

Virginia Water Monitoring Council Steering Committee Meeting
June 17, 2010
Conference Call

Minutes by Robin Wilder

Steering Committee representatives attending:

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay (ACB) – Chris French
County of Chesterfield – Weedon Cloe
County of Henrico – Robin Wilder
County of James City – Fran Geissler
Ferrum College – Carolyn Thomas
University of Mary Washington – Michael Bass
Virginia Citizens for Water Quality/Friends of the Shenandoah – Karen Anderson
Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) – Stuart Torbeck
Virginia Save our Streams (VASOS) – Jay Gilliam
Virginia Water Resources Research Center (VWRRC) – Jane Walker

Organizations without a representative at the meeting:

Clean Virginia Waterways (CVW)
Longwood University
Newport News Waterworks
Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District
United States Geological Society (USGS)
Virginia Association of Counties (VACo)
Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF)
Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF)
Virginia Department of Health (VDH)
Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)
Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences (VIMS)

The Virginia Water Monitoring Council (VWMC) Steering Committee met by conference call on June 17, 2010 (1:00– 2:30 PM). Chris French, Steering Committee Co-Chair, led the meeting. The meeting was called to order at 1:05 PM. Following welcome and introductions, the meeting agenda was reviewed and approved. The minutes from the April 13, 2010 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Financial Report:

Jane Walker reported that the VWMC has a financial balance of \$16,656 as of June 17, 2010.

Announcements:

Upcoming conferences/seminars/workshops, publications and general announcements were discussed:

- Fran Geissler reported that James City County decided to fund their Stormwater Program by offering a \$30 million bond referendum (which equates to a 2 cent tax increase).
- Stuart Torbeck indicated the DEQ 2011 Citizen Monitoring Grant RFP would be published tomorrow. Due to budget cutbacks no mini-grants were offered this year. Stuart also indicated the 305b/303 report will be released by DEQ in August. Stuart also announced that new fish advisory signs would be posted soon in the following areas: Piankatank River, Lake Gaston, Lake Whitehurst/Little Creek, Mattaponi, Pamunkey, Potomac tribs., Reedy Creek, Mill Creek, Tabb Creek, Poquoson River, and Chisman Creek.
- Jane Walker announced the Water Center's 2010 Virginia Stormwater Symposium would be held Thursday, October 21st at VCU.

- Chris French announced the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay will hold a rain barrel workshop in Richmond on July 7. He also announced the Virginia Citizens for Water Quality will hold their Summer Summit in Appomattox this year on August 14th with hands-on monitoring. Chris French announced he attended the National Water Monitoring Council conference recently held in Colorado. Virginia is coming up on its 25 year anniversary of having citizen water quality monitoring. An article regarding this 25 year history is located in the current issue of the Chesapeake Bay Journal (page 4). Chris spoke at the conference regarding this rich history. He also announced the NWMC has a group within it that desires to promote and support the efforts of Citizen Monitoring groups.

Old Business:

2009 Altria Grant Obligations

The World Water Monitoring Day (WWMD) activity guide is nearing completion. It is a web-based guide. The content has been developed, and it will take approximately ½ day to upload it onto the web. The Stream School component of the project has been dropped, and the monies transferred to the WWMD web-based activity guide.

2010 Altria Grant Obligations

The grant monies for 2010 will be used to promote the WWMD activity guide, administrate the annual conference, facilitate VWMC communications, provide a summer intern to the VWMC, and provide WWMD monitoring kits.

Membership Survey

Fran Geissler provided a review of her findings on the membership survey. Her review is attached. The bottom line question remaining after reviewing the membership survey answers is how will the VWMC engage its membership and give them the perception of value from their membership. There are two focus groups within the membership that have differing needs: local governments and citizen monitors.

2010 Conference:

Neither Katie Register nor Dan Dietrich was present to provide official conference results. There were 92 pre-registered and an estimated 20 registered onsite. Conference evaluations indicated positive feedback with regard to the speakers. Attendees indicated they would pay an average of \$50 for such a conference. Fran asked that alternate directions be provided to the facility to route people around downtown traffic. Financial information regarding the conference will be available at the next Steering Committee meeting.

New Business:

How Can VWMC Help Localities with MS4 Compliance?

Discussion continued regarding how the VWMC may be able to assist localities in meeting some of the burgeoning requirements of their MS4 permits. A sub-committee was formed to provide a direction to the larger steering committee: Fran Geissler, Jane Walker, Karen Anderson, Robin Wilder, and Weedon Cloe. Robin also suggested that Sandra Erdle from VIMS be invited to join the committee. Fran will arrange a conference call by the end of July. Chris French asked to be kept in the loop and requested the committee to engage Katie Register as well.

Survey of VWMC Steering Committee: The subcommittee has formulated this survey, however, Jane wants to add some questions. It should be ready to publish by the end of the summer.

Future Meeting Date:

Wednesday, August 11th (1-3:30pm) Conference Call

The meeting was adjourned at 2:15pm.

VWMC 2009?-2010 Member Survey – Draft Summary

During early 2010, VWMC members were polled through an online survey in order to evaluate participation and interest in VWMC activities. The 100 respondents answered ten questions about length of membership, affiliation, usefulness of activities and preferred future offerings. Information was gathered in a variety of formats, including written comments, ratings and yes/no type questions.

Who responded to the survey?

- Almost half of the respondents have been a member of VWMC less than 1 year. Over one-third have been members for more than 3 years.
- Two-thirds of the respondents work in academia, local government or state government. Consultants, federal employees, nonprofits and interested citizens provided most of the other responses.

How interested are members in participating in VWMC Steering or other committees?

- Well over three-quarters of the respondents have never been involved in either the steering or other VWMC committees.
- Over a quarter of the respondents are able and willing to commit ten or more hours per year to support the VWMC. About half of the respondents are only able to commit up to 10 hours per year. Another quarter are not able to contribute at all.

How members view the VWMC services

- More than any other activity, respondents find the weekly email announcements a useful tool for keeping abreast of opportunities and issues. All members who use the announcements rate them positively.
- Similarly, networking opportunities were used by a large majority of the members and were rated as beneficial.
- While the members who have attended the annual conference rated it highly, almost half the responses came from members who have never participated.
- Besides the weekly announcements and the annual conference, members are looking to the Council for technical resources and information on monitoring techniques. Written comments support the need for dissemination of technical information at the local level.
- Members consistently reported little interest in either World Monitoring Day activities or purely social events.
- While most respondents have not sought continuing education credits from VWMC activities, the credits were important for those who did. Written comments supported the perception that offering credits positions the Council as an authoritative source of information on monitoring.

Implications for the future

Based on the survey results, the VWMC continues to be a fairly young organization, still developing its niche among many competing interests. Most of the respondents are recent members who work either in local or state government or within academia. Most members have little time available to donate to the Council. Members look to the Council primarily for information; either through the weekly announcements, through the annual conference or through on-line technical resources.

Refining the Council's focus on monitoring issues and engaging the new members may be important for the long term sustainability of the Council. New members will need to perceive value from their membership in order to continue.