

## State Technical Committee Meeting

NRCS/FSA State Office, Tolland, CT

January 14, 2015

### MINUTES

**Participants:** Kira Jacobs, EPA; Milan Bull, CT Audubon Society; Rick Jacobson, DEEP; Rich Meinert, UConn Ext; Wayne Woodard, TNC; Abbie Maynard, CAES; Rob Hurst, DEEP; Chuck Lee, DEEP; Doug Emmerthal, DEEP; Karl Honkonen, US Forest Service; Steve Winnett, US EPA; Lisa Coverdale, NRCS; Joyce Purcell, NRCS; Carol Donzella, NRCS; Arde Ramthun, NRCS; Nancy Ferlow, NRCS; Abbie Cadman, NRCS; Mark Edmonds, NRCS; Jim Hyde, NRCS

**Welcome/ Introductions:** Lisa Coverdale

Lisa Coverdale, STC welcomed everyone and wished them a Happy New Year. She is celebrating her 2-year anniversary working with CT NRCS. She also noted that the Soil Health Campaign is also celebrating its second year. She mentioned the soil health workshop for policy makers was a huge success; the rainfall simulator has been very busy; there have been a number of tours and lots of outreach going on and thanked the partnership for all their help and support. Lisa highlighted the importance of our volunteers and that in FY-14 we had 453 volunteers contribute over 5,100 hours of service. FY-14 goals were met with 96% EQIP, 98% AMA and 100% ACEP-FRPP allocations were expended. The new marketing committee has been busy with Farm Bill outreach, holding eight outreach sessions; the gov-delivery system (e-blast) is a popular way to get the word out, currently it has over 3,500 subscribers; work continues on the 30 partnership agreements; EWP Floodplain easements for Rounds 1 and 2 are moving ahead, as well as the dam rehab.

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – RCPP Multistate and State FY 2014 Proposals and Call for FY-2015 Proposals** – the group listened to Secretary Vilsack announce the funding of FY-14 RCPP applications via conference call. Lisa thanked NRCS staff and partners for all their help with the RCPP rollout, with special thanks to Joyce Purcell for all her outreach efforts. The announcement for pre-proposals for FY-15/16 is expected in early spring.

**FY-2015 Funding Allocations for EQIP, AMA and ACEP Funding Pools** - Joyce reported on the FY-14 allocations and how it was divided into subaccounts, of which some are mandated. She noted: that we allocated \$4.5m in EQIP funds for 219 contracts; many AFO/CAFO producers met their limitation and will be reapplying for FY-15 funding, and 5% of EQIP funds went towards CIG and Beginning Farmers. The need for more TSP for CNMPs was discussed. A question arose on Veteran status – Veterans will receive a higher payment rate only if they a beginning farmer, too. Veteran status requires all applications are ranked. The advance payment percentage was increased to 50% from 30%.

**Action Items:** State Technical Committee members to review how FY-14 funds were allocated and make recommendations on where to focus FY-15 funds (Lisa to provide past trends); make recommendations on how to recruit more TSPs, and comment on NRCS website.

CT NRCS received a quarter of its FY-15 allocation - \$1.2m; the rest should come in February/March.

The first batching was Dec 19th; 300 applications were received. The next batching date will be either February 20th or March 20th. A question arose regarding funding for invasive control after harvest as a preventative measure. After clear-cutting a forest invasives pop-up and additional treatment is needed.

It was recommended that invasive control be included in the practice when opening a canopy, and helpful to have forestry broken down by practice; acres not dollars. She also distributed summaries of statutory changes for CSP and EQIP. The deadlines for public comments are January 20, 2015 for CSP, and February 10, 2015 for EQIP.

Lisa explained that our allocation comes from several factors: state resource assessment/resource concerns, national program manager's input; goals achieved; historic use of funds, and NRCS decisions. In FY-14 discretionary funds were \$3.2m (CTA); mandatory \$2.6m, and FA (on the ground programs) \$8.4m. CT-NRCS yearly budget is approximately \$15m with regional equity. There is also no-year funding with the new Farm Bill which means some funds can be rolled-over. The state resource assessment is due by June/July; state priorities are used for RCPP. A question arose about regional equity – regional equity is extra funds for Farm Bill programs. Once initial allocation is spent, the states have an opportunity to earn more; the State Conservationist can decide which account it can go into; some programs offer more TA than others. There are 16 states eligible for regional equity.

**EQIP-CIG 2014 Awards & CIG 2015 proposals** – Nancy Ferlow reported that 5% of our EQIP allocation goes to the state CIG program. CIG offers up to \$1m for national grants and \$75k for state grants with a 1:1 match. In FY-14 two state grants were awarded to UConn and UConn Extension for nutrient management and forestry. Sometime in January the FY-15 CIG grants will be announced; national first/state second; encouraging all to start on their proposals; focus is on innovation in implementation; standards for practices; grants are funding up to 3-years; tailor state CIG to CT needs with input from the State Technical Committee members. Go to grants.gov for more information.

Action Item: Nancy to provide Karl Honkonen with a copy of the executive summary for the UConn Extension grant.

**Hurricane Sandy – Emergency Watershed Program-Floodplain Easements** – Arde Ramthun reported that 95 parcels were tentatively selected for the EWP Floodplain Easement program; the EWP Recovery projects have been completed; \$446k for dam rehab has been secured for the Norwalk 1 site; \$360k for dam assessments has also been secured for 18 state owned high hazard dams, and \$400k for two City of Norwich dams; CT engineering staff has been assisting RI-NRCS since Oct. 1st by providing an Acting SCE; CT-NRCS is assisting EPA evaluate 2015 Brownfield proposals.

Action Item: Arde will provide a map showing the dam sites to STC members

#### **Sub-committee reports:**

National Water Quality Initiative Report (NWQI) – Rob Hust reported they are working on two projects, Broad Brook and Muddy River; both are drinking water; both are impaired; there are new requirements and metrics to follow; an announcement on funding is forthcoming.

Wildlife Subcommittee – Rick Jacobson reported the comment period is still open for the DEEP Wildlife Action Plan; conservation actions are a hot topic these days; work on the New England Cottontail habitat

is on-going; the USF&W refugee acquisition is expanding its holdings; the subcommittee plans to meet 2X per year, there has been continued discussion on the long ear bat.

Forest Practice Discussion – Mark Edmonds reported on forest practices; there are 50 plans leading to contracts; job sheets have been drafted; hope to do multiple years of invasives.

Easement Subcommittee – no report

New Committees – Jim Hyde suggested a *Nutrient Distribution* subcommittee as there is a problem with more nutrients than can be applied in the state; Jim will recruit members for the team.

### **Partner Roundtable**

Steve Winnett mentioned the CAFO general permit; EPA reviewed and sent back for comments; slowly moving towards DEEP issuing CAFO general permit; CNMPs is a requirement; NEIWPC conference has been moved to Maine in May; next year to be held in CT. It was suggested that a soil health session/field trips be included in next year's conference.

Rick mentioned the development of an MOU for technical assistance; they are working on 12 cutting plans, 1900 acres which could lead to potential projects; 19 wildlife conservation plans have been written; aggressive outreach being done; Boots on Ground project funds have all been used; kudos to NRCS on the regional RC meeting in Hadley, MA.

Wayne Woodward reported on the Urban Conservation program and its management plans for smaller parks; the CT River Program addressing floodplain work, national infrastructure to protect human communities; LIS program nitrogen load survey and the decline in sea grass and the Mystic River watershed project.

Karl reported on the "Hudson to Housatonic" project where they are working with private landowners and land managers to protect their land and impacts on drinking water; funding was provided by the Forest Service; Yale and USFS working to sustain family forests; adapt practices to improve water quality; source water protection initiative; Water Planning Council Advisory Group that address water quality issues.

Rob introduced new Program Manager Chuck Lee (welcome Chuck!); he spoke on the 319 grant program; the 5-year NPS state plan which was approved by EPA in September; request for 319 grant proposals forthcoming; focus is on implementation.

Doug Emmerthal spoke on the EAB and the statewide quarantine and the need to be careful with firewood; there have been two comment periods on the NE long ear bat; hoping for funding for legacy programs; tweaking forest action plans.

Kira Jacobs spoke on source water collaborative at the national level; the importance to leverage funds; looking at ways to protect drinking water in CT; a private wells initiative to encourage landowners to test often; a pamphlet is available on their website; a tour of water treatment plant is being planned.

Lisa summarized the session noting the action items. She thanked everyone for attending and wished all a happy new year.

The next meeting date is schedule for May 20, 2015.