

VAPDC Winter Conference: Richmond, Virginia

Environmental Committee Meeting January 30, 2009

Committee Members in Attendance:

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Dave Rundgren, NRVPC	dave.nrvpc@nrvpc.org
Jackie Stewart, RRPDC	jsstewart@richmondregional.org

Other Attendees:

Michael Fishman	msfishman@stearnswheler.com
Buck Kline	Buck.Kline@dof.virginia.gov

PRESENTATIONS

Ecosystem Services

Buck Kline, Director, Division of Forestland Conservation, Virginia Department of Forestry (VADOF), presented information on the VADOF's initiative to develop a method for quantifying the public benefits of natural systems. Currently, development costs, including land acquisition, site development and building construction, are easily determined. And, although the benefits of natural resources are recognized, their value is not quantified in the development process. As envisioned by the VADOF, a market-based system of evaluating natural resource benefits will encourage conservation by providing compensation to landowners, and promote more balanced and informed land development decisions.

Forested lands and other natural systems provide public benefits through carbon sequestration, stormwater management, wildlife habitat, recreation and pollutant reduction. Landowners receive no compensation for these benefits, nor any incentives to retain the ecosystems that provide them. VADOF is working with Virginia Tech to formulate a sound, science-based tool that will integrate existing models into a methodology to be used to determine ecosystem values. Proposed applications include the development of resource quality credit exchanges, inclusion within cost-share programs and conservation easement agreements, and the determination of the true cost of land development. Standardization of ecosystem values will be necessary prior to their use in the purchase or transfer of development rights. Mr. Kline emphasized the fact that work on the project is on-going and that success ultimately depends upon collaboration among agencies and stakeholders to finalize the development of the tool, consider its function within a regulatory framework, and develop and market ecosystem service portfolios. As is always the case, adequate funding to support the project is critical. It was noted that the 2008 Farm Bill authorized the USDA to create what is now the Office of Ecosystem Services and Markets under the Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Kline's presentation may be viewed at:

http://www.rrregion.org/vapdc_env.html

Stormwater Management Regulations: "What's in the Draft?"

Normand Goulet, Senior Environmental Planner, Occoquan Program Manager, Northern Virginia Regional Commission, provided an update on the current state of the "complete and controversial overhaul of stormwater regulations" in the Commonwealth. Currently, the draft regulations, as approved by the Soil and Water Conservation Board at their September 24th meeting, are under Administrative Review. EPA review and an opportunity for public comment will follow. The Board will review the draft and comments in September, 2009. December, 2009 is the targeted effective date of adoption; however, legislation currently under consideration proposes postponement by up to one year. Anticipated problems including implementation costs to localities, the adequacy of the proposed fee schedule, inspection and maintenance of micro-controls and local limitations on where controls may be sited were discussed. It was noted that the BMP Handbook has not yet been approved; however, it is expected to include several chapters based on the Northern Virginia LID Supplement.

Mr. Goulet updated the group on the Chesapeake Bay TMDL. Detailed draft tributary strategies are to be completed by June 2010, with the Bay TMDL established by December 2010. It is not clear how the Bay TMDL will impact MS4 jurisdictions or whether EPA will exert political pressure to require Virginia to subdivide allocations to counties rather than basin levels, as Virginia prefers. Questions concerning the accuracy of models and the proposed method of monitoring changes in water quality were discussed.

Mr. Goulet provided copies of bills relating to stormwater management and water quality currently being considered by the General Assembly. Discussion centered on those bills relating to the date of applicability of the proposed stormwater regulations, disclosure of the presence of stormwater management facilities on residential property and the ability of a locality to regulate alternative on-site sewage facilities.

Environmental Committee Roundtable Discussion

The remainder of the meeting focused on a discussion of how to structure future meetings to:

- Promote greater participation and maximize opportunities for meaningful discussion among PDCs;
- Provide opportunities for periodic program updates by state and federal agencies;
- Provide meaningful feedback to the VAPDC;
- Identify and address local and/or statewide issues requiring collaborative efforts and support.

Problems with the current meeting format were identified as:

- Competition with other scheduled meetings;
- Time limitations; and
- Limited participation by PDC representatives.

Among the suggested solutions to the identified problems were:

- Meet at a time other than the scheduled Summer and Winter VAPDC Conferences;
- Expand the meeting time frame to one whole day;
- Rotate meeting locations around the state;
- Consider teleconferencing;
- Invite representatives from various state agencies to provide periodic policy/program updates; and
- Include a roundtable discussion of "lessons learned" within each meeting agenda.

Participants agreed that although face-to-face meetings are preferred, budgets, distance and time limit that possibility. It was decided that the best compromise might be linked regional teleconferences. Each participant agreed to identify teleconferencing opportunities within their region. Regional VDOT offices and local community colleges were identified as possible conferencing access sites.

In discussing the role of the Environmental Committee, all agreed that providing timely updates on environmental initiatives, policy changes and new directions in program development to the VAPDC and their member localities is of primary importance. It was agreed that members of the Environmental Committee and other PDC staff should work with their member localities to facilitate the dissemination of information and assist in developing and maintaining clear lines of communication among the localities and other governmental agencies. Periodic communication among all Environmental Committee members was characterized as essential to developing a statewide voice that might influence legislative issues and decisions.

Future Committee Meetings

- Meetings should be day-long and include opportunities for updates on timely issues from all PDCs and, periodically, from state agencies; and
- Meetings should be held at times and locations other than those determined by the VAPDC Summer and Winter Conference dates.

Homework

Environmental Committee members are asked to:

- Submit a topic of interest for discussion at a future meeting by March 30th;
- Comment on the group recommendations as detailed above; and
- Suggest alternatives/ideas for more effective and meaningful exchange of ideas among group members.