

State Technical Committee Meeting

Tolland Agricultural Center

24 Hyde Avenue

Vernon, Connecticut

September 25, 2019

NOTES

In Attendance:

Doug Emmerthal, Dan Peracchio, Eric Thomas, Chuck Lee, Erik Bedan, Judy Wilson, Joe Wettemann; DEEP, Peter Beringer; USDA-FS, Abbie Maynard; CAES, Tom Worthley; UCONN, Rich Meinert; UCONN CES, Kira Jacobs; EPA, Joe Walsh; Aquarian Water, Mathew Wallach; CTDDH, Wayne Woodard; TNC, Steve Winnett; EPA, Chris Sullivan; SWCD, Carol Donzella, Jim Hyde, Carol Grasis Abbie Cadman, Joyce Purcell, Arde Ramthun, Javier Cruz, Thomas Morgart; NRCS, Denise Savageau; CACD

Welcome/Introductions: Tom Morgart

Tom Morgart welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave an update on the Farm Bill 2018.

The 2018 Farm Bill authorizes NRCS to continue specific program activities in accordance with existing regulations through September 30, 2019. The expiration of the transition authority does not apply to the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program and therefore all activities with the AMA program may continue in FY 2020.

States will continue to accept new applications for ACEP on a continuous basis. These applications will be reviewed after publication of the ACEP interim rule. Applicants will be allowed to correct and update their applications after publication of the interim rule.

There is a short period of time to identify 10 practices with great environmental benefits that will get an extra 15% payment. If you have any ideas send to: Thomas.morgart@usda.gov.

Subcommittee Reports: Wayne Woodward

Wayne reported he is reaching out to new members and gearing up for FY-20 ACEP-ALE ranking and WRE GARC.

2018 Farm Bill Discussion: Arde Ramthun

Arde reported that CT is scheduled to move the contents from the states' Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) Section IV into the new Conservation Practice Documents-Document Management System (CPD-DMS). The results will be greater uniformity and consistency of information provided by states' FOTG, Section IV, increased efficiency for states in future maintenance of their FOTG Sect IV documents, a greater number of 508-complaint documents, and greater accessibility of conservation practice documents and data to other NRCS business systems. December 19th is the scheduled date for moving documents to the new system.

New standards have been created regarding conservation practice standards for water quality improvement. These include practices such as saturated riparian buffers, phosphorous removal

structures, blind inlets, riparian buffer effectiveness (in a joint project with the Farm Service Agency), bioreactors, drainage water management, cover crops, conservation crop rotation, irrigation water management, and specific nutrient management approaches within the 4Rs that are effective for no-till, tile drained, or cover cropped areas. Steve Winnett has information on the standards.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Source Water: Tom Morgart/Javier Cruz

The Farm River Watershed Project has held three stakeholder meetings already; there is good support for a watershed-based plan; the Southwest Conservation District was awarded a \$70k grant to write the plan using both the EPA 319 criteria and the NRCS planning steps.

Denise Savageau - reviewed progress in the grant for the Farm River project

Kira Jacob – gave praise to CT NRCS, the only state in New England to take on the water project.

Chuck Lee – 319 of the Clean Water Act – feels it's conflicting with the right to farm. Would like to see a better balance

Steve Winnett – Is the 319 Coordinator – it needs to be specific to location and land owner

Gypsy Moth Update: Tom Worthly

Tom noted that both state forest lands and many private parcels in eastern Connecticut have been affected, with severe canopy loss on tens of thousands of acres, and partial canopy loss on many more, from the Rhode Island line west to the other side of the Connecticut River forests are being looked at for what was there before, what is there now and how that will effect forest soil health, vegetation, bird & animals.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP): Tom Morgart/Joyce Purcell

Streamline the process for ACEP applications – the Easement Sub-Committee will give input on the ranking worksheet – possibly adding waterfront property.

Program Allocation Update: Tom Morgart/ Joyce Purcell

There were none to report at this time.

Program Updates: Carol Grasis

Carol provided a FY-19 year-end review on state sub-accounts, EQIP implementation and practices, AMA, CSP obligations, number of contracts and dollars allocated, and ACEP-ALE new agreements

Doug Emmerthal – Forest over Connecticut average by county by year is available on the federal register

RCPP Updates: Joyce Purcell

Joyce reported that RCPP is a big part of the new Farm Bill and reviewed the four principles: 1) Impact, 2) Partner Contributions, 3) Innovation and 4) Partnership and Project Management. The new stand-alone program has been allocated \$300M annually, utilizes programmatic agreements instead of cooperative agreements, has enhanced funding arrangement provisions and went from 3 funding pools

to 2. It also offers non-competitive project renewals, puts the emphasis on outcomes, and provides TA for outreach. Activities include: land management, land rental, easements, and public works/watersheds. Project funding ranges from \$250k to \$10M.

The National Website has information for applications. The portal will be up and running 30 days prior to December 3, 2019. You must have E-Auth to submit an application.

Partnership funding – Direct funding and in-kind support

Can write new standards thru RCPP projects. Joyce is willing to hear any ideas you have.

Resource Conservation Updates: Abbie Cadman

2020 Payment Schedule – Linking technology planning to payment; currently developing EQIP, RCPP-EQIP and AMA payment schedules; CSP to come later in FY-20; new for FY-20 include practices, restoration and plan development, and contract similar to EQIP-AMA.

Conservation Assessment Racking Tool (CART)/ Conservation Desktop (CD) – CART will merge traditional conservation planning with current program delivery creating a streamlined approach and a more customer friendly experience. Clients will have the opportunity to select which ranking pools they would like to apply for to be evaluated for funding. CART will be replacing Toolkit – Training will be provided.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) - NRCS anticipates announcing this year's On-Farm Trials awards in November 2019 and CIG Classic awards in December 2019.

UCONN Extension (Tom) submitted a proposal for a literature search on Forest Management Practices and Forest Soil Health implementation and come up with suggestions on voluntary BMPS.

UCONN Extension (Rich) submitted a proposal on utilizing a manure spreader with GPS capabilities on farms to quantify how much manure to put on fields; look at ranges, costs, methane digesters and hauling charges for additional liquids to quantify economics.

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) – Readiness Watershed (Farm River)- Javier Cruz

Javier gave an update on meetings for the watershed and Denise Savageau gave an update on the NWQI application.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program-Floodplain Easements (EWPP-FPE): Arde Ramthun

Arde reported they recently closed on a Round 2 EWPP-FPE parcel and have received 39 applications for Round 3. Nationally, CT is leading the pack and other states are reaching out to them for guidance. They are also working on an EWP-Recovery project behind a school in Clinton.

Dam Rehab: Arde Ramthun

Arde reported the dam in Norwalk will be removed and the 3 dams along the Farm Book will not be removed. They are working on a request from DEEP for a watershed operation plan for the South Branch of the Park River in West Hartford. Another possible project is the Spalding Dam in Norwich. Wisteria roots, which can be 9 feet long, have compromised the riser. Using Ground Penetrated Radar (GPR) has been helpful.

Draft Practice Standards Process: Arde Ramthun

Arde relayed that NRCS Ohio puts their practice standards on their State Web site (Ohio CADalog Standard Details) –Connecticut standards will be put on the CT Web site, too . An e-mail will be sent out when the standards are up and ready.

Partner Reports – All

Dan Peracchio – work is underway to update the Connecticut Forest Action Plan which will be completed by June 2020. The Connecticut Forest Action Plan acts as a guide for the Division of Forestry is created in collaboration with many partners and stakeholders, the Forest Action Plan aims to identify issues and prioritize important areas, values, and needs.

https://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/forestry/forest_resource_plan/Forest_Action_Plan_Information_Sheet.pdf

Judy Wilson – “Boots on the Ground” – Hiring a habitat Biologist. The Gypsy Moth has not affected heavily on wildlife.

Denise Savageau – RCPP Updates: UConn has announced free soil testing to help with conservation plans, an RFP for ACEP-ALE applications coming soon, no go for automatic renewals. Thanked NRCS for the \$70k contract with the Southwest Conservation District; State water plan moving forward; Council put together soil health committee; Farm Bill – change in definition “no dollars on public land” to “no dollars non-federal land”

Chuck Lee – Water Bureau has staff changes – State is on debt diet – Emergency watershed protection has less money

Kira Jacobs – Free 2-day workshop scheduled for November 7-8 on Climate Change and how to manage changing forest, field tour included.