

WV NRCS Civil Rights Committee

FY 2003 1st Quarter Meeting

December 12, 2002

Present:

Lillian Woods, STC and thus Deputy Equal Employment Opportunity Officer
Jim Piper, formerly acting STC and thus Deputy Equal Employment Opportunity Officer
Lorenzo Henderson, Civil Rights Chairperson
Carlos Cole, American Indian Program Manager
Isaac Wolford, Disabled Person's Program Manager
Ron Howard, African American Program Manager
Susan Edgar, Wellness Program Coordinator
Wanda Smith, Federal Women's Program Manager
Pat Bowen, advisor to the Committee
Larry Sargent, advisor to the Committee
Charlotte Wertz, outgoing advisor to the Committee

Absent:

Casey Shrader, Hispanic Program Manager

The meeting convened at 11 a.m. at the NRCS State Office.

The Civil Rights Committee (CRC) will be meeting quarterly, possibly utilizing teleconferencing or net conferencing.

State Conservationist Lillian Woods addressed the group. Some of her expectations for the role of the CRC:

- CRC minutes are to be distributed statewide.
- The Committee is to identify problems and solutions, and provide the State Conservationist with written recommendations of changes.
- The State Conservationist's Performance Review in 2003 will include an Affirmative Employment evaluation. She will need the assistance of the CRC to diversify the NRCS workforce in WV.

Issues the State Conservationist laid before the committee are:

- Composition of the committee: general members in addition to the Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPM's) to tally 7-12 people recommended.
- Recruitment issues: around 50 people in WV NRCS can retire now, ½ of technical staff in field offices can retire.
 - need aggressive recruitment strategy
 - need work on transition
- Retention issues:
 - training
 - equipment
 - mentoring
 - guidance

Other items Ms. Woods addressed:

- A copy of the state's Affirmative Employment Plan (AEP) will be provided to the CRC.
- Ms. Woods will be putting together a recruitment team, composed of volunteers, to develop a long term and short term recruitment strategy.
- An All Employee meeting will be held in March, 2003. CRC to suggest agenda items to Charlotte Wertz.
- Civil Rights Compliance Reviews, conducted by Jim Piper, are an opportunity for SEPM's to receive training by participating.
- Opportunities in farmbill:
 - opportunity to reach persons who traditionally have not participated
 - new programs for a different clientele
 - Technical Service Providers can be minorities and can extend opportunities to minorities
- Ms. Woods wants all committee members on Voice mail.
- Ms. Woods will maintain an open door policy. Schedule with Roseanne Kennedy.
- Consider having a CRC representative attend state staff meetings and provide updates to the Program Managers.

The meeting then assumed a question and answer format with participation by all members (*additional items appear on the "Action Items" list, page 6*):

Q: What is the status of the Senior Environment Program?

A: No one present knew the status, will have to check it out.

Q: What is the status of the Workforce Recruitment Program?

A: This program has been determined not compliant.

Q: How are budget requests for Special Emphasis Programs submitted?

A: Put budget requests on Business Plan.

Q: What about the timing of budget requests?

A: Submit in July of 2003 for FY 2004.

Q: What about recruitment trips to schools?

A: Work with your supervisor who approves your travel.

A discussion ensued regarding "visible recruitment" vs. "recruit when have a vacancy". It was noted that the pipelines are rusty from only recruiting when have a vacancy.

Items brought to the attention of the CRC by various members and advisors (*additional items appear on the "Action Items" list, page 6*):

- SEEP announcements are out, and have been mailed to a large list of schools.
- Fall/Spring Career fairs need to be added to Business plan; get contacts to the schools.
- We discussed Soils classes online with labs for other areas besides WVU. We could recruit as GS 0401 Biology instead of GS 0457, then perhaps assist or allow employee to fulfill soils credits possibly by placement near WVU, Potomac State, Shepherdstown, etc.
- We need to work with the schools who have Resource Management, Environmental Science, etc., to get soils added to curriculum. WV State now has Land Grant status and an extension service, but has no soils classes yet.
- One example of prior success in the state was an employee who took the soils class online, took lab with Carlos Cole, took the tests at WVU, and received credit.
- The state's Affirmative Employment Plan (AEP) was passed out, with the caution that it contained confidential information. The AD-714 (PATCO) were passed out and discussed.

- To address lack of Cultural Awareness, training at the all employee meeting was suggested. Compliance Reviews may also address Cultural Awareness.
- The 256 Reports regarding disability were discussed.
- Desk audits were suggested as the best means to seek promotions.
- Individual Development Plans are needed by all individuals.
- Give any recommendations for the new AEP to Charlotte Wertz.
- The annual \$500 Civil Rights award and its' basis was discussed briefly.
- Civil Rights and the Farm Bill:
 - Contacts need to be made to get the word out to people
 - Jim Piper will make presentations at meetings etc. when requested.
 - Look for outreach possibilities at individual Field Offices.
- An all employees meeting is planned for the week of the 10th of March, 2003. Two bids have been received, additional contacts are still out. No decision on location yet.
- DC's are to report on PRMS minority numbers and characteristics by Program. SEPM's can check the parity reports.
- Discussed Civil Rights Appraisal form, used on Civil Rights Reviews in FO's. For SEPM to arrange to go on CR Reviews, contact Assistants for the respective areas.
- For all employee mailouts, get approval from CRC chair and STC. Send to CRC chair after approved.
- It was suggested the CRC do a questionnaire and email it out.
- The STC is to sign off on SEPM Activities.
- CRC to receive copies of Appraisal Guides
- The CRC chair requests written updates from each SEPM.
- We discussed the possibilities of coordination between the Cherokee Nation and the PMC.
- According to the ASTC-FO present, SEPM's are welcome in the areas, and it is suggested we call the DC directly. ASTC-FO's will support all activities.

- It was suggested SEPM's get on the agenda at Area meetings.
- It was suggested that SEPM's in each area can be available to do the presentations for SEPM's from outside of the area, which would reduce travel expenses.
- General Manual Sections 508, 501, and 504 were mentioned and discussed briefly.
- Agriability Project pamphlets were distributed. The National meeting of Agriability Project is slated for WV in 2004. Issac Welford has been on the Agriability Steering committee for about 6 months. This Project has money which comes to the extension service of the state, 25 or so states participating. In WV, the money comes to the Safety Division of Extension, who contracted with the WV Center for Independent Living (WVCIL). The WVCIL has 3 staff funded. NRCS makes referrals.
- Annette Arbogast with the WVCIL will:
 - Work with individuals
 - Build database of individual assessments
 - Potential to do presentation at all employees meeting
- The Reasonable Accommodations Officer is the States Deputy EPM. "When in doubt, accommodate", solve at the lowest point. We can do disability hires, but they must not be set up to fail.
- East Region Teleconferences for more than one program have suggested face-to-face meetings. This idea was not viewed favorably by advisors.
- It was suggested that a line at the bottom of Business Plan be used for approved/not approved for budget items
- It was suggested that SEPM's be available to put a face on recruitment efforts.
- Currently each SEP has a budget of \$1000.00.
- It was suggested that we pool with other Federal Agencies to get bulk rate posters, etc.
- E-mail costs to CRC chair for current budget requests.

Listed below are Action Items developed by the Civil Rights Committee:

1. Appoint general advisory members to the Civil Rights Committee. The makeup would be one member from each area plus one member from the State Office for a total of four advisory members. Consider disciplines not currently represented.
2. Request that a representative SEPM be allowed to sit in on budget, strategic planning and state staff meetings, and provide updates to the other Program Managers.
3. Request training for new SEPM (Ron Howard). NOTE: Charlotte will check with OPM or other agencies for training to be held soon.
4. Establish a relationship with WV State College staff to see if students can have soil classes taken at nearby colleges and universities which offer soils or other resource management courses. On-line courses to also be considered with NRCS staff providing soils and other lab course curriculum. It was also discussed that this was not just a minority issue.
5. Complete annual AEP report.
6. Request to include SEPM on field office CR appraisals.
7. Invite Agriability of WV to put on a program at the all employees conference.
8. Request to increase SEPM's budget, and make separate item for travel and training.
9. Request to assist Human Resources in all recruitment efforts.
10. Request for current State Outreach Plan to be sent to all SEPMs.
11. Request to send out information on the Senior Environment Employment Program (for ages 55 and over).
12. Request for status of student loan re-payment program information. This program allows up to \$6,000 per employee per year for hiring as an incentive. The program has a maximum of \$40,000 per employee with a service commitment.
13. Request a review of the State Training Plan including requests, approvals and denials.
14. Request to appoint Wellness Program Coordinator and the AIPM for one additional year.
15. Request to invite health officials for screening of staff in the Harley O. Staggers building for high blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes during African-American History Month celebration.