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# FY 2013 Executive Summary

Originally established by Congress in 1935 as the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has expanded to become a conservation leader for all natural resources, ensuring private lands are conserved, restored, and more resilient to environmental challenges such as climate change.

Seventy percent of the land in the United States is privately owned, making stewardship by private landowners absolutely critical to the health of our Nation's environment.

NRCS works with landowners through conservation planning and assistance designed to benefit the soil, water, air, plants, and animals that result in productive lands and healthy ecosystems.

The following information provides FY 2013 highlights regarding Rhode Island NRCS conservation projects where success is attained through cooperative partnerships with a multitude of organizations who share a common vision regarding the importance of conservation to benefit the environment.

## **NRCS Partnerships:**

The Rhode Island NRCS partners with a multitude of Federal, State, municipal, and local agencies along with several private and nonprofit organizations. Such partnerships are paramount to the success of the organization protecting natural resources throughout Rhode Island and improving the quality of life for all Rhode Islanders. We are constantly striving to develop new partnerships that will help us realize our vision of a Rhode Island where people and the environment are in harmony.

The following list provides examples of the primary partners NRCS collaborates with on conservation projects throughout Rhode Island:

RI Conservation Districts (RICD) including Eastern, Northern, and Southern Districts; RI Resource Conservation and Development Council (RIRC&D); RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM); RI Coastal Resources Management Council, RI Farm Bureau, RI Land Trust Council, RI Raised Livestock Association, RI Dairy Cooperative, Farm Fresh RI, RI Nursery and Landscape Association, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

*Message From  
R. Phou Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist*



In 2013, NRCS staff worked diligently to implementing conservation practices and award contracts. The field staff successfully completed and certified 622 conservation practices worth well over \$1.7 million dollars. For FY 2013 in total, the field staff ranked and approved 134 contracts worth almost \$2.5 million dollars for conservation programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (122 contracts worth over \$2.3 million), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (3 contracts worth over \$121,000), and Agricultural Management Assistance (9 contracts worth over \$37,000).

Implementation of Conservation Practices and New Contract Obligations in FY 2013

In FY 2013, NRCS implemented several conservation practices which address resource concerns that positively impact water quality, create and protect wildlife, reduce invasive plant species, manage the health of forested areas, and protect wildlife habitat. The following sections provide a breakdown on conservation practices obligated in FY 2013 for each conservation district. In addition, the number of new FY 2013 contracts is highlighted by program for each conservation district.

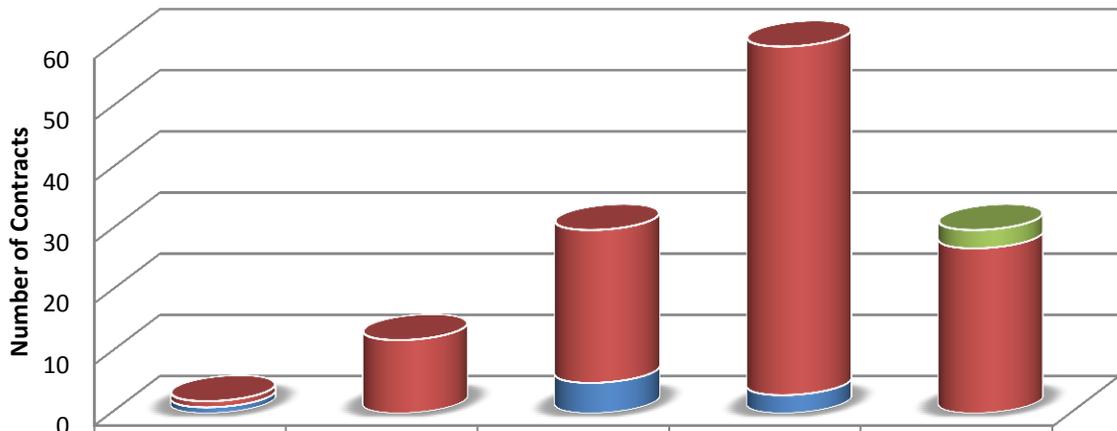
**FY 2013 Financial Assistance Program**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Total Obligation</b>
AMA 2008	\$ 37,068.00
EQIP 2008	\$ 2,322,323.14
WHIP 2008	\$ 121,490.00
Total	\$ 2,480,881.14

**Total Contracts Obligated**

AMA 2008	EQIP 2008	WHIP 2008	Grand Total
9	122	3	<b>134</b>

## FA FY 2013 Contracts Obligated by Program and County



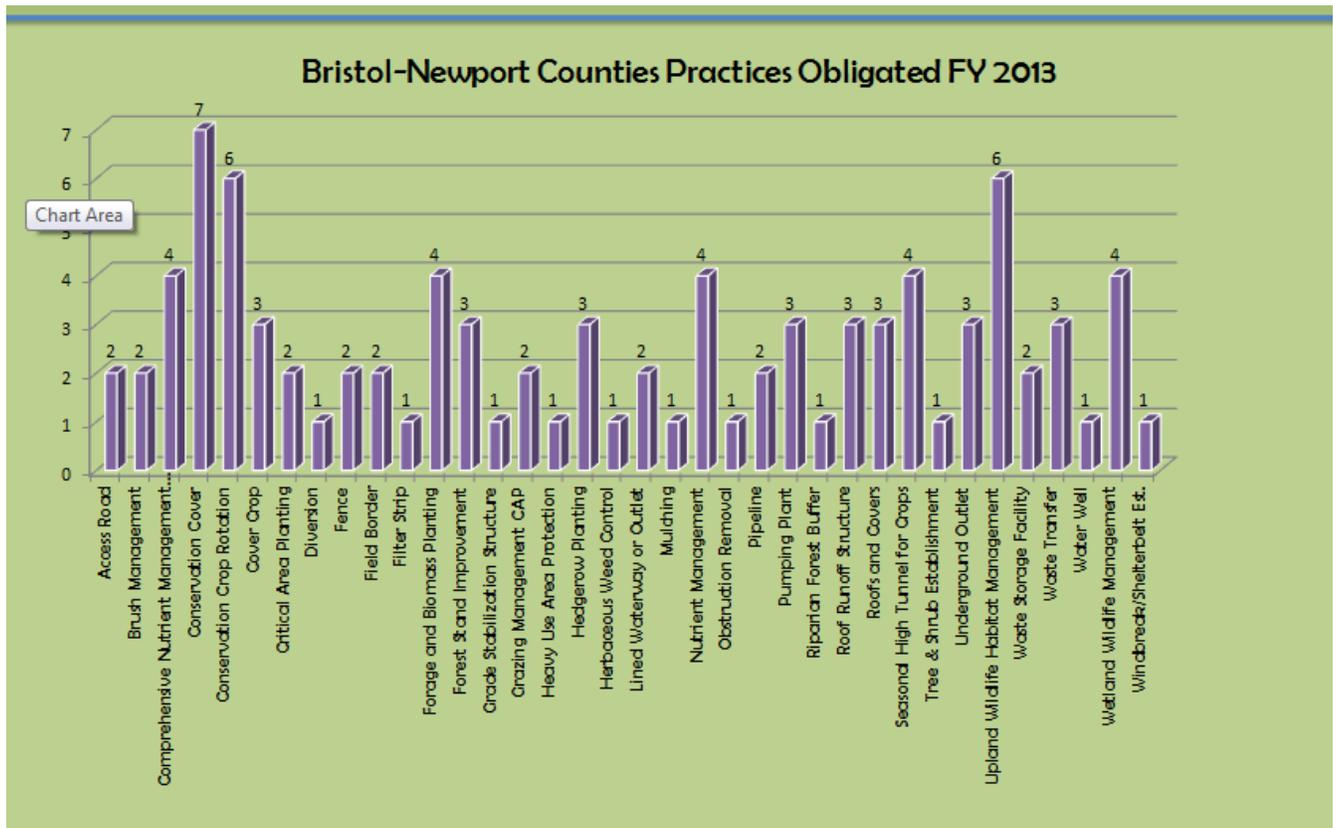
	BRISTOL	KENT	NEWPORT	PROVIDENCE	WASHINGTON
■ WHIP 2008					3
■ EQIP 2008	1	12	25	57	27
■ AMA 2008	1		5	3	

## Conservation District - Eastern District (Bristol and Newport Counties)

by Melissa Hayden, Eastern District Conservationist

Implementation on existing contracts in the Eastern District in 2013 included completion of a total of 35 Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) practices worth \$66,290, 90 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) practices worth \$389,199, 4 Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) practices worth \$3,756 and 2 Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA) practices worth \$9,600. These include implementation of brush management for invasive species control; fencing for prescribed grazing; pest management; high tunnels; restoration and management of declining habitats and two wells. Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, Forest Management Plans, and Nutrient Management Plans were also completed in the quarter.

For FY 2013, the Eastern District has completed conservation plans and funded 26 EQIP projects for a total of \$712,267. In addition, 6 AMA conservation plans were completed and funded for a total of \$19,738.

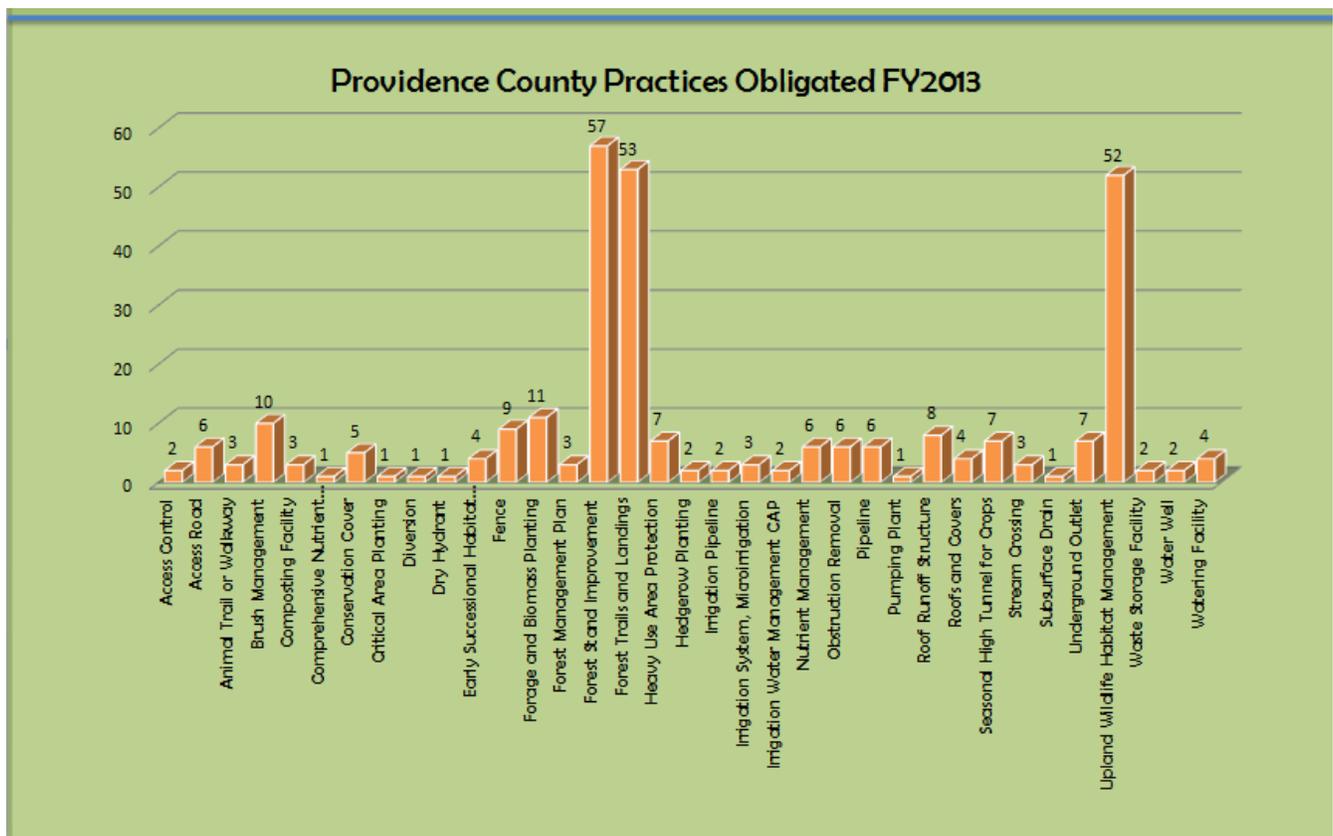


## Conservation District - Northern District (Providence County)

by Justin Tuthill, Northern District Conservationist

In 2013, NRCS Northern District has completed and certified 152 conservation practices totaling \$332,522 through EQIP. These practices include Forest Stand Improvement, Brush Management, and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans. In addition, there were 33 WHIP practices implemented worth \$77,823, 34 Conservation Security Program (CSP) practices implemented worth \$4,627, and 15 Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) practices implemented worth \$5,000.

For FY 2013 in total, the Northern District funded 57 EQIP contracts for a total of \$814,938 and 3 AMA contracts worth \$17,330.

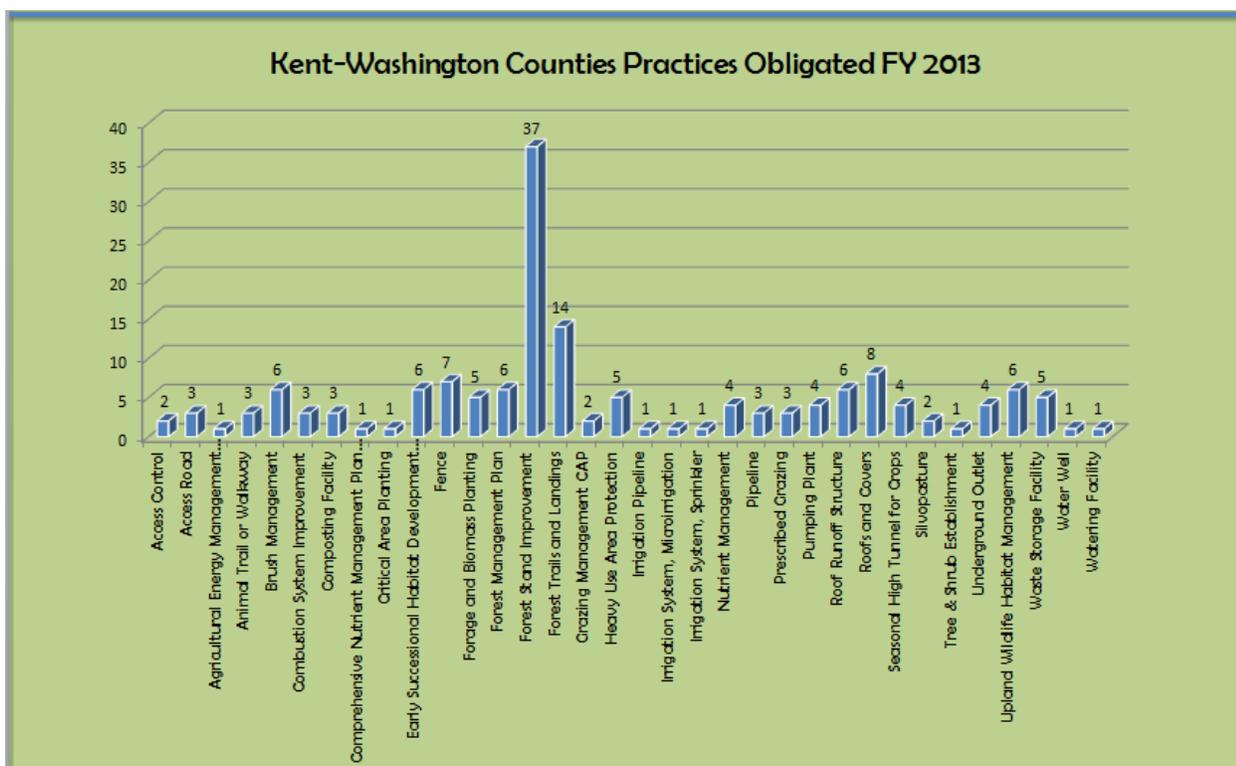


## Conservation District - Southern District (Kent and Washington Counties)

by John Richard, Southern District Conservationist

In 2013, NRCS Southern District completed and certified 196 conservation practices under EQIP totaling \$768,056. These practices include Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats, High Tunnels, Timber Stand Improvement, and Pasture Planting. There were 49 WHIP practices implemented worth \$98,288 and 12 Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) practices implemented worth \$5,719.

For FY 2013 in total, the SRICD completed conservation plans and funded 39 EQIP projects for a total of \$795,008 and 3 WHIP contracts worth \$121,490.



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## Protecting Farms Through Conservation Easements

by Michael Kenyon, Easement Program Manager

High land values pressure farmers to sell farm properties for residential, commercial, and industrial development in Rhode Island. From 1980 to 2004, Rhode Island lost 30,000 acres of prime farmland due to development where high land values played an integral role in the conversion to residential and industrial uses. Since 1996, NRCS RI provided over \$17 million to work with conservation partners to preserve over 40 parcels on over 2,300 acres of rich farmland.

### Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) in FY 2013

The program staff obligated a little under \$3 million to protect 225 acres of land on 4 parcels. All of the parcels were located within the Eastern Rhode Island Conservation District.

### Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) in FY 2013

There have been no new enrollments in FY 2013 although the program staff is moving ahead to protect approximately 24 acres by the end of the calendar year. One parcel is 7.5 acres and the other is 16.5 acres worth a total of \$119,100 in easement payments.

### Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) in FY 2013

The program staff is working towards protecting slightly over 100 acres on three parcels worth \$272,000 in WRP easements and \$355,000 in WRP restoration projects.

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## Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment

by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist

During the FY 2013 stemming from October 2012 through September 2013, NRCS actively participated in a total of approximately 50 outreach events. Such events included twelve general open house information workshops coordinated with the RI Conservation Districts. The events were targeted to the farming and forestry communities to learn about technical and financial assistance available for conservation efforts. The events were held at various locations throughout the State and included tours of NRCS clients with high tunnels and livestock operations.



Attendees at Young Farmer Night held at Scratch Farm in Cranston, RI, discuss opportunities and challenges of farming in RI.

The other events included the RI Flower Show, URI Spring Festival, Foster Old Home Days, the Washington County Fair, and Pardon Gray Day which attracted the general public who have an interest in agriculture and conservation issues. To target new and beginning farmers, NRCS and the Conservation Districts attended Young Farmers Nights in the three conservation districts which were all well attended. Other events targeted to farmers included the URI Twilight Growers Meeting and Good Earth Harvest Festival.

During the summer months, the three summer interns visited over 20 farmers markets located throughout the state where they distributed NRCS information on the EQIP program with particular emphasis on funding available for high

tunnels.

In respect to recruitment events, NRCS attended four university level career fairs in FY 2013. The annual Government Career Fair was held at URI's Ryan Center on October 24, 2012 where students from eight local colleges and universities learned about career opportunities with over 45 governmental agencies. NRCS also attended the three URI Internship and Job Fairs where staff explained the educational requirements for careers within NRCS and hiring process for Federal government job vacancy announcements. In addition, NRCS staff attended two high school career fairs and participated in the annual RI Envirothon competition.



Civil Engineering Technician Ron Lewis speaks to a URI student about the various occupations NRCS hires to implement conservation practices on farms and forest land.

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## Outreach Training Workshop

by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist

### Rhode Island NRCS Hosts “Working Effectively With American Indians” Workshop To Provide Spiritual, Cultural, and Intellectual Awareness of American Indians



Cassius Spears, RI NRCS Soil Conservationist and Narragansett Tribal Councilman explains American Indian customs to workshop attendees on a tour of the Pequot Museum in Mashantucket, CT.

The Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) hosted a workshop “Working Effectively with American Indians” on Monday, August 19, 2013 through Friday, August 23, 2013 in Warwick, RI. The objective of the workshop was to provide spiritual, cultural, and intellectual awareness of the American Indian in order for NRCS to effectively work, interact, and provide technical assistance to American Indians in the use and care of our natural resources.



Chief Sachem Matthew Thomas and speaker Elizabeth Hoover welcome workshop attendees at a luncheon and tour of the Narragansett Indian Reservation in Charlestown, RI.

In order for USDA/NRCS employees to have a successful relationship with American Indians and Alaska Natives, this course provided attendees with an understanding of this land’s history, the political complexities, government-to-government fiduciary responsibilities, and most importantly an understanding of the cultures and life from an American Indian and Alaska Native perspective. In addition, the course enhanced attendees’ skills pertaining to NRCS and American Indian tribal policy and procedures.

The workshop was hosted by NRCS in conjunction with the Narragansett Indian Tribe. The Narragansett Indian Tribe guest speakers included Chief Sachem Matthew Thomas and several tribal elders. Additional guest speakers included James Sappier, Tribal Historian and former Chief of the Penobscot Nation; Loretta Metoxen, Tribal Historian of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin; Brian Patterson, President of United South and Eastern Tribes (USET); Elizabeth

Hoover, Assistant Professor of American Studies at Brown University; and Endawnis Spears, Cultural Anthropologist.

The workshop also included a field trip to provide hands on interactive training and educational insight. Attendees visited the Pequot Museum in Mashantucket, CT where Cassius Spears, NRCS Soil Conservationist and Narragansett Tribal representative, provided a tour and explained historical facets of American Indian culture. Additionally, attendees visited the Narragansett Indian reservation for a luncheon of traditional Narragansett foods and tour of the reservation. Chief Sachem Matthew Thomas of the Narragansett Indian Tribe welcomed attendees at the luncheon which was followed by a tour of Long House and a visit to the grounds surrounding the Narragansett Indian Church. Attendees learned about the history of the Narragansett Tribe and participated in a tribal round dance led by Cassius Spears.

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## Soils Program

*by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist*

Resource staff has been working with Soils and Engineering to develop GIS methods to use Rhode Island's new LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) elevation data to produce contour and slope maps for use in planning and soil survey.

### **Soil Response to Hurricane Sandy:**

Hurricane Sandy impacted RI in late October 2012 with major impacts along the south shore of RI. Following Sandy, the RI Assistant State Soil Scientist organized a tour with Soil Scientists, Coastal Geologists, URI Professors, and other officials to observe the damage and assess any improvements that could be made to our current Coastal Zone Soil Survey. The tour began in Narragansett and ended at the South Kingstown Town Beach, the team examined the fresh soil/geologic erosion exposures along the shore and bluffs. Results of the tour and issues uncovered were presented at the National Cooperative Soil Survey National Conference in June. Corrections to the RI soil survey data have already been made and will be available on the next upload of the RI soil survey maps in November.

NOTE: Photos of the tour are at:

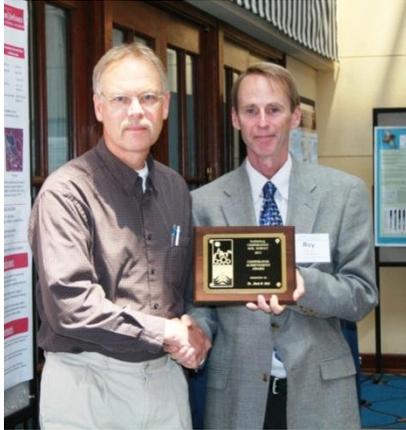
<https://picasaweb.google.com/107760312765312991840/HurricaneSandyOutcrops#>



**RI is the leading state in the country to map our submerged lands and coastal zone as part of the RI Coastal Zone Soil Survey.** To assist with this mapping we formed a partnership called the **Mapping Partnership for Coastal Soils and Sediment (MapCoast.org)** which consists of over 15 State and Federal Partners. We are the first state to have SSURGO soil mapping for submerged lands both fresh and salt water. Phase III of the RI Coastal Zone Soil Survey are on schedule to be

completed by FY 2014. All of the shoreline, dunes, and marshes have been completed by the RI Soil Staff and the coastal lagoons in Little Compton will be mapped this summer. There are several Special Management Area Plans underway in RI in which the coastal zone soil survey may be useful for resource planning; the Shoreline Change Special Area Management Plan (Beach SAMP) and the Shellfish SAMP.

Dr. Mark Stolt receives cooperators of the year award: At the 2013 National Cooperative Soil Survey National Conference, Dr. Mark Stolt from the University of RI received the Cooperator of the Year



Award for his many years of work with the Soil Survey. Some of the partner work highlighted was the assistance provided by Mark for the two-year Rapid Carbon Assessment, work Mark did in developing the Subaqueous Soil mapping and classification protocol, work with the Society of Soil Scientists of Southern New England, and soil research. A video of the award presentation can be found at:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=510377005701480&l=7790202747545042388>



#### **Rapid Carbon Assessment data released:**

For the past two years RI Soil Scientist Maggie Payne led the Northeast part of the National Rapid Soil Carbon Assessment program. Over 7,000 soil samples were collected, described, and analyzed at the URI laboratory to determine soil organic carbon stocks. The RCA project was recently (June 5, 2013) mentioned in Secretary Vilsack's speech to the National Press Club on Climate Adaptation:

<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=climate-change>

Info on the RCA can be found at:

<http://soils.usda.gov/survey/raca/>

RI was the **lead state in the Northeast for the national Rapid Carbon Assessment** – over 7,000 samples were analyzed by our (former) Resource Soil Scientist who was the RCA Liaison for MO-12. URI is one of the lead universities to study soil organic carbon.



**Jim Turenne, Asst. State Soil Scientist, and Deborah Surabian, State Soil Scientist, speak with Sandra Kittell of the Bureau of Criminal Identification. They used ground penetrating radar to scan the ground for anomalies such as other possible bodies or evidence. (Photo Sandor Bodo of the Providence Journal.)**

#### **RI and CT NRCS assist the Providence Police:**

The URI crime lab contacted the RI Assistant State Soil Scientist to see if the ground-penetrating radar (GPR) unit could be used to help out with an investigation

that was underway by the Providence Police. GPR provides high resolution images of subsurface features and is frequently used to help locate human remains in soil and under concrete. With the help of the State Soil Scientist located in the Tolland CT office, the two soil scientists profiled the basement of a building to determine if additional information could be collected for the investigation.

The work was featured in the Providence Journal newspaper.

Link: <http://www.providencejournal.com/breaking-news/content/20130807-forensic-analysis-unearts-clues-to-skeleton-found-buried-at-former-providence-mill.ece?ssimg=1135651#ssStory1135653>

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## Resources

*by Eric, Boettger, Resource Conservationist; Gary Casabona, State Biologist; Chris Modisette, State Forester; and Reena Shaw, Agriculture Economist*

- **Developed New Partnerships with the following groups**
  - Working with RIDEM and the RI Water Resources Board to partner on a Water Conservation Program in the Chipuxet River Watershed.
  - Serving on the Habitat Team for the State Wildlife Action Plan
  - URI through the SWAT Forestry Initiative
  - MassConn Forest Partnership
  - Last Green Valley Institute
- **Maintained existing partnerships**
  - Liaison to: Southern New England Heritage Forest Project, RI RC&D Council, RI Tree Farm Committee, RI Christmas Tree Growers Association, RI Envirothon,
  - Member of the RIDEM State Forestry, Forest Assessment Team, State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee, Forest Legacy Committee, Farm, Forest & Open Space Valuation Subcommittee.
  - Strengthened NRCS relationship with the natural resources community to include: the US Forest Service, RIDEM- Div. of Forest Environment, RI water Resources Board, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, RIFCO, Tree Farm Committee, RI Christmas Tree Growers Association, RI Chapter-Society of American Foresters, RI Forest Fire Advisory Committee, the Rhode Island Tree Council, the Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, the New England Governor's Conference, Highstead, the Wildland & Woodlands Initiative, among others;
  - Partner technical assistance: Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, Southern New England Coastal Restoration meetings, USEPA, RIDEM Forest Legacy Program, Southern New England Heritage Forest Project, US Fish & Wildlife Service re: New England Cottontail, Advisory Board for RI Sea Grant, Shellfish Management with RIDEM and CRMC,

### Water Quality and Agronomy

Working with RIDEM and the RI Water Resources Board to partner on a Water Conservation Program in the Chipuxet River Watershed.

The Resource staff has been working with RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) – Office of Water Resources and the RI NRCS State Technical Committee on the selection of HUC -12 watersheds which are targeted under the 2012 Water Quality Initiative. The selected watersheds are as follows:

- 1) Sakonnet River watershed
- 2) Upper East Passage watershed
- 3) Tomaquag Brook – Pawcatuck River watershed

Sakonnet Riparian Buffer Assessment in process.



### **Wildlife**

State Biologist, Gary Casabona, continues to work with US Fish & Wildlife Service and RI DEM partners on the creation of “scrub/shrub” young forest habitat to benefit the New England cottontail, one of the seven species covered under the Working Lands for Wildlife program. Thanks to the participation of Rhode Island landowners, land trusts, and rod & gun clubs, 112 acres of cottontail habitat management has been planned through NRCS Farm Bill programs since April 2012.

Gary is also working with staff from the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation to review and edit job sheets and implementation guides for pollinator conservation under NRCS practices such as Conservation Cover or Tree and Shrub Establishment. Along with Xerces staff, Gary was one of the instructors for a full-day Pollinator Habitat workshop given at Roger Williams Botanical Garden in Providence on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

**Stream Continuity Project** - A partnership of NRCS, RIRC&D, and Trout Unlimited volunteers has been assessing the opportunity to restore the **continuity of stream and river systems** to allow for easier fish, wildlife and aquatic organism passage and to benefit the overall water quality of watersheds across the state. As a result of this partnership, Kat Zuromski of RIRC&D has established a statewide database of impediments to riparian zone connectivity. Gary hopes to use this dataset to identify stream and wetland restoration projects to be funded through NRCS programs.

A workshop on Pollinator Conservation with Xerces Society staff was held at URI for Partners, producers, and NRCS staff. Another Pollinator training will be held in either MA or CT in the coming months. Partners, producers, and NRCS staff who missed the RI training last year are encouraged to attend this training. There will be a NRCS Food Security Act Wetland Training to be held in conjunction with MA and CT NRCS staff this spring.



Rhode Island NRCS provided technical and financial assistance to the Conanicut Island Land Trust for seeding of four acres of “high intensity” pollinator habitat in Jamestown, RI. The seed mix contained 16 species of native forbs (wildflowers) and one native grass. Nearly all of the species are perennials, and the pollinator habitat is expected to persist for 10 years or more before re-seeding is necessary. The forbs will provide pollen and nectar as food for native bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and European honeybees. The grass will provide nesting sites for bumblebees and other native bees. European honeybees and native bees provide important crop pollination services for farmers, and help to increase yields of many crops. These bee species have declined in recent years because of “Colony Collapse Disorder”, a broad name given to describe the effects of viruses and mites on bee populations. NRCS has been consulting with bee experts at the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation to develop Best Management Practices to conserve bee populations, and will continue to work with farmers and other private landowners to seed new project areas.

### **Forestry**

Rhode Island is over 55% forested and these lands significantly contribute to the health of our Bay, estuaries and the ocean. Proper management of these lands can help to improve water quality by improving overall forest health.

- Forests protect watersheds, aquifers, and groundwater supplies that provide the bulk of our clean drinking water. 75% of Rhode Islanders get their drinking water from reservoirs protected by forests.
- Rhode Island has completed forest management plans that promote the protection and improvement of water resources on close to 9,000 acres.
- NRCS entered into a partnership with the RI RC&D and State Forestry agency to accelerate technical support for forestry, wildlife habitat, and water quality practices.
- Sponsored training for private landowners, foresters and logging professionals on Forestry BMPs to protect wetlands and water quality.

### **New England/New York Forestry Initiative**

This effort is a collaboration of the offices of the State Foresters, State Conservationists, USFS staff, local officials and regional conservation partnerships of conservation groups and agencies.

- **SWAT Forestry** - NRCS is working with the RI RC&D Council and the University of Rhode Island (URI) to collaborate in implementing NE/NY Forestry Initiative Contribution forestry projects. Through this

agreement RIRC&D hired URI staff forester, Bill Buffum to promote USDA Farm Bill programs and accelerate technical support for forestry, wildlife habitat, and water quality practices in existing NRCS contracts.

- **Southern New England Heritage Forest Pilot Project** - An outgrowth of the NE/NY Forestry Initiative is a US Forest Service pilot project for the Southern New England Heritage Forest, an area that includes western RI, eastern CT and central MA. The purpose of this project is to test how to most effectively to engage family forest landowners in contributing to three main goals: 1) strengthen markets for forest products, 2) strengthen forest stewardship, and 3) conserve the many values of the region's forest landscape for future generations. The long-term goal of the project is to encourage better forest management and permanent protection for the region's forest lands. The geographic focus of the initial landowner outreach efforts will focus on 16 towns in 3 states. This effort is a collaboration of the offices of the State Foresters, State Conservationists, USFS staff, local officials and regional conservation partnerships of conservation groups and agencies.

**Small Scale Forestry** - There are an estimated 38,400 private woodland owners in RI who own 80% of Rhode Island's forest resources. Approximately 24,000 of these woodland owners own less than 10 acres of woodland. NRCS is working with the Northern RI Conservation District, RIRC&D, and the Providence Water Supply Board to investigate issues and opportunities surrounding **Small Scale Forestry**. To date held four (4) workshops with 104 attendees

USDA released an **Agroforestry Strategic Framework (June 2011)** to increase awareness and support of agroforestry. This strategic framework creates a roadmap for advancing the science, practice, and application of agroforestry as a means of enhancing America's agricultural landscapes, watersheds, and rural communities. Through the **Rhode Island Agroforestry Project**, RI NRCS in cooperation with RIRC&D and its partners is investigating agroforestry practices which will aim to help sustain small farms and private woodland productivity. Examples of Agroforestry practices being considered include forest farming, silvopasture, riparian zone restoration, alley cropping, and windbreak/shelterbelts.

#### **Resource Economics**

**National and Regional Practice Payment Schedules** - Agricultural Economist Reena Shaw and State Forester Chris Modisette continue to be part of the national effort to develop and maintain NRCS payment schedules, their associated scenarios, and estimated incurred costs on a national and regional basis. The objective of this initiative is to provide greater consistency in program payment rates nationally and will be completed for all practices during FY 2012. The goal is to complete all schedules and maintain the data in a web-based system for use by NRCS field staff to develop participant contracts for FY 2013. Reena provided a dual role through participation on the **Payment Schedules - National Technical Specialist and Cost Team** while Chris is part of the **Forestry National Technical Specialist Team** and is also part of the **Regional Payment Scenario Team** for the northeast.

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## Engineering

### Water Resources Success Stories:

The NRCS Water Resources Programs have contributed to helping protect life and property within Rhode Island's critical watersheds.

Through the Watershed Operations Program, NRCS has partnered with the Town of Johnston and the City of Cranston to provide nearly \$1.8 million to relocate six families out of the Pocasset River Floodplain. We are working with the town of Johnston to use the remaining Pocasset Watershed project funds to address the drainage issues at Lafazia & South Bennett Streets. So far, we have evaluated the structure to determine its hydraulic condition. To offset the cost of the work and allow all of the project funds to go towards implementation, our staff is providing assistance with the Hydrology & Hydraulic analysis and engineering designs. This project will be completed in 2014.

In response to Hurricane Sandy, the USDA-NRCS has conducted 25 site evaluations in three counties for Rhode Island. Five of the sites were determined to be eligible for EWP assistance and had Damage Survey Reports completed. Some of the sites that we are providing assistance to include:

- Providence County site involves the Woonasquatucket River watershed consisting of fallen debris, streambank scour, and erosion. Property threatened at numerous locations. Erosion based damages led to watershed impairment.
- Town of Bristol requested assistance with streambank stabilization on the Silver Creek. The bridge headwall and bank protection had undermining that if left unrepaired would greatly increase property damage in future events.
- Washington County (town of Westerly) site involves the Pawcatuck River watershed consisting of fallen debris within the river channel. Infrastructure (bridges/roads) threatened at a few locations.
- Bristol County (town of Barrington) site involves the Hampden Meadows drainage ditch in the Barrington River watershed consisting of fallen debris within the ditch. Infrastructure (culverts/roads) threatened at numerous locations for the four towns that I have recently been out to, including Westerly, Barrington, Warren, and Narragansett.
- Newport County (town of Newport) site involves debris and sand sedimentation on Ocean Dr. and displaced riprap at a culvert along Hazard Rd. Infrastructure threatened at these locations.

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## Forestry Success Story



### **Landscape Initiatives tackle pressing natural resource concerns by strategically investing federal funds and leveraging partner resources in Rhode Island.**

#### New England/New York Forestry Initiative

The New England/New York region contains over 52 million acres of forest land, including the largest intact block of temperate broadleaf forest in the Nation. Eighty percent of these forests are privately owned.

In 2008-2009, the New England Governors' Conference commissioned a Blue Ribbon Task Force to identify the most urgent land conservation issues facing New England. The committee identified five principles to build a lasting conservation legacy for future generations of New Englanders including "Keeping Forests as Forests." NRCS is supporting the Governors' effort by establishing the New England/New York Forestry Initiative.

Through the New England/New York Forestry Initiative, NRCS is working with its partners, forest landowners and land managers to "Keep Forests as Forests" and maintain and enhance the public benefits they provide. The initiative provides a combination of technical and financial assistance to landowners and land managers in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

In Rhode Island this has resulted in:

- Development of 46 Forest Management Plans on some 6,443 acres of private forest land;
- Implementation of contracts with 34 private landowners owners to improve the health and diversity of some 4,723 acres of private forest land;

**SWAT Forestry** - NRCS is working with the Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Council (RIRC&D) and the University of Rhode Island (URI) to collaborate in the implementation of USDA Farm Bill programs and accelerate technical support for forestry, wildlife habitat, and water quality practices in existing NRCS contracts.

**Southern New England Heritage Forest Pilot Project** - An outgrowth of the New England/New York Forestry Initiative is a US Forest Service pilot project for the Southern New England Heritage Forest, an area that includes western RI, eastern CT, and central MA. The purpose of this project is to test how to most effectively engage family forest owners with the long-term goal to encourage better forest management and permanent protection for the region's forest lands. This effort is a collaboration of the offices of the State Foresters, NRCS State Conservationists, US Forest Service staff, local officials, and regional conservation partnerships of conservation groups and agencies.

Through the **RI Coverts Project**, NRCS is partnering with the RIRC&D to develop and implement the RI Coverts Program with the goal of teaching woodland owners how sound forest management practices can increase the diversity and abundance of wildlife by improving wildlife habitat. Over the past five years, a total of 84 persons have attended the training. These individuals own a total of 1,898 acres of forest land and are involved in stewardship decision making on another 6,234 acres of land largely associated with land trusts.

**Small Scale Forestry** - There are an estimated 38,400 private woodland owners in RI who own 80 percent of Rhode Island's forest resources. Approximately 24,000 of these woodland owners own less than 10 acres of woodland. NRCS is working with the Northern RI Conservation District, RIRC&D, and the Providence Water Supply Board to investigate issues and opportunities to work with these smaller scale forests.

RI NRCS is interested in identifying opportunities for the development of appropriate **Agroforestry Practices** to replace or augment traditional forest products and to foster natural resource based economic development in rural areas consistent with rural character and lifestyle. RI NRCS in cooperation with the RIRC&D is implementing an agroforestry initiative which will aim to help sustain small farms and private woodland productivity.

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## New England Cottontail Project



### **Wildlife Habitat and Young Forest Management: NRCS and Landowners Help Native Rabbit Species in Addition to Creating Recreational Activities and Improving Air and Water Quality**

Six landowners in five Rhode Island towns have been energetically involved with forest management to benefit the New England cottontail rabbit. This species is the only rabbit that is native to Southern New England and it is a candidate for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. Rhode Island, along with the other New England states, has experienced a decline in the young forests and shrublands due to a combination of increased residential and commercial development. In addition, the remaining forested land that does exist is typically more mature since we are more vigilant in reducing natural disturbances such as fire, which historically maintains young forests.

So far, 112 acres of habitat management for the cottontail has been completed. It is hoped that voluntary landowner participation in habitat enhancement projects may help this rabbit species enough to preclude the need for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Landowners and land trusts in the towns of Richmond, Coventry, Westerly, Exeter, and West Greenwich will receive NRCS financial assistance to implement small “regeneration cuts” on their forest lands to benefit the New England cottontail and over 50 other species which use young forest and “scrub-shrub” areas. For example, migratory songbirds and pollinators benefit from the thick regeneration that occurs after the habitat work is completed. In Rhode Island, approximately \$227,000 in Farm Bill financial assistance was obligated in FY 2012 for these six projects.

Besides the targeted benefit to wildlife, the continuing forest stewardship on these lands has other public benefits. Managing young forests and shrublands creates open scenery and new recreational activities such as bird watching and hiking for people now and in the future. Managing forests also supports the local economy by sustaining jobs in the woods, mills, and supporting industries. Habitat creation provides wood, a renewable resource, which can be used in place of foreign oil, gas, or electricity to heat homes. Forest management also benefits the environment since healthy woods act as filters to improve both air and water quality for all Rhode Islanders.

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