

**DRAFT**

## State Technical Committee Meeting

NRCS/FSA State Office, Tolland, CT

October 25, 2017

### Meeting Notes

Participants: Tom Morgart, Joyce Purcell, Carol Grasis, Mark Edmonds, Abbie Cadman, Deb Surabian, Carol Donzella, Jim Hyde, Amy Fischer, Alyce Donahue NRCS; Denise Savageau CACD; Tom Worthley, Joe Bonelli, Angie Harris UCONN Extension; Sarah Fournier, FSA; Abbie Maynard CAES; Doug Emmerthal, Judy Wilson, Joe Wettemann, Chuck Lee, Chris Martin, Lisa Wahle, DEEP; Lois Bruinooge, TLGV; Wayne Woodward, TNC; Amanda Fargo-Johnson, Jeanne Davies RC&D; Cameron Weimar, Commissioner Steven Reviczky, DOAG

#### **Welcome/Opening Comments/Review Agenda: State Conservationist Tom Morgart**

Morgart reported this year's budget numbers have not been approved/finalized. Connecticut has been receiving partial funding allocations. NRCS is under a continuing resolution (CR) thru December 8, 2017.

Morgart updated the Committee on the 2017 funds allocated to cut tress for the gypsy moth damage across the state.

Introductions followed and there were no additions or deletions to the May 24, 2017 minutes.

#### **Subcommittee Reports:**

##### National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) subcommittee: Chuck Lee

Chuck Lee reported that watershed plan is in place for Broad Brook and Little River. NRCS will not be selecting any NWQI watersheds for FY 2018.

NRCS would like to develop a plan to work on the Scantic River Watershed to include part of Massachusetts.

##### 2018 Easement Subcommittee: Joyce Purcell for Wayne Woodward

The easement subcommittee annually reviews ranking questions to evaluate easement parcels and has adjusted ranking points as needed for Connecticut. This year's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) allocation level is unknown and will be announced soon. 2018 easement ranking questions will be developed by the subcommittee for state technical committee comment. Additional committee members are needed and are welcome to assist with the FY 2018 ranking questions. Let Purcell or Woodward know if you are interested in serving on the easement subcommittee.

Purcell reported that the announcement for the 2018 ACEP-ALE application batching date and 2018 ACEP-ALE agreement materials will be provided by NHQ soon.

Other:

Judy Wilson DEEP

Wilson will be reaching out to NRCS leadership to address the need for a wildlife/forestry subcommittee. Subcommittee members are needed to serve. Please let Wilson know if you are interested.

**FY 2018 Program Updates:**

FY2017 Program Wrap-Up: Tom Morgart

Morgart and Purcell reviewed FY 2017 allocations EQIP, AMA, CSP, contract and funding amounts. 2018 program sub account allocations were proposed based on funding trend from the last 2 fiscal years.

~~Program Ranking dates and Initiatives:~~ Joyce Purcell FY 2017 were discussed per the dates below.

Signup Number	Batching Date	Ranking Due Date	Obligation Due Date
1	10/20/2017	12/1/2017	1/12/2018
2	1/19/2018	2/23/2018	3/23/2018
3	3/16/2018	4/27/2018	6/01/2018
4	6/15/2018	7/13/2018	8/10/2018

Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC): – Joyce Purcell

The proposed ACEP-WRE GARC methodology for FY-18 was discussed with the Committee. For the majority of the state individual USPAP appraisals would be utilized and 90% of the appraised fair market value would be offered, not to exceed \$5000 per acre. For priority areas identified by TNC and habitats of Threatened and Endangered species (bog turtle) and species of special concern (wood and spotted turtles) individual USPAP appraisals would be utilized and 90% of the appraised fair market value would be offered, not to exceed \$7200 per acre. The rationale for the 90% of the FMV was due to the fact that WRE easements are more restrictive than ALE easements the remaining value would be less than half of the agricultural value or 10-12%, the easement valuation for the GRP program has shown it to be between 78-94% with the average of 88%, therefore the proposed WRE GARC for CT would be set at 90% of the FMV determined by the appraisal following the WRE appraisal specification. This also aligns with neighboring states. The \$7,200 per acre amount comes from the August 2017 NASS

data for cropland values in CT. The Committee concurred with the methodology and approved the proposed ACEP-WRE GARC for FY-18.

**Resource Conservation updates:** – Abbie Cadman

- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIGS)  
CIGs are competitive grants for development and adoption of innovative technology for conservation on agricultural land.
- Working lands for Wildlife/Turtles: USFWS, NRCS, state departments and partners meeting this week to discuss how NRCS practices can benefit 2 species of turtles, NRCS Conservation Practices and species needs, Targeted geographic areas, Communication support systems, etc.
- Practice Standards: CT is working jointly with Massachusetts on many engineering practice standards that need to be updated. All state payment schedules are located at electronic Field Office Technical guide (eFOTG)

**Engineering Updates/Emergency Watershed Protection** – Jim Hyde

Farm planning for animal producers – Hyde reviewed NRCS and DEEP common goals

Guidance for site visits with ag waste planning: guidance for NRCS personnel was available for the committees input. The guidance included a producer handout with descriptions on sharing information among agencies. The DEEP and UCONN had given feedback and approval for use. The Dept. of Ag was vetting the information between the Preservation and the Regulatory Service bureaus. The information will be used to help producers record which agencies should be involved in proposed plans or changes to the farm infrastructure related to animal farm production

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Updates:**

- UCONN water security/drought – Ange Harris reported that all RCPP financial assist funds have been allocated and producers expected to begin implementation 2018.
- Last Green Valley (LGV) Lois Bruinooge, discussed the new 5-year multistate RCPP agreement. Forest management practices will be implemented using EQIP funds and permanent easement on forest lands will be acquired using the Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP). Other partners included the Conservation Districts and Audubon in the three states. Meetings are scheduled for October 31, 2017 and November 8, 2017 to roll out the multi-state project. If you want to get on the project mailing list, let Lois Bruinooge know.
- Long Island Sound (LIS) - Denise Savageau reported that many projects are underway with conservation districts and sub awardees in the LIS multistate project area.

**New Soil Interpretations in Web Soil Survey/Portable X-Ray Florescence Spectroscopy (pXRF) Unit Update:** Debbie Surabian

Surabian provided updates on Web Soil survey and soils information on line. She discussed CT Inland Wetlands interpretations and summaries by map unit. She reviewed soil suitability for forest and biomass harvesting, subsurface sewage disposal systems, and large animal disposal pits/trenches.

Surabian reported that CT's soil survey is the most down loaded soil survey in the nation.

Surabian also provided and update on the pXRF unit, and reviewed the X-Ray Fluoresce trace metal analysis report and that she has been working with UCONN Soil Nutrient Analysis Laboratory on the analyses provided.

CT Wetlands web page (One stop soil shopping: <http://arcg.is/CvTjK>) on the Resource Conservation Development web page.

Upcoming Soil Health Training is scheduled for 11/27/2017, Lebanon Fire Hall.

**Open Discussion:**

Angie Harris – Farmers that need water wells – Is there money available under other Farm Bill Programs.

Answer – NRCS-EQIP can provide wells for water conservation. No new wells under general EQIP.

AMA has not been funded in FY 2018. No new wells installed under existing programs, now that AMA is no longer a funded program.

History of Conservation Video: All

Video viewed. Discussion about Hugh Bennett - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) prepared a documentary on soil conservation pioneer Hugh Hammond Bennett, the history of our agency and the birth of the private lands conservation movement in the U.S.

**Next Meeting:** TBD

