



## **USC Retreat Minutes – January 30, 2020**

Tioga Downs Casino Resort

Nichols, NY

- 1.) **Welcome & Introductions**
  - a. See attached attendance sheet
- 2.) **Aggregating Watershed Restoration Efforts for Measurable Ecosystem Improvements**  
Matt Ehrhart, Director of the Robin L. Vannote Watershed Restoration Program Stroud Water Research Center
  - a. See attached presentation
- 3.) **Conservation Stewardship Program**, Emily Armstrong, NRCS
  - a. See attached presentation
- 4.) **Where do we stand with Chesapeake Bay?** Lauren Townley, NYSDEC
  - a. See attached presentation
- 5.) **Cornell University Program Update**, Quirine Ketterings
  - a. See attached presentation
- 6.) **Let's Think Strategically** – Wendy Walsh, Watershed Coordinator
  - a. Participants were given instruction to break out into sessions choosing either buffer, wetlands, agriculture, or streams.
- 7.) **Breakout Session #1**
  - a. Room 1 Buffers
    - i. See attached presentation
    - ii. Additional Notes/Discussion:
      1. Incentives
        - a. Compensation to farmers is important
        - b. Provide riparian buffer success stories to landowners
          - i. Specifically from a landowner that was highly uninterested in planting a buffer and then changed their mind once the buffer was planted
        - c. Provide a tax break or tax credit on land that a buffer was planted
        - d. Provide information to the landowners of the importance of a riparian buffer to properties
          - i. Farmers lose soil without buffers which ultimately is a decrease in money
      2. Partnering
        - a. Meet SWCD, landowners, and land trusts/desires
      3. Staff
        - a. Need to establish work plans

4. Ideas to increase buffers:
  - a. Look at vacant farmland and non ag land
  - b. Understand the farmers by collecting statistics of factors concerning farmers interest/dislike
  - c. Apply for climate smart grants through the DEC
  - d. Need to make money stretch
  - e. Look towards land trusts for money, official support and landowners
  - f. Coordinate with the town board
  - g. Partnering with the state

b. Room 2 Wetlands

- i. See attached presentation
- ii. Additional Notes/Discussion:
  1. Wetland restoration numbers are dwindling. This is likely due to the decrease in available funding and staffing. Also prioritization of other programs, the narrowing of wetland restoration definition, and permitting constraints.
  2. Mentimeter poll questions
    - a. What wetland features interested landowners
      - i. Results on page 20 on presentation.
    - b. How can USC help increase wetland restoration across the watershed?
      - i. Results on page 21 on presentation.

**8.) Breakout Session #2**

a. Room 1 Agriculture

- i. See attached presentation
- ii. Additional Notes/Discussion:
  1. Incentive/How to engage landowners
    - a. Farmers want to be paid quickly, so districts should return their reports quickly
    - b. Providing staff or tractors to landowners to help get the seed in the ground
    - c. Currently, the land that has already received cover crop payment in previous years receive less payment compared to new cover crop land.
      - i. The rates should be the same for new land and repeat cover crops
    - d. Provide seed to the farmers
    - e. Spotlight success stories to spread word of the program
  2. Staff
    - a. What assurances do districts need to hire:

- i. Reimbursement for staff time
- ii. Training for new staff

3. Training

- a. What do we want to learn
  - i. Identification of cover crops and pests

4. Partners

- a. We need to use up the RCPP staff time or the funding will go away if it is not used

b. Room 2 Streams

- i. See attached presentation
- ii. Additional Notes/Discussion:

1. What are we missing?

- a. Should we define a more dedicated training date/time/location/level of training?
- b. Look into continuing education credits for trainings.

2. Can USC host something related to source water buffer?

- a. There are 3 webinars posted on sharepoint, frustration was that they aren't interactive. Will follow up with Bethany B.

3. Does USC need a P.E. on staff to sign off on projects?

- a. YES!!!
- b. Discussion on if the district staff can pull together the design and then just have the PE sign off on the projects.
- c. Tioga SWCD has Engineering Tech position open, have been unable to fill.
- d. Tompkins SWCD has Engineering position open, also have been unable to fill.

4. Land Trust Alliance Funding

- a. Recommended look into further.

5. Erosion Hazard Index for local municipalities

- a. Model after Vermont

6. More NACC assessments

- a. Initiative expansion and support

**9.) Break Out Updates**

- a. Discussion was held revealing what each group highlighted during their breakout sessions. See above notes.