

04/13/2010

9:00am – 12:00pm

# State Technical Committee Meeting

New Hampshire Audubon  
84 Silk Farm Rd, Concord, NH

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**Meeting Called By:** Rick Ellsmore      **Type of meeting:** State Technical Committee  
**Facilitator:** Rick Ellsmore      **Note taker:** Honor Lawler

**Attendees:**

Betty Anderson (NRCS), Anne Archie (USFS), Dean Bascom (NRCS), Karen Bennett (UNH Cooperative Extension), Charlie Bridges (NH Fish and Game), George Cleek (NRCS), Rick Ellsmore (NRCS), Pam Gilbert (GCCD), John Hodsdon (BCCD), Kim McCracken (NRCS), Grant Mecozzi (NWTF), Marilyn Ricker (FSA), Brooke Smart (NRCS), Vickie Smith (NH Dept of Agriculture), Deb Weymouth (NRCS), Eric Williams (DES), Mark Zankel (TNC)

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## Meeting Minutes

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**Agenda item:** Partner updates      **Presenter:** Rick Ellsmore, ASTC Operations NH NRCS

**Discussion:**

**Charlie Bridges– Fish and Game** – Release of wildlife action plan update – new info. available on granite system (maps) (UNH)

**Mark Zankel – TNC**

1. Coordination with local land trust – mapped intersection of floodplains in upper Connecticut River
2. Planned series of community workshops – help landowners in upper CT river to restore function of floodplains near farm land. GIS map active farmland.

**Vikki Smith – NH Dept of agriculture** – Resolving budget issues, several calls about high tunnels

**John Hodsdon– Belknap County Conservation District** – Resolving budget, Nashville next year (NHACD conference)

**Pam Gilbert - Grafton CCD** –Need more direction from NRCS, funding rates, need more guidance, Suggestion of a district employees meeting (Rick)

**Ann Archie – US Forest Service**

1. State assessments mandated by 2008 Farm Bill, forested lands in state, **Plans due June 18<sup>th</sup>**
2. Award grants (redesign grants) large scale landscape, sustainable operations plans, entomologist (Worcester long horn beetle) working. Don't move firewood campaign,
3. Keeping forest as forest land

**Marilyn Ricker – FSA –**

1. BCAP – suspended (after april 30<sup>th</sup>, no activity until final rule (late summer))
2. ECP
3. CRP, Supplemental revenue program should be happening soon

**Grant Mecozzi - NWTF** – Grant from fish and game – new regional biologist – technical guidance, project in VT with Green Mountains

**Brooke Smart – District Conservationist NRCS (Strafford and Rockingham counties)** – Just finished approvals for cleanups in woodlots

**Eric Williams –NH Dept Environmental Services –**

1. 2.3 million dollars in general fund money cut
  2. Aquatic resource mitigation fund – money being granted to restore wetlands in watersheds across state.
  3. Road salt issues – focusing on impaired watersheds in 1-93 corridor, need to reduce salt application up to 40%, private lots causing about 50% of salt contribution to watersheds, more outreach to come.
  4. In stages of working out practical guidance on water quality control, how to deal with runoff, etc.
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5. New fluvial geomorphologist – flood damage along rivers over last 4 yrs, how river channels with naturally migrate, potential future property damage

**Betty Anderson – NH NRCS Public Affairs Officer**– Creating floor standing displays for field offices and conservation districts

<b>Action items</b>	<b>Person responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
✓ Follow up with Pam Gilbert and other Conservation Districts – need more guidance and potential district employee meetings	Rick Ellsmore	
✓ Forested lands plans due?	US Forest Service	June 18

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**Agenda item:** Program Allocations

**Presenter:**

Deb Weymouth,  
Acting ASTC  
Programs NH NRCS

**Discussion:**

**Financial Assistance Updates --**

EQIP - Review program allocation by county and resource concern – Ag census, NH's changing landscape, wildlife action plan used to generate data

Initial total county EQIP allocation = \$1.8 million towards forest, cropland, grazing and farmstead categories

- Cheshire County allocation was reduced to only 3% due to lack of applications
- Coos County allocation was larger because of one particularly high ranking large contract
- Suggested that it would be beneficial to fine tune (county based info and statistics could be helpful)
- Total contracts: 172

Final total dollars allocated: \$2.82 million

Farmstead Resource Concern – 16 applications, 7 contracts, \$660,000

Forestland Resource Concern – 46 applications, 23 contracts, \$470,000

Cropland Resource Concern – 53 applications, 19 contracts, \$389,000

Grazing Resource Concern – 18 applications, 8 contracts, \$259,400

Historically underserved funding – 34% to EQIP, 51% to WHIP, 32% to AMA and 3.9 % to CSP

Conservation activity plans (CAP) – offered 7 CAPs: Ag Energy, Transition to Organic, Fish & Wildlife Habitat and Integrated Pest Management Plans. Only received applications for Forest management, Grazing Management, and CNMP Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans.

- Counties with more TSPs have more forest management plans
- Use of CAPs requires services of TSP – trying to get more TSPs for other categories
- For Ag Energy Plans – someone who works out of VT, ME and NH - looking for someone to do the converting to organic plan

Organic initiative through EQIP – May 1<sup>st</sup> obligation date (\$280,000) – higher payment rates for those practices that support organic operations

CIG – announced nationwide, pre-proposal application process APRIL 26 for national – opportunity to be selected to complete and submit full application package JUNE 4<sup>th</sup>

State announcement to come

WHIP – 85 applications, only funded 6 contracts for \$95,000

AMA – 29 apps, obligated 5 contracts, \$68,000

CSP – 29 apps, 12 funded, 8 under agricultural land use, 4 under forestry, first year that forest land is included under CSP, previously used only for agricultural land and only incidental forest land. Planning to work with partners to get the word out and encourage stewardship

**Easement updates –**

FRPP – funded all 6 apps, in process of obligating contracts

GRP – only \$113,000, funded 2 easements

WRP – \$1.5 million initial allocation - 60 applications, still awaiting final funding decision pending waiver approval from Chief of NRCS

May 14<sup>th</sup> second ranking deadline – only eligible applications will be considered, others will be deferred – practical deadline for land eligibility paperwork– 2 weeks or more to submit paperwork (individuals), longer for entities (at least 3 wks), minimal for existing customers

Chief's priority is high tunnels – 73 apps, funded 33 (two under AMA) – looking to create subaccount through EQIP specifically for high tunnels

Regional equity for GRP and FRPP (\$4.1 million) was granted

Attendees agreed on suggestion that there be a fall ranking cut-off every year, same time of year, good for assessing needs – VT is doing this

- Pros: consistency for clients, identifies our statewide need for funding early on in fiscal year, offers time for conservation planning in the field before snowfall.
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- Cons: uncertainty of funding, funding comes between November and June
- Suggestions: timely updates as to status of funding, etc

Rick – special initiatives, primary objective to get conservation on land, balancing funds and high quality projects, staff is spread thin already.

Action items	Person responsible	Deadline
✓ TSP recruitment	Help from all	
✓ Find way to make Organic initiative more appealing and feasible to customers	Help from all	
✓ Pre-proposal deadline for National CIG	NRCS NHQ	April 26
✓ Deadline for full application of approved pre-proposal	NRCS NHQ	
✓ Second ranking deadline for all NH programs	Programs team	May 14
✓ Discuss annual fall ranking deadline	Programs team, Leadership	
✓ Organic initiative through EQIP obligation date	Programs team	May 1

**Agenda item:** FSA Report – Conservation Reserve Program      **Presenter:** Marilyn Ricker, FSA

**Discussion:**

See CRP Fact Sheet, available on FSA website

CRP is a hard sell in NH

About 76 acres enrolled – part due to cropland value, don't want to have to set aside

Takes environmentally sensitive land and asks producer to set it aside for 10-15 yrs, receive rental rate, soil rental rates looked at by NASS

2 ways a producer can enroll land in CRP – general sign up (not every year) when funding available, or continuous sign up – targets smaller parcels of land that producer can enroll

Land eligibility – cropped within certain timeframe or has been in CRP during time period

See FSA website/fact sheet for land eligibility

Asked to review and revise conservation priority areas (CPA) – producer in area wouldn't have to meet erodibility criteria

CPAs expire every 5 years (state designated) – requesting national designation now

Nationally designated CPA – requesting 4 counties on Connecticut river be included in Long Island Sound Watershed (now ends at Massachusetts border) (would be required to have practices that benefitted watershed)

State CPAs – Sullivan and Grafton

Second request to include Hillsborough for wildlife designation CPA – looked at wildlife quality and southeast corner of state was lacking

Comment (Mark Zankel) – Rockingham and Strafford for wildlife – estuaries in Great Bay in danger

Comment (Eric Williams) – good program to support consideration of Rockingham and Strafford (nitrogen issues in Great Bay)

Comment (Rick Ellsmore) – pollinator habitat may support interest in program – adjust seeding recommendations

Action items	Person responsible	Deadline
✓ Consider CPA for Hillsborough, Rockingham and Strafford county	FSA	

**Agenda item:** Committee Updates, Timelines, Special Initiatives      **Presenter:** Kim McCracken, Rick Ellsmore

**Discussion:**

**KIM MCCRACKEN**

**CIG** – How can we take great ideas and make sure that some of them can be adopted as innovative conservation practices? Are there issues to ask people to focus on?

Seasonal high tunnels – incorporate interest in studying effects, production, etc. of high tunnels into CIG

Past CIG – maple sugaring, low till, energy conservation -- objective is for more demonstration and outreach projects, not necessarily research based

August 15<sup>th</sup> – is a potential deadline for obligation, but is not set yet

**Special initiatives** – increase in number of applications for new practices (organic, high tunnels, etc)

Review of high tunnels

- Difference between greenhouse and high tunnel: greenhouse uses electricity such as a mechanical heating mechanism, high tunnel has no supplemental mechanical systems
  - Plants must be in ground
  - Only certain types of high tunnels, resistant to wind and don't require set up and break down each season
  - Purpose - helping promote local agriculture, season extension
  - Plans to look at soil quality, pest management, etc.
  - Announcement has led to great deal of positive feedback – 73 applications
  - Can occupy 1/5<sup>th</sup> of acre, one per operation, ranking focused on resource concern
  - 3 year "PILOT" practice – study aspect is important – to monitor the benefits
  - Mechanical irrigation is acceptable
  - Crop rotation (high tunnel on "wheels") – trying to be flexible without making it a greenhouse
  - NO animal raising, chickens for pest management is okay, but high tunnels may NOT be used as livestock housing
  - Funding through both AMA and EQIP
  - Information sheet titled "Seasonal High Tunnels for Food and other Specialty Crop Production" is useful and available on NH NRCS website
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**RICK ELLSMORE:**

Suggested that subcommittees meet on timely schedule to create most efficient and useful practice lists, ranking, rates, etc.

This year – 2 technical subcommittees (Forestry and Wildlife subcommittee, and Agriculture subcommittee) plus an Easement Subcommittee

**TIMELINE:** Draft Form – Issues as to when/how often State Tech committee should meet (every 3 months/4 times per year)

**GEORGE CLEEK**– Special Initiatives and Closing comments:

SOPs for local workgroups – there is a need to follow up on SOPs for work groups

Geographic priority areas

- 1996 Farm Bill had "Focus Areas"– removed by Congress in 2002 Farm Bill
- 2008 Farm Bill again has similar approach in "Special Initiatives" – administration has set them (Great Lakes, Sage Grass, Chesapeake watershed, etc)

Conservation evaluation assessment P – CEAP - model watersheds, reports from studies have shown conservation does pay, target and focus areas result in 10-100 fold increase in benefits.

State Technical Committee's duty to make suggestion to new STC about possible target initiatives

Some examples of NH Potential Initiatives:

1. Great Bay – water quality
2. New England cottontail
3. Keeping forests as forests

Federal registry notice - Ag water enhancement program (AWEP) – 20 million dollars set aside for targeted water

quality improvement – national competition, 3 – 5 years, only in targeted focus area

CCPI – came out on April 12 - similar concept for targeted focus area (EQIP and WHIP)

Resource based allocations – Chief wants states to identify targets and focuses, major issues, STC submits budget to Chief with what state can deliver – full implementation in 2012

Formerly obligation focused, more requests than funding

Chief – since 2002 farm bill, in 8 years, financial assistance dollars have increased 310% and workforce is down 9-13%

Partnerships are extremely important now in order to get conservation on the ground – set TSP rates in NH – better rates to engage private sector

Past fiscal year is the 1<sup>st</sup> year to grow workforce

<b>Action items</b>	<b>Person responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
✓ State CIG obligation	TBD	August 15
✓ Follow up on State tech committee meeting schedule	Rick Ellsmore	
✓ Follow up with SOPs for work groups	George Cleek	