



NRCS Activity Report

for our Conservation Partners

April 2015-July 2015

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Helping People Help the Land

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- Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment

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Message From *R. Phou Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist*



During the April 2015 to July 2015 period, NRCS staff focused on work related to implementing conservation practices and ranking applications for FY 2015 funding. Staff obligated several million dollar in funding under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In addition, funding was obligated through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA)

Regarding outreach and communications from April to July 2015, RI NRCS participated in several events which included two high tunnel workshops, two recruiting events, a soil health and water quality workshop, and RI Ag Day at the RI State House. There were several ribbon cutting events held where NRCS provided funding for fish ladders, emergency watershed measures to protect riverbanks along the Blackstone River, and the completion of an urban community garden in Providence, RI. To inform the general public on the importance of conservation, NRCS had exhibit booths at several venues including the Earth Day Party for the Planet and the URI East Farm Spring Festival.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Phou Vongkhamdy".

R. PHOU VONGKHAMDY
State Conservationist

Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment

by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist



URI's Andy Radin explains planting techniques and fertilization studies at the workshops held April 21, 2015 (left) and July 7, 2015 (right).

During the April 2014-July 2014 period, NRCS worked in partnership with the University of Rhode Island on two high tunnel workshops. The first was held on April 21, 2015 Getting Started: Seasonal High Tunnel Workshop where attendees learned the basics of high tunnels including site selection, types of structures, and spring crop selection. John Wells of RIMOL Greenhouse Systems presented along with Dr. Rebecca Brown of URI. The second was held on July 7, 2015 Seasonal High Tunnel: Summer Cover Cropping and Drip/Microirrigation. Trevor Hardy of Brookdale Irrigation Supply presented a wealth of information on drip/micro irrigation principles and irrigation set ups for high tunnels. Dr. Rebecca Brown of URI gave an overview of a Conservation Innovation Grant funded study on summer cover crops seeding rates. Both events were well attended where NRCS provided an overview of funding opportunities for high tunnels through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).





To celebrate the International Year of Soils, NRCS hosted a soil health and water quality workshop at Sweet Berry Farm in Middletown, RI on June 11, 2015. The event was well attended and focused on the importance and interconnection of soil health and water quality.

Ray Covino of

CT NRCS conducted an interesting rainfall simulator demonstration on various soils to show the impact on the environment.

Additional presenters included Dr. Art Gold, Chair of URI's Dept. of Natural Resources; Bill Buffum, Research Associate, URI; Eric Boettger, RI NRCS Resource Conservationist; Brian Zalewski, RI Dept. of Environmental Management's Office of Water Resources; and Molly Allard, RI Association of Conservation Districts.

Jan Eckhart, host and owner of Sweet Berry

Farm, provided a tour of the property where he highlighted conservation practices utilized on the farm to improve water quality and soil health.



NRCS staff provided technical support in the 2015 Envirothon competition which was held at the Champlin Scout Reservation in Cranston, RI on May 15, 2015. It marked the 21st annual completion for Rhode Island Envirothon where students from eight schools in the state demonstrated their knowledge of

forestry, soils, aquatics science, wildlife ecology, and special topic urban forestry. Several conservation partners provided technical assistance for the event including the RI Department of Environmental Management, RI Conservation Districts, and RI State Conservation Committee. The top ranking team was from Narragansett High School, followed by Coventry High School which ranked second, and The Greene School which ranked third. The winning team will compete in the National Envirothon which will be held on July 27-August 2, 2015 at Missouri State University in Springfield, MO.



NRCS participated in two recruiting events which included the University of Rhode Island Spring Career Fair held April 2, 2015 and the E-Cubed Academy High School Career Fair held June 2, 2015. Students at the high school and university level learned about NRCS career opportunities, educational requirements, and summer internships.



NRCS civil engineer Joe Rocks discusses conservation information with attendees during Ag Day at the RI State House on May 28, 2015.

Rhode Island Ag Day was held at the Rhode Island State House on May 28, 2015 where NRCS had an exhibit booth to showcase conservation efforts throughout Rhode Island. The event provided the opportunity for RI DEM, agricultural related associations, local farmers, universities, local food organizations, and government agencies to network with legislators. Emphasis was placed on the value and importance that agriculture has for Rhode Island's economy and quality of life.



On June 19, 2015, the Ten Mile River Ribbon Cutting Ceremony took place at Hunt's Mill Dam in Rumford, RI. NRCS provided \$373,000 for the project under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). The project was conducted in two phases with fish ladders constructed at Turner Reservoir and Hunt's Mill Dams in 2012 and Omega Pond Dam in April 2015. The ribbon cutting celebration included prominent speakers such as U.S. Senator Jack Reed, U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, U.S. Congressman David Cicilline and

several federal, state and local dignitaries involved with the project: They included the RI Department of Environmental Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, City of East Providence, and Save the Bay. The entire project cost \$8.9 million which will restore river herring to the Ten Mile River watershed and

provide river connectivity for other resident fish species including shad.



On June 26, 2015, a ribbon cutting event was held at the Pawtucket City Hall riverbank along the Blackstone River. NRCS provided \$825,000 in financial assistance through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) to install emergency watershed protection measures to relieve hazards created by the March and April 2010 floods on the Blackstone River. The floods seriously damaged and compromised the river wall behind Pawtucket City Hall which not only protects city hall but also Slater Mill which is now part of the Blackstone River National Historic Park.



On June 11, 2015, the Southside Community Land Trust held a celebration to mark the completion of the Dexter Street Community Garden which is an urban community garden located in Providence funded through RI NRCS along with several other local conservation partners who support urban agriculture. Tony Kramer, Acting Regional Conservation for the Northeast, visited Rhode Island to attend the event. The food grown at the location will be consumed by the local urban community. During Tony Kramer's visit, Rhode Island NCRS staff showcased several other local conservation projects including fish ladders in Providence and an aquaculture project in Matunuck, RI.

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