

LFICD Board Meeting
Oct 3, 2023
Virtual Zoom meeting

Minutes:

1. Call to order: 5:39

Present: Christine Chapline, Judd Markowski, Gary Rodes, Bob Cluss, Dinah Bain, David Zarowin, Craig Zondag, guest: Tom Vanacore

2. Introduce new board member:

David Zarowin (from Cornwall) has joined the LFICD board to take David Dodge's place.

3. Approve September minutes: The September minutes are approved.

4. Approve Treasurer's report:

Cash forward: \$114,569.77

Cash received: \$0.70

Total cash for month: \$114,570.47

Total Disbursements: \$21,269.80

Cash on hand: \$93,300.67

Total Accounts payable: \$1,400

Total Accounts receivable: \$32,000

Net Current assets: \$118,486.06

The Treasurer's report is approved.

5. Field coordinator's report:

Field Conditions: Despite active surveillance and targeted treatments in the Lemon Fair River valley, this was a difficult mosquito season. Some of the most sustained flood conditions we've seen on the Lemon Fair River made tracking and identifying new hatches of mosquito larvae difficult.

The month of August recorded 13" of rain, with one rain event on August 3 yielding 4.7" in about one hour's time. Combining July's rain with August, the total rainfall amount was 30". The Lemon Fair River valley sustained the longest period of floodwater since the LFICD has been keeping records. Repeated rain events generated hatches everywhere (e.g., upland puddles, lawns), not just limited to the Lemon Fair floodplain and Cornwall Swamp. All 8 mosquito traps were set up on a weekly basis. We surpassed 2021's highest trap year of 64,827 mosquitoes. We are more on the order of 105,000+ for 2023.

Only selective acreages (1 to 30 acres) in the Lemon Fair floodplain had large larval counts and many areas didn't yield any larval activity. Given these small and scattered areas of standing water, helicopter treatment could not be justified. (North Fork, our helicopter provider, requires 1,000-acre minimum treatment.) From June to August, we undertook hand treatments using a backpack sprayer. Post treatment surveillance proved these treatments were 90% effective.

The LFICD Hotline registered 33 complaint calls. We responded either in person or by phone and email. The goal was to help property owners mitigate mosquito habitat on their properties and empower them to treat areas using larvicides and barrier sprays for adult mosquitoes.

Moving Forward: We need the ability to treat 10, 30, 50 to 100/200 acres in a day. At best, the backpack sprayer can treat only 15-30 acres a day. The ideal solution is a drone capable of carrying 40 lbs. of granular larvicide at a time and treating up to 200 acres in a day. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture (“VAA”), the LFICD’s Grant Administrator, has expressed support for using a drone for larvicide treatment. However, before the treatment drone becomes available, there are several hurdles that need to be addressed including VAA funding, establishing applicable regulations, pilot identification, training, and licensing. We look forward to working with the VAA to make this a reality.

Summer Internship Program: The LFICD employed two college interns as field/lab technicians as it has for the last three years, Audrey Maxwell from Middlebury College and Ramsey Anis from UVM. The district benefited, not only in conducting “boots on the ground” field and lab work, but also applying data collection skills. They also represented the LFICD at a table set up in the Home and Garden Pavilion at the Addison County Fair & Field Days. A total of 237 people stopped by the exhibit. Thank you, Audrey and Ramsey.

6. Draft Budget Presentation:

Dinah presented a draft budget for 2024 with numbers for actuals as of the end of Sept. She will update the draft with actuals through October for the November budget approval meeting.

7. Discussion of topics to bring up with the VAAF:

Bob has contacted Patti Casey at the VAAF to arrange a future meeting between the VAAF and the LFICD to discuss the mosquito season.

This has been a terrible mosquito season, but the majority of calls on the complaint line are not close to the Lemon Fair floodplain. What else can we be doing to branch out beyond the limitations of surveying and spot treating the LF and Cornwall floodplains? Craig already responds to homeowner’s properties when they contact us and gives suggestions for mosquito habitat abatement. For instance, a Cornwall resident submitted a photo via email of a mosquito that he thought might be an *Aedes albopictus* mosquito, a.k.a. Asian tiger mosquito. Craig was glad to assure him that it wasn’t, but it was a mosquito species that we’ve seen in greater numbers this year, *Psorophora ciliata*, a.k.a. “Gallinipper.” Craig wasn’t able to visit the property but looked at aerial images through “Parcel View” and could clearly see deep tire ruts in what used to be forest, that most likely bred mosquitoes all season. What can we do for these situations?

We will work on a list of topics for the VAAF when we have a meeting date.

Tom Vanacore (former LFICD Field Coordinator and founding board member) provided the history of originally working aggressively to treat the LF valley over a two-year period by aerially “painting the valley” with larvicide, and applying it often, after the bad mosquito season in 2005. He believes this is what is needed again, regardless of State larval count threshold limits, or we will be facing mosquito Armageddon next year. We need to be prepared to do something proactively in the spring.

The level of mosquitos this year were not only a nuisance situation, but affected livelihoods ifor people who work outside, and potentially, public safety from mosquito born illnesses. Drone technology to deliver larvicide will be good if implemented in the future, but it is too far out in the time-line to be useful next spring.

Craig pointed out the problem that the State grant money for mosquito control (which has not changed in at least 12 years) is currently divided between the only two mosquito districts, and if other areas decide to form a district, the money does not grow with any additional programs. There needs to be new provisions in the State budget for mosquito control. We need to involve our State representatives and Select Boards again. The State should be taking over responsibility for the mosquito program as the first line for the whole state, or county-wide programs, or watershed based, so that more people benefit from a mosquito program. The LFICD is a volunteer public group charged with a responsibility that should be shifted to the State.

To continue the discussion, we will meet again (virtually) on Tuesday Oct. 31 from 3-5. Chris will Warn a special LFICD board meeting to discuss a strategy for 2024.

8. Topics for proposed meeting with Select Boards:

Chris will send the annual report (same as the Field Coordinator's report, above) to the Towns' Select Board members and we will see if there is interest from them to meet with us.

9. November public meeting virtual or in person?

The November meeting will be via Zoom with the link provided on the agenda.

10. Add Tom Vanacore letter to the minutes.

Correspondence was received from Tom Vanacore on Sept. 21. At his request, his letter will be attached to the end of the minutes, along with the Board's response and a further response from Mr. Vanacore.

11. New Business:

The cell phone service from Visible (which uses the Verizon network) has a continuing problem and we may need to change service providers. The issue that has not been resolved is with the district's cell phone's identification—the message callers get appears to come from someone other than the LFICD. This does not involve the hotline number.

Craig needs help in the lab to finish up the season and has received interest from 2 persons to help with finishing the season's trap counting, identifying mosquito species, and data analysis. The board approved the hiring of the 2 helpers.

The Northeast Mosquito Control Association annual meeting is Dec. 3-6 in Mystic, CN and Craig plans to attend.

Personnel: A motion was made to approve a bonus for Craig to acknowledge his hard work under challenging conditions this season. The motion was passed unanimously.

12. Adjourn 7:40 Special meeting (virtual): Oct. 31, 2023, 3:00 pm

Next (virtual) regular meeting: Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2023, 5:30 pm; Annual public budget hearing.

10. Attachment of correspondence from Tom Vanacore:

The original correspondence from Tom Vanacore is in black.

The LFICD Board responses are in red below:

Mr. Vanacore's **response to the District Board communication is in blue.**

Craig, and the LFICD Board.

Craig, I am sorry you had to suffer through this season of extreme weather and the unhappy pressures it brought to you as Field Coordinator of the LFICD. You are a person of great integrity and deserve respect for your accomplishments. Having said that, I am happy to hear David Dodge has resigned as the Chairman of the District. That was a long time coming.

As per the minutes of the September Board meeting, I would like to attend the meeting suggested between the LFICD Board and Agency of Ag officials including Patty Casey and the Agency of Ag administrator who is in charge of authorizing payments to the District for treatment activities. I believe I can be useful in bringing some historic perspective to the discussion. I know the territory.

Based on a reading of the Minutes from Sept. 2023, there seems to be a general misconception about the origin of the massive increase in mosquitoes in the LF district as well as the actual mission of the District as it was originally established. I am not aware that the mission of the District was ever changed from its inception, which was to treat for mosquito "where needed, as needed". There was no qualifying statement regarding this mission nor was there ever any indication that the LFICD was primarily established to treat for "nuisance" mosquito.

The Formation Agreement specifies "mosquito abatement." The Grant Agreement with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture ("VAAF") specifies nuisance mosquitoes. Our suspicions on the origin of the mosquitoes in the LF district are based on our data collection, including larval numbers in the floodplain, adult trapping and species identification using 8 permanent light traps and several rotating light traps, and the locations of public complaints and communication or visits by Craig to those properties. **The LFICD funding mechanism is currently through a "grant" arrangement with the State of VT. The purpose of and the mission of the LFICD is not entirely dependent on the State nor state funding except by force of circumstance and choice. The authority to treat for mosquitoes within the LFICD Municipal District is granted by its own permits to do so, not by the terms of the grant funding. Only the terms or conditions for reimbursement for larviciding is dependent on the grant. The LFICD can choose to engage in its own funding mechanism and maintain its own mechanical ability to treat where needed as needed. The purchase and operation of the aircraft in the inception of the LFICD was part of this strategy. LFICD had the mechanical ability to treat and the means to raise revenue to do so by offering that service to others. LFICD Board members made the poor decision to sell the**

mechanical ability to treat and to use that capacity raise revenue money at the same time. That was not only shortsighted, it was irresponsible.

To the contrary, the LFICD was established primarily as a public health and safety initiative with the complete support of the State Agency of Ag to treat for vector management as per Statute of the State of VT Dept of Health as the primary authority and responsible party for mosquito control within the State, and the vehicle for direct payments for the surveillance and treatment of mosquito vectors of disease issuing from waters of the State including those territories within municipal Districts established to assist the State in carrying out this responsibility.

The LFICD has no responsibility for vector surveillance and no involvement in mosquito related public health issues. The VAA's Vector Surveillance Program and the State of Vermont Dept. of Health are responsible for disease vector surveillance and management (i.e., eliminating disease carrying mosquitoes) and they have made it clear that vector management is not the responsibility of the mosquito districts. **If this is the position of the LFICD Board then the LFICD should be disbanded, or new leadership appointed. There is no purpose for the LFICD's existence in its current management. The LFICD has failed to manage nuisance mosquito and the board has claimed (erroneously) that it has no responsibility to either survey for or manage mosquito for disease.**

Thresholds later established to curtail the expenditures of the State in reimbursing the District for aerial application services were both arbitrary, capricious, and well outside of BMPs utilized throughout the United States. The failure to implement ANY treatment protocols to control mosquito, or to completely surveil the primary breeding habitat for flood plain mosquito, and in the absence of any meaningful treatment for nearly 8 years, to control the proliferation of water breeding mosquito in "puddles" within the Lemon Fair and beyond, is contributing to a proliferation of mosquito of numerous species and amounts to a public health and safety threat through inaction. The current protocols governing inaction, for whatever reason, are being perpetuated by the District in the name of mosquito control, which it is not doing. The proactive and governing word in LFICD is CONTROL. Not Surveillance.

Our field coordinator and interns were out daily surveilling known breeding habitats and setting light traps to ascertain where adult mosquitoes likely originated. Backpack treatments were conducted immediately where larva were found. There was no period of time where enough continuous treatable acreage was found, even when combined with the OCW district, to justify an aerial treatment with a 1000 acre minimum. We are experimenting with long lasting bti briquettes (120 days) and some were placed in select areas early in the season. Conditions this season were such that persistent subsequent rainfall would have washed any such treatments in the Lemon Fair away. **In this case either the thresholds were wrong or the surveillance was being conducted in such a manner as to miss the hatches as they occurred. Numerous complaints from citizens around the LF and watersheds either feeding the LF or the Dead Creek basin as well as the burgeoning populations of mosquito attest to the failure of the program. Allowing these breeding populations to increase will result in an exponential**

growth in the breeding populations in subsequent years. As a preventive measure the LFICD failure to treat effectively this year represents a clear and present danger for years to come.

Unless the towns decide to approve adulticiding, our treatment is limited to larviciding and homeowner advice on how to reduce the mosquito population on their property. Presently, larviciding is limited to using a backpack sprayer and helicopter. The last year we treated by helicopter was in 2017. Since then, we have either had dry years with limited mosquito activity, or wet years (e.g., 2021 and 2023) where we did not have the count to justify aerial treatment pursuant to the terms of our Grant Agreement. In the future we are pursuing the use of a drone with the State, which should give us the ability to treat up to 200 acres in “mosquito hotspots spots” in a day. If the LFICD did not exist, the towns would not have access to larviciding either by hand or helicopter or, for that matter, Craig’s expertise and advice. As a member of the Cornwall select board said, the \$6,000 annual fee is “cheap insurance”. **It's a waste of taxpayers' money and a false sense of security to think that insurance is prevention against harm. Adulticiding will not be effective in the LF District. There is not enough road frontage adjacent to the known breeding territory to warrant adulticiding by the District. Drone technology is indeed a promising future option, if there were a fleet of drones to serve the entire State and if the FAA decides to allow for heavy lift drones to operate in commercial airspace anytime soon. Given the current gridlock and dysfunction in government at any level, near term permitting and local acquisition of a functioning drone program is unlikely and amounts to wishful thinking.**

There are several ways to deal with the ongoing problem. But the first is to be clear on the facts as it relates to the environmental considerations as well as the actual mission of the LFICD as it was originally established. This mission was never changed by any vote of the Board nor by any change in the Articles under which the Municipal District was established. If the District will not fulfill its mission, which is "To Treat Where Needed, as Needed" then the District should be disbanded.

The LFICD treats “...Where Needed, as Needed” with larvicide under the terms of our Grant Agreement with VAAFM. **The terms of the Grant Agreement govern the terms of reimbursement for treatment. Confining the District to an ineffectual and ultimately irresponsible treatment protocol does not fulfill the mission of the District as it was originally founded, that is to control the breeding populations of mosquito where needed, as needed.**

Surveillance is not the mission of the District. That is the mission and responsibility of the State. Surveillance for the purpose of supporting a robust insect control program is in the service of the mission. The District has failed in this mission, and in so doing has undermined the public health and safety of the local population including the taxpaying citizens who support the District and the State Agency responsible for oversight of it.

Our responsibilities are limited to dealing with nuisance mosquitoes. However, we are aware that mosquito reduction is beneficial both from a nuisance and public safety standpoint. Furthermore, when we identify species that are potentially dangerous vectors, e.g., *Culiseta melanura* and EEE, we will and have notified the VAA Vector Surveillance Program. **Confining the definition of the mission of the district to "nuisance" is a legalistic dodge, and a**

distinction that the State would like to maintain where their own responsibilities are concerned. By adopting the language of the State the Board of the LFICD has undermined the mission of the LFICD. If this were simply a question of funding on a Statewide level we would not be talking about the distinction between nuisance and vector management. The State's own framework for funding mosquito control is wrong, hence the failure of the LFICD is a case in point. In hindsight we should never have agreed to work to establish the LFICD without a robust Statewide funding mechanism in place. The State is now robbing Peter to pay Paul by defining "nuisance" as a local concern and "vector management" as a state concern. That is a false distinction based on expedience, not facts. This is neither good public health and safety policy nor is it good mosquito control policy at any level.

I understand communication with the general public is not the responsibility of the Field Coordinator. However, the Board of the Lemon Fair Insect Control District has a responsibility to communicate with those who communicate their concerns, and who have offered their services, including dedicated effort in establishing the District and mapping the territory so others could continue with the mission of the District in years to come.

The District Board members have failed to communicate in any meaningful way with me, nor have the statements made to the general public been accurate or meaningful where the duties of the District and its mission are concerned.

As a member of the public, you and all town members are welcome to attend LFICD board meetings. We do communicate with the public, through our Website, newsletters, submissions to Front Porch Forum, notices in the Addy Indy and in person visits to homeowners. Perhaps the best way to ensure that the residents of our 3 towns are aware of the LFICD's treatment limitations and opportunities is to determine whether they are in favor of treating adult mosquitos. That would be another bad idea. Homeowners already have the opportunity to poison themselves and their neighbors with over the counter foggers. The LFICD had a working, cost effective program to treat for mosquito during the worst of times. That was its mission, and we proved it could be done. That capacity was dismantled by a combination of willful negligence at the State level and ignorance at the local level. The result is the present dilemma, to continue to do nothing by force of having no other option or to treat with adulticide which will be a waste of taxpayer money. The definition of insanity to continue to do the same thing over and over again regardless of the consequences.

If there will be no meaningful engagement with the public, nor definite communication regarding reform of the current protocols governing treatment within the District prior to the submission of the budget for operations in 2024 I will suggest that the Select Boards of the member towns refuse to accept the submitted budget, and that the budget be put to a vote of the taxpayers of the member towns as per the Articles. I, for one, will strongly oppose the continuation of the District as it is currently being managed.

I ask that this communication be read into the minutes of the next LFICD meeting.

Respectfully,

Thomas Vanacore
September 29, 2023

Thomas Vanacore
Founding Chairman
LFICD
Bridport, VT
September 21, 2023