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Contact Us

USDA NRCS
60 Quaker Lane,
Suite 46
Warwick, RI 02886
Ph: 401.828.1300
Fax: 401.828.0433

Message From Pooh Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist



Island.

Greetings from the Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office. During May and June, I worked extensively with staff to implement the 2008 Farm Bill programs spending time meeting the various partners who pay an integral role in conservation efforts throughout Rhode

Island.
Highlights among the various activities include the following:

NRCS conducted Technical Service Provider (TSP) workshops with much success with several individuals attending to eventually work with NRCS in the future. In addition, staff conducted two technical trainings on erosion and surveying.

Several additional outreach events were completed including a presentation through the Bryant University Community Connections where several Russian visitors learned how NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to local farmers and landowners and thus encourages economic growth.

NRCS staff worked diligently to conduct conservation field visits resulting from a record number of applications received for FY 2009.

I look forward to working with the staff and partners to continue the implementation of funding related to our FY 2009 budget.



PHOUKHAM "POOH" VONGKHAMDY
State Conservationist



Picture 1. Oyster farmers transport oyster seed to their farms.

Lower Narragansett Bay

by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist

On Tuesday, June 9, 2009, 13 aquaculture producers (oyster farmers) began the 2009 oyster restoration project funded through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The goal of the effort is to increase the native oyster population, provide essential oyster reef habitat to benefit a wide variety of aquatic organisms, and improve water quality.

This project is believed to be the first, large scale oyster restoration program in the U.S. that is totally industry based. Playing a pivotal role partnering with NRCS and other organizations, oyster farmers have adapted their expertise in growing market ready oysters to the oyster restoration project. The NRCS-funded oyster farmers grow, rear, and transplant oysters for three years using approved oyster seed on shell oyster setting techniques. The farmers are responsible for obtaining certified seed on shell oyster larvae, growing out juvenile oysters for five months on their farms, and transplanting the oysters to approved oyster habitat restoration sites throughout Narragansett Bay and the coastal ponds.

In 2008, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) awarded \$792,000 to eight Rhode Island oyster farmers. This initial effort yielded approximately 2.5 million oysters which were transplanted to several restoration sites. For 2009, additional funding was sought by a total of 13 growers to produce approximately 24 million oysters over the next three years. This year alone, an estimated 8.9 million oysters will be grown for restoration effort. Last week, half of the participating farmers obtained 1,300 bags of oyster seed on shell from a hatchery in Dennis, MA where they were transported to their individual farms for the summer grow-out. A second set is scheduled for late June.

The farmers will grow out the juvenile oysters for approximately five months on their farms. From July through September, the oysters will be periodically observed to monitor growth. In the fall, site visits will be conducted at each grow-out location to calculate and measure the number of live, healthy oysters. On average, oysters are required to be 1 inch or larger before they can be transplanted to the final restoration sites which will occur from the fall into the winter.

RI NRCS worked in collaboration with leaders from the aquaculture industry, DEM, the University of Rhode Island, Coastal Resources Management Council, Roger Williams University, Ocean State Aquaculture Association, and The Nature Conservancy to develop an oyster restoration program modeled on successful citizen volunteer and academic oyster restoration programs along the Atlantic seaboard.

Economics - Happenings

by Reena Shaw, Economist

Fiscal Year 2009 has been a big year for change. A new Administration and a new Farm Bill have resulted in several deadline extensions and amendments to the FY 2009 Practice Payment Schedule (PPS). The Rhode Island State Economist continues to work diligently to keep abreast of these changes as they occur. Due to the number of amendments, the state office is working toward posting the FY 2009 PPS at <http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/treemenuFS.aspx>, Section 1, Item C2 Cost data, and 2 Conservation Practice Cost List, 2009 Practice Payment Schedule and Item D. Cost Data Sheets FY2009. Please look for these



files in early August.

The State Economist is also now working on the draft PPS for FY 2010. Our partners are encouraged to review past years PPS and cost list and provide data and/or other comments to the state office regarding the incentive payments provided to our clients.

NEPA

by Reena Shaw, NEPA Liaison

NRCS has added 21 new categorical exclusions to our regulation implementing NEPA for actions that the Agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the environment. As a result, we no longer need to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for these actions as long as there are no "extraordinary circumstances" present. However, we are still required to prepare an Environmental Evaluation Worksheet (Form NRCS-CPA-52) to document the presence or absence of "extraordinary circumstances" and to comply with any other applicable NRCS policies and environmental laws, such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Executive Orders, etc., included in the NRCS list of Special Environmental Concerns. These categorical exclusions apply to actions for both technical assistance as well as financial assistance.

We currently have only five listed categorical exclusions that cover soil survey, snow survey, plant materials for conservation, inventory and monitoring, and river basin studies. The expanded list of categorical exclusions will expedite environment compliance for our conservation programs, such as the watershed rehabilitation, and watershed operations and easement programs, which currently may require preparation of an EA or EIS. The expanded list will also expedite environmental compliance for any of our other program actions denoted on the expanded list of categorical exclusions including, but not limited to certain restoration activities associated with the easement programs.

State Staff will be participating in a net meeting on August 3, 2009, to obtain training regarding this expanded list for categorical exclusions.

For more information, please visit the following link:

<http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/viewerFS.aspx?hid=25178>

Outreach and Communications-Happenings

by Walter Marshall, State Public Affairs Specialist

NRCS sponsored a booth at the 2009 Rhode Island Ag Day at the RI State House which was well attended by several partners in the agricultural community and the general public. NRCS also sponsored a display at the Johnny Cake Festival at Kenyon's Grist Mill.

Other outreach events included two Technical Service Provider (TSP) workshops, a RIFCO workshop, Celebrate South County Days, and two technical presentations on surveying and erosion/sediment control.

A presentation was conducted by State Conservationist Pooh Vongkhamdy for several Russian visitors who were provided insight on how local farmers and landowners receive technical and financial



A student analyzes soil at the 2009 Envirothon event.

assistance which encourages economic development.

Regarding press releases, six were completed and disseminated to the news media and conservation partners. Topics highlighted included the EQIP Organic Initiative, FRPP, Envirothon, Rhode Island CIG, 2009 Oyster Restoration Season, and second WHIP application period.

NRCS was played a prominent role in the 2009 Envirothon competition held at Goddard Memorial State Park where Coventry High School won the event. NRCS staff provided technical assistance judging students' responses to the various environmental challenges.

Outreach Event	Date	People Reached
RI Ag Day	05/05/09	50
RIFCO Spring Workshop	05/09/09	25
Celebrate South County Days	05/12/09	250
TSP (Forestry) Training Workshop	06/03/09	16
NRCS & TSP Workshop of CAP	06/10/09	31
Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting	06/19/09	12
Certified Professionals in Erosion & Sed Control	06/29/09	9
Total		393

Performance Update

by Jackie Pashnik, Management Analyst

Statewide Performance Goals (as of July 24, 2009)

Performance Measures 2008	Program	Goal	Progress	Percent
Conservation plans written, acres	CTA	--	2,336	--
Watershed or area-wide conservation plans developed, number	CTA	--		--
	RC&D	6		
Soil surveys mapped or updated, acres	SOILS	1,400		
Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality, acres	CTA	250		
	EQIP	930	614	66%
Land with conservation applied to improve water quality, acres	CTA	5.054		
	EQIP	1,409	1,198	85%
CNMP written, number	CTA	--		--
	EQIP	--		--
CNMP applied, number	CTA	2	1	50%
	EQIP	2	1	50%
Land with conservation applied to improve irrigation efficiency, acres	CTA	114		
	EQIP	--	173	--
Grazing and forest land with conservation applied to protect and improve the resource base, acres	CTA	900		
	EQIP	1,600	992	62%

Non-federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality, acres	CTA	482		
	EQIP	204	721	353%
	WHIP	935		
Wetlands created, restored or enhanced, acres	CTA	4,150		
Farmland, forestland, and grazing lands protected by conservation easements, acres	FRPP	132		
Prime, unique, or important farmland protected by conservation easements, acres	FRPP	--		--
Land and water resources benefited by RC&D projects, acres	RC&D	2,100		
Local businesses created in rural communities, number	RC&D	32		

-- denotes not available.

Engineering - Update

by Meghan Walter, Hydraulic Engineer

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) RI NRCS received \$2.4 million for the design and construction of four Emergency Watershed Protection – Floodplain Easement (EWP-FPE) projects. The purpose of this program is to restore floodplain functions and values. Of the four projects, one is located in West Warwick and three are in Cranston. The projects consist of restoration of oxbows along the Pawtuxet River (Cranston), relocating an existing drainage channel near Blackmore Pond (Cranston), breaching an existing dike to access floodplain near the confluence of the Pocasset and Pawtuxet Rivers (Cranston), and restoration of an historic stream channel through culvert removal (West Warwick).

Work continues on the Pocasset Watershed Plan. A new task order was signed July 7 with Fuss and O'Neill for additional work items to complete the Watershed Plan.

A Notice of Intent to develop an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published in the Federal Register on July 10. A kick-off meeting was held at NRCS offices on July 6 with a six-week period of performance to complete the task items.

The following items have been completed under the task order:

1. Revised Table of Contents has been completed.
2. Photo renderings of two critical areas have been developed for typical floodwall sites.
3. An alternatives matrix was completed to justify the economic, social and environmental reasons for project alternatives.
4. A revised map was developed to clearly show two related flood areas in a single map.

Frank Vogel, Civil Engineer, attended Construction Inspection training in Syracuse, New York. Jade Nield, Assistant State Engineer, is out on maternity leave.

Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)

by Chris Modisette, RC&D Coordinator

The following information highlights the activities of the Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Area (RI RC&D).

1. Attendance/participation at 32 events with approximately 1,260 attendees. Some highlights include:

- RI Ag Day Celebration at the State House, May 5, 2009
- RIFCO Forestry Field Day, May 9, 2009
- Celebrate South County Days at the State House, May 12, 2009
- RI Envirothon Competition, May 21, 2009
- RI Tree Farm Program Performance Assessment, May 27, 2009
- NRCS Conservation Partners Outreach Meeting, June 1, 2009
- Rhody Warm Wool Collection Day, June 6, 2009
- Forest Legacy Committee, June 8, 2009
- Bryant University Community Connections, June 2009

2. RC&D Council Capacity

a. Area Plan Update

The RI RC&D Area Council's existing Area Plan was approved in May 2004 for the period from June 2004 – September 2009. As such the RI RC&D Council completed the following activities in furtherance of this plan:

- Held three (3) Area Plan meetings with the Council

3. RI Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator

RIRC&D is working with the Rhode Island Division of Forest Environment (RIDFE) to coordinate the implementation of the Rhode Island Urban and Community Forestry Program. The RC&D Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator reported the following accomplishments:

- Attended three (3) Arbor Day ceremonies where I presented the communities with their Tree City USA awards:
- Attended the RITree Tree Steward Class at URI East Farm:
- Presentation to Ms. Facey's 5th grade class at Kingston Academy in Saunderstown.
- Planned Arborist Workshop on June 23 at the South Foster Volunteer Fire Department. Over 700 RI Licensed Arborists invited;
- Participated at a planting and inventory workshop in Exeter, RI;
- Planned and attended the Working Safely Workshop at the South Foster Volunteer Fire department; and
 - Proctored the Arborist exam on June 26, 2009.

He also continued planning for future outreach on Asian Longhorn Beetle Surveys and Urban Tree Canopy Project.

4. RI River and Stream Continuity Project

- The Draft Watershed Area Plans for the Beaver and Clear River watershed have been completed and are available for review and



comments. To obtain a copy, please contact Kathryn Zuromski at Kathryn.Zuromski@ri.usda.gov or by calling 401-822-8877;

- Inventory work with the Northern RI Chapter of Trout Unlimited continues in the Clear and Millers Rivers watersheds. To date, approximately 150 of these sites have been inventoried
- Inventory work is underway in the balance of the Pawcatuck watershed by the Narragansett Chapter of TU;

6. "Rhody Warm" - Surplus Wool Project

4TH ANNUAL RHODY WARM WOOL COLLECTION DAY

Date: Saturday, June 6, 2009

Time: 9:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.

Location: Urban Edge Farm, 35 Pippin Orchard Road, Cranston, RI

35 producers participated and collected over 2,400 pounds of wool for processing.

7. Pawcatuck Water Optimization Project

- USGS has completed the final study and draft Circular
- RC&D reconvened the project Technical Advisory Committee on June 4, 2009
- Formed Outreach Committee



Soils Program - Happenings

by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist

Outreach Events:



Outreach Events:

A talk on the RI NRCS needs and uses of Lidar data was presented at the USGS conference on Lidar at Woods Hole in Falmouth, MA. The soil staff also assisted the Ri Envirothon competition that was held at Goddard Park, a nice Hinesburg soil was used for the soil pit.

On-site Assistance:

The soil staff conducted numerous on-site soil investigations to support the planners and engineering staff. On-site assistance included hydric soil determinations, logging soil pits for engineering structures, FRPP, Rapid Watershed Assessment, and elevation surveys.

National Cooperative Soil Survey Conference:

The RI Assistant State Soil Scientist attended the National Cooperative Soil Survey Conference in Las Cruces New Mexico. The National conference is held every two years in various locations, the purpose of the conferences are to meet with members of the cooperative soil survey and discuss research, direction, and uses of soil survey data. The RI staff participated in the subaqueous soil workgroup and provided information about the RI MapCoast partnership.

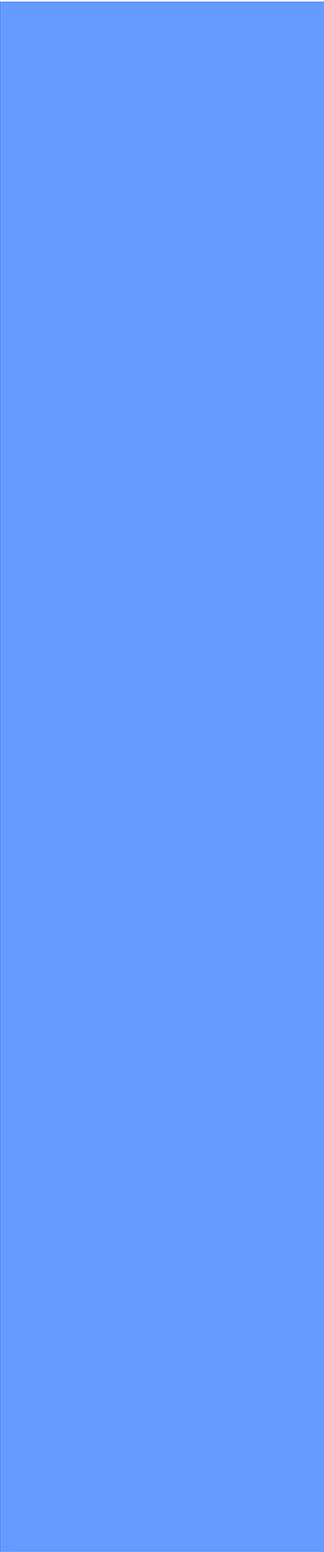
MapCoast Update:

The MapCoast field crew has been busy mapping and collecting data in the South County Coastal Lagoons and also some of the fresh water ponds in RI. Soil cores,

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bathymetric surveys, and side-scan sonar mapping has been underway during the non-rainy days of the spring/summer with work planning to continue through the late fall. Plans are underway to complete the soil mapping for the coastal lagoons and have the mapping and data moved to the Web Soil Survey by next year.