

**MASSACHUSETTS
USDA-NRCS
STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES**

Wednesday, May 23, 2012
Doyle Conservation Center
Leominster, MA 01453

Present: 19 in attendance.

Terron Hillsman, NRCS Asst. State
Conservationist, F.O.
Barbara Miller, NRCS State Resource
Conservationist
Deborah Johnson-Hawks, NRCS Asst. State
Resource Conservationist
Carol Rickless, NRCS Secretary
Don Lewis; MA Conservation Districts (MACD)
Peter Church, MA DCR
Aaron Dushku, NRCS
M. Hogue, Carr Research Lab
Maryanne Reynolds, Landowner

Jane Peirce, MA Dept. of Env. Protection
Maryjo Feuerbach, US EPA
Dave Welsch, USFS
Artie McCollum, US FWS
Gerard Kennedy, MA DAR
Jeff LaFleur, CCCGA
Karen Lombard, TNC
John O'Leary, MA Dept. of Fish & Game
John Spargo, UMass Extension
Richard Starkey, Greenfield Conservation
Commission

This meeting was digitally recorded.
Meeting duration: 9:30 A.M. to 11:30 A.M.

Welcome & Opening Remarks: Terron Hillsman, Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC-FO), Field Operations.

- Terron introduced himself as the new ASTC-FO coming from NRCS in Tennessee.
- He commented on the uncertainty of funding for conservation programs in the new Farm Bill, explained NRCS's focus on technical assistance (TA) in the field called the *90% Solution* and talked about funding for Landscape Initiative's which is shared between states – creating regional partnerships.
- Terron asked State Technical Committee members for ideas on how our agencies can help each other implement conservation in our region.

Review of minutes from May 25, 2011 meeting:

- Last meetings minutes were accepted by STC members.

Outreach Sub-Committee Report: Barbara Miller, State Resource Conservationist

- Barbara presented the Outreach Subcommittee report, for Diane Petit, Chair of the STC Outreach Subcommittee. The Legislative Fact Sheet, NE/NY Forestry Initiative Fact Sheet, Water Quality Initiative Fact Sheet and the FRPP Brochure were available for review. All are on the Massachusetts NRCS website.
<http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>

- Barbara asked for success stories from the group for the Legislative Fact Sheet.
- The FRPP brochure was created to clarify for landowners the process of how FRPP works with the State of Massachusetts' APR program.

Watershed and Landscape Initiatives Updates: Barbara Miller, State Resource Conservationist.

- National initiatives are increasing in number each year, creating a heavier workload for NRCS staff.
- The initiatives are mainly driven by national policy regarding funding, ranking, and practices but there are some local questions to pinpoint our regions concerns in ranking.
- Unlike the “initiatives”, the Long Island Sound *Partnership* gives states more leeway in establishing practices and local ranking criteria.

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) – New England Cottontail and Bog Turtle:

- Under WHIP New England Cottontail and Bog Turtle initiatives have been funded. NRCS is waiting for the funding to come through.
- Working Lands for Wildlife will be funded at \$213 million.

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) – Palmer River Watershed

- The Palmer River Watershed located in the Rehoboth, MA area flows through Rhode Island to the ocean.
- The Palmer River watershed is on the 303D List of Impaired Waters due to an excess of nutrients and bacteria. It was noted that after 2 or 3 years there should be a re-evaluation of the NWQI impact.
- NRCS will be using a water quality monitoring index in the next several years. In other states NRCS is partnering with universities to assist with monitoring. This could also work in Massachusetts.
- Agriculture is only one contributor of water quality impairment. There are practices producers can use to mitigate runoff from pollutants.

Long Island Sound Partnership

- In FY 2012 the Long Island Sound Partnership is funded at \$600K in FA under EQIP.
- This partnership layers upon other initiatives in the region such as the Conte Refuge and Working Lands for Wildlife. The goals are to improve water quality, minimize health risks from shellfish contamination, restore fish/wildlife habitat and hydrologic and ecological functions.

New England/New York Forestry Initiative

- NRCS submitted a 5 year plan for funding the NE/NY Forestry Initiative under WHIP and EQIP.
- IN FY12 there were fewer applications for this initiative. More outreach is needed to increase application numbers.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) – National & Massachusetts:

- CIG encourages new innovations in technology not yet adopted by NRCS.
- In MA there were five CIG applications. Three were funded, including: Berkshire-Pioneer RC&D for the Mass Farm Energy Program; UMass Cranberry Station for cycling frost protection; and the Town of Wellfleet for wild aquaculture restoration for water quality improvement. The total amount of CIG funding this year is \$217K.
- For the National CIG, UMASS applied but pulled its application. UMASS will resubmit next year. Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association (CCCGA) submitted and is waiting to hear if they are funded. They will be working on phosphorous use in cranberry nutrient management.
- The NRCS CIG website gives information on previously funded projects.
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/cig>

Easement Program Update – Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)/Farm & Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP):

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP):

- Under WRP NRCS is working to increase the number of easements in forest areas and in cranberries.
- WRP acreage is capped at 200 acres for FY2012.
- Funding and restoration under WRP are obligated separately.
- Continuous monitoring of WRP easements and completion of restoration can be challenging.

Farm & Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP):

- NRCS has an agreement with Massachusetts Dept. of Agricultural Resources (MDAR).
- FRPP/APR programs work to leverage federal and state monies (50%/50%) match.
- This year NRCS-MA received \$4 million in funding.

Reports from Partners:

- There were no new updates for the Local Working Groups. It was noted that the 12 Local Working groups could distill their district's concerns into one document to create effective local questions for Massachusetts and pinpoint local resource needs for the State Resource Assessment (SRA).

Other Comments and Discussion:

- NRCS national headquarters is working on new guidance regarding the State Resource Assessment (SRA). It should be rolled out summer of 2012.
- A subcommittee may be formed to voice the concerns and needs of NRCS partner agencies in regard to the SRA. NRCS is asking the State Tech Committee for input.
- Jeff LaFleur of CCCGA asked why NRCS is lenient on producers who do not complete their contractual obligations. Terron Hillsman, ASTC FO responded that he is working with the District Conservationists to improve communication with producers. Field offices have to make clear to each participant their responsibility to complete contracted practices. Many farmers look at the programs as grants. NRCS could ask producers to return the Technical Assistance dollars spent on their contract. If a producer can not complete a practice there are options. The farmer has time, up to 3 years, to complete the

practices in the contract or modify the contract by substituting another similar practice. Barbara mentioned that the current ranking tool does penalize a producer who has not conformed to the contract requirements.

- Maryanne Reynolds of *Stone Harvest Farm* in Petersham, MA shared her commitment to establishing a standard for silvopasture. Ms. Reynold's farm hopes to epitomize the use of silvopasture methods. She is blending farming and forestry, achieving a dual use of forest land for foraging and grazing.
- Karen Lombard of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) asked how rankings in EQIP and WHIP relate. Barbara Miller answered EQIP's focus is forest regeneration while WHIP is wildlife oriented. This year there is more EQIP funding so practices under EQIP would be the logical choice over WHIP which has no extra funding.
- Artie McCollum of US FWS's Silvio O. Conte Refuge announced "*Watershed on Wheels*" or WOW. WOW is a mobile visitors' center that offers environmental education relating to the Connecticut River Watershed. NRCS is teaming up with US FWS to create a new kiosk in the exhibit. Diane Petit, Public Affairs Specialist and Catherine Ulitsky, Visual Information Specialist are creating four sides to the kiosk to represent soils, land use, NRCS programs and US FWS Adopt-a-Habitat Program. The watershed on wheels is available from April to October. WOW travels to community events, fairs, and schools.
- Don Lewis, Exec. Director MACD on behalf of Joe Smith of the Massachusetts State Commission reminded committee members that the State Commission Meeting will be on July 19, 2012. An agenda item will be re-evaluating the Envirothon and planning forward 25 years into the future. He asked for the input of the STC members.
- Barbara Miller, SRC asked the State Tech Committee members to think about volunteering for a new 2012 Farm Bill sub-committee. The Farm Bill will be enacted when the STC meets in November or December of 2012.

Any suggestions from STC members to make the meetings more effective are welcome.

Next Meeting in November or December of 2012

Adjourn

Attachments:

STC523112.pptx

STC Outreach Report2012-05-23.docx

WOW Schedule in Massachusetts – May-September 12.docx

Link to Outreach Sub-Committee Brochures: <http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>

The Legislative Fact Sheet

NE/NY Forestry Initiative Fact Sheet

Water Quality Initiative Fact Sheet

FRPP Brochure