

State Technical Committee



Natural Resources Conservation Service

New Jersey State Technical Committee
220 Davidson Avenue 4th Floor, Somerset, NJ 08873

Meeting Date: Wednesday, December 2, 2020

Meeting Location: Microsoft TEAMS

Julie Hawkins opened the Microsoft TEAMS event at 9:01. The meeting was convened by Christine Hall. She welcomed everyone and thanked them for their participation in the State Technical Committee.

Those present included:

Amy Hansen
Andrew Burnett
Austin Damminger
Bill Angstadt
Brian Cowden
Brian Schilling
Bridgett Hilshey
Brittany Dobrzynski
Cali Alexander
Christine Hall
Clare Flanagan
Danielle Bara
Dave Clapp
David Lamm
Edwin Muniz
Elizabeth Freiday
Elizabeth McShane
Emily Blackman

Eric Schrading
Fran DeFiccio
Gail Bartok
Jairo Gonzalez
Jay Springer
Jim Simon
John Kluthe
John Parke
Jon Klischies
Julie Hawkins
Kaitlin Farbotnik
Kathy Hale
Ken Klipstein
Kristen Meistrell
Kristin Adams
Laura Tessieri
Lauren Finnegan
Lauren Lapczynski

Liz Matseur
Michael Flood
Michael Westendorf
Michelle Pedano
Mitchell Mickley
Nagisa Manabe
Nancy Coles
Nicholas Saumweber
Nicole Ciccaglione
Robert Nyman
Rosalynd Orr
Sharon Petzinger
Stefanie Miller
Stephanie Murphy
Tara Walker
Tina Notas
Trish Long
Virginia Lamb



9:05 Meeting Logistics Review - Christine Hall, NRCS

Christine Hall explained how to use Microsoft TEAMS to ask questions via the chat window as well as how to use the raise hand function. For the purpose of time management, rather than having all participants introduce themselves verbally, attendees should announce themselves and their position in the chat.

9:11 April Meeting Minutes review and acceptance: Correct minutes as needed & review action items - Christine Hall, NRCS

Christine Hall shared/explained how to find past minutes on the website and addressed the previous meeting's action items.

9:14 2020 Program Year in Review, Gail Bartok, NRCS

Gail Bartok went over Agricultural Conservation Easements (ACEP) for FY20 and described their subsections: Agricultural Land and Wetlands Reserve (and then broke out the Wetlands Reserve Easements affiliated with the RCPP as a separate line item). The ACEP ALE provided \$345,679 to three parcel contracts on a total of 134 acres, the ACEP WRE including restoration provided \$720,462 to three parcel contracts on a total of 122 acres, and the ACEP WRE in affiliation with RCPP provided \$176,741 to one parcel contract on a total of 19 acres. Easements that were funded in previous years but had closed during FY2020 include: ACEP ALE (three General and four RCPP), ACEP WRE (three), and Restored (two WRE and one WRP).

In FY20 NRCS provided funding to the following initiatives: Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA) with \$43,856 for five contracts, Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) with \$79,723 for five contracts, Conservation Stewardship Program (GCI) with \$9,290 for five contracts, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) with \$5,402,168 for 227 contracts. One note about the GCI is that this program was new for FY2020 and only certain land was eligible for this program.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program's (EQIP) National Special Initiatives had not changed from the previous fiscal year. They include National Water, Organic, On-Farm Energy, as well as Working Lands for Wildlife (specifically the Golden Winged Warbler). The state and local EQIP fund pools haven't changed much since FY19, apart from Aquaculture, which was brought back in FY20. The below-listed state and local initiatives all fell within the usual spending, except for the Energy Initiative as we had no takers this year, and the Bobwhite Quail, which has increased significantly due to partnering with a biologist.

Socially Disadvantaged/Beginning Farmers were provided \$112,435 for seven contracts, The Energy Initiative received no funding this year. The Organic Initiative was provided \$588,722 to five contracts. The National Water Quality¹ Initiative was provided \$363,786 for 9 contracts. The Soil Health Initiative² was provided \$74,184 for five contracts. Aquaculture was provided \$152,218 for two contract., Conversation Activity Plans³ were provided \$125,696 for 67 contracts. Working Lands for Wildlife was provided \$100,001 for four contracts. The Bobwhite Quail was provided \$121,069 for eight contracts, The American Black Duck was provided \$17,715 for two contracts. High tunnels were provided \$111,755 for 10 contracts.

Question:

- John asked if these numbers are a result of the meeting in Columbus and outreach, which Gail Bartok answered yes to.
- Nagisa requested information about the Organic Initiative. Gail Bartok responded: there are two components: offer assistance to transition to organic and for people who are already certified organic.
- Eric asked about aquaculture – what practices the two contracts were for. Fran came back with answers: Restoration of Rare and Declining Natural Communities and Bio Valve. Christine Hall chimed in with a few examples: Delaware Bay Shore producers concerned with horseshoe crab movement concerning protecting red knot bird species and implemented rack replacement to raised racks, and shell placement to create reef habitat.

¹ The National Water Quality Initiative has special funding from headquarters and if the funds are not spent, they are returned to HQ.

² The Soil Health Initiative requires participants to agree to plant multi-species cover crops on the same ground for 5 years.

³ Conservation Activity Plans require plans in writing for forest and nutrient management, a comprehensive nutrient plan, and other crop information like pollinators. Once those plans have been completed those participants can then apply to other fund pools

Local Fund Pools have been broken down into South, Central, and North. These locations were driven by local working groups that identified their resource concern priorities. The South spent approximately \$1,300,000 in FY20 for 28 contracts. In comparison to FY19, the South spent the same amount of \$1,300,000 on 22 contracts. Central spent \$828,000 in FY20 for 43 contracts. In comparison to FY19, Central spent approximately \$550,000 on 28 contracts. The North spent approximately \$2,000,000 on 37 contracts. In comparison to FY19, the North spent approximately \$1,400,000 on 31 contracts. The Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) fund pool had \$200,000.00 allocated. In FY20 we only had five contracts and spent \$44,000 out of the allocated fund pool.

Top Five by Planned Amount for 2020	Top Five by Planned Amount for 2019
1. Cover Crop	1. Cover Crop
2. Brush Management	2. Brush Management
3. Forest Stand Improvement	3. Forest Management Plan – Written
4. Forest Management Plan – Written	4. Fence
5. Structures for Wildlife	5. Tree Shrub Established

Top Five by Dollar Amount for 2020	Top Five by Dollar Amount for 2019
1. Cover Crop	1. Cover Crop
2. Waste Storage Facility	2. Roofs and Covers (livestock)
3. Stream Habitat Improvement & Management	3. Waste Storage Facility
4. Sprinkler System	4. Sprinkler System
5. High Tunnel System	5. Heavy Use Protection (livestock)

Top Ten By Planned Amount for 2020	Top Ten By Dollar for 2020
1. Cover Crop	1. Cover Crop
2. Brush Management	2. Waste Storage Facility
3. Forest Stand Improvement	3. Stream Habitat Improvement and Management
4. Forest Management Plan – Written	4. Sprinkler System
5. Structures for Wildlife	5. High Tunnel System
6. Tree/Shrub Establishment	6. Forest Stand Improvement
7. Mulching	7. Streambank and Shoreline Protection
8. Conservation Cover	8. Brush Management
9. Underground Outlet	9. Lined Waterway or Outlet
10. Fence	10. Irrigation Pipeline

Question:

- Laura: Do you ever analyze top 20 practices in terms of planned vs dollar? Gail said not usually, but we could if the group would like to see it and she asked for anyone interested to please indicate as such in the chat.

The Regional Conversation Partnership Program (RCPP) allows each partnership agreement to have Farm Bill dollars held in place. In addition to the Farm Bill dollars they all have EQIP money available as well. The Delaware River still has money available because they did not advertise the program due to new policy rules and tools that were late in getting to NRCS. The Whole Farms Systems, Columbia Dam, and Black River Greenway still have funding available as well. The Delaware Bay and Raritan Basin were both completed in FY20 and no longer have funds available.

Using the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART), planners determine things like what resource concerns exist and which areas to address. This is recorded into CART and then moves to ranking (RT). The RT phase takes a long time but is the heart of what NRCS is all about. FY20 had a state total of 361 assessments completed, Columbus – 45, Freehold – 33, Frenchtown – 57, Hackettstown – 116, Vineland – 25, and Woodstown – 85.

Christine Hall sent out via the chat window, a copy of today's agenda to help keep everyone on point.

9:42 2021 NRCS Program Change- Gail Bartok and Christine Hall, NRCS

Allocations:

Gail Bartok started this topic by showing the expected funding in dollar value for each of the programs in FY21:

ACEP – ALE⁴ \$2,457,221.00, ACEP – WRE (General and Bog Turtle) - \$497,938.00, ACEP – WRE Stewardship⁵ \$62,938.00, AMA⁶ - \$203,000.00, EQIP - \$5,609,000.00, EQIP – NWQI \$349,826, and EQIP – WLFW specifically Golden Winged Warbler (GWW) \$70,000.00.

****Big news on ALE**** – Since the Farm Bill passed in 2018, they have negotiated a new deed for closing ally parcels. SADC and HQ worked together with a lot of effort to finally get an approved deed template to close “Farm Bill 2018 Parcels”. This template was approved by National HQ in November 2020 and is on the agenda for approval at the December SADC meeting. The parcels have been sparse in previous years, but this deed shouldn't hold up the process anymore. There is no current deadline for the ALE and WRE signups yet (as we are waiting for the final policy to be published). Please look for a news release from Lauren Finnegan on the specifics and dates.

Question:

- Cali - Does this reflect the increase (same appropriation) in total funding? Gail said WRE is lower, which is usually \$700-\$800k -everything else is normal.
- Sharon – Is the GWW lower than previous years and if so, why? Gail said yes, it is a little lower than normal. Fran also added that NRCS started out with 50k allocation, then it was increased, and later decreased. We are nowhere near the 50K we started with. You can add to any national initiative with your own allocations but cannot take unused national initiative funds and put it into the general allocation. NRCS would have to send it back if it was unused.

Applications:

NRCS had an EQIP signup deadline in November and the following information was compiled before the deadline closing. In total there were 367 applications throughout the state, then broken down into both sections of the state as well as field offices: North Jersey - 177 applications (Hackettstown - 131, Frenchtown - 46), Central - 62 applications (Columbus - 28, Freehold - 34), and South Jersey - 128 applications (Woodstown - 93, Vineland - 35).

⁴ Gail feels confident that if the funding for ACEP does not meet our requirements that we can ask for more.

⁵ NEW This year we are getting money for WRE Stewardship, which had not been done previously and this is mostly for maintenance activities on existing closed easements

⁶ The AMA is a program to mitigate risk in existing operations and is only available in 16 states

Ranking Pools:

The list provided is the same from FY20 as it will be in FY21:

Organic, Energy, Aquaculture, American Black Duck, Beginning Farmer/Socially Disadvantaged, Bobwhite Quail, Golden Winged Warbler, Soil Health, High Tunnel, NWQI ((Upper Salem, Upper Cohansey), Conservation Activity Plans (CAPS) Forestry, CNMP, NMP, Other), Central (Forestry/Wildlife, Livestock, Local Working group), North (Forestry/Wildlife, Livestock, Water Quality), and South (Forestry/Wildlife, Livestock, Local Working group).

In the past few years, NRCS has had problems both getting applications for AMA as well as spending our allocations because we are mandated by Congress to spend 50% of EQIP funds on livestock. We don't want to fund livestock through AMA. We want to diversify our clients, thus allowing us to spend more of our allocation. As a result, NRCS has decided to fund Cropland and High tunnels (prioritizing those that don't currently have a tunnel in addition to the square footage of high tunnels that currently exist, HU applicants, non-profit organizations, proximity to areas of low food access, and distance to market) in FY21. One note to mention is we do not fund structural practices through AMA like diversions and waterways; that would fall under EQIP.

In FY20 part of the new farm bill says states can offer up to ten high-priority practices and those practices would receive an additional cost-share percent. For example: if Conservation Cover was previously listed at 75%, the new bill would allow up to 90%. Christine Hall had convened a subcommittee in addition to canvassing field employees and DC's to see which practices were not selling well and they were unable to utilize that information to compile a more up-to-date list. The committee didn't have time to analyze how effective a higher payment rate was. This resulted in the top ten practices for FY21 being the same as FY20: Conservation Cover, Diversion, Grassed Waterway, Lined Waterway or Outlet, Waste Storage Facility, Critical Area Planting, Underground Outlet, Roofs and Covers, Stream Crossing, and Grade Stabilization Structures.

Question:

- Dave: Regarding AMA – at one point we were limited to certain regions of the state. Is that still part of the AMA process or will that be statewide? Gail answered: FY20 we offered AMA in the North, FY19 we offered AMA in Central, FY18 we offered AMA in the South. Now FY21 will be open statewide.

Source Water Protected Areas:

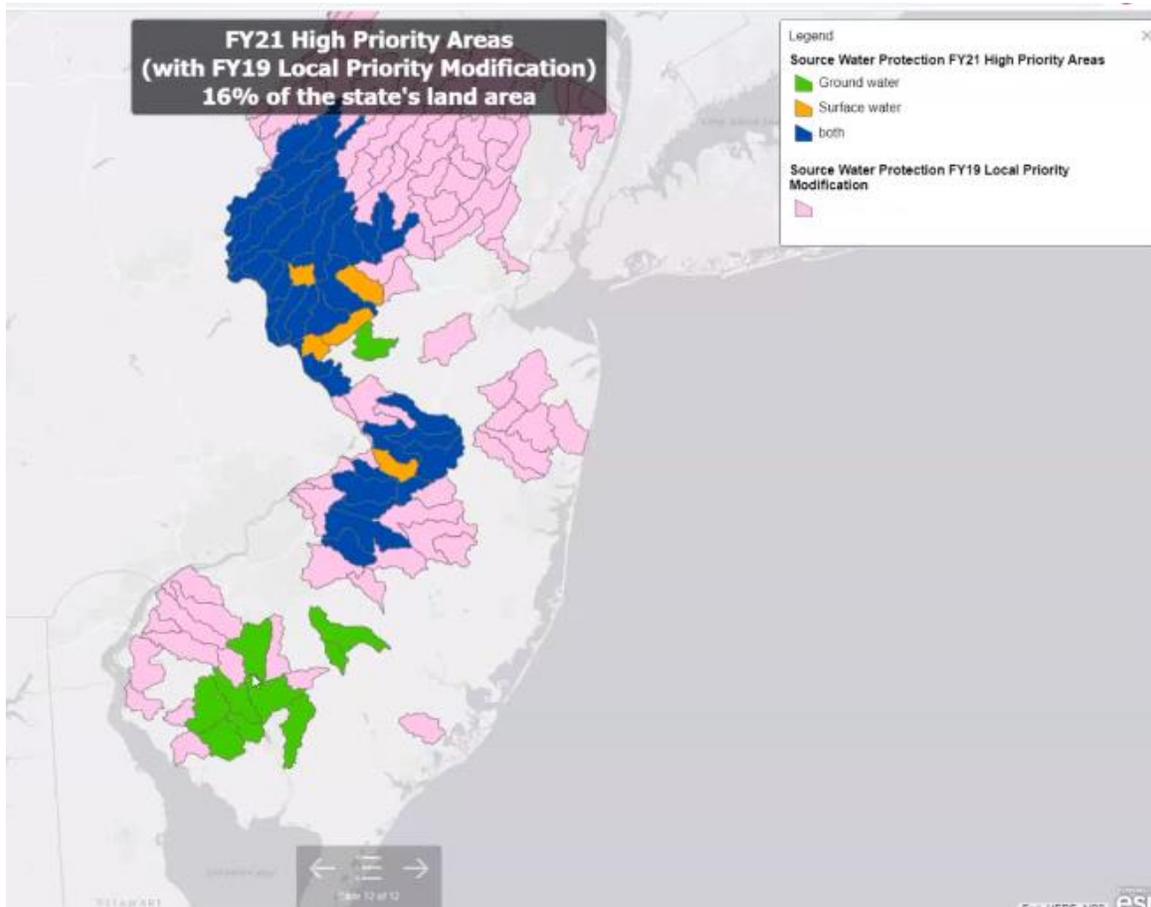
The 2018 Farm Bill put in a provision that would identify source water protection areas and then offer a higher payment rate for practices that can address the water quality concerns in those areas. NRCS has been working for the past few months with volunteers in the State Technical Committee as well as the NJ Water Supply Advisory Council's Farm Bill Subcommittee (which included partners from DEP, EPA, Water Supply Advisory Council, NJ Water Supply Authority, North Jersey Arts, D&D, Rutgers Eco Complex, NJ Water Association, Water Utilities, and others) to put the map into place. The subcommittee was able to identify 49 HUC and 12 watersheds.

Items in blue were selected because they are considered a high priority with both surface and groundwater protection, items in blue are surface water only, items in green are groundwater only.

The minimum map unit you can identify for protection is Hydrologic Units 12 digit (HUC12). We have 271 HUC12 in the state of New Jersey with an average size of 22,509 acres.

Source water (drinking water) was the first item addressed. They looked at basins and watersheds that withdrew over one million gallons per day and color-coded them pink. The map was given a layover of medium green to cross-reference the agriculture aspect to see where we can make a difference (with an initial identifying mark of 20% agriculture to the area). Groundwater was the second item addressed. They looked at wellhead protection areas first and color-coded them green. The areas of blue designate both ground and surface water as high priority areas.

Source Water Protection opportunities in NJ are submitted to HQ with the high priority areas we are going to focus on (and by focusing we will have a higher cost-share). Areas identified as a high priority for extra funding could not exceed 20% of New Jersey.



A special initiative this year relates to highly erodible land. NRCS is proposing a fund pool dedicated to helping producers to allow them an opportunity to access funding when needed to stay in compliance. By keeping these producers compliant it allows them to be eligible for other programs through USDA. Some of those programs include but are not limited to: Agriculture Loss Coverage (ARC), Price Loss Coverage (PLC), Market Facilitation Programs (MFP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

In 2016 an audit was performed which found NRCS provided conflicting guidance, which in turn caused inconsistent compliance and unclear national policy. NRCS's response was to clarify the compliance requirements through the Food Security Act HEL Provision by giving clear, descriptive information as well as working with producers to correct the issue without notifying FSA. Also, a conservation plan must be developed, agreed-to, and signed within 45 days of the non-compliance findings. This plan must be implemented within one year or NRCS would need to report non-compliance to (FSA). During that time, however, the producer is not considered out of compliance as they are actively working with NRCS.

Question/Comments:

- Brittany – Is the wellhead protection shape file available through Geofile data internally? This information was not available previously but has since been uploaded to the share drive.
- Dave – With the HEL Fund Pool – is the intent with that more of a rolling application that wouldn't have an October cutoff? Whereas before you would have to wait until the next October to reapply. Christine says that is the intent, but they are still working on specifics (especially regarding the final fiscal quarter).
- Dave – With that, would there be a ranking deadline that needs to be met or set a minimum score? Right now, when a farmer has an issue, they are instructed to use certain programs through NRCS, but implementation could take almost a year from that point. Christine says that is part of the details that need to be ironed out but indicated Fran or Gail may have more knowledge of this subject. Fran chimed in saying she and Gail are putting together a working group to help the process for FY21 with the hopes of turning it into automatic funding for FY22.
- Laura – Regarding the Highly Erodible fund pool (HEL) – when would it start? Fran indicated that would be start in FY21. What types or levels of assistance would the producers be eligible for? Christine said the cost-share rate would be the same.

- Mitchell provided a PSA: Some wells have been decommissioned and new wells drilled since that wellhead protection area shape file has been generated. Like all things, not perfect, but a good start. Confined wells won't have the "ice cream cone" of protection tiers like Christine mentioned earlier. They show as a solitary yellow dot in that case.

Kaitlin wanted to address the audit results from 2016 and asked what can be done? By utilizing outreach and joint training with FFA they have taken on a pilot initiative from out west and brought it to New Jersey to try and implement it.

10:25 NRCS Easement Programs, Lauren Lapczynski, and Gail Bartok, NRCS

NRCS sent out an email in October about the proposed team's FY21 Geographic Area Rate Cap. The new rates proposed are 90% of the appraised fair market value for general WRE applications and 95% of the appraised fair market value for Bog Turtle WRE applications. We use a percentage of the fair market value in the WRE program to capture what we anticipate the cap to be. In previous years NRCS used an Area Wide Market Analysis (AWMA) to come up with those rates. AWMA typically costs between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per year. In FY20 we were unable to use AWMA rates because most of our parcels did not fit the restrictive acre criteria set by our National Appraiser. Therefore, NJ had to pay for appraisals on three of four of the parcels. Appraisals can be very time-consuming so for FY21 we are trying to set up a purchase agreement with a local appraiser so that the contracting process will move a bit faster.

10:30 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Nick Saumweber, NRCS

The NJ State Allocation Fund partnership is broken down into two categories: Contribution, where the partner pays a percentage of the funding, and Co-operative, where NRCS pays 100% of the funding. The table below lists our current, active partners and the types of agreements we have with them, as well as their respective dates, funding level, description, and who the partner employee is.

NJ NRCS Active Agreements

Partner Name	Type	Dates	Funding Level	Description	Partner Employee
Sussex County Municipal Utilities Authority	Contribution	2016 - 2021	\$210,092.00	Conservation Planning and engineering support - Hackettstown	Eric Vanbenschoten
NJ Water Supply Authority	Contribution	2016 - 2021	\$48,750.00	Implementation of Regional Conservation Partnership Project - Frenchtown	Dan Reynolds
Cape Atlantic Conservation District	Cooperative	2016 - 2021	\$100,772.99	Seasonal support - Plant Materials Center	Vacant
NJ Water Supply Authority	Contribution	2017 - 2021	\$106,652.00	Conservation Planning assistance - Frenchtown	Dan Reynolds
North Jersey RC&D	Contribution	2017 - 2021	\$234,194.10	Conservation planning assistance - North Jersey	Christian Bench
Xerces	Contribution	2017 - 2022	\$250,000.00	Pollinator support services - NJ, PA, NY, RI, CT, MD, DE	Kelly Gill
New Jersey Audubon Society	Contribution	2017 - 2022	\$114,920.30	Conservation planning and wildlife support - South Jersey	Brittany Dobrzynski
Burlington Soil Conservation District	Cooperative	2017 - 2021	\$140,084.40	Program assistant services - Columbus	Pat Hollerbach
Conserve Wildlife Foundation	Cooperative	2017 - 2022	\$213,030.13	Conservation planning and wildlife support - North Jersey	Nicole Porter
NJ Association of Conservation District	Contribution	2018 - 2020	\$38,460.00	Coordination support - NRCS and Conservation Districts	Lily Mehl (contractor)
Cape Atlantic Conservation District	Cooperative	2018 - 2021	\$234,178.02	Civil engineering technician support - South Jersey	Ariana Efstatos
North Jersey RC&D	Cooperative	2018 - 2021	\$192,872.71	Civil engineering technician support - North Jersey	Eric Romaine
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Interagency	2018 - 2021	\$70,821.72	Easement evaluation, planning, outreach & acquisition	Elizabeth Frieday
Morris County Soil Conservation District	Contribution	2020 - 2025	\$301,326.00	Conservation planning & forestry support - Hackettstown	Vacant

There are a few agreements that come down from National HQ. Most are one year agreements and are listed below. These agreements can apply for another year extension IF National is still active.

Partner Name	National Agreement	Description	Partner Employee Name
Quail Forever	8-3A75-17-308	Wildlife planning assistance in Central and South Jersey	Austin Damminger
Cape Atlantic Conservation District	NACD Technical Assistance Grant	Conservation Planning assistance in Vineland	Briana Nagengast
Morris County Conservation District	NACD Technical Assistance Grant	Conservation Planning assistance in Hackettstown	Kara Hasko
Ocean County Conservation District	NACD Technical Assistance Grant	Aquaculture support services for Central and South Jersey	Kristen Adams

NRCS has the option of entering into an agreement if it is mutually beneficial to both parties. Currently NRCS is open to suggestions for partnerships. We must make sure it is an agreement the partner can put in 25% and not a co-op (where NRCS pays 100% as they are no longer authorized to do so).

RCPP was designed to take NRCS experience & funding and leverage them with partners experience & funding in order to prioritize projects we are currently working on in New Jersey. The funding cycle closed in November and NRCS received five proposals requesting a total of 4.5 million dollars. NRCS will make a state recommendation using information provided in the form of "review and feedback" to highlight which proposals fit the high priority list. Ultimately funding does come from HQ and therefore the final say is theirs, specifically by the NRCS Chief. This decision should be finalized by February and at that point proposals will go into negotiations to execute a Programmatic Partnership Agreement (PPA). This PPA will

address the deliverables, clarification of expectations, and will include a supplemental PPA between NRCS and the partner -- should the partner need to request technical assistance or money as part of their proposal. Final execution of agreement is expected sometime during the summer 2021.

New sign-up dates: Alternative funding signup in the spring and then the next round of RCPP around the same time in calendar year 2021. These alternative funding signups are designated for specific people with specific purposes. In other fund pools there may be geographical restrictions that make the funding unavailable. These alternative funding options are there to fill in those deficits and specify eligibility, land, and practices.

Question:

- Mitch asked for a list of the high priority areas for source water. Christine indicated a factsheet needed to be created and will be reaching out for feedback from eligible parties.
- Rosalyn asked if the source water information was available internally. Christine tasked Trish with making sure that information is available.

10:57 Conservation Innovations Grants (CIG), Christine Hall, NRCS

This is one of the only true grant programs from a definition standpoint. This competitive program supports the development of new tools, approaches, practices, and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands. Components of these grants include national competition with larger scope projects and high dollar value projects, on farm trials (which is relatively new, more demonstrations), and state competition (can allocate funds to offer a larger competition). Conservation Innovations Grant (CIG) were offered annually until 2019 when it was switched to every other year. In FY21 \$200,000 will be allocated for the NJ CIG grants, whereas in the past, the allocation only allowed a maximum of \$75,000.000 per project. However, one to one contribution is still required.

NRCS has five current projects and two closed grants that are still waiting for deliverables (soil health and cover crop). Current projects: Rutgers University - Recycling Irrigation Water at NJ Nurseries, North Jersey RC&D - Cover Crop Experimentation, Conserve Wildlife Foundation - Quantifying Impacts of Innovative Conservation Systems, North Jersey RC&D - Use of Short Season Variety Corn and Soybean, and Groundwork Elizabeth - Developing an Urban Conservation Farm.

NRCS will be moving forward with the FY21 CIG and is looking for ideas of what areas of priority we should be focusing on to align with our previous projects. Historically funded projects focused in on water quality, soil quality, energy, wildlife, invasive species, water quantity, urban agriculture, outreach, forestry, and grazing. When narrowing down your ideas please keep in mind what is important to NRCS and what we can pick up and run with Internally among staff a few ideas have been generated: soil health (such as develop an economic analysis of cropping and integrating new technology), climate adaptation (develop innovative practices to mitigate coastal marsh migration), water quality/quantity (quantify changes to erosion rates and runoff volume), urban agriculture, and historically underserved producers (improved outreach).

Question:

- John: From a state and private perspective, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in nutrient management. We should see if we can use that as part of the focus. Christine asked if the barrier could be overcome with better outreach or those types of assistance. John agrees and thinks as long as people know about the programs and what is available that should help.
- Julie spoke about different grant opportunities from the 2018 Farm Bill (National Conservation and National Urban).
- Nagisa suggested a "chat-storm" – everyone simultaneously comments with their ideas and said NOFA MA. is doing good work on Urban Soil remediation, with so many urban areas in NJ -- it would be great. Also, urban high tunnels as a subset of urban farming, pest management with our changing climate (specifically nematodes as a solution to pest management challenges).
- Fran brought up a previous question – for Christine – Brian asked if matching funds had to be non-federal or if it mattered? Christine said historically, CIG matching has been non-federal but is unsure if there were any changes from National. Fifty-fifty non-federal was usually the way it ran.
- Bridgett suggested Precision Nutrient Management and Adaptive Management
- Jim said Urban Ag encompasses soil health, HU, and climate adaptation. Would also parallel new Nat'l NRCS urban Ag & innovation grants. Also, national management for croplands implementing soil health practices
- Virginia commented Soil health for climate mitigation via carbon drawdown. Nutrient management as tool for reducing GHG emissions, Soil health to include compost additions across the board, which would also address waste reduction.
- Kristen brought up aquaculture

- Kaitlin – Some of the suggestions are in EQIP in Management. Mini-research project has funding that can be used.
- Cali said the more demonstration field days (when safe and possible) the better.
- Sharon said there are a lot of discussions about forestry and climate change/carbon storage, to the point where some people are arguing that incentives to cut trees go against climate change. It would be good to quantify the benefits of forest management on carbon sequestration rates and forest ecosystem services.
- Stephanie M. said she agreed with ideas for carbon sequestration/increasing soil health with organic matter improvements, and adaptive nutrient management. Also, soil health/remediation in urban ag.
- Michelle said the use of dredge materials (from intracoastal waterways) on ag land. Maybe some demonstration sites. We periodically get calls on this subject.
- Mitchell suggests watering of edible crops with reclaimed water. <https://watereuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Edible-Crop-White-Paper.pdf>

11:13 National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), Rosalyn Orr and Christine Hall, NRCS

The NWQI provides national funds to implement practices that would address water quality. Since 2012 NRCS has been involved with NWQI and 3 watersheds located in South Jersey were chosen for allocated funding: Upper Salem, Upper Alloway, and Upper Cohansey. In 2019 National HQ released a bulletin updating requirements for watershed funding. This bulletin stated a watershed plan or assessment is needed and it must meet national NRCS criteria. Existing NWQI watershed plans must be submitted for review and approval. After reviewing the current watersheds chosen, Upper Salem and Upper Cohansey already had an existing watershed assessment and were submitted for review. Additional information was needed to meet requirements (specifically identification of critical source, NEPA documentation and compliance, and an outreach plan). The Upper Alloway did not have an existing watershed assessment. Due to limited resources the Upper Alloway watershed was removed as a NWQI watershed for FY20.

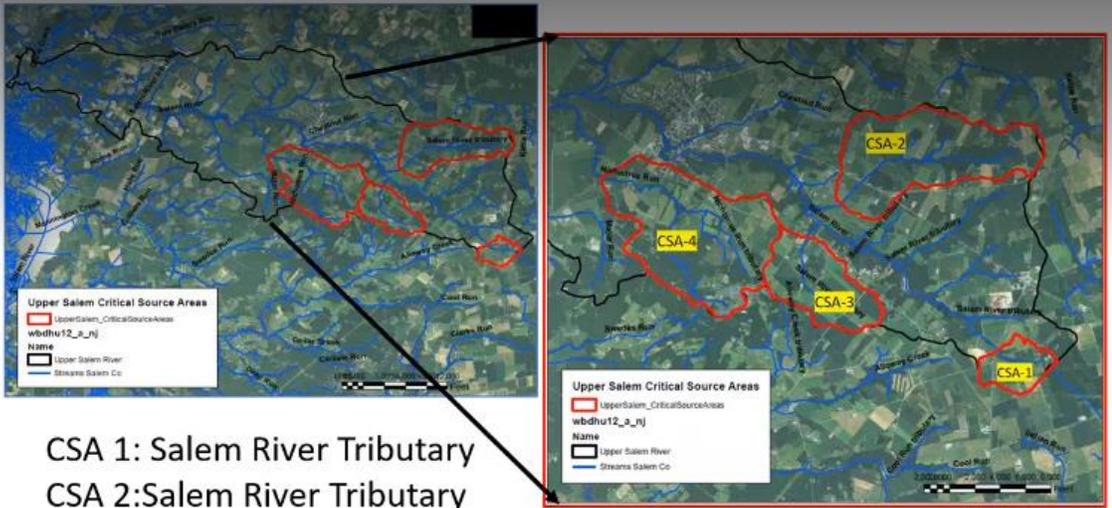
In FY21, National HQ sent out a bulletin in April 2020 highlighting new requirements for NWQI watersheds. All states must designate a minimum of three watersheds in order to continue receiving funding. An assessment was made at the HUC12 level to receive the NWQI funding of existing watersheds that have some type of plan that could be built off to meet requirements. NRCS solicited the committee for ideas during the April meeting.

Accomplishments and plans for FY21: After reviewing the plans from Rutgers Extension on the existing watersheds it was determined that there were a few missing components, such as official critical source areas. This first step of reviewing targeted areas in the Upper Salem and Upper Cohansey was to identify those areas that have the highest levels of Total phosphorus and bacteria. The second step involved NRCS collaborating with NJDEP Bureau of Freshwater and Biological Monitoring Staff to analyze more recent water sampling data and identify sub-watersheds with high levels of TOP and bacteria.

Another missing component was a formal outreach plan. A four faceted general outreach plan was created for both Upper Salem and Upper Cohansey stating the NRCS would put together an initial scope and meeting for any interested partners to identify concerns about the program and to further educate those involved to sell those efforts. Field staff would be required at this point to do field tours to highlight conservation practices. We would have field staff do direct targeted outreach like cold calling or stopping by the farms to provide support if necessary.

Upper Salem – FY21 plans has been submitted, approved, and funded (a total of \$50,000 between Upper Salem and Upper Cohansey). Below is the map of the four areas chosen based on findings from Rutgers Watershed Assessment Plan and current data from NJ DEP.

Upper Salem Critical Source Areas

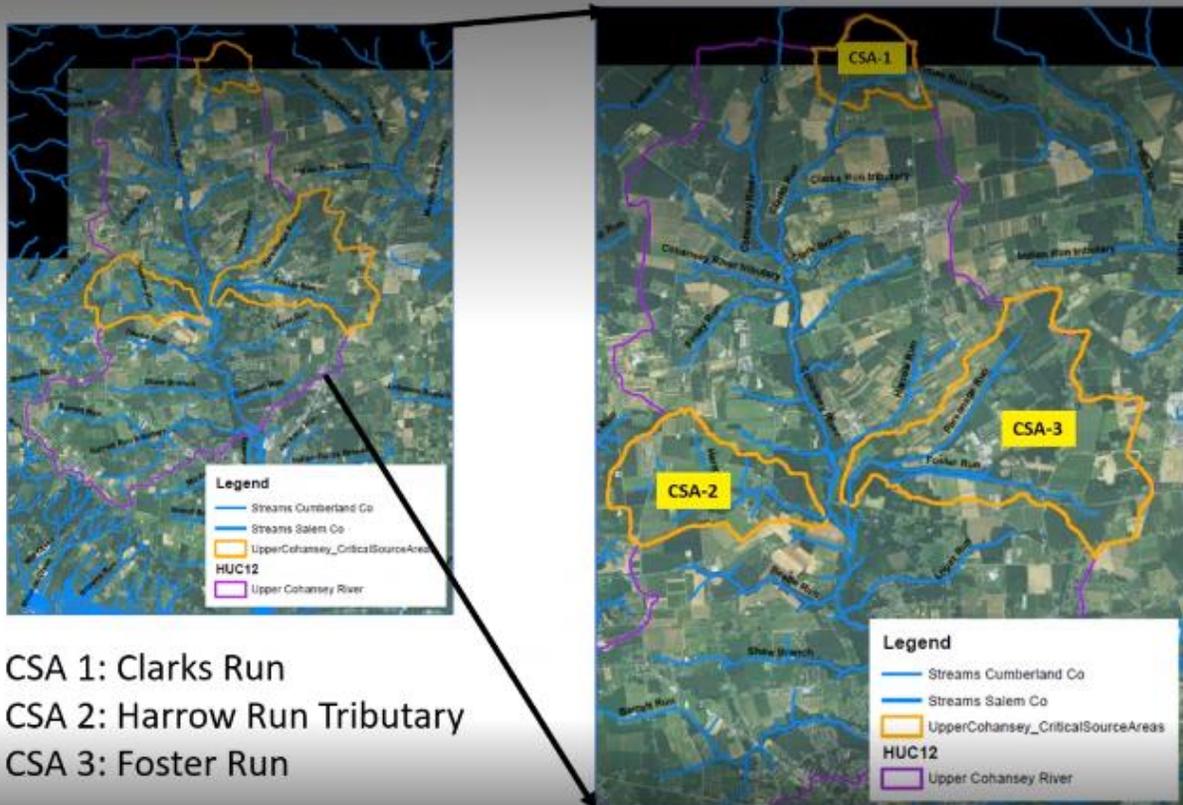


- CSA 1: Salem River Tributary
- CSA 2: Salem River Tributary
- CSA 3: Salem River Tributary
- CSA 4: Nichomus Run

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Upper Cohansey – FY21 plans has been submitted, approved, and funded. Critical source areas have been identified and will be included in the FY 21 ranking. Below is the map of the three areas chosen.

Upper Cohansey Critical Source Areas



- CSA 1: Clarks Run
- CSA 2: Harrow Run Tributary
- CSA 3: Foster Run

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To address the new quantity requirements to the NWQI, two new watersheds have been decided on in Northern New Jersey: Mulhockaway-Spruce Run and Lower Musconetcong.

Mulhockaway-Spruce Run is located mostly in Hunterdon County and will be serviced by the Frenchtown field office. The NJ Water Supply Authority (NJWS) developed a watershed plan for most of the HUC12 location and expressed interest in updating the assessment plan and identifying it as a priority for source water protection. This location is currently in the planning phase. \$30,000 in funding from National was allocated to complete the plan. Once the plan is complete and revised (to update the existing watershed plan to meet NRCS criteria) a determination needs to be discussed as to whether NRCS or NJWSA have the resources or if an outside contractor would be needed.

Musconetcong is located within Warren and Hunterdon Counties and will be serviced by both the Hackettstown and Frenchtown field offices. The North Jersey RC&D and Musconetcong Watershed Association have been chosen as partners to update the assessment plan and identify it as a priority for outreach, grant funding, and project implementation. This location is currently in the planning phase. \$30,000 in funding from National was allocated to complete the plan. Once the plan is completed and revised (to update the existing watershed plan to meet NRCS criteria) a determination needs to be discussed as to whether NRCS, NJWSA, or RC&D have the resources, or if an outside contractor would be needed.

11:26 Soil Health Activities, Kaitlin Farbotnik, NRCS

This year the scope has changed from just cropland to include Sub/Urban as well as Forestry. Stephanie Murphy from Rutgers Soil Testing Lab will be taking the lead on Sub/Urban and Brittany Dobrzynski from NJ Audubon will be taking the lead on Forestry. With the expanded scopes identified, a steering committee is being discussed so that all leads can convene and track progress. There is a Google Drive that has been setup for information, timelines, contact material, etc. If anyone wants to join there is still time to do so. Please contact Kaitlin as well as add your name on the excel spreadsheet contact list located within the Google Drive.

The Cropland Chapter is broken down into three subcommittees and has three phases. Once Phase 1 is completed, the plan is to start Phase 2 at the same time so the different subcommittees can work closely together.

Phase 1 (all should be completed by the end of December 2020)

- Social Trends – Nick Saumweber, NRCS, and Bridgett Hilshey, NJ RC&D
- Baseline Inventory – Bill Angstadt, Growmark FS, and Rosalynd Orr, NRCS
- Resource Inventory – Kaitlin Farbotnik, NRCS, (with the help of Edwin Muniz and Trish Long, NRCS)

The Soil Health Management Conservation Activity Plan (CAP116) helps producers transition to a complete soil health management system within a three year plan. Unfortunately, there are no templates for this, this isn't a "one size fits all" scenario. We are looking for a Technical Service Provider (TSP) to create plans for the practices. TSP's will need a special skill set of technical and practical knowledge. If anyone has any interest in becoming a TSP please contact Nancy Paolini and she will assist in the sign-up process for training and certification.

Soil Testing Activity (216) is an activity (not a practice or plan) that provides financial assistance to those doing very in-depth soil tests. Some of the things they look for within the test is soil organic carbon content, wet macro-aggregate stability, respiration using a 4-day incubation, active carbon, bioavailable nitrogen, pH and EC, and micro and macro nutrients. Right now not all testing sites are open and available but once the test is completed at an approved laboratory the results will be correlated by NRCS soil scientists based on location, climate, and actual soil type.

Carbon Amendments (CPS808) is a practice designed for people to intentionally apply organic matter like wood chips and Biochar to their soil and get paid for it. But it must meet requirements set forth within the standard. Restrictions on those items include, but are not limited to: very high P-Index value, soil and landscape characteristics that might prevent this practice from being applied, and cannot be used for the application of biosolids unless biosolids are mixed with other material.

There will be an internal meeting on December 21st to review the new opportunities with the Soil Health Division and NRCS. Pennsylvania received an invite to this meeting as well. The meeting will discuss outreach, planning, and implementation of these new practices as well as training for the new TSP's. If anyone is interested in receiving more information please comment in the chat box and someone will follow up to provide information.

Carbon farming updates are brought to us by Christine Hall. A carbon farming workshop was held at Duke Farms in

November 2019. Duke, Farm Euro, Secretary of AG, Dean Goodman from Rutgers School of Environmental Science, and our former State Conserv. Carrie Lindig, all took part in this field workshop. NRCS has been keeping busy within this practice of carbon farming. One of the things NRCS did was host a call between NRCS staff, SADC, and NJDA to discuss programs, opportunities, and long reach strategies. In addition to the workshop, NRCS is also looking at collaborating between the Plant Material Center, USGS, and NJAES to work with farmers to evaluate their impact on their operation relating to climate change and sea level rise. Usually there are plans to visit the farms and get direct feedback from the farmers, but due to COVID-19 this in-person activity has been placed on hold.

The New Jersey Climate Change Alliance (NJCCA) has been working with NRCS staff participating in the Natural and Working Land Workgroup. One of the key roles NRCS has been playing is serving as a crosswalk between activities to alleviate double work and streamline processes. The purpose of this work group is to identify opportunities for the Climate Change Alliance to advance these science-informed climate change strategies at the state and local levels.

Through the work via AG Experiment Stations, NJCCA learned that NRCS has an employee who is an atmospheric scientist working out of Colorado and is the keeper of the atmospheric data, Adam Chambers. Adam is able to provide the atmospheric benefit to programs in which NRCS is working on. Since Adam is considered as a part of the West Coast division, Julie Hawkins has put in a request to implement the same application of providing atmospheric benefits to the programs in New Jersey. A meeting has been scheduled, so hopefully by the time the next State Technical meeting occurs, NRCS will be able to provide this additional information.

Question:

- Nagisa: She was unable to see the key at the bottom of the chart and asked for clarification. Christine explained that the bar graph shows the building blocks of important practices like soil health, grazing/pasture, nitrogen management, livestock, and Agriculture Forestry/Herbaceous/Wildlife.
- Mitchell said we have three watershed regions that are at a water deficit (water quantity issue)
- Lauren provided the link to the soil health strategic plan: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ale78AnCKggtv4bKHjULjRZg-PmG22fT>
- Edwin provided the link to soil mass and grind size: [https://usdagcc-my.sharepoint.com/personal/edwin_muniz_usda_gov/Documents/Microsoft%20Teams%20Chat%20Files/Soil%20mass%20and%20grind%20size%20used%20for%20sample%20homogenization%20strongly%20affect%20per%20manganate-oxidizable%20carbon%20\(POXC\)%20values,%20with%20implications%20for%20its%20use%20as%20a%20national%20soil%20health%20indicator.pdf](https://usdagcc-my.sharepoint.com/personal/edwin_muniz_usda_gov/Documents/Microsoft%20Teams%20Chat%20Files/Soil%20mass%20and%20grind%20size%20used%20for%20sample%20homogenization%20strongly%20affect%20per%20manganate-oxidizable%20carbon%20(POXC)%20values,%20with%20implications%20for%20its%20use%20as%20a%20national%20soil%20health%20indicator.pdf)

11:45 Farm Services Agency Program Update, Nancy Coles, FSA

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was signed into law in 1985 and celebrates its' 35th anniversary this month. It is one of USDA'S largest conservation programs. The original primary function was to control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal land out of production. Since inception it has migrated towards conservation and economic benefits.

On November 12, 2020, USDA announced the signup period for CRP and CRP Grasslands for FY21. General signup begins January 4, 2021 and ends Feb 12, 2021 (6-week period). Signup period for CRP Grasslands is March 15, 2021 and ends April 23, 2021 (6-week period). Both programs are competitive and provide annual rental payments on land devoted to land conservation practices.

Below is a list of the current conservation programs. There is a total of 340 contracts, 201 farms, and an average rental rate of \$92.01/acre.

**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
New Jersey Conservation Practices (Acres)**

Conservation Practice	Signup Type	Practice Description	Practice Acres
CP5A	Continuous	Field Windbreak Establishment	1.67
CP42	Continuous	Pollinator Habitat	13.72
CP8A	Continuous CREP	Grass Waterways	157.50
CP15A	Continuous CREP	Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips)	0.56
CP21	Continuous CREP	Filter Strips	259.43
CP22	Continuous CREP	Riparian Buffer	272.32
CP38B-9	Continuous SAFE	Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife	1.70
CP38E-33	Continuous SAFE	Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds	4.50
CP42	General	Pollinator Habitat	6.70
CP38E-1	General SAFE	Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes	344.05
CP38E-2	General SAFE	Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses	¹ 395.04
CP38C-3	General SAFE	Tree Plantings (Softwood)	51.00
CP38E-4D	General SAFE	Permanent Wildlife Habitat	61.38
CP38E-10	General SAFE	Vegetative Cover – Grass - Already Established <i>(Practice Was Available Before 03/14/11)</i>	68.03
CP38E-12	General SAFE	Wildlife Food Plot	2.20
CP38E-25	General SAFE	Rare and Declining Habitat	54.81
CP87A	Grasslands	Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes - Livestock	153.70
State Total			1884.31

The CRP program has many facets. There is a general signup which opens in January. There is also the continuous practice and CREP, both having open signup with no time restrictions. The Safe program used to be continuous only but now is general and continuous.

Signup Type	Acres	Acreage Percentage
Continuous	15.39	0.8%
Continuous CREP	689.81	37.3%
Continuous SAFE	6.20	0.4%
General	6.70	0.4%
General SAFE	976.51	52.8%
Grasslands	153.70	8.3%

Looking forward there are several acres expiring between now and September 2025. This information is being provided to highlight areas in which we can increase our efforts before we lose the opportunity.

⊗ **Expiring Acres (next 5-years)**

Date	Acres	Contracts	Farms
09/30/2021	169.50	26	21
09/30/2022	328.17	56	44
09/30/2023	140.32	26	19
09/30/2024	55.19	11	11
09/30/2025	183.88	31	22

- The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) currently has 257 contracts with 155 participating farms. The average rental rate for the CREP is \$146.88 per acre. This rate is higher because of incentives with enhancements.
- The State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) currently has 59 contracts with 46 participating farms. The Development of Landscape Scale Agricultural Heritage and Habitat Conservation Plans (NJAS) has 211.28 contract acres. The Grassland Habitat Restoration and Management (CWF) has 335.75 contract acres. The Raritan-Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership (RPWHP) Implementation of Grassland Conversation Plan has 293.82 acres.
- CRP Grasslands currently has a total of four contracts with three participating farms. The average rental rate for CRP Grasslands is \$18.87 per acre.

In total the FY21 CRP Payments issued were \$165,206.00.

The active CRP contracts and easements are listed below in the table. Funding for these began in 2003 and ended in 2012. This was a joint effort between NRCS and FSA. At this time GRP payments have not been issued for FY21.

Active GRP Contracts and Easements –

Fiscal Year	GRP Contracts	GRP Contract Acres	GRP Easements	GRP Easement Acres
2004			1	18.90
2010				
2011	3	46.50		
2012	1	15.50		
Program Totals	4	62.00	1	18.90

GRP Contract Expirations -

2021	2026	2027
2 (27.30 ac)	1 (19.20 ac)	1 (15.50 ac)

11:57 Local Work Group Info for FY22, Nick Saumweber, NRCS

The purpose of the local workgroups are to bring together our partners, clients, and farmers to identify priority resource concerns. Those concerns are then brought back to the State Technical Committee for review and prioritization. The last time a local work group convened was 2018 and had conducted a series of statewide meetings: two in the North, one in Central N.J. and one in the South. Attendance fluctuated whereas some meetings had a great mix of partners and farmers while other meetings just had partners. The more participants the better the outcome.

NRCS wants to solicit responses from the State Technical Committee to answer the questions: "How Can We Conduct Local Working Groups This Year?," "How Do We identify Priority Resource concerns?" and "How Would We Rank Priority Resource Concerns?"

The State Technical Committee agreed that the previous meeting formats were good but acknowledged they might not be feasible in light of COVID-19. Many agreed that a questionnaire would be the best way to solicit feedback from our partners and farmers and that including a link to the questionnaire in correspondence that the field offices send might be the best choice for getting that information. In addition to the questionnaire, an informational video describing the local workgroup process would be beneficial. Another suggestion would be to host an online seminar (but there are reservations about the effectiveness regarding the constituent's participation).

A few suggestions:

- Nagisa said a questionnaire is a great idea followed up by a seminar.
- Elizabeth said a lot of people are using Zoom.
- Virginia also suggested a questionnaire followed up with volunteers.
- Mitchell said TEAMS was a good digital platform and might be a good replacement for working group meetings.
- Jim and Brittany think the questionnaire would reach more people than virtual participation.
- Brittany asked if we could include with the questionnaire an EQIP signup for FY21.
- Christine thinks the questionnaire could work but it would need to be well crafted. It would lose the benefit of being able to get explanations or further details. It would also need a lot of support from partners in promoting and following up.
- Christine also said that putting together a video with producers giving their feedback about the programs and how effective they were for them would be a great tool. Maybe not for this round but something to keep in mind for the future.
- John says the SADC meetings have excellent participation so we should reach out to them to see if they are doing anything different
- Elizabeth suggested hosting evening sessions as her previous experience with these seminars had great participation
- Virginia asked what quantity of surveys are estimated to come back? Nick said NRCS wants to paint a broad stroke to encompass as many producers and partners in the state as possible but limit it to agriculture (but that is not set in stone).
- Mitchell said farmers are essential workers and have been meeting in person, in an open-air setting, following six feet separation rules and this has been effective.

If NRCS decides to move forward with the questionnaire we would need to solicit a few volunteers from the State Technical Committee to go through the returned questionnaires and consolidate the information. A subsequent summary meeting would then take place with the entire committee to go over the results and identify concerns.

12:11 New and Revised Conservation Practice Standards (CPS) for 2021, Christine Hall and David Lamm, NRCS

Conservation Practice Standards (CPS) are the best management practices we recommend and implement with farmers. These are categorized into two parts: Ecological Sciences and Engineering.

The current process is the National Discipline Leads make updates to our practice standards and then those standards are rolled out to the state level. States then have 12 months to put the changes into implementation. State Technical Leads (STL) work to gather feedback and then issue the mandatory national changes that we can do.

We are looking for anyone on the State Tech Committee that wants to comment on the updates. Please let the STL know you are interested in reviewing/commenting by December 11, 2020. Updates will then be sent out by December 18, 2020. Your comments are due back no later than January 8, 2021. At that point all responses will be completed and updated. CPS's will be posted by January 25, 2021.

Below are the Ecological Conservation Practices up for review and their corresponding contact.

Conservation Practice	State Technical Lead
Bivalve Aquaculture Gear and Biofouling Control (400)	Betsy McShane Elizabeth.Mcshane@usda.gov
Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315)	
Prescribed Burning (338)	
Riparian Forest Buffer (391)	
Tree and Shrub Site Preparation (490)	
Forage Harvest Management (511)	Kaitlin Farbotnik Kaitlin.Farbotnik@usda.gov
Pasture and Hay Planting (512)	
Pest Management Conservation System (595)	
Any Engineering Practices on the attached list	Dave Lamm Dave.Lamm@usda.gov

Engineering Conservation Practices are reviewed every 5 years. This year a total of 53 were reviewed:

<u>Code</u>	<u>Practice</u>	<u>Current Date</u>	<u>Action/Roll Out</u>
NOTICE 170			
560	Access Road	Nov-20	10/01/2021
591	Amendment for Treatment of Ag Waste	Aug-20	01/01/2021
450	Anionic PAM Application	Nov-20	01/01/2021
397	Aquaculture Ponds	Jun-20	10/01/2021
310	Bedding	Sep-20	TO BE REMOVED
317	Composting Facility	Nov-20	10/01/2021
605	Denitrifying Bioreactor	Oct-20	10/01/2021
672	Energy Efficient Building Envelope	Aug-20	9/30/2020
670	Energy Efficient Lighting System	Aug-20	9/30/2020
412	Grassed Waterway	Nov-20	10/01/2021
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	Nov-20	10/01/2021
447	Irrigation and Drainage Tailwater Recovery	Nov-20	9/30/2020
430	Irrigation Pipeline	Jun-20	9/30/2020
436	Irrigation Reservoir	Jun-20	9/30/2020
441	Irrigation System, Micro-irrigation	Oct-20	9/30/2020
449	Irrigation Water Management	Nov-20	9/30/2020
460	Land Clearing	Mar-20	01/01/2021
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	May-20	10/01/2021
516	Livestock Pipeline	Mar-20	10/01/2021
576	Livestock Shelter Structure	-	10/01/2021
482	Mole Drain	NOT OFFERED IN NJ	
353	Monitoring Well	Nov-20	01/01/2021
500	Obstruction Removal	Jun-20	10/01/2021
533	Pumping Plant	Jun-20	10/01/2021
555	Rock Wall Terrace	NOT OFFERED IN NJ	
557	Row Arrangement	Aug-20	01/01/2021
610	Salinity and Spodic Soil Management	NOT OFFERED IN NJ	
604	Saturated Buffer	10-16R	10/01/2021
318	Short Term Storage of Animal Waste & By-Pdt	Nov-20	10/01/2021
572	Spoil Disposal	Jun-20	9/30/2020
574	Spring Development	May-20	10/01/2021
570	Stormwater Runoff Control	Nov-20	01/01/2021
607	Surface Drain, Field Ditch	Oct-20	01/01/2021
600	Terrace	Nov-20	10/01/2021
575	Trail and Walkway	Nov-20	10/01/2021
620	Underground Outlet	May-20	10/01/2021
629	Waste Treatment	Aug-20	10/01/2021
636	Water Harvesting Catchment	NOT OFFERED IN NJ	
614	Watering Facility	Nov-20	10/01/2021
640	Water spreading	NOT OFFERED IN NJ	
351	Well Decommissioning	Nov-20	10/01/2021

NOTICE 171			
402	Dam	Nov-20	01/01/2021
348	Dam, Diversion	Jun-20	01/01/2021
554	Drainage Water Management	Nov-20	10/01/2021
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	Nov-20	10/01/2021
355	Groundwater Testing	Nov-20	10/01/2021
320	Irrigation Canal or Lateral	Nov-20	01/01/2021
428	Irrigation Ditch Lining	NOT OFFERED IN NJ	
388	Irrigation Field Ditch	Jul-20	01/01/2021
464	Irrigation Land Leveling	Nov-20	01/01/2021
610	Saline and Sodic Soil Management	NOT OFFERED IN NJ	
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	Nov-20	10/01/2021
462	Water Well	Nov-20	10/01/2021

Question:

- Christine: So many standards have been cracked open for revision. Have you [Dave] ever seen so many engineering practices requiring changes at one time? Dave indicated historically there are usually six practices, but he has seen up to 12 at one time. With the last Farm Bill release, it was mandated that all practices be put up for comment and reviewed every five years in order to be compliant.

12:23 Open Discussion, Julie Hawkins, NRCS

Julie Hawkins thanked everyone for the hard work and input for the presentation and discussion. Christine Hall reiterated that she has accepted a new detail working with Headquarters Staff for the next two years and a new person will be chosen to take over her position in an acting capacity to help facilitate the State Technical Committees starting in January 2021. Applications are currently being accepted for this position. Christine has also asked for all participants to think about what was done well during the meeting today and what could be changed for future meetings or other virtual meetings hosted by NRCS. Please share your feedback. Kristen provided a quick update - New Jersey Audubon in southern New Jersey will have funding available for Atlantic white cedar in Southern NJ and wildlife habitat in Cape May County.

12:29 Next Meeting Date, Julie Hawkins, NRCS

To be determined

Adjourn