

Pollinator Working Group Meeting

Date: Thursday November 2, 2017

Time: 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Location: NRCS Conference Room

Minutes

Call to order at 4:10 PM

Attendees:

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

Guest: Judie Sky, Nyssa Sky (Golden Root), Allison Hamel (RIDOT)

Dates of next Working Group Meetings: The PWG is scheduled to meet on the following dates:

Thursday December 7, 2017. DEM Room 300. We will discuss pesticide management and consider what we would like to include as recommendations in our report.

Thursday January 11, 2018 from 4 PM – 6 PM at the NRCS conference room

Thursday February 1, 2018 from 4 PM – 6 PM at the NRCS conference room

Year 2 report – Due February 15, 2018

Presentation by Allison Hamel, RIDOT

RI DOT is permitted as a MS4 under DEM's stormwater program. Their existing permit is 15 years old although permits are only issued for 5 year terms.

Rhode Island has a lot of water quality impairments. Sixty percent of the state is in an impaired catchment area and 96 waterbodies are listed as impaired. The cause of water quality impairments is primarily stormwater runoff pollution.

RI DOT has not been compliant with their permit. EPA conducted an audit, requested DOJ assistance and in December of 2015, RIDOT signed a consent decree with EPA. The agreement included \$315,000 civil penalty and \$240,000 in Special Environmental Projects (SEPs). Water quality requirements in the agreement (from <https://www.epa.gov/enforcement/rhode-island-department-transportation-settlement#injunctive>)

"The consent decree requires the RIDOT to improve its stormwater management program including to:

- comply with applicable TMDL requirements, including building structural controls where appropriate;
- reduce its discharges of pollutants of concern to impaired waters to the maximum extent practicable, including implementing structural and non-structural controls
- implement an effective illicit discharge detection and elimination program and prevent unauthorized discharges,
- comply with street sweeping and catch basin permit requirements, and
- inspect, clean and repair, as necessary, catch basins and other components of its storm drainage system.

The Consent Decree includes the following Next Generation Compliance tools:

- RIDOT must consider and evaluate the use of green infrastructure for controlling discharges from its MS4 to impaired waters;
- RIDOT must post certain submissions required under the consent decree on its website; and
- RIDOT must submit reports and deliverables under the consent decree in electronic format.

EPA estimates that in total RIDOT will spend approximately \$200 million over a 20 year period to implement the required injunctive relief.”

RI DOT has increased staffing to meet these requirements. The Office of Stormwater Management now has 13 staff. Opportunities for testing out pollinator plantings can be pilot tested in partnership with this program.

Recommendations for the PWG to consider:

- 1) Have the legislature or the Governor direct DOT to make pollinator enhancement a priority.
- 2) Make pollinator plantings easy.
 - a. Have pollinator seed mixes ready to go
 - b. Have priority areas identified
 - c. Develop general guidance on plantings by region
- 3) Keep both short and long term maintenance in mind. DOT has 3 maintenance strategies: mow, weed whack, ignore. RI has short staffed maintenance crews.
- 4) Focus on two-fers. Combine pollinator habitat with other priorities like:
 - a. Water quality TMDLs
 - b. Stormwater
 - c. Flooding
 - d. Heat sinks
 - e. Green streets
 - f. Climate resiliency
 - g. Governor has daffodil initiative – can pollinator plantings be combined with this?
- 5) Public perception often drives maintenance – especially close mowing. If we want to promote pollinator habitat, we need to address this.

Questions & Answers

Q. What other states are leading on DOT pollinator planting?

A. MD is about 10 years ahead of us.

Q. What are the requirements for trees along highways?

A. After Hurricane Irene, the Federal Highway administration recommended moving trees away from the roadways.

Q. How does DOT control invasive plants?

A. We mow, weed whack and ignore. We would welcome suggestions on how the plantings could be used to control invasives.

Q. RI DOT has a blue book with seed mixes. If we want to amend this, are we looking at a rule change or a soft recommendation?

A. We should have a rule change that adds pollinator mixes. The process at DOT, we would test out the mix (perhaps with a stormwater project), then the mix goes to the Spec Committee. The PWG could recommend a seed mix for DOT to consider.

Q. Can you suggest a project?

A. The new stormwater project at Rt. 10/Roger Williams Park includes a grass swale. Perhaps pollinator plantings could be included. However, a recommendation would have to be added quickly. Other projects that are in the queue: Woonaquattucket watershed is the focus of DOT work; Old Tower Hill Rd. in Wakefield.

PWG discussion

We have priority areas mapping from Julia's work. We discussed conducting a survey of beekeepers and then adding that information to the map.

We should review pollinator seed mixes and think about mowing and weed whacking. We could design the practices around this maintenance regime.

There are more ways to include promotion of pollinators in the road design standards (Blue Book) than just specifying particular pollinator seed mixes, one could also include pollinator friendly soils (lots of sand) in the DOT construction guidance, at least where appropriate. Sandy soils help restrain tall plant growth which reduces mowing and provide bare soil where ground nesting pollinators can dig

Meeting adjourned: 5:55 PM

After the meeting follow up:

Howie Ginsberg put us in touch with Matt Horning, Forest Service, who has developed national guidance for roadside revegetation with pollinator-friendly plants.

<http://www.nativerevegetation.org>

Meg and David Gregg will participate in a conference call with RI DOT and MA DOT on pollinator friendly planting on Monday Nov 27.