

2013 Summer Study
Cost Share Subcommittee
Thursday, May 30, 2013

Attendees

Megan Dalton, Shenandoah Valley SWCD
Elizabeth Dellinger, Shenandoah Valley SWCD
Carmie Duer, Eastern Shore, SWCD
Jerry, Ingle, VSWCB
Ann Jennings, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Stephanie Martin, DCR
Jacob Powell, Virginia Conservation Network
Lou Ann Wallace, VASWCD
Rick Weeks, DCR
Michael Fletcher, DCR

Mr. Weeks reviewed the issues assigned to the subcommittee.

The first issue was the 60/40 division of funds between the Chesapeake Bay localities and the Southern Rivers. Mr. Weeks said that he understood the concern. The question was how funds should be distributed to the Southern Rivers.

Ms. Duer said that in her district the highway was the divide between the Southern Rivers and the Chesapeake Bay localities. She said that while she understood the need to focus on the Bay there were still a lot of farms and impaired waters in the Southern Rivers areas.

Ms. Dalton said that Virginia farmers want to do the right thing. She said that farmers in the Southern Rivers areas are also concerned and that there should be some equity.

Mr. Weeks said that the Bay has been the focus but noted that the Gulf of Mexico also has the same issues.

Ms. Wallace said that there were already questions being raised regarding the Southern Rivers. She said that it's important to note that many of the Southern Rivers areas are the headwaters to the Mississippi River.

Ms. Dellinger asked if the Bay areas actually needed additional funding or if the needs were already being met.

Mr. Weeks said that the reality was there was not enough money to accomplish everything in the WIP.

Ms. Jennings said that with regard to the 60/40 split that both areas need additional funding. She said that there was no rationale to differentiate that the Bay was more important. She said that the current 60/40 split was a longstanding practice well before being enacted in the Code.

Mr. Weeks said that the next issue was the use of the HUCs. He said that was the foundation of the current system. He said that he was not certain why this was raised as an issue. He said that HUCs are essentially sub-watersheds but the differentiation between them is rankings based on land use and what types of impairments are in those watersheds.

Mr. Powell said that there was a lack of confidence with regard to the land use. He said that when the entire region is considered the factors of urban, suburban, forested, etc. are well known. He said that when looking at an individual watershed there was a lack of consensus with regard to priorities. He said that he would suggest that the attention be focused where the impairment is much higher.

It was noted that some districts have multiple HUCs or that some HUCs are in multiple districts.

Ms. Duer said that she could not imagine not using the HUCs for determination.

Ms. Jennings said that it would be helpful for DCR to demonstrate how funding dollars were distributed prior to the use of the HUC rankings. She said that if the WIP called for a high level of implementation in a district but that the HUC ranking showed otherwise, the district could be short changed.

Ms. Martin noted that the NPS assessment was statewide and not limited to the Bay watershed. She said that it takes into account all waters, animal units, types of agriculture, etc.

Ms. Martin said that in the history of the Ag BMP Cost Share program DCR had never looked at one side of a watershed vs. another in the process for ranking HUCs. She said that the intent was never to look at the Southern Rivers vs. the Bay.

Mr. Weeks said in summary if more emphasis was placed on the areas of high concern the impairments and the worst waters would be addressed more quickly.

The committee recessed briefly for lunch.

Ms. Dalton asked if the level of detail in the WIP could be broken out by the district. She said that the level of detail in the WIP was a different issue than the non-point assessment.

Ms. Jennings said that the non-point assessment addresses a different set of concerns. She said that the WIP is actually an implementation plan where clear expectations were spelled out. She said that some of that discussion may be outside the scope of the stakeholder group.

Mr. Weeks moved to the next discussion item which was the extent of voluntary practices. He said that the concern was that some farmers did not want to be on the map. He said that the biggest response from farmers was asking what credit they would receive for participating.

Ms. Duer said that while some farmers may be going above and beyond with their practices the expectation to meet the standards was a problem for some farmers.

Ms. Jennings said that the numbers would help the state with negotiations with the EPA with regard to results.

Ms. Duer noted that the DCR tracking program did not allow for a notation for voluntary practices, so farmers could not receive credits.

Ms. Jennings said that may be an issue to be addressed by the efficiency subcommittee.

Mr. Ingle said that he would like DCR to note the comments regarding efficiency. He said that with regard to performance measures if a practice started as a BMP and converted to a different voluntary practice there should be a way for the farmer to receive credit.

Ms. Dalton said that maybe the recommendation should be to provide incentives to districts to be able to track this information.

Ms. Duer said that getting voluntary practices tracked had to start with an incentive to the farmer.

Ms. Jennings noted that the Director had said that this information was available through the FSA.

Ms. Duer said that she was not certain the level of detail being reported.

Ms. Dalton said that planting dates are not captured. She said there would still not be verification that a practice has met the standards.

Ms. Jennings said that the stakeholder group could recommend that the Ag BMP cost share committee look at the suite of BMPs to determine if some were more cost effective.

Ms. Jennings said the other concern was with regard to increasing the caps on practices. She said that the caps are often disincentives for larger operations.

Ms. Dalton said that she thought the caps should not depend on the farm size, but on the practice.

Mr. Weeks asked if caps were really needed.

Ms. Duer said that caps were important. She said that otherwise large farm operations would use all of the funds available and nothing would be left for smaller operations.

Ms. Jennings said that there needed to be some rejuvenation to the Ag. BMP cost-share committee, perhaps some different direction.

Mr. Weeks said that there may be a need to reframe the discussions or what the Ag. BMP cost share committee should be doing. He said that some of the discussions could continue beyond the life of the Summer Study group.

Ms. Wallace noted that the group had discussed voluntary practices that were not being tracked but noted that there were also significant volunteer hours not being captured.

Ms. Jennings said that there was a need to track more than cost-share. She said that every practice needed to be tracked and that was important for matching federal grants.

Ms. Jennings said that if voluntary hours were tracked and associated with a standard dollar value that information could be useful when approaching the General Assembly for funding concerns.

Mr. Weeks said that he would be in touch with the group regarding the next meeting date and location.