



Maine NRCS Conservation News

February 2013

FARM BILL UPDATE

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has filed last year's Senate-passed version of the farm bill, calling it a "high priority" in the new Congress. The bill will serve as a placeholder until the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee prepares and approves an updated version.

On January 2, 2013, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack issued the following statement on the Food, Farm and Jobs Bill: "I am pleased that Congress passed needed middle class tax relief and continued unemployment insurance protection for 2 million unemployed

Americans. However, while I am relieved that the agreement reached prevents a spike in the price of dairy and other commodities, I am disappointed congress has been unable to pass a multi-year reauthorization of the Food, Farm and Jobs bill to give rural America the long-term certainty they need and deserve. I will continue to work with Congress to encourage passage of a reauthorized bill that includes a strong and defensible safety net for producers, expanded rural economic opportunity in the new bio-based economy, significant support for conserving our natural re-



Secretary Tom Vilsack will remain on board for President Obama's second term.

sources, increased commitment to important research, and support for safe and nutritious food for all Americans. I look forward to continuing the effort to get this critical work done."

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USDA CELEBRATES SUCCESS OF 4-YEAR-OLD CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

In just four years, America's top conservationists have enrolled 50 million acres in USDA's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), a program that helps farmers, ranchers and forest landowners take conservation to the next level. CSP is aimed at producers who are already established conservation stewards, helping them to deliver multiple conservation benefits on working lands, including improved water and soil quality and enhanced wildlife habitat.

The land enrolled in CSP totals more than 78,000 square miles, an area larger than Pennsylvania and South Carolina combined, making the program one of the largest voluntary conservation programs for private lands offered by NRCS. Nearly 12.2 million acres, or 18,750 square miles, were added to the program's rolls in 2012.

• NRCS TAKING SECOND SIGNUP FOR ON-FARM ENERGY INITIATIVE



NRCS has announced a second signup period for the On-Farm Energy Initiative, funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Applications for the second ranking period of 2013 are due at the NRCS offices by close of business on **March 15, 2013**.

Through the On-Farm Energy Initiative, NRCS and producers develop Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMP), or farm energy audits, that assess energy consumption on an operation. There are two separate AgEMP op-

tions: (1) for a landscape component, that assesses equipment and farming processes, and (2) a farm headquarters component, that assesses power usage and efficiencies in livestock buildings, maple syrup operations, and similar facilities to support the farm operation.

NRCS then uses audit data to develop energy conservation practice recommendations. Clients may apply for financial assistance through the On-Farm Energy Initiative to implement the recommended practices.

• NRCS PROGRAM ASSISTANTS TO PROVIDE HELP TO FIELD OFFICES



Barbara Maurer

Maine NRCS has filled three Program Assistant positions on the Programs Staff. Although supervised by the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, these positions will be located in three field offices: Barbara Maurer is located at the Machias Field Office, Carl Perry is at the Lewiston Field Office, and Cindy Green is at the Houlton Field Office.

The Program Assistants' top priority workload will be second level review of conservation program contract payments that are <\$10,000. Other workload tasks include:

- Assisting field office staff with conservation program application and contract management;
- Management and archiving of hard copy conservation program contract files;
- Preparing/ mailing contract related letters to participants;

- ROOT reviews;
- Assisting Pauline Pare, Assistant State Conservationist for Operations, with some Operations tasks such as assisting with PRS and workload progress reports; and
- Helping fulfill FOIA and other information requests from the public and assisting with procurement requests.

Barb Maurer will be covering the Augusta, Bangor, Belfast, Hancock and Machias (except second level payment review) offices. She will also be doing the second level payment reviews for Houlton.

Barb will continue to order supplies for the Bangor, Belfast, Dover/Foxcroft, Ft. Kent, Hancock, Houlton, Machias, and Presque Isle offices.

Carl Perry will be covering the Farmington, Lewiston (except second level

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Carl Perry

PROGRAM ASSISTANTS (CONTINUED)

payment review), Scarborough, Skowhegan, and South Paris offices.

Carl will continue to order supplies for the Augusta, Farmington, Lewiston, Scarborough, Skowhegan, and South Paris offices.

Cindy Green will be covering the Dover-Foxcroft, Fort Kent, Houlton (except second level payment review), and Presque Isle offices. She will also be doing the second level payment reviews for Lewiston and Machias.



Cindy Green

• OUTREACH TO MAINE'S MAPLE SYRUP PRODUCERS

— BY CHRISTOPHER JONES, ASSISTANT STATE CONSERVATIONIST FOR SPECIAL PROJECTS

On December 4, 5 and 6, 2012 Maine NRCS and FSA held outreach sessions to Maine Maple Syrup Producers on the new EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative. NRCS can assist Maple Syrup producers with addressing energy conservation. Assistance is available to producers in two ways:

1. It enables the producer to identify ways to conserve energy through an Agricultural Energy Management Plan (AgEMP) conservation activity plan (CAP), also known as an on-farm energy audit; and,
2. Provides financial and technical assistance to implement some of the conservation practices recommended in the energy audit.



Approximately \$250,000 is available to Maple Syrup and agricultural producers in Maine in Fiscal Year 2013 through the EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative.

Because many of Maine's Maple Syrup producers hold off-farm jobs, the three outreach sessions were held from 6:00-7:00 p.m. The sessions were held at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension (UMCE) office in Skowhegan, USDA Service Center in Bangor and the UMCE office in South Paris. Twenty-five producers attended these sessions.

Chris Jones, NRCS Energy Contact, explained the program opportunities to conserve energy in the production of maple syrup. FSA County Executive Directors Elaine Moceus, Valerie Porter and Marcia Hall explained the process producers need to go through to get into the FSA system. They also explained FSA loans, crop insurance for maple syrup production and the importance of filling out the Agricultural Census. DCs Kevin White, Dan Schmidt and Anna Donahue explained the process producers need to follow to sign up for the Initiative. Susan Arrants, Assistant State Conservationist, was available to answer questions on the program.



• NRCS SOIL SCIENCE PROGRAM REORGANIZATION— BY TONY JENKINS, STATE SOIL SCIENTIST

THE STATE SOIL SCIENTIST POSITION WILL REMAIN UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE MAINE NRCS STATE CONSERVATIONIST AND WILL REMAIN THE PRINCIPLE LIAISON TO ALL STATE AND LOCAL SOIL SURVEY USERS AND PARTNERS.



We are in the midst of a national reorganization of the NRCS Soil Survey Division that is affecting our operations in the state of Maine. Nationally, last year the NRCS Soil Survey Division changed to the Soil Science Division, and the process of realigning all soil survey office staff from State-NRCS staffs (e.g. under State Conservationists) to line-staff leadership via the Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) Office Regional Director (in Amherst, MA for us) directly to the Division Director is underway. So, our Soil Survey Office (at Dover Foxcroft) will be overseen by Amherst – this will likely take place sometime this calendar year. The State Soil Scientist (SSS) position will remain under the direction of the Maine NRCS State Conservationist and will remain the principle liaison to all state and local soil survey users and partners.

The workload planning and project generation of soil survey offices will remain similar to the present system, with the State Soil Scientist funneling the priorities of users and partners to the Soil Survey Office, but with direct oversight now from the MO-12 Regional Director at Amherst.

The current personnel in these positions are as follows: The Director of the Soil Science Division is now Dave Smith, formerly State Soil Scientist/MO Leader in California. Tony Jenkins will remain as State Soil Scientist in Maine. In late January, Luis Hernandez will become the permanent Regional Director for MO-12 at Amherst. Bob Evon remains the Soil Survey Office Leader at Dover Foxcroft. The office in Presque Isle was closed on September 30, 2012. Bob's staff consists of Sally Butler (Ecological Site Inventory Specialist, Farmington), and Dave Turcotte, Nick Butler, and Matt Dorman (all soil scientists at Dover Foxcroft). Lindsay Hodgman continues as Assistant State Soil Scientist at the State Office.

It is important to state that regardless of our reorganization, our interest in the needs and requests of soil survey users is high. Feel free to contact Tony Jenkins, State Soil Scientist, anytime with questions/comments at tony.jenkins@me.usda.gov.

INAUGURATION TRIVIA

Question 1: How many presidents have given second inaugural addresses?

Question 2: When was the first inaugural ball?

Question 3: Who had the shortest inaugural address?

Question 4: Who had the longest inaugural address?

Answers: 1. Sixteen;
2. 1809. It cost \$4 to
attend; 3. George
Washington's, 135
words; 4. William
Henry Harrison's, almost
two hours.

• NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL INITIATIVE

— BY JEFF NORMENT, BIOLOGIST

Activities associated with Maine's New England cottontail (NEC) conservation initiative has always been time consuming—more so over the past two years—and things really ramped up with the Fiscal Year 2012 Working Lands for Wildlife NEC Initiative (WL4W-NEC).

Since 2007 NRCS' Scarborough Field Office and State Biologist have been active participants in the Maine NEC Working Group. Stakeholders are a diverse group of Federal and State agencies, non-profit organizations and university academics with a goal of increasing populations of a State of Maine endangered species and a candidate for federal listing. The Scarborough Field Office has hosted the majority of stakeholder meetings. The group has almost outgrown available space at the field office, so some larger meetings are now held at the Wells Reserve in York County.

As with most initiatives, it takes a lot of initial effort to develop a strategy; work plan; focus areas; conduct scientific research and surveys; develop technical, education and outreach tools; and to conduct outreach/education to gain traction and momentum. Habitat management guidelines and brochures have been published, GIS spatial prioritization models have been developed and used to fine-tune focus areas and parcel prioritization, Maine's NEC strategy has been developed and refined multiple times, NEC pellet count surveys and genetic analysis have been completed, and more. Work in Maine and NH elevated NEC to be one of several keystone species identified nationally and supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Federation (NFWF). Through a NFWF grant, the workgroup hired Kelly Boland to be our full-time Maine NEC coordinator. Like Maine, similar efforts were and are occurring in NH.

What lagged behind was applied on-the-ground conservation. Up to FY2012, NRCS had funded one project (NEC was not a WHIP priority during FY2011) and the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Partners Program funded several others. Despite Kelly's extraordinary efforts, the workgroup realized the limiting factor was full-time biologists dedicated to planning habitat improvements for NEC. During FY2011 FWS hired an employee to help their efforts. The same year NRCS and the NFWF co-funded a grant to hire non-NRCS biologists to work full-time in NRCS field offices for NRCS' priority species initiatives. Through this grant the workgroup was able to hire Jeff Feaga to work out of the Scarborough Field Office. Jeff was hired by Maine NRCS as a Soil Conservationist when the position became available as a result of Anna Kettell becoming District Conservationist in Oxford Co. The grant position has subsequently been filled with Brad Zitske, so there has been no loss in capacity; actually, capacity has increased with both Jeff and Brad on board.

Within the last three years and particularly the last two, what was a ME-NH initiative morphed into a six-state Regional NEC Initiative (ME, NH, MA, CT, RI & NY). A Leadership Team was formed consisting of the FWS' Regional Director, NRCS' NH State Conservationist, Wildlife Management Institute's Regional Director, and six State Wildlife Division Directors. A Regional Technical Subcommittee was also formed to advise the Leadership Team, with NRCS being represented by the NH and Maine State

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WORK IN MAINE AND NH ELEVATED NEC TO BE ONE OF SEVERAL KEYSTONE SPECIES IDENTIFIED NATIONALLY AND SUPPORTED BY THE NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FEDERATION.



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NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL (CONTINUED)



Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

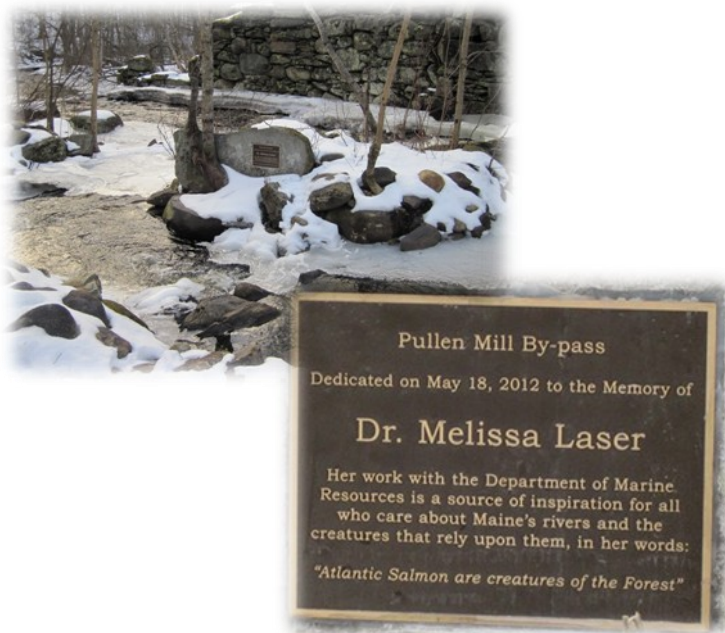
Biologists. Mirroring Maine's efforts, a regional conservation strategy and prioritization model has been developed and focus areas mapped for each state. Numerous subcommittees of the Regional Technical Committee were formed to identify habitat best management practices, scientific needs, captive breeding protocols, parcel prioritization, adaptive management procedures, etc. As part of this effort a proposal was submitted to NRCS headquarters by the six NRCS states asking for a dedicated NEC WHIP initiative. These efforts resulted in the FY2012 NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife-NEC WHIP Initiative.

The Initiative brought many new challenges and duties for programs, technology and planning staff, and also for our partners. A Regional Conference Opinion agreement for a federal candidate for

the Endangered Species Act was developed between the FWS and NRCS, a regional ranking process developed and intensive outreach and planning occurred under an exceptionally contracted timeline. With our increased planning capacity and the dedication of all staff involved, particularly the Scarborough Field Office staff, Maine NRCS processed 20+ applications, weaned to 10 viable projects which received \$193,000 of WHIP financial assistance.

The take-home message: initiatives involving at-risk species can be frustratingly slow to develop; can be a hard sell for land-owner involvement; involve lots of time, coordination and compromise; but success tastes sweet. The Initiative is being funded again in Fiscal Year 2013, so let the momentum build from here.

• PROJECT DEDICATION COMPLETED



When the Pullen Mill Bypass on the West Branch of the Sheepscot River in China (Kennebec County) was completed in FY 2012, the project was dedicated to Melissa Laser, a respected employee of the Maine Department of Marine Resources who passed away in 2010. Melissa was a steadfast advocate for the environment, working tirelessly to achieve and maintain healthy ecosystems for the watersheds of Maine. She had a special place in her heart for the Sheepscot River. She introduced this project to the project managers and was the inspiration, along with restoring fish runs, for seeing this project through to completion. Unfortunately, the plaque was not ready for the project dedication ceremony held in May of 2012. However, the plaque was installed in November 2012.



Sunny Stutzman working on the framing for the CIG high tunnel.



A piece of the Gothic arch frame.



The CIG high tunnel in progress. An NRCS high tunnel is seen in the background.



The finished CIG high tunnel at Stutzman's Farm in Sangerville.

• **PISCATAQUIS COUNTY SWCD RECEIVES CIG GRANT**—BY JOANNA TARRAZI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PISCATAQUIS COUNTY SWCD

The Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District (PCSWCD) received a NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant in 2012 to develop a high tunnel using **Maine wood products**. Organic vegetable growing trials are currently underway in this innovative high tunnel that was designed for the PCSWCD by Sunny Stutzman of Sunny Skies Design in partnership with the University of Maine’s Advanced Engineered Wood Composites Center.

The PCSWCD high tunnel at Stutzman’s Farm in Sangerville incorporates locally available renewable building materials and offers specific enhancements in soil management and climate and pest control. The frame has been tested for structural integrity and suitability for small farm use. The tunnel has wheels to make it portable. In this way the grower can move the high tunnel to a new location in order to rest and restore the soils after several seasons of use. The high tunnel uses only the heat from the sun to warm the soil, and the crops are grown in the ground.

This project hopes to demonstrate that this innovative high tunnel can reduce pest and disease toll on crops, improve soil health, and provide opportunities for growing locally-produced, nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables year round in a region with a short growing season. The PCSWCD is collaborating with natural resource consultant and soils specialist Susan Watson to evaluate agricultural conservation practices and soil ecosystem improvements associated with the use of this high tunnel. Field monitoring, testing and evaluation of conservation practices will be conducted over a three-year period. The project will verify environmental (soil, water, air, plants, energy usage) effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability of conservation technology in the field with a high probability for success.

Goals for this project are to eventually have these high tunnels deemed acceptable to use with NRCS programs, and to create plans, a kit and a handbook for farmers and gardeners who would like to grow crops in a high tunnel. A low-cost high tunnel design and usage program can be developed for the northern climate that will allow small farms to extend their growing season without heating costs and to increase the availability of affordable, nutritious, locally-grown food. The adoption of this model by growers will provide a manufacturing opportunity to stem the statewide loss of jobs in the forest products manufacturing sector, increase profits for small scale farmers and increase sustainable production of food for Maine communities.

This material is based upon work supported by NRCS under number 69-1218-11-25. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the USDA.

• URBAN RUNOFF TO BE HELD IN CUMBERLAND Co.

— TAKEN FROM WWW.URBANRUNOFF5K.COM

Our community—health, economy, way of life—depends on clean water. Polluted runoff threatens the health of Maine’s lakes, streams rivers and bays.

Runoff is water that flows over the surface of the ground, picking up pollution before it flows into nearby waterbodies. Runoff happens after any rain storm, and in Maine we see a lot of runoff in the springtime when the snow melts.

A new kind of “Urban Runoff” will soon be seen in Southern Maine! On April 20, 2013, runners and walkers will be hitting streets and trails in Portland for the “Urban

Runoff 5K” and walk to raise awareness of water pollution and raise money to support clean water education in local schools. The date of the “Urban Runoff” was chosen to coincide with Earth Day and spring’s “first flush” of stormwater pollution.

The “Urban Runoff” is coordinated by the Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District on behalf of 14 municipalities in Southern Maine (collectively known as the Interlocal Stormwater Working Group).

For more information go to www.urbanrunoff5k.com.



April 20, 2013

• PERSONNEL UPDATE

Meet Cindy Green...

Cindy is a Program Assistant working on the Programs Staff but located in the Houlton Field Office. Originally from Lewiston, Cindy received her Bachelor of Science and Management Degree from the University of Phoenix. She just recently retired from the U.S. Coast Guard after serving on active duty for 24 years while being stationed in seven different locations. She and her husband, Will, who also just retired with the same amount of service from the U.S. Coast Guard, bought property located on 60 acres in Cary Plantation, and are in the process of raising alpacas and Katahdin sheep. Her husband will run the farm while she works off the farm.

Cindy and Will have three children (two sons and a daughter, who have or are currently serving in the military) and five grandchildren.

“I’m very down to earth”, said Cindy. “I like to jump out and do new things...step out of my comfort zone”.

Welcome aboard, Cindy.



• MAINE NRCS WEBSITE TO HAVE A NEW LOOK

On February 19th NRCS in Maine is scheduled to have a new look...the same look as the National NRCS website. Eventually all of the NRCS state websites will have the same format. For a preview go to the National NRCS website at www.nrcs.usda.gov.

• **CIVIL RIGHTS AND EO UPDATE**

**CIVIL RIGHTS
COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

NRCS

(MEMBERS)

COLEEN CHURCHILL,
CO-CHAIR
HEIDI BUNN
DEBBIE GRAY

(SEPMs)

CHRIS JONES
HELENA SWIATEK
JADE GIANFORTE

(ADVISORS)

BRIAN VIGUE
ELAINE TREMBLE
STEPHANIE LANDRY

FSA

(MEMBERS)

MARY ANNE COFFIN,
CO-CHAIR
LISA ISBISTER
ELAINE MOCEUS
AMANDA MAY

(ADVISOR)

KEN GUSTIN

◇ Special Emphasis activities and support are an integral part of the Civil Rights Program at NRCS. Within their respective programs, Special Emphasis Program Managers assist all NRCS employees to ensure that equal opportunity is present in all aspects of NRCS programs and services. This includes assisting the State Conservationist to provide leadership to identify under-representation and ensure positive actions are being taken to address any such problem areas. Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs) work with the State Conservationist to provide advice and assistance to management officials in order to help them meet civil rights program goals and objectives. They also work to ensure effective communications among all persons and areas dealing with, or affected by, Agency civil rights responsibilities.

Effective immediately, Christopher Jones, Assistant State Conservationist for Special Projects, will serve as the Multi-Cultural Emphasis Program Manager and will be responsible for American Indian, Alaska Native, Veterans, and Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender. Helena Swiatek will continue to serve as the Federal Women’s Program Manager and Asian American/Pacific Islander SEPM, and Jade Gianforte will continue to serve as the Hispanic SEPM and Black SEPM. When Helena and Jade’s terms expire, Chris Jones will take on those special emphasis programs as well. Stephanie Landry will be the Disability Contact Person for NRCS. Thanks go out to Seth Jones, who previously served as the American Indian/Alaska Native SEPM, for all of his efforts.

◇ Lindsay Hodgman’s term on the State Civil Rights Committee expired at the end of Fiscal Year 2012, and Debbie Gray will fill the vacancy. In addition to Debbie, the State Civil Rights Committee consists of Coleen Churchill (Co-Chair) and Heidi Bunn from NRCS; Mary Anne Coffin (Co-Chair), Lisa Isbister, Elaine Moceus and Amanda May (who filled the slot vacated by Brad Hansen) from FSA. Brian Vigue, Elaine Tremble and Stephanie Landry from NRCS and Ken Gustin from FSA serve as advisors to the Committee. Thanks go out to Lindsay Hodgman and Brad Hansen for their efforts while serving on the State Civil Rights Committee.

• **FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

The theme for Black History Month in 2013 is *"At the Crossroads of Freedom and Equality: The Emancipation Proclamation and the March on Washington."*

The theme highlights two important anniversaries in the history of African Americans and the United States:

- ◇ 150 years ago, on January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation set the United States on the path of ending slavery.
- ◇ A century later, on August 27, 1963, hundreds of thousands of Americans, blacks and whites, joined the March on Washington to the memorial of Abraham Lincoln, the author of the Emancipation Proclamation, in pursuit of the ideal of equality of citizenship. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his celebrated “I Have a Dream” speech during the March on Washington.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.