

State Technical Committee Meeting

The Lodge at Crandall Park, Tolland, CT

March 14, 2012

MINUTES

Participants: Paul Rothbart, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP); Doug Emmerthal, DEEP; Joe Wetterman, DEEP; Michael Hart, DEEP; Rob Hust, DEEP; Henry Talmage, CT Farm Bureau; Steve Winnett, Environmental Protection Agency; Denise Savageau, CT Association of Conservation Districts; Wayne Woodard, The Nature Conservancy; Sal DeCarli, Eastern CT RC&D; Ron Hocutt, CT Horse Council; Abbie Maynard, CAES; Jay Mar, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Joyce Purcell, NRCS; Nancy Ferlow, NRCS; Nels Barrett, NRCS; Arde Ramthun, NRCS; Mark Edmonds, NRCS; Carol Grasis, NRCS, Carol Donzella, NRCS.

INTRODUCTION – Joyce Purcell, NRCS

Joyce Purcell opened the meeting and reviewed the agenda. A round-robin of introductions followed.

REVIEW MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 2010 MEETING – Joyce Purcell, NRCS

There were no corrections.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/PARTNERSHIPS/BUDGET UPDATE/OTHER – Jay Mar, NRCS

Jay reported the many accomplishments that came out of suggestions from the partnership. They included: increasing more networking opportunities; improving communications (new Marketing Committee); sharing resources (training sessions and upcoming LIDAR flight data); being less tied to programs (restructuring of field office delivery), and continuing open communications (sharing resources, respect, training and trust).

Jay reiterated that he is enjoying working with all the partners and hopes to continue building sound relationships. He asked the Partnership for ideas on how to “put more boots on the ground” and to leverage more funding that will benefit our producers and customers.

The Budget for 2013 indicates a 6% decrease to NRCS (\$4.1 billion); a 3% decrease in discretionary funds, and a 4% decrease in staff years nationwide (433). A proposal has been submitted for a Long Island Sound Initiative and is waiting the Chief’s decision.

Chief White spoke to Congress recently on a New Farm Bill. Topics addressed: \$300k cap on EQIP; consolidation of programs; regional equity, and WHIP for non-federal lands.

USDA PARTNER REPORTS

This item was tabled until the next meeting.

FARM BILL PROGRAM UPDATES

Working Lands for Wildlife – Nels Barrett

Nels reported that there was \$33 million nationwide for the *Working Lands for Wildlife* initiative, and that NRCS is working in concert with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The program is equivalent to WHIP and is a landscape initiative with targeted species. CT has two targeted species: bog turtle and New England cottontail. Currently the Partnership is working on developing: designated areas, suite of practices, ranking criteria and landowner assurances. Tentative schedule for implementing the new program: all on board by March 30th; sign-ups by April 30th; ranking by May 15th, and allocations by July 2nd. DEEP and Service Centers have an estimated 10 projects lined up (approximately 295 acres/\$718,526).

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) Update – Nancy Ferlow

Nancy reported that CIG grants are funded through EQIP and applicants must be EQIP eligible. RFPs are out and the deadline for applications is March 30, 2012. This year's focus is on innovative approaches on: soil health, energy conservation, wildlife management and nutrient management. Applications can be found on the NRCS website and at www.grants.gov.

Nutrient Management 590 & Phosphorus Index – Arde Ramthun

Arde provided hand outs and reviewed the draft Nutrient Management practice (Code 590). He reported that new tools are being developed: Phosphorous Index and a management planner. He mentioned that the payment rate for TSPs was increased due to the huge amount of work needed to develop conservation plans. He reiterated the importance of working with the Conservation Districts through Agreements and providing them training to increase their knowledge base. He spoke about the developing Phosphorous Index software and how in the future it can be made available to producers and customers.

Program Ranking and Obligations – Carol Grasis

Carol reported that there was \$1.8 million for AFO/CAFO and rankings were completed on March 1st; there were 14 applications from Beginning Farmers; 173 applications were received in the 1st round, and 59 in the 2nd round; 10 Forestry applications in the 1st round = \$200,000, and 4 applications for Organic (2 not meeting criteria). Total applications: \$4.2 million before regional equity and \$4.7 with regional equity. Round 1 - \$4.5 million in requests (may have some duplications); seasonal high tunnels – continuous sign-ups; energy – 10 caps (8 implemented = \$850,000). She also reported rankings are on-going.

FRPP, GRP, WRP Sub-committee Report & WRP GARC – Carol Donzella

Carol reported that the sub-committee met on December 8th to review the ranking criteria for FRPP and GRP - only minor changes were made. She also reported that the 2013 WRP GARC (geographic area rate cap) area-wide market analysis, which helps determine easement values, was recently conducted by an outside source. The market analysis looked at a number of towns within each county. The data will be

populated into a spreadsheet and recommendations will be made to the State Conservations and STC on what the GARC will be for CT. The WRP GARC for 2012 cannot exceed \$5,000.00 per acre. FY-12 allocations for the easement programs are: FRPP - \$6.6 million, GRP - \$413,114, WRP – 130 acres.

Program Initiatives – Joyce Purcell

Joyce distributed a hand out that listed all the Farm Bill programs, their allocation, number of applicants, funds requested, number of contracts and acres. She also mentioned the new DOA *Community Farm Preservation Program* that caters to smaller parcels (<30 acres); deadline for applications is May 31, 2012. Establishment of an Agricultural Commission is a prerequisite - NRCS has received 15 requests from Towns for farmland soil maps.

State Water Quality Initiative – Joyce Purcell

Joyce distributed a map that depicted 303(d) impaired agricultural watersheds for the STC to review. She asked if these sites were accurate and if additional sites needed to be explored. Suggestions included: Broad Brook, main stem of the CT River, upper CT river valley, and most of Hartford County. A sub-committee was organized with representatives from the following agencies: NRCS, EPA, DEEP, TNC and the CT Horse Council.

Open Discussion - All

DEEP reported that new Connecticut *Stream flow Regulations* were finalized and passed and work will start in the Thames River basin, and they are in the process of developing a *Hazardous Mitigation* plan.

NRCS reported that they are pushing producers to implement their conservation practices. A new budget tool reports implementation rate. If money sits idle, it will be taken away. Three Soil Conservation Technician positions have been advertised for the Torrington, Hamden and Windsor field offices. They will replace those who recently retired.

Next Meeting Date - All

The next meeting will be held in July at the NRCS/FSA State Office.

Adjourn

Submitted by Carol Donzella, NRCS, Hamden