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## Message From Pooh Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist



Greetings from the Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office. During the October to December period, NRCS staff diligently worked to implement conservation practices throughout Rhode Island where there were a record number of applications processed.

During the first three months of FY 2010, staff successfully implemented a record 166 Best Management Practices (BMPs) with \$1,955,464 expended on various resource concerns which compares with \$1,949,422 for the entire FY 2009. We currently have received over two hundred new conservation applications since the beginning of FY 2010.

Several outreach events were completed including six information session workshop to inform landowners on NRCS conservation programs. NRCS staff also held three educational seminars related to soils for Envirothon and Brown University students. Other outreach events included a seminar on becoming a Technical Service Provider (TSP), two employment recruitment events at local universities, and a presentation on the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP).

A marketing campaign was completed for the general Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and we are working on several current marketing efforts including the Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs) with a special emphasis on forest management plans where promotional billboards were used throughout Rhode Island. Other current outreach efforts include the FY 2010 Forest and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP), High Tunnel Hoop House Pilot Program as part of the White House 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiative, and the FY 2010 Organic Initiative.

NRCS staff continued progress on the projects funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for Emergency Watershed Protection-Floodplain Easements (EWP-FPE).

I enthusiastically look forward to working with the staff and partners as we continue to successfully put conservation on the ground through the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs). I am confident that FY 2010 will be another banner year in conservation efforts throughout Rhode Island.

PHOUKHAM VONGKHAMDY  
State Conservationist

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## Summary: Upper & Lower Narragansett Bay

*by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist*

During the October to December period of FY 2010, NRCS staff successfully completed a large increase in work demands through the successful implementation of almost \$2 million of best management practices (BMPs) where 166 conservation practices were completed to address various resource concerns including invasive plant management, irrigation, soil erosion, nutrient management, and oyster restoration transplants. This compares with a total of almost \$2 million of BMPs for the entire 2009 fiscal year. Most of the conservation practices were awarded under EQIP funding although AMA, WHIP, and WRP were also utilized.

In addition, the Rhode Island State Office received a total of over 200 new applications during the first three months for the 2010 fiscal year with the total increasing daily. Among programs, EQIP was by far the most popular conservation program although there were some AMA, WHIP, and CSP applications submitted. Special emphasis was placed on the promotion of the general EQIP and the Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs) including forest management plans under EQIP. Staff completed the assessments for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) which encourages producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities in addition to existing conservation activities.

Current and future conservation program marketing efforts include the FY 2010 Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program with over \$4 million available, the High Tunnel Hoop House Pilot Program funded under EQIP as part of the White House 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiative, and the FY 2010 Organic Initiative which is also funded under EQIP. The high tunnel pilot project will verify if high tunnels are effective in reducing pesticide use, keeping nutrients in the soil, extending the growing season, increasing yields, and providing other benefits to growers. So far, all three program efforts have shown considerable public interest based on the application inquiries received thus far.

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## Focus: Lower Narragansett Bay

### Oyster Restoration Transplants

*by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist*

In FY 2010, NRCS continued work with 13 shellfish farmers in a unique partnership to implement oyster habitat restoration with the goal to increase essential oyster habitat to benefit a wide range of aquatic organisms and simultaneously improve water quality. During October and November, NRCS funded shellfish farmers transplanted over 10 million oysters which had been grown out on oyster farms to approved oyster habitat restoration locations throughout Narragansett Bay and the coastal ponds. Some specific locations for oyster restoration transplants included Ninigret Pond, Bissel Cove, Quonochontaug Pond, Potters Pond and Jenny's Creek. By 2011, it is estimated that NRCS shellfish farmers will have grown, reared, and transplanted over 30 million oysters or approximately 5,700 cubic feet of oysters on shell using approved oyster seed-on-shell setting techniques. It should be noted that this effort is



Shellfish farmer explains how oysters grow on "cultch" or shell to *Providence Journal* reporter.



Close up view of oysters growing on "cultch" or shell.



Shellfish farmers load oysters on boat during transplant.



NRCS employees observe demonstration at shellfish farmer's oyster restoration site.

believed to be the first oyster restoration program that is totally industry based where NRCS collaborated with several partners including RI DEM, the University of Rhode Island, Coastal Resources Management Council, Roger Williams University, Ocean State Aquaculture Association, aquaculture industry leaders, and The Nature Conservancy.

During the fall transplant at Quonochontaug Breachway, Peter Lord and Andrew Dickerman of the *Providence Journal* accompanied NRCS staff and several shellfish farmers. The *Providence Journal* staff wrote an informative article and accompanying educational video explaining the entire oyster restoration process which can currently be viewed on the *Providence Journal* Web site.

Related to the aquaculture effort, NRCS participated in the Eastern District Tour where Peter Brown received an outstanding achievement award for excellence in aquaculture.

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## Personnel

*by Brenda Venable, Accounting Technician*

### Personnel Actions:

NRCS welcomed three new employees during the October to December period.

Karen Duke was hired as Budget Officer for the Rhode Island State Office and most recently worked in accounting at the New York State Office in Syracuse, New York.

Kevin Farmer was hired as State Engineer for the Rhode Island State Office and most recently worked in engineering at the Georgia State Office in Athens, Georgia.

Stewart Taffe was hired as a full-time Soil Conservation Technician after working as a part-time employee for the Rhode Island Field Office.

Melissa Hayden, who works at the Wareham, Massachusetts office, completed a temporary detail as a Soil Conservationist at the Rhode Island Field Office where she greatly assisted in implementing best management practices related to the large increase in conservation contracts.

In October, the Rhode Island State Office held an Employee Awards and Recognition Day in Matunuck, Rhode Island. Leadership training was held along with a field trip to a shellfish farmer's oyster restoration site where employees gained educational insight on the entire oyster growth process. Employees were also recognized for their valuable input in successfully accomplishing the FY 2009 conservation goals.

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## Earth Team Volunteer Program (ETVP) - Update

*by Michelle Moore, State Volunteer Program Coordinator*

During the September to December period, there was a large influx in the number of Earth Team volunteers who are Technical Service Providers (TSPs). Such Earth Team volunteers are provided the opportunity to actively work with the NRCS planning and resource staffs to apply technical conservation practices to real world situations.

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## Outreach and Communications-Happenings

*by Walter Marshall, State Public Affairs Specialist*

NRCS participated in several outreach events with presentations and exhibit booths. There were three information workshops for the general Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and three additional information workshops which highlighted the WHIP and Conservation Activity Plans with a special emphasis on the forestry management plans. NRCS soils staff conducted three trainings for Envirothon students and Brown University soil science students. Jessie Dyer held an employment workshop highlighting the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) for college students. Eric Scherer conducted a presentation to the American Society of Civil Engineers on opportunities for Technical Service Providers (TSPs). Lastly, NRCS had exhibit booths at two career fairs including the Federal Government Career Fair at Bryant University where staff spoke to 175 students from approximately 10 local colleges and universities and the URI Career Fair where staff spoke to approximately 150 students.

Regarding press releases, four were completed including the 2010 Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP) with a February 5, 2010 deadline, the 2010 High Tunnel Hoop House Pilot Program as part of the 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiative with a February 15, 2010 deadline and two oyster restoration transplant announcements. The releases were disseminated to the news media and conservation partners. In addition, advertisements for the Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs) such as forest management plans under the EQIP program were published in several local newspapers including the RI Central Newsgroup (e.g., Chariho Times, Standard Times), and Rhode Island Newspaper Group (e.g., Valley Breeze, Bristol Phoenix).

NRCS public affairs staff also embarked on a marketing campaign for the forest management plans by creating its first billboard advertisements which were displayed during the entire month of December in three locations including North Scituate, Bradford, and North Kingstown. Throughout the end of 2009, there was considerable interest in sign ups for the forest management plans. Staff will assess the effectiveness of such a billboard campaign for future conservation marketing efforts.

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## Soils Program - Happenings

*by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist*

Subaqueous Update: The Mapping Partnership field crew worked on completing the soil and geologic mapping for Green Hill Pond in Charlestown, RI. The data will be posted to the MapCoast IMS site once the digitizing is complete. During the winter, plans are to investigate fresh water subaqueous soils. An article about MapCoast was featured in the Fall 2009 edition of *Soil Survey Horizons* which also featured Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist on the front cover operating an RTK GPS.

Technical Soil Services – the soil survey staff conducted numerous technical soil services including on-site soil investigations, assisting with soil and educational talks, and remote sensing investigations.