

## State Technical Committee Meeting

NRCS/FSA State Office, Tolland, CT

July 25, 2012

### MINUTES

**Participants:** Kip Kolesinskas, American Farmland Trust; Milan Bull, CT Audubon Society; Gregory Weidemann, University of Connecticut; Rich Meinert, UConn Extension Systems; Bob Ricard, UConn Extension Systems; Jay Mar, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Joyce Purcell, NRCS; Arde Ramthun, NRCS; Nancy Ferlow, NRCS; Randy Snow, NRCS; Carol Grasis, NRCS; Carol Donzella, NRCS; Sal DeCarli, North Central Conservation District/Eastern CT RC&D; John Guszowski, Eastern CT RC&D; Norma O'Leary, Eastern CT Conservation District; Wayne Woodard, The Nature Conservancy; Steve Hill, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Joe Wetteman, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP); Paul Rothbart, DEEP – Wildlife Division; Doug Emmerthal, DEEP – Forestry Division; Bill Hyatt, DEEP – Natural Resource Division; Marsha Jette, Farm Service Agency (FSA); Rosemary Edwards, FSA; Devon Marsden, FSA; Lance Shannon, CT Department of Agriculture; Henry Talmage, CT Farm Bureau; Denise Savageau, CT Association of Conservation Districts; Abbie Maynard, CT Agricultural Experiment Station; Steve Winnett, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Kira Jacobs, EPA

#### **WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS – Joyce Purcell, NRCS**

Joyce Purcell opened the meeting and reviewed the agenda. Introductions followed.

#### **OPENING COMMENTS – Jay Mar, NRCS**

Jay announced that the Connecticut River has been designated a *National Blueway*; the first in the country. He spoke briefly about the new Farm Bill noting that streamlining programs is a top priority, and reiterated the importance of regional partnerships. An estimated \$30 billion in cuts is proposed. The CT NRCS budget is tight and currently no additional funds are available for contribution agreements; however, he is taking proposals (RFPs) from partners just in case funds become available.

Chief Dave White visited Connecticut the week of July 9<sup>th</sup> and had the opportunity to meet with staff, farmers and partners. Touring our state, he understood the importance of small farms, greenhouse industries and aquaculture.

Jay reiterated the importance of partnerships, and how these hard times have forced us to come together. Connecticut's future depends on what we can do together in this ever changing landscape (i.e. develop practices and strategies; get timelines to link together; find opportunities with Land Trusts and other partners to match funds, and become more efficient in getting folks into a queue).

We also need to look at soil health/soil quality and sustainable and precision agriculture; demonstration farms on landscapes and under the sea; rotation to salvage nitrogen; diverse cover crops; utilizing the locally led process tapping everyone for ideas and input.

He also spoke about the *90% Solution* process which means putting more staff in the field – taking staff out of the state office and putting them into the field offices; utilizing mobile computing, and focusing on the 5-Ps: Partners, People, Programs, Policy, and Publicity. He closed with the quote, “We need to be careful of obstacle illusions.”

#### **REVIEW MINUTES FROM MARCH MEETING – Joyce Purcell, NRCS**

Minutes were accepted - there were no corrections.

#### **ROUND ROBIN PARTNER UPDATES**

John Guskowski and Sal DeCarli – Eastern CT RC&D, reported on the Advocate Program – providing assistance in developing local agricultural commissions; CT Farm Energy Program funded by Rural Development; Slaughterhouse Initiative; streamlining the Environmental Review Team Program; Horse Environmental Awareness Program; developing Lakeshore Guidelines (BMP) Manual for Landowners; PEAT Replacement Program.

Abby Maynard – CT Agricultural Experiment Station, reported on Annual Plant Science Day scheduled for August 1, 2012 – 90 plots will be open to participants; currently renovating buildings on campus; on-going cover crop demonstrations at Lockwood Farm; responding to inquiries on invasive bamboo and addressing questions on wood chips (soil health/forest).

Lance Shannon – CT Department of Agriculture, reported on the Farmland Restoration Program (\$500k), reaching a diverse group; matching grant up to \$20k to restore farmland (i.e. clearing trees, stumping and picking stones); the Community Farms Preservation Program has 24 cooperative agreements with local municipalities, with 33 towns designated locally important soils; deadline for applications is 7/31/12.

Joe Wetteman – DEEP, reported that the Sec. 319 Program is working well with producers and EPA is pleased with the farm programs; ideas to circulate nutrients throughout the state to eliminate imports from out of state; to promote in-state consumed milk, and utilize in-state produced fertilizer to have zero balance are being considered.

Steve Winnett and Kira Jacobs – EPA, reiterated the success of the Sec. 319 Program; the non-regulatory Drinking Water Protection Division; looking for opportunities to improve ground and surface water; source water collaborators meet quarterly in DC; work with conservation districts; opportunities to showcase partnerships; Highstead Foundation works with land trusts on wild and wood lands.

Henry Talmage – Farm Bureau, commended NRCS on the success of the Chief’s visit; reported on partners and leveraging dollars and how CT is a model for other states; the importance of keeping in contact with producers; municipal land use programs, and the Governor’s Council on Agriculture.

Denise Savageau – CACD, reported the first CTA grant is working well with the Districts; contracting with DOA on the Farmland Restoration Program; LIS Grant and the Equine Program; updates on the Farm Bill, and success of tour with Chief.

Marsha Jette – Farm Service Agency, thanked NRCS for putting the Chief's tour together, and reported that their FY-13 program funding will depend on the new Farm Bill; they are working to make aquacultural producers eligible for program funding; Rosemary Edwards is retiring at the end of July and Devon Marsden is replacing her, AGI's are being updated for producers; feed grain and milk programs are linked to Commodities and Food Stamps and that "all agencies benefit from producers."

Gregory Weidemann, Bob Ricard, and Rich Meinert – UConn, reported on the Governor's Council's strategic plan for agriculture and the addition of 13 new faculty members; urban forestry – tree warden working with municipalities, new role of Environmental and Natural Resources Leader; programmic teams forming; CES holding three workshops on heavy use areas, beef production and grazing systems; lack of slaughter house capacity; development of CAFO general permit regulations training session for dairy farmers, and dairy cost production calculations.

Milan Bull – Audubon Society, reported on habitat development and habitat restoration with a focus on the New England Cottontail; the bunnies have been sighted; working to increase early successional habitat on other land; kudos to Carol Grasis and NRCS for supporting their efforts.

Kip Kolesinskas – American Farmland Trust, reported on their work on the new Farm Bill; the Milk Shed Study; the new farmland retention and restoration initiative for farmland practitioners and others addressing issues such as estate planning, land transfer, rental/leasing farmland, and farmland protection; SARE grant training, and updated planning guide coming out soon.

Bill Hyatt, Doug Emmerthal, Paul Rothbart – DEEP, reported on the Emerald Ash Borer (now in CT) and their invasive species program; quarantine areas and sawmills, educate public, update website; the importance of partnerships in getting this under control; USFW stepping back as they have no capacity to rebuild; stressed partnerships; five year strategic plan to increase hunting by 10% and fishing by 30%; those involved with the land become better conservationists; partnership working to restore species and develop habitat for the New England Cottontail; planning landowner workshops in focus areas; the importance of partnerships to do this work, and Mr. McAvoy changed his farm name to "Cottontail Farm."

Steve Hill – Fish and Wildlife Service, reported budget problems like all others; working with private landowners on habitat conservation by providing technical assistance and utilizing Farm Bill programs; looking to leverage funds for the New England Cottontail Initiative for now and in the future; making the process to participate in programs simple for landowners; working with EPA on the LIS Initiative; filling one position to cover CT and hoping to make the EPA liaison position permanent in Stamford.

Wayne Woodward – TNC, reported that the CT River was designated the first Blueway in the nation; working on a multi-state CT River initiative to research the river flow, 20,000 culverts, dams and providing outreach to promote the Wetlands Reserve Program; work on the lower CT River to remove invasive species; dam removal on the Saugatuck River; manage grassland birds and early successional habitat management, and globally sustain food production and clean water.

Norma O’Leary – sits on various committees and found that “communication” is the name of the game; promotes working closely with producers; and enjoys working with all of us.

Joyce Purcell – NRCS, provided handouts on the funding status of the Farm Bill programs. She reported it has been a busy year, and thanked all the partners for their contributions to CT’s natural resources.

**SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATES:**

**Wildlife**

Joyce Purcell provided a handout prepared by Nels Barrett highlighting the NY/NE Forestry work, and the NEC partnership.

**Easements**

Joyce Purcell provided information on the Geographic Rate Caps for the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP).

**OTHER ITEMS:**

None

**SET NEXT MEETING DATE:** Date to be forthcoming

**ADJOURN**

Submitted by Carol Donzella, NRCS, Hamden