

April-June 2012

Message From R. Phou Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist

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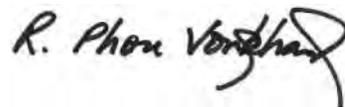
Greetings from the Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office. During the April to June 2012 period, NRCS staff continued work related to obligating contracts for the second and third rounds of application funding for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 conservation practices.

Regarding outreach activities, NRCS participated in eleven outreach events targeted to various audiences including potential clients, conservation partners, students, and the general public. Such events included two farm tours (Breene Hollow Farm, Confreda Farms), a URI recruiting event, RI Energy and Environmental Leaders Day, Envirothon, Agriculture Day at the RI State House, and Earth Day Party for the Planet at Roger Williams Park Zoo. Two trainings were conducted for NRCS staff and partners including a two-day plant identification class and the 2012 Soil Survey Work Planning Conference. Such events were successful to increase awareness of NRCS technical and financial assistance in Rhode Island and subsequently to increase the number of program applications received.

The field staff concentrated on obtaining new applications for FY 2012. So far, Rhode Island has received 285 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications. Among applications received, 172 have been awarded contracts worth approximately \$2,500,000 covering approximately 11,300 acres of land. The third and final round application ranking deadline ended on June 1, 2012.

The 2012 RI soil survey data is now available for download. This new version features the first ever example of a fresh water subaqueous soil survey, a re-digitizing of Block Island, completion of Phase II of the RI Coastal Zone Soil Survey, and numerous other enhancements to the spatial soil maps and data.

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R. PHOU VONGKHAMDY
State Conservationist

Conservation District Happenings Including Program Funding:

Conservation District - Eastern District (Bristol and Newport Counties)

by Melissa Hayden, Eastern District Conservationist

During the period April to June 2012, the Eastern District obligated 31 contracts on over 800 acres for a total of \$390,000. Combined with our contracts from round 1, the Eastern District has obligated a total of 59 contracts on 1,351 total acres worth \$805,637 in FY 2012. We also completed conservation plans and rankings for applications in our third round of funding which total \$900,000.

Implementation on existing contracts this quarter included completion of 3 Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, installation of 2 seasonal high tunnels, invasive plant management on several properties, tree and shrub establishment for wildlife habitat, installation of 8,200 feet of fencing to facilitate prescribed grazing on several properties, and installation of a grassed waterway.

The ERICD is holding its next outreach event on July 18 at 5:30pm at Watson Farm in Jamestown. The event will include a tour of Watson Farm and Don Minto will showcase several NRCS conservation practices implemented on the farm. Participants will learn about conservation farming practices and funding opportunities through NRCS.

Conservation District - Northern District (Providence County)

by Justin Tuthill, Northern District Conservationist

The Northern District has continued to work with applicants to develop conservation plans for FY 2012 Conservation Programs. We have funded 54 applications on approximately 2,000 acres for \$527,000 in financial assistance and have an additional 21 pre-approved applications for \$439,116 through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. In mid-May, the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District on behalf of NRCS organized a farm tour outreach event at Confreda Farms for interested landowners and operators. Special thanks goes out to Vinny Confreda for letting NRICD and NRCS use his farm to illustrate several different conservation practices and discuss the various ways the Conservation District and NRCS can help agricultural producers. The NRICD has played a critical role assisting NRCS to develop and implement a successful program outreach campaign throughout FY 2012 – it has been a great partnership that has helped link more agricultural producers and private forest landowners with NRCS programs than in previous years.

The third quarter was also a busy time for construction and installation of conservation practices in the Northern District. The following summarizes conservation practices applied to date in FY 2012:

Practice	Sum of Amount Applied
Access Control	26.1 ac
Access Road	300 ft
Animal trails & walkways	1317 ft.
Brush Management	12.4 ac
Composting Facility	1 no
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan	4 no
Conservation Cover	0.5 ac
Critical Area Planting	3.1 ac
Cropland Annual Payment	409.19 PT
Diversions	5.5 ft
Early Successional Habitat	2.3 ac
Fence	1195 ft
Forage Harvest Management	10 ac
Forest Management Plan	1 no
Forest Stand Improvement	161.4 ac
Forest Trails and Landings	6.9 ac
Forestry Management Plan	6 no
Grazing Management Plan-Written	2 no
Herbaceous Weed Control	4.5 ac
High Tunnel	6588 sq ft
Mulching	1.5 ac
Nutrient Management	37.3 ac
Pest Management	34.3 ac
Pipeline (Ft.)	936 ft
Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats	22.9 ac
Subsurface Drain (Ft.)	5.5 ft
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	469.2 ac
Water Well	4 no
Watering Facility	4 no
Wetland Enhancement	0.8 ac

Conservation District - Southern District (Kent and Washington Counties)

by John Richard, Southern District Conservationist

The NRCS Southern District has obligated funding for 59 total contracts under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) with 15 developed in Kent County and 44 in Washington County for a running total so far of \$1,134,506.80 on 7,992 acres. The SRICD is continuing to work hard to build relationships and partnerships to implement the new Working Lands for Wildlife initiative (targeting conservation of the candidate species New England cottontail) under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). The SRICD developed 5 applications that are pending final obligation that would total \$139,515. We have also been in contact with more groups and individual landowners who are very excited about participating in this program to help create habitat for this species in hopes that it recovers to a self-sustaining population.

In conjunction with the Southern Rhode Island Conservation District, we held an open house outreach event on May 5th at Breene Hollow Farm in West Greenwich. Breene Hollow Farm is a dairy farm and

member of Rhody Fresh. The event was successful since new farmers and landowners were able to stop in and discuss our programs with NRCS staff as well as to meet and talk with a farmer who is an NRCS program participant to get his perspective on working with USDA-NRCS.

Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment

by *Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist*

During the April to June period, NRCS sponsored exhibit booths or participated at several conservation related events throughout the State. In April, NRCS celebrated Earth Day by exhibiting at the Roger Williams Park Zoo Party for the Planet where staff provided general information on the importance of conservation efforts throughout Rhode Island. The audience was primarily families with young children who were educated on how conservation efforts benefit everyone through improved air and water quality. Children were able to select various NRCS temporary conservation tattoos.

NRCS also provided technical assistance with several conservation partners at the 5th Annual RI Coverts Cooperator training which was held at the Alton Jones Whispering Pine Conference Center in West Greenwich, RI. The well attended event was coordinated by the RI Resource Conservation and Development Area Council. The trainers informed woodland owners on how sound forest management practices can make wildlife more abundant and healthier while simultaneously improving the quality of forest health which ultimately enhances both air and water quality.

NRCS collaborated with the RI Association of Conservation Districts (RICD) to conduct two farm



The NRCS staff consults with attendees at the Breene Hollow Farm open house.

learned about technical and financial assistance provided through NRCS to address soil erosion and participated in a hay ride to tour the property. It should be noted that NRCS and RICD attended the 90th anniversary celebration of Confreda Farms which is one of the largest commercial vegetable farms in Rhode Island. Prominent speakers

tours to showcase conservation practices implemented through NRCS and RICD. At Breene Hollow Farm in West Greenwich, RI, attendees learned about conservation efforts including comprehensive nutrient management plans, underground outlets, subsurface drains, roof runoff structures, heavy use area protection, and manure storage pits. An informative article written by Sanne Kure-Jensen showcasing NRCS efforts at Breene Hollow Farm was published on the cover of the *Country Folks* magazine. At Confreda Farms in Cranston, RI, attendees



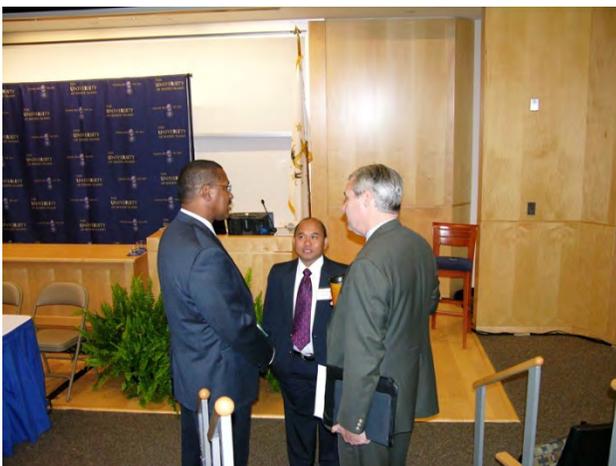
The Confreda family poses in the greenhouse at the Confreda Farm's 90th anniversary celebration on May 4, 2012.

included Mayor Fung-Cranston, Mayor Avedisian-Warwick, Janet Coit-RIDEM, R Phou Vongkhamdy-NRCS, Paul Brule-FSA, Al Bettencourt-RI Ag Bureau, and Hannah Mellion-Farm Fresh.

Among other outreach event held, NRCS had an exhibit booth at Agriculture Day at the RI State House where local agriculture producers and conservation partners showcased their products and services. A legislative program commended the local agricultural community for its efforts to successfully market local products directly to end consumers.

NRCS also attended the RI Energy and Environmental Leaders' Day at URI on May 1, 2012 where Dr. Homer Wilkes, NRCS Acting Associate Chief visited Rhode Island to represent NRCS at the event. Well over 150 attendees from the public and private sectors convened to discuss the importance of the health and protection of our oceans, rivers, and drinking water. Dr. Wilkes was one of four distinguished panelists who addressed "Watershed Management: Protecting the Ocean State's Waterways". The panel showcased innovative ways to protect our waterways from nutrient pollution and roadway run-off. Wilkes emphasized the importance of working partnerships with private producers here in Rhode Island and across the country where introducing proven conservation practices on private lands is essential to any efforts to conserve natural resources.

Through the Farm Bill's Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding, Rhode Island partnered with aquaculture farmers to improve water quality and wildlife habitat in the Narragansett Bay and Southern Rhode Island coastal salt ponds. NRCS collaborated with 13 aquaculture farmers to rear oysters on artificial reefs in the Bay and Southern Rhode Island coastal salt ponds. The oysters filter out harmful nutrients from the water. Each oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water a day and 30 million oysters were transplanted into protected sites controlled by the producers in just two years. NRCS Rhode Island also works with aquaculture producers to implement gear cycling. This practice gives aquaculture operators a method to clean their gear on shore rather than directly into the bay or coastal ponds. This practice can improve water quality. To curb potential oil spills from their operations, 60 percent of all aquaculture producers in Rhode Island have worked with NRCS on this practice.



Dr. Homer Wilkes, R. Phou Vongkhamdy, and U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse converse at the RI Energy and Environmental Leaders' Day at URI.

Restoring wetlands – nature's sponges – is a large part of filtration and improving water quality. NRCS Rhode Island is working with landowners in wetlands like Gooseneck Cove, Aguntaug Swamp, and Jacobs Point Marsh to design and install new channels and water control structures to restore tidal flow into the salt marshes. Restoration of tidal flow reduces the presence of invasive plant species. In addition, the improved hydrology improves water quality, restores critical salt marsh plant communities, and protects endangered plant species such as the Atlantic White

cedar.

Among other efforts, NRCS Rhode Island completed dam removals and installed fish ladders which also

help landowners improve wildlife habitat and enhance water quality in the watersheds throughout the State and Narragansett Bay. Since 2006, we obligated more than \$4.5 million in financial assistance to support fish passage in Rhode Island. Such projects support Rhode Island's \$200 million recreational fishing industry by helping to ensure bluefish and bass are around for the long term.

In another effort to improve water quality, NRCS Rhode Island worked with more than 60 producers to install riparian buffers on their lands. These buffers improve water quality by filtering out sediments and nutrient run-off before they enter waterways.

Through Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, we're curbing run-off from fertilizer and manure applications by providing a plan to assist the producer with the proper application rates of nutrients and animal waste which reduce the inputs of nitrogen and phosphorous into the waterways.

Lastly, forests protect watersheds and groundwater supplies that provide the bulk of our clean drinking water. More than 55 percent of Rhode Island is forested and 75 percent of Rhode Islanders get their drinking water from reservoirs protected by forests. NRCS has worked with private landowners to develop forest management plans on 9,000 acres in the State and implement forest stand improvement practices that help improve water quality.



The NRCS staff examines plant specimens at the Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge.

NRCS RI conducted two training events. A two-day plant identification class included a site visit to Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge in Charlestown, RI where the NRCS staff was able to assess habitat quality for various species of wildlife and pollinators; plan strategies to manage invasive plants; and assist landowners in managing their forest resources. The second training was the 2012 RI Soil Survey Planning Conference held on June 28, 2012 at the Coastal Institute's Kingston location where approximately 75 attendees learned about the latest version of the Soil Survey of Rhode Island. In addition, attendees learned about the site specific mapping, latest research in soil science, and how to use and

access soils data from a variety of sources. The conference was sponsored by Rhode Island NRCS, URI Cooperative Extension NEMO, and the Society of Soil Scientists of Southern New England.

Regarding recruiting events, NRCS exhibited at the 2012 URI Spring Career and Job Fair where staff highlighted employment opportunities for soil conservationists, soil scientists, civil engineers, and biologists along with summer internship opportunities.

Rhode Island Envirothon, Inc. held its annual competition on Friday, May 18, 2012 at Goddard Memorial State Park in Warwick, RI. NRCS provided technical and administrative support at the one-day event which marked the culmination of a year of dedicated, hard work by high school students from around the State who competed in teams of five to address environmental issues in four subject areas

which include aquatic ecology, forestry, wildlife, and soils and land use, plus one special environmental issue which changes annually. For 2012, the environmental issue was the “Low Impact Development and Nonpoint Pollution”. Six high schools participated in the competition with a total of 12 teams. The high schools included The Blackstone Academy, Coventry High School, The Greene School, Narragansett High School, Scituate High School, and The Wheeler School.



The Wheeler School ranked in first place at the 2012 RI Envirothon competition where U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse presented the awards.

This year, it was a great honor to have U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse present at the awards ceremony where he commended the students who participated in the event and highlighted the importance in addressing environmental issues in Rhode Island. The winning team ranking in first place was from The Wheeler School which will represent Rhode Island in the Canon North American Envirothon which will take place in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania on July 22-27, 2012. Teams from Narragansett High School and Coventry High School ranked second and third, respectively, in the competition.

Resources

by Eric, Boettger, Resource Conservationist; Gary Casabona, State Biologist; Chris Modisette, State Forester; and Reena Shaw, Agriculture Economist

Resources

The Resource Team continues to provide assistance through:

Program Delivery – Assisting in the management process for effective program delivery during the fiscal year which include setting priorities and goals and addressing resource needs in the State.

Resource Conservationist Eric Boettger has been working with RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) – Office of Water Resources and the RI NRCS State Technical Committee on the selection of HUC -12 watersheds which are targeted under the **NRCS’ 2012 Water Quality Initiative**.

The selected watersheds are as follows:

- 1) Sakonnet River watershed
- 2) Upper East Passage watershed
- 3) Tomaquag Brook – Pawcatuck River watershed

Eric and members of the Resource staff have been working to develop a watershed assessment for the Sakonnet River Watershed which will help determine benefits achieved under the Water Quality

Initiative. The staff has also been developing on-line maps and attending meetings to promote and enhance the Water Quality Initiative.

NRCS is initiating the **Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI)** to implement a more effective, efficient, and sustainable business model for delivering conservation assistance across the Nation. The Resource staff has been assisting in this initiative by providing Geographic Information System (GIS) data requirements and data clean-up, assisting in consolidating Resource Concerns, and participating in trainings in preparation for the CDSI conversion.

State Biologist Gary Casabona has continued to work with US Fish & Wildlife Service and RI DEM partners on the creation of “scrub/shrub” young forest habitat to benefit the New England cottontail, a species of greatest conservation need which is targeted under NRCS’ **Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative**. New England cottontails are the only native rabbit east of the Hudson River. Thanks to the participation of Rhode Island landowners, land trusts, and rod & gun clubs, 112 acres of cottontail habitat management has been planned through NRCS Farm Bill programs since April.

Gary was also very glad to host a visit from former NJ-NRCS colleagues, Tim Dunne and Chris Miller, who came to Rhode Island to teach a two-day **Plant Identification** course to Rhode Island NRCS staff. The development of good plant identification skills helps NRCS staff to assess habitat quality for various species of wildlife and pollinators; plan strategies to manage invasive plants; and assist landowners in managing their forest resources.

Agricultural Economist Reena Shaw and State Forester Chris Modisette are part of the national effort to develop and maintain NRCS payment schedules, their associated scenarios, and estimated incurred costs on a national and regional basis. The objective of this initiative is to provide greater consistency in program payment rates nationally and will be completed for all practices during FY 2012. The goal is to complete all schedules and maintain the data in a web-based system for use by NRCS field staff to develop participant contracts for FY 2013. Reena provided a dual role through participation on the **Payment Schedules - National Technical Specialist and Cost Team** while Chris is part of the **Forestry National Technical Specialist Team** and is also part of the **Regional Payment Scenario Team** for the northeast.



Chris and Gary were part of the training team for the 5th Annual **Coverts Cooperator Training Workshop** held at URI’s W. Alton Jones Campus from April 20-22, 2012. Since 2008, NRCS has partnered with the Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Council (RIRC&D) to develop and implement the RI Coverts Program with the goal of teaching woodland owners how sound forest management practices can increase the diversity and abundance of wildlife by improving wildlife habitat. A total of 84 persons have attended the training since 2008. These individuals own a total of 1,898 acres of forest land and are involved in stewardship decision making on another 6,234 acres of land largely associated with land trusts. Since 2009, through NRCS programs, RI Coverts Cooperators have implemented practices on 368 acres to benefit wildlife and with an additional 639 acres planned through 2012. A recent URI

study of the Coverts Project indicated that **financial support from NRCS was an important factor that motivated landowners to manage their forests for wildlife.**

New England/New York Forestry Initiative

The New England/New York region contains over 52 million acres of forest land, including the largest intact block of temperate broadleaf forest in the Nation. Eighty percent are privately owned. In 2008/2009, the New England Governors' Conference commissioned a Blue Ribbon Task Force to identify the most urgent land conservation issues facing New England. The committee identified five principles to build a lasting conservation legacy for future generations of New Englanders, including "Keeping Forests as Forests." (For the full report, go to http://www.negc.org/main/admin/uploads/20_negc_clc_report_909.pdf.) NRCS is supporting the Governor's effort by establishing the **New England/New York Forestry Initiative**.



NRCS is supporting the Governor's effort by establishing the **New England/New York Forestry Initiative**. Through the New England/New York Forestry Initiative, NRCS is working with its partners and forest landowners and land managers to Keep Forests as Forests and maintain and enhance the public benefits they provide. The Initiative provides a combination of technical and financial assistance to landowners and land managers in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Landowner Outreach:

Resource staff was involved in outreach to landowners at the following events: 5th Annual RI Coverts Cooperator Training Workshop, Southern RI Conservation District Outreach workshop, RIFCO/Tree Farm Spring Field Day, Senator Whitehouse's Environmental Leadership Day, Watershed Counts event, State Arbor Day celebrations, and the RI Envirothon Competition,

Soils Program

by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist



Over 75 attendees listen to presentations at the 2012 RI Soil Survey Work Planning Conference

RI Soil Survey Work Planning Conference:

Over 75 people attended the 2012 RI Soil Survey Work Planning Conference held in June at the URI Coastal Institute. Participants included Federal, State, and local government soil survey users along with private and NGO personnel. Soil Survey Work Planning Conferences are typically held each year to obtain input from soil survey users within a State and to provide updates and information on using soils data.



Soil Technician Jill Phillips presents soils data at the Soil Survey Work Planning Conference.

A summary of the conference is available at:

http://www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov/news/Soil_Survey_Work_Planning_Conference_2012_News_Release.html

New Soils Data for RI now available:

The 2012 RI soil survey data is now available for download. This new version features the first ever example of a Fresh-water subaqueous soil survey, a re-digitizing of Block Island, completion of Phase II of the RI Coastal Zone Soil Survey, and numerous other enhancements to the spatial soil maps and data. RI is actively working to modernize the 32 year-old soil survey by submitting work plans each year to update the data and improve the accuracy of the maps. Information on the new soils data is available at:

http://www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RI_Soil_Survey_2012.html

Notice to Hispanic and/or Women Farmers or Ranchers

Compensation for Claims of Discrimination

If you believe that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) improperly denied farm loan benefits to you between 1981 and 2000 because you are Hispanic, or because you are female, you may be eligible to apply for compensation.

This means you may be eligible if:

1. you sought a farm loan or farm-loan servicing during that period; and
2. the loan was denied, provided late, approved for a lesser amount than requested, or approved with restrictive conditions, or USDA failed to provide an appropriate loan service; and
3. you believe these actions were based on your being Hispanic, or your being female.

If you want to register your name to receive a claims packet, you can call the Farmer and Rancher Call Center at 1-888-508-4429 or access the following website:
www.farmerclaims.gov

In 2011, a claims administrator will begin mailing claims packages to those who have requested one through the Call Center or website. The claims package will have detailed information about the eligibility and claims process.

For guidance, you may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider in your community.

If you are currently represented by counsel regarding allegations of discrimination or in a lawsuit claiming discrimination, you should contact your counsel regarding this claims process.

USDA Cannot Provide Legal Advice to You.

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