PMNRCD Board Meeting Minutes
January 14, 2026 – **3:30 PM**
PMNRCD Zoom Number (https://zoom.us/j/9041299305)

Call to order: Meeting called to order at 3:41 pm by Don.

Present: Don Markie, Darryl Kuehne, Katy Crumley, Olivia Carlson, Olivia Butterman, Hilary Solomon, Averie Noble, Whitney Hier, Jen Alexander, Sadie Brown, Jaden Groff, Vicki Pattison.

Edit to original agenda: Original agenda called for the approval of August and September board meeting minutes. This was corrected to a call to approve the minutes from the December board meeting.

Approve Minutes: After partner reports Don motioned for the approval of December board meeting minutes on Darryl's arrival, this was seconded by Darryl and approved unanimously.

Financial Summary

Six-Month FY26 Financial Report: Hilary presented an overview of the six-month FY26 financial report. The Profit and Loss statement currently appears elevated due to invoices related to the Fair Haven project (FHV-06), which has a higher budget than other projects. Payroll expenses are largely up to date. Invoicing for CWSP, DEC, and other grants is currently being finalized. Additional income is anticipated in the coming weeks as projects are closed out, including Lake Champlain Basin Program projects and the 2024 WUV Capacity Grant. Once completed, the financials are expected to reflect a stable and neutral financial position for the District. Overall, the District's financial position is improving, and recent cash-flow challenges (from the fall) are being resolved as outstanding invoices are processed. Don motioned to approve the six-month financial report, which was seconded by Darryl and unanimously approved.

Simple IRA Update: Hilary provided an update on the implementation of Simple IRAs for staff. She has met with all staff, who are currently using a range of financial institutions. Hilary is scheduled to meet with Trevor on January 16, 2025, to further discuss options and will provide an update at the next Board meeting. Staff are consulting with their own financial advisors, and Hilary is also reviewing how peer organizations, including WUV, are managing Simple IRAs. While using a single financial institution may be beneficial administratively, it may not suit all staff. Hilary encouraged staff to reach out with questions or preferences and anticipates further clarity in the coming months.

Partner Reports
Olivia Carlson (NRCS): Olivia provided an update on NRCS programs and recent agency announcements. She highlighted a shift away from statewide funding pools toward category-based funding pools, organized into three Category Tiers. This new structure is intended to better align funding with locally led conservation priorities, including conservation practices and participation in the Regenerative Agriculture Pilot Program (RPP), and will be evaluated within a defined geospatial footprint. NRCS will allow multiple conservation practice types to be assessed within each category and is seeking input from Conservation Districts on which practices planners should continue to assess in order to meet local funding pool goals. NRCS will continue to work with Districts to refine project priorities. Applications are limited to one per farm, but we may elect to use a whole-farm approach that could include agricultural, forestry, and other conservation practices (within this single application).

Olivia shared the following key dates and deadlines for FY25–FY26 programs:

- **FY25 CSP annual payments** must be completed by **February 6, 2026**. Participants should connect with their **Soil Conservationist** for additional information as needed.
- **CSP application deadline:** January 15, 2026
- **EQIP / AMA / RCPP assessment date:** March 27, 2026
- **CSP assessment date:** May 8, 2026
- **EQIP / AMA / RCPP plans due to State Office for review:** July 10, 2026
- **CSP plans due to State Office for review: July 31, 2026**

Phylicxia Moore is requesting a follow up on the District's position re the MOU and UCA. Hilary noted that she had shared comments regarding the UCA with the Board in the last day or so and had identified several questions requiring clarification. These are expected to be forwarded to Olivia/ NRCS for review tomorrow once board members have had a chance to look at them. Olivia indicated this timeline was acceptable and noted that NRCS has been very busy, so no urgency.

Hilary noted the need for additional clarification regarding the NRCS funding pool changes discussed. Olivia advised the upcoming Locally Led Office Hours scheduled for January 15, 2026, will be recorded and is expected to include a detailed discussion of these changes, as well as updates to IMPACT programs. Hilary will be attending the meeting together with ag staff via Zoom.

Olivia Butterman (USDA Farm Service Agency – FSA): Olivia apologized for not being able to attend the December meeting, noting a very high workload. She shared several important program updates and upcoming deadlines relevant to local agricultural producers impacted by drought conditions.

- **Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)**
The application deadline for water and feed hauling assistance or livestock relocation (due to drought) is March 3, 2026.
- **Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP):** Applications are open through **March 1, 2026.** LFP provides financial assistance to eligible livestock producers who experienced grazing losses due to qualifying drought conditions during the normal grazing period.
- **Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC):** Program enrollment deadline is **February 26, 2026**. The program is currently undergoing updates related to how producer productivity history is calculated. While these changes may require additional documentation, they are expected to be beneficial for dairy producers.
- **Federal Crop Insurance:** The deadline to enroll in crop insurance for annual crops, including fruits, vegetables, and market garden operations, is **March 13, 2026**.
- **Financial assistance for sheep producers:** USDA FSA programs require advance enrollment. Enrolled producers may be eligible for supplemental payments for wool sales and unshorn lamb pelts marketed for meat, in addition to normal market income. Eligibility is based on enrollment information e.g., flock size, breed, and annual production records. Producers are encouraged to enroll early and maintain accurate documentation. There is a simple factsheet Olivia will share with Whitney.
- **Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (SDRP)**: Olivia highlighted the Supplemental Disaster Relief Program, which provides financial assistance for crop revenue, production, and quality losses resulting from weather-related events in 2023 and 2024. The program is offered in **two stages**: Stage 1 is for producers with indemnified losses using existing Crop Insurance or NAP data, while Stage 2 is for non-indemnified, uninsured, or quality losses. The application process is paperwork-intensive, and the deadline for both stages is **April 30, 2026**.

- **FSA Meeting tomorrow (15, Jan):** Ag staff from PMNRCD will be attending- this will be an opportunity to meet the new program analyst who started back in September.

Brief Staff Reports and Updates – including one highlight from the year:

- **Hilary :** With additional staff and an increased budget, overall, finances remained stable and healthy throughout the year. Despite a few small hiccups, the organization is in a strong position heading into the rest of the working year.
- **Jennifer:** Helped write and submit three Capital Equipment Assistance Program (CEAP) applications, all of which were successfully funded.
- **Whitney:** Completed an intensive 60-page till and no-till certification for a producer, with support from Olivia. The application was very well received, and the accomplishment was formally recognized by the Board.
- **Sadie:** Successfully secured a large nursery grant, fully funding nursery operations and allowing work beyond minimum requirements. In addition, with the new seed shed, the program can now grow and stock more plants in-house.
- **Averie:** Led development of the Square online store for the annual plant sale, which is nearly ready to launch and will allow customers to place orders online.
- **Jaden:** Played a key role in supporting the water chestnut program, streamlining implementation despite limited capacity. Also expressed enthusiasm for the successful nursery grant supporting expanded work.
- **Vicki:** Built her grant-writing experience - preparing multiple grant applications, some under tight deadlines, all of which have been successful to date. Looking forward to implementing funded projects in the coming year.

Old Business:

CWSP update from Hilary: Hilary reported that Barbara has officially retired. She has a meeting scheduled with Devon and MK and noted that CWSP is currently experiencing reduced capacity and slower progress due to recent staff losses. While available hours are limited, improvements are underway in communications, reporting, and documentation, including streamlining and standardizing naming conventions. Resumes for candidates applying to replace Barbara will be shared for review following the first round of interviews, in advance of the second round.

MOU w NRCS: Final recommendation needed from the board.

Hilary provided comments on the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Unfunded Cooperative Agreement (UCA) with a final Board recommendation needed. Key discussion points included annual reporting requirements (planned resource allocation, accomplishments, unmet conservation needs, and reporting on milestones and planned vs. actual resource use), level of detail, templates, reporting responsibility, consequences of non-compliance, and authority for conservation planning approvals. The Board discussed the potential value of improved feedback loops, particularly for farms not funded through NRCS grants, which could allow the District to better support those producers through alternative programs. Don supported Hilary moving the process forward as she sees fit.

Board members expressed mixed views. Katy raised concerns about additional workload and unclear benefits, noting that PMNRCD has not previously signed this agreement and may not utilize certain benefits (e.g., office space or vehicles). She emphasized the importance of ensuring the agreement is manageable and

clearly beneficial before proceeding. Olivia offered to continue discussions to address these concerns. Travis has raised concerns about the optics of not signing agreements, particularly in relation to local fund pools and long-term integration with NRCS systems. Olivia explained the goal is to streamline existing and legacy MOUs and improve system integration, though staffing capacity remains a limiting factor. Access to NRCS systems could be beneficial for future planning and coordination, but if the agreements are not signed, operations would continue as they currently do.

NRCD legislative update: Hilary reported that the Future of Lake Champlain group is beginning to organize its meetings and work for the year, with Hilary joining them in Montpelier less than in past years. There were no major legislative updates at this time; the policy "ask" has been submitted and comments on the Governor's budget have been provided.

HR and Financial Update work: Hilary reported that Structural Integrity has provided a contract for the financial review; additional language related to audit provisions was added and the revised contract has been resent for signature. The cost of the review is $11,000, which is expected to be covered through CWSP administrative funds, with a meeting scheduled with MK next week to confirm. If this is not an option, there are also WUV Organizational Support Grant funds. A meeting with Dave Dore is scheduled next week to initiate this process.

Technology/Website Update: All systems are functioning normally, and Whitney's email issues have been resolved. Hilary emphasized the importance of proactive planning and is working with SI to identify potential support options. This is on hold for now, but needs to be dealt with soon.

NRCC/VACD Meeting Updates: No program updates at this time. The Board discussed participation in VACD/NRCC meetings, noting that Darryl has not attended meetings beyond the annual VACD meeting and exploring whether remote attendance options are available. With the next NRCC meeting scheduled for February, Board members requested that all upcoming meetings be communicated in advance. Hilary noted that reimbursement checks for Board members who have attended meetings are forthcoming.

<u>New Business</u>

Annual Staff Reviews and Position Descriptions: Hilary reported that a short, straightforward document is being distributed to staff for annual reviews and position description updates. Staff should contact Hilary with questions or comments; she will meet one-on-one with staff and report back to the board. Staff reviews are expected to be completed in time for the next board meeting.

New HR/Admin staff position: WUV is currently advertising a similar position, providing a useful reference for position scope, posting locations, and hiring timeline. Katy noted her limited availability from mid- to late February to help support recruitment process due to reconciliation work and encouraged Board members to share the opportunity with qualified individuals in the community, including those with financial backgrounds or relevant professional experience. The position emphasizes financial skills rather than conservation or field experience. Onboarding is expected in spring, ideally April, to support upcoming data management and system uploads.

Board Meeting Scheduling: Katy may not be able to attend the February 11 meeting, and the Board unanimously agreed to push the meeting to the end of the month if needed.

Board meeting adjourned at 4:49pm.