



Revised per motion at the 1/18/2024 LWG Meeting to define all acronyms.
Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation District
2023 Local Working Group (LWG) Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 18, 2023, from 1:40 –3:33pm held in-person as well as via Zoom Video Call

Attendees:

Joe Dembeck, Executive Director (outgoing) – Somerset County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD); Jennifer Hebert, Executive Director (incoming) – Somerset County SWCD; Nick Pairitz, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Skowhegan Service Center District Conservationist; Alexis Clune, NRCS Skowhegan Service Center Soil Conservationist (virtual); Jon Doty, Private Consulting Forester – Madison; Brad Santy, Dairy Farmer – Skowhegan; Joseph Roy, Private Lands Biologist – Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IF&W) (virtual); Julie Davenport, District Forester – Maine Forest Service (MFS) (virtual); Catherine Spolarich – Invasive Plant Biologist – Maine Natural Areas Program (virtual); Daren Turner, Private Consulting Forester – Skowhegan (virtual).

Joe Dembeck, Somerset SWCD Executive Director, called the meeting to order and thanked attendees for their participation. Joe read the attendance list for the meeting, stating each person's name and organization/department/town of residence or land ownership. All participants were emailed two days before the meeting or immediately upon their registration if after this date, with a packet that included: meeting agenda, 2021 LWG Meeting Minutes, and summary sheets on NRCS programs.

Joe discussed what the Local Working Group (LWG) is, the role of the group in this meeting, and how participants can ask questions to the presenter or group. Joe asked the group if anyone had any questions or comments regarding the 2021 LWG Meeting Minutes. No comments were raised. Joe asked the group if anyone opposed the acceptance of the draft meeting minutes as final. No opposition was voiced therefore the meeting minutes from the 2021 LWG were finalized.

Nick Pairitz (NRCS District Conservationist) reviewed the historical funding levels and category allocations (both local and state funding pools) and explained the FY2023 funding allocations (state and local pools) in detail to the group. Nick noted that Pasture had to be separated Crop in the FY2023 local pool as the new NRCS ranking system does not allow the two groups to be pooled, therefore the split occurred after the last LWG with Pasture receiving 1% funding in the local pool. Nick highlighted the National Water Quality Initiative and State Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) as opportunities that have not been explored in Somerset County (outside a Soil Health CIG led by the Somerset SWCD) and suggested that attendees consider them as possibilities. Joe Dembeck supported Nick's suggestion and explained that both these



funding pools are approached with a collaborative team to better support a proposal due to the nature of the activities conducted under either of the categories.

Jon Doty asked if Brush Management is included as resource priority in the Climate Smart Ag program and was informed that at this time it was not. Jon asked how Brush Management can be added as a primary focus under this program and it was suggested that it be added as a discussion item in NRCS's State Technical Committee Forestry Subcommittee meetings.

Joe Roy inquired about the effectiveness of the CIC program in Maine. Alexis Clune stated that only certain practices are currently available at this time under the program. As it is new, NRCS still learning how to implement this program most effectively.

Nick provided that in FY2022 Ag Waste had 9 applications with 4 funded, Forestry had 15 applications with 5 funded, and Crop had 3 applications with 2 funded. Nick added that for FY2023 16 Forestry applications were received with 9 of them being placed in the statewide Climate Smart Ag Pool. This represents how a statewide pool can assist in getting more funded contracts for the county.

Nick then turned the groups focus on soliciting comments for FY 2024 allocation.

Discussion followed, including:

Daren Turner suggested increasing the percentage of funds that go towards the Forestry Funding Pool due to the number of applications received.

Joe Roy asked how often applications for Pasture practices are received by the office. Nick replied that a couple are received every other year.

Based upon comments, Joe Dembeck made the following FY2024 funding suggestion to the group to initiate further discussion:

Ag Waste – 70%

Forestry – 21%

Crop – 8%

Pasture – 1%

Several comments were made that Ag Waste should remain at its current level given the demand for funding in the County.



Joe Roy suggested the following:

Ag Waste – 70%
 Forestry – 23%
 Crop – 6%
 Pasture – 1%

Joe Dembeck then asked the entire group about their support for this proposal. All were in favor.

Nick moved on to reviewing the local ranking questions and sought input from the group. He reminded the group that comments from the LWG on this topic assists both the NRCS County and State Offices in updating these questions. The NRCS State Technical Committee is the avenue in which discussions on statewide questions occur. It was noted to the group that Jenn Hebert will become Somerset County SWCD is a member of the NRCS State Technical Committee in a few weeks.

Ag Waste Category Local Questions

No comments or discussion.

Crop Category Local Questions

No comments or discussion.

Forestry Category Local Questions

Joe Roy asked why the question about invasive plants that was suggested at the previous Local Working Group was not added to the Somerset Questions.

Jon Doty stated that the current Somerset Questions all focus on large trees currently and should be modified to more equitably compare forest stands of varying age classes and structure.

Joe Roy feels that the current site index Somerset Question limits the ability of a landowners application to rank higher when suggested wildlife habitat improvements occur in limited site quality locations on a property. He suggested that a question, worth 25 points, be added that asks does the Forestry Management Plan include practices that benefit wildlife management by specifically addressing NRCS practices that focus on such management, similar to Deer Wintering Area questions.

Alexis responded that the ranking question would have to have specific wildlife focuses, because if left to interpretation it would not be a useable question given the NRCS ranking system.



Pasture Category Local Questions

No comments or discussion.

Nick reminded attendees that everyone has received an electronic copy of the schedule of cost share rates for individual practices. All are encouraged to review and submit comments/questions by the January 27, 2023, deadline.

Joe Dembeck informed all attendees that they had until Friday, January 27, 2023, to provide any feedback about the meeting to Joe. Joe's contact information was on the bottom of the meeting's agenda sheet and attendees were reminded of this.

The meeting adjourned at 3:33 pm.

Note: By 5:00pm on Friday January 27, 2023, Joe Dembeck did not receive any further comments from meeting attendees.

*Respectfully submitted by: Joseph Dembeck, Executive Director – Somerset County SWCD
 February 9, 2023*

Resource Concern	% of Local Allocated Funding	Previous Year 2021	Previous Year 2020	Previous Year 2019	Previous Year 2018	Previous Year 2017	Previous Year 2016
Animal Waste	70 %	70%	74 %	74 %	74 %	74 %	74 %
Forestry	23 %	19%	15 %	15 %	13 %	16 %	8 %
Pasture	1 %	1%	11 %	11 %	3 %	5 %	8 %
Cropland/Hayland	6 %	10%			10 %	5 %	10 %
Soil Health	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Water Quality	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Local Fund Pool	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Seasonal High Tunnels	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Irrigation	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Wildlife	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
TOTAL	100 %	100%	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %

Meeting/Project Name	Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation District LOCAL WORKING GROUP MEETING		
Date of Meeting:	(01/18/2023)	Time	1:40 pm to 3:33 pm
Minutes prepared by: J Dembeck		Conducted In-person and via Zoom (Virtual)	
Attendance at Meeting			

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 Contact Jenn Hebert at (207) 474-8323



Name	Department / Division	Name	Department/Division
Joe Dembeck	Somerset SWCD	Jennifer Hebert	Somerset - SWCD
Nick Pairitz	NRCS – Skowhegan DC	Julie Davenport	Maine Forest Service
Alexis Clune	NRCS – Skowhegan SC		
Catherine Spolarich	MNAP		
Daren Turner	Consulting		
Brad Santy	Dairy Farmer		
Jon Doty	Consulting Forester		
Joseph Roy	Maine DIFW		

Local Working Group Meeting Minutes, Somerset County SWCD
February 9, 2023