

Ag and Ecosystem Subcommittee of the Vermont Climate Council
10:00 AM July 31, 2024
Minutes

Location:	The meeting was recorded and posted online here .
Subcommittee Members Present:	Billy Coster, Jaiel Pulskamp, Stephen Leslie, Jake Claro, Andrew Milliken, Earl Hatley, Judy Dow, Ryan Patch
State Agency Staff Present:	Evan Horne, Marli Rupe, Judson Peck
Minutes by:	Evan Horne

10:00 Approve Agenda

- Review of agenda
- July 17 Minutes approved as drafted
- Judy Dow shared comments about the urgency of climate change affecting rural Vermonters.

10:05 Brief additional discussion updates presented at the July 17 meeting, as needed.

- Stephen Leslie commented on the Use Value Appraisal program regarding passive management of ecologically sensitive areas and old-growth forests.

10:25 Overview of CAP Kick-off Events

- Billy Coster shared an overview of CAP Kick-Off Events.
- Jaiel Pulskamp shared follow-up comments on CAP meetings.
- Judy Dow shared comments on climate change education.
- Earl Hatley shared comments on the Renewable Energy Standard, contracts with Hydro-Quebec, energy credits, and Vermont having conversations with Abenaki Nation leaders.

10:35 Public Comment #1

- No public comments.

10:40 Theme 1 prioritization – initial discussion

- Jaiel Pulskamp noted some confusion among subcommittee members regarding the number of actions to prioritize.
- Billy Coster noted that the subcommittee should select five actions per pathway with 15 total actions among the themes.
- Jake Claro noted that there is an opportunity to combine several actions into one.
- Jaiel Pulskamp commented that it's challenging to narrow down the list. Still, there's an opportunity to combine actions, such as riparian buffers and flooding, to incentivize farmers to participate.
- Ryan Patch commented that Theme 1 could be expanded while sharing how to synthesize actions at a high level.

- Jaiel Pulskamp commented on payments for ecosystem services.
- Jake Claro commented that the subcommittee should see if there is any emerging consensus on specific actions and be mindful of how the term “payments for ecosystem services” is used.
- Earl Hatley commented that they do not support payments for ecosystem services and finding other ways to support farmers.
- Stephen Leslie commented that soil health is the most essential pathway to be addressed, especially when restoring highly degraded ecosystems. Stephen advocated for a soil health management rubric and for farmers to work with local conservation districts to enroll farmers in these systems. Stephen is concerned about finding ways for Vermont farmers to make a living wage and bring new and young farmers to the State.
- Andrew Milliken commented that there is a need to focus on the health of land and ecosystems using nature-based solutions that support sustainable farming and other working land practices.
- Judy Dow commented that there is a need to look at agriculture from a different perspective and calls for braiding traditional and Western agricultural practices. Judy stressed that further education is necessary.
- Ryan Patch noted in response that there is a debt-finance trap and that farmers must be met where they are to help solve this problem. Ryan encouraged folks to look at the 2012 report on Payments for Ecosystem Services in Vermont to see some background on the research and how it could be positively implemented in the State.
- Jaiel Pulskamp commented that we need to look at where farmers are and the system they are in and make sure we meet them where they are financially.
- Earl Hatley expressed concern again over payments for ecosystem services and developing government relations with the Abenaki Nation and other tribes.

11:10 Public Comment #2

- Annette Smith commented that funding RPCs has to be tied to robust public engagement, noting the lack of engagement from the public at Rutland RPC. Annette also commented that they were surprised there had been no conversation about recent rainfall in Vermont at this subcommittee meeting.

11:15 Theme 2 prioritization – initial discussion

- The co-chairs noted that some folks have not been able to share thoughts on Theme 1 and that we push Theme 2 to another meeting.

Theme 1 continued

- Stephen Leslie commented that UVA could be reformed by incorporating ecological land management plans to enhance biodiversity and old-growth forests.
- Judy Dow commented that there is a need for agreed definitions and a common language so folks know they are discussing the same thing, referencing definitions for net-zero, recycling, and carbon sequestration.

- Jaiel Pulskamp noted that there could be time in a later meeting to ensure everyone is on the same page to define these terms.
- Jake Claro commented that there are certain organizing concepts from today's meeting: soil health and agroforestry. There is an opportunity to use these two ideas to frame the subcommittee's work.
- Marli Rupe commented that we can combine all the thoughts shared by looking at the priorities that address multiple co-benefits (sequestration but flood resilience, TEK, farmer viability, and food security). Soil health is one way to hit numerous benefits and others.

11:45 Public Comment #3

- Zack Porter asked if sending content recommendations to co-chairs would be possible. Zack Porter also commented they hoped to see more explicitly the reduction of extraction and consumption of forests in Theme 1, as well as reforestation, afforestation, and proforestation.

11:50 Discuss next steps and upcoming meetings

- Co-chairs discussed future opportunities for meeting virtually and for a longer in-person meeting.

12:00 Adjourn