



## RI NRCS Ecological Sciences Update - 2024



# Conservation Practices

- For 2023/2024, NRCS –
  - Rhode Island applied 1676 Conservation Practices/Enhancements.
  - Of the 1676 Conservation Practices/Enhancements, 38% were Climate Smart Practices/Enhancements.
  - Rhode Island applied 641 Climate Smart Conservation Practices/Enhancements.
  - 126 Climate Smart conservation Enhancements through CSP.
  - 515 Climate Smart conservation practices through EQIP.
  - Climate Smart conservation covered over 2197 acres



# Climate Smart Forestry and Agriculture (CSAF) Activities

- Core practices (CSAF mitigation list) are the ones that have a direct impact on the selected resource concern (s). Just like always, planners will need to justify the use of any practice. If a supporting practice is not on the CSAF mitigation list the planner must document a clear connection between the core/mitigating practices.

# Climate - Inflation Reduction Act implementation

- Submitted 643 Oyster Restoration for consideration as a climate smart practice.
- Ongoing work with field staff to plan and implement forest management practices that are funded under IRA.
- Established a CSAF agreement with URI that provides technical assistance to NRCS staff and helps to accelerate program delivery for IRA related practices.
- Established URI forestry agreement that helps with planning and implementing CSAF practices as well as trainings for field staff that have focused on climate smart forestry.





# Workforce Development

- Develop a training program to increase technical competencies, teach compliance standards and increase ecological job approval authority.
- Regular and ongoing work with field staff to provide technical assistance on a variety of wildlife and forestry related topics.
- ESD is in the process of adding 2 new positions to the team, State Archaeologist and State Agronomist in FY24.
- State Biologist serves as a mentor in the New England mentoring program.
- State Biologist is providing on the job training to new pathways employees and summer interns on site surveys for small whorled pogonia.



# Partnership Expansion

- Expanded work with Save the Bay to include collaboration on two separate outreach presentations with their Director of Habitat Restoration.
- Provided a letter of support to partners seeking funding for habitat projects.
- Provided assistance at the RI Envirothon by team member serving as a judge for oral presentations.
- Continued work on various projects with partner organizations such as the conservation districts, Audubon Society of RI, Save the Bay, local land trusts, and RI DEM.
- Provided technical assistance on several RI food system briefs that will inform a state-wide food strategy.



# Other Highlights

- Add a new practice for FY24, Bivalve Aquaculture Gear and Biofouling Control, so that all oyster growers have the same opportunity to participate in EQIP (as opposed to restoration work where sites are only available in specific areas each year).
- Adopted the new interim practices Raised Beds (812) for FY24.
- Providing ongoing assistance with a CIG to develop an EQIP practice relating to kelp production, with a goal of providing additional opportunities for aquaculturists to participate in our programs.
- Developed a state specific fact sheet on establishing pollinator gardens, which can be provided to a broad audience including urban landowners with limited space for implementation.





