

**Blue Ridge PRISM  
Meeting Minutes  
July 20, 2016**

**Ivy Creek Natural Area Education Building: Charlottesville, VA**

*The Blue Ridge PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management) holds meetings that are open to the public once a quarter. The following are the meeting minutes from the PRISM's quarterly meeting on July 20, 2016, section titles reference slide titles used in the meeting's powerpoint. Please reference the powerpoint slides used in the quarterly meeting to supplement meeting minutes. If you have any questions, please email Ashton Stinson, Blue Ridge PRISM Program Coordinator, [ashton@blueridgeprism.org](mailto:ashton@blueridgeprism.org).*

**Agenda/Introduction**

Rod Walker, founder of the Blue Ridge PRISM, introduced himself and welcomed everyone. About 40 people attended the meeting. Rod introduced Ashton Stinson, the PRISM's new program coordinator and first employee. Ashton's job responsibilities include a wide variety of projects. Having a full-time employee takes a large weight off of the leaders of the Blue Ridge PRISM, which is run solely by volunteers.

Rod initiated introductions. Each person in the room stated their name and organization/property location/etc. Attendees ranged from landowners that have been battling invasives, to government employees, contractors, and nonprofit partners.

**NRCS RCPP Program Updates: Rod Walker**

The Blue Ridge PRISM applied for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) award in the second year of the program's existence. We initially applied for \$375,000 of the full \$894,000 RCPP pool. When we were informed that our pre-proposal was accepted and we should submit a full proposal, the PRISM was also notified that we were the only bidder for the RCPP award and that we could apply for the full amount. As a result, we applied for the full amount. The application was accepted in January 2016 and the PRISM was awarded the full amount of \$894,000.\*

\*The RCPP Program is an *award*, it is not a grant. The Blue Ridge PRISM does not receive any of the RCPP funds.

The RCPP Program is an incentive program administered through the Natural Resource Conservation Service's (NRCS) [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) and is set aside for landowners in the Blue Ridge PRISM's 10-county region. (Note: The PRISM's 10-county region includes: Albemarle, Nelson, Augusta, Greene, Madison, Rockingham, Rappahannock, Warren, Page, Clarke)

NRCS took 20+% off the top for administrative costs. The net amount to be available to landowners is about \$640,000.

The PRISM's Area Stewards program encourages neighbors to work together to tackle invasive species. This program will proactively reach out to generate RCPP award recipients. The General Landowners Program is more reactive and will accommodate incoming inquiries. Both programs accommodate the RCPP Program well.

RCPP is a five year program. Each landowner signs a three year contract that is to be completed within the five year program. All contracts will be signed and all incentives will be awarded in the first two years of the RCPP Program. The five year 'clock' starts once the RCPP Program contract is signed in DC (see section below for details).

The roles in relation to the RCPP Program are as follows:

NRCS: owner of EQIP Program - handles program administration and provides assistance to landowners as needed

Department of Forestry: consults with landowners to determine work plan, acreage, etc and certifies the work was completed

PRISM: Public awareness work, contacting landowners and driving them to the RCPP Program

RCPP is a federal program and involves quarterly reporting from the PRISM (acres covered, landowners reached, etc.)

#### **NRCS RCPP Agreement Status: Rod Walker**

Please note that the details discussed today regarding the RCPP Program *are not yet actionable for landowners.*

The RCPP signing is currently pending. We are unable to do a widespread PR campaign until the agreement is signed. Our hope for the RCPP PR campaign is that people are not only aware of RCPP funding but become familiarized with the Blue Ridge PRISM.

Since most USDA programs were originally defined through the lens of agriculture, landowners are technically considered 'producers'. RCPP Paperwork will reflect this.

Question: If you are new to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) can you participate?

Rod Walker: Yes

Jim Hurley: More details about the PRISM/RCPP can be found by googling 'NRCS EQIP RCPP PRISM'. \*

\*The link can be found [here](#).

#### **NRCS RCPP Program Details: Rod Walker**

Rod gave an overview of 'NRCS RCPP Program details'. The following questions were asked by the audience:

Question: Will landowners be reimbursed after the year or after each time the contractor comes out?

Rod: Landowners can be reimbursed after each practice is completed in the given year. I.e. once a year.

Question: [The landowner speaking is battling Oriental Bittersweet over hundreds of acres] How does NRCS estimate for invasives that are spread over hundreds of acres?

Rod: When DOF does the initial survey, estimating will come into play a lot. We're shoehorning an EQIP program into an invasives program. Some landowners have done invasives work through EQIP (before the Regional Conservation Partnership Program) and it has worked well.

Question: Are landowners charged for any of the planning process?

Kory Kirkland: No, costs are covered in the RCPP.

### **NRCS RCPP Program Details and Publicity Program: Rod Walker**

After the RCPP funding is approved in Washington D.C. the PRISM will launch a PR campaign over the ten county region. Landowners can then begin the application process, hopefully before the plants begin to go dormant. Our goal is to encourage landowners to start work on their applications immediately after the RCPP contract is signed. [Note: the contract was actually signed in late September.]

We tentatively expect applications to be accepted in November and contract pre-approvals to occur in January. Monthly batches of applications will be ranked after the application period is opened. But landowners can begin the application process and work with the NRCS and the VA Dept of Forestry to get their plans done as soon as the contract is signed.

Question: What are the parameters of the contract funding?

Rod: The answer is somewhat complicated. We expect a ~\$20,000-\$30,000 cap on each contract over the three year term. We're trying to reach a larger number of landowners rather than having only a few landowners receive a large amount of money per contract.

Question: What is the per acre cost coverage percentage?

Rod: RCPP is an incentive program, *not* a cost-share program. Reimbursement rates will be decided by NRCS on a per-acre basis.

Question: Is restoration work included in RCPP funding parameters?

Rod: No. The PRISM debated including restoration work but decided to focus entirely on removing invasives for this funding opportunity.

### **NRCS RCPP Training Program: Rod Walker**

Rod gave an overview of the training program that will be held for NRCS and VDOF personnel. The training will take place at Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI) on July 28th and Ivy Creek Foundation on August 4th.

### **NRCS RCPP Publicity Program**

Rod gave an overview of the PRISM's publicity program. Jay Jeffreys raised his hand and suggested that the following would be great potential partners for the PRISM: Department of Conservation and Recreation, VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, The Nature Conservancy, Planning Districts and Commissions. Ashton thanked Jay for his feedback and will get his contact information after the meeting.

### **Education, Outreach, Prevention: Susan Roth and Ashton Stinson**

Ashton gave an overview of the purpose of the landowner kit. The landowner kit will serve as the 'invasives 101 guide' for landowners of varying experience levels. Our goal is to provide information to landowners through the entire spectrum of identification, treatment, equipment, resources, reading materials, funding and more.

Susan Roth has been spending many hours writing the fact sheets for the PRISM. She has also been in communication with the Virginia Cooperative Extension to vet the fact sheets and potentially have the Extension put their logo and 'seal of approval' on fact sheets.

Question: With the toxicity levels of herbicides, am I swapping out plants for poisons when treating invasives?

Rod: Each landowner has to come to grips with the options available to them and what their choices are. For example, there is no non-herbicide treatment for Oriental Bittersweet. We recommend that you read the herbicide labels and follow the instructions in order to minimize potential risks. The [Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services](#) is an excellent resource.

Marcia Mabee: I urge landowners to look into getting their Pesticide Applicator License in order to learn more about storing and using herbicides and using them to treat invasives.

Question: Who will decide how to treat the invasives?

Answer: Treatment is ultimately up to the landowner, NRCS does not specify treatment methodology.

Question: Are there enough contractors to do this work?

Answer: The industry is lagging behind the demand for invasive work. We have obtained a list of contractors who will do invasive species work and intend on expanding this list as much as possible.

Question: Is the RCPP application process guided by a first-come, first-served basis or ranking process?

Kory Kirkland: There is a ranking process.

Rod: There is a monthly batching process. Any month in which the overall funding is not exhausted, all eligible landowners will move forward in the approval process. In the month in which the pool of funds will be completely obligated, a ranking process that is still being designed will be used to rank the applications to decide who receives a contract.

### **Education, Outreach, Prevention: Ruth Douglas and Rod Walker**

Noxious Weed Law Update: Ruth Douglas

In the latest meetings on the Noxious Weed law, a working group has started work on defining the changes required in the VDACS regulations. The law was changed earlier this year to eliminate the language that said that no plant that is widely disseminated could be listed as a noxious weed. With that language eliminated, the door is open to classify many more plants as noxious weeds. But before that can happen, the VDACS regulations need to be changed to specify how a plant comes to be classified as a noxious weed and what restrictions apply to such plants.

Ruth reported that there is a “new spirit of cooperation” among noxious weed advisory committee representatives. This is a “game changer” that benefits conservationists and landscapers alike.

Question: Will VDOT be treating invasive plants on the right-of-ways that they maintain?

Answer: Their budget has been cut and invasive work is no longer done proactively. You can call VDOT and request that they work with you. Depending on the personnel, they may be willing to treat the road corridor adjacent to your property.

Proposed quarterly joint course with SCBI: Rod Walker

Virginia Working Landscapes is working with the PRISM to create an invasives training program for landowners. The training program would be held quarterly and each training session would speak to a current issue. The training would include an in-classroom portion as well as field demonstrations. We are still in discussion of the logistics of the training. It would likely be provided for a small fee (~\$30) and would be replicated through the PRISM’s ten county region. This could also be a volunteer opportunity for those that are interested.

### Other Topics

Wavyleaf update:

Ruth Douglas noted that there is a new discovery of Wavyleaf Basketgrass near Ragged Mountain.

Matt Smith, Albemarle County’s Park Superintendent noted that Wavyleaf is a new and very invasive plant that he has been dealing with.

Jim Hurley is working with Jake Hughes from Shenandoah National Park to treat a very large infestation within the park. The infestation is off of route 33 and it is “truly impressive”. Jim is organizing a volunteer treatment day.

Brian Morse, Wildlife Biologist with Virginia Forestry and Wildlife Group, said that Wavyleaf is “on the verge of going out of control” and people should familiarize themselves with the plant and be on the lookout. Brian also mentioned that the plant is currently going to seed.

Jim Hurley stated that the Shenandoah National Park’s funds are low to treat Wavyleaf Basketgrass. A budget amendment was proposed in February but failed. There is a plan to resubmit the budget amendment for next year. The threat is that Wavyleaf Basketgrass infests thousands of acres very quickly and can be spread easily.

Status of General Agreement: Rod Walker

Rod Walker reports that the General Agreement that formally defines the Blue Ridge PRISM's governance process is currently out for signature. Formally, the PRISM will be governed by a steering committee composed of the signatories to the General Agreement. Any organizations or individuals interested in being signatories should contact Rod.

#### Area Stewards Program Updates:

Marcia Mabee reports that, as an area steward, she has hosted three meetings and that the neighbors involved have helped each other tackle invasives in a 3,000 acre area. They have issues with garlic mustard and oriental bittersweet, their goal is to have more areas free of invasive plants. Marcia is speaking at Farm Colony's board meeting in Greene County soon.

Brian Morse, area steward, states that if landowners or land managers would like more information on becoming an area steward or joining an existing area stewardship group they should contact the PRISM.

Rod Walker stated that it is a great way to meet neighbors.

#### Logo Update: Shirlee Grody and Maggie Walker

Shirlee Grody, graphic designer, has been working on the PRISM's new logo. The logo is near completion and will be opened up to a larger group for feedback soon.

#### Website: Ashton Stinson and Susan Roth

The website now contains all twelve fact sheets and the Wavyleaf alert. Deane Dozier is working as the webmaster but will soon be overcommitted with other work. The PRISM is seeking a long-term solution to website needs.

#### Meeting with Potomac Highlands CWPMA: Rod and Maggie Walker

Rod and Maggie Walker recently had a meeting with the Potomac Highlands CWPMA (Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area). They are a Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) in West Virginia that recently expanded their territory to include three of the Blue Ridge PRISM's counties. Like most CWMA's, their approach to invasive work focuses largely on public lands. Like most other CWMA's Potomac Highlands was formed by The Nature Conservancy and federal and state landowners. Private landowners are not the primary focus.

Potomac Highlands CWPMA and the Blue Ridge PRISM have different approaches that could be mutually beneficial. We are in discussion about Potomac Highlands CWPMA becoming an area steward. The conversation is still in progress.

The Potomac Highlands CWPMA's approach employs AmeriCorps members to work on their public lands.

#### Fund Raising Report: Maggie Walker

Maggie Walker stated that the PRISM is applying for a NFWF grant. The PRISM did not receive the grant last year and is putting together a more compelling argument this year. She noted that NFWF's application process is a complex, multi-step process. Additionally, the PRISM has explored applying for grants through Patagonia, Norfolk Southern Foundation, the Middendorf Foundation, National Forest Foundation, and the Virginia Environment Endowment.

Volunteers are needed for grant writing. No experience is needed but writing skills, creativity, and marketing skills are helpful.

**Closing**

Rod Walker asked for PRISM members to record their volunteer hours since the last quarterly meeting.

Question: Does time spent battling invasives count?

Rod: For RCPP, yes. For NFWF, no.

The Blue Ridge PRISM's next quarterly meeting is on November 4th and the following meeting is on January 25, 2017.