

## New Jersey State Technical Committee Minutes of March 13, 2013

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### Those in attendance:

Andrew Burnett, NJ DFW  
Audrey Moore, US EPA – Region 2  
Barbara Phillips, NRCS  
Bob Ericksen, NWTf  
Charles Roohr, NJ SADC  
Christine Hall, NRCS  
Dave Clapp, NJDA  
David Steckel, NLT  
Dominick Mondri, NJNLA  
Eric Olsen, The Nature Conservancy  
Eric Schradling, USFWS  
Eric VanBenschoten Walkkill River Watershed  
Management Group  
Fran Grasso, NRCS  
Gail Bartok, NRCS  
Grace Messinger, North Jersey RC&D

John Cecil, NJ Audubon  
John Parke, NJ Audubon  
Kathy Hale, NJWSA  
Kristina Heinemann, US EPA – Region 2  
Lauren Lapczynski, NRCS  
Liz Thompson, NJFB  
Lynn Fleming, DEP – State Forestry Services  
Maria M. Collazo, NRCS  
Marie Banasiak, NJFB  
Michael Catania, Duke Farms  
Mike Westendorf, Rutgers Coop. Extension  
Nancy Coles, USDA – FSA  
Nathaniel Sajdak, Walkkill River Watershed  
Management Group  
Richard K. Shaw, NRCS  
Thom Almendinger, Duke Farms Foundation

Carrie Mosley opened the meeting at 10:10 am and thanked everyone for coming to the NJ NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting. There have been a couple changes to the meeting since we last met. First, we modified the seating to try to be more inclusive. Second, the last two meetings, we were unable to get to all of the agenda items, so we have extended the meeting until 1:00 pm. We hope that your schedule permits you to stay until then.

In addition, Mosley reiterated that this is a State *Technical* Committee. Mosley would like to see technical items become prominent on the agenda. For future meetings, we may have recipients of the Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program give presentations on projects. We'd like to get into the technical details of conservation and examine more of the practices that we offer through our programs. For today, we will have Richard Shaw, State Soil Scientist, give a presentation on urban soils and soils classifications.

We're all here because we are concerned about conservation. This committee should work together on that focus.

### **Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Status - Carrie Mosley**

Carrie Mosley gave a synopsis of the current Fiscal Year 2013 budget status. Mosley mentioned that it has been a very interesting year with our budget with lots of uncertain factors: Sequestration, Farm Bill Negotiations, and Continuing Resolution. For those of you with agreements, we would like to let you know that we are putting our future agreement decisions on hold at this time until there is more certainty to make budgetary decision. We are currently operating on a continuing resolution that ends March 29th. In addition, sequestration did come to pass early this month, which has and will affect our program dollars. Our programs, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP) to name a few, were all impacted by sequestration.

Nationally, NRCS has made decisions to prepare for sequestration. Because of this, NRCS is fortunate enough that we will not have to furlough any employees. However, please be aware that other agencies within USDA may have to furlough due to less flexibility within their operating budgets. The overall cut that we will be facing is around 5-6%.

A question was posed asking if the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), a subset of EQIP, will still be moving forward. Mosley confirmed that the NWQI was announced earlier this week and we will be moving forward with sign-up. The current application batching deadline is April 19, 2013. Our funding for this initiative may be reduced, but we will continue to fund as many applications as we can.

A question was posed asking if open conservation contracts will be impacted by the reduction. Mosley discussed that contracts are funded with that year's budget allocation so already funded contracts with previous years' money will not be impacted. Only new contracts for FY 2013 will be impacted by the reduction in FY 2013 funding.

### **December meeting minutes review and acceptance – Christine Hall**

Christine Hall requested comments, corrections and acceptance on the December meeting minutes. Prior to today's meeting, Christine had received a few corrections and incorporated the changes. The format of the meeting minutes was changed to highlight action items that were determined during discussions during the meeting. Additional typographical errors were noted in the minutes. The corrections will be made and the minutes accepted with the corrections.

## **Old Business**

### **Programs Update – Gail Bartok**

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – The initial funding allocation for EQIP was around 4.1 million. This includes general EQIP, initiatives, and the Conservation Innovation Grant program. Once we subtract for all of the priorities within EQIP, we had around 3.3 million for general EQIP. After sequestration, we have around 3 million to fund contracts. We have already funded all of our high, pre-screened applications.

A question was posed asking about Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) within EQIP and how they will be affected. A conservation activity plan is a conservation plan for a specific purpose (Forest Management Plan, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan, etc.) that is not developed by NRCS. The producer hires a technical service provider, which is essentially a consultant approved by NRCS, to write the plan. NRCS then helps contribute a conservation payment to support the producer in hiring this consultant. Due to the nature of these contracts, there are no identified concerns or practices, so these practices are automatically funded if they are pre-screened high applications. These applications can only be prescreened as low or high priority. Following applications resulting from recommended practices within a CAP are treated like all other applications. We have approximately \$90,000 in CAP applications.

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) –WLFW is a new subset of the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) that was released last year. Funding for general WHIP is not available and only WLFW is supported. NJ has two of the target species: the Golden-winged Warbler and the Bog Turtle. We currently have 5 applications from the first sign-up period. Four are for the

Golden-winged Warbler and one is for the Bog Turtle. We have advertised a second sign-up period that will end on April 19, 2013.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) – The AWEP program is a program in cooperation with the North Jersey RC&D and NJ Water Supply Authority (NJWSA). It is a 5-year program where North Jersey RC&D applied for funding for the priority watersheds in the Raritan river basin. We are in the 5<sup>th</sup> year. The NJWSA has begun offering mini-grants this year to support the AWEP program. The mini-grant program is on a practice-by-practice basis like NRCS contracts. However, the NJWSA is a reimbursement program as opposed to paying for the estimated incurred cost. The mini-grant money is available through DEP. The money available through the mini-grant program is in addition to the conservation payment from NRCS. A second sign-up period for AWEP has been advertised as well, ending on April 19, 2013. A sign-up for the mini-grant program is running concurrently.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) – We are now able to accept new applications, and will be continuing to work on existing restoration work.

The National Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program was announced. Christine Hall also announced that since she is now the State Resource Conservationist and will no longer be managing the CIG program, Greg Westfall will be the new contact for the NJ CIG. We will be announcing the NJ CIG program soon. It will follow a similar process as last year and we will be accepting pre-proposals first, followed by the full proposal. There are two subsets of the CIG program. There is a national competition and a state competition. An applicant can apply to one competition or both. The national CIG component is generally able to fund larger CIG proposals. We would be interested in feedback from the committee for the needs in NJ. What priorities areas would be a good fit for CIG projects?

**Action:** Members were asked to provide feedback on potential CIG priorities to Christine Hall or Greg Westfall via phone or email.

Agriculture Management Assistance (AMA) program – We have 35 applications for AMA this year. We typically have more applications than we have money to support contracts and interest in this program. This year is no different and we will fund as many applications as we can with our allocation.

### **CRP, CREP, SAFE Activity – Nancy Coles**

Nancy Coles reported on the CRP, CREP, and SAFE Activity updates. FSA had been at a standstill since October 1, 2012. The 45<sup>th</sup>, general CRP sign-up was announced for May 20 through June 14. The general CRP sign-up is competitive based on the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) scoring. The continuous sign-up, which includes SAFE, are not competitive. New fact sheets are available for CRP on the website at [www.fsa.usda.gov/crp](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp). Pollinator Habitat is available in the continuous and general sign-up.

Nancy Coles distributed her quarterly Conservation Programs Status Report. Due to the standstill in program delivery, the only change from the December report was the general CRP status. The number of practices went from 320 to 319 due to a contract dropping out of the program. The total acreage enrolled is 2231.5 acres. It is possible to have more contracts than farms as one farm may have multiple contracts. Coles added a listing of expiring acres by year. There are currently 16 contracts or 177 expiring acres in 2013. We need to recoup those lost

acres. FSA will be reaching out to those contract holders and encouraging them to re-enroll in the program. Most of these contracts are in the Hunterdon, Somerset, and Monmouth areas.

The CREP and SAFE status has not changed since the last report since FSA was unable to accept new applications. The continuous sign-up for SAFE and CREP should open this spring. Depending on the practices installed, a contract can be between 10 and 15 years.

To summarize the report, FY 2013 CRP payments issues since October 1 totals \$324,229. FY 2013 Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) payments issues to date is \$117,567. Most of the ECP money to date has been from damage associated with Hurricane Irene. The Hurricane Sandy damage has not yet been paid. FY 2013 Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) payments issued to date is \$43,461. A correction was made to a clerical error on the 2003 GRP information.

The CRP soil rental rates are being modified and a link will be available on the FSA website as soon as they are finalized. FSA works with NASS to produce the survey to obtain these rates. It is a producer driven survey that is dependent on what the producer reports in the survey. Because these rates are sometimes used as rental payments for producers, they may falsely report lower rates for their benefit. Unfortunately, this may also lower the rental payment for CRP.

### **State Technical Committee Survey – Christine Hall**

Christine Hall reported on the results from the State Technical Committee survey. This topic was tabled from the last meeting. The intent of this survey is to find out how we, NRCS, are doing, and what we can do to improve our service. 46% of the survey respondents stated that their organization primarily represented environmental interests. 35% reported their interest is agricultural. The interests of the State Technical Committee translate to the policies and priorities that NRCS takes into consideration for program decisions. In future meetings, there is room for improvement to talk about our ranking and contracting decisions. We want to tie together the technical resource concerns more with our ranking concerns. What benefits are we buying with the payments we are distributing? Are we spending the money on the practices and concerns that we are interested in funding? Are the program rankings leading us to fund the projects that will meet the resource concerns we think are top priority?

**Action:** Further examine the practices we are funding and resource concerns we are addressing through our program payments to determine what future program screening and ranking changes may be needed.

31% of respondents to the survey do not attend the meetings. Of those that attend, most are satisfied with the content. A summary of the survey results is attached.

Maria posed a question to the Committee regarding how to get more agricultural people involved. Dominick Mondy suggested using technology, such as webinars, and getting more associations involved that can represent and reach out to the producers. Provide training about what the State Technical Committee is and why someone should be interested in and be part of the Committee.

**Action item:** Discussion on this topic will be added to the agenda for the next meeting, so that a plan can be developed for recruiting more representation from the agricultural sector.

In regards to media, Barbara Phillips mentioned that NRCS will be using a new service called, GovDelivery. This service will be able to link several types of media such as twitter and email. We will be able to send out e-blast newsletters. People will be able to subscribe to the content that they are interested in receiving information on by clicking a link on our website. It was also brought up that presentations from producers about the success of their projects and what it was like working through the process would be very beneficial. Several success stories are already available on our website at: <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/news/ConservationShowcase/index.html>. NRCS is always looking for producers that may be interested in sharing their success story.

Kristina Heinemann suggested NRCS provide live chats where someone is available to answer NRCS questions online at specific times.

NRCS is also working on improving the process of their delivery through the Conservation Desktop Streamlining Initiative (CDSI) that uses the lean six-sigma, process improvement model. The CDSI is slated to be rolled-out sometime in the fall for the 2014 program year.

## **New Business**

### **State Resource Assessment – Maria Collazo/Christine Hall**

Two years ago, in 2011, NRCS headquarters tasked each state with developing a State Resource Assessment (SRA). The State Resource Assessment was an analysis of several data sources and 9 major resource concerns to identify priority treatment acres and targeted areas for treatment in the future. The purpose of the SRA is to help National and State leadership by providing guidance on resource objectives and priorities. Hall shared that in 2011 the State Technical Committee identified Water Quality Degradation, Soil Erosion, and Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife as the top three resource concerns in NJ. The findings can help with funding and priority area decisions.

In 2013, we will be creating a new assessment. The 9 major resources concerns will be determined by headquarters. We do not know at this point if we will have to analyze based on individual land uses. The new assessment will be a three year plan. There are three goals of the SRA:

- 1) NRCS wants to create a method for the State to document the resource needs.
- 2) To provide states with a uniform quantitative analysis. The GIS data will not be obtained within the state, but will be provided by headquarters for the analysis.
- 3) To utilize the resource assessment in combination with other workload analyses to determine the needs for technical and financial assistance.

NRCS will likely be asking for State Technical Committee feedback within the next couple of months regarding the new assessment. At this time, we still do not have the tools to develop it.

In addition to using the SRA for funding decisions, Carrie Mosley handed out an analysis on the top 14 practices that were funded in EQIP in 2012. Mosley asked the State Technical Committee to review the top funded practices and compare that with our resource concerns. Mosley would like the State Technical Committee to think about what we are buying in terms of the money that we spend. Expect more of this type of analysis as we will be reporting at the end of every fiscal year a synopsis of our program funding.

**Action:** NRCS will prepare a report showing EQIP 2013 funded practices for review at a future State Technical Committee meeting.

## **2013 National Water Quality Initiative – Gail Bartok/Christine Hall**

The National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) was one of the initiative programs that were released last fiscal year. For the NWQI, we had to select 1 to 3 impaired (HUC-12) watersheds to target. In NJ, we picked three watersheds in South Jersey: Upper Salem, Upper Alloway, and Upper Cohansey. These watersheds have a high percentage of agricultural lands, and are listed on the 303d list of impaired waterbodies. We were encouraged to keep the same watersheds for the 2013 program year and in consultation with NJDEP and USEPA we decided to continue with these watersheds. The program was advertised through a press-release and sign-up will end April 19, 2013. Last year we had great support with our partners in that area.

In addition to practice implementation, the NWQI has a monitoring element. Interested participants in NWQI can apply for funding to support Edge of Field Monitoring on their farm. NJDEP has expressed a willingness to relocate some of their existing in-stream monitoring stations to better capture the benefits of the NWQI program. Additionally, we will run the *Water Quality Index for Runoff Water from Agricultural Fields (WQIag)* in selected watersheds. WQIag will provide an overall score that may be used to establish trends in water quality over time.

**Action:** For the next meeting Christine will prepare a report showing the practices funded under the NWQI in New Jersey

## **Urban Soil Conservation Opportunities - Rich Shaw**

Richard Shaw gave a presentation on urban soil conservation opportunities that he has been involved with both in New York and New Jersey. Shaw emphasized the importance of meeting an underserved population. According to Natural Resource Inventory data, NJ leads the nation in the amount of urban land, and more than 90% of our population lives in urban areas (2000 U.S. Census).

## **Farmland of Local Importance – Rich Shaw**

Rich Shaw gave a presentation on the *Farmland of Local Importance* designation in New Jersey. There has been some interest expressed recently in making additions to the list of Farmland of Local Importance soils, which has been static for many years. The NRCS is charged with providing leadership for inventories of important farmland. It was decided that a committee would be formed to work on developing the criteria and the procedure for the *Farmland of Local Importance* designation.

**Action:** Anyone interested in serving on the committee to develop the NJ criteria for Farmland of Local importance should contact Rich or Christine

## **Farm and Ranchland Protection Program Update – Gail Bartok**

NJ NRCS received approximately \$7 million in funding for FRPP for FY2013. The last signup cutoff date was 1/31/13 and thus far we have received about \$4 million in requests through various entities. We will have to announce at least one more sign up deadline to ensure that we spend our FY13 funding allocation. Lauren and Gail will review the parcels that have already been submitted and determine a ranking cutoff so that the best parcels are selected with this year's funding.

Some issues that will need to be addressed in the NJ FRPP program include drafting a prime soils waiver policy for NJ to state that parcels north of Route 78 and west of Route 287 are exempt from the requirement that parcels must contain a minimum of 50% prime soils. In the past, this same area was exempt from the 50% prime rule through individual State Conservationist waiver. Also, we would like to address the impervious cover percentages on the ranking sheets. There are a lot of discrepancies between the amount (percent) requested at ranking/submittal and the percent that actually is documented in the parcel deed. Programs staff will be considering ways to re-tool the ranking before the next FY round of funding.

## **Open Discussion/Announcements**

Andrew Burnett reported the NJDEP, Division of Fish and Wildlife is starting a review of the Wildlife Action Plan. Once officially reviewed, it will be out for comments and review. The plan is to contact organizations interested in native species habitat improvement and get their feedback on the plan. They also sent out a survey to the head of various agencies to see what skills or other resources they can bring to bear.

Kathy Hale reported that the first sign-up for mini-grants with AWEP ended in mid-February. A concurrent sign-up with the AWEP sign-up is underway. Brochures and posters are available if anyone is interested.

Dominick Mondì reported that NJ American Water has a water use program focused on landscape and irrigation professionals.

**Action:** Dom will get this information to Christine Hall who will then share it with the committee.

Mike Westendorf mentioned that they are looking to continue recognition for sustainable equine farms. Every year they select an equine operation that meets certain sustainable criteria. The winner receives a plaque. Showplace Farm received the 1<sup>st</sup> award in NJ. Mike is looking for NJ staff to help judge farms.

Carrie Mosley asked the organizations if they have priority areas determined in New Jersey. If your organization has identified some, please share them with NRCS. At some point, we would like to have our priorities layered for the state.

**Action:** Bring your organization's priority areas to the next State Technical Committee meeting. If you have a GIS coverage, send it to Christine Hall so we can layer the various priority areas around the state.

## **Next Meeting Date**

The June meeting will be a field meeting as we have done the last two years. The meeting will tentatively be held on June 19, 2013. If anyone has a specific interest that they would like to see for this meeting, please contact Christine Hall with your suggestions.

## **Adjourn**

Meeting adjourned at 1:00