quality Specialist** - In the northern half of Vermont, works on annual reporting requirements for medium and large farms, permit writing for large farms, writing permit amendments, non-sewage waste importation requests, development of TSP certification.

**Andrew Mitchell, Engineer with BMP program** – Providing consultations on water quality risks within farm production areas, moving farms through the grant process, works in Franklin and Grand Isle.

**David Wardrop, Water Quality Inspector** – Inspections in the Missisquoi River basin, part of the regulatory team.

**Luke Hughes, Water Quality Inspector** – Northern Lake Champlain area.

**Sylvia Jensen** (sylvia.jensen@vermont.gov), **Water Quality Inspector** - Lamoille Basin (not present, introduced by Brodie Haenke)

**Brodie Haenke, VAAFM 1:38:31 – 1:46:36**

1:38:31 – Water Quality Inspectors used to only work with certain sized farms; Large Farm Operations (LFO), Medium Farm Operations (MFO), or Small Farms but now they are each working within specific watersheds. [Map](https://agriculture.vermont.gov/water-quality/contacts) outlining which inspectors and engineers work in each watershed.

1:39:21 - VAAFM provides regulatory oversight of water quality on farms and voluntary financial assistance programs. Act 67 gives VAAFM authority to enforce water quality practices on farms from [Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs)](https://agriculture.vermont.gov/rap) adopted in 2016, LFO individual permits, and MFO general permits. VAAFM has authority to issue emergency order to protect water quality and to require implementation of mandatory corrective actions.

1:40:18 – Water Quality Program Team –

* Working on [Vermont Pay for Phosphorus Program](https://agriculture.vermont.gov/VPFP-TA-to-Producers), RFP for RCPP released.
* Engineers and Inspectors work on BMP program for infrastructure
* [Capital Equipment Assistance Program (CEAP),](https://agriculture.vermont.gov/ceap) has two open applications, Phosphorus Removal Equipment are due Oct. 1 and General Equipment are due Nov. 1
* [Farm Agronomic Practice (FAP)](https://agriculture.vermont.gov/fap) Program, provides cost share for field practices
* Grass, waterway, and filter strip Program
* Pasture Surface Water Fencing Program, improved stream crossings and watering systems
* [Working Lands Enterprise](https://agriculture.vermont.gov/agency-agriculture-food-markets-news/working-lands-enterprise-board-releases-new-request), open request for applications for business assistance
  + VAAFM Secretary Tebbetts has convened a Task Force to compile resources and provide options for 28 organic dairy farms impacted by Danone/Horizon’s announcement that contracts to purchase milk would not be renewed after August 31, 2022.

1:44:30 – Additional Updates

* RAP Revisions Drafted - with the addition of the Technical Service Provider (TSP) Section as the new Section 13 of the RAPs, and a new Section 14 of the RAPs focused on wetlands located on agricultural lands.
  + The TSP Section creates a definition for a TSP, as well as certification requirements and criteria, regulatory requirements concerning the process of NMP preparation and submittal to the Agency, and enforcement capabilities on TSPs when these requirements are not met. The creation of the TSP Section was with immense input and comment from the TSP community.
  + The wetlands section was included pursuant to Act 64 of 2019, requiring the VAAFM Secretary to create requirements for activities occurring in areas that are excluded from ANR wetlands regulation. This Section is a combined effort of VAAFM and ANR/DEC personnel, involving over a year of discussion and effort by both Agencies.
  + There were several other changes of note in the RAPs, if you have questions contact Kaitlin Hayes at [Kaitin.hayes@vermont.gov](mailto:Kaitin.hayes@vermont.gov).
* VAWQP Orientation Site to Launch 10/15 – Site Still Under Construction – This website will be a great first stop for new employees working in the water quality partnership.
* Partner Database - Please continue to use the partner database to track your interactions with farmers. The Partner Database currently stores:
  + 10,000 practices – capturing in 16,000 KG Phosphorus reductions!
  + 3,000 farm visits
  + 1,700 facilities

**Colleen Hickey, Lake Champlain Basin Program Education and Outreach 1:46:36 – 1:58:45**

1:46:36 – LCBP was started through the Lake Champlain Special Designation Act in 1990, role is to coordinate water pollution planning for Lake Champlain with New York, Vermont, and Quebec. Implement projects as funding became available. Focus on phosphorus reduction, toxic substances, biodiversity, aquatic nuisance species, and climate change. Last 3 years approximately 93,000 people on boat launches, and 6,800 in the [resource room at ECHO](https://www.lcbp.org/our-goals/informed-involved-public/resource-room/) this last year. Can use this as an opportunity to share information with the public. Office in Grand Isle, in complex with VTFW hatchery.

1:48:50 Program information -

* Publish the [State of the Lake](https://www.lcbp.org/news-and-media/publications/state-of-the-lake/) Document every three years, in partnership with scientists from NY, VT, and Quebec.
* Alli Lewis is producing a VAWQP organization orientation, info on LCBP will be included in the next few weeks when that is finalized.
* NRCS, USFWS, VAAFM are involved in the LCBP Steering Committee. Amy Overstreet is on the Education and Outreach Committee. Laura DiPietro, Ryan Patch, and others have served in the past on the Technical Advisory Committee. Phil Benedict helped start the Lake Champlain Farm Award that was presented at the Annual Dairy Banquet at the farm show.
* LCBP funding comes primarily through the EPA and Great Lakes Fishery Commission
* Programs supported by LCPB include the nutrients stone tile drain field practice modeling, the stone tile drain load assessment and literature, the UVM Extension whole farm management planning pilot, and Tile Affluent Flute Filters in Lake Carmi. Teacher training cooperative since 1990 with Lake Champlain Sea Grant, Lake Champlain Committee, State of Vermont, and other partners.
* Opportunities for more education in St. Albans, encourage everyone to look for those in the future.
* Management plan for Lake Champlain is called *Opportunities for Action*, up for renewal in 2022 update every 4-5 years
* Under Special Designation Act in 1990, LCBP was the only plan in the nation required to include cultural heritage and recreation planning. This is still a key component, now called the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership. In 2022, Education and Outreach Grants will be available, theme is celebrating 50 years of the Clean Water Act. Just issued RFPs for $1.4 million that include agricultural projects in list of potential applicants.
* Franklin and Grand Isle Farmers Watershed Alliance video on large farm equipment
* Raise the Blade Campaign, building off ag partnerships

**Katie Darr, LCBP** **Citizen Advisory Committee Coordinator 1:58:45 - 1:59:41**

Citizen Advisory Committee has a strong interest in future of agriculture in Vermont, it is on their action plan for state legislature.

**Susan Brouillette, UVM Extension Norwest Crops and Soils Program Manager 1:59:41 – 2:10:50**

Introduction of Heather Darby ([heather.darby@uvm.edu](mailto:heather.darby@uvm.edu)), Jeff Sanders ([jeffrey.sanders@uvm.edu](mailto:jeffrey.sanders@uvm.edu)), Dan Lerner ([daniel.lerner@uvm.edu](mailto:daniel.lerner@uvm.edu)), Jeff Carter ([jeff.carter@uvm.edu](mailto:jeff.carter@uvm.edu)), Kirsten Workman ([kirsten.workman@uvm.edu](mailto:kirsten.workman@uvm.edu)), and Eric Roy ([eric.roy.1@uvm.edu](mailto:eric.roy.1@uvm.edu)). Roy Desrochers ([roy.desrochers@uvm.edu](mailto:roy.desrochers@uvm.edu)) a sensory expert, new program addition.

Borderview Research Farm Station in Alburgh, VT owned by Rodger Rainville has 68 experiments, 960 treatments, 3,450 plots. Program and project areas of UVM Extension include on-farm research, Crop Testing Laboratory (in process of being renamed as the E.E. Cummings Crop Testing Laboratory), Technical Assistance, Equipment Rent/loan Program, goCrop, Manure share, Grass-Fed Benchmarking, Educational Courses, Outreach Events, online outreach, sensory analysis, water quality monitoring (tile drain sampling), Farming and Climate Change Program, Edge-of-Field Monitoring Work, Discovery Acres, CEAP Watershed-Scale Monitoring, and more.

**Break for Lunch** – thanks to Mill River Brewing BBQ and Smokehouse

**Danielle Owczarski, VT DEC Watershed Planner 2:10:50-2:27:10**

2:13:00 – Watershed Planner at the DEC for the Lamoille River watershed and parts of the Connecticut River watershed. Presentation on the 2021 Lamoille Tactical Basin Plan – Ag Update. There are 15 tactical basin plans for Vermont, 5 basin planners. Tactical basin plans are a guidebook for protecting the best waters and to restore impaired waters, in addition to maintaining and enhancing. Plans are written every 5 years. Writing process starts with monitoring including chemical and biological monitoring, then work with partners to develop specific strategies.

2:16:50 - Lake Champlain phosphorus TMDL, reductions complete by 2036. RAPs help to meet targets; phosphorus reductions are reported yearly through the DEC Clean Water Initiative Program.

2:18:13 – Once strategies are determined, work with partners to develop them, then put them in the Tactical Basin Plan, then have the plan reviewed for feedback, updated based on feedback, then it is released for public comment, write a responsiveness summary to the public comment, then the final plan is published. In December 2021 the next Tactical Basin Plan will be published, on October 13th, 2021 it will be released for public comment. There will be public meetings and a story map for the plan.

2:20:45 – Lamoille Basin Agricultural Strategies - category for agricultural lands runoff that include priority subbasins, priority towns, partners, and funding for each strategy. Some strategies:

* Identify projects with significant sources of nutrient input based on mapping, inspections, outreach. Deer Brook, Stones Brook, Mill Brook, and Browns River are priority areas.
* Implement projects that address significant sources of nutrient input including BMP areas.
* Implement NMP recommendations.
* Form agricultural sector workgroups for priority subbasins. Deer Brook and Stones Brook are both listed as impaired, specific workgroups.
* Provide education, outreach, and technical assistance
* Continue funding to support programs and practices to achieve these goals
* Support monitoring efforts to identify water quality issues related to agricultural land uses and track progress

2:25:55 – Reach out if you want to be more included in the working groups of particular areas. Generally, reach out to Conservation Districts and VAAFM to know who to include, but reach out if you are interested. Plan will be up for public comments from October 13th – November 12th, 2021.

**Karen Bates, VT DEC Watershed Planner 2:27:10-2:36:39**

2:27:10 – Coordinator for the Missisquoi Tactical Basin Plan. This has been informed by partner meetings along with input from VAAFM from Mary Montour and Nina Gage to make sure it reflects their needs.

2:28:25 – Missisquoi Plan includes the Missisquoi River Basin along with everything that drains into the Vermont side of the Missisquoi Bay on Lake Champlain, which includes the Rock and Pike Rivers. Priority Subbasins include headwaters of Pike River, Black Creek, Fairfield River, Enosburgh Falls. In addition to management plans for impaired waters list that are primarily impaired due to agriculture, potential for workgroup to encourage voluntary action. Focus of strategies include supporting RAP compliance with a focus on CSFOs (Certified Small Farm Operations) and SFOs (Small Farm Operations), supporting BMP Implementation, improving soil health, and enhancing partnerships through farm management team and communications plan.

**Lauren Weston, FCNRCD 2:36:39 – 2:39:20**

Farm Management Teams are being piloted in White River Watershed currently. So that all service providers working on a farm meet together twice a year to coordinate efforts. Potential for this here.

Discussion on what is working well and what isn’t, ideas for future meetings, and other thoughts.

**Karen Bates**

Partnerships with Vermont Land Trust (VLT), Missisquoi River Basin Association (MRBA) and other conservation groups is working well. Would like to talk about collaboration with these conservation groups and farmers/landowners. What are the roles; who knows the farmer, who knows the resources? How can it work well, especially with additional funding on the way?

**Emily Porter-Goff**

It would be helpful to have a resource with all the different grant programs and what types of projects they can take on, funding period and timing. Maybe on google drive so that it can be a working document that everyone can contribute to and update as needed.

**Lauren Weston**

We don’t currently have a farm management team. What I do currently as a district is try to figure out who is working with a farmer through the partner database, conversations, and talk to their NRCS Planner and try to gather as much information as possible before going out to visit the farmer. Does anyone have thoughts on how they approach a new farmer or what their experience is?

**Carissa Stein**

Usually if I have a new farmer, I email them the list of everyone’s contacts from the VAAFM composite list of all the resources in Vermont. Also provide information of NRCS programs, FSA, and USDA. On the farm visit listen to them about plans for next five years and where they are now. I may see a resource concern but try to stay on their side. My concern may be number 10 on their list, so how do I help them address the things on the top of their list so that we can get to the concerns that I have. Beginning farmers generally need a lot of technical assistance, it is well worth your time to help them while starting out.

**Lauren Weston**

What do you need? What would be helpful to have or talk about or to know about from a different agency? Trainings, explanations of processes?

**Danielle Owczarski**

One challenges that I’ve had is where we’ve identified a problem and want to work with a farmer to address it and not go to regulatory immediately. As a planner this is outside my scope. What is the path that I should take? Sometimes this information comes from a phone call but more often comes from monitoring information and can take some investigating to find the source of the problem. What’s the best path to take as planners? We don’t want to sit on this information until there is a violation or their farm is inspected.

**Molly Varner**

I think it would be helpful to hear about success stories or processes that have worked, for example how did you get the water quality volunteer monitoring program started, who were the major players? Connecting with one another about how to get ideas off the ground and hear through examples would be valuable.

**Peter Danforth**

For next meeting or meetings coming up, having a scenario where we have people from our organizations that role play what they have been through from A to Z for outreach to different farm sizes and how they went about it. It can be a difficult scenario to figure out.

**Tucker Malone**

A Q&A forum for higher level and hypothetical questions. Without knowing specifically where to direct it, being able to put it out there and have it get answered and other people could see what feedback you had gotten in case they have similar situations.

**Carissa Stein**

One thing that has worked really well is the layer effect of programs such as EQIP, VAAFM, VHCB another one is VLT, FWS, CREP, VACD so that you take a farm that is going into VLT and you can make a whole plan of all the programs that could be applied and then present that. Each of these programs has perimeters, filling the niche, and then those layers have to happen one thing after another. It takes a lot of communication with the farmer and partners. Using this approach has worked well and the farmers have approved.

**Danielle Owczarski**

During the state meeting they had a panel of farmers that had gone through various funding programs and could talk about their experience and what worked for them and challenges with the funding. Being able to hear more feedback would probably be helpful for the funders and also helpful to have that perspective when writing plans that sound good in theory but might not be that applicable or there may be big challenges that need to be addressed first.

**Meeting Concludes**