

## State Technical Committee Meeting

NRCS/FSA State Office, Tolland, CT

January 27, 2016

### NOTES

**Participants:** Tom Morgart, NRCS; Joyce Purcell, NRCS; Debbie Surabian, NRCS; Arde Ramthun, NRCS; Mark Edmonds, NRCS; Nancy Ferlow, NRCS; Jim Hyde, NRCS; Abbie Cadman, NRCS; Carol Grasis, NRCS; Carol Donzella, NRCS; Christina Cerino, NRCS; Javier Cruz, NRCS; Charlotte Pyle, NRCS; Joe Wettemann, DEEP; Kira Jacobs, EPA; Denise Savageau, CACD; Bryan Hurlburt, FSA; Steve Winnett, EPA; Amanda Fargo-Johnson, CT RC&D; Dan Peracchio, CT DEEP, Forestry; Dan Mullen, ECCD; Doug Emmerthal, DEEP, Forestry; Rob Hurst, DEEP, Water; Abbie Maynard, CAES; Shelley Green, TNC; Judy Wilson, DEEP, Wildlife

**Welcome/Introductions:** Tom Morgart

Tom welcomed all to the meeting; introductions followed.

**Review Agenda/Review Minutes (Oct. 29, 2015)** – Joyce Purcell

Joyce welcomed everyone to the meeting, provided an agenda and notes from the last meeting, and asked for comments. Hearing none, the notes were accepted as is.

#### **Sub-Committee Reports**

##### National Water Quality Initiative Subcommittee

Rob Hurst reported the subcommittee is continuing to work on the Little River and Broad Brook watersheds, utilizing \$550k for the two. He reported there is an embargo until next week, and new watersheds will be added.

##### Forest Practices Subcommittee

All are awaiting the final rules on the long eared bat; the consensus is that they will be easier to work with.

##### Easement Subcommittee

The committee met in November to discuss the FY-16 ranking criteria; an emphasis on agricultural attributes was the key in weighing the state questions; the ranking form and criteria are available on the CT website ([www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov)) for review; additional comments are welcomed; the State Conservationist will approve in two weeks.

##### Nutrient Management Subcommittee

Jim Hyde reported the Committee has not yet formally met; topics being considered are information and education on methane digesters; a 319 funds informational group that would include the partnership; exportation of nutrients; expanding the Southwest Conservation District's Manure Share site, and demonstration plots on farms. DEEP recommended their phosphorus report as a resource.

#### **Farm Bill Program Updates**

##### Conservation Innovation Grants/National Water Quality Initiative/Resource Stewardship Evaluation Tool

Nancy Ferlow reported the 2016 grant proposals will be due in February/March; \$1 million for national and \$75,000 for state grants are available; the focus this year is on water quality and soil health. She also reported on the National Water Quality Initiative/Resource Stewardship Evaluation Tool being used for the Little River Watershed, and there are new NRCS standards on high tunnel systems (325) and ground water testing (355). These new standards and others can be found on the CT FOTG website.

### Emergency Watershed Protection Floodplain Easement Program/South Branch Park River O&M

Arde Ramthun reported that another closing took place, with three more pending. The City of West Haven is contracting for the demolition of 13 sites; 24 contractors were interested. There is an environmental concern on a Round 1 parcel -- awaiting a decision from NHQ regarding whether or not to proceed. The appraisals are nearly complete for the Round 2 parcels; 2 offer letters have been sent. Ramthun also reported that through administration transformation, an Easement Support Team will be in place at the end of FY2017 to take on most of the easement work (this new structure is being piloted in several states). The South Branch Park River restoration project is underway. To date, 13 acres have been cleared of trees and brush with 2500 cy of sediment being removed. Special thanks to DEEP for their assistance with this project, which affects the towns of Newington, West Hartford, and Hartford.

### Farm Bill Programs and Initiatives Updates

Joyce Purcell reviewed program allocations for EQIP, AMA, and ACEP-ALE; CT NRCS received \$4.5 million for FY2016. The sub-accounts are based on resource concerns and recommendations from the State Technical Committee. ACEP-ALE applications will be ranked by March 1, 2016, lots of quality assurance in April, and final obligation by September 23, 2016. There may be an opportunity to request additional funding for the forestry, CNMPs and on-farm energy sub-accounts, if needed.

Tom Morgart noted there is no budget yet and we are on a continuing resolution; additional EQIP and ACEP-ALE funds may become available nationwide with Connecticut getting a share. CSP acres are increasing from 7 to 10 million acres. The Connecticut budget is very tight; four positions are vacant (one engineer, two soil conservationists and one district conservationist). Morgart was happy to report there have been six FRPP closings since October, with two more expected in February.

### Bridges to Opportunities

Bryan Hurlburt informed the group about a new initiative being piloted in the New London and Windham areas. The focus is to service customers and support farmers by utilizing a new software program that will provide a customized print-out of resources that will help the customer with conservation needs. Any agency that would like to be in the system will need to sign an agreement.

### **Partnership Opportunities**

#### 2016 Regional Conservation Partnership Program/2015 RCPP

Joyce Purcell reported the one state and no national proposals were submitted for the FY2016 RCPP. UConn submitted the state proposal titled, *Path to Pathogens*; it was invited to submit a final proposal. Two FY2015 state projects are underway -- the Last Green Valley and UConn, as well as the one national project -- Long Island Sound.

#### RCPP -- Long Island Sound Project

Denise Savageau reported the \$10 million project is picking up momentum. A steering committee and the technical committees are now in place, and an RFP for the Conservation Districts is being developed. The issues being addressed are soil health, nutrient management, land management, and resiliency within the six states. Connecticut is focusing on healthy soil and nutrient management. The Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) is being focused on heavily, with \$4 million being utilized for conservation easements. Rule changes are being requested as this program has not been used in New England before.

#### Cultural Resources Agreement with State Historic Preservation Office, State Archaeologist and NRCS

Charlotte Pyle reviewed the definitions of words used in the new agreement. She also explained the Section 106 process and the role of consulting parties, and making the required review less burdensome.

### Subaqueous and Tidal Marsh Soil Survey Work and New Soil Interpretations

Debbie Surabian reviewed a number of posters on subaqueous soils, the web soil survey, and data collection and process. A draft copy of *Soil Suitability for Closed-Loop Horizontal Residential Geothermal Heat Pumps* was available for review. The posters addressed *Connecticut Geothermal Energy Project & Surficial Material Thermal Conductivity, Using Landscapes and Geographic Parameters for Mapping Southern NE Tidal Marsh Soils*, and *Mapping Partnership of the CT Coastal Zone Soil Survey*.

### Open Discussion

Tom Morgart addressed the earlier program deadlines and said all programs are requiring obligations sooner. There are new goals and new deadlines to meet -- this will also be a change for producers. Applications will be accepted on a year round basis. Morgart also mentioned that a new screening documents tool is being developed. It will look at the history of cancellation of practices which will make an application rank lower. Those with developing plans will rank higher. This streamlining process will help reduce the number of applications we need to take through the process, as the time to rank is intensive.

Judy Wilson mentioned revising of the Wildlife Sub-Committee. Tom Morgart said he would consider it and asked if she would be interested in heading the committee.

Amanda Fargo-Johnson mentioned the upcoming Soil Health Workshop on March 23, 2016, at Scout Hall, in South Windsor. Speaking for Rural Development, she noted the April 7, 2016, deadline for Energy Conservation.

Rob Hust mentioned the Regional Non-Point Source Conference on April 23, 2016, the National Non-Point Source Conference in Boston in late fall, and UConn's Natural Resource Conference on March 14, 2016. A call for papers with a Long Island Sound focus is being advertised. Hust also mentioned two water use database grants are being offered, and a Non-Point Source RFP for implementation projects that has a deadline of February 27, 2016.

Denise Savageau mentioned the upcoming NACD Annual Meeting where the new Farm Bill will be discussed. Joe Smith, Forester from Massachusetts, will be heading the NACD Forest Working Group. If anyone has anything specific - federal programs related to forestry, to get input from/to him.

Carol Grasis mentioned the Southern New England Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society will be meeting on March 4, 2016, in Sturbridge, MA. Use and regulations of swamp maps in forested areas are to be highlighted. Registration is open on their website. There's a special rate for federal employees.

Shelley Green mentioned that Wayne Woodard, who works at the Sunny Valley Preserve, received a grant for developing New England cottontail habitat. They received a \$1.4 million grant to restore the American Elm; are looking at coastal resilience in undeveloped salt marsh areas; and addressing Bridgeport's flooding issues and green infrastructure.

Kira Jacobs mentioned EPA's Healthy Watershed Grant for communities throughout the nation for Forestry and Communities Endowment; there is a federal dollar match with private funds.

\*The next State Technical Committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for **April 27, 2016**.

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 PM