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Message From Pooh Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist

Greetings from the Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office. During the summer months, I worked extensively with staff to implement the 2008 Farm Bill programs for FY

2009 with a record number of applications received.

Highlights among the various activities include the following:

The Silver Creek Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) project was successfully completed in July.

The Gooseneck Cove Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) project where NRCS provided approximately half of the funds needed to replace culverts and dam removal was completed with a ribbon cutting event. It was the first intentional dam removal in the State's history.

Several additional outreach events were completed including sweetgrass planting at Nuweetooun School in Hope Valley, presentations at the public tour of the OSV Bold, presentation at the Lower Blackstone River Fish Ladder Project, and exhibit booths at the Washington County Fair and The Big E.

NRCS staff graciously assisted the White House Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force during their visit to Providence. Staff assisted in activities related to the public policy meeting with over 350 attendees and also provided assistance with the informational field trip where task force members gained valuable insight on competing marine issues in the New England region.

NRCS staff continued progress on the projects funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for Emergency Watershed Protection-Floodplain Easements (EWP-FPE). Rhode Island received almost \$2.5 million in restoration and easement costs for such projects.

Progress was made on the final draft of the Pocasset Watershed Plan which was submitted to the National Watershed Management Center.

I look forward to working with the staff and partners as we complete the FY 2009 budget and begin efforts to implement conservation practices throughout Rhode Island in FY 2010.



PHOUKHAM "POOH" VONGKHAMDY
State Conservationist

Upper Narragansett Bay

White House Council on Environmental Quality – Ocean Policy Task Force
by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist



Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force at the India Point Park press conference



Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force at the URI Coastal Institute

On September 24-25, the White House Council on Environmental Quality Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force visited Providence, RI for a public meeting to solicit ideas and comments on ocean policy. The task force also participated in a press conference at India Point Park and field trips in Rhode Island to see and understand issues around competing marine uses in context of the New England region. The task force is charged with developing a recommendation for a national policy that ensures protection, maintenance, and restoration of oceans and coasts. It will also recommend a framework for improved stewardship and effective coastal and marine spatial planning.

NRCS staff assisted in hosting the task force at the public meeting and was also involved in the logistics of the field trips. The public meeting was a success with approximately 350 live attendees and an additional 500 online attendees. Task force members gained beneficial insight learning about competing marine uses in Rhode Island through the field trip. Visits included the URI Coastal Institute, Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge, and the Charlestown Breachway where scientists presented on various ocean-related issues including soil mapping, cultivation and harvesting of oysters, and the importance of developing partnerships among local, State, Federal, and international agencies.

Lower Narragansett Bay

Gooseneck Cove

by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist



Shore birds at Gooseneck Cove

In September, NRCS celebrated the completion of the \$1.2 million restoration of Gooseneck Cove in Newport, Rhode Island with a ribbon cutting event. The project exemplifies how several partners worked successfully together to enhance conservation efforts in Rhode Island. Such partners include Save the Bay, City of Newport, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Restore America's Estuaries, RI Coastal Resources Management Council, and Aquidneck Land Trust among others. After 70 years of degradation including the loss of 14 acres of salt marsh, the project removed three barriers to the marsh where water quality and fish habitat had been severely degraded due to restricted tidal flow. The restoration is expected to improve water quality and growing conditions for native marsh plants and improve habitat of the marsh and tidal creeks for fish such as striped bass and bluefish, shellfish, waterfowl, and shorebirds. It will also reduce flooding and make the marsh more resilient to storm damage. NRCS was a major contributor to the project providing technical assistance and awarding restoration funds of \$550,000 through the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) to restore tidal flow, improve habitat for fish and other wildlife, and reduce flooding.



State Conservationist Pooh Vongkhamdy speaks at the Gooseneck Cove ribbon cutting event

The event was well attended with over 75 people and an additional 25 students from Rogers High School who volunteered as part of an environmental class study program. Speakers included Senator Jack Reed, NRCS State Conservationist Pooh Vongkhamdy, Newport Mayor Jeanne Marie Napolitano, RI Senate President Teresa Paiva Weed, Save The Bay Executive Director Jonathan Stone, NOAA Northeast Administrator Pat Kurkul, CRMC Chairman Michael M. Tikoian, and Restore America's Estuaries Executive Director Jeff Benoit.

[Planting Sweetgrass at Tomaquag Museum and Nuweetooun School](#) by Chris Modisette, RC& D Coordinator

Rhode Island NRCS State Conservationist Phoukham Vongkhamdy and several of his staff spent the morning helping with the planting of a sweetgrass garden at the Tomaquag Museum and Nuweetooun School in Hope Valley, RI. This grass, Hierochloa odorata (L.), is known for its sweet, aromatic scent, which is enhanced when it rains or is burned. The sweet odor is from the coumarin oil, similar to vanilla. Many native tribes in North America, including the Narragansett Indian Tribe, use sweetgrass in prayer, smudging or purifying ceremonies and consider it a sacred plant. It was often braided into women's hair as the braid signified Mother Earth. Sweetgrass has been used in making baskets, mats, rugs, bedding, and cradleboards.

Several years ago, members of the tribe expressed interest in re-establishing sweetgrass in Rhode Island for use by the tribe. Then State Conservationist, Roylene Rides-at-the Door arranged for the plants to be propagated and sent to the tribe from NRCS' Plant Materials Center in Cape May, NJ. The plants arrived recently and "Pooh" and his staff arrived with tools in hand to help with the planting. Thirty plants were set out in the museum's Three Sister's Garden and adjacent to the Roaring Brook which runs through the museum's property. A traditional Narragansett ceremony blessing the newly planted sweetgrass was performed by Dawn Dove. Ms. Loren Spears, Director of the Nuweetooun School, 12 students, and staff attended the planting.

"I am very pleased that we could bring these traditional plants to the tribe for their use" said NRCS State Conservationist "Pooh" Vongkhamdy.

[Economics - Happenings](#)

by Reena Shaw, Economist

Fiscal Year 2009 was 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) so it seemed that FY 2009 has run into FY 2010. The Rhode Island State Economist has worked diligently to keep abreast of the changes and to adjust the FY 2009 PPS for inflationary factors for FY2010. The FY 2010 PPS is complete and the PPS pertaining to EQIP and AMA Farm Bill programs has been posted to our Web site. The data sheets for the conservation practices will be posted to efotg by the end of October and will be found at <http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/treemenuFS.aspx>, Section 1, Item C2 Cost data, and 2 Conservation Practice Cost List, 2010 Practice Payment Schedule and Item D. Cost Data Sheets FY2010.





NRCS staff volunteers
at Franklin Farm



Pumpkins harvested
at Franklin Farm

Cultural Resources

by Reena Shaw, Cultural Resources Coordinator

Several Memorandums of Agreement (MOA) between NRCS and the Rhode Island State Historic Preservation Office were drafted, signed, and recorded by the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation over the past few months.

One MOA addresses mitigation measures for fish passage restoration projects at the Slater Mill complex in Pawtuxet and another MOA addresses mitigation measures for fish passage restoration at the Lower Shannock Falls in Charlestown.

Earth Team Volunteer Program (ETVP) - Update

by Michelle Moore, State Volunteer Program Coordinator

In September, several Rhode Island (RI) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees took leave and volunteered a portion of their day at a community garden harvesting vegetables to be donated to the RI Food Bank. The volunteerism took place at the Historic Metcalf-Franklin Farm Preservation Association (MFFPA) better known as Franklin Farm which is located in Cumberland off Abbott Run Valley Road. Franklin Farm is a community garden that is run entirely by volunteers of all ages. The farm donates almost one hundred percent of its produce to different charitable organizations such as RI Food Bank, House of Compassion, and area food kitchens.

RI NRCS employees picked green beans, tomatoes, yellow squash, zucchini, eggplant, hot peppers, and cucumbers. David Coute, committee member, coordinated the effort to determine the amount of produce picked by NRCS volunteers. As the day came to a close David informed us that our employees had harvested five hundred and seventy-two pounds of produce which we then delivered to the RI Food Bank.

Franklin Farm welcomes volunteers every Monday and Thursday from 5:30 to dusk throughout the summer to help with planting, weeding, watering, picking, etc. On average, David said, "There are anywhere from 10 to 15 volunteers and their children who pick four hundred pounds of produce each day." So far this year, volunteers have picked close to nine hundred pounds of produce to be donated to the RI Food Bank. In 2008, Franklin Farms donated eleven thousand five hundred and fifteen pounds of produce to the RI Food Bank. In the last four years, over thirty-one thousand pounds of produce have been donated. For more information about the farm please visit <http://franklinfarmri.org/> or if you are interested in becoming a volunteer, please contact them at volunteer@franklinfarmri.org.

Outreach and Communications-Happenings

by Walter Marshall, State Public Affairs Specialist

NRCS participated in several outreach events with presentations and



Wildlife observations at Silver Creek Marsh

exhibit booths. Joe Bachand presented at the completion ceremony for the Silver Creek Marsh in Bristol, RI which was funded under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). State Conservationist Pooh Vongkhamdy presented at the Gooseneck Cove completion ceremony in Newport, RI which was funded by the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). NRCS staff including Pooh Vongkhamdy and Meghan Walter presented on the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) at the Lower Blackstone River (Main Street and Slater Mill) groundbreaking event where fish ladders will be installed. Eric Scherer represented NRCS with a display at the public tour of the OSV Bold where over 350 visitors toured the vessel and NRCS' efforts were presented highlighting eelgrass restoration and work with shellfish growers. NRCS sponsored an exhibit booth at the Washington County Fair in Richmond, RI and The Big E in Springfield, MA where staff highlighted NRCS technical and financial assistance. Several NRCS employees took leave and volunteered their time to harvest vegetables at Franklin Farm which were then donated to the Rhode Island Food Bank. In addition, NRCS staff participated in the sweetgrass planting at Nuweetoun School in Hope Valley. Lastly, NRCS staff participated at the White House Council on Environmental Quality Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force event which included a public meeting with over 350 attending and field trips to India Point Park, Coastal Institute, Ninigret national Wildlife refuge, and the Charlestown Breachway.

Regarding press releases, two were completed including the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the 2010 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) October 30, 2009 application period deadline. The release was disseminated to the news media and conservation partners. In addition, advertisements for the EQIP program were published in several local newspapers including the Providence Journal, RI Central Newsgroup (e.g., Chariho Times, Standard Times), and Rhode Island Newspaper Group (e.g., Valley Breeze, Bristol Phoenix).

Engineering - Update

by Jade Nield, Civil Engineer



Dyerville dam prior to construction

In the exciting world of fish passage restoration, the engineering team has some great news to report. The Dyerville Dam Removal project was completed at the end of September. The Dyerville Dam Removal project is part of the fish passage restoration efforts along the Woonasquatucket River in Providence. The first timber dam at Dyerville Mills was constructed in 1835 and was composed of a wooden frame backed by earthen material. The remains of the Dyerville dam consisted of dilapidated timber crib structure and associated fill. See before and after photos of the project.



Dyerville dam post construction

Water Quality Certifications have been issued for fish passage facilities at both Main Street and Slater Mill Dams on the Blackstone River. The Slater Mill project received DEM wetlands approval. The Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) continues their review of the projects. NRCS expects to put the projects out to bid this winter and start construction in Summer 2010.

Ronald Lewis, Civil Engineering Technician, and Meghan Walter, Hydraulic Engineer attended AutoCAD Civil 3D 2008 training in September. Frank Vogel, Civil Engineer, attended A&E Contracting training in Salt Lake City, Utah in September. Jade Nield, Assistant State Conservation Engineer, is

back from maternity leave.

Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)

by Chris Modisette, RC&D Coordinator

I. Highlights

1. Attendance/participation at 25 events with approximately 790 attendees.

| Event | Date |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Pawtucket Optimization Outreach/TAC Committee | 7/16/2009 |
| 2. RC&D Executive Committee | 7/23/2009 |
| 3. Pawtucket Optimization Outreach Committee | 7/23/2009 |
| 4. RIEDC Farm Energy Tour | 8/4/2009 |
| 5. RI Foundation meeting, Jennifer Perreira | 8/6/2009 |
| 6. Washington County Fair | 8/12-16, 2009 |
| 7. Sweetgrass Planting, Nuweetooun School/Tomaquag Museum | 8/13/2009 |
| 8. Narragansett Indian Tribe, Natural Resource Division | 8/14/2009 |
| 9. Pawtucket Optimization Outreach Committee | 8/18/2009 |
| 10. Rhody Warm | 8/18/2009 |
| 11. RI Tree Council meeting | 8/18/2009 |
| 12. Pawtucket Optimization Outreach Workshop, Municipal Officials, Westerly Land Trust, Westerly | 8/20/2009 |
| 13. Asian Long-horned beetle Survey | 8/20/2009 |
| 14. Pawtucket Optimization Outreach Workshop, General Public, Kettle Pond Visitors Center, Charlestown | 8/24/2009 |
| 15. Pawtucket Optimization Outreach Workshop, Agriculture, Alton Jones Environmental Education Center, West Greenwich | 8/27/2009 |
| 16. RC&D Council Meeting | 9/2/2009 |
| 17. Rhody Warm Marketing Committee mtg. | 9/2/2009 |
| 18. Pawtucket Optimization Outreach Committee mtg. | 9/10/2009 |
| 19. American Wood Pellet Meeting | 9/10/2009 |
| 20. Pawtucket Optimization Science Workshop, URI Bay Campus | 9/14/2009 |
| 21. Rhody Warm Project Committee | 9/14/2009 |
| 22. Rhody Warm Marketing Committee | 9/14/2009 |
| 23. RI Tree Farm Committee mtg. | 9/17/2009 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 24. Pawtucket Optimization Capstone Farm Event, Schartner Farm, Exeter, RI | 9/19/2009 |
| 25. Coverts Project Committee mtg | 9/22/2009 |
| Total | 15 |

2. RC&D Council Capacity

- Met with the RI Foundation to discuss Council projects and opportunities for support.
- Worked with NRCS to amend and implement the 2009 RC&D Area Plan Agreement
- Received a grant from the USDA Forest Service that provides funding for the continuation of the Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator project designed to assist RIDEM Division of Forest Environment with the implementation of their Urban and Community Forestry Plan.
- Negotiated an agreement with USDA-NRCS to prepare Nutrient Management Plans for qualifying USDA-NRCS clients in 2010.

3. RI Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator

RIRC&D submitted a grant application to the US Forest to continue the RC&D Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator position in 2010. A grant in the amount of \$64,000 was received by the Council on August 26, 2009.

Brian Sattarlee reported the following accomplishments during the period of this report:

Planning and promoting an Arborist Workshop scheduled for October 1, 2009. The Workshop is promoted at the following sites:

- **RI DEM Urban Forestry** (Now Live, check it out!)
<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/forest/urbanfor.htm>
- **RI Tree** <http://www.ritree.org/>
- **Rhode Island Natural History Survey** <http://www.rinhs.org/>
- **ISA New England Chapter**
<http://www.newenglandisa.org/calendar.html>

273 Rhode Island Licensed Arborists were notified of the October 1 arborist workshop.

A survey was prepared and mailed to the same arborists to determine priority topics for upcoming workshops with 61 arborists responding (a 26% response rate). Topics for future worked ranked by response frequency included:

- 1) Pests and Diseases
- 2) Tree Nutrition
- 3) Tree/Soil relations
- 4) Tree ID

The RI DEM Urban Forestry Web page is now up and running and can be accessed at: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/forest/urbanfor.htm>.





5. RI River and Stream Continuity Project

- The Draft Watershed Area Plans for the Upper Pawcatuck and Millers River watersheds 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;

6. "Rhody Warm" Project

- A subcommittee has been set and met to move the USDA RD RBEG Marketing grant forward. They will be meeting with representatives of the RI Small Business Development Center to initiate development of the marketing plan.
- Research continues on a manufacturing source for the Rhody Warm Wool Mulch

7. Pawcatuck Water Optimization Project

- Technical Advisory Committee met on July 16, 2009;
- The Outreach Committee met three (3) times;
- Public outreach workshops were held on August 20, 24, and 27, 2009. 62 people attended these workshops;
- A scientific workshop was held on September 14, 2009 at the URI Bay Campus.
- A Capstone Farm Tour was held at Schartner Farms on Saturday, September 19, 2009 for the general public to see how farms are working to conserve water;
- An Executive Summary for the project was developed and 350 copies were printed;
- A project brochure was developed and distributed;
- A Web site to promote the project was developed by WPWA;
- Two (2) PowerPoint presentations were developed for the workshops; and
- Stakeholder invitations for the public outreach workshops were developed and distributed to approximately 1,000 individuals, partners, and organizations.

8. Narragansett Indian Tribe

- On August 13, 2009 RC&D assisted NRCS with a planting of sweetgrass at the Nuweetoun School and Tomaquag Museum.

Ray Robinson arranged for RC&D to meet with representatives the Natural Resource Division of the Narragansett Indian Tribe to discuss several projects to include Black Ash Restoration and Alternative Energy Opportunities for the Tribe

9. American Wood Pellet Company Proposal

Representatives from USDA-NRCS, USDA-RD, RC&D, RIDEM, RIRDC, and Senator Reed's office met with official from the American Wood Pellet Company (AWP). AWP is investigating the feasibility of establishing a wood pellet manufacturing facility in Rhode Island.

10. The Rhode Island Conservation Partnership Planning Process

In Rhode Island there is a growing need to coordinate the assistance that is provided to producers and not overburden them with multiple layers of assistance from the partners. Recent needs have come to light that state requirements for Farm, Forest and Open Space requirements for 'conservation farm plans' are needed for those who participate in this

state program for local property tax abetments. Additionally, the state is developing a state-wide program on Biosecurity for livestock operations. A lot of the information and data being required to manage and provide assistance to producers for various initiatives and programs is or could be duplicative. In an effort to reduce the burden on producers and partners, a collaborative effort has been developed to address the needs of producers and partners called the "Rhode Island Conservation Partnership Planning Process".

RC&D is working closely with USDA-NRCS, the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District, and the RI Division of Agriculture to develop a planning guide that can be used by landowners to facilitate this process.

Soils Program - Happenings

by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist

Ocean Policy Task Force:

The soil staff assisted with a tour of URI Coastal Institute and Ninigret Pond with members of the Center for Environmental Quality Ocean Policy Task Force. The task force was in Providence for a public hearing on the ocean policy. During the tour the members heard a presentation about MapCoast and subaqueous soil mapping and visited Ninigret Pond.

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, and FRPP.

MapCoast Update:

The soil staff collected detailed bathymetric data on Smith and Sayles Pond as part of an invasive plant study of the pond. A survey grade fathometer was used to map the bottom elevation of the pond and bottom type. A Google Earth file of the data is available upon request. During the summer field season work continued on the South County Coastal Lagoons – Point Judith, Green Hill, and Quonochontaug Pond were examined for various interpretive data. The coastal zone was also mapped along the Quonny Barrier.

Outreach:

A talk on the RI Coastal Zone Soil Survey was presented to a group of National and Major Soil Survey Area Office leaders in Amherst. The leaders learned about the RI program to map shallow water areas and some of the products we are providing to our users.

Products:

The RI Soil Parent Material Map (available at: http://www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RI_Soil_Parent_Materials.pdf) was converted into a Google Earth file and posted on the user forums as a way to provide this map to non-traditional users. In the short time that the file has been on the forum, it has been viewed over 200 times. To download the file, visit: www.nesoil.com and follow the link on the top center of the page.