

**United States  
Department  
Of Agriculture**

**Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service**

**Civil  
Rights  
Advisory  
Committee**

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The Georgia Civil Rights Committee (GA-CRAC) quarterly meeting was held at the Federal Building, Perry, GA on Thursday, February 28, 2013 at 10:00 a.m. Those in attendance were:

Committee Members and Advisors

**Amy Bell**, Area 4 Representative  
**Jerome Brown**, Black Emphasis Program Manager (BEPM)  
**Jason Gatch**, Disability and Veterans' Emphasis Manager  
(DEPM/VEPM)  
**David Gaines**, State Office Representative, Vice President  
**Jewel Ghavimi**, Asian/Pacific Islander Emphasis Program Manager  
**Sharon Gipson**, State Administrative Officer, CRAC Advisor  
**Chris Groskreutz**, Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager  
(HEPM)  
**Diane Guthrie**, LGBT SEPM  
**Cindy Haygood**, Chairperson  
**Dianna Hodge**, Area 1 Representative  
**Ray Jones**, Area 3 Representative  
**Robyn Ledford**, American Indian/Alaska Native SEPM  
**Karla Martin**, 1890 Liaison, Advisor  
**Dee Pederson**, Federal Women's Program Manager (FWPM)  
And Secretary  
**James Tillman**, Deputy Equal Employment Opportunity Officer,  
State Conservationist (STC)  
**Daniel Westcot**, Outreach Coordinator

Visitors

Calvin Essex, DC, Perry, GA  
Tansel Hudson, ASTC-Operations  
Aquanda Jones, ASTC-Programs  
Sidney Lanier, Area 4 ASTC-FO

Chairperson Cindy Haygood called the meeting to order and welcomed members and visitors. Introductions were made by all those present.

The minutes from the November 1, 2012 meeting were approved. The approved minutes will be posted on Georgia's Civil Rights website.

Special Presentation

**Jason Gatch**, DEPM and VEPM, delivered a two-part presentation. The first part was on Reasonable Accommodation; the second part was on Veteran and Disability employment. He hopes to provide this training to all Areas. A few highlights from the presentation were:

- Medical paperwork for employees must be kept separate from personnel paperwork.
- GA has had some requests that have come to HR through supervisors. Most of these are for ergonomic accommodations, such as office chairs that provide more support.
- Calvin Essex pointed out that disclosing disabilities is optional for employees.
- Diane Guthrie asked whether reasonable accommodation was for medical issues only. The presentation highlighted medical issues. Examples during conversation included non-medical issues, such as ergonomic chairs. The response was that reasonable accommodation includes both.

- It was suggested that another presentation be put together that highlights reasonable accommodation for customers.
- Committee discussed the possibility of providing a list of potential contractors for interpretation and translation services.
- Discussed the Veterans Hiring Authority and requested that Area reps and ASTC-FO work with Jason to schedule times for discussions
- Karla Martin mentioned that veterans could be converted to Pathways participants. However, Pathways is a program for recent college graduates. David Gaines brought up that many veterans in need of a job are not recent graduates because they have been on active duty. Further discussion included the possibility of placing veterans in administrative positions as well as soil conservation technician positions because specialized technical coursework is not required for some of those positions.

#### **Chairperson Report, Cindy Haygood**

- **Plan of Work update:** 2012-2013 Plan of Work has been updated; it will be sent out electronically for comment.
- **Meeting minutes:** Ray Jones asked if meeting minutes could be accessed. Meeting minutes are distributed to committee members after they are typed and approved by the committee chair. They are posted on the CR website upon approval; therefore, the posted minutes are from the previous quarter. Minutes that have not been approved by the committee cannot be posted publicly.
- **Civil Rights Performance Element:** Exceeding this element is difficult for many employees.
  - Attending a CRAC meeting should not equal an “Exceeds” rating.
  - A list was distributed to the SLT, but will not be distributed statewide. It is not intended to be used as a checklist but as a basic guide for supervisors to use when establishing performance plans.
  - Criteria for exceeding this element should be decided based on conversations between the employee and supervisor.

#### **Area 1 Field Office appraisal review and Civil Rights required posters, Dee Pederson, FWPM**

- Three Area 1 FOs were reviewed in January. The review went well – there were some accessibility issues, but FOs were compliant with employee and contract issues.
  - One recommendation for CRAC was to help Area and Field Offices analyze demographic data for their respective areas. This will help FO staff target groups that the FO may not be reaching.
    - Sidney Lanier mentioned that NASS data is skewed based on the way it is reported and suggested we try to obtain data from REAP. Lisa Reid is a contact in Beltsville, MD.
  - One recommendation was to potentially decrease the number of required posters in Field Offices. The GA CR website lists 16 posters, and the CR Division requires four. The FWPM inquired about the required posters to the NFWPM and was referred to Samora Benneman-Johnson, Branch Chief, Program Compliance Branch, NRCS/Civil Rights Division. Mrs. Benneman-Johnson said that states can add to the required posters as they see fit, and certain departmental issuances should be displayed when they are active (such as the Hispanic and Women’s Discrimination procedure). Other suggested inclusions are the USDA Civil Rights Policy and NRCS Civil Rights Policy. A handout was distributed to the committee that described these requirements. The committee discussed accepting the proposed list of posters. The FWPM proposed discussing the list with the STC before making a decision. The SAO mentioned that several posters on the GA CR website pertain to employees instead of the public. It was suggested that the posters be separated into two groups – those for the public, and those for employees. The employee posters could be posted in a location where all employees can view them, perhaps in a break room.

#### **Georgia Civil Rights Compliance Review, Haygood**

- National Civil Rights team will visit Georgia April 8-12, 2013
- **Committee questionnaires are due March 15 to Elvin Gant**
  - One of the questions for SEPMs is length of tenure. Because National policy reads that SEPM terms are 3 years, will it be a problem for those of us who have been on the committee longer than 3 years?
  - SAO produced a list of recommendations from the 2008 National CR Review. One of the recommendations was to increase the terms of SEPMs to five years.
- It was asked whether assistance from committee members would be needed during the review. The SAO responded that word has not been received from the Civil Rights Division about that.
- **Does everyone have a copy of their signed MOU? Let the SAO know.**
- Accessibility issues: What space is considered NRCS space? Response: Any space where NRCS staff are, whether it's the office, field day, or meeting. It was recommended that contact information be included on meeting/field day announcements for individuals who need some sort of accommodation. That way, NRCS can be sure the space is accessible.
- DEPM has reports for some of the offices that will be visited and will post them on the GA SharePoint.

**The committee broke for lunch at 12:05.**

**The meeting reconvened at 1:00.**

### **Committee Activity Highlights**

- Membership applications to NWIAA (National Women in Agriculture Association) and WiN (Women in NRCS) were made available to committee members.
- **LGBT SEPM** announced the first annual VTC meeting on March 19, 2013. She will send an agenda when it becomes available. Each state is limited to one line, so interested parties should try to come to Athens.
- Quarterly report format will be discussed at the next meeting due to technical difficulty (provided printouts were single-sided but should have been double-sided; therefore, half the information was missing).
- **Acting PAS** mentioned GovDelivery as a good tool. He also reported that GA-NRCS has 100 followers on Twitter. The GA website is being updated.
- **Area 3 rep** mentioned a TAG workshop to be held on March 14. There will be a Farm Home Administrators' Conference on March 5.
- **Outreach Coordinator (Westcot):** Local NWIAA chapter in Carrollton kick-off meeting March 2
  - Conservation Tillage Conference, March 12, Tifton
  - Envirothon competitions are good Outreach opportunities for NRCS
  - Grazing Management, March 19
  - LIFE (Landowners Initiative Forestry Education) workshop on March 28 in Waynesboro, sponsored by Fort Valley State
  - Coastal RC&D – Energy Conservation conference
  - Broad River Soil and Water District will host a Field Day in Washington
  - Pine Mountain Soil and Water District will host a Forestry Field Day on March 21
  - It was suggested that these events be Tweeted.
- **BEPM:** Outreach article on African-American contributions to Georgia agriculture was written and distributed during Black History Month.
  - **March 12** – Multicultural workshop; only have ~75 registered so far; would like more. The theme is “My conservation pad”.
  - Requested Natural Resources websites for Multi-cultural workshop materials. Please submit them to him by next Tuesday, March 5.
- **Chair:** Distributed Georgia Agriculture Landowners' Guide. This was produced by Limestone Valley RC&D from an Outreach Grant. Boxes were given to all areas.

- **ASTC-Programs:** Presented tables showing demographics of funded contracts for several years. Demographic reports can be pulled directly from Protracts. DEPM ran these reports for his area, and they were not totally accurate. FO staff will have to analyze the data.

**State Conservationist's Report, James Tillman**

- Sequestration
  - Georgia is down ~18.5 FTE right now. More prioritizing will be necessary; employees may be asked to fill in where needed, perhaps in acting roles. The state will have to further decrease travel, meetings, etc.
  - Actual furloughs are not anticipated at this point.
- National CR review: Georgia has been doing good work; cited several cases of landowner satisfaction with NRCS efforts.
- Civil Rights awards will be handled after the National CR review.
- Involvement with Southeast American Indian Workgroup

**Advisor and Human Resources Report, Sharon Gipson**

- Georgia vacancies
  - A hiring freeze is in effect. All vacancies are on hold.
  - Georgia is not advertising for students this summer. The state is going to honor the commitments it already has with graduating SCEP participants. The state has 120 days after graduation to honor the commitment.

**New Business**

- Chair mentioned interest from other employees about CRAC meeting announcements.
  - STC doesn't want to discourage meeting attendance, but we need to be mindful of policy limits.
- SEPM training is being assigned. Please make sure you visit AgLearn. ASTC-Operations said to let Training Coordinator know if training is needed.
- STC: Can we consolidate Pathways announcements with other states to save time and money? SAO responded that we could, but all locations have to be known when vacancy is announced.

**The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:30 p.m.**

**The next meeting will be held May 2, 2013. The location is yet to be determined.**

Submitted by: Dee Pederson, Secretary