



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
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[www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov)

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**New Jersey State Technical Committee Meeting  
Wednesday, December 7, 2011  
MINUTES**

**Those in attendance:**

Janice Reid – NRCS	Mike Westendorf – Rutgers Cooperative Extension	Justine Cook – NOFA – NJ
Larry Katz – Rutgers Cooperative Extension	Marie Banasiak – NJFB	Fran Grasso – NRCS
Brian Zarate – NJDEP-Division of Fish and Wildlife-ENSP	Liz Thompson – NJFB	Barb Phillips – NRCS
Mackenzie Hall – Conserve Wildlife Foundation	Christine Hall – NRCS	Lauren Rega - NRCS
Dave Clapp – NJDA	Brad Smith – TNC	Kristina Heinemann (via phone) – EPA
John Parke – NJ Audubon	Kim Korth – NJDEP-Division of Fish and Wildlife	Kathleen Hitchner - NJDEP
Kathy Hale – NJWSA	Sam Conard – Somerset County Farmer	Don Pettit – NRCS
Audrey Moore – USEPA Region 2	Betsy Clarke – NRCS	Amy Hansen – NJCF
Nancy Coles – FSA	Charles Rhoor – NJDA - SADC	Dominick Mondì- NJNLA
		Elizabeth Ciuzio - USFWS

**Welcome:**

The meeting was called to order at 10:05am by Don Pettit, State Conservationist. Don welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

**Minutes:**

Nancy Coles found minor typing errors in the September minutes. Christine Hall sent out the corrected minutes before the meeting. The September minutes were reviewed and accepted.

**NRCS/USDA 2012 Budget Status:**

President Obama signed a minibus for FY 2012 which includes the USDA budget for 2012. The state allocations have not yet been distributed. The minibus suggests an overall cut of about 15 percent in funding. Decisions are still being made to determine where the cuts will occur. The allocation formula has changed for this fiscal year. In previous years, we received our allocations and then made budgetary decisions. This fiscal year, each state sent in a budget request based on natural resource needs identified in the State Resource Assessment.

Don Pettit and Janice Reid will be attending the 2011 New Jersey Governor's Environmental Excellence Awards Ceremony in Trenton. Two projects funded by NJ NRCS will be recognized. In the Healthy Ecosystems Category, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation was awarded for their WRP funded wetlands restoration project at the Franklin Parker Preserve. In the Land Conservation Category, the

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AMA – Agricultural Management Assistance Program  
AWEP – Agricultural Water Enhancement Program  
CAP – Conservation Activity Plan  
CCPI – Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative  
CIG – Conservation Innovation Grant  
CRP – Conservation Reserve Program  
CREP - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program  
FRPP – Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program  
GRP – Grassland Reserve Program  
HFRP – Healthy Forest Reserve Program  
SAFE – State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement  
WHIP – Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program  
WRP – Wetlands Reserve Program

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New Jersey Audubon was awarded for their CIG funded Support Agriculture Viability and the Environment (SAVE) Initiative.

#### Old Business: Outreach Subcommittee Update

Barb Phillips reported that the USDA discrimination information continues to be a priority for all USDA agencies to spread the word regarding the [Hispanic/Women's farmer discrimination claims](#). An adjudicator will be assigned for this case and will be responsible for distributing more information about the claims process.

The outreach subcommittee will be meeting in January to regroup and discuss opportunities to promote the EQIP initiatives.

The outreach subcommittee will be working on developing the media lists and contacts to better get the word out about program opportunities and to reach potential applicants.

In addition, we have agreements with three Soil Conservation Districts (Morris, Mercer and Gloucester). These districts will be hosting workshops during the winter months on topics such as soil quality, water quality/quantity, and energy conservation. Each workshop will also feature an intro to USDA and training on how to apply for NRCS programs.

We are also getting involved in social media and have created a twitter account. We have posted one 'tweet' on the wetlands restoration construction event at Duke Farms. NRCS NJ already has 13 followers on twitter after one post. Increasing our presence in social media outlets is another project that the outreach committee may get involved in to help increase awareness to potential customers that we would not necessarily have contact with.

Don Pettit reiterated that extending our outreach helps to ensure we are meeting the historically undeserved groups. We want to publicize our information to people that would not normally walk through our doors. If we provide our information through multiple media outlets, we expand our outreach to more potential customers.

For more information about the outreach subcommittee, contact [Barb Phillips](#).

#### CRP, CREP, SAFE, GRP Activity

Nancy Coles gave an update of the Farm Service Agency programs (CRP, CREP, and SAFE). See attachment for more information. Nancy reminded everyone that GRP is a continuous sign up, but the application closing date for FY 2012 will be Friday, December 30, 2011. There is a NJ Fact Sheet available on the NRCS website at <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/grp/index.html>.

John Parke commented that there is a need for more web information regarding SAFE. He recognizes that SAFE is a program that could benefit from more outreach, but finds it difficult to obtain program information on the FSA website. Nancy Coles said she would bring the suggestions for more web content for SAFE back to the FSA web designers.

#### WRP Easement Acquisition Status

Janice Reid reported the WRP easement status. Although not official, we will be funding and ready to close on 4 WRP easements in December 2011.

- 29.5 located in Salem County
- 41.8 acres in Salem County
- 76 acres in Cumberland County
- 41.1 acres in Burlington County

All of the landowners expressed interest to close this calendar year if we were able to and it looks like we will be able to accomplish that. The new state total will be 4381.7 acres in WRP. The deadline for FY 2012 is December 30<sup>th</sup>.

John Parke asked a question regarding the rule that requires an applicant to own the property for 7 years prior to enrolling in WRP. Janice mentioned the 7 year ownership rule can be waived depending on the individual circumstances. The landowner needs to be able to prove they did not purchase the property in order to be able to enroll in the program. The WRP manual provides guidance on the requirements.

The sign-up for WRP is continuous. We have the opportunity to fund applications after the cut off if we have additional funds. We are receiving additional applications, which is likely due to the increased outreach for the program through the help with our partners.

## NJ CIG Recipients

Christine Hall reported that all contracts have been signed. Of the 8 applications, we had 4 applications that the committee wished to fund. One of the applicants opted out and we were able to move forward with 3 projects.

The first CIG project was awarded to Spectrum BioEnergy to demonstrate the feasibility of using small-scale anaerobic digestion technology to convert horse manure into energy and soil nutrient. This project was awarded \$44,160.

The second project funded was to the Atlantic County Board of Agriculture to monitor, evaluate, and demonstrate to NJ farmers the potential impacts of seasonal high tunnel systems on nutrient, pest, and irrigation management. This project was awarded \$75,000.

The third CIG project was awarded to Rutgers University to determine soil quality improvement with leaf wastes combined with cover crops, rotations, and reduced tillage. He will be producing a guide to improve soil organic matter with conservation practices. This project was awarded \$67,375.

As these projects move forward, if there is any interest we can see if any of the grantees would be willing to present at our meetings. The hope is that we can use the technical information obtained through the CIG grants. The goal is to fund projects with transferable information for our technical guides and practice standards to improve how we do business.

Our goal is to announce the FY 12 NJ CIG program in January after the national CIG program announcements.

A question was raised regarding the Seasonal High Tunnel Systems. Don Pettit explained that to a casual observer, the seasonal high tunnel system might look like a greenhouse. However, the plants are grown in the soil, not in containers and the covers are removable. It extends the growing season by warming the soil on both sides of the growing season. The purpose of the CIG grant is to study the effects of seasonal high tunnels for conservation benefits. For example, are we reducing our use of pesticides? Visit the NY NRCS website for more information about the conservation of seasonal high tunnel systems: <http://www.ny.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/practices/pc798.html>

## New Business:

### 2012 EQIP Initiatives – Outreach needs

Janice Reid reported that the National Initiatives have officially been announced by headquarters. The national initiatives applicable to NJ are organic, energy, and seasonal high tunnel. The application cut off dates are February 3, March 30, and June 1. The sign-up windows are very tight. NRCS has a 10 day turn around to visit the farm, develop conservation plans, write up the contract, complete the ranking, etc.

please stress the importance to potential applicants to be sure that they have all eligibility information ready at the time of application or the application will be rolled into the next sign-up period.

There will be no NJ specific information regarding these initiatives. The NJ website will link to the national initiative websites when they become available. The practices for each initiative were decided nationally.

The energy initiative will not only cover the Agricultural Energy Management Plans, but will also be focusing on practices that may have been recommended by an energy audit. Farmstead Energy Improvement recommendations must be from an Agricultural Energy Management Plan or Energy Audit completed to ANSI/ASABE S612 Standards.

The payment for the seasonal high tunnel practice is limited to 5% of 1 acre or 2,178 square feet. This is the maximum for any farm operation. However, the related conservation practices may be applied to other seasonal high tunnels on the farm. For example, nutrient management is eligible on all seasonal high tunnels on the farm. The payment rate for the scenario(s) for the seasonal high tunnel practice is nationally determined and has not yet been announced.

There is a concern regarding impervious cover with seasonal high tunnels. The CIG project will hopefully determine more information regarding the conservation impacts of this farming practice.

NRCS does have specifications to determine the proper use of a seasonal high tunnel. (See the attached interim conservation practice standard.)

Another concern mentioned is that not all seasonal high tunnel products are appropriate for use in NJ. Perhaps Rutgers can develop a fact sheet for the standards and specifications for the type of seasonal high tunnels that work best in NJ cropping systems and climate.

The group discussed opportunities to promote these initiatives. A poster was displayed at the New Jersey Farm Bureau Meeting. NRCS is on the agenda for the Vegetable Growers and NOFA conventions. Information will also be displayed at these conferences. There was also discussion of having joint FSA and NRCS "What's new" meetings to promote program offerings and changes.

One suggestion was to have meetings/field days with the CIG participant to see how the site evaluations for seasonal high tunnels were conducted and how the seasonal high tunnel functions.

As a reminder, these initiatives do not hinder the allocations for regular EQIP funding. The funds for the initiatives are in addition to the regular EQIP funds. The regular EQIP sign-up is December 30.

#### Clarification of 2012 land eligibility policies

Janice Reid distributed an updated fact sheet on the eligibility requirements and applying for financial assistance programs with NRCS. The fact sheet is also available online at <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/financialassistance.html>. In the past, NRCS had an eligibility requirement that a producer had to produce \$1000 of agricultural products to be considered an agricultural producer eligible for funding. Nationally, there has been some discussion and it has been determined that there is no minimum requirement in statute. This has been removed from the EQIP manual, but is still a requirement for consideration in AMA. To be eligible for NRCS funding an applicant must have a resource concern present, an interest in an agricultural operation, and control of the land.

A question was raised regarding contract requirements. If a dairy farmer puts a manure storage structure in with NRCS funds, what happens if a few years down the road, the farmer decides to sell the dairy cows? Janice Reid responded that it is written into the contract that the producer is required to maintain the structure for the life of the contract for the purpose of the contract. In this case, the farmer would be in violation of the contract and NRCS would have the authority to request cost recovery depending on the circumstances.

Janice Reid also mentioned another significant change in EQIP policy with respect to fencing. In NJ, we had promoted the use of prescribed grazing techniques for feeding livestock. Our recommendations often include expanding the grazing area to meet the livestock needs. The exterior fence to expand pasture into land that was not previously grazed is no longer eligible for funding under EQIP. It is now considered a change in land use. Interior fencing to divide paddocks is eligible.

In addition, fence for the purpose of wildlife exclusion is not eligible under EQIP. Therefore, deer fencing is no longer an eligible practice for organic producers.

## WRP – Bog Turtle Initiative Potential

Betsy Clarke presented a PowerPoint regarding the initiative potential for Bog Turtle under the WRP program (available at [http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/state\\_tech\\_comm/meeting\\_minutes.html](http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/state_tech_comm/meeting_minutes.html)). Typically participants in WRP are either not interested in farming the land, or the land is marginal and not productive farmland. Bog turtle sites can be small areas that can have great habitat potential. It was suggested through the presentation that a specific bog turtle initiative be considered for the WRP program. It is important that bog turtle habitat is supported for the long-term.

An inventory of NJ's known bog turtle sites is underway to determine what areas have potential for restoration practices. This inventory could open up a list of potential applicants that may be interested in participating in WRP. Landowners have three choices in WRP: Restoration cost share agreements, 30 year easements, and permanent easements.

In the past, NRCS has done work for Bog Turtle habitat restoration under WHIP due to the costs associated with acquiring easements for the small sites under WRP. Don Pettit suggested a subcommittee meet to discuss further the opportunities and obstacles of establishing a Bog Turtle Initiative in WRP.

## WRP Restoration Completed at Franklin Parker Preserve

Betsy Clarke presented a PowerPoint on the restoration work at the Franklin Parker Preserve (available at [http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/state\\_tech\\_comm/meeting\\_minutes.html](http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/state_tech_comm/meeting_minutes.html)). NRCS entered into a WRP agreement 6 years ago with the New Jersey Conservation Foundation for the Franklin Parker Preserve project. At 2,190 acres, this project is the largest WRP easement in the state of NJ. The estimated easement cost was \$5 million at the time for restoration and easement.

## Open Discussion:

Brian Zerate - he would like to see a Bog Turtle Initiative move forward in NJ.

Mackenzie Hall - reiterated Brian's comments

Dave Clapp - announced that NJDA is looking for partners to collaborate on animal waste projects. They are looking for a better way to write and implement plans. They have been in touch with Rutgers and North Jersey RC&D already. If you have ideas please send them to Monique Purcell or Dave Clapp.

John Parke - wanted to make sure that everyone is aware of the Common Waters funding June deadline for projects in the Paulins Kill and Upper Delaware Watersheds. The money that is available is not specifically for forests, but is heavily weighted for forests. This could be used as extra funding for EQIP applicants. For more information contact Eric Olsen at The Nature Conservancy office in Chester, NJ.

Kathy Hale - The agricultural mini-grant program is expected to roll out in early 2012. This will provide extra funding to agricultural producers in several subwatersheds in the Raritan Basin.

Amy Hansen- inquired about the status of the soil standard. However, the NRCS staff involved in that initiative were not present at the meeting so no update could be provided.

Audrey Moore & Kristina Heinemann – mentioned the extended EPA rule deadline for the Spill Prevention, Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) for storage of oil on farm. Audrey asked whether the committee would be interested in a presentation or longer discussion on the SPCC rule. EPA can certainly provide more information at a future meeting. The original compliance deadline was November 2011, and has now been extended to May 10, 2013. There is a need to prepare an SPCC plan for facilities that store, transfer, or use oil. There are various size threshold requirements to develop a plan. NY NRCS has a program for SPCC, but there may not be many farms that fall under this rule in NJ. More information is available at [http://www.epa.gov/osweroe1/content/spcc/spcc\\_ag.htm](http://www.epa.gov/osweroe1/content/spcc/spcc_ag.htm). A fact sheet was handed out at the meeting. Janice Reid suggested this information can be discussed at the “What’s New” meetings with FSA and NRCS.

Audrey also mentioned that a NJDEP Pesticide Application Discharge Permit may be required to apply pesticides for certain applications. (A handout distributed).

Nancy Coles – A handout of FSA accomplishments was passed around on behalf of Paul Hlubik.

Mike Westendorf – 1) The deadline for producers to develop Animal Waste Management Plans under the new state rule is March. There is a final push for education on this. 2) If a producer has a CNMP and expands their operation, at some point they need to redo their CNMP. It is the producer’s obligation to pay for the CNMP to be rewritten.

Liz Thompson - There is a 100 page policy book for 2012. The document is public and shared with legislators. The document is available online at [www.njfb.org](http://www.njfb.org)

Brad Smith - The Nature Conservancy (TNC) recently completed a project funded through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation that looked at prioritizing projects for conservation in the four-state Delaware River Watershed. TNC will be meeting with NRCS staff next week to review the results of the project and discuss ways to use this information.

Kim Korth - Conservation Resources Inc. announced the availability of grants in the Raritan Highlands Area. It is mostly for forest health, wildlife habitat, and grassland practices that promote habitat and water quality.

Larry Katz – Regarding the “fertilizer law”, Rutgers now has their training program up on the website. This education program is primarily for landscapers to understand and comply with the law. Announcement: The Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Essex County, Roseland received 2011 Governor’s Environmental Excellence Awards Honorable mention in the Healthy & Sustainable Communities Category. This project created a sustainable landscaping and stormwater management training program for military veterans.

Dominick Mondy – The Nursery and Landscape Association will have their convention January 24-25, 2012. Jim Murphy will be presenting on the fertilizer law at the conference.

Chuck Rhoor – The State Ag Development Committee (SADC) will meet on 12/8 to discuss medical marijuana. Rutgers Cooperative Extension will not be providing any support to these growers as Rutgers receives federal support. Positions have been advertised and four new staff will be joining the SADC, including a Chief of Stewardship who will be dealing with post-closing issues.

Justine Cook - NOFA is planning their conference for the end of January and is looking for participants for their *Advanced Growers Seminar*. This panel discussion and Q&A session will include representatives from state and federal agricultural agencies and is geared towards the more experienced farmer.

Kathleen Hitchner – Much of the 319 grant funds will be going to the Barnegat Bay to support the governor's 10 point plan. Previous 319 grant funds were used to support the award winning project that Larry Katz mentioned in Essex County. Other 319 funds will be supporting an agricultural grant program in the Upper Cohansey similar to the mini-grant program Kathy Hale discussed.

Beth Ciuzio – Several partners attended a Bog Turtle Recovery meeting held in Pennsylvania. This is where we learned about the efforts in PA and MD utilizing NRCS programs. The NY Times published a piece on bog turtles and farmers ([Nov 14th Farmers Find Rewards in Helping Bog Turtles](#)).

Next Meeting Date:

The next meeting is planned for March 14th at 10:00 a.m. in the NRCS State Office in Somerset.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:46.

DRAFT