

October-December 2012

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Message From R. Phou Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist



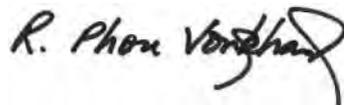
During the October to December 2012 period, NRCS staff began work related to implementing conservation practices as part of contracts for the first quarter of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2013.

Regarding outreach and communications, RI NRCS coordinated a tour with the RI Conservation Districts for Regional Conservationist Richard Sims who visited Rhode Island where he gained insight on the varied conservation practices implemented in Rhode Island. The visit also provided the opportunity for him to interact with the multitude of local conservation partners where he provided information on the status of the FY 2013 budget. NRCS participated in two university level career fairs including the annual Government Career Fair held October 24, 2012 at URI and the URI Fall Internship and Job Fair held November, 7, 2012. Staff explained educational requirements for careers within NRCS and the hiring process for Federal government job vacancies. Three open house workshops were held in the districts where farmers and forest landowners learned about financial and technical assistance available to implement conservation practices in Rhode Island.

The field staff worked diligently to rank conservation program applications for the first quarter of FY 2013. The first round to rank applications ended on December 21, 2012. In total, 71 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts worth \$1,214,624 were preapproved for funding and 7 Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) contracts worth \$23,909 were preapproved for funding.

The resource staff focused on a series of workshops with URI on Conservation Activity Plans and conservation practices for landowners. In addition, resources will participate in the RI 2015 Wildlife Action Plan with RI DEM. Other efforts include supporting forestry outreach to enhance landowner knowledge of forestry practices and encourage program participation. Lastly, the national and regional practice payment schedules were finalized for FY 2013.

Following Hurricane Sandy, the soils staff completed a tour of the shoreline from Narragansett to Matunuck to assess shoreline erosion, coastal hazards, and the geologic soil exposure along the coast.



R. PHOU VONGKHAMDY
State Conservationist

Administration

by Jacqueline Pashnik, Management Analyst

Personnel changes:

- Michael Moorman, ASTC for Programs, has taken a new position at NRCS Headquarters, effective December 30, 2012. Mike is now the Great Lakes Initiative Coordinator as part of the NRCS Landscape Conservation Initiatives. We wish Mike all the best in his new position.
- Job announcements were recently posted to USA Jobs for 1) State Resource Conservation and 2) Assistant State Conservationist for Programs to fill vacant positions.
- A job announcement for a Soil Conservation Technician, GS-5/6/7, will be posted to USA Jobs very soon. This new field position will be dedicated to the implementation of practices and getting conservation on the ground.

A Civil Rights Compliance Review was conducted on December 6th and 7th by Sheila M. Shepperd, JD, Equal Opportunity Specialist, from the Civil Rights Division - Program Compliance Branch. The review covered a range of topics from employee knowledge of civil rights, landowner and conservation board member knowledge and feedback, facilities accessibility, outreach efforts, program participation, and workforce diversity. The preliminary report presented at the exit conference commended RI NRCS for our efforts in partnerships, outreach, commitment to workforce diversity, and the “field staff’s work ethics, performance, service and helpfulness”. The report also included recommendations on how we can continue and enhance our civil rights compliance as well as two required actions – working with the building owners on accessibility findings and correcting Section 508 deficiencies on the State’s Web site. Walter Marshall, State Public Affairs Specialist, and other webmasters across NRCS, are actively migrating our Web sites to a new compliant format. Once the final report is received, action items will be developed to ensure the necessary actions are taken by FY2014.



State Conservationist R. Phou Vongkhamdy presents a recognition award to Landscape Architect Kanseese Xiong.

Employee Recognition Day was held November 28, 2012 where the RI NRCS staff was commended for successfully implementing conservation efforts throughout Rhode Island. John McNiff, National Park Service Ranger, was a guest speaker who provided an interesting historical perspective on Roger Williams and his interaction with the local Native Americans.

Conservation District Happenings Including Program Funding:

Conservation District - Eastern District (Bristol and Newport Counties)

by Melissa Hayden, Eastern District Conservationist

Following Hurricane Sandy, NRCS staff joined the RI DOT, FEMA, and RI EMA in meetings with town officials in Warren, Bristol, and Little Compton to survey the storm damage and determine if we could utilize EWP funds to address any storm related issues. The Town of Bristol submitted a request for assistance through EWP and NRCS completed the Damage Survey Report in December.

Meetings were held with the Town of Bristol, Save the Bay, RI State Conservation Committee (SCC), and Eastern RI Conservation District to discuss storm water management issues along Silver Creek in Bristol and the potential for NRCS to provide technical and financial assistance to address these issues. NRCS and RI SCC staff completed a survey of Silver Creek at Mt. Hope High School.

During this quarter, the Eastern District completed conservation plans and application rankings for round 1 of applications for EQIP and AMA. We preapproved 13 EQIP contracts in Bristol and Newport counties for a total of \$402,398 and we preapproved 5 AMA contracts for a total of \$15,755.

Implementation on existing contracts this quarter included completion of a total of 43 practices. These include installation of over 1,500 feet of access road, 1,800 feet of fencing for prescribed grazing, 3 acres of pollinator habitat, 3 high tunnels, 5 acres of Phragmites herbicide treatment, and 20 acres of pasture and hay planting. Two Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans and a Forest Management Plan were also completed in the quarter.

First Qtr. FY 2013 Program/Fund Code	Eastern District	
	# Contracts	Sum of Contract Cost
AMA		
Cropland	5	\$15,755
EQIP		
Conservation Activity Plans	1	\$5,676
Cropland	2	\$6,151
Forest	1	\$104,317
Livestock	1	\$245,772
Pasture	1	\$9,360
Beginning Farmer/Rancher	3	\$9,100
High Tunnel	3	\$17,619
NE-NY Forest Initiative	1	\$4,403
Grand Total	18	\$418,153

Conservation District - Northern District (Providence County)

by Justin Tuthill, Northern District Conservationist

- A meeting was held between NRCS and DEM to kick off the design phase for the fish passage project at the 4th dam on the Blackstone River in RI.
- NRCS hosted a visit by the Regional Conservationist, Richard Sims that included several stops in the Northern District including the district office.
- The Northern District in cooperation with NRCS organized an open house style workshop in late November to showcase NRCS programs to prospective applicants.
- The 1st application ranking period deadline for programs was December 21, 2012 where 53 applications were received.
- We preapproved a total of 32 EQIP contracts worth \$527,363 and 1 AMA contract worth \$4,077.

First Qtr. FY 2013 Program/Fund Code	Northern District	
	# Contracts	Sum of Contract Cost
AMA		
Cropland	1	\$4,077
EQIP		
Conservation Activity Plans	3	\$5,655
Cropland		
Forest	5	\$36,180
Livestock	3	\$69,775
Pasture		
Beginning Farmer/Rancher	3	\$221,477
High Tunnel	1	\$7,275
NE-NY Forest Initiative	17	\$187,001
Grand Total	33	\$531,440

Conservation District - Southern District (Kent and Washington Counties)

by John Richard, Southern District Conservationist

In the first quarter of FY2013, NRCS Southern District completed and certified 112 conservation practices totaling \$453,872. These practices include Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats, High Tunnels, Timber Stand Improvement, and Pasture Planting.

The Southern Conservation District organized an NRCS outreach event aimed at providing the public with an opportunity to speak with conservation experts. Several disciplines were represented for people to speak with such as a biologist, forester, and conservationists as well as an environmental easement specialist.

In the first quarter, the SRICD completed conservation plans and will be funding 26 EQIP contracts worth a total of \$284,863 and 1 AMA contract for \$4,077.

Two of FY 2012's Working Lands for Wildlife – New England cottontail projects are underway, and the early successional cuts are happening this January!

First Qtr. FY 2013 Program/Fund Code	Southern District	
	# Contracts	Sum of Contract Cost
AMA	1	\$4,077
Cropland		
EQIP		
Conservation Activity Plans	7	\$11,877
Cropland		
Forest	2	\$21,700
Livestock	2	\$134,748
Pasture	2	\$1,920
Beginning Farmer/Rancher	1	\$6,077
High Tunnel	4	\$85,243
NE-NY Forest Initiative	2	\$23,298
Grand Total	27	\$288,940

Programs-Easements

by Michael Kenyon, Easement Program Manager

Easements:

During the last several months, four Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP) conservation easements were purchased on approximately 86 acres in total with almost \$1.8 million FRPP funds. In addition, preparation for the upcoming 2013 FRPP applications was underway. Both the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) remained unauthorized following the end of FY 2012 and the 2008 Farm Bill. This resulted in no funding for new interests in FY 2013 where applications were put on hold until the enactment of the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 which extended the program authorities provided by the 2008 Farm Bill for another year. This allows eligible landowners the opportunity to apply for both of these programs in FY 2013. NHQ is currently in the process of securing the funds to address these program authorities.

On another note, programs staff worked with the field staff on the ROOT audit for the fourth quarter of FY2012. One hundred and thirty-one obligations were reviewed with a total open obligation of a little over \$2.5 million.

Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment

by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist



Regional Conservationist Richard Sims listens to RI NRCS staff explaining the benefits of hoop houses including extending the growing season for vegetables in Rhode Island.

On November 6-7, 2012, Northeast Regional Conservationist Richard Sims visited the Rhode Island NRCS office where he met with the entire staff to provide an update on the status of the FY 2013 budget due to the new Farm Bill not being approved by Congress. In addition, RI NRCS coordinated a tour with the RI Conservation Districts to educate Regional Conservationist Sims on conservation practices implemented through Rhode Island. The tour included visits to an aquaculture farm, livestock operation, urban farm, and recently completed EWP site. In addition, staff showcased local fish ladders and forestry efforts near the Scituate Reservoir. The visit also provided the opportunity for Regional Conservationist Sims to meet with conservation partners to provide information on the “Field Office of the Future” and status of the new Farm Bill.

In October and November, NRCS in cooperation with the University of Rhode Island completed the remaining four of six educational workshops which included grazing management plans, integrated pest management plans, nutrient management plans, and a livestock fencing workshop.

In respect to recruitment events, NRCS attended two university level career fairs in the fall. The annual Government Career Fair was held at URI's Ryan Center on October 24, 2012 where students from eight local colleges and universities learned about career opportunities with over 45 governmental agencies. NRCS also attended the URI

Fall Internship and Job Fair where staff explained the educational requirements for careers within NRCS and hiring process for Federal government job vacancy announcements.



Local aquaculture farmer Perry Raso explains the entire process of growing oysters to the NRCS staff including Regional Conservationist Richard Sims.



Civil Engineering Technician Ron Lewis speaks to a URI student about the various occupations NRCS hires to implement conservation practices on farms and forest land.

In late November, Rhode Island NRCS in cooperation with the RI Association of Conservation Districts hosted three open house workshops to inform potential clients in farming and forestry about the technical and financial assistance available to implement conservation practices on farms and forest land. The events were held at local libraries and a grange where separate stations were set up for agriculture, forestry, wildlife, and easements to provide specialized focus on programs and practices.

Resources

by Eric, Boettger, Resource Conservationist; Gary Casabona, State Biologist; Chris Modisette, State Forester; and Reena Shaw, Agriculture Economist

Technology Transfer in the form of training, technical tools, standards and job sheets required for technical assistance. **Program Delivery** – Assisting in the management process for effective program delivery during the fiscal year includes: setting priorities and goals; and addressing resource needs in the State.

In addition, we have transitioned the duties of WC/HELC compliance to the resource team, taken the lead for CDSI and data clean-up, supported the National & Regional Practice Payment schedules (2 members), provided support for the national focus on soil health, promoted native vegetation in conservation practices, worked with partners to develop and sustain a healthy and productive Narragansett Bay, as well as local waters and their watersheds.

Agronomy

Rhode Island 2012 NWQI Report

Through the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering financial and technical assistance to farmers and forest landowners interested in improving water quality and aquatic habitats in the priority watersheds with impaired streams. Eric Boettger has been working with RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) – Office of Water Resources and the RI NRCS State Technical Committee on the selection of HUC -12 watersheds which are targeted under the 2012 Water Quality Initiative. The selected watersheds are as follows:

- 1) Sakonnet River watershed
- 2) Upper East Passage watershed
- 3) Tomaquag Brook – Pawcatuck River watershed

NRCS will help producers implement conservation and management practices through a systems approach to control and trap nutrient and manure runoff. Qualified producers will receive assistance for installing conservation practices such as nutrient management, animal waste systems, and riparian buffers. For over 75 years, NRCS has provided agricultural producers with assistance to implement voluntary conservation practices that protect natural resources while maintaining production and profits.

The resource team completed a Quality Assurance Review (QAR) report for FY 2012. Conservation Plans and completed Conservation Practices were reviewed. This review included evaluating adequacy of planning and adequacy of supporting records. Sufficient Ecological Science practices were reviewed to meet current General Manual requirements.

Eric participated in a series of workshops in cooperation with the University of Rhode Island. The purpose of the workshops is to increase the understanding of Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs) and conservation practices for landowners. The workshops included; Comprehensive Nutrient Management (CNMP), Nutrient Management, Integrated Pesticide Management, and Grazing Management.

Wildlife

Gary Casabona and Chris Modisette have been asked to participate in **RHODE ISLAND'S 2015 WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN**

In 2005 Rhode Island DEM created its first-ever Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS), now called the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), as part of an unprecedented national framework of plans developed by every U.S. State and territory. All States are required to update these plans by 2015. As part of RI's revision a core group of wildlife experts from within DEM, TNC, URI and other key organizations will help lead the process to provide direction and coordination of wildlife conservation efforts in the State for the next decade. The SWAP revision aims to provide updated assessments of priority species and habitats, analyze threats affecting these fish and wildlife, and outline conservation actions to address or alleviate these threats in the State. We also hope to provide more detailed information and mapping of priority conservation areas in Rhode Island.

State Biologist, Gary Casabona, continues to work with US Fish & Wildlife Service and RI DEM partners on the creation of "scrub/shrub" young forest habitat to benefit the New England cottontail, one of the seven species covered under the Working Lands for Wildlife program. New England cottontails are the only native rabbit east of the Hudson River. Thanks to the participation of Rhode Island landowners, land trusts, and rod & gun clubs, 112 acres of cottontail habitat management have been planned through NRCS Farm Bill programs since April 2012. A total of \$227,000 has been obligated -- \$140,000 under Working Lands for Wildlife, along with an additional \$87,000 through EQIP.

Gary continues to work with staff from the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation to develop job sheets for pollinator conservation under NRCS practices, such as conservation cover and tree and shrub establishment. Species of greatest benefit to pollinators include Black willow, Pussy willow, Black chokeberry, and Elderberry. Wood nesting native bees will nest in Elderberry. Pollinator habitat creation and enhancement can be funded under the EQIP program. For more information on pollinators, see the Xerces Society webpage: <http://www.xerces.org/>

Stream Continuity Project - A partnership of NRCS, RIRC&D, and Trout Unlimited volunteers has been assessing the opportunity to restore the **continuity of stream and river systems** to allow for easier fish, wildlife and aquatic organism passage and to benefit the overall water quality of watersheds across the State. As a result of this partnership, Kat Zuromski of RIRC&D has established a statewide database of impediments to riparian zone connectivity. Gary hopes to use this dataset to identify stream and wetland restoration projects to be funded through NRCS programs.

Forestry

New England/New York Forestry Initiative Forestry - NRCS is working with the RI RC&D Council and the University of Rhode Island (URI) to collaborate in implementing NE/NY Forestry Initiative Contribution forestry projects. Through this agreement RIRC&D hired URI staff forester, Bill Buffum to promote USDA Farm Bill programs and accelerate technical support for forestry, wildlife habitat, and water quality practices in existing NRCS contracts.

Southern New England Heritage Forest Pilot Project - An outgrowth of the NE/NY Forestry Initiative is a US Forest Service pilot project for the Southern New England Heritage Forest, an area that includes western RI, eastern CT, and central MA. The purpose of this project is to test how to most effectively engage family forest landowners in contributing to three main goals: 1) strengthen markets for forest products, 2) strengthen forest stewardship, and 3) conserve the many values of the region's

forest landscape for future generations. The long-term goal of the project is to encourage better forest management and permanent protection for the region's forest lands. The geographic focus of the initial landowner outreach efforts will focus on 16 towns in 3 States. These include:

- 1) Thompson, Putnam, and Killingly CT; Douglas, MA; Burrillville, Gloucester, Foster, and Scituate RI
- 2) Stafford and Union CT; Holland, Wales, and Monson MA
- 3) W. Brookfield, Brookfield, and Warren, MA

NRCs will be working with the Northern RI Conservation District, RIRC&D, and Providence Water to investigate issues and opportunities surrounding **Small Scale Forestry**.

Through the **Rhode Island Agroforestry Project**, RI NRCS in cooperation with the RIRC&D and its partners is investigating agroforestry practices which will aim to help sustain small farms and private woodland productivity. Examples of Agroforestry practices being considered include forest farming, silvopasture, riparian zone restoration, alley cropping, and windbreak/shelterbelts.

Resource Economics

National and Regional Practice Payment Schedules were finalized during this period - Agricultural Economist Reena Shaw and State Forester Chris Modisette were part of the national effort to develop and maintain approximately 108 NRCS payment schedules and their associated 800 regional scenarios. The objective of this initiative is to provide greater consistency in program payment rates nationally and will be completed for all practices during FY 2012. The goal is to complete all schedules and maintain the data in a web-based system for use by NRCS field staff to develop participant contracts for FY 2013. Reena provided a dual role by participation on the **Payment Schedules - National Technical Specialist and Cost Team** while Chris is part of the **Forestry National Technical Specialist Team** and is also part of the **Regional Payment Scenario Team** for the northeast.

Soils Program

by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist



RI NRCS staff including soils scientist and soil planners assess coastal erosion resulting from Hurricane Sandy.

Staff News: Resource Soil Scientist and Coastal Pedologist, Maggie Payne, has been re-assigned to a Soil Conservationist position. Maggie headed up the regional part of the National Rapid Carbon Assessment and was instrumental in the RI Coastal Zone Soil Survey. She was the go-to person for developing products, data, and operating technical equipment for the soils program where her talents and expertise will be missed.

Assessing the impacts of Hurricane Sandy: At the request of the RI Assistant State Soil Scientist, a team of soil scientists and coastal geologists from URI toured the shoreline from Narragansett to Matunuck following Hurricane Sandy. The purpose of the tour was to observe the shoreline erosion, coastal hazards, and the soil/geologic exposures along the coast. The storm provided a wealth of information regarding shoreline resiliency, effects of human manipulation, and ways to improve our soil interpretations along the coastal zone. It also highlighted the importance of our RI Coastal Zone Soil Survey to provide baseline data such as bathymetry, soil cores, detailed soil maps, and interpretive data. Results of the tour will be presented at the National Soil Survey Conference this spring.

Technical Soil Services: The Assistant State Soil Scientist will now be handling the technical soil services in place of Maggie Payne who conducted several on-site soil and geophysical investigations during the fall. These include wetland delineations for farm planning, soil test pits for structures, conducting soil training, and GIS/Geophysical investigations.

Notice to Hispanic and/or Women Farmers or Ranchers

Compensation for Claims of Discrimination

If you believe that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) improperly denied farm loan benefits to you between 1981 and 2000 because you are Hispanic, or because you are female, you may be eligible to apply for compensation.

This means you may be eligible if:

1. you sought a farm loan or farm-loan servicing during that period; and
2. the loan was denied, provided late, approved for a lesser amount than requested, or approved with restrictive conditions, or USDA failed to provide an appropriate loan service; and
3. you believe these actions were based on your being Hispanic, or your being female.

If you want to register your name to receive a claims packet, you can call the Farmer and Rancher Call Center at 1-888-508-4429 or access the following website:
www.farmerclaims.gov

In 2011, a claims administrator will begin mailing claims packages to those who have requested one through the Call Center or website. The claims package will have detailed information about the eligibility and claims process.

For guidance, you may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider in your community.

If you are currently represented by counsel regarding allegations of discrimination or in a lawsuit claiming discrimination, you should contact your counsel regarding this claims process.

USDA Cannot Provide Legal Advice to You.

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