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## Message From Pooh Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist



Greetings from the Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office. During my first two months as Rhode Island State Conservationist, I worked extensively with staff to implement the 2008 Farm Bill programs. In addition, I spent a considerable amount of 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 worked with several partners to arrange a tour of Joslin Farm in Scituate, RI where the general public was invited to learn about the project goals and progress to encourage wildlife habitat. The tour was a success with over 130 attendees and much positive feedback regarding our efforts.

Considerable progress was made on the Gooseneck Cove Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) project where NRCS provided approximately half of the funds needed to replace culverts and dam removal. It was the first intentional dam removal in the State's history.

Several additional outreach events were completed including two recruiting events and a presentation at the unveiling of the Woonasquatucket River Watershed River Panels at Providence Place where NRCS provided over \$4.5 million in WHIP funds for the fish passage and river conservation efforts.

NRCS staff worked diligently to roll out funding opportunities under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for Emergency Watershed Protection-Floodplain Easements (EWP-FPE) where a total of 30 applications were received. Six of the application projects were submitted to national headquarters for funding totaling \$4.3 million in restoration and easement costs.

Progress was made on the draft Pocasset Watershed Plan which was completed and submitted to the Pocasset Steering Committee.

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



Fig. 1 Pooh Vongkhamdy at Joslin Farm  
Scituate, RI



Fig. 2 Kate Giorgi at Joslin Farm  
Scituate, RI



Fig 3 Attendees at Joslin Farm, Scituate, RI

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## Upper Narragansett Bay

*Article by Kate Giorgi, Biologist*

### Touring Joslin Farm

Providence Water, along with funding from NRCS, is in the midst of a massive wildlife habitat project aimed to benefit grassland and shrub land dependent species at the old Joslin Farm property near the Scituate Reservoir. Eighty acres of mature forest were cut over the past year and this spring half of the cleared land will be stumped and seeded with warm season grasses. This seeding will benefit species such as the field sparrow and Eastern kingbird currently already breeding at Joslin, as well as hopefully attract species such as bobolink or Eastern meadowlark. The remaining half of the newly cut forest will be allowed to regenerate in order to create stands of saplings which will enhance the site's ability to support woodcock, blue-winged warblers, and ruffed grouse.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, a tour of Joslin Farm was set up in order to explain the goals and current progress of the Joslin Farm wildlife project with the community. Over 130 people came to the event! Folks were very enthusiastic about the work being done and much positive feedback was received about the event.

Partners supporting this event included:

Providence Water

Scituate Conservation Commission

Southern New England Forest Consortium

RI Forest Conservators Organization

Northern RI Conservation District

USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service

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## Lower Narragansett Bay

*by Garrett Timmons, Soil Conservationist*

Hints of summer weather and longer days are very welcome after our last winter. We are in the middle of green-up now; the magnolia and cherry trees are dropping their petals, partly under the weight of the bumblebees, and the maples are dropping their blooms and starting to leaf out. Closer to the ground, unfortunately the invasives seem to have gotten a head start; much of the new green out now belongs to autumn olive and multiflora rose though our blueberries and viburnums don't seem too far behind. Under our feet, celadine and periwinkles are showing off, the rye cover crops that struggled under all that snow are growing with leaps and bounds, and pastures and hayfields are showing life with the bright green of new growth.

Though they aren't the showiest this time of year, pastures and hayfields in Rhode Island are getting a lot of attention right now. Manure and lime have been spread, fertilizer is going down, and hopefully the grasses have all they need to do their best. NRCS is working with landowners across Rhode Island to help make this happen. Pasture and hayland planting is a practice being utilized where landowners are getting help in seeding new fields or overseeding existing fields and pastures with legumes or grasses for renovation purposes. Planting in this manner provides benefits in terms of increased forage production and quality, decreased runoff and erosion, higher amounts of water infiltrating to the roots, an increase in the value of the land as wildlife habitat, and

sometimes higher nitrogen levels in the soil.

Nutrient management is another practice being widely utilized where landowners keep records of field applications they are doing at this time. That information, coupled with an up-to-date soil test, helps landowners ensure they do not over-apply nutrients (which are not only a water quality concern but are also not cost-effective) or have a deficit of a nutrient critical to vegetation growth. Rhode Island NRCS is now also offering additional assistance by way of higher financial incentives to producers who choose to utilize precision fertilization methods. One tool being used to do this is GPS guided equipment that can reduce spray overlap and over-application of nutrients. Organic producers may also get additional financial assistance for using organic fertilizer and/or amendments. Adoption of these practices is growing, and when combined with the work of Rhode Island producers, will ensure our lands are ready to have a productive summer.

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## Economics - Happenings

*by Reena Shaw, Economist*

Recent changes in National Policy will allow NRCS to provide payments to clients enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for conservation activities involving the development of plans appropriate for the eligible land of the producer. In Rhode Island, this includes the following: Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, Forest Management Plans, Grazing Management Plans, Integrated Pest Management Plans, and Irrigation Water Management Plan.

The deadline for States to submit the data sheets detailing the cost of these management plans to the National Office was April 10, 2009. We will be assessing the needs of Rhode Island for the development of additional management plans in FY 2010.

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.

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## Biological Sciences - Update

*by Andrew Lipsky, Biologist*

Biological Sciences:

Gooseneck Cove Wetland Reserve Program Completion:  
Gooseneck Cove Coastal Lagoon Restoration is nearing completion following implementation of dam removal and culvert replacements over the Winter of 2008 and 2009. This is the first intentional dam removal in our State's History. A ribbon cutting event with partners is planned for Spring 2009.

Project Partner Contributions:

NRCS WRP Program:	\$550,000
NOAA Community Based Restoration:	\$160,000
City of Newport:	\$163,000
Coastal Resources Management Council:	\$90,000
RI Dept. of Transportation:	\$88,000
Total:	\$1,051,000





Chief White

Status on Southern New England ESA Programmatic Agreement for Southern New England:

The NRCS RI State biologist is participating with CT, MA, and NH to develop a programmatic general permit for Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). From March 9-11, NRCS biologists in partnership with USFWS and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies met in Hadley, MA, to begin work on a matrix to characterize the potential for NRCS conservation practices to impact listed species in CT, MA, NH, and RI. We are also including the New England cottontail, a USFWS Candidate Species, in this effort.

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## Earth Team Volunteer Program (ETVP) - Update

*by Michelle Moore, State Volunteer Program Coordinator*

April 19-April 25, 2009 was National Volunteer Week, in which the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and our partners recognized the contributions of our dedicated volunteers and took the time to show our appreciation through distribution of award certificates.

Last year, over 100 Earth Team volunteers contributed 3,556 hours in helping the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and our partners in Rhode Island. That's the equivalent of employing two full-time employees.

Volunteers allow us to do more. They are truly vital members of our conservation team. I am proud of the dedicated volunteers and employees in RI who have committed their time and talents to conserve and protect our natural resources.

RI NRCS has accepted two new Earth Team volunteers. Resource Conservation and Development will work with one of the volunteers to help her obtain her technical service provider (TSP) status as she helps us, and the NRCS field staff will work with a Junior Scientist and graduate of URI who majored in Wildlife and Conservation Biology. We are proud to welcome our two newest volunteers.

In a memo from chief White he states:

"To "volunteer" means to give yourself willingly to a cause, as 30,000 Earth Team members nationwide did in the past year. Donating more than 800,000 hours, they supported conservation through field work, data collections, resource survey and analysis, planning assistance, contract and project support, monitoring and evaluation, conservation engineering assistance, administrative support, and conservation education."

Thank you for doing your part utilizing the Earth Team program to help make the NRCS volunteer program in RI a success.

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## Outreach and Communications-Happenings

*by Walter Marshall, State Public Affairs Specialist*

NRCS sponsored a booth at the 2009 Federal Career Day held at Bryant University which was attended by several hundred students from ten area colleges and universities. NRCS staff spoke to students regarding employment opportunities with NRCS in engineering, biology, and soil conservation. A second recruiting session was held at the Dr. Alvarez



Fig. 1  
Woonasquatucket  
River Panel Event



Fig. 2  
Woonasquatucket  
River Panel Event



Fig. 3  
Woonasquatucket  
River Panel Event

Green High School in Providence.

In addition, NRCS RI sponsored a booth at the Land and Water Conservation Summit with over 300 attendees from land trusts, conservation commissions, and watershed councils.

Other outreach events included a tour of Joslin Farm with over 130 attendees, the Rhode Island Coverts Cooperators Training Workshop, and the Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative Annual Meeting.

A presentation was conducted by State Conservationist Pooh Vongkhamdy at the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council' unveiling of the river panels at Providence Place. NRCS provided over \$4.5 million in WHIP funds for the fish passage and river conservation efforts. There were over 50 attendees. A second presentation was conducted by Kate Giorgi on pollination at the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District Plant Sale.

The first meeting of the Conservation Outreach Partnership was held April 24 where partners began some of the groundwork to coordinate and strategize a unified conservation initiative in Rhode Island.

Regarding press releases, one was written for the \$145 million in funds for floodplain easements and restoration funds as part of the Emergency Watershed Protection Plan (EWPP) under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The release was disseminated to the news media and conservation partners.

Outreach Event	Date	People Reached
Woonasquatucket River Watershed River Panel Unveiling	03/16/09	50
Land and Water Summit	03/21/09	325
Dr. Alvarez High School Green Career Day	03/27/09	550
Federal Career Day	03/31/09	300
NRICD Plant Sale	04/17/09	18
RI Coverts Cooperator Training Workshop	04/17-18/09	60
RI Sheep Cooperative Annual Meeting	04/18/09	60
Conservation Outreach Partnership Meeting	04/24/09	10
Tour Joslin Farm	04/25/09	130
Total		1503

## Performance Update

by Jackie Pashnik, Management Analyst

Statewide Performance Goals (as of May 5, 2009)

Performance Measures 2008	Program	Goal	Progress	Percent
Conservation plans written, acres	CTA	--	437	--
Watershed or area-wide conservation plans developed, number	CTA	--	--	--
	RC&D	6	--	--
Soil surveys mapped or updated, acres	SOILS	1,400	250	--

Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality, acres	CTA	250	--	--
	EQIP	930	559	60%
Land with conservation applied to improve water quality, acres	CTA	5,054	--	--
	EQIP	1,409	1,037	74%
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	878	55%
Non-federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality, acres	CTA	482	--	--
	EQIP	204	572	280%
	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.

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## Engineering - Update

by Jade Nield, Civil Engineer

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) authorized \$145 million nationwide for floodplain easements and floodplain restoration under the Emergency Watershed Protection – Floodplain Easement (EWP-FPE) Program. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Rhode Island made these funds available statewide on private, State, municipal, and Tribal lands. Applications were accepted during a five-week period from March 9 through April 10, 2009. The Rhode Island NRCS received a total of 30 applications for the ARRA EWP-FPE Program.

Based on program eligibility requirements, ranking criteria scores,



Fig. 1 River Avenue,  
Johnston, RI



Fig.2 Fletcher Avenue near  
Plainfield Pike, Cranston,  
RI

project merits, and landowners' readiness to proceed, RI NRCS has submitted six projects to National Headquarters (NHQ) for funding totaling \$4.3 million in restoration and easement costs. The funding allocations will be determined by NHQ within the next couple of weeks.

The draft Pocasset Watershed Plan was completed by NRCS and consultant GZA in February 2009 and forwarded to the National Water Management Center (NWMC) for the purposes of technical review. NRCS staff and GZA have begun editing and resolving the review comments received. State Historic Preservation Office comments were received in May for action and inclusion into the plan.

The Pocasset Steering Committee met on April 30, 2009 to discuss the draft plan along with alternatives considered, costs, and a projected implementation schedule. Senators Reed and Whitehouse had representatives at this meeting. Upon completion of review comments and approval by the NWMC, the final plan will be advertised in the Federal Register and a public meeting will be held to allow all interested stakeholders an opportunity to comment on the plan.

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## Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)

*by Chris Modisette, RC&D Coordinator*

### RC&D Program Highlights (March – April 2009)

Attendance/participation at 23 events with approximately 2,712 attendees.

### RC&D Council Capacity

#### Area Plan Update

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

- Held four public workshops to solicit public input into the plan
- Held two Area Plan meetings with the Council

### Rhode Island Coverts Graduates 2<sup>nd</sup> Cooperators Class

The Rhode Island Coverts Project announced the graduation of its second annual Rhode Island Coverts Cooperator Class at URI's W. Alton Jones Whispering Pine Conference Center.

The Rhode Island Coverts Project is an initiative of the Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Area Council (RIRC&D) and its partners and is funded through a Conservation Innovation Grant provide by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Harriet Powell, RIRC&D President says that, " Ultimately, we hope that more woodland owners will participate in the project and serve to promote the sustainability of Rhode Island forests."

The RI Coverts Project is supported by the University of Rhode Island - Department of Natural Resources Science (URI), the RI Chapter of the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS), the RI Department of Environmental



Fig. 1 RI Coverts  
Graduates



Management Division's Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and Forest Environment (DFE), USDA-NRCS, and the RI Forest Conservators Organization (RIFCO).

Anyone interested in participating in the program or who would like more information should contact Paul Boisvert, RI Coverts Project Coordinator at the RI RC&D Area Council, 60 Quaker Lane, Suite 45, Warwick, RI 02886. Telephone: 401-568-1610 or e-mail [sneforest@sneforest.necoxmail.com](mailto:sneforest@sneforest.necoxmail.com)

### **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:

- Presentation to URI Dept. of Natural Resources Science class on forest management including the topic of careers in arboriculture;
- Meeting attendance include: the RI Tree Board of Director's meeting, the Connecticut Tree Council meeting in Rock Fall, CT; the RITree Steward Symposium at the at Franciscan Mother of Mary in N. Providence; and the ALB Committee meeting in N Kingstown;
- Proctored the second Arborist exam of 2009;
- Assisted in pruning trees at Franciscan Mother of Mary in N. Providence;
- Coordinated the State Arbor Day Ceremony at Lincoln Woods State Park (120 attendees);
- Coordinated the Arbor Day ceremony in Warwick on April 24 (25 attendees); and
- Attended the RI Tree Council Arbor Fair on Saturday, April 25 at Roger Williams Park (130 attendees).

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

### **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](mailto: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.

### **"Rhody Warm" - Surplus Wool Project**

#### **4<sup>TH</sup> 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

**NO FARM IS TOO SMALL – ALL ARE WELCOME!**

For more information, contact the RISC at 401-578-2012 visit [www.risheep.org](http://www.risheep.org)



Upcoming Events	Location
RC&D Council Meetings	May 6 and July 1, 2009
RI AG at the State House	May 5, 2009
RIFCO Spring Field Day	May 9, 2009
Celebrate South County Days	May 12, 2009
Coggeshall Farm Wool & Fiber Festival	May 16, 2009
4 <sup>th</sup> Annual Rhody Warm Wool Collection Day	June 6, 2009
NARC&D National Conference, Albuquerque, NM	June 15-17, 2009

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## Soils Program - Happenings

*by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist*

### Outreach Events:

A talk about the soils of Rhode Island was given to a group of high school science teachers who are learning about watersheds. The teachers learned about soils, how they relate to watersheds, and some experiments they can do with their classes. Another talk about the RI subaqueous soil program was provided at the Southern New England Soil and Water Conservation Society winter meeting on wetlands. Approximately 50 people attended the workshop held in Hadley, MA. The soil staff also provided the Envirothon teams with an overview of soils and field sessions.

### EWPP Assistance:

The soil survey staff assisted with the Emergency Watershed Protection Plan (EWPP) stimulus program during the months of March and April. The soil staff provided maps of applications and visited sites to provide information and interpretations about the soils in the project areas.

### On-site Assistance:

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

### MapCoast Update:

Work has begun getting the boats and equipment ready for the field season which begins in May. Summer work will be conducted in Winnapaug, Green Hill, Pt. Judith, and Potters Ponds. A poster on MapCoast was presented at the RI Natural History Survey conference on off-shore energy. Information about MapCoast was also presented at the Geo-tools National Conference in South Carolina and as a result of the talk, MapCoast members were invited to give a talk at Woods Hole which was broadcasted across the country to other oceanographic institutes. A series of videos showing the soil type and bottom of Point Judith Pond was added to the Google Earth MapCoast Data Example file. The points are linked to the videos which are posted on YouTube and the MapCoast Web site. To view the post visit:

<http://bbs.keyhole.com/ubb/ubbthreads.php?ubb=showthreaded&Number=1196193#Post1196193>