

Empire Chapter – Soil and Water Conservation Society

Meeting Minutes

Annual Meeting

8:30 – 9:30 AM

November 17, 2015

NYS Agricultural Experiment Station, Jordan Hall

Geneva, NY

- 1) Welcome – Jessica Sargis, President called the meeting to order at 8:40 am. Brad Schwab, Jessica Sargis, Elaine Dalrymple, Ray Mueller, Lisa Miller, Dana Chapman, Don Kuhn, Peter Wright, Jason Schenck, Heath Eisele, Megan McAnn, Jason Cuddeback were in attendance.
- 2) **2016 Council Elections** – This was delayed to later in the meeting (see below).
- 3) **Review the minutes from the September 16, 2015 meeting** – Elaine highlighted portions of the minutes from the September meeting. Ray made a motion to accept the minutes as written, with a second from Jessica. All were in favor.
- 4) **Review the Treasurer’s Report** – Ray reviewed the report from **Jan 1, 2015 to November 16, 2015**. Ray said there has been **\$X in income**, to date, in 2015 and **\$X in expenses** for a **net income of \$X** which includes \$X in other income (sales tax vendor credit (\$X) and other (\$X)). The **checking account has \$X** with \$X in the Paypal account. The **Vanguard Fletcher account has \$X** in it as of Sept 30, 2015; down \$X from the previous quarter and down \$X for the year. The **Vanguard Endowment account has \$X** as of Sept 30, 2015, down \$X from the previous quarter and down \$X for the year, but \$X was taken out of this account to help with operating costs. Ray said the stock market has been up this quarter so far. There has been a total of \$X of stormwater field notebook sales this quarter. Costs for Ray to attend the National Annual meeting have been taken out of the budget already and there will be no scholarship awarded this year. Expenses for this year’s annual meeting have not been paid yet. **Brad commented that we budgeted \$X for our income but only have \$X in income to date**. He feels we need to look at our business model. There are no easy cuts to be made and right now we are vulnerable to the stock market. The stock market and book sales are both down. Brad continued and said **this is an important time for the chapter – how do we transition to something more sustainable?** Don Kuhn mentioned that historically the stock market has yielded, on average, 9% per year and long term, it is the only place to be in terms of investments vs. just bonds. Peter said the society funds are in a mutual fund that has some bonds. **Peter commented that technology has caught up to us re: the stormwater books can now be downloaded electronically from DEC**. We need to either find another source of income or sell more books. Peter mentioned that in the past, if a stormwater seminar was given, everyone who wanted to attend had to buy a book and it was included in the registration fee. Someone said something about a phone application such that if there is a new version of the book, it refreshes itself. ??? **The question**

was asked if we can live on the income from the endowments. Don asked about where we are now vs. where we were. Brad said we used to pay for scholarships from the operating budget, and now they come out of the endowment. Our major expenses are printing new editions of the stormwater books, when they are updated, and paying Lisa for her services. The last time we updated one of the books, we got stuck with many extra copies of the previous edition. Jess said the Design manual only needed a few updates so the whole thing was not reprinted last year. She agreed that we need more income and less expenses. **Jess added that the direction we choose to go will dictate decisions about budget ie. it is hard to justify increasing income if we are not really doing things.** We need to maintain membership and increase involvement. We do not get much of the membership money from the national office. **Brad agreed that if we cannot provide scholarships and sponsor events, then we are not doing much.** This year Pat was too busy to handle the scholarship program. Someone asked Ray if he thought the national meeting was worth attending. Ray said it was for him personally, but without many other attendees from the Northeast (only 3 besides the national rep), he did not feel he could represent the chapter very well. Don asked why only 4 from the Northeast came and Ray said that every professional organization is having trouble with membership and that not having regional meetings is a problem. Heath asked why the Central region has more members and Ray said they have more corporate sponsors (seed, chemical, equipment dealers, etc). Brad asked if NRCS policy was different from region to region, in terms of how they view SWCS membership by NRCS staff. Ray said he did not think so, but that the state soil scientist can influence membership by pushing the society more to his staff. **Heath said that the General Services Administration (GSA) decision that said that costs for all attendees from any particular agency to attend a meeting must be under \$7,000 (with salaries considered part of this cost) has had an impact on participation to training events, etc.** This decision was a reaction to public sentiment. Heath said that NRCS staff received an email that said unless you are in a leadership role, you must go to outside meetings and trainings on your own time and expense. Brad commented that we cannot control that decision but if we make our meetings enticing, folks will want to come. But, if we have less members, it is hard to organize enticing meetings; it is a vicious cycle. Peter said that we should think about having smaller, regional meetings so people don't have to drive too far. Ray added that perhaps we can offer short courses such as an erosion and sediment control seminar and, for example, for \$150 you get a set of stormwater manuals when you attend. Brad said that Don Lake used to take the manuals to the courses, whereas now we have to pay to ship them to the various instructors. Brad thought the regional meeting idea is worth exploring with maybe a half-day program organized with the help of our regional reps. The Annual meeting does require a lot of driving for many members. Someone asked how many members attended this year. Jess said 35 registered but 7 are speakers. This is out of a total membership of 70. Ray said another issue is fewer students are enrolling in 4 year schools preferring to attend a community college for 2 years and then transferring. This is due to the high cost of 4 year schools. And these

students do not have time to get integrated into a department so they would have time to consider attending SWCS programs. **Jess said we will continue to brainstorm at the next meeting about our goals for next year and about student chapters. Brad made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report, Elaine seconded and all were in favor.**

- 5) **2016 Empire Chapter Goals** - Further discussion occurred about how we should proceed as a chapter. **Brad said we need to brainstorm and list our challenges. Don said we need to have a 30 second 'elevator speech' on why someone should be a member. We need to be able to tell people what we can do for them. Jason asked what percentage of our members are NRCS or SWCD employees. Jess said probably ¼ and it is shrinking. Our members are mostly from the private sector. Don asked if we had a mission statement and Jess pointed out that the 'Objectives of the Chapter' is printed on the bottom of the agenda. Jason commented that he was shocked that so few of our members are from SWCD and NRCS, as our objectives directly relate to the work of these agencies.** It has been hard to get agency folks to be members. Heath says he has his membership dues come right out of his paycheck. He said many NRCS staff are swamped at work and there has been a lot of turnover of staff lately. People are hired from out of state, they stay a couple years, then move on. **Heath said we need to focus on cutting edge and scientific material for our program. Get the knowledge out there on what is happening that is new; the latest and greatest in conservation. We need to represent the chapter at educational events that council members are already attending. We should piggyback on these, be a vendor, deliver our message. People don't know we exist.** Don mentioned we should be at Cooperative Extension programs but Jason said a challenge is that each county Extension office operates differently. Peter is part-time Pro-Dairy so can represent us at those meetings. Heath commented that our name is confusing and we get lost in the mix. Also, the SWCD Employee's Assoc. has been filling an educational niche with various trainings. Heath said let's find the gap in what is being provided and fill that void. We have a lot to discuss next year.

- 6) **2016 Council Elections –**
President Elect – Peter Wright
Past President – Jessica Sargis
Vice President - Jason Schenk
Treasurer – Ray Mueller
Secretary – Brad Schwab
Region 2 – Jason Cuddeback
Region 3 – Pat Barry (one year left of term)
Region 4 – See addendum below; Jessica will email Scott Fitscher
At Large – Don Kuhn
Region 1 not up for election but Heath Eisele is the rep.
Jason made the motion to accept these nominations; Elaine (?) seconded and all were in favor.

- 7) **Lisa's Memorandum of Agreement** – Lisa is the Executive Office Manager of the Empire Chapter and every year we sign a Memorandum of Understanding with her for work she does for the Council, which includes handling all the book sales. The 2016 MOU is the same as 2015 (\$X per hour and \$X for each publication sold). All were in favor that we sign the 2016 MOU with Lisa.
- 8) 2016 meeting dates /times – Not discussed. In 2015, Council meeting dates/times- were every other month starting in January and held on the 3rd Wednesday at 1 pm.
- 9) Adjourn – All were in favor on a motion by Elaine, second by Don. Meeting adjourned at 9:38 AM.

Minutes taken by Elaine Dalrymple, Secretary

Addendum: An email vote was held on the nomination of Scott Fitscher to be Region 4 representative. Scott accepted the nomination. In favor: Peter, Jessica, Elaine, Brad, Jason C., Jason S., Heath, Pat. Ray and Don either abstained or did not vote. Vote approved on Nov. 11, 2015.