

MEETING NOTES

Massachusetts State Technical Committee Outreach Subcommittee Meeting

Wednesday, November 30, 2011
2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

USDA-NRCS State Office
451 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002
and by teleconference

Participants:

- Diane Baedeker Petit, Public Affairs Officer, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (chair)
- Ruthie Davis, Program Specialist, NRCS Massachusetts
- Nancy Garrabrantz, Director, UMass Extension
- Marianne Piche, Habitat Management Biologist, Mass. Dept. of Fish and Game (by phone)
- Richard Starkey, Earth Team Volunteer, NRCS Greenfield (by phone)

➤ Indicates an action item.

NRCS State Strategic Communication Plan

Diane Petit reported on accomplishments of the final FY2011 Massachusetts State Strategic Communication Plan and provided a copy to subcommittee members. Overall, approximately 70 percent of the actions on the plan were achieved. Diane expressed satisfaction with that level of progress considering the fact that she and her staff spent one month and three months respectively on details to NRCS National Headquarters in FY2011.

She also explained that all NRCS Massachusetts communications projects are tracked in a database; the report of completed projects for FY2011 shows that of the 183 projects completed, more than half were not on the strategic communication plan. The reason for this is that new priorities emerge at the national and state level, unanticipated needs arise at the field level and other unplanned but important projects arise throughout the year.

Copies (hard copy and/or electronic) of two new NRCS Massachusetts publications: ***Understanding the 2008 Farm Bill Conservation Programs*** and ***A Landowners' Guide to the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)*** were provided to the subcommittee. Both publications fulfill objectives on the state communication plan and state business plan to help NRCS customers better understand the processes, policies and procedures involved in participating in Farm Bill conservation programs.

- Diane will provide a copy of the completed projects report to the subcommittee.
- Diane will incorporate ideas discussed during this subcommittee meeting into the FY2012 Massachusetts Strategic Communication Plan.

Upcoming outreach events and venues

In addition to the events already on the NRCS communication plan, subcommittee members suggested other events at which NRCS might exhibit or present program information. These include:

- Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) Annual Meeting
- Highland Communities Initiative/The Trustees of Reservations event in Franklin County
- Massachusetts Tree Farm Association Field Day
- Citizen Planning Training Cooperative conference

Marianne Piche cited several venues at which she has promoted NRCS programs and distributed materials. Nancy Garrabrantz asked whether NRCS maintains a master calendar of outreach events and opportunities. Diane said that meetings and events are posted on a calendar on the Massachusetts NRCS SharePoint site, however it probably does not capture all of the possible opportunities throughout the year and across the state. Information on field office outreach activities is solicited after the fact for a quarterly outreach report submitted to NRCS National Headquarters.

- Nancy will provide contact information for the CPTC conference.
- Diane will share NRCS Massachusetts' partner list with the subcommittee members.
- Diane will explore the possibility of developing a master events calendar.

Other ideas and discussion

Dick Starkey continues to be available for outreach to the general public and is willing to travel to Hampshire and Hampden counties. He has conveyed his availability to Vince Snyder, District Conservationist in the Hadley office.

Dick recommended that NRCS consider using Earth Team volunteers to do program outreach. The subcommittee discussed ideas for how volunteers, who are not familiar with program specifics, can be prepared to deliver program information and handle detailed questions. Ideas included providing volunteers with a PowerPoint presentation and literature.

Marianne asked whether land trusts receive NRCS Massachusetts Conservation Connection e-blasts. Diane said that some land trusts are on the distribution list and all program announcements are posted to the Conservation Common website, which is for the land trust community.

Ruthie Davis asked about the next program brochures/materials to be developed. Diane said that a Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) brochure is currently in development. A Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) brochure will be next. Development of program materials will continue despite the fact that a new Farm Bill is expected. Materials can be revised if program rules change.

- Diane will explore the possibility of acquiring a contact list for all Massachusetts land trusts and, if available, add them to the e-blast list.

Next meeting date: to be determined by the next State Technical Committee meeting date.