

April 2011-July 2011

Message From *R. Phou Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist*

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Greetings from the Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office. During the April to July 2011 period, NRCS staff diligently worked to implement conservation practices throughout Rhode Island.

Several outreach events were completed including six information session workshops and three Canada Goose abatement workshops. Other outreach events included an Earth Day exhibit at Roger Williams Park Zoo, two Earth Day

presentations at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service's Oath Ceremonies, two recruiting events, and an exhibit booth at RI Ag Day at the State House where Edward Avalos, USDA's Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, commended the Rhode Island agricultural community for its successful implementation of the buy local movement which can be utilized as a model for the Nation. NRCS also participated in three legislative tours including the America's Great Outdoors Comes to Providence tour where the White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley joined U.S. Senators Reed and Whitehouse, Governor Chaffee, and Providence Mayor Taveras at Riverside Park where NRCS constructed a fish ladder.

The field staff focused on obligating Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 conservation funds for various projects throughout the three conservation districts. Resource staff coordinated an educational Xerces Society pollinator training at URI's East Farm for the field staff to gain knowledge on pollinator habitat techniques.

Engineering continued to make progress on the implementation of the Pocasset River Flood Mitigation Plan with the purchase of six residential properties and a request for proposals for the design of a floodwall. The four American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) projects were completed. In addition, portable garden planters were built and an info workshop on edible landscapes was held in support of "The People's Garden" initiative.

As part of the National Rapid Carbon Assessment, the soils staff completed 75 percent of the field sampling in Rhode Island.

As many of you have heard, the FY 2011 appropriations bill eliminated funding for the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program. As a result, NRCS will stop work on agreements and cannot incur any costs associated with RD&D activities including providing coordinators for the RC&D Council.

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Administrative - Happenings

by Jackie Pashnik, Assistant State Conservationist for Operations



Newly hired Soil Conservationist Aides Bukky and Anthony assist Landscape Architect Kanseese Xiong to create pollinator planters as part of "The People's Garden" initiative.

If you stop by our office, you will see some new faces! Recent hires include:

- Gary Casabona was tempted away from the New Jersey NRCS and now proudly serves as our State Biologist.
- Nicole Bernier who joined the Administrative Team as Secretary to the Principal Staff.
- David Gold, who came to us under the Student Career Experience Program, has completed his degree and now joins us as a Civil Engineer.
- Shane McNamara, who originally was recruited from the RI Envirothon, joins us again this summer under the Student Career Experience Program as a Soil Conservation Trainee.
- Cassius Spears was converted to a Student Career Experience Program appointment as a Soil Conservation Trainee
- Jill Phillips, who joined the soils staff under the Student Educational Employment Program, graduated and now joins the Soils staff under a temporary appointment and will be working on the National Rapid Carbon Assessment project.
- Olubukola "Bukky" Olugbemi and Anthony Gutierrez, recent high school graduates, have joined us for the summer as Soil Conservation Aides before they head off to college in the fall.

If you get a chance, stop in and meet these most excellent additions to the Rhode Island NRCS!

Conservation District Happenings:

Conservation District - Eastern District (Bristol and Newport Counties)

by Melissa Hayden, Eastern District Conservationist

Outreach for FY 2011 was completed with a final outreach meeting in Little Compton on May 31, 2011. We are continuing to work on obligating FY 2011 funds. We have obligated \$468,742 of EQIP funds (with an additional \$141,453 remaining to be obligated), \$88,431 of WHIP funds (with an additional

\$6,400 remaining to be obligated), and \$4,000 of AMA funds (with an additional \$4,800 remaining to be obligated). Two FY 2011 contracts were funded through the Conservation Stewardship Program.



District Conservationist Melissa Hayden and Engineer Frank Vogel surveying for an access road at a farm in Little Compton, RI.

We have been working to complete contract maintenance for all active contracts. We have completed 90 percent of FY 2011 contract reviews and have addressed 100 percent of all contracts that were set to expire in 2011.

We are working to promote easement programs within the Eastern District. We recently worked with landowners to submit an application for the Grassland Reserve Program as well as met with applicants for the Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program at a property in Portsmouth, RI.

We have been working with the Norman Bird Sanctuary to plan the first New England cottontail habitat project in the Eastern District. We also continue to work closely with our partners. We have participated in several meetings with The Nature Conservancy to discuss potential projects in the Eastern District including treatment of Phragmites around Long Pond in Little Compton.

Conservation District - Northern District (Providence County)

by Justin Tuthill, Northern District Conservationist



A portable planter in support of "The People's Garden" initiative at the Northern Conservation District Office.

NRCS in conjunction with the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District held the final information/outreach meeting for NRCS programs on June 2, 2011. There were 22 landowners in attendance and approximately 4 applications for NRCS Farm Bill programs were received as a result of the meeting. Currently NRCS has 34 applications – 26 for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and 8 for the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). The breakdown of these applications is as follows:

Application Type	# Applications	Total Estimated Obligation
Cropland Management	6	\$86,047.00
Energy Management	1	\$1,200.00
Forest Management	13	\$160,574.00
Grazing/Hayland Management	7	\$531,822.00
Manure/Nutrient Management	2	\$13,500.00
Unknown	5	\$0.00
Grand Total	34	\$793,143.00

First round contract obligations for NRCS programs in the Northern District were completed in early April. A total of 51 contracts were approved for funding including 6 WHIP and 45 EQIP for a total of \$745,733.40 (\$44,616 for WHIP, \$701,117.40 for EQIP). The most notable fact regarding NRCS conservation programs in the Northern District is the number of forestry and grazing related contracts. Together, forestry and grazing contracts make up 76 percent of the total contracts funded to date in 2011. Below is a summary of FY 2011 contracts:

Contract/Practice Type	# Contracts	# Practices	Total Obligation
Cropland Management	4	9	\$28,087.00
Forest Management	25	97	\$258,564.40
Grazing/Hayland Management	14	68	\$385,971.00
Manure/Nutrient Management	6	20	\$65,327.00
Wildlife Management	2	11	\$7,784.00
Grand Total	51	205	\$745,733.40

With assistance from the Agricultural Technicians working for NRCS through an agreement with the RI State Conservation Committee, NRCS was able to complete contract review for 100 percent of the contracts in the Northern District. The Ag-Techs are continuing to assist NRCS with follow up to ensure that all contracts are on schedule and all participants are provided the assistance they require.

Conservation District - Southern District (Kent and Washington Counties)

by John Richard, Southern District Conservationist



Senator Whitehouse and his staff tour Emma Acres in Exeter, RI as part of a legislative tour.

So far for FY 2011, we have obligated \$773,334 in the Southern Rhode Island Conservation District (Kent and Washington Counties). This includes \$364,778 in Kent County and \$408,558 in Washington County. We have obligated \$10,300 in the AMA program, \$700,970 in the EQIP program, and \$62,064 in the WHIP program. We are currently working to obligate another \$394,706 in Washington County (EQIP program) and \$24,099 in Kent County (EQIP program). We are also currently working to obligate \$39,190 of funds in Washington County (WHIP program).

In the Southern District, we are working on several potential projects that will address declining species including a dam removal project that will provide habitat for anadromous fish species (e.g., alewife and Blueback herring) as well as a large scale New England cottontail habitat project. We have also worked to provide assistance to private forest landowners under the NY-New England Forestry Initiative.

With assistance from NRCS, the Town of Westerly and the Narragansett Indian Tribe completed a large scale WRP project in the Aguntaug Swamp area that consisted of the replacement of three culverts that are now fitted with water control weirs that will better enable the management of the water levels for the habitat of concern – the Atlantic White Cedar forest. The culverts were also fitted with beaver deceiver fencing technology that will help to keep these new structures free of obstruction.

NRCS participated in several meetings with project partners (Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Assoc., TNC, RIDEM, CT-NRCS, CT-DEP) to discuss the potential for easement programs and potential restoration sites along the Pawcatuck River. NRCS also met with TNC to discuss opportunities for projects on Block Island. NRCS also participated in partner meetings (CRMC, RWU, URI, TNC, shellfish growers, NOAA and STB) to discuss moving the shellfish restoration efforts forward in the future.

Engineering

by Kevin Farmer, State Engineer

Pawtuxet Falls Dam Removal Project

On Friday, July 1, 2011, the Pawtuxet River Authority awarded the construction contract for the dam removal at Pawtuxet Falls to SumCo Eco-Contracting of Salem, MA. SumCo intends to do the dam removal in late July/early Aug. and to do the planting in Sept/Oct.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program EWP

- St. Mary's Cemetery construction has restarted.
- Exeter 399 Summit Road, an A&E firm was selected and designs have begun.
- Carolina Trout Pond designs are complete and the construction contract has gone out for bid.
- 90 Sylvan Road survey completed by NRCS and designs are being completed by the Town of East Greenwich.
- Sandy Bottom Road survey completed by NRCS and designs are being completed by the Town of Coventry.

- 1050 Main Street survey completed by NRCS and designs are being completed by the Town of East Greenwich.
- Designs for the Pawtuxet retaining walls are complete and the construction contract will be awarded.

Extreme Precipitation Data

On June 17, 2011, the data (return period estimates only) and precip.net Web site was launched from Beta. Rhode Island Hydraulic Engineer Lakelle Pritchett is working with the national hydrology team to complete the uploading of Rhode Island hydrology data into TR-55 and other NRCS hydrology tools so that the new extreme precipitation data may be utilized in our current designs.

ARRA EWP- Floodplain Easement

Construction was completed at all four ARRA EWP-FPE sites.



A recently completed waterway in Cranston, RI funded under ARRA EWP.

People's Garden

Landscape Architect Kanseese Xiong designed planter boxes and coordinated with Ferolbink Farm to secure construction materials. Ferolbink Farm donated wood pallets that were recycled to construct the planter boxes. Kanseese coordinated with the Rhode Island Youthbuild organization to have them construct planter boxes. They have been installed at the USDA facility in Warwick, RI and the Northern Conservation District Office.

Pocasset Watershed Project

- Offers were made for the purchase of six properties in the city of Johnston. Appraisals were completed by Sweeney Real Estate and Appraisal and were reviewed by Tom Andolfo. The city is putting together estimates for the demolition costs.
- A request for proposals (RFP) is being developed for the Fletcher Ave floodwall engineering design contract.

Access Road Standard Design Training

On June 17, 2011, the engineering staff conducted training on the recently developed Standard Engineering Design for Access Road Code 560. The training introduced the design to field staff and provided them with training on the use of the design.

Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment

by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist



State Conservationist R. Phou Vongkhamdy and Senator Whitehouse on a legislative tour at Bucklin Point.

During the April 2011 to July 2011 period, NRCS was actively involved in several outreach and recruitment events.

NRCS participated in three Earth Day related events. This included an exhibit booth at the Roger Williams Park Zoo's Party for the Planet where staff distributed general conservation program materials to visitors. In addition, two presentations highlighting NRCS conservation practices in Rhode Island were conducted at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service's Oath Ceremonies held on Earth Day, April 22, 2011 where over 100 attendees were sworn in as American citizens.

Regarding recruitment, NRCS sponsored an exhibit booth at the University of Rhode Island's Spring Internship and Job Fair held at the Ryan Center where over 400 students learned about conservation careers. NRCS also participated at the

South Kingstown High School's Junior Career Fair where students learned about conservation careers and the Earth Team volunteer program.

NRCS sponsored an exhibit booth at the annual Rhode Island Ag Day held at the Rhode Island State House where general conservation materials were distributed along with posters highlighting prime soil loss throughout Rhode Island over the past 25 years due to developmental pressures. The event was well attended with several high profile government officials including RI Governor Chaffee and Edward Avalos, USDA's Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs who both spoke. Avalos commended the success of the buy local movement in Rhode Island and noted that the local agricultural community model can be used as a model on a national level to address food safety, pricing, and distribution directly from farms to schools, restaurants, grocery stores, and hospitals.

In honor of Earth Day, NRCS RI also developed a Conservation Showcase section on its Web site which highlights several conservation success stories throughout the State where NRCS conservation programs have been utilized to improve conservation efforts. Web visitors can also peruse success stories in other States through an interactive map which neatly consolidates success stories throughout the Nation. Information on the Rhode Island success stories may be accessed at the following NRCS RI Web site:

<http://www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov/news/successstories/index.html>



Students participating at the aquatic station during the 2011 Envirothon competition.

NRCS staff was actively involved in support of the 2011 Envirothon on May 20, 2011 where The Wheeler School won first place, followed by two teams from Narragansett High School.

NRCS RI worked with the three conservation districts to conduct three general information workshops highlighting the

benefits of implementing conservation plans for farm and forest land owners. An educational workshop on “The People’s Garden” initiative was conducted at the Northern Conservation District Office where Kanseese Xiong, Landscape Architect, provided information on creating edible landscapes including vegetables, herbs, and plantings that encourage increased pollination. In addition, NRCS worked in cooperation with the conservation districts to hold three Canada Goose Abatement workshops for livestock and agricultural producers throughout the State.

Three high-profile legislative tours were conducted in Rhode Island which highlighted NCRS projects. This included the “America’s Great Outdoors Comes to Providence” tour where the White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley joined U.S. Senators Reed and Whitehouse, Governor Chaffee, and Providence Mayor Taveras at Riverside Park where NRCS constructed a fish ladder. The Northern Rhode Island Conservation District conducted a tour for Senator Whitehouse and his staff which included visits to several NRCS funded conservation projects. Lastly, NRCS participated in the U.S. Senator Whitehouse tour at the Narragansett Bay Commission’s Bucklin Point facility.



NRCS Staff showcases the fish ladder at Riverside Park during the "America's Great Outdoors Comes to Providence" legislative tour.

Programs

by Michael Moorman, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

The Financial Assistance Programs, which include the

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program, and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Easement Programs, which include the Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP), have continued to be popular in Rhode Island.

The Easement Programs activity included 11 FRPP applications received from 9 entities that equated to approximately 600 acres submitted for the potential purchase of development rights to allow the land to continue to be utilized as farmland. FRPP Agreements were developed for 5 entities totaling over \$4 million. In recent months, three parcels totally approximately 140 acres were closed on protecting them from development through the FRPP. The WRP’s interest quadrupled from last year with the help of an agreement that was developed with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), which brought a number of interested landowners to the table. The applications received equated to 215 acres of land that has the potential to be enrolled in the WRP. Appraisals are currently being finalized to determine the exact values of the easements. In addition to the agreement that was developed with the TNC, a similar agreement was developed with the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) to assist with the growing FRPP interest. The Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) also flourished over the last couple of months with an increase in the number of applications received from landowners.

The Financial Assistance Programs had 190 contracts developed on over 10,500 acres for a total obligation of about \$3.6 million. The New England – New York (NE-NY) Forestry Initiative was also added to the programs that were offered. The \$250,000 that was allocated for the program was quickly utilized throughout the State. In preparation for the upcoming FY 2012 budget, staff is preparing for the alternative energy practices that will be offered in the future by attending various training sessions and collaborating among the various disciplines to determine the specifics as they relate to this exciting new addition to our practice list.

Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)

by Chris Modisette, Former RC&D Coordinator

NRCS and RC&D are partnering with the Northern RI Conservation District and several partners (Providence Water, RIFCO, RI Tree Farm) to celebrate the International Year of the Forest. Activities to date include developing literature for use by teachers and the general public titled, "Forests, A Working World in Your Backyard"; a poster and photo contest illustrating clean water as a forest product; and A "Walk in the Woods" event on May 21, 2011 to coordinate with the National Walk in the Woods being hosted by the American Tree Farm Program. Over 1,600 informational packets were sent to our woodland owners in the Scituate Reservoir Watershed to promote technical assistance for woodland management. The RI Coverts Project, now in its 4th year, trained 15 landowners from across the State through its workshop held April 17-19, 2011 that focused on forest ecology and stewardship, wildlife management, and land conservation. NRCS provided assistance to the RI Tree Farm Program to develop three outreach meetings with the RI Tree Farm Program to assist tree farmers in updating their forest management plans. NRCS also developed an executive summary for the Tree Farm Committee's 2010-2015 Strategic Plan.

NRCS helped to organize a field trip on May 18, 2011 which highlighted recent USDA NRCS forestry initiatives, Rhode Island's growing aquaculture industry, local history, and a visit to the Watson Farm for the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters Cooperative Forest Management Committee annual meeting. This year's theme was "Forest Conversion – New England's Changing Landscape."

A new URI Web site on forestry and wildlife habitat was developed to support cooperative extension programs involving forest management and wildlife conservation. The Web site address is:
<http://nrs.uri.edu/ce/Forestry.html>

NRCS continues to develop a Strategic Watershed Action Team partnership agreement with an NGO and State Forestry agency to accelerate technical support for forestry. It is also working with RIDEM staff to obtain State mapping data and discuss the use of the NRCS State Resource Assessment process to help identify and prioritize forest habitats and areas of program emphasis. NRCS is working with conservation partners to leverage expertise and funding for forest management to benefit the New England cottontail. This species requires dense thickets of scrub-shrub habitat for cover. Other wildlife species including woodcock and many neo-tropical migratory songbirds will also benefit from this type of habitat management.

As many of you may have heard, the FY 2011 appropriation bill eliminated funding for the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program in FY 2011 and we do not anticipate funding for FY 2012. As a result, NRCS will have to stop work on agreements and cannot incur any additional costs associated with RC&D activities. NRCS will no longer provide coordinators to the RI RC&D Council.

Since 1973, we have worked side by side with RI RC&D to conserve and improve the use of land, develop natural resources, and improve and enhance social, economic, and environmental conditions in Rhode Island. Please know we consider RC&D Councils to be our partners and we will continue to work with RI RC&D on conservation activities.

Resources

by Gary Casabona, State Biologist

On July 6, 2011, many of our field staff attended a pollinator training at the University of Rhode Island's East Farm campus.

This training was presented by Jolie Goldenetz-Dollar, Pollinator Habitat Restoration Specialist, Mid-Atlantic Region (The Xerces Society). Jolie is currently working at the NRCS Cape May Plant Materials Center. In addition, Mace Vaughan, Pollinator Program Director (The Xerces Society) also trained staff. Mace is currently working at the NRCS West National Technology Support Center with support from Gary Casabona, State Biologist, NRCS-RI and Kristen Castrataro, Agricultural Extension Agent, URI Cooperative Extension.

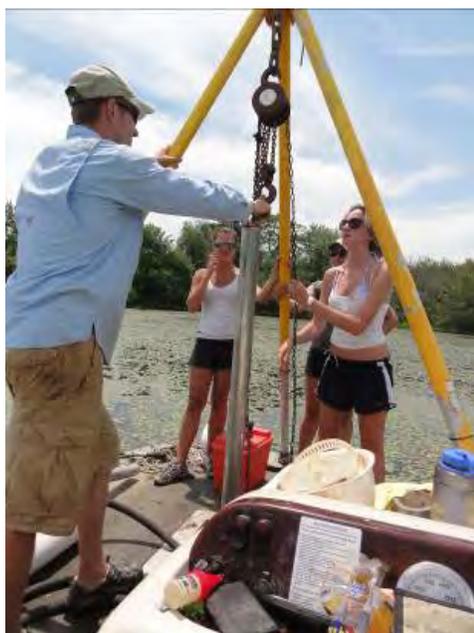
The course was comprised of seven modules including the importance of pollinators, bee biology, bee-friendly farming, field tour of pollinator habitat, developing new pollinator habitat, bee conservation and Farm Bill programs, and additional resources.

Course attendees included NRCS staff from RI, CT, and MA as well as producers and ag researchers from the three States. Over 40 people attended the course and their response was very enthusiastic despite the high summer temperatures! All attendees received a copy of the Xerces Society's 372 page book, "Attracting Native Pollinators", which will be highly useful in conservation planning for pollinator habitat.

All of the course material was highly relevant to NRCS conservation planning and emphasized the many ways in which pollinator components can be included in NRCS conservation practices.

Soils Program

by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist



National Rapid Carbon Assessment:

The National Rapid Carbon Assessment (RCA) project is a scientific study of soil organic carbon stocks that are held within our Nation's soil. This assessment began in 2010 as a top priority from the NRCS Chief White with its plan for completion by 2012. Rhode Island's NRCS Resource Soil Scientist Maggie Payne is the liaison for the project for the Northeast region (MO-12). Maggie is responsible for coordination of the field sampling and laboratory analysis of over 300 samples that will be analyzed at the University of Rhode Island. To date we have completed 75 percent of the field sampling. To assist with the laboratory analysis, RI NRCS hired a temporary soil scientist and also receives assistance from URI and other NRCS States from Southern New England. Results of this study will be available in 2012. The data will help improve our worldwide carbon

NRCS and URI soils staff conduct soil mapping of the coastal lagoons in South County.

distribution stocks in soils, improve our soil database, and be used for our conservation management programs.

Soil Survey Updates:

Phase II of the RI Coastal Zone Soil Survey is underway. This phase will cover the area from Point Judith to Greenwich Bay and also complete all of the remaining South County coastal lagoons. The updated soil maps will be available by Winter 2012. In June, the Narrow River in Narragansett was completed along with the coastal soils to Wickford Harbor. Subaqueous soil mapping of the freshwater ponds is also underway with completed ponds including Watchaug, Wordens, Tucker, Bellville, and Bowdish Reservoir. A graduate student at URI is studying the relationship of the freshwater ponds and aquatic vegetation along with classifying these submerged soils. The data will also be part of the next update of the soils mapping in 2012. Information of the RI Coastal Zone Soil Survey is at: http://www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RI_Soil_Survey_2011.html

Congratulations to the URI Soil Judging Team which came in first place at the national competition held in Bend, Oregon. This is the first time a team from the northeast has won the nationals since the competition began in 1961. RI NRCS Soil Scientist Jill Phillips was part of the URI team. Jill also won first place in the individual contest at the 2010 nationals. Info on the URI team is available at: <http://cels.uri.edu/news/nSoilchamps.aspx>.



URI Soil Judging Team won first place at the national competition in Bend, OR.