

## State Technical Committee Meeting

NRCS/FSA State Office, Tolland, CT

April 27, 2016

### NOTES

**Participants:** Thomas Morgart, NRCS; Joyce Purcell, NRCS; Debbie Surabian, NRCS; Arde Ramthun, NRCS; Mark Edmonds, NRCS; Nancy Ferlow, NRCS; Jim Hyde, NRCS; Carol Donzella, NRCS; Javier Cruz, NRCS; Amy Fischer, NRCS; Carol Grasis, NRCS; Denise Savageau, CACD; Dan Peracchio, CT DEEP, Forestry; Rob Hurst, DEEP, Water; Abbie Maynard, CAES; Wayne Woodward, TNC; Judy Wilson, DEEP, Wildlife; Jack Clausen, UConn; Rich Meinert, CES; Bonnie Burr, CES; Rick Jacobson, CT, DEEP, Wildlife; Judy Preston, LISW-RCPP; Mike O’Neill, UConn; Karl Honkonen, USFS; Lois Bruinooge, LGV

**Welcome/ Introductions:** Thomas Morgart, State Conservationist, NRCS /All Tom welcomed all to the meeting; introductions followed.

#### **Review Agenda/Review Minutes (January 27, 2016)** – Joyce Purcell, ASTC, NRCS

Joyce welcomed all to the meeting; provided a meeting agenda and notes from the last meeting, and asked for comments/corrections. One correction was noted by Mark Edmonds, under the *Forest Practices Subcommittee* section, the term “long eared bat” should be added for clarification. The minutes were approved pending the aforementioned correction.

#### **RCPP Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**

##### **Long Island Sound** – Judy Preston, LISW Coordinator

The Committee viewed a power point presentation on the LIS project. The grant addresses non-point source pollution throughout the entire watershed focusing on working lands. Judy reviewed the project goals, partnerships, budget, structure of groups and reporting. She also demonstrated the new interactive map of the watershed. It is an RCPP national funded project, a \$10M/5 year grant that covers 6 states.

##### **UConn – Path to Pathogens** - Dr. John Clausen, Professor -UConn

Dr. Clausen updated the committee on the *Path to Reduce Pathogens/CT Agricultural Run-off* project. The project is aimed at pathogens with nutrient benefits; identifying sources of pathogens and determining when it is and when it is not an agricultural issue; to look at barriers and opportunities for producers. The project covers an area of 36 towns in eastern CT and involves over ten partners. It is an RCPP state funded project, a \$1.2m/5 year grant.

##### **Last Green Valley** - Lois Bruinooge, LGV Coordinator

Lois updated everyone on the project which focuses on improving soil health and soil quality with corn producers. They are utilizing economics as a key factor in reaching out to producers – cost savings to implementing practices such as cover crops and no-till. To date, 4 applications have been received with 2 in the works. Creative outreach has been a goal – attending meetings, conferences, and commission meetings; articles placed in new publication call “In Touch”. It is an RCPP state funded project, an \$800k/5 year grant within the Thames River watershed.

**UConn – Water Security** - Dr. Michael O’Neill, Assistant Director, UCONN

Dr. O’Neill updated the committee on the *Agricultural Water Security in CT* project. The goal of the project is to determine how much water does it take for agricultural purposes; then expand it to the increase in local food production and where to get more water. The objectives of the project include: understanding baseline agricultural water use and management practices, drought preparedness plans and education for producers and community. The goal is to install 12 meters this year, with another 12-15 next year; increase visits, interviews and drought preparedness plans, data analysis, and support applications for financial assistance. It is an RCPP state funded project, an \$800k/5 year grant.

**Subcommittee Reports**

**National Water Quality Initiative Subcommittee** – Robert Hust, CT DEEP

Work continues on the Little River watershed; nothing on Broad Brook yet; efforts are underway to move to other areas to do projects.

**Forest Practices Subcommittee** – Mark Edmonds, NRCS Forester

Finishing up forest stand improvement job sheet; determine minimum lands needed for New England Cottontail for non-profits and Towns; talking with Chris Marten at American Forests.

**Easement Subcommittee** – Joyce Purcell, ASTC, NRCS

No report this quarter.

**Nutrient Management Subcommittee** – James Hyde, Agronomist, NRCS

Goals of the project: move nutrients out of state, move nutrients within state, and no till on cover crops. Getting feedback from producers; manure spreading efficiency being discussed; finding ways to put network together – pulling people together for conversation.

**Wildlife Subcommittee (new)** – Tom Morgart/Judy Wilson, CT DEEP – Wildlife Division

Consideration for a new wildlife subcommittee was discussed; the goal of this committee would help to get out in front of the issues; cost-share doesn’t work; time tables can’t be reached; FMP does not allow for producers to do what they want; get practices to apply to needs; small and nimble committee to work with private landowners and put practices on the ground. Judy to provide list of possible members to Tom.

**Ad Hoc Subcommittee (new)** – Tom Morgart, STC, NRCS

A short term Ad Hob subcommittee was proposed; an example would be for the group to assist with developing a ranking system and screening tool like for EQIP for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) that doesn’t leave anyone out of the process, i.e. producers. Looking for feedback from the State Technical Committee on this idea. Denise volunteered to be a member of this subcommittee.

**Farm Bill Program Updates**

**Conservation Innovation Grants** – Nancy Ferlow, SRC, NRCS

State CIG grants can be found on Grants.gov and the CT NRCS website; up to \$75K for EQIP funds, due date is May 20, 2016; national grants are due on May 20<sup>th</sup>; match can be in-kind services which is new this year; applicants must talk with the State Conservationist before submitting an application.

**National Water Quality Initiative – Resource Stewardship Evaluation Tool** – Nancy Ferlow, SRC, NRCS  
To use the tool: put in baseline documentation (pesticides, irrigation, wildlife, nutrient management, crop rotation, conservation practices), then add in the new conservation practices and you get a report that shows where improvements were made, and where to make improvements. Ranking criteria is being built; does the tool improve water quality; more information coming in October.

**Northern Long-Eared Bat** – Nancy Ferlow, SRC, NRCS

New 4-D rule; consulting with National Fish and Wildlife Service; no cutting of trees during maternity season (roost tree season is June/July); monitoring devices for field to be utilized and information shared with DEEP. Also, bog turtle biological opinion being worked on; eFOTG updated with different job sheets such as: nutrient management, energy, forest management, brush pile and high tunnel.

**Emergency Watershed Protection Floodplain Easement Program** – Arthur Ramthun, State Engineer, NRCS

The Old Lyme design has been completed; to be built this fall pending permits; two applicants dropped out in Old Lyme; 3 parcels in Madison and Branford to close soon pending title issues; West Haven will demolish 13 homes within 70 days; hazardous materials studies were completed; NRCS Chief approved a Phase II study on the Old Field Creek parcel; offers were made on the Milford parcels; they have a May 12<sup>th</sup> deadline to respond; Darien Land Trust original offer was declined; making them a new offer as there was an error in the manual; EWP-FPE is a heavily audited program.

**Farm Bill Programs and Initiatives Updates/2017 RCPP** – Joyce Purcell, ASTC, NRCS

CT NRCS received \$4.9M EQIP allocation (additional funding received for climate change); reviewed EQIP/AMA allocations and sub-accounts via a power point presentation; sub-accounts include conservation activity plans, national initiatives, and mandatory funding levels; reviewed application ranking and obligation due dates for EQIP, CSP and ACEP; to date \$4.4M has been allocated out of the \$4.9M; of note were the sub-accounts for Forestry, Energy, and NWQI; eight FRPP easements were closed on with four in pipeline.

**Soils Update** – Debbie Surabian, State Soil Scientist, NRCS

Several Earth Team Volunteers from Central and UConn have been assisting the soils staff by way of free internships; working on GIS urban soils, bats, and thermal conduct activity readings with EPA; the tidal marsh remapping project is nearing its end; starting subaqueous soil survey project in Jordon's Cover; Soil Health workshop is June 1<sup>st</sup> in Woodstock; continuing cultural resource reviews with State Archaeologist utilizing GPR.

**Open Discussion** – All

**Tom Morgart** noted that \$23M has been invested in RCPP projects; the deadline for 2017 RCPP proposals is May 10, 2016. Applicants must talk with him first before submitting a proposal. This applies to state and national proposals.

**Tom Morgart** reported on new CT NRCS hires/vacancies; the Engineering staff is now full; two Soil Conservationist at GS-9 levels were advertised with no results; these two positions will be re-advertised at the GS-5 to GS-9 level; the positions are for the Hamden and Torrington field offices; they should be hitting the street soon. If anyone knows of a candidate direct them to the [usajobs.gov](http://usajobs.gov) website. The positions will be open for 5 working days with the panel closing at 40 applicants. The DC position closed for the Norwich field office; now waiting for panel.

**Karl Honkonen**, reported on the Hudson to Housatonic Initiative – a series of workshops to educate landowners on land use practices on forested lands, and the Forest Health and Bio-diversity – Forestry for Birds; working with the Audubon Society on 100 assessments on forest/forest management mirrored by bird habitat to be finished this time next year.

**Jim Hyde** noted that CT RC&D found that digesters got farmer's attention and follow up is needed.

**Next meeting:** tentatively set for Wednesday, **July 27, 2016**

Adjourn: 12:04 PM

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