

USDA-NRCS Minnesota Civil Rights Committee Minutes
February 23rd 2005; 10:00 a.m. – 2:45 p.m.
Waite Park Field Office, Waite Park, MN

Attendees: Amy Stratton, Chair of Civil Rights Committee
John Anderson, Area 1 Rep.
Shannon Bengtson, Area 3 Rep. (beginning a term on the committee)
Mark Kulig, Area 7 Rep.
Julie Lindner, Area 3 Rep. (concluding a term on the committee)
Stephen Lutes, Vice Chair of Civil Rights Committee / Area 2 Rep.
George Montgomery Jr., Area 4 Rep./BEPM
Cutrina Moreland, State Office Rep.
Dennis Reimers, Area 6 Rep. (concluding a term on the committee)
Mike Taylor, Area 6 Rep. (beginning a term on the committee)
Mike Walker, Committee Secretary / MLRA Office Rep.

Advisors: Gloria Larson, HR Spec., State Office
Mary Lou Warner, HR Manager, State Office
Ann English, Advisor/CR Coordinator
Tessa Garcia, HEPM
Sandy Jerzak, FWP SEPM
David Wise, AISEPM

Welcome

The meeting was called to order by Amy Stratton, Committee Chair, at 10:00 am.

Introduction and welcome to new members

Minutes October 20, 2004

Draft minutes from the previous quarterly CR committee meeting had been emailed for review prior to today's meeting. Steve Lutes ***moved*** that the minutes be approved. George Montgomery ***seconded*** and the motion ***passed***.

Teleconference minutes November 2, 2004

Draft minutes from the teleconference had been emailed prior to today's meeting. Cutrina Moreland ***moved*** that the minutes be approved. Steve Lutes ***seconded*** and the motion ***passed***.

2005 Business Plan

The FY 2005 MN NRCS CR Advisory Committee and Special Emphasis Program Business Plan was approved during the November teleconference. It is now signed and in effect.

Budget Report

Amy Stratton requests that expenditures under the CR committee budget be reported directly to her. She compiles this information into quarterly reports that are sent to the State Budget Officer.

CR Subcommittee Updates

Recruitment Subcommittee

George Montgomery reported that a subcommittee meeting is upcoming. Included on the agenda are schools we maintain contact with, retention efforts, the recruitment timeline, and a PowerPoint program for recruitment purposes.

Notification Subcommittee

CR related content is being maintained on our state NRCS Web site. A discussion on how bulky the 6-part folder has become led to the suggestion that we increase content on the Web site with material that could be trimmed from the folders.

Cultural Resources Subcommittee

Planning is underway for this year's all-cultures month celebration. One proposed approach to programming the celebration is to involve Kathy Starkweather. She has been contacted. Options on scheduling and combining multiple areas are being considered. Need to balance number of locations, session length, and funds available for travel.

Training Subcommittee

The subcommittee has held a teleconference.

Current issues include:

- a draft bulletin on the EEO and program complaint process (a copy is among the handouts for today's meeting)
- a draft pocket reference guide to the EEO and program complaint process

Other issues include training for newer employees and students (including Web-based training) and the career coach/mentor program. The subcommittee recommends the Roles and Responsibilities of EEO Advisory Committee Members/Managing a Special Emphasis Program training session for the new committee members and SEPMs.

Awards Subcommittee

This subcommittee met twice (including a teleconference) since the last full committee meeting. Response to a second bulletin asking for CR award nominations was very good, with several nominations received from around the state for both individual and group categories. All members of the Civil Rights committee and Advisors were invited to participate in making a selection in each category. A teleconference was held and the results were forwarded to Mr. Hunt in the form of a recommendation. Mr. Hunt then made the final selections. Awards went to Mary Monte (Individual Award) and Stone Hill Regional Park (Group Award)

These nominations will be forwarded for the national award.

Election of Officers

Election of Vice Chair

Cutrina Moreland nominated Mark Kulig for Vice Chair. Steve Lutes seconded the nomination and moved that nominations be ceased and a unanimous ballot cast for Mark Kulig. George Montgomery seconded. Mark Kulig was elected by a voice vote.

Election of Secretary

John Anderson nominated Steve Lutes for Secretary. George Montgomery seconded the nomination. Steve Lutes nominated Cutrina Moreland for Secretary. George Montgomery seconded the nomination. Cutrina Moreland nominated Shannon Bengtson for Secretary. George Montgomery seconded the nomination. Shannon Bengtson nominated John Anderson for Secretary. Steve Lutes seconded the nomination. Steve Lutes moved that nominations be ceased. George Montgomery seconded. Four names were placed into nomination. Shannon Bengtson was elected by a ballot vote.

Reports and Plans

MN NRCS Corrective Action Report

Ann English updated the committee on progress. One item needs action; all others have been resolved.

DN 714 Report - update

A DN714 based on data current as of 9/18/04 was circulated among the attendees. This is the most recent information available in the DN714 format. Sources indicate that upcoming releases will be in the new MD 715 format. For customer data on the county level, an RSNOD report from FSA is a possible source.

Affirmative Employment Plan - update

Guidelines for preparation of this document (a report compiled annually) are not yet available. The committee chair will notify the committee members when we have the opportunity to help compile this report.

Awards

Ann English presented all the Civil Rights Committee members and SEPM's with awards from Mr. Hunt. A group photo was taken.

(lunch)

Following the lunch break, Shannon Bengtson described a civil rights concern that has surfaced in Area 3. NRCS staff and partners are now working with landowners/operators who are natives of Laos. Communications can be a challenge and in at least one instance, misunderstanding has led to increased cost in getting practices applied.

Human Resources Presentation

Part 1: Getting in the System

Mary Lou Werner made a presentation on the procedure followed to place job applicants under the merit promotion plan. The primary focus of her presentation for today was either prospective new hires or workers with current status.

The placement action begins with a job analysis/classification process and the creation of a Position Description. This is followed by establishment of a rating schedule and the KSAs. Then, an SF-52 is completed. Next, the vacancy announcement is issued.

Mary Lou explained the difference between status and non-status categories.

Announcing a vacancy under both categories offers the flexibility for anyone meeting the job qualifications and citizenship requirement to apply.

Basic components of an application package:

- KSA statements
- OF 612 or SF 171 or a resume
- transcript
- other components as requested in the announcement

Currently, most vacancy announcements are accessed electronically (e.g., at usajobs.gov or my.NRCS). Remember, an original signature is needed when submitting an application package (whether the application is by hard copy, or some combination of digital via email, fax, and hard copy). Periodically, the HR staff has a need for subject matter experts to help with evaluating applications.

Students (SCEP or STEP), are under a different plan. Details of SCEP and STEP will be presented at an upcoming committee meeting.

CR in MN NRCS

All Cultures Day Event in each area

Our direction to take in planning for this will be affected by the outcome of discussion on the possibility of multi-area programs (refer back to update from Cultural Resources Subcommittee). To fund the events, each area and the SO have a budgeted amount for FY 2005 (documented in our Business Plan).

Area and SEPM Reports/Upcoming Events

(the following area reports were submitted by email to Committee Chair and compiled prior to the state leadership meeting held Feb 14-17)

The area reports are attached in the minutes.

Recommendations to Management

CRC Recommendations for Management

John Anderson returned the discussion to communications with cooperators of non-English speaking background. He proposed that it might be possible to use TSP funds for language translation services. This touched off a discussion that also brought in the possibility of getting help from the extension service. John Anderson *moved* that the committee draft a letter with recommendations to management regarding seeking means for improvement of communication with cooperators of non-English speaking background. George Montgomery *seconded* the motion and the motion *passed*.

Next Meeting & Adjourn

Next Meeting Date 3rd Quarter (April, May, or June)

Proposed Date for Next Quarterly Meeting:

April 20th, 2005

Location and time to be determined

Adjourn

Following a motion by Cutrina Moreland, the meeting adjourned at 2:45 pm.

MN NRCS Civil Rights Committee Report 1st Quarter FY 2005 October-December 2004

**Compiled by: Amy Stratton, Chair
Articles Submitted by: Civil Rights Committee Members and SEPM's**

Chair, Amy Stratton

- Civil Rights Committee met on October 20th, 2004 at Waite Park.
- Civil Rights Committee met on a teleconference November 2nd and made committee assignments for the Recruitment, Notification, Cultural Resources, and Training subcommittees.
- Area VI NRCS meeting was held on November 17th. Dennis Reimers and Angela Paben-Pursfil scheduled our meeting to include a tour of the St Peter Treaty Site. Employees had the opportunity to watch a short film about Native Americans in the region and then tour the museum. Dennis and Amy also provided civil rights training on “retaliation” and gave the employees updates on the accomplishments of the civil rights committee.
- I attended the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees 12th Annual Training in Sacramento, California. I acted as a moderator for several sessions and had a great opportunity to attend training sessions and met people from around the states.

Some highlights include presentations by the Assistance Chiefs, Effective Briefing Techniques, Effective Presentations, Homeland Security, the small farmer awards and Byron Kunisawa's presentation. The tour of California was excellent as well. We were able to see many different farmers: grapes, olives, tomatoes, and more. We also had the opportunity to visit UC Davis' “Plant Science Teaching Center and Student Farm” as well as the “Long Term Research on Farming Systems Project” at the Center for Integrated Farming Systems. It was a great opportunity to meet great people from many different disciplines and learn about NRCS in other parts of the country.

- Worked with Steve Lutes and Sandy Jerzak to put together a proposal for Kathy Starkweather to provide her “Unconscious Discrimination” presentation to all MN NRCS employees. Since this may be the “All Cultures Day” celebration in July we have informed the Cultural Resources Subcommittee and they have been working on this item.
- Civil Rights Awards Nominations were received in December. In early January all Civil Rights Committee, Advisors and SEPM's were invited to choose the nominations for the 2004 NRCS Civil Rights awards for individual and group/team. Those selected were passed on to Mr. Hunt, State Conservationist, for his approval.
- Wrote article for Current Developments December 2004 “Treating People with Dignity and Respect.”

Soils, Mike Walker

As committee secretary, I am continuing to pass along the meeting minutes, as they are approved, for posting with the civil rights content of the MN-NRCS Web site. Dave Wise and Dennis

Reimers also serve on the Web site subcommittee to the CR committee. We work with Webmaster Susan Ploetz. Also included is information from Joe McCloskey below.

**DIVERSITY OF RECENT HIRES IN MINNESOTA'S SOIL SURVEY PROGRAM
Submitted by Joe McCloskey**

The Minnesota soil survey program has been very active and successful in increasing the diversity of our workforce. Since 2001, 14 individuals have been selected for permanent positions. Of these, 79% are females, minorities, and/or handicapped. In addition, a Native American has been selected as the project leader for the Pine County Soil Survey. In addition, the soils program employed two Native Americans as students in 2003 and one Black male as a student in 2000.

Recruitment efforts have continued during recent Organization meetings. During the December NOPBNRCSE meeting, two NRCS employees from other states were consulted regarding potential employment opportunities with NRCS-Minnesota. Ongoing communication has been established with these individuals to keep them informed of positions for which they may be qualified.

State Office, Cutrina Moreland

NA

Area I, John Anderson

One FO posted the Barbara Jordan Health Policy Scholars Program information on the public bulletin board. The Roseau FO Viewed the Menendez vs. Westminster tape at a staff meeting.

Area 2, Stephen Lutes

NA

Area 3, Shannon Bengston

Mary Monte DC in Isanti County reports that she is currently working with a 2 family dairy operation in Isanti County where the owners and operators are mother, father, daughter, and son-in-law. The females are equal partners in the operation. I will be asking to interview the females for a story for the FWP newsletter.

Larry Nelson, Onanegozie RC&D reports that Peter Bundy, Masconomo Forestry, and Larry Nelson gave a presentation to a group of BIA and Reservation land use managers from around Minnesota, about the potential implications of certifying or not certifying the tribal forest lands.

Shannon Bengtson and Larry Nelson met with Scott Hanson, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe-Department of Natural Resources, about the potential for the RC&D Council and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe to cooperate on a project to determine options for food waste from the Band's school and casino operations.

Steve Haar, DC in Kananbec County suggested to Bill Dykes, Snake River Watershed Manager, to develop a nutrient management incentive payment similar to EQIP, targeting those producers in the Snake River Watershed.

Pine County DC Bob Korth reports that the Hinckley Field Office preformed outreach by having a booth at the WCMP Lifestyle show in Pine City (attended by several hundred women and estimated six minorities). The booth featured the CSP program and cost-share programs available to landowners. The District Newsletter was mailed to all landowners in Pine Co. including any minorities. Soil Conservationist Jessica Stoll, DC Bob Korth, and District staff; Sam Martin and Robin Payne were judges at the Hinckley-Finlayson Science Fair; included in the fair were several minority students.

Shannon Bengtson, DC in Milaca County reports she attended the State Postsecondary Agricultural Student (PAS) organization conference on February 1st and 2nd in St. Cloud. Career Opportunities with NRCS booklets, and earth team volunteer bookmarks were divided among the four colleges that were participating in the competitions. There were approximately 175 agricultural students in attendance with ¼ of them female. Shannon judged the scholarship interviews, and the career planning and progress competitions.

Shannon Bengtson has been working closely with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe on a potential project utilizing our plant materials center materials for an educational planting around the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe learning center.

Paul Sandstrom, DC from the Duluth FO summated a civil rights report that is attached.

Area 4, George Montgomery

Purpose. To share with upper management the activities partaken by the Area 4 representative for the State Civil Rights Committee in an effort to assist in the accomplishment of Minnesota CR goals.

As the Area 4 representative for the State Civil Rights Committee, I would like to share the most notable accomplishments that have taken place in area 4. Please note the listed items:

Notable Accomplishments:

- Serving on several subcommittees for the completion scheduled CR work items.
- Provide the Area 4 staff with updates of the State CR committee activities.
- Shared the CR committee's annual plan at our area meeting.
- Completed handicap accessibility survey conducted in all Area 4 offices.
- Visited with individual colleagues about serving as a career coach.
- Suggested that the Area 4 staff form a committee that plan 2 after work summer activities with our summer interns.

Area 5, Mark Rose

Overall it has been a fairly quiet quarter. We have been checking with field offices on their Official Bulletin Boards and accessibility to/in and around the office.

We have been assisting the Upper Sioux Agency in Granite Falls with a resource inventory of the reservation. I just completed the forest survey and will be having Ginger Kopp the State Forester, compile the field data into a report. We wrote up an EQIP plan for them and discussed other programs like; CRP and maybe CSP.

We talked to the Upper Sioux about hosting a Harmony session that we wanted to have in Area V and they agreed to host it which happened the first week of August. It was enjoyed by both the Tribe and NRCS employees.

A year ago the library in Worthington put in for a grant of 25,000 to fund a learning project for the Hispanics to afford them the opportunity educate themselves on working and leaving here. The grant funded computers and self directed computer workshops all in Spanish. I talked with the library director about how other communities could avail themselves of this grant. I will bring it to the next CR meeting.

As for personnel we had 9 Student Interns for most of the summer: Shantel Spielman, Tom Kost, Patrick Sievert, Bill Anderson, Casey Thomazin, and Alvin Howell, who are gone now. Nathan Blankers, Rich Berschied, and Sara Zwach are still working with us.

We also had Lynette Davila-Murphy a SCEP employee from Puerto Rico who was up in Big Stone County and like it very well. She stated she would like to come back to Minnesota.

We have two Soil Conservationist Trainees:

April Sullivan stationed in Swift County, Cheryl Isder stationed in Murray County.
For WAE's we have Mike Timmerman, Noelle Saeger, Amy Chartie and Brend Smith.

We also have Chandi McCracken working in the Lyon FO as an Earth Team Volunteer.

Area 6, Dennis Reimers

1.) Yamika Stokes was hired as the District Conservationist in Nicollet County. She is currently the only Black, female District Conservationist in the Area as well as the state of MN.

Activities completed by Yamika

A. Attended the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees (NOPBNRCSE) Annual conference in Sacramento, CA on December 12 – December 19, 2004. Served as a moderator for a General session; facilitator for the Nutrient Management course; and attended several courses (ArcGIS, FSAFeds, Rhythm of Life, Networking for New Employees, etc). Also serve as acting Interim Recording Secretary for the National Executive Board.

B. Currently serve as Secretary of the MN Chapter of The Organization (NOPBNRCSE). Also helping to recruit minority summer interns for FY05.

2). Meeker County has reviewed civil rights issues at 2 staff meetings.

3). Brown County assisted two female landowners to enroll into CCRP.

4). On November 17th, Area 6 used part of there civil rights budget for 40 participants to attend a tour at Treaty Center/Historical Society in St. Peter. A presentation was presented by the center.

5.) Report from Mankato FO:

Provide technical assistance to 5 Limited Resources Farmers (LRF) (2 is already in EQIP and 1 is signing up for 05).

Provide tech assistance to 2 Organic Farmers (both in EQIP program)

Assist the DC in Kanabec County to work with API farmer (translating, etc...)

Make "Careers Opportunities with NRCS" presentations to API students and

faculties at the University of Minnesota-St. Paul campus and the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Represent NRCS to serve in New Immigrant Agriculture Project Advisory Committee (NIAPAC). Attended its first meeting on the January 31st. Below is the brief information of the Advisory Committee:

Advisory Committee Composition: Representatives from diverse organizations and ethnic groups in MN agriculture, Ag producers, State and Federal agencies, the sustainable/organic Ag community, cooperative sector, banks and lending institutions, extension educators from UM, and others.

Committee Members Responsibilities:

*** Attend quarterly meeting for a two year term

*** Identify topics, resources, and presenters for education and training relevant to new immigrants coming to Minnesota (e.g., crop production, Ag business, loan application, marketing, etc.)

*** Develop and strengthen relationships between new immigrants and other underserved producers, the USDA, and the MNDA.

*** Advise staff on assisting new immigrants in establishing relationships with towns and counties in which they will be relocated;

*** Advise and assist staff in creating partnerships with organizations interested in training new immigrants on crop and livestock production;

*** Advise staff in developing appropriate plans for the NIAP crop production sites: In the Ag Training Center at Wilder Forest (Chaska/Carver County, and Worthington/Nobles County)

The Goals are:

To provide technical assistance to 20 new immigrant producers on crop production

To provide education and training on farm business management using MFA's newly published curriculum, Breaking New Ground.

To graduate five new immigrant producers. The producers will be eligible to purchase and / or lease farm land and establish a farm operation that is self-sufficient.

Area 7, Mark Kulig

Raelene Marquez, SCT at Wabasha wrote an article on MS and distributed area wide in October relative to National Disability Awareness.

At the Area 7 all employee meeting on October 20th, each office brought a different ethnic food to share for lunch in order to celebrate cultural awareness. In addition, Jeff Vert from the SE MN Center for Independent Living spoke on Disability Awareness. Any finally, John Nicholson, ASTC, outlined the Discrimination and EEO complaint process.

Eugene Kleven, SCT at Goodhue distributed an article on Sioux Indians area wide in November as part of National American Indian month.

Sandy Jerzak, Federal Women's Program Manager Jan. 2005 Report

FWPM held a committee meeting in December to review this years' business plan, budget, committee work assignments, and news letter ideas. This years committee members are: A-1 Cari Rebeschke, A-2 Stanley Musielewicz, A-4 Mary Monte, A-4 Michelle Wohlers (Presently) Melanie Dickman (transferred to SD), A5- Jim Ridler, A-6 Kamara Holmes, A-7 Sue Glende, SO – Leah Moore. FWPM – Sandy Jerzak, FWP Alternate: Kamara Holmes, FWP Recorder – Cari Rebeschke

Area 4 FWP representative, Melanie Dickman, participated in the "Reach for the Stars" 4th annual Girl's Conference on Non-Traditional careers. The event was held on November 4, 2004 in St. Cloud and was open to all 6th, 7th and 8th grade girls which had approximately 200 girls participate. Melanie informed the girls about her education, NRCS organization, daily work activities and why she chose her career. She also gave the girls some hands on experience by identifying native grasses and wildflowers in a field that NRCS had designed the planting.

Melanie accepted a dual county Soil Conservationist position in South Dakato. Her replacement on the FWP committee is Michele Wohlers.

Cari Rebeschke reported six new women employees and 3 women promotions. Area 1 ranks the highest in having female employees in rural MN.

Area 3, Mary Monte, noted 3 out of 9 DC positions are held by females.

Sandy, Sue, and Cari have talked with approximately seven women interested in NRCS internships this summer and have forward applications to the State Office for consideration.

Sandy assisted with Ortonville Field Office Civil Rights Appraisal in Area 5.

FWP will be highlighting the 25th Anniversary of the Multicultural Women's History Movement in March FWP Newsletter. The FWP committee has sent out a survey to their respective areas for comments in looking at NRCS challenges, opportunities and rewards for the FWP Newsletter.

Kamara Holmes, Soil Scientist in Area 6, has volunteered to be FWP Vice-Chairperson this fiscal year. In FY06, she'll then transition into the FWPM. She will be attending the SEPM conference in Reno, NV in March as this would be very beneficial for her.

Conservation: A Quilt for Natural Resources: Water and Life are two threads woven intrinsically together is the theme for the upcoming women's luncheon at P.K. Egan's in Canby on February 8, 2005. The Yellow Medicine SWCD and the Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Clean Water Partnership are working together to bring this workshop to women in the Canby area. The participants will gain insight of urban and rural conservation practices and their impact on our most valuable resource-Water. The quilt display will be utilized to tying the pieces together. "Creative Quilting" by Bonnie will also discuss some quilting opportunities. NRCS provided some of the resource materials for this outreach event.

The Lac Qui Parle SWCD and the LQP-Yellow Bank Clean Water Partnership is hosting a Wine, Women and Water event on February 10th at the Quest House in Dawson. Following a sit-down meal, information will be shared on protecting our water resources. The guest speaker is a women grape grower, Sue Roisen, and she will share her family's experiences from the decision to grow an alternative crop – grapes. The evening will conclude with tasting Minnesota wines. NRCS provided some of the materials for this meeting. Three NRCS employees supported the event by participating: Beth Collins, Janine Milbradt, and Sandy Jerzak.