



United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service
Massachusetts State Office, 451 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002
413-253-4350 | fax 855-596-7666 | www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov

MASSACHUSETTS STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

October 3, 2017

*Mass. Division of Fisheries & Wildlife Richard Cronin Building
1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough MA
9:45 am – 12:15 pm*

Participants

- Christine Clarke, USDA/NRCS
- Tom Akin, USDA/NRCS
- Deron Davis, USDA/NRCS
- Vince Snyder, USDA/NRCS
- Dan Wright, USDA-NRCS
- Trish Garrigan, EPA
- Gerard Kennedy, MDAR
- Marianne Piche, MassWildlife
- Jane Obaggy, MACD
- Aaron Dushku, USDA/NRCS

The meeting was called to order at 9:45 am by Christine Clarke, Massachusetts State Conservationist

Welcome & Opening Remarks – Christine Clarke NRCS/USDA

- There were no corrections to the October 27, 2016 minutes.

Role and Responsibilities of the State Technical Committee – Christine Clarke, NRCS/USDA

- Chris Clarke reminded everyone about the roles and responsibilities of the State Technical Committee (STC); i.e., the STC is an advisory body and provides information to stakeholders and an opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback to NRCS.
- The STC meeting framework allows for the formation of subgroups to provide more input from partners on specific topics, such as forestry or land conservation and to suggest utilization of NRCS funds.

USDA Staffing, Administrative Reorganization – Christine Clarke NRCS/USDA

- NRCS continues to condense administrative functions from the states into a centrally managed unit called Management Support Services. Over the coming year this unit will be moved up to the Department level and FSA and RMA administrative services will join. This will result in a single unit managing budget, HR, contracts and agreements from the department level. The unit will be called the FPAC Business Center
- Going forward, detailed county level workload analysis will drive NRCS hiring numbers and locations. Hiring will be done on a “best for the agency” perspective rather than “best for the state perspective”. Analysis should be complete in the next 6 months. Secretary is focused on enhancing the number of staff at the field level and the customer experience.
- The 2014 Farm Bill is in its last year. This is an opportunity to have input on the formation of the next Farm Bill through NGO’s, conservation districts and others interested in agriculture and conservation issues in the region. We are fortunate to have Representative McGovern engaged and on the House Agriculture Committee.

Farm Bill – Christine Clarke, NRCS/USDA

- The 2014 Farm Bill is in its last year. This is an opportunity to have input on the formation of the next Farm Bill through NGO’s, conservation districts and others interested in agriculture and conservation issues in the region. We are fortunate to have Representative McGovern engaged and on the House Agriculture Committee.
- Marianne Piche indicated a consortium of state wildlife agencies met recently to discuss the next Farm Bill elements of habitat enhancement/preservation policy priorities:
 - Increase EQIP FA minimum to 10% for wildlife;
 - Include more state priorities;
 - Increase financial assistance from 3 years to 10 year payments for wildlife management practices;
 - Increase the acres of prescribed burning in the region.

Green Infrastructure for Drought Resilience Project – Trish Garrigan, USEPA

- MA Governor Baker Executive Order 569 mandates the upcoming state hazard mitigation plan include a section to address climate adaptation. The updated plan will be submitted to NEMA and FEMA by June 2018 and approved by September 2018. The plan should include preparedness strategies of all Commonwealth towns and cities. The plan will focus on building community resilience and establishing a benchmark if FEMA assistance should be needed in the future. See www.resilientma.com. More science is needed as we experience more floods, drought, more moisture and the like. There is ongoing work in the state focused on mapping climate smart cities, and green infrastructure. Trish welcomes feedback on the report from this group when drafted.

Soil Health Update – Kate Parsons, NRCS/USDA

- NRCS has conducted regular outreach events to farmers in the Commonwealth. Farmers have begun to adopt no till and cover crop techniques and are beginning to see improvements in water holding capacity, organic matter and crop health.
- Group discussed the various farm implement tools used by farmers and the most appropriate to best foster soil health. Aerial seeding has been very popular with farmers due to the ease of application but it has not taken as well as expected due to dry conditions. Several seed mixes have been tried to address a variety of conditions.
- NRCS has been working with some farmers on soil health since 2013 and we are seeing good results.

Anaerobic Digesters - Tom Akin NRCS/USDA

- NRCS has experienced more farmers interested in anaerobic digesters due in part to the state food waste regulations. To provide the best planning information for the farmer, NRCS must have a full understanding of the number of animals the unit will be supporting and if any offsite food waste will be added to the digester.
- To address this issue NRCS requires a CNMP and spreading plan to be completed before funding the digester or waste storage unit. This enables NRCS to discuss nutrient management issues with the farmer and determine available land to handle nutrients from the digester.
- Phosphorous appears to be the limiting factor to applying the digestate to the land. There is research being conducted on phosphorous separation techniques that might resolve this issue.
- MA DAR manages the state Nutrient Management Regulations.

Farm Bill Programs – Dan Wright, NRCS/USDA

- The WRE GARC was discussed with the group and will be submitted to Washington for approval. Ideally, we would have a GARC for the entire state but currently the applications come from cranberry country so that is the geography of the GARC.
- Summary of applications received and funded was provided in ALE, CSP, EQIP/soil health practices and AMA. Further break out was provided regarding applications to address wildlife issues.

Miscellaneous Items

- Gerard Kennedy--40th anniversary of the APR program will be celebrated on 10/20/2017 at Mount Sugar Loaf State Park in South Deerfield.
- Trish Garrigan mentioned that a new publication from Harvard Forest, New England Forestry Foundation and Wildlands woodlands – Farmland and communities

- The group discussed the declining attendance at meetings and how we might engage more partners and farmers. There was consideration given to future funding of local working groups which was done in the past. This resulted in additional engagement at the local level but not necessarily at the State Technical Committee meetings. Going forward a teleconference line will be provided to those that are unable to participate in person.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 pm.

Minutes compiled by Tom Akin, Chris Clarke, October 3, 2017