

State Commission for Conservation of Soil, Water & Related Resources

Regular Meeting

Via Microsoft Teams

Friday, January 24, 2025 – 10:00 am

AGENDA

- Introductions
- Approval of Minutes from October 10, 2024
- Mass Envirothon Council & Committee
 - General Envirothon Steering Committee update on the 2024 – 2025 program
 - Update on EEA actions regarding Envirothon program and structure – (for reference and to refresh everyone's memory, I have attached below the original 2 emails that began our efforts to seek help from EEA on restructuring the Envirothon.)
- Healthy Soils Action Plan for Massachusetts - updates
 - HSAP Challenge Grant (round 1)
 - HSAP Challenge Grant (round 2)
 - Soil Health Coordinator
 - UMass Interagency Service Agreement, *Climate-Smart Agricultural Practices Assessment*
- State Commission
 - District Grants
 - Conservation District Grant Program update on FY25 round
 - New Conflict of Interest law training process
- General Business Items
 - Supervisor Appointments if needed (voting item)
 - Berkshire Conservation District
 - Name
 - Supervisor Handbook
 - District Annual meetings
- Partner Updates
 - Future Commission meeting dates – April 10, 2025, July 10, 2025
 - (Please note that the State Commission generally meets on the second Thursday in January, April, July and October)

Adjourn

*If you wish to attend this virtual meeting, please email Tom Anderson, Executive Secretary at Thomas.anderson@mass.gov and he will email you the link.

To State Commission members,

The following are the first two emails that I received last February regarding Envirothon. These emails, and others, kicked off our efforts to reboot the Envirothon program, which was clearly in crisis. I am not sure if these were ever sent to you, but they provide important context for the current situation and why we asked EEA for help in solving the problem.

Tom Anderson

From: Gonsor, Justin (DCR) <justin.gonsor@mass.gov>
Sent: Saturday, February 17, 2024 9:58 AM
To: Anderson, Thomas (EEA) <thomas.anderson@mass.gov>
Subject: RE: Envirothon Follow-up

Thanks Tom,

If you can, I would read the email Brita sent on 2/9, it's her resignation letter officially saying she won't renew her coordinator contract, and does list a lot of specific problems she has been having. Although the program has been a success, our coordinator has really been holding it together, and it looks like she is now leaving the program at the end of July. That's what has me, and a bunch of other people associated with the program, very concerned. Brita did include you in that email chain, but I'll attach it if you haven't seen it. I'm sorry if I kinda blindsided you at the meeting last Tuesday, but thought you have seen some of the email chains we were more in the loop than maybe you were, my bad on that.

I don't feel like the steering committee has the personnel to find her replacement. I'm not sure if that's how it's supposed to work, but it seems to me that the state commission or council has the high powered people within these state agencies to find us someone to continue managing the program going forward, rather than creating a new full time position, etc.

I need to call some of my steering committee members as well as Kelley Freda on Tuesday. Maybe we could plan to do a quick team chat this coming Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday.

Thanks again Tom for the support, really appreciate it.

Justin Gonsor

Program Coordinator 1

Quabbin Reservoir – Visitor Center

485 Ware Road, Belchertown, MA 01007

The following is the letter we received from the Envirothon Coordinator on February 9, 2024

From: MassEnvirothon <massenvirothon@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, February 9, 2024 8:42 AM

To: Gonsor, Justin (DCR) <justin.gonsor@mass.gov>; Anderson, Thomas (EEA) <thomas.anderson@mass.gov>; Warren Chamberlain <w1uir@aol.com>

Cc: Michael Leff <MLEffMACD@gmail.com>

Subject: Envirothon coordinator contract

To: Justin Gonsor, Chair, MA Envirothon Steering Committee

Warren Chamberlain, Chair, MA Envirothon Council

Tom Anderson, Executive Secretary, MA State Commission for Conservation of Soil, Water & Related Resources

I am writing to let you know that I will not be renewing my contract when it is completed at the end of July. If the State Commission, Envirothon Council, and Steering Committee want me to continue functioning as the de facto executive director of this program, then they need to compensate me as such with full time, benefited employment.

MA Envirothon is a program which is internationally known for its successes and which regularly receives inquiries from other states interested in learning from those successes. However, it saddens me that MA Envirothon does not receive commitment and attention from the State commensurate with its accomplishments and prestige. Instead, I have steadily and reliably picked up task after task discarded as Steering Committee members have left. Increasingly over the last 15 years, I have been the stable center which has held this program together. This is well beyond the role in my job description and although I am proud of the program that we have built, I am not being adequately compensated for the additional level of responsibility that I am expected to manage.

One example of the mismatch between my contract and my duties is with respect to the DEI initiative. Here, the Steering Committee has delegated to me basically all of the organizing, planning and now even the role of supervising another contractor. Please take a look at the expectations being placed on me as a contractor asked to perform this job. In contrast to any part time employment at a non-profit organization or agency, my years of service as a contractor don't even count towards student loan forgiveness programs. It is ironic that I am being asked to run the DEI initiative for the benefit of our participants in this manner which is quite inequitable for me.

Arguably, MA Envirothon is not set up to be run by an executive director. It is supposed to be a collaboration of state agencies under the supervision of the state commission with leadership coming from within this network. The Coordinator position was initially set up to handle the administrative tasks of the Steering Committee and be a liaison with teachers, which was easily accomplished in a few hours a week. However, while many members are doing their best to keep their areas of the program strong and vibrant, there is no central leadership and no guidance from the upper levels of the state leaving the program adrift. Now, in order to cover all the tasks abandoned by a dwindling committee, the workload regularly necessitates over 32 hours a week. This lack of other's capacity to do the work has led to my engaging experience, skills and abilities well beyond the qualifications for a Coordinator -- duties and talents arguably commensurate with that of an Executive Director.

I am no longer willing to try to keep the program moving forward at the expense of myself and my family. I am forced to confront the fact that at the level of leadership and management with which I am currently tasked, I could easily acquire a less stressful and more financially stable job. The cracks are no longer small. I am giving you fair warning that I am no longer willing to plug my fingers into the proverbial dike as a part-time independent contractor.

Sincerely, Brita Dempsey

-Brita Dempsey

Massachusetts Envirothon Coordinator

40 Morgan St, Holyoke MA 01040

she/her p:413.532.0372



massenvirothon.org
