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Who We Are

Inspired by a shared vision of agriculture as a valued component of the landscape, NRCS works in partnership with farmers, ranchers and many others to improve, restore and protect the Nation's natural resources.

Working side-by-side with these partners, we work to sustain and improve the quality of our soil, water, air and wildlife habitat, and we develop conservation plans that work for the land and for farmers and ranchers. Farm Bill programs help with the cost of putting conservation on the ground, which benefits the farm, the watershed and the community. Conservation easement programs, also in the Farm Bill, help to protect the agricultural and natural resource values of the land over the long-term.

With our help, Massachusetts is balancing economic goals with a high quality environment— ensuring productive lands to supply food, fiber, forest and energy products for the Nation and the world.



Photo: Diane Peit, NRCS

The Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project will improve water quality for shellfish beds and wildlife habitat across the Cape.

Water Quality Improves as Cape Cod Restoration Project Begins

When contractors removed the 610-foot long earthen berm at Sunken Meadow in Eastham, Mass. last March, it was a small first step toward a larger effort to improve water quality across Cape Cod. The Sunken Meadow salt marsh restoration is part of the **Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project**, an estimated \$30 million undertaking to restore 1,500 acres of degraded salt marsh, improve fish access to 4,200 acres of spawning habitat, and improve water quality for 7,300 acres of shellfish beds over 10 years.



Salt Marsh: The Sunken Meadow berm had separated two salt marshes for over 100 years. In less than a week, the berm was removed, the area re-graded to proper marsh elevations, and water flowed unimpeded through the creek and over the new marsh on the spring tide. A pair of Canada geese even came by for a swim as workers were finishing.

- ◆ Four more salt marsh restoration projects are scheduled to go to construction. Tidal flow at each site will be improved through the installation of larger culverts.
- ◆ The Cape Cod Conservation District funded feasibility studies for four priority salt marsh restoration projects, including the Herring River, which is the largest planned salt marsh restoration project in New England to date. The feasibility studies will help NRCS move these priority projects closer to final design and construction.



Shellfish: On Little Pleasant Bay in Orleans, where excellent water quality is a priority because it supports commercial aquaculture operations and recreational shellfishers, we helped install two infiltration systems under Barley Neck Road to treat stormwater runoff from about 10,000 square feet of impervious surface area.

- ◆ This was one of eight stormwater management projects completed in three towns. Two more projects are underway.
- ◆ We completed designs for six sites in two towns where no construction help was involved.



Fish Passage: In Bourne, our experts and CCCD staff surveyed the Holway Axe Dam at Carter Beal Park. The dam has two spillways, but only one has a fish ladder. During the spring upstream migration, herring swim up the incorrect spillway and get stuck at the bottom of the dam. We are designing a channel and fish ladder that will connect the two spillways.

- ◆ Seven fish passage projects in five towns have seen considerable progress like Bourne.

Some \$6.5 million in Recovery Act funding allowed work to begin in 2011 on 25 of 76 proposed sites. NRCS is working in partnership with the Cape Cod Conservation District, the Barnstable County Commissioners and all 15 Cape Cod towns.

Restoring Water Quality and Aquaculture Viability

Restoration project is returning natural tidal flows and improving fish habitat.

In a state with about 1,980 miles of shoreline, protecting our water is critical. All along our beautiful Cape Cod shores, aquaculture, recreation, tourism and wildlife habitat are threatened by poor water quality and obstructed waterways. Native herring cannot reach their breeding grounds due to obstacles in streams, shellfish farms must close when polluted stormwater runoff contaminates oyster and mussel beds, and salt marsh ecosystems choke when the natural tidal flow is restricted by undersized culverts.

The Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project will restore degraded salt marshes, improve fish access to spawning habitat and improve water quality at almost 80 sites spread across all 15 Cape Cod towns. Not only will the Cape's ecosystems benefit, but so will the local economy benefit through the protection of shellfish beds and creation of jobs. Funded in part through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the estimated \$30 million "Cape Project" is a success story in the making.



Photo: Catherine Ulitsky, NRCS

Barnstable County, Mass.—also known as Cape Cod—is a coastal area where urban development has compromised ecosystems. Water quality is a major concern, particularly as it affects the ground water aquifer, salt marshes, shellfish beds and herring runs.

Promoting Energy Efficiency to Protect Air Quality and Climate

We are simplifying landowner access to energy efficiency and renewable energy incentive programs and technology.

The Massachusetts Farm Energy Program (MFEP) is a one-stop-shop for energy planning, audits and fund-leveraging assistance, including financial incentives up to \$5,000 based on energy saving upgrades and certain renewable projects. Initial findings show that this approach had a remarkable impact on energy savings and reduction of CO₂ emissions—exceeding the project target by nearly 600 percent.

The MFEP has helped us develop and pilot energy efficiency and renewable standards, now in use in other states. It has also been instrumental in developing protocols for assisting Northeast farmers with our national on-farm energy audit and implementation initiative.

In 2010, The American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE) recognized the MFEP as one of the exceptional state-led energy-efficiency programs in the U.S. In addition, the MFEP was recognized for technical assistance provided to help start the Connecticut Farm Energy Program.



Photo: Diane Pett, NRCS

The MFEP has developed specific technical guidance for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects for several agriculture sectors in the Northeast including: greenhouse and nursery, dairy, vegetables, fruits and maple syrup.

Fostering Healthy, Productive Forests

Landowners voluntarily enroll over 47 million acres into stewardship on privately owned forest land programs.

Forests across New England and New York define the region's character, are integral to its economy and sustain many of its communities. NRCS Massachusetts has helped to craft the New England-New York Forestry Initiative, which created a blueprint for protecting the region's forest land base. It is now being implemented on more than 47 million acres across the seven-state region.

We helped develop the Massachusetts Forest Stewardship Program, which has provided funding for 208 new Forest Stewardship Plans and 40 Green Certifications totaling over 28,000 acres. Some 67 percent of new Forest Stewardship Program landowners also enrolled their Stewardship property in regulatory "current use" programs with tax advantages, protecting that land from development for the next 10 years.



Photo: Steve Rejniak, NRCS

Private forest land ownership accounts for 75 percent of the forest in Massachusetts—the eighth most forested state in the country.

Conservation Technical

Assistance (CTA) *is simply about helping people help the land. NRCS has used CTA successfully for more than 75 years to reach out to American farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners and managers.*

America's farmers and ranchers invest in conservation with help from CTA to care for the more than 70 percent of our land, water and other natural resources that are in their hands. In FY2011 Massachusetts received \$4 million in CTA funds.

NRCS employees work with customers to identify natural resource problems, inventory resources, develop conservation alternatives and help individual farmers, ranchers, Tribes, local governments and urban landowners with their conservation decisions. This prepares the way for using Farm Bill and other conservation funding.

Environmental Improvement:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

—promotes agricultural production, forest management and environmental quality as compatible goals.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)—improves wildlife habitat on private agricultural, forest and Tribal lands.

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) — encourages agricultural producers to address water management, water quality, and erosion control by incorporating conservation into their farming operations.

Conservation Easements:

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)—helps keep farm and ranch land in agriculture.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)—restores wetlands and wetland habitat on marginal agricultural land

Stewardship:

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)—encourages long-term comprehensive conservation by maintaining and improving existing conservation measures.

Watershed and Communities:

Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)—undertakes emergency measures in watersheds where there are imminent threats to life and property resulting from fire, flood and other natural disasters.



Photo: Diane Peritt, NRCS

Massachusetts in the National Landscape

Disasters Hit the Bay State; NRCS Helps in Recovery

Several extreme weather events struck Massachusetts in 2011, causing significant damage to homes, businesses, infrastructure and the landscape.

In the wake of the storms, NRCS provided financial and technical help to help communities repair damage and reduce the threat to life and property from excessive erosion and flooding.

In June, we provided \$657,000 in federal funds for removal of trees and other debris deposited by rare tornados in rivers and streams in the western Massachusetts communities of Springfield and Monson.

NRCS covered up to 75 percent of the cost of debris removal, which involved cutting up downed tree limbs and using heavy equipment to lift the debris from water bodies.

NRCS also provided \$2.8 million to help western Massachusetts towns recover from damage caused by Tropical Storm Irene along rivers and streams. The emergency



Photo: Jonathan Cote, NRCS

protection work repaired town roads, sewer lines, and buildings at 35 sites in 14 towns in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire counties.

In both cases, town officials requested the federal assistance, citing concern that public safety and nearby homes and businesses were threatened.

The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program provided assistance to the communities struck by natural disasters.

Wetland Restoration Project Completed, Recognized with National Award

Federal, state and local partners gathered last June to celebrate completion of the Eel River Headwaters Restoration Project in Plymouth, Mass. with a dedication ceremony, and presentation of the nationally prestigious Coastal America Partnership Award.

The project restored over 60 acres of habitat and two miles of headwater stream that had been extensively altered and degraded by human use. The restoration has made dramatic improvements to wetland and riverine habitat that resulted in new and more abundant fish and wildlife, helped the local ecology become more resilient to climate change, and enhanced public use of the conservation land.

The \$2 million project was funded through a variety of sources with major contributions provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, NRCS, and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

2011 Farm Bill Program Funding*

NRCS Program	Number of Contracts	Financial Assistance to Producers
Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)	23	\$424,000
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	5	\$13,000
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	251	\$6,538,000
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)	16	\$5,500,000
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	5	\$3,675,000
Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)	49	\$1,253,000

Of the hundreds of conservation practices available to Massachusetts farmers and landowners in 2011, these are the top five for which we provided funding:

- 1) Nutrient Management
- 2) Pest Management
- 3) Brush Management
- 4) Pumping Plant for Water Control
- 5) Forest Stand Improvement

*Financial Assistance (FA) is provided directly to producers. Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funding is used by NRCS for professional planning and expertise to help carry out conservation activities. Data source: Foundation Financial Information System Status of Funds Report October 2011.