

Pollinator Working Group Meeting

Thursday December 6, 2018

NRCS Conference Room

60 Quaker Lane, Warwick, RI

Draft Minutes

Working Group members in attendance: David Brunetti, Shannon Brawley, Meg Kerr, Joel Tirrell, Heidi Quinn, David Gregg,

Guests: Steve Alm, Howard Cook, Pat Hogan, Jim Wilkinson, Aya Rothwell

1) The meeting was called to order by Joel Tirrell at 4:05 PM.

2) Working Group Business:

- Review upcoming meeting schedule (January 24)
- Minutes from September will be reviewed at January meeting
- Meeting with DEM

Members of the PWG (Joel Tirrell, Meg Kerr) along with Jesse Rodrigues from RINLA met with DEM Director Coit, Ken Ayars and the DEM CFO on November 9 to review the recommendations of the Senate Study Commission and develop shared priorities for the 2019 legislative session. We acknowledged that it is a challenging time to discuss funding, but agreed that we would work together on the following package:

Background: DEM collects \$1.5 M in pesticide registration fees each year for approximately 9,000 pesticide products. And \$71,000 in licensing and certification fees for the testing and recertification of 2,100 applicators and dealers. These funds go directly to the general fund.

DEM once had a pesticide relief fund that was used for “both emergency relief for pesticide contamination and financial support for pest control methods that reduce or eliminate reliance upon chemical pesticides”. But it has been unfunded for many years.

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/pubs/regs/regs/agric/pestrelf.pdf>

Registration fees are paid, in part, to ensure proper regulation of the pesticides in the state. With limited staff dedicated to the pesticide program and therefore limited oversight, Rhode Island runs the risk of a pesticide accident or incident that creates public concern for pesticide use throughout the state.

The Pollinator Working Group and the Special Legislative Commission to Study Pesticide Control Regulations recommend increased funding for the work of pesticide management.

Proposal:

\$250 K per year

Allocated to:

\$50 K / year for pesticide disposal program. The volume of pesticides needing disposal will decrease over time, eventually eliminating the need for this investment.

\$50 K/ year for pesticide relief fund – small grants that leverage outside investments

\$100 K/year for the mosquito abatement grants. These grants are used to eliminate mosquitos without the application of pesticides

\$50 K/year for staff at DEM (\$25K) and URI/RINLA (\$25K) to administer the grant programs and to enhance the pesticide training program

Discussion: Howard Cook said that there may be too much money in pesticide disposal. DEM has money from VW settlement to dispose. So we should decide and be specific where unspent money will go. Perhaps grants for proper storage.

3) Industry Presentations on BMPs and Pollinators

A) Pat Hogan, Sodco and RI Golf Course Superintendents.

Pat described how golf courses do a good job attending to environmental issues. There is a green certification program available from DEM and about half the state's golf courses participate (total of about 54 courses in the state). With this program, golf courses have successfully reduced fertilizer, chemical and water use. Bayer Corporation has a bee center which has educated golf courses and offers grants to promote habitat and protect pollinators. Several RI superintendents have taken the course and some even have hives on their courses. Have plant lists for plants to foster bee health in Sept/Oct newsletter: <https://rigcsa.org/resources/Newsletters/5-RIGCSA-SeptOct2018%20newsletter.pdf>

Q – how many golf courses contract pest management? A -- Most do it in house and are licensed applicators.

B) Dr. Jim Wilkinson, SeaScape

SeaScape primarily provides services to residential customers – lawn, trees and shrubs. They also do yard guard – tic and mosquito control. All applicators need to be licensed which includes training at URI. Pollinator protection is included in the training. Also have recertification requirements. Industry aware that they need to follow label directions to protect pollinators. They are inspected regularly, but DEM's limited funding has resulted in very few inspections during the past years. SeaScape was the first landscape company to get the green certification from DEM. Some of the best management practices that SeaScape applies: 1) they do not spray on windy days, 2) when there is an opportunity to use a granular product, they choose it if it will do the job, 3) they do not treat flowering plants. This can be a problem with trees and shrubs because pests show up when the plant is in bloom. SeaScape is unique in the industry in that they pre-notify all customers ahead before applications. They respect customer requests to hold off treatments. They have about 8 customers who have beehives and they are especially sensitive to protecting the bees. Some states use their bee registry to notify bee owners ahead of time. SeaScape would be willing to do this in RI. Neonics. SeaScape uses Merit for grub control in lawns. It is applied as a granular product by SeaScape. It is unlikely to affect bees because they don't forage a lot on lawns. Also use Merit (which contains Imidacloprid) in tree and shrub program. In 2019, the company is moving away from Merit to acelepryn (alternate to neonic products). Acelepryn is expensive. Other actions in plant health care business – combine insecticides with dormant oil which controls a lot of insects with significant reduced amounts of insecticides.

Q. How do you find your customers approach the question of pollinator health?

A. The vast majority don't care.

Q. Have you considered handing out a brochure that identifies pollinators as a concern?

A. Possibly. If/when they switch to acelepryn, it might be a good time to educate their customers. The concern is that right now the cost is prohibitive to make the switch.

Q. Do you do any plantings?

A. No, the business is the maintenance of existing plants. But they do install lawns.

Q. What percentage of homeowners take care of their own property?

A. The majority of property owners do nothing (more than 50%). About 25% do their own lawn care and about 25% hire a lawn company. Joel would estimate that more than 25% do it their own based on fertilizer sales at home depot. About 12 % of SeaScape customers take on the plant health care. Tic and mosquito control is the rapidly growing part of the business. This is a booming business statewide. SeaScape's tic and mosquito control program considers how to protect pollinators. They don't apply on windy days or when rain is coming. Most people doing mosquito control are using mist blowers which is a concern because of the drift. Pyrethroids are generally used for mosquito and tic control.

4. Discussion of Proposed Changes to Laws and Regulations from DEM (Howard Cook, RIDEM)

Howard briefly reviewed the pesticide law and discussed some changes DEM is considering. The PWG is invited to work with DEM on these changes.

The PWG agreed that Joel will collect comments and we will discuss at the next meeting.

Q. Steve Alm – what about the requirement that folks go through the training. Joel – his concern with this is that some folks have received training in other states and should not be required to spend time taking the training. What about knowledge on pollinators? What about allowing an exemption if someone can demonstrate knowledge. Steve is very concerned that his training has the worst case examples that are not included in other trainings and that other trainings may not be adequate. There is also concern that the test is not rigorous enough. It is also only offered in English.

5. New Research and Findings.

Steve Alm is doing research on Japanese beetle traps. Traps are capturing bumble bees. By simply changing the colors of the trips and changing one of the attractants, the traps catch a lot fewer bees. How will the trap industry respond? They are interested in offering more bee friendly traps.

Carpenter bees are collecting a lot of tree pollen – so treating shrubs and trees can be problematic.

Mites are a big problem with bee hives. The industry selling bees and the chemicals to control the mites are selling a lot of products.

6. Brainstorming re Rhode Island agencies and their work to protect pollinators, i.e., Dept. of Education, RI DEM Parks, etc.

This topic was put on hold for next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00 PM.