

WV NRCS Civil Rights Advisory Committee
FY 2003 3rd Quarterly Meeting
July 30, 2003

Present:

Lorenzo Henderson, Civil Rights Advisory Committee Chairperson
Isaac Wolford, Disability Emphasis Program Manager
Casey Shrader, Hispanic Program Manager
Wanda Smith, Federal Women's Program Manager
Larry Sargent, Human Resources Manager
Susan Edgar, Wellness Program Coordinator

11:26 a. m. WV NRCS Civil Rights Action Committee (CRAC) teleconference called to order by chairperson Lorenzo Henderson.

Chairperson Lorenzo Henderson read to the group a letter from STC Lillian Woods in response to the December 12, 2002 Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) Meeting minutes. The letter was dated June 13, 2003, and reads:

“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. Approved – I strongly encourage the CRAC to review new agency policy in General Manual, Title 230, Part 404, Civil Rights Advisory Committee, would include general members of the Civil Rights Advisory Committee. I would like to implement this change starting in FY-04. Please submit draft bylaws or standard operating procedures to me by September 15, 2003.

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 Manager. Approved – Starting with the July 8-9 2003 Principle Staff/Program Manager Meeting, a representative of the CTRC may attend the general session and present a Civil Rights update. The CRAC chair will notify the ASTC-Operation Management who will be representing the CRAC for each Principle Staff/Program Managers Meeting.

3. Request training for new SEPM (Ron Howard). NOTE: Charlotte will check with OPM or other agencies for training to be hold soon. Approved – Ron Howard and Casey Shrader were nominated for training to NHQ. Due to overwhelming requests and limited NRCS slots in the training course, Ron and

Casey were not selected. Casey is scheduled to participate in HEPM Training in conjunction with National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees Training Conference.

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. Approved – I have a working relationship with WV State College staff. Options for students to complete requirements to qualify for Soil Conservationist series includes transfer to a school that has the courses needed, on-line courses, and correspondence courses. NRCS needs to insure students understand what courses leads to eligibility for the various series. The decision for the student to meet the eligibility lies with the student.

5. Complete annual Affirmative Employment Plan (AEP) report. Approved – The WV AEP was completed and submitted February 6, 2003. I will have Larry Seargent, HRM to review the AEP at an upcoming CRAC meeting.

6. Request to include SEPM on field office CR appraisals. Approved – I am in the process of gathering dates of the last Civil Rights Compliance Reviews conducted for all offices. General Manual, Title 230, Part 405, Equal Opportunity in Program Delivery states that “states shall conduct periodic (every 3 to 5 years) compliance reviews of area, field and project offices to evaluate and monitor progress in program delivery and for continuous compliance with nondiscrimination regulations.” I ask the CRAC to develop a schedule for Civil Rights Compliance Reviews starting in FY-04. This schedule needs to take into consideration the Field Office and RC&D Appraisals schedule for FY-04.

7. Invite AgrAbility of WV to put on a program at the all employees conference. Approved – A speaker has been added to the Northeast NACD meeting in August 2003. A speaker can be scheduled for Area and State Office meetings by coordinating with the ASTC-FOs and STC.

8. Request to increase SEPM’s budget, and make separate item for travel and training. Approved – SEPM’s budget (\$1,000 each) will support those items in the SEPM business plan. Training will come from the general training budget.

9. Request to assist Human Resources in all recruitment efforts. Approved – Pending development of a WV Recruitment Plan which will lay out our strategy for recruitment to address WV AEP.

10. Request for current State Outreach Plan to be sent to all SEPM’s. Approved – I will provide all SEPMs a copy of the Long Range Strategic Plan for USDA Service Centers in Historically Underserved Communities which was submitted to the National Food and Agricultural Council September 1, 1999. This

plan was requested by the previous administration and has not been updated. I would encourage the CRAC to review the plan and recommend updates, or add action items to SEPM's 2003 business plans, or recommend action items for the FY-2004 WV Business Plan.

11. Request Human Resources send out information on the Senior Environment Employment Program (for ages 55 and over) to the SEPM's, who will provide the information to employees at area meetings. Status – Larry Sargent is researching this issue and will provide additional information to all employees that SEPMs can review at area meetings.

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. Status – USDA Departmental Regulation Number 4050-537 dated April 2, 2002 provides the USDA Repayment of Student Loan Plan. General Manual, Title 360, Part 407, Subpart B, Student Loan Repayment Plan provides additional supplemental guidance. This plan can be used as a recruitment incentive for difficult to fill positions or as a retention incentive for current employees.

13. Request a review of the State Training Plan including requests, approvals and denials. Approved – I will have Charlotte Wertz, Training Officer to review this with the CRAC at an upcoming meeting.

14. CRAC chair to check appointment status of the Wellness Program Coordinator and the AIPM. The Wellness Program Coordinator appointment expired but agreed to carry out the duties for this fiscal year. The AIPM appointment expires September 30, 2003. I will distribute a bulletin requesting nominations for vacant program manager position, expiring program manager positions, and Civil Rights Advisory Committee members. Please make recommendations for the FY-04 Committee chair, general members, AIPM, and BEPM to me by September 15, 2003.

15. Request to invite health officials for screening of staff in the Harley O. Stagers building for high blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes during African-American History Month celebration. Approved – Although African-American History Month has passed, health officials can be invited to the State Office in conjunction with an Employees Association Meeting or another appointed time.

The Awards Committee in their recommendations requested “a listing of all awards nominations and actions taken on each.” I did not approve this recommendation. I ask the CRAC to review the awards listing since one of your roles includes “Focusing the attention of management on specific personnel practices or problems of an EEO nature that are producing or could produce

dissention and dissatisfaction among employees (e.g., merit promotion and procedures; selection for training and assignments; criteria, nomination, and distribution of awards, etc.).” Charlotte Wertz, Incentive Awards Officer can provide necessary information for your committee’s analysis.

I ask that the CRAC develop recommendations for criteria or format or additional nominating instructions for the WV Civil Rights Award.

Thank you for your leadership of the Civil Rights Committee. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact me.”

This letter was signed by Lillian V. Woods, State Conservationist. This letter was not presented in electronic format. A hard copy will be retained with the hard copy of the official minutes.

Chairperson Lorenzo Henderson next read to the group a letter from STC Lillian Woods dated July 30, 2003. The letter reads:

“This letter is in response to the recommendations form the April 29, 2003 Civil Rights Committee (CRAC) Meeting minutes.

In light of the Conservation Programs Delivery workload at the end of fiscal year 2003, I am willing to work with you to identify those items the CRAC needs to complete by September 30, 2003 and those items that can be carried over to the next fiscal year.

“I have asked Charlotte Wertz, SAO to contact National Employees Development Center (NEDC) about WV hosting a “Civil Rights Compliance in Program Delivery” course in FY-04. Training will be essential as WV moves towards conducting Civil Rights Compliance Reviews in GY-04. I look forward to receiving a proposed schedule for the Civil Rights Compliance Reviews starting in FY-04. I have contacted surrounding State Conservationists on the viability of holding NEDC “EEO for Civil Rights Advisory Committee Members: course next fiscal year.

I addressed Action Items 1-15 in my letter to you dated June 13, 2003. On item 14, Carlos Cole’s term was extended for one year and I will be accepting nominations for a new American Indian SEPM.

I am working with the WV State Food and Agriculture Council as leases expire that we insure office spaces meet disability accessible requirements. An issue we may want to forward to the National Civil Rights Advisory Committee is that FSA, RD and NRCS utilize different checklists to determine if an office space meets disability accessible requirements. This makes it hard to determine when or if an office meets disability accessible requirements.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact me.”

The letter was signed by Lillian V. Woods, State Conservationist. This letter was not presented in electronic format. A hard copy will be retained with the hard copy of the official minutes.

The vacancy for collateral duty Black Emphasis Program Manager was discussed, and the need to publicize the vacancy. Those who are interested or who wish to make a nomination need to forward information to the CRAC.

Wanda Smith reported on her attendance at the Federally Employed Women’s (FEW) conference, which included a day for USDA Federal Women’s Program Manager (FWPM) sessions, a day for NRCS FWPM sessions, and a meeting of the East Region FWPM’s. She received a copy of the new Special Emphasis Program Manager (SEPM) Guide at the NRCS session, and will send/bring to the State Office for copies to be made for all the SEPM’s, State Conservationist (STC), and Human Resources (HR).

STC Lillian Woods has requested the CRAC draw up By Laws for the committee, and a Plan of Work by September 15. Included in the By Laws should be guidelines for general members.

A retreat for the CRAC to work on the By Laws was tentatively scheduled for 10 a.m. September 3, 2003, in the conference room at the Gassaway field office.

Items for consideration at retreat:

- Recruitment Plan
- By Laws
- Guidelines for General Members
- Guidelines for WV Civil Rights Award
- Plan of Work
- Rewrite State Outreach Plan

A discussion of appointment terms, general membership, and advisors to the committee took place.

Chairperson Henderson requested nominations for a SEPM to give a Civil Rights Action Committee report at the Principal Staff/Program Managers Meeting, with the next one coming up in September, date not specified. Wanda Smith volunteered contingent on date if no conflicts.

Civil Rights Compliance Reviews in Fiscal Year 2004 will be scheduled for a Field Office and an RC&D office.

Review of Awards was discussed by the CRAC.

Review of Training was discussed by the CRAC.

SEPM Budgets were discussed (currently \$1000.00 per Special Emphasis Program). Some of the items this budget can be used for are building libraries for a Special Emphasis Program, an annual function, or combined functions. The CRAC requests SEPM budgets be separate from travel and training for the SEPM. The \$1000.00 is to be earmarked for business plan items. The CRAC asks that \$1000.00/SEPM be a line item in the budget, and that travel and training for each SEPM be a separate line item in the state budget.

The State Outreach Plan has been mailed out, and the CRAC is to consider the plan at their next meeting.

During discussion of the State Training Plan, it was noted that it is up to supervisors to input needs. Anyone who feels singled out should take it up with their supervisor.

A multiyear Affirmative Employment Plan (AEP) has been mailed out to the CRAC. Larry Sargent reviewed the AEP with the CRAC. He stated we have problems getting people into WV. He prepared this plan after working for WV NRCS only a couple months. In the future, the CRAC should get involved in preparation of the AEP itself – usually in December or January of the year.

It was decided to have the AEP as an agenda item at the 1st Quarterly CRAC meeting.

For recruiting, it was suggested to have an NRCS Representative at the State FFA convention, usually the 2nd week of July. Isaac Wolford will call Don Michael to discuss.

Lorenzo Henderson discussed a group called MANNERS – for minorities and women majoring in Natural Resource Sciences, with a home office in Memphis Tennessee.

Charlotte Wertz and Lorenzo Henderson will be attending “Blacks in Government “ recruiting trip the last week of August.

The state’s Recruitment Plan is in its infancy.

The Awards Committee cannot ask for some information which the CRAC can ask for. The CRAC will consider requesting CRAC members attend Awards committee meetings to advise.

Next meeting set for Sept 3 at Gassaway at the Field Office Conference Room. Lorenzo Henderson will set up the meeting.

Lorenzo Henderson is to let Wanda Smith know the date of the Principal staff meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 12:43 p.m.