

State Office

451 West Street
Suite 1
Amherst, MA 01002

MASSACHUSETTS STATE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

July 23, 2024

9:00am – 12:00 pm

Meeting Held Virtually

Welcome and Opening Remarks – Dan Wright, NRCS/USDA

The meeting was called to order at 9:00am by Dan Wright, Massachusetts State Conservationist. Dan welcomed everyone and requested attendees enter their Name, Agency, and Title into the Chat.

Minutes from the November 21, 2023, meeting of the State Technical Advisory Committee was accepted.

Dan briefly mentioned planning happening at both the state and national levels. He met with the National Leadership Team to discuss planning, getting feedback and how we can improve processes and systems. Agency policy updates are being explored. An action team at the national level has been created to focus on policy updates.

As an agency, we are exploring changes both on the Financial Assistance Programs Division (FAPD) and the Easements Program Division (EPD). Working on streamlining processes to make them more expeditious.

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – MA has received more applications this fiscal year than we have ever received. The national estimated ASK for funding this year is \$1.5 billion dollars. As an agency we are looking to see how we can better capture RCPP in the future.
- Equity – We need to work on outreach and making our programs accessible to all, both at the state and national levels.

MA has been selected to have an Urban Ag office set up in the city of Boston. We're working on trying to get a mobile field office (i.e. Van) that can travel to any producer in the state. There is still a look at the national level of trying to establish a brick-and-mortar location in Boston. NRCS and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) will be meeting in the first full week of August to discuss Urban Ag offices and the next steps are for them.

Aggression and Prejudice - Notify leadership if you hear of any aggressive and prejudice behavior whether at outreach events, farm visits, etc. We want to make sure our staff, our partners, and our producers are heard. We want to be able to provide the services in whatever way feels safest and best for us and them.

Staffing – As close to 100% capacity as we have ever been. More staff than we have had in 15-20 years with 65-66 Full-Time Federal Employees and 24-25 Partner Employees.

Farm Bill Programs – Rita Thibodeau, NRCS/USDA

Rita provided details from the Fiscal Year 2024 Financial Assistance Program Division (FAPD) and Easement Program Division (EPD):

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – Available \$5,876,000 – Obligated \$4,082,790
- EQIP Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) – Available \$6,189,000 – Obligated \$2,048,799
- EQIP Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) – information unavailable
- Agricultural Management Assistance Program Risk Management Agency (AMA RMA)
Available \$349,625 – Obligated \$108,776
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – Available \$1,400,000 – Obligated \$1,111,925
- CSP Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) – Available \$374,000 – Obligated \$329,586

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

- Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) – Available \$1,922,068 – Obligated \$4,442,000
- Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) – Available \$756,607 – Obligated for Restoration \$252,931
- WRE Stewardship – Available \$27,425

*The ACEP WRE Area Wide Market Analysis for FY 2025 is in process. We will be able to renew this year's Area Wide Market Analysis.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

- 3 Proposals were entered for FY2024

Current Projects – Status Updates

- RCPP 1710 - The Nature Conservancy will expire on 8/31/2024
- RCPP 1734 - MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife will expire on 8/31/2024
- RCPP 2311 – American Farmland Trust (AFT) is Active
- RCPP 2325 – Rensselaer Plateau Alliance is Active

How RCPP Projects Are Selected

- Scorecard – The Four Pillars of RCPP
 1. Impact
 2. Partner Contribution
 3. Innovation
 4. Partnership & Management

*Only 15 RCPP projects nationally per year are selected.

*RCPP Points of Contact – Sarah Heller (AFT), sheller@farmland.org and Sarah Pellegrino (The Nature Conservancy), spellegrino@TNC.ORG

State Resource Conservationist – Catherine Magee, NRCS/USDA

Additional IRA Funding:

FY2024 – New Agreements – Five Notices of Funding Opportunities - We received applications for all five proposals.

- Energy – We are looking to expand energy in MA.
- Integrated Pest Management – Want to work with more orchard producers and farmers.
- Shellfish – Shellfish, Salt Marsh Restoration, and Eelgrass Restoration along our coastlines.
- Southern MA – Get more full farm planning assistance for SEMA.
- Project Management – Comprehensive Nutrient Management plans and contract management in general, statewide.

*Reach out to catherine.magee@usda.gov with ideas for new FY2025 agreements.

New Interim Practice – Wildlife Habitat Site Preparation 828

- Purpose
 - Control or eliminate undesirable vegetation with mechanical or chemical methods to facilitate the successful establishment, survival, and growth of desired plant communities.
 - Manage soil conditions to favor establishment, survival, and growth of the desired plant communities.

*This Interim Practice does not include Controlled Burning

FY2024 – Ten Priority Resource Concern Practices

- 449 – Irrigation Water Management
- 400 – Bivalve Aquaculture Gear and Biofouling Control

*The following Priority Resource Concern practices are on the Climate Smart Ag and Forestry list and can be used for the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

- 313 – Waste Storage Facility
- 340 – Cover Crop
- 367 – Roofs and Covers
- 374 – Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation
- 442 – Sprinkler System
- 345 – Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till
- 666 – Forst Stand Improvement
- 314 – Brush Management

*In the process of considering the Priority Resource Concern practices for FY2025

*All applications for any of the 10 Priority Resource Concerns practices would receive a 90% cost share rate.

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) Program - We currently have four Projects in progress.

- Planning Phase
 - Manhan River
- Implementation Phase
 - South River

*The following will be completed next year.

- Westport River
- Unkety Brook

*Currently working on identifying watersheds for future projects.

Source Water Protection (SWP) Areas – Specifically looked at for drinking water.

- Nationally, a state can only have 20% of the state included in a SWP area. Being a densely populated, small state with a lot of drinking water impairments, MA was granted a waiver to add additional percentages of SWP areas. Currently, 29.7% of the state is in a SWP area.
- Applicants located in SWP area with water resource concerns receive a 90% cost share rate.

Soil Scientist – David Zimmermann, NRCS/USDA

Farmland of Local Importance (FLI)

- Currently 97 towns with designated FLI.
- Updated Guides on the FOTG for program applications
 - Acres of Prime and Important Farmlands
 - Using Web Soil Survey
 - Presence of Farmland of Local Importance
 - Understanding Qualifying Conditions
 - Using Web Soil Survey
 - Screening Tool – developed by American Farmland Trust (AFT) in partnership with NRCS
- FLI questions can be directed to Al Averill, Soil Scientist for American Farmland Trust, albert.averill@usda.gov, 413-253-4356

How to Access and Manage Soil Survey Data

- SSURGO Portal
 - SQLite Database – License free and open source
 - Manage Soil Survey – currently Vector data – Raster data associated with soil surveys will be added soon.
 - Will replace other tools
 - Soil Data Viewer
 - SSURGO Bulk Downloader
 - SSURGO Template Access Database

National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS)

- NCSS Partners Seminars - Scheduled to be held Quarterly – Tailored for Partners
- First Seminar held 5/24/24 which covered Soils Data 101 – Soil and Ecological site data creation, storage, and delivery.

*Contact David.Zimmermann@usda.gov, 413-253-4357 with questions

Forestry and Wildlife Subcommittee - Patrick Conlin, MassWildlife, Habitat Biologist

Patrick provided updates from the most recent subcommittee meeting.

- Met 6/27/24
- 20 Attendees representing private sector, private nonprofit, state, and federal.
- Introduced Mike Barry, Forester for NRCS MA
 - Mike Barry has been working toward qualifications to allow him to plan prescribed fire practices in MA.
- Discussed how prescribed fire practices offered don't meet up with the needs of the state and how it would be helpful to have a variety of scenarios to account for the variation in burning different habitats (i.e. Grassland vs. Woodland).
- Exploring ideas for proposed practices for the NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG).
- Looking into the Umbrella agreement offered by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in partnership with entities like NRCS to provide additional planning and technical support, including securing compliance, which is a hurdle for several practices.
- Discussed wanting to propose Forest Stand Improvement, Brush Management, and Successional Habitat Management as Priority Resource Concern practices for FY2025.

Soil Health Committee – Kate Parsons, NRCS/USDA, and Caro Roszell, AFT

Kate provided updates from the most recent Soil Health Subcommittee Meeting:

- Met 10/26/23
- Approx. 15 Attendees representing farmers, consultants, MACD, UMASS, CISA, AFT, and DCR
- Shared experiences and thoughts on soil health challenges.
- Lincoln Fishman, farmer and soil health consultant, presented on his project on a white clover living mulch in annual cropping system. – No till system and trying to have perennial cover and dealing with the issue of getting cover crops established later in the fall.
- Expressed interest in more technical information on compost and manure and the differences.
- One of the producers expressed interest in bringing in an expert soil health producer to present at a field day.
- NRCS in coordination with AFT held a webinar on Soil Carbon Amendment
 - The Soil Carbon Amendment practice helps pay for biochar, compost, and other carbonaceous amendments to improve soil quality and other purposes.
 - Webinar was held 4/18/24
 - 127 registrants, 66 Attendees
 - Arthur Siller and Olivia Golden, Soil Health Specialists at UMASS, presented on the compost side of the Soil Carbon Amendment
 - Debbie Aller, Cornell Soil Health Specialist, presented on biochar.
- Future Work
 - Review soil health related program ranking questions and provided feedback as applicable or needed.
 - Host a field day for producers to learn more about healthy soil structure – Tentatively Fall 2024
- Open the link to view the [Soil Carbon Amendment Webinar](#) - Passcode: siN?8^Jq

Urban Agriculture Subcommittee - Charline Zu, AFT

- pXRF Soil Lead Screening at Urban Farming Institute on Friday 7/26/2024
 - Here's the link to the [Translated Materials](#) for sharing and using at the event.
 - Open and Closed Office Hours are still running
Open Office Hours are every 2nd Tuesday of the month from 11am-2pm. If you are interested in attending one, send me an email, cxu@farmland.org or charline.xu@usda.gov, to invite you to the series
- If interested in being added to the Urban Ag Subcommittee, email Charline.

Easement Subcommittee – Chair, Jamie Potters, AFT

- Have been meeting quarterly with 20-35 attendees. Primarily local and regional Land Trust staff, NRCS, and local municipalities.
- Last met on 4/10/24
- 22 Attendees
- Received updates from Rita Thibodeau and her Easement team and MDAR about funding and encouraging folks to get applications in.
- Introduced new AFT staff member, Kathleen Doherty.
 - Came from CT Farmland Trust.
 - Extensive experience with ACEP-ALE projects.
 - Her role is to provide one-on-one technical support to partners on the ground.
 - Serves as support to the NRCS MA Easement team.
 - Kathleen ran through a brief overview of FLI initiative.
- Ran through case studies.
- Brainstorming session on potential improvements and changes to some of the Easements programs in the future.

Program Manager - Martha Craig, Cape Cod Conservation District (CCCD)

Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project (CCWRRP)

- Developed by NRCS and approved by Congress in 2009.
- Developed to address environmental degradation of water quality and fish and wildlife habitat.
- Will have long-term, beneficial effects on restoring the water resources and ecosystems along the coastal areas of Cape Cod.
- Agricultural benefits – improve water quality entering bivalve aquaculture farms.
 - Improve water quality to over 7,300 ac of shellfish growing areas with the installation of stormwater treatment systems.
 - Restore/Improve access to 4,200 ac of spawning, nursery, and juvenile habitat for anadromous fish through installation and/or repair of aquatic organism passages (fish ladders).
 - Restore 1,500 ac of degraded salt marsh.
- To reach the goals of the plan, NRCS contracted with the CCCD to review the CCWRRP Watershed Plan and suggest updates. The CCCD, through consultation with the towns, updated the list of projects that would meet the Plan goals over the next 4-5 years.

- Based on the new project list, NRCS received \$42 million in FY22 for 25 projects and \$22.5 million for FY23. NRCS has also provided funding support for the CCCD to help manage these projects. Currently, 4 full-time staff and multiple technical experts.
- There are 59 Active projects in the following towns.

Barnstable	Mashpee
Bourne	Orleans
Brewster	Provincetown
Chatham	Sandwich
Dennis	Truro
Eastham	Wellfleet
Falmouth	Yarmouth
Harwich	

- CCWRRP Sponsors and Project Partners:

NRCS	NOAA
CCCD	USFWS
MA Division of Marine Fisheries	Association to Preserve Cape Cod
MA Division of Ecological Restoration	Center for Coastal Studies
Barnstable County	Friends of Herring River
All 15 Cape Cod Towns	Friends of Bass River
Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe	Many Others

MA Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) - Executive Director, Michael Leff

- Mentioned upcoming NACD and Northeast Region summer meeting in Boston, MA – Key Dates 8/12/24-8/14/24

Link to NACD conference: <https://www.nacdnet.org/news-and-events/summer-meeting/>

- There will be key speakers Monday morning, August 12, and then half a day of interesting tours on Tuesday. Plus, additional events on Wednesday.
- MACD will be hiring for another position as part of the NRCS staffing agreement. This is for a combined position for statewide local working group coordinator as well as a program assistant in a couple of the field offices.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Drinking Water Protection Coordinator, Kira Jacobs

- Member of the NACD summer meeting planning team.
 - There will be 2 afternoon tours of urban ag sites on Monday, 8/12/24
 - Boston
 - Charlestown
- *Attendees will be transported via buses.
- The NACD applied to be the lead partner for a 13-state partnership. We are the Northeast Mid-Atlantic Partnership for Forest and Water, modeled after the Southeastern Partnership for Forest and Water, which is from TX to VA.
 - Drinking water utilities, EPA-Kira Jacobs, Forest Service staff, and NRCS are working on how to actively protect and complete on the ground projects to protect our drinking water supplies.
 - Kira will be attending the Land Trust Alliance Rally in Providence, RI this September 25-28.
<https://alliancerally.org/registration2024/>
 - At the Rally, there will be an American Farmland Trust booth to share conservation resources and AFT will be hosting the National Ag Lands Network (NALN) member breakfast on the morning of Friday, Sept. 27. If you are engaged in farmland protection efforts, please consider [joining](#) the NALN online platform. It's free!
 - please mark your calendars for this event in Amherst!!! <https://wildlandsandwoodlands.org/events-and-programs/2024-rcp-network-gathering-collaborating-for-healthier-communities/>

Dan Wright thanked everyone for participating in the state tech committee meeting and for providing input on NRCS programs.

The meeting adjourned at 11:30am.

About the State Technical Committee

The State Technical Committee advises the NRCS State Conservationist on the technical guidelines necessary to implement the conservation provisions of the 2018 Farm Bill. Committee membership includes representatives from federal and state agriculture and environmental agencies, agricultural producers, UMass Extension, nonprofit organizations, and agribusiness.

State Technical Committee meetings are open to the public and are held as often as necessary to advise and implement NRCS conservation programs. For information about upcoming meetings, please contact Catherine Magee at the NRCS State Office at 413-253-4365 or catherine.magee@usda.gov. More information and meeting minutes are available on the MA NRCS web site: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/massachusetts/massachusetts-state-technical-committee-0>



United States Department of Agriculture



NRCS Technical Updates

July 2024

Catherine Magee, State Resource Conservationist

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

FY24 New Agreements

Energy

Shellfish

Integrated
Pest
Management

Southeastern
MA

Project
Management



New Interim Practice – Wildlife Habitat Site Preparation 828

PURPOSE:

- Control or eliminate undesirable vegetation with mechanical or chemical methods to facilitate the successful establishment, survival, and growth of desired plant communities.
- Manage soil conditions to favor establishment, survival, and growth of the desired plant communities.

Priority Resource Concern Practices



FY2023

313 - Waste Storage Facility

340 - Cover Crop

367 - Roofs and Covers

374 - Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation

442 - Sprinkler System

449 - Irrigation Water Management

345 - Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till

666 - Forest Stand Improvement

314 - Brush Management

400 - Bivalve Aquaculture Gear and Biofouling Control



FY25 NWQI

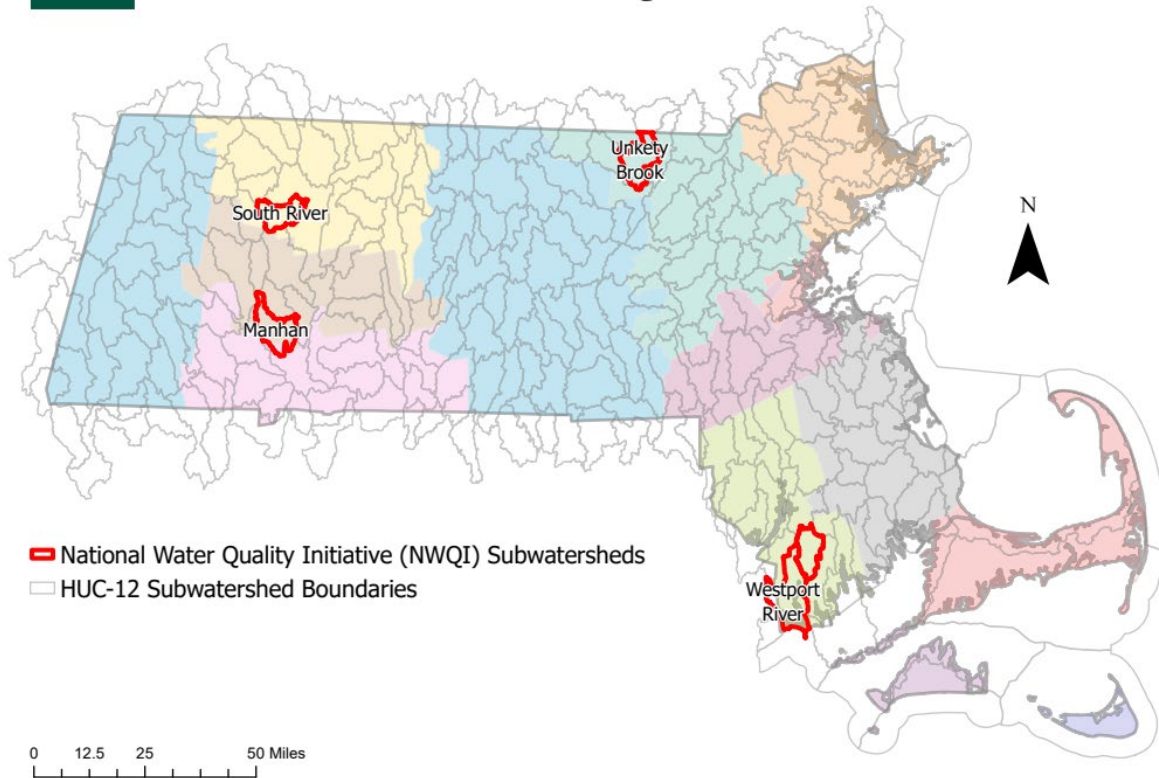
Planning Phase

- **Manhan River**

Implementation Phase

- **Westport River**
- **Unkety Brook**
- **South River**

USDA Massachusetts NWQI Sub watersheds



USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Created 1/24/24, E. Bazluke

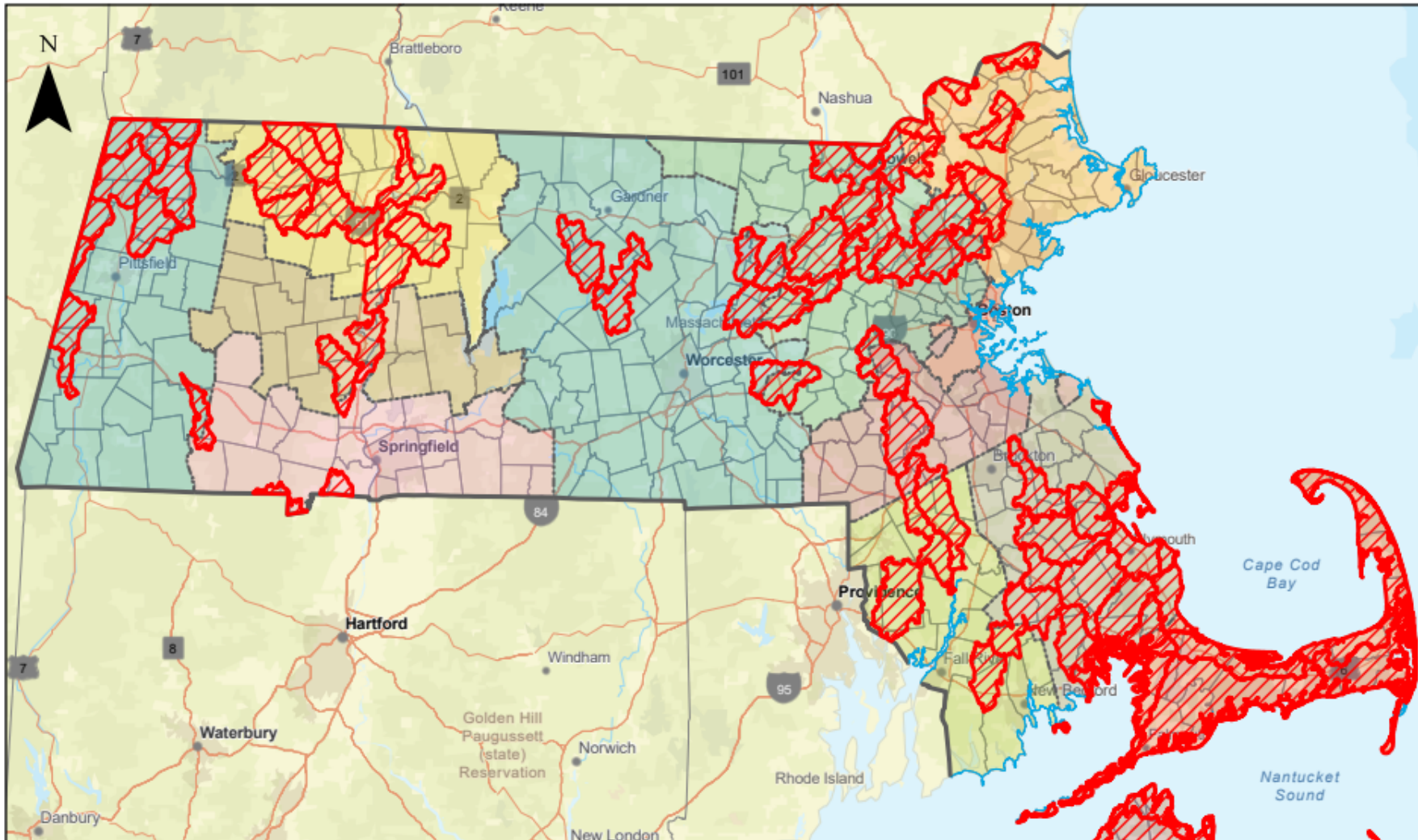
Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/





FY24 Massachusetts SWPA Locations





United States Department of Agriculture

Contact Information:



Catherine Magee

Catherine.magee@usda.gov

Mobile: (413) 835-1278



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at **How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint** and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

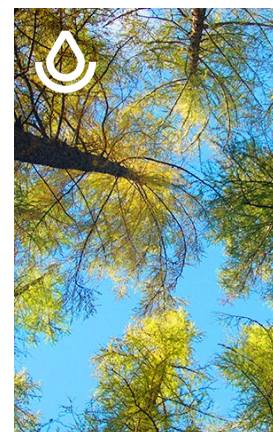
Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/





United States Department of Agriculture



Fiscal Year 2024 Funding Status for Financial Assistance and Easement Programs Updates

Rita Thibodeau, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

July 23, 2024

Natural Resources Conservation Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

Fiscal Year 2024 Financial Assistance Program Division (FAPD) and Easement Program Division (EPD)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) \$5,876,000 *obligated* \$4,082,790
EQIP Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) \$6,189,000 *obligated* \$2,048,799

EQIP Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) – *no announcement this year due to IRA language challenges*

Agricultural Management Assistance Program Risk Management Agency (AMA RMA)
\$349,625 *obligated* \$108,776

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) \$1,400,000 *obligated* \$1,111,925
CSP Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) \$374,000 *obligated* \$329,586

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) \$1,922,068 *obligated* \$4,442,000
Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) \$756,607 *obligated for restoration* \$252,931
WRE Stewardship \$27,425

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service



The ACEP WRE Area Wide Market Analysis for FY 2025 is in process. Preliminary results indicate we maybe able to renew the FY 2024 for this coming fiscal year.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

- 3 proposals were entered for FY 2024
- RCPP 1710 with The Nature Conservancy will expire on 8/31/2024
- RCPP 1734 with MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife will expire on 8/31/2024
- RCPP 2311 with American Farmland Trust is active
- RCPP 2325 with Rensselaer Plateau Alliance is active



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/





NRCS Soil Updates

Dave Zimmermann, NRCS Soil Scientist

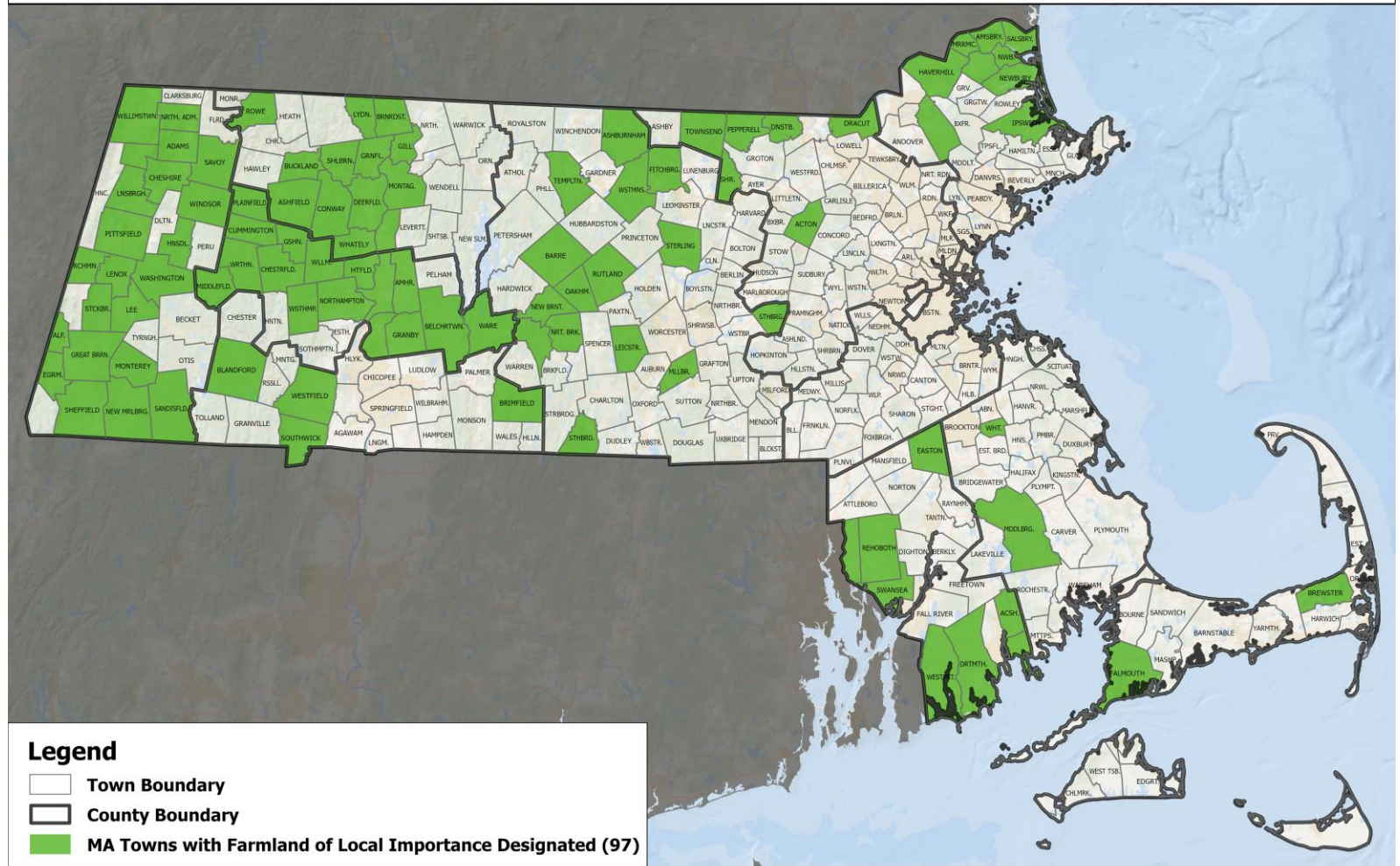
Massachusetts State Technical Committee Meeting 07/23/2024

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

Farmland of Local Importance

Al Averill
Soil Scientist
American Farmland Trust
albert.averill@usda.gov
413-253-4356

Massachusetts Towns with Farmland of Local Importance Designated

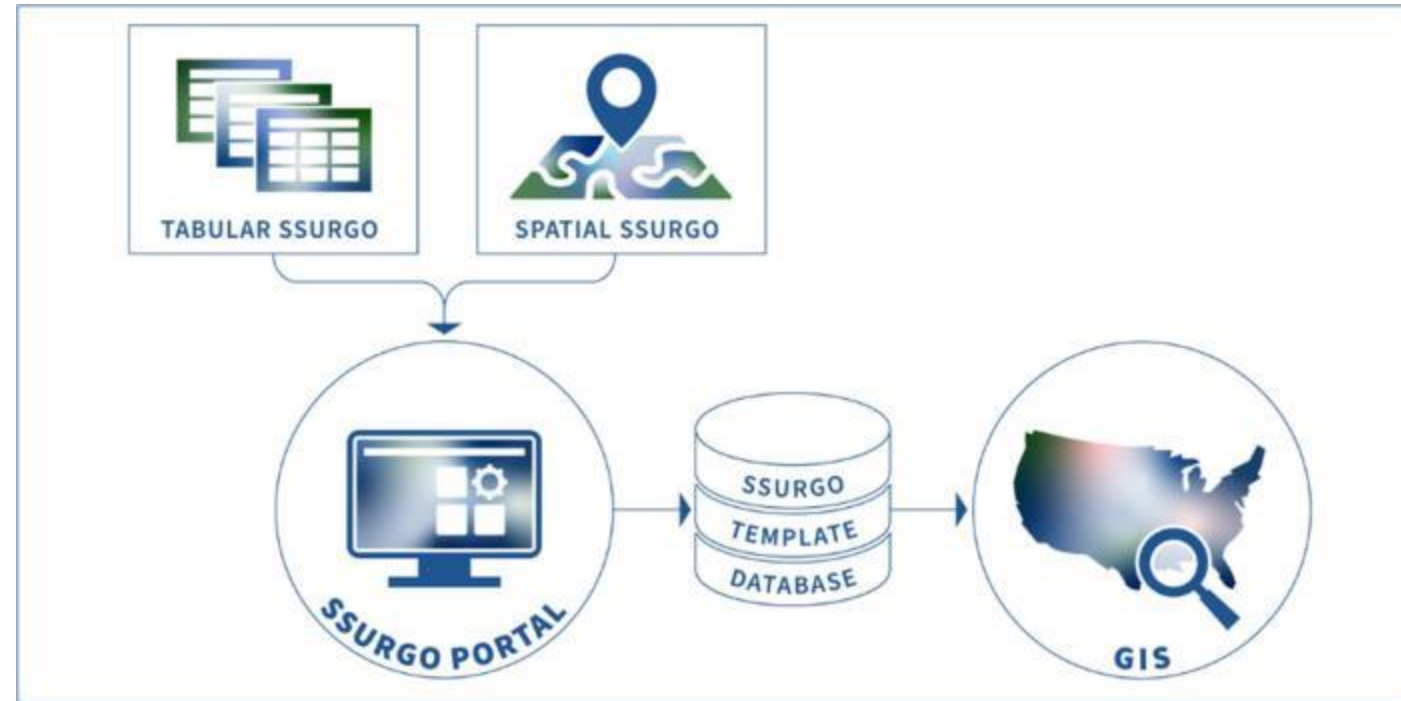


Farmland of Local Importance

- Updated guides on the [FOTG](#) for program applications
 - [Acres of Prime and Important Farmlands](#)
 - Using Web Soil Survey
 - [Presence of Farmland of Local Importance](#)
 - Understanding Qualifying Conditions
 - Using Web Soil Survey
 - [Screening Tool](#)
 - developed by American Farmland Trust in partnership with NRCS.

SSURGO Portal

- SQLite database
 - License free and open source
- Manage soil survey data
 - Vector and raster
- Will replace other tools
 - Soil Data Viewer
 - SSURGO Bulk Downloader
 - SSURGO Template Access Database



[SSURGO Portal | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/ssurgo-portal)

NCSS Partners Seminars

- [NCSS Partners Seminar: Soils Data 101 \(5/24/24\) \(youtube.com\)](#)
 - Soil and ecological site data creation, storage, and delivery
- Quarterly





Contact Information:

Dave Zimmermann

david.zimmermann@usda.gov

413-253-4357



NRCS Soil Updates

Massachusetts State Technical Committee Meeting 07/23/2024

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center