



NRCS Activity Report

for our Conservation Partners

April 2014-July 2014

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Helping People Help the Land

In This Issue

- Administration
- Conservation Districts Update: Programs and Easement Funding
- Eastern, Northern, and Southern Conservation Districts
- Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment
- Resources
- Soils Program

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Message From R. Phou Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist



During the April 2014 to July 2014 period, NRCS staff focused on work related to implementing conservation practices and ranking applications for the first, second, and third ranking period deadlines. This resulted from the enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014 which is commonly referred to as the 2014 Farm Bill. The three periods selected to rank applications are May 30 (Round 1), July 18 (Round 2), and August 29 (Round 3).

From October 2013 to July 2014, there were 611 conservation practices completed worth over \$1,400,000. The Eastern Conservation District implemented 141 conservation practices worth almost \$290,000 with 109 under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The Northern Conservation District implemented 284 conservation practices worth almost \$525,000 with 169 under EQIP. The Southern Conservation District completed 186 conservation practices worth almost \$600,000 with 140 under EQIP. For FY 2014 so far, NRCS Rhode Island approved a total of 134 applications worth almost \$1,100,000. There are an additional 73 applications worth over \$1,500,000 pending approval in the second and third ranking periods.

Regarding outreach and communications from April to July 2014, RI NRCS participated in a total of 17 events which included three high tunnel workshops and two pollinator workshops which were coordinated in cooperation with the Rhode Island Conservation Districts. NRCS also participated in two recruiting events including the URI Spring Career Fair and Mount Pleasant High School Career Fair. NRCS had information available at two Young Farmer Network events which target the growing number of young farmers in the state. To inform the general public on the importance of conservation, NRCS had exhibit booths at several venues including RI Ag Day at the RI State House, Earth Day Party for the Planet, and URI East Farm Spring Festival among others.

R. PHOU VONGKHAMDY
State Conservationist

Administration

by *Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist*



Through the Pathways Intern Program, the two summer interns including Zachery Fisher and Tim Brosnan continued to work in conservation planning with the field staff while continuing their academic studies at the University of Rhode Island. Ghyllian Conley, who started as a Pathways Intern in 2013, recently graduated with a degree in geology from the University of Rhode Island and was promoted to a Soil Conservationist. NRCS staff extends a warm welcome to our interns and congratulations to Ghyllian for her promotion.

David Gold, NRCS Civil Engineer, recently departed the agency to pursue a Master's Degree in Engineering at Cornell University in New York. In addition, Maggie Payne, RI Soil Conservationist, was recently promoted to a Soil Scientist position in West Wareham, Massachusetts. NRCS staff wishes both of them much success in their future endeavors.

Conservation Districts Updates Including Programs and Easements Funding

by *Michael Kenyon, Easement Program Manager*

Rhode Island received its first applications for the new Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) this fiscal year. The new ACEP consists of two components which include the Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) and the Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE). The ALE component combines the "old" Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) and Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) while the WRE component operates like the "old" Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). One ALE application and three WRE applications have been received. The Program Staff has been working to review the applications and determine eligibility and completeness of the applications. Until regulations

have been promulgated for the 2014 Farm Bill, temporary administration and implementation of ACEP will be under the existing FRPP, GRP, and WRP regulations.

In addition, the Program Staff has been working with the National Easement Staff on completing a detailed inventory of all easement files both closed (acquired parcels) and open (pending parcels) for quality review. Information gathered has been and continues to be cross referenced with information in the National Easement Staging Tool (NEST) and updated if necessary.

The Program Staff has also been working with the Field Staff in monitoring the stewardship lands.

Conservation Districts-Overview

by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist

Conservation Practices Implemented October 2013-July 2014			
District	Program	Number of Practices	Sum of Payments
Eastern	AMA	2	\$7,347
	CSP	20	\$8,748
	EQIP	109	\$229,614
	WHIP	10	\$44,153
Eastern Total		141	\$289,863
Northern	CSP	79	\$22,313
	EQIP	169	\$387,315
	WHIP	36	\$113,488
Northern Total		284	\$523,115
Southern	CSP	22	\$33,968
	EQIP	140	\$461,604
	WHIP	24	\$99,651
Southern Total		186	\$595,223
Grand Total		611	\$1,408,201

FY 2014 Applications Approved Oct. 2013-July 2014			
District	Program	Number of Contracts	Estimated Contract Cost
Eastern	AMA	2	\$10,904
	EQIP	21	\$127,650
Eastern Total		23	\$138,554
Northern	CSP	3	\$1,294
	EQIP	53	\$244,434
Northern Total		56	\$245,728
Southern	CSP	3	\$6,343
	EQIP	52	\$680,691
Southern Total		55	\$687,034
Grand Total		134	\$1,071,316

Applications Received Pending Approval in 2 and 3 Ranking Periods		
Eastern		
AMA	4	\$13,671
EQIP	21	\$1,077,588
Eastern Total	25	\$1,091,259
Northern		
EQIP	32	\$264,673
Northern Total	32	\$264,673
Southern		
AMA	1	\$6,000
EQIP	15	\$171,589
Southern Total	16	\$177,589
Grand Total	73	\$1,533,521

Conservation District - Eastern District (Bristol and Newport Counties)

by Melissa Hayden, Eastern District Conservationist

The Eastern District has been working on processing applications for FY2014 programs. This has included completing inventory and evaluations at all application sites, developing conservation plans, developing contracts, ranking applications, and obtaining contract signatures for obligation.

NRCS and the Eastern RI Conservation District held a high tunnel workshop in April at to provide outreach to landowners and discuss high tunnel production and construction. In July, Ghyllian Conley joined the Eastern District staff as a soil conservationist. Ghyllian recently graduated from the University of Rhode Island with a degree in geology.

Ongoing contracting work included completion of Conservation Stewardship Program payments and progress on 2014 contract reviews. Planning and ranking was also completed for new applications which were received for the second and third ranking period. So far, 23 contracts have been approved worth \$138,554 which include 2 Agricultural Management Assistance Program applications worth over an estimated \$10,000 and 21 EQIP contracts worth an estimated \$127,650. In addition, there are approximately 25 additional applications received but not yet ranked during the second and third rounds worth almost \$1,100,000.

The Eastern Conservation District staff worked diligently to implement conservation practices during the October 2013-July 2014 period. A total of 141 conservation practices were implemented worth almost \$290,000. There were 109 EQIP practices completed worth almost \$230,000, 20 CSP practices completed worth over \$8,700, 10 WHIP practices completed worth over \$44,000, and 2 AMA practices completed worth over \$7,000. Some of the most popular practices completed included: the 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 October 2013-July 2014 time frame.

Conservation District - Northern District (Providence County)

by Justin Tuthill, Northern District Conservationist

- The Northern District in cooperation with NRCS worked diligently to accept and conduct site visits for several EWP applicants in the town of Johnston.
- NRICD with NRCS also held a Pollinator workshop at Hi-On-A-Hill Herb Farm in North Smithfield.
- Providence County NRCS has obligated 53 EQIP contracts for \$244,000 in FY 2014 round one.
- Currently Providence County NRCS has 32 applications for EQIP 3rd round with a total estimated cost of \$265,000
- Providence County NRCS continues to implement an agreement with the Northern RI Conservation District that employs an Ag Technician to assist with program implementation, planning and practice implementation. This agreement has been extremely useful with regards to the planning and implementation of Forest Conservation Activity Plans through the EQIP program.

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implementation. This agreement has been extremely useful with regards to the planning and implementation of Forest Conservation Activity Plans through the EQIP program.

Ongoing contracting work included completion of Conservation Stewardship Program payments and progress on 2014 contract reviews. Planning and ranking was also completed for new applications which were received for the second and third ranking period. So far, 56 contracts have been approved worth \$245,728 which include 3 Conservation Stewardship Program applications worth an estimated \$1,200 and 53 EQIP contracts worth an estimated \$244,434. In addition, there are approximately 32 additional applications received but not yet ranked during the second and third rounds worth almost \$265,000.

The Northern Rhode Island Conservation District staff focused on implementing 284 conservation practices worth almost \$525,000 during the October 2013-July 2014 period. There were 169 EQIP practices completed worth almost \$388,000, 36 WHIP practices completed worth over \$113,000 and 79 CSP implemented worth over \$22,000. Some of the most popular practices implemented included Forest Stand Improvement, Brush Management, and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans.

Conservation District - Southern District (Kent and Washington Counties)

by John Richard, Southern District Conservationist

So far in FY 2014, the Southern Conservation District approved 55 contracts which include 53 EQIP contracts worth over \$680,000 and 3 CSP contracts worth over \$6,300. Currently there are 16 additional applications received during the 2nd and 3rd ranking periods which include 15 EQIP applications worth an estimated \$171,589 and 1 AMA application worth \$6,000.

During the October 2013-July 2014 period, the Southern District completed and certified 186 conservation practices totaling almost \$600,000. There were 140 EQIP practices completed worth over \$460,000, 22 WHIP practices implemented worth almost \$100,000 and, and 22 CSP practices completed worth over \$33,000. Some of the more popular practices implemented included Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats, Fencing, Timber Stand Improvement, and Pasture Planting.

Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment

by *Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist*



Host Jo-Anne Pacheco explains benefits of pollinator habitat created at Hi-on-a Hill Herb Farm.

During the April 2014-July 2014 period, NRCS actively participated in a total of 15 outreach events. Such events included three high tunnel workshops coordinated with the RI Conservation Districts which were well attended. They were held at Stone Crophe Farm in Tiverton, RI, Red Planet Vegetables in Johnston, RI, and Matunuck Vegetable Farm in South Kingstown, RI. Attendees learned about the many benefits of high tunnels including the extension of the growing season and harvesting cold, hardy crops all winter. Other topics highlighted were the high tunnel design and construction, pest control, irrigation requirements, and NRCS technical and financial assistance. There were two pollinator workshops held at Hi-on-a-Hill Herb Farm in North Smithfield, RI and Godena Farm in Jamestown, RI. Gary Casabona, State Biologist, presented on the importance of native pollinators, best pollinator species, conservation practices to increase crop yields, and NRCS' financial assistance available.



Workers install a high tunnel at a local farm in Rhode Island which extends the growing season.



Students compete at the 20th annual Envirothon held at Snake Den Farm in Johnston, RI on May 16, 2014.

NRCS staff provided technical support participating in the 2014 Envirothon competition which was held at Snake Den Farm in Johnston, RI on May 16, 2014. It marked the 20th annual completion for Rhode Island Envirothon where students from eight schools in the state demonstrated their knowledge of forestry, soils, aquatics science, wildlife ecology, and sustainable local agriculture. There was a considerable increase in the number of students participating in the competition where several schools had two or three teams. Several conservation partners provided technical assistance for the event including the RI Department of Environmental Management, RI Conservation Districts, RI State Conservation Committee, Audubon Society of RI, and the RI Natural History Survey. The awards were presented by Janet Coit, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. The top ranking team was from Narragansett High School, followed by Coventry High School which ranked second, and Scituate High School which ranked third.

NRCS participated in two recruiting events which included the University of Rhode Island Spring Career Fair held April 2, 2014 and the Mount Pleasant High School Career Fair held May 7, 2014. Students at the high school and university level learned about NRCS career opportunities, educational requirements, and summer internships.



Rhode Island AG Day was held at the Rhode Island State House on May 1, 2014 where NRCS had an exhibit booth to showcase conservation efforts throughout Rhode Island. The event provided the opportunity for RI DEM, agricultural related associations, local farmers, universities, local food organizations, and government agencies to network with legislators. Emphasis was placed on the value and importance that agriculture has for Rhode Island's economy and

NRCS staff member Jackie Pashnik discusses conservation information with Ken Ayars from RI DEM during Ag Day at the RI State House on May 1, 2014.

quality of life.

NRCS provided information on its financial and technical assistance targeted to livestock producers at the RI Raised Livestock Association's annual meeting held April 7, 2014. Targeting the growing number of young farmers in Rhode Island, NRCS worked with the RI Conservation District staff to provide information on NRCS programs at Young Farmers Network events held at Mowry Gardens on June 4, 2014 and Windmist Farm on July 30, 2014. Other outreach events where NRCS provided general conservation information with the assistance of the RI Conservation Districts included the Earth Day Party for the Planet at Roger Williams Park Zoo on April 25, 2014, Arbor Day at Snake Den Farm on April 24, 2014, URI East Farm Spring Festival on May 10, 2014, Good Earth Garden Party on May 10, 2014, and Westerly Land Trust Market Garden Party on May 10, 2014.

Resources

by Chris Modisette, State Resource Conservationist

Wildlife

NRCS-RI State Biologist, Gary Casabona, was invited to speak at the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association's lecture series "Adapting the Watershed." The lectures focused on adaptations to climate change. Gary co-presented with Dr. Peter August of URI on the topic of "Conserving Tomorrow's Plants and Animals Today." Dr. August spoke about GIS modeling of species movements in response to climate change, such as predictions of tree species ranges moving northward. Gary spoke about pollinator habitat management as it relates to potential changes in herbaceous plant species communities. Plants which provide pollen and nectar for native pollinators, such as bumble bees, are critically important to ensure that we have sufficient native bees to pollinate our agricultural crops. The management concept is to plant or seed many different species of valuable pollinator plants – because we're not sure which plants will adapt well to climate change, and which ones will not. Establishing a wide diversity of species will ensure availability of pollen and nectar. NRCS offers both technical and financial assistance for establishment of pollinator habitat.

Outreach

RI RC&D Annual Meeting, April 16th

RI Forest Conservators Spring Workshop, May 3rd

RI Envirothon Competition, May 16th

Pollinator Lecture to Master Gardeners, May 28th

RI Woods to Water Partnership Meeting, June 5th

Northern RI Conservation District Pollinator Workshop, June 10th

Eastern RI Conservation District Pollinator Workshop @ Godena farm, Jamestown – June 16th

Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association presentation on Pollinators and Climate Change, July 24th

SARE Summer Workshop - Grass-fed All Year Long workshop, Windmist Farm, Jamestown, August 5th

Resource Conservation (Eric Boettger)

- Requested to participate on a RI State Guide Plan Advisory Committee to update the state's water quality plan.
- Participated on Narragansett Bay Estuary Program Management committee.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

USDA's new **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**, which brings together businesses, tribes, communities, and other non-government partners to invest in conservation efforts, has drawn an overwhelming response from partners across the nation. Nearly 5,000 organizations, including some from Rhode Island, partnered together to submit nearly **600 pre-proposals** by the July deadline.

The pre-proposals demonstrated how partners across the nation plan to work together to further conservation stewardship on agricultural lands.

The total amount of NRCS funding requested is more than six times the available funding. About \$2.8 billion was requested while \$394 million is available for fiscal 2014/2015. Pre-proposal submissions were received from all 50 states and each **critical conservation area**, and they varied from \$6,000 to \$20 million in requested funds.

"This program is an entirely new approach to conservation," Secretary Vilsack said. "By establishing new public-private partnerships, we can have an impact that's well beyond what the Federal government could accomplish on its own. And we put our partners in the driver's seat, allowing them to find creative solutions to the conservation issues in their local areas. The overwhelming response to this new effort illustrates eagerness across the country to partner and invest in innovative conservation projects."

Soils Program

by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist

NRCS Assists With Radar Investigation at Stony Lane Baptist Church Cemetery



Assistant State Soil Scientist Jim Turenne utilizes ground penetrating radar equipment to assess the composition of soil for possible human remains at the Stony Lane Baptist Church cemetery.

Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist, completed ground-penetrating radar (GPR) investigation at the Stony Lane Baptist Church Cemetery to assist in locating possible human remains in the soil in areas unmarked by monuments. Ground penetrating radar (GRP) provides high resolution images of subsurface features and is frequently used to help locate human remains in soil and under concrete. Turenne profiled the historic cemetery which dates to approximately 1703 when the land was deeded for use as a meeting house commonly known as Old Baptist Meeting House. The data results are currently in the process of being analyzed to determine if any human remains exist in the unmarked areas.

Soils

1st International Soil Judging Contest

The 1st International Soil Judging contest was held in June in South Korea. Team USA had two teams (A and B) and they placed 1st and 2nd in the competition. NRCS' intern, Bianca Peixoto, was in the contest along with other top U.S. soil judges. Bianca also paced 12th in the Individuals competition.



Bianca Peixoto, URI student and former NRCS summer intern poses at the 2014 National Collegiate Judging Competition. During the national event, Peixoto placed first in the individual competition!

National Collegiate Soils Contest

Delaware Valley College was the site of the 2014 National Collegiate Soil Judging Competition this past April. More than 100 students from 19 colleges and universities participated. Many of the teams drove to campus for the chance to compete, coming from far away states such as Kansas. The national soil judging contest has been held at a different host institution each year since 1961. Soil contestants arrive at various soil pits and are expected to correctly identify, evaluate, classify, and describe four soil profiles.

This year the **University of Rhode Island team placed 2nd** in the overall Team Competition and **Bianca Peixoto, from Rhode Island, placed 1st** in the Individual Competition.

To view the new soils data, visit the Web Soil Survey at:

<http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>

A version will be posted on the RIGIS site in the near future.

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