

USDA-NRCS Minnesota Civil Rights Advisory Committee Minutes

November 7, 2007; 9:30am – 3:00pm

1st Quarter, FY2008

Waite Park Field Office, Room 217

Attendees: Cory Drummond, CRAC Chair, Area 5 Rep
Steve Lutes, Area 2 Rep
Debra Hermel, Area 3 Rep
Katundra Shears, Area 4 Rep
Brenda Tonn, Area 6 Rep
Christiane Roy, Area 7 Rep
Mike Walker, MLRA Office REP
Deb Walchuck, MN State Outreach Coordinator
Lisa Buckner, FWP
Via speakerphone:
Cutrina Moreland, State Office Rep
Gloria Larson, HR Manager
Ann English, CRAC Advisor

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Cory Drummond, Committee Chair at 9:45am.

Introductions of new committee members: Debra Hermel Area 3 Rep
Brenda Tonn Area 6 Rep

Approval of August 6, 2007 meeting minutes:
Motion: Steve Lutes, Second: Deb Hermel

Approval of area civil rights reports
Motion: Mike Walker, Second: Steve Lutes

Civil Rights Advisory Committee

Cory discussed committee member terms and general responsibilities of members.

Election of Vice Chair – nominated and approved (Unanimous Vote); Katundra Shears accepted

Election of Secretary – nominated and approved (Unanimous Vote); Debra Hermel accepted

Sub-Committee/SEPM Reports

Recruitment

Cutrina and Gloria reported on the progress of recruiting students and updated the group on progress in the last year. They've attended career fairs and talked with students interested in internships with NRCS. The budget will dictate the number of new hires this year.

Notification

Mike reported that the web site is maintained with updates of CRAC meeting minutes, SEPM details, CR compliance guide for field offices.

Training

Cory reported that civil rights helpful hints guides were made available for field offices to use as a reference. The EEO cards were also distributed to field offices explaining the process of filing a complaint.

Cultural Resources

Christiane and Cory reported that six cultural resource field days were offered at different locations throughout the state. Good attendance was recorded at the field days.

SEPM Report

Federal Womens Program

Lisa reported that she sent emails to colleges about announcements that information regarding NRCS employment and internship opportunities. She also requested career fair dates from various colleges.

Disability Emphasis Program Manager

Asian/Pacific Islander Emphasis Program Manager

Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager

Cutrina reported that she is continuing to work on recruitment of qualified individuals for these emphasis programs. She's working with the National Hispanic Manager on a database to collaborate information from student interviews that will assist in hiring qualified full time individuals.

Lisa informed the new members that the EEO training course needs to be completed or in training plan within 6 months of start date.

2008 Business Plan

Reviewed 2007 Business Plan for Civil Rights Advisory Committee and discussed changes for 2008. Dates were updated reflecting current fiscal year. 2008 Business Plan will be forthcoming.

Subcommittees

Subcommittee members were selected on a volunteer basis as follows:

Notification: Mike Walker (Chair), Deb Hermel

Cultural Resources (All Cultures Appreciation): Brenda Tonn (Chair), Katundra Shears, Cory Drummond

Training: John Anderson (Chair), Christiane Roy, Cory Drummond

Recruitment and Retention: Cutrina Moreland (Chair), Steve Lutes, Cory Drummond

Diversity Awareness

The CRAC committee discussed ways to increase diversity within our agency. Steve pointed out that in the next few years, a large amount of turnover will exist due to retirements. Minnesota has taken positive strides to increase diversity of employees but the opportunity will exist to increase this even more in the next few years.

Civil Rights Issues and Recommendations for Management

A few items were discussed throughout the meeting that were summarized as suggestions to present to management:

Deb W. initiated a discussion about the amount and kind of feedback individuals receive when they apply for a position and are not selected. A few quality employees have not been given adequate reasoning as to why they were not selected for a position. A suggestion was made to develop a procedure or set of guidelines to improve the deficiencies of the unselected application. This will help the quality employees develop better skills and remain interested in NRCS positions.

Steve questioned the existence of the mentor program. The committee feels this program should be encouraged and promoted to all new employees and those new MN employees. This would give the employee a neutral resource to ask questions to and seek professional development. Many new employees aren't given proper guidance on issues from health insurance options, thrift savings planning, to career goals and steps to achieve those goals. Each area representative is to discuss with their ASC (FO) the number of mentor/mentee relationships and the effectiveness of this program within their area. Cory will draft a proposal of how this program can be improved based on this information.

Christiane asked that civil rights material in media library be converted and available online. Also the inventory of this material should be updated or purchased new. More field offices would take advantage of these materials if they were more current.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45pm.