

Pollinator Working Group Meeting
Thursday September 20, 2018
4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
RI DEM (235 Promenade St.) Room 300, Providence RI

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Call to order at 4:05 PM

Attendees:

Working Group Members: Meg Kerr, Joel Tirrell (absent), Shannon Brawley, David Brunetti, Sara Churgin, David Gregg (absent), Rafael Nightingale (absent), Keith Salisbury, Robert Mann, Heidi Quinn for Henry Wright, Ken Payne (absent), Lisa Tewksbury (absent), Ken Ayars (absent), Howie Cook

Guests: Brett Cotler, Kobi Weinberg, Aya Rothwell

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 PM.

Brief discussion of PWG protocols. We agreed to the following:

1. We do not need formal letters of appointment unless they are necessary to make our work credible.
2. We will meet quarterly and meetings will be canceled if we do not have substantive content to cover.

Presentation and discussion “Beekeeping Practices in Rhode Island”

Kobi Weinberg and Brett Cotler, Brown University students

Brett and Kobi summarized their research from the spring semester, 2018. Their full report is on the PWG web site. With the assistance of the RI Beekeepers Association (RIBA), the students developed a survey and distributed it to the full RIBA mailing list (about 600 beekeepers). The survey was developed to understand the challenges RI beekeepers face. Questions probed bee health, availability of food for bees, beekeeper experience managing hives, training and beekeeper registration. The students did in-person interviews with an additional 10 beekeepers.

The findings included:

- Beekeepers surveyed suspect that weather and mites are the major cause of die off for their hives. Food is rarely seen as a problem for their bees.
- Technical assistance is available from RIBA and the state. The surveyed beekeepers are more likely to use the assistance from RIBA but not all beekeepers take advantage of the assistance.
- Not all of the beekeepers completing the survey have registered their bees with the state and not all say that they understand that registration is mandatory. Those who have complied generally find the registration process to be easy.

The students also researched how Connecticut, New York, Maryland and Massachusetts manage pollinator health. In answer to a question from the PWG, they said that they thought that MA and NY had excellent model pollinator plans.

Discussion of the Findings and Recommendations from the Special Legislative Commission to Study Pesticide Control Regulation

Bob Mann, National Association of Landscape Professionals and a Member of the Special Legislative Commission and Member PWG

Bob's powerpoint presentation is on the PWG web site. He reminded the PWG that the Commission was formed, at least in part, in direct response to recommendations from the PWG. The Commission's recommendations are also congruent with recommendations put forward by the PWG.

The commission was created by a Senate resolution (2017 – S 0982) introduced by Senators Sosnowski, Calkin, Kettle and Conley. The purpose of the commission was, "to review all pesticide control regulations and make recommendations to the Senate to update and strengthen the governance of the use of pesticides in Rhode Island".

The Commission met four times and considered information presented by DEM (Key Ayars and Howard Cook) as well as by URI (Steve Alm).

The Commission's recommendations and findings:

1. Fund RIDEM to the greatest extent possible using funds from pesticide registration, licensing, certification and training fees to be used by RIDEM and URI for pesticide program activities.
2. Make URI's pesticide applicator training program mandatory for the RI exam.
3. DEM should offer a disposal program for unwanted or unused pesticides.
4. The state bee inspector should be a full-time position.

Supplemental Recommendations and Findings

- Approximately \$1.5m collected via registration.
- \$71k collected via licensing/certification that goes directly to DEM.
- \$100k collected via pesticide training fees that goes directly to URI.
- Homeowners must be properly educated in application, risks in using pesticides.
- Contemplate requiring label-specific training for RUP/SLU products for certified applicators.
- Provide best practices training for farmers using general use pesticides.
- Legislation that would require information be given to beekeepers to register hives.
- Require pesticide training specifically on pollinator issues.
- Amend Subchapter 15, section 3 to include pollinators.
- Provide notice to beekeepers when pesticide applications made near hives.
- Pesticides more widely used in home & garden than in agriculture.
- Educational pamphlets should be available at retail POS.
- Explore legislation that would impose penalties for applying without license.

General Discussion

- The cost of pesticides is a factor in limiting use by commercial applicators and farmers.
- Time is an issue when we think of requiring additional training for farmers. This is why RINLA provides much of their training in the winter time.

- Notifying beekeepers of pesticide use on adjacent properties is challenging because not all beekeepers are registered and bees forage up to 3 miles from their hive. There are programs available for doing the notification (FieldWatch was mentioned: <http://www.fieldwatch.com>). But they are expensive.

Howard Cook told the group that he is looking at the state's pesticide laws and regulations and would be interested in discussing his recommended changes with the PWG. The group agreed and this will be a top priority at the next meeting.

Next meeting:

December 6, 2018 from 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM at the NRCS conference room.