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## Who We Are

Inspired by a shared passion for conservation, NRCS collaborates with farmers, ranchers, communities, and other individuals and groups to protect natural resources on private lands.

Working side-by-side with these landowners, we identify natural resource concerns, such as water quality and quantity issues, soil erosion, air quality, wetlands and wildlife habitat, and develop unique conservation plans for restoring and protecting resources. Funds to implement these plans are made available in Farm Bill programs that share the cost of conservation for the benefit of the farm, the watershed, and the community. Conservation easement programs, also in the Farm Bill, provide long-term options to conserve land.

NRCS helps Rhode Island and the Nation balance economic goals with the needs of the environment—ensuring sustainably productive lands that supply food, fiber, forest products, and energy for all citizens.



Rhode Island Coverts Project attendees learn forestry management practices to improve wildlife habitat.

## Mobilizing Private Landowners Through Educational Insight to Manage Forests for Wildlife Habitat-RI Coverts Project

Starting in 2008, NRCS partnered with the Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Council (RIRC&D) to develop and implement the RI Coverts Project with the goal to teach woodland owners how sound forest management practices can increase the diversity and abundance of wildlife habitat, provide recreational activities, and enhance water quality.

In 2011, a study of landowner involvement in forestry and wildlife habitat management was conducted to strengthen outreach programs by documenting the experience of landowners who attended the Rhode Island Coverts Project training. Program highlights include:

- Since 2008, 71 persons attended the training who own almost 2,000 acres of forest land and provide stewardship decision making on another 6,234 acres of land largely associated with land trusts.
- Since 2009, NRCS obligated more than \$800,000 in contracts directory resulting from the coverts training attendees to benefit wildlife and improve forest management with creation of forest openings as the most common practice implemented on 368 acres to benefit wildlife with an additional 639 acres planned through 2012!
- More than 80 percent of coverts attendees implemented forest management activities on their land with almost 70 percent reporting substantial impact on wildlife including increased populations of birds (e.g., woodcock, scarlet tanagers), other animals (e.g., deer, rabbits, bees), and flora (e.g., herbs, grasses, flowers).
- Study revealed NRCS financial support was a key factor to motivate landowners to manage their forests for wildlife where half noted that they would have not implemented such practices without such financial support. The Coverts Project demonstrates the effectiveness of the outreach program to mobilize landowners in forest management for wildlife habitat.

## Improving Fish and Wildlife Habitat While Enhancing Water Quality

**Issue:** Improving the ecosystem and water quality of the Pawtuxet River Watershed and Narragansett Bay.

**What NRCS RI is doing:**

Industrial development along the Pawtuxet River has prevented native migratory fish such as river herring and American shad from accessing their natural spawning upstream habitat for hundreds of years. NRCS provided financial and technical assistance for the restoration of the free-flowing river which was the largest ecological dam removal project yet undertaken in Rhode Island! NRCS provided over \$500,000 towards planning, design, and construction costs for the removal of the Pawtuxet Falls Dam and planting native wetland plants and trees along the river. Herring and shad are important components of marine and freshwater ecosystems, providing abundant food for bluefish, striped bass, and largemouth bass which are an integral part of Rhode Island's \$200 million dollar fishing industry. It is estimated that 100,000 herring and shad will return to the Pawtuxet River annually. The dam removal will also provide modest flood reduction for homes and businesses and improve water quality. Three additional dams have been removed and eight fishways have been completed on other Rhode Island rivers to support fish passage in the State!

Program used: (WHIP)



Removal of the dam spillway required excavators fitted with hydraulic hammers to break up 150 feet of concrete. The project restored seven miles of free flowing river habitat to one of the State's largest and most historic rivers.

## Promoting Forest Stewardship to Protect Water Quality, Wildlife, and Recreational Opportunities

**Issue:** Private forest land and wildlife habitat are endangered by residential development and invasive pest species.

**What NRCS RI is doing:**

The Southern New England Heritage Forest which covers parts of Rhode Island is the largest undeveloped and intact forest along the coast between Washington, DC and Boston. The area has provided citizens with clean water and air, thriving wildlife, recreational opportunities, and is an integral part of the economy through traditional forest products along with tourism and recreation. To maintain and enhance public benefits, NRCS promoted forest stewardship by working with private owners to complete forest management plans and implement forestry practices. In 2011 alone, NRCS obligated 68 contracts totaling almost \$1 million to protect over 6,400 acres of forest land.

Programs used: (EQIP), (WHIP)



Forested land treated through individual and group selection thinning is done to improve forest health and regeneration as well as improvement to a forest trail for recreational use.

## Protecting Farms Through Conservation Easements

**Issue:** High land values pressure farmers to sell farm properties for residential, commercial, and industrial development in Rhode Island.

**What NRCS RI is doing:**

From 1980 to 2004, Rhode Island lost 30,000 acres of prime farmland due to development where high land values played an integral role in the conversion to residential and industrial uses. Since 1996, NRCS RI provided approximately \$17 million combined with \$24 million from private entities for a total of \$41 million to work with conservation partners to preserve 40 parcels of almost 2,300 acres of rich farmland. In 2011, NRCS RI funded over \$4.1 million to help purchase development rights on six parcels (290 acres) to keep productive farms in agricultural use to provide food, clean air, clean water, healthy soils, and wildlife habitat.

Programs used: (FRPP)



NRCS collaborates with numerous conservation partners to preserve valuable farmland through conservation easements such as Wicks Nursery which was the last major property within the Sisson Pond Watershed to be protected from development.

# Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

*is the core approach NRCS has used successfully for more than 75 years to reach out to all American farmers. Through CTA America invests in conservation by investing in American farmers and ranchers, and the technical assistance they need to care for the more than 70% of our land, water and other natural resources that are in their hands. In FY11, Rhode Island received \$2,681,000 million in CTA funds.*

*CTA is simply about helping people. NRCS employees assist in identifying problems, inventorying resources, providing conservation alternatives, and making recommendations to individual farmers, ranchers, local governments, and urban landowners. This prepares the way for using Farm Bill and other conservation funding by providing —*

## Technical Planning and Design:

- Soils
- Water
- Air
- Plants
- Animals
- Human impacts
- Energy

## Project Coordination:

- State Environmental Regulation
- Archeological Permits
- Necessary Environmental Consultations
- Professional Coordination

### Financial Assistance for Working Lands:

**Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)**—reduces the risk associated with marketing agriculture products by helping producers diversify crops and livestock and implement conservation practices.

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

—provides assistance for a broad spectrum of conservation practices that promotes agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible national goals.

**Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)**—improves wildlife habitat on private agricultural, forest, and Tribal lands.

### Conservation Easements:

**Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)**—helps keep farm and ranch land in agriculture.

**Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)**—restores wetlands and wetland habitat on marginal agricultural land.

### Stewardship:

**Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**—encourages producers to embrace long-term comprehensive conservation by maintaining and improving existing practices.

### Watershed and Community-Wide Programs:

**Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program**—undertakes emergency measures on watersheds damaged by fire, flood, and other natural calamities to prevent erosion and runoff that could endanger lives and property.



## Rhode Island in The National Landscape

### Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program assists in recovery measures to safeguard lives and property after historic March 2010 floods

Due to damage stemming from the historic floods of March 2010, NRCS RI was able to activate the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program for the first time since 2001. After receiving almost \$300,000 in 2010, NRCS RI received additional funding of \$1.1



million to address 16 projects in 12 communities. The majority of the projects involved streambank repair and stabilization. Other work involved rebuilding retaining walls that were undermined and collapsed, spillway erosion repairs, and sediment and debris removal. The Laurel Avenue Pawtuxet River Streambank Stabilization Project in Coventry, RI was one of the most complex projects. The site suffered structural failure of mill buildings and severe erosion adjacent to bridge abutments and buildings where a side of the building fell into the river and



the parking lot was destroyed. The floods caused severe erosion leading to failure of the Laurel Avenue bridge abutments and threatened to undermine the mill structure.

- NRCS RI provided financial and technical resources to a local sponsor to acquire engineering and construction services to analyze the damage, develop a temporary solution to stabilize the site, and implement the work.
- Forty yards of concrete fill were placed beneath the foundation of the mill tower and a cable anchoring system was installed to support the streambank at the foundation of the tower.
- One hundred and twenty tons of rock and 150 feet of concrete blocks were installed to prevent the streambank walls from collapsing and causing further erosion.
- NRCS RI efforts enabled local businesses to resume operations and continue providing employment to more than 40 employees.

NRCS RI and the local sponsor are committed to develop a permanent stabilization of the Pawtuxet River stream corridor adjacent to the mill complex. In addition, the work will protect the Laurel Avenue bridge repairs currently underway.

### 2011 Farm Bill Program Funding\*

NRCS Program	Number of Contracts	Financial Assistance to Producers
Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)	4	\$54,000
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	3	\$2,000
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	165	\$3,232,000
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)	6	\$4,128,000
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	1	\$121,000
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	29	\$393,000

\*Financial Assistance (FA) is provided directly to producers. Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funding is used by NRCS for professional planning and expertise to help carry out conservation activities. Data source: Foundation Financial Information System Status of Funds Report October 2011.