

Recognizing Women in NRCS



Nancy Ferlow

State Resource Conservationist

CONNECTICUT

Nancy Ferlow, State Resource Conservationist, has been with NRCS for 30 years. She started with the agency after obtaining her college degrees in biology, geology, and forestry.

Nancy began her career as a soil conservationist for Hartford and Windham Counties. In her NRCS career, she has worked as the Connecticut Agriculture Team Coordinator, Manure Queen, and District Conservationist for Windham County.

For years, she has trained the CT-NRCS staff and producers to preserve the resources on our lands.

Nancy Ferlow is a great inspiration for the coming generations. During Women's History Month, we celebrate her contribution to NRCS. Below are some details and memories about her life ...

Hometown location and how it influenced you ...

As much as anywhere, I grew up in Stamford, Connecticut -- most of my schooling was done there.

I worked for the Stamford Museum and Nature Center where I took care of animals ranging from goats to snakes.


My family participated in a lot of outside activities -- from gardening to hiking and camping. I also belonged to a Girl Scout troop where we did lots of hiking and camping.

Education history ...

I obtained my Bachelor's Degree in Biology from Oberlin College in Ohio, and my Master's Degree in Forestry from State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry. My master's thesis was about using GIS for mapping and interpreting forest resources. I received my Law Enforcement Certification from Southwest Technical College in North Carolina to increase my chances of a landing job with the Park Service and Forest Service, and I took an extra soils class at UConn to make sure I could qualify for positions in NRCS (formerly known as the Soil Conservation Service or SCS) as they were hesitant to accept the soils classwork from ESF (who knew that forests grow without soils?).

Memorable NRCS moment ...

As a soil conservationist, I assisted with the design of a concrete settling basin to hold



a 10-year storm. I ran all the calculations (yes Dan, it was checked). I was responsible for the construction inspection as the design engineer was on leave (we had no engineering techs at the time). The contractor and the farmer were both convinced it was way too big and would never even see a foot of water. They gave me grief on excavation depth, steel in the walls, concrete inspection, and the location of the weir structure. Two days after the forms were off (discussion on that too) we had a 10-year storm – it filled to the top. I went out to inspect the full structure to **silence** – *Silence is golden*. One of many stories!

What do you enjoy most about your career with NRCS?

Training staff and producers to see what management and practices can help the land be as good as it can be. Being in the field.

How is your role important to conservation efforts in Connecticut?

I think it is important for the staff to have someone to answer questions about practices and landscape issues. I assist people with CD and CART. I work with the staff on training and certification.

What motivates you in your work?

I like being in the field, talking to producers, and training the staff.

Would you share some of the things that make you uniquely you?

- I have a place in the Adirondacks where I go and sit and listen.
- I started with a forestry degree in a time when there were few women in the field – this led to a thick skin and an aversion to chewing tobacco. I am grateful for my time in the Forest Service and Park Service – I saw some amazing places behind the scenes.
- I do fiber arts for relaxation and love working with alpaca wool (and merino/silk).
- I speak fluent sarcasm.

How has your journey shaped you?

Every step in your journey has an effect ...

- If I had gone to different schools
- Taken a different job
- Not worked as hard at this part or harder at that part

I'm glad I stayed on the technical side of NRCS. I love learning new things and teaching others. I like being in the field.

As I look back on things, I am content with my path. (*Egads these questions are making me introspective!*)

Do you have any recommendations for women that would like to follow a similar path?

- From construction work: Don't let jerks get you down – if you haven't pissed someone off, you are not doing your job. If you piss off both sides – you hit the exact right spot.
- Take the time to listen to nature and observe – she will tell you what you need to know.
- Water and manure flow downhill – gravity always works. To fight gravity, you need lots of power.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help – I spent quality time beating my head against a brick wall, only to be shown where the gate is. And don't hesitate to show others the gate.