

State Technical Committee Meeting

NRCS/FSA State Office, Tolland, CT

May 24, 2017

Draft Meeting Notes

Participants: Tom Morgart, Carol Grasis, Nancy Ferlow, Arthur Ramthun, Kristin Walker, Jim Hyde, Barbara Alexander, Amy Fischer, Todd Bobowick, Carol Donzella, NRCS; Rich Minor, Bonnie Burr, UConn; Dan Peracchio, Chuck Lee, Doug Emmerthal, Judy Wilson DEEP; Steve Winnett, EPA; Henry Talmage, CT Farm Bureau, John Weedon, CFT; Dan Mullins, ECCD; Abbie Maynard, CAES, Commissioner Steven Reviczky, DOAG

Welcome/Opening Comments/Review Agenda: Tom Morgart

Tom updated the Committee on the recent reorganization of the USDA. NRCS, FSA and RMA are now under the newly formed *Farm Production and Conservation Agency*. Under the proposed Presidential budget there could be a 21% cut; FY-18 EQIP is being targeted however the 2014 Farm Bill would need to be re-opened to make that cut; NRCS continues to work putting conservation on the ground; currently staffing is at 10,112 employees, to be increase in FY-17 to 10,800 employees, and decrease in FY-18 to 10,300 employees. NRCS budget is okay. Introductions followed.

Review Minutes of January 14, 2017: All

Dan Mullins noted that Roseland Lake was misidentified as Rosen Lake. No other corrections noted; minutes were accepted.

Subcommittee Reports:

The National Water Quality Initiative Subcommittee: Chuck Lee and Dan Mullins

It was reported that there are a number of on-going projects in the Little River and Broad Brook basins; through 319 grants and NRCS funding several projects have been initiated: the solar powered, aerated composting facility has been completed, the precision planting equipment is producing a green cover crop, and the woodchip bio-reactor is in place; they are also working with a producer on addressing manure management and installing storage and receiving tanks; a nutrient study on Roseland Lake is underway. The Floating Workshop is scheduled for June 9.

Wildlife Subcommittee: Judy Wilson

The subcommittee is planning to meet in July. The RCPP Young Forest initiative is being well received; 4 forest management plans have been completed; there is interest from the Land Trust Exchange and CT Forest and Parks.

No reports were submitted for the Forest Practices and Easement Subcommittees.

FY2017 Program Updates: Carol Grasis

New national initiatives – AMA, high tunnel initiative with urban/suburban focus; high priority areas include Hartford, New Haven, and Fairfield; new state initiative, gypsy moth initiative with forest land focus; new RCPP wildlife management initiative, Young Forest Initiative, focus species are woodcock and NE Cottontail; practices to create new forest; RCPP LIS Adaption and Resiliency, Trout Unlimited is offering a mini sign-up; RCPP UConn Path to Pathogens in CT Agricultural Runoff, Last Green Valley volunteers, DNA extracting to identify source; remaining sign-up dates: Batching 6/16, Ranking 8/11, Obligation 9/8. Reviewed status of EQIP, AMA, CSP, RCPP and Easements.

Portable X-Ray Fluorescence: Tom Morgart

A new tool to test urban soils; takes 5 minutes to sample; gives a quick assessment; cost of \$30k, easy to operate and maintain, radio active with minimal exposure to operator, application for soil survey and characterization, environmental quality and health; soil-based research, ideal for addressing spatial variability; tests for 23 elements; Debbie Surabian, State Soil Scientist is lead, no costs per sample.

Resource Conservation Updates: Nancy Ferlow

Conservation Innovation Grants - no call for grants this year, maybe next year funding; Committee wants to continue program; grants are now processed through the Grants and Agreements Team; 5% of EQIP allocations are currently used for CIG grants, not sure what percentage for next year; no announcement yet for national CIG grants.

Working Lands for Wildlife – new project for NE turtles (wood, spotted and Blanding’s), applications accepted for FY18 funding; any interest in turtles contact Nancy, for considered or about to be listed species, nesting areas mirrored to nearby wetlands, safe crossings and protecting habitat with WRE easements considered.

National Water Quality Initiative – already discussed

Practice Standards – are out for review; get comments back ASAP; required to work on 20% of standards this year.

Engineering Updates – Arde Ramthun

Currently serving on national team working on wetland mitigation; completed 20 dam assessments; requested funding to complete 2 rehab plans for the worst ones; for flood control and high hazard dams; removed 25k cubic yards of contaminated soils in the South Branch Park River; Commissioner is asking Cities to agree to do maintenance in their areas instead of the State taxpayers; trees were removed, too. New standard building design is out; a technical

conference will be held in July/August, and the regional conference will be held in Groton this year.

Emergency Watershed Protection Flood Plain Easements – Kristin Walker

Round 2 applications in West Haven, Milford and Darien are moving ahead; a few have dropped out due to lack of access, contamination, and other reasons; Regional Conservationist Gayle Norman and the Appropriations Committee toured the project areas, the Appropriations Committee reviewed all the files and found everything satisfactory; the West Haven Sponsor gave us a glowing report as they have been able to leverage additional funds to help their City; possibility of a RD 3 is being considered; Internal Control reviews are a continuous process; the Suffield Brook restoration project in Old Lyme is almost completed, it was a RD 1 project.

RCPP Updates – Tom Morgart/Partners

RCPP- Long Island Sound: UConn reported that GIS will help locate possible target areas for on-farm assessments, conservation plans, technical assistance, and follow-up performance measures; targeted areas equal better results for practices and greatest change for improvement.

RCPP – Water Security: drought is a continuous challenge, Angie is finding interested parties especially with wells, this will use up all the funding; another batching date is being considered; encourage producers to get their water allocation permits now. The 535 page draft State Water Plan should be completed by June 30th and opened for public comments; Representatives to review by December 31st.

Tom reported that there are two HFRP easement applications to manage for wildlife species; the Council to hire a person to develop restoration plans. The Last Green Valley has submitted an FY18 RCPP application for stewardship plans for birds; implementation; 65% FA to HFRP with focus on forest land.

Open Discussion: All

CACD is working on the 2018 Farm Bill; if there are things that need to be changed let Denise Savageau know; the Council has a loud voice and can make a difference; they are looking to change the HFRP program's focus to include other resources besides wildlife, and address the DUNS/SAM issues. There's a need for Regional Equity in New England. Henry noted that everyone needs to work together for their region. Sen. Murphy had a listening session with producers and others and voiced what they wanted in the next Farm Bill.

Commission Steven Reviczky mentioned the many state grant programs that might fit projects the Committee members are working on; he spoke of the Governor's plan to eliminate the Department of Agriculture and merge it with other departments which could save \$5m/yr.; the administration is looking for ways to raise funds to keep the state alive. This will be a topic of

discussion at the Agricultural Lobby Day. Eliminating the department is a huge risk to agriculture, it's about survival of agriculture in our state.

Tom noted that the STAC is agency heavy and producer light. He would like the Committee to be more Producer driven and will be asking them personally what their needs are. He would like their input at our meetings; wants them weighing in and asked for names of producers to contact. Steve noted that they used to come to these meetings and is not sure why they stopped. Henry noted that time, place, length of meetings were issues, as well as stopping production in order to attend – is it worth it? A suggestion was made to have a 30-minute phone conversation in lieu of attending a meeting. It was also suggested that NRCS get on agendas at statewide meetings to reach the producers.

Joe inquired about the status of the policy change with CNMP approvals. Tom reported that he hasn't signed anything yet, he's still working on it; he's looking at where State rules come in to play. DEEP would like the opportunity to review the plans and agree on practices; NRCS policy says if the farmer doesn't want regulators on their property, they don't have to invite them, they don't have to share their CNMP. Tom needs to know under what circumstance the plan needs to be approved by DEEP. Tom reiterated that NRCS does not have authority to invite other agencies onto the producer's property, the farmer has to invite them. The revised draft document will be sent out for review/comment.

Steve reported that he met with the new Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue and the EPA Director Scott Pruitt. He felt there are opportunities to get things done, a good time to empower the states and the State Conservationists in making local decisions.

Next Meeting: TBD