

July-Sept 2013

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### *Message From R. Phou Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist*



During the July to September 2013 period, NRCS staff worked diligently to implementing conservation practices and award contracts for the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2013.

In 2013, the field staff successfully completed and certified 622 conservation practices worth well over \$1.7 million dollars. For FY 2013 in total, the field staff ranked and approved 134 contracts worth almost \$2.5 million dollars for conservation programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives

Program (122 contracts worth over \$2.3 million), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (3 contracts worth over \$121,000), and Agricultural Management Assistance (9 contracts worth over \$37,000).

Regarding outreach and communications, RI NRCS participated in a total of 11 events which included two open house workshops coordinated in cooperation with the RI Conservation Districts where farmers and forest landowners learned about financial and technical assistance available to implement conservation practices in Rhode Island. The open houses were held at the Mount Hope Farm's Farmers' Market in Bristol, RI and Hope Associates' Barn in Hope, RI. In addition, Rhode Island NRCS hosted the "Working Effectively With American Indians" workshop to provide spiritual, cultural, and intellectual awareness of American Indians in order for NRCS to effectively work, interact, and provide technical assistance to American Indians in the use and care of our natural resources. The workshop consisted of classroom training and field visits to the Narragansett Indian Reservation in Charlestown, RI and Pequot Museum in Mashantucket, CT.

Regarding staffing changes, three summer interns were hired under the Pathways Intern Program and Shane McNamara was hired as a Soil Conservationist Technician after completing his studies at the University of Connecticut. In addition, Shelby Pearson, a USDA 1890 Scholar Program participant, assisted the engineering staff during the summer months.

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R. PHOU VONGKHAMDY  
State Conservationist

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## Administration

by *Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist*

Personnel changes:

- Through the Pathways Intern Program, NRCS hired three summer interns including Ghyllian Conley, Zachery Fisher, and Tim Brosnan who assisted the conservation planning and public affairs staff to learn hands on experience providing technical assistance to farmers and forest land owners.
- Shane McNamara was hired as a Soil Conservationist Technician. He completed his studies in environmental science at the University of Connecticut and was a participant in the NRCS Pathways Intern Program,. Shelby Pearson, Student Engineer Trainee and participant in the USDA 1890 Scholars Program, assisted the engineering staff on conservation projects throughout the summer months before returning to Florida A & M University to continue her studies in engineering.

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## Conservation Districts Updates Including Programs and Easements Funding

by *Michael Kenyon, Easement Program Manager*

### **Protecting Farms Through Conservation Easements**

High land values pressure farmers to sell farm properties for residential, commercial, and industrial development in Rhode Island. 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 over \$17 million to work with conservation partners to preserve over 40 parcels on over 2,300 acres of rich farmland.

#### Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) in FY 2013

The program staff obligated a little under \$3 million to protect 225 acres of land on 4 parcels. All of the parcels were located within the Eastern Rhode Island Conservation District.

#### Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) in FY 2013

There have been no new enrollments in FY 2013 although the program staff is moving ahead to protect approximately 24 acres by the end of the calendar year. One parcel is 7.5 acres and the other is 16.5 acres worth a total of \$119,100 in easement payments.

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) in FY 2013

The program staff is working towards protecting slightly over 100 acres on three parcels worth \$272,000 in WRP easements and \$355,000 in WRP restoration projects.

Implementation of Conservation Practices and New Contract Obligations in FY 2013

In FY 2013, NRCS implemented several conservation practices which address resource concerns that positively impact water quality, create and protect wildlife, reduce invasive plant species, manage the health of forested areas, and protect wildlife habitat. The following section provides a breakdown on conservation practices implemented throughout each conservation district by program. In addition, the number of new FY 2013 contracts is highlighted by program for each conservation district.

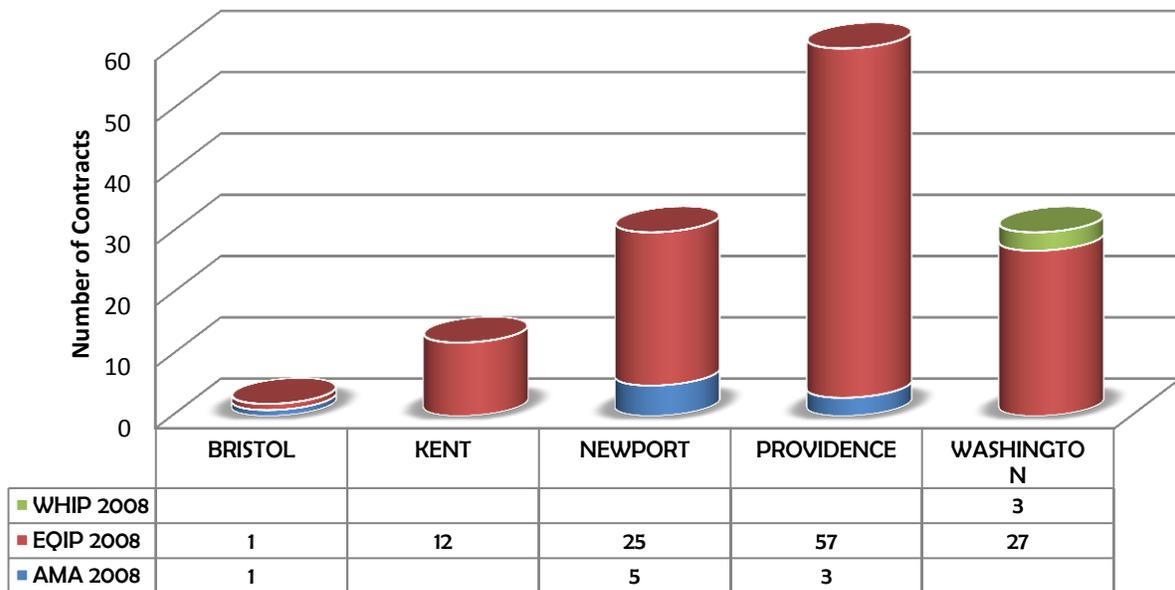
**FY 2013 Financial Assistance Program:**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Total Obligation</b>
AMA 2008	\$ 37,068.00
EQIP 2008	\$ 2,322,323.14
WHIP 2008	\$ 121,490.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 2,480,881.14</b>

**Total Contracts Obligated**

<b>AMA 2008</b>	<b>EQIP 2008</b>	<b>WHIP 2008</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>3</b>	

## FA FY 2013 Contracts Obligated by Program and County



### Conservation District - Eastern District (Bristol and Newport Counties)

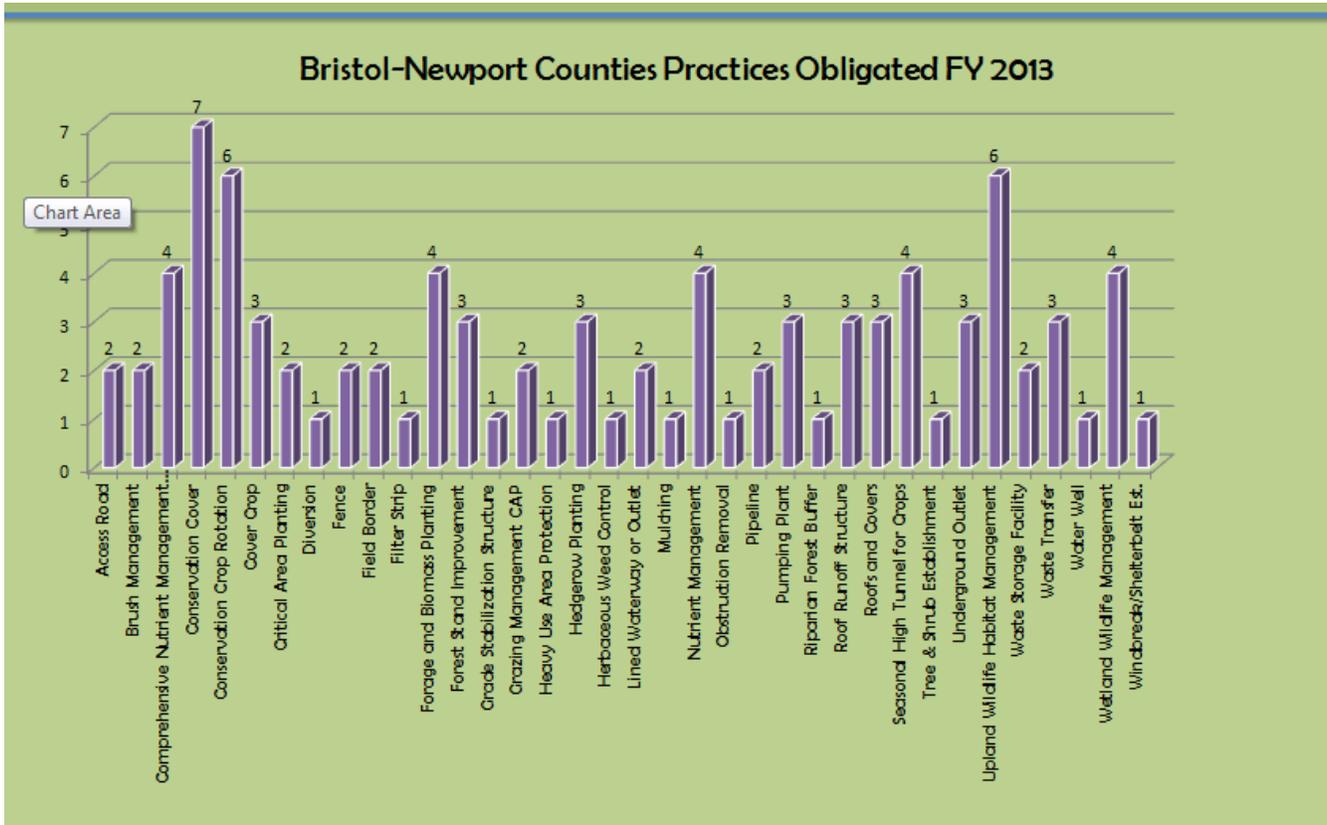
by Melissa Hayden, Eastern District Conservationist

Implementation on existing contracts in the Eastern District in 2013 included completion of a total of 35 Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) practices worth \$66,290, 90 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) practices worth \$389,199, 4 Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) practices worth \$3,756 and 2 Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA) practices worth \$9,600. These include implementation of brush management for invasive species control; fencing for prescribed grazing; pest management; high tunnels; restoration and management of declining habitats and two wells. Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, Forest Management Plans, and Nutrient Management Plans were also completed in the quarter.

For FY 2013, the Eastern District has completed conservation plans and funded 26 EQIP projects for a total of \$712,267. In addition, 6 AMA conservation plans were completed and funded for a total of \$19,738.

NRCS and the Eastern RI Conservation District provided outreach to landowners at the Mt. Hope Farmers' Market on September 7. We provided information and discussed programs and practices with several interested landowners, from long time farmers to backyard conservationists. Among the topics of interest were composting, high tunnels, pasture restoration, invasive plant control, and wildlife habitat.

We began a project at Long Pond in Little Compton which is Rhode Island’s largest Phragmites removal effort to date. The first phase of the project, which occurred in September, included an herbicide treatment of the approximately 50 acres of Phragmites on site. The hope is that, as the Phragmites dies back as a result of the treatments, native vegetation and wildlife will re-inhabit the area. The next step will be to mulch the dead stalks of Phragmites sometime this winter.



## Conservation District - Northern District (Providence County)

by Justin Tuthill, Northern District Conservationist

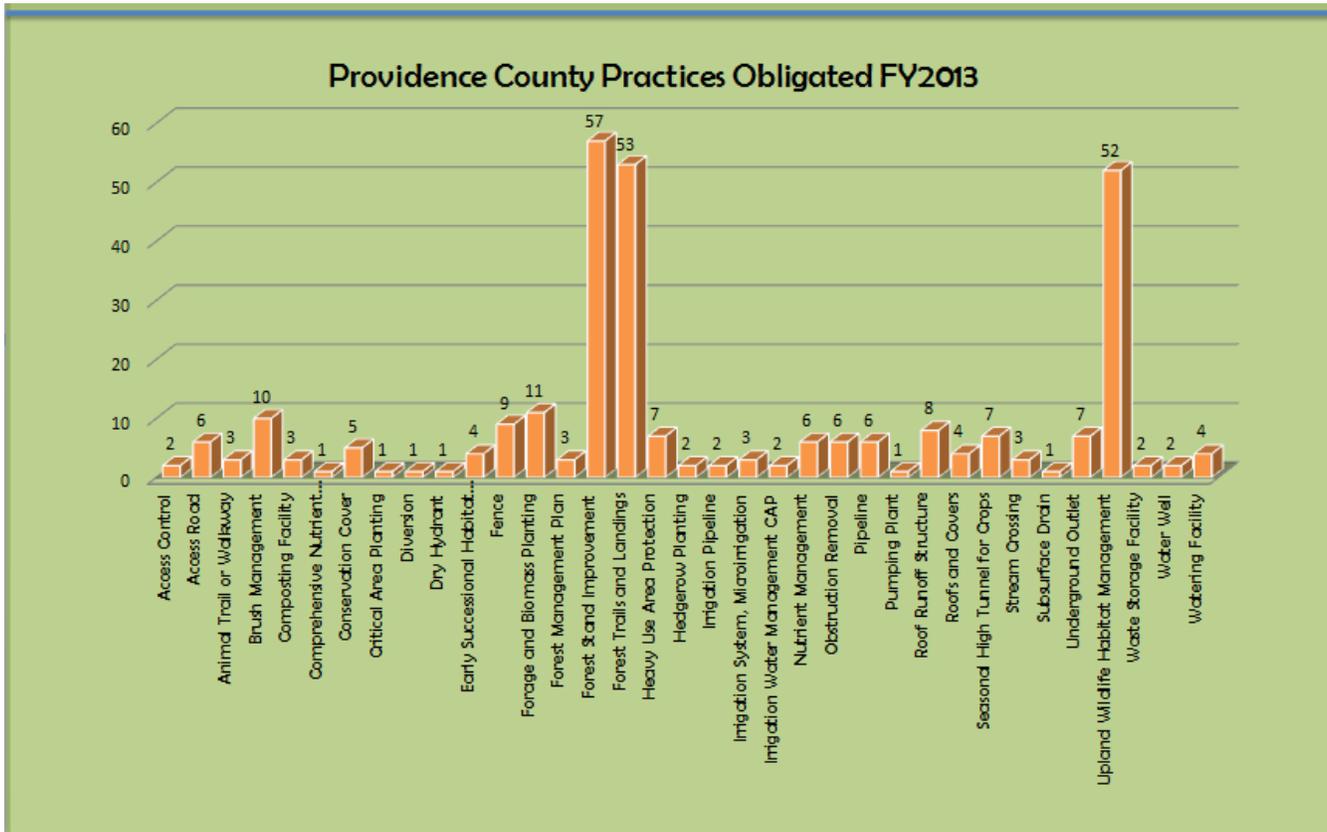
In 2013, NRCS Northern District has completed and certified 152 conservation practices totaling \$332,522 through EQIP. These practices include Forest Stand Improvement, Brush Management, and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans. In addition, there were 33 WHIP practices implemented worth \$77,823, 34 Conservation Security Program (CSP) practices implemented worth \$4,627, and 15 Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) practices implemented worth \$5,000.

For FY 2013 in total, the Northern District funded 57 EQIP contracts for a total of \$814,938 and 3 AMA contracts worth \$17,330.

The Northern District in cooperation with NRCS organized an open house style workshop in early September at the Hope Associates’ Barn to showcase NRCS programs to prospective applicants.

Several runoff management and livestock watering projects began construction in late summer in Providence County where most will be completed by early November.

Nina Bhattacharyya – Soil Conservationist in Providence County accepted the position of WRP specialist in Gainesville Florida. Nina provided excellent assistance to many producers in the Northern District and she will be missed.



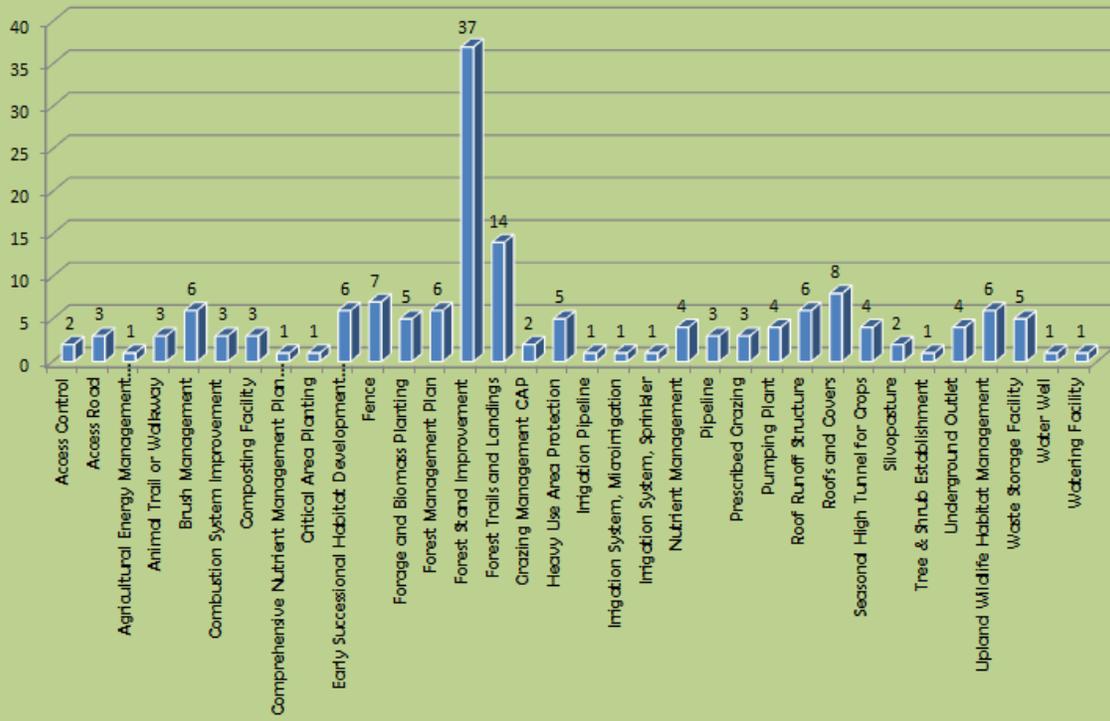
## Conservation District - Southern District (Kent and Washington Counties)

by John Richard, Southern District Conservationist

In 2013, NRCS Southern District completed and certified 196 conservation practices under EQIP totaling \$768,056. These practices include Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats, High Tunnels, Timber Stand Improvement, and Pasture Planting. There were 49 WHIP practices implemented worth \$98,288 and 12 Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) practices implemented worth \$5,719.

For FY 2013 in total, the SRICD completed conservation plans and funded 39 EQIP projects for a total of \$795,008 and 3 WHIP contracts worth \$121,490.

## Kent-Washington Counties Practices Obligated FY 2013



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## Local Conservation Highlight - Southern RI Conservation District - Narrow River Land Trust New England Cottontail Project

by Gary Casabona, State Biologist

NRCS is providing technical and financial assistance to the Narrow River Land Trust in North Kingstown for a 19 acre forest opening to benefit the New England cottontail rabbit and other species that rely on dense “scrub/shrub” or “young forest” habitat. The New England cottontail is our only native rabbit in Rhode Island. It is considered to be an “umbrella species” for young forest habitat – meaning that habitat management for the cottontail will also benefit a whole group of other species including woodcock, ruffed grouse, and numerous forest songbirds. Birds that breed in scrub/shrub habitats such as Chestnut-sided warbler, Yellow-breasted chat, and Brown thrasher will especially benefit from this project.



New England cottontail rabbit foraging in dense woody brush. (Photo taken by John Greene.)

New England cottontails need brush, shrubs, and densely growing young trees -- habitats described by the general term “young forest”. In the past, natural factors created plenty of young forest. Today, because we don't let wildfires burn unchecked or beaver dams flood and kill trees -- and because many people oppose clearcut logging, we no longer have enough of this habitat for New England cottontails and the dozens of other wild animals that need it.

In addition to the 19 acre forest opening, the Narrow River Land Trust will create numerous brush piles which are used as hiding cover by rabbits and other wildlife. Sufficient amounts of downed woody material will be left on the forest floor after the cut to function as habitat for reptiles and amphibians.

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## Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment

by *Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist*

During the July-September period, NRCS actively participated in a total of 11 outreach events. Such events included two general open house information workshops coordinated with the RI Conservation Districts. The events were targeted to the farming and forestry communities to learn about technical and financial assistance available for conservation efforts. The events were held at Mount Hope Farm's Farmers' Market in Bristol, RI and Hope Associates' Barn in Hope, RI.



Attendees at Young Farmer Night held at Scratch Farm in Cranston, RI, discuss opportunities and challenges of farming in RI.

The other events included Foster Old Home Days, the Washington County Fair, and Pardon Gray Day which attracted the general public who have an interest in agriculture and conservation issues. To target new and beginning farmers, NRCS and the Conservation Districts attended Young Farmers Nights in the three conservation districts which were all well attended. Other events targeted to farmers included the URI Twilight Growers Meeting and Good Earth Harvest Festival.

During the summer months, the three summer interns visited over 20 farmers markets located throughout the state where they distributed

NRCS information on the EQIP program with particular emphasis on funding available for high tunnels.

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## Outreach Training Workshop

by *Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist*

### Rhode Island NRCS Hosts “Working Effectively With American Indians” Workshop To Provide Spiritual, Cultural, and Intellectual Awareness of American Indians



Cassius Spears, RI NRCS Soil Conservationist and Narragansett Tribal Councilman explains American Indian customs to workshop attendees on a tour of the Pequot Museum in Mashantucket, CT.

WARWICK, RI (September 27, 2013) – The Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) hosted a workshop “Working Effectively with American Indians” on Monday, August 19, 2013 through Friday, August 23, 2013 in Warwick, RI. The objective of the workshop was to provide spiritual, cultural, and intellectual awareness of the American Indian in order for NRCS to

effectively work, interact, and provide technical assistance to American Indians in the use and care of our natural resources.



**Chief Sachem Matthew Thomas and speaker Elizabeth Hoover welcome workshop attendees at a luncheon and tour of the Narragansett Indian Reservation in Charlestown, RI.**

In order for USDA/NRCS employees to have a successful relationship with American Indians and Alaska Natives, this course provided attendees with an understanding of this land's history, the political complexities, government-to-government fiduciary responsibilities, and most importantly an understanding of the cultures and life from an American Indian and Alaska Native perspective. In addition, the course enhanced attendees' skills pertaining to NRCS and American Indian tribal policy and procedures.

The workshop was hosted by NRCS in conjunction with the Narragansett Indian Tribe. NRCS American Indian instructors taught the workshop and included Roylene Rides at the Door, State Conservationist Washington State; Tim Oakes, Conservation Program Analyst-Liaison; Nathaniel Todea, Civil Engineer; and Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen, Area Easement Specialist. In addition, classroom insight was provided from four Tribes including the Narragansett Indian Tribe, Penobscot Nation, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, and Oneida Indian Nation of New York. The Narragansett Indian Tribe guest speakers included Chief Sachem Matthew Thomas; Dawn Dove, Tribal Elder; Hiawatha Brown, Tribal Elder; Doug Harris Assistant Director of Historic Preservation, Randy Noka, Ambassador and Councilman; Dinalyn Spears, Director of Planning and Natural Resources, and Cassius Spears, Councilman. Additional guest speakers included James Sappier, Tribal Historian and former Chief of the Penobscot Nation; Loretta Metoxen, Tribal Historian of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin; Brian Patterson, President of United South and Eastern Tribes (USET); Elizabeth Hoover, Assistant Professor of American Studies at Brown University; and Endawnis Spears, Cultural Anthropologist.



**James Sappier, Tribal Historian and former Chief of the Penobscot Tribe speaks to the workshop attendees.**

The workshop also included a field trip to provide hands on interactive training and educational insight. Attendees visited the Pequot Museum in Mashantucket, CT where Cassius Spears, NRCS Soil Conservationist and Narragansett Tribal representative, provided a tour and explained historical facets of American Indian culture. Additionally, attendees visited the Narragansett Indian reservation for a luncheon of traditional Narragansett foods and tour of the reservation. Chief

Sachem Matthew Thomas of the Narragansett Indian Tribe welcomed attendees at the luncheon which was followed by a tour of Long House and a visit to the grounds surrounding the Narragansett Indian Church. Attendees learned about the history of the Narragansett Tribe and participated in a tribal round dance led by Cassius Spears.



Cassius Spears leads the participants in a tribal round dance held in the Long House at the Narragansett reservation.

The training was effective and successful to provide attendees an understanding of the trust responsibility of USDA employees in working with American Indians and Indian Nations. In addition, attendees gain a better understanding of basics Indian laws and treaties and how they impact relationships policies, and activities. This was supplemented by gaining an understanding of American Indian culture, history, and traditions in order to work more effectively with American Indians. Ultimately, attendees were able to recognize the government-to-government relationship between NRCS and Indian Nations along with the appropriate protocol and procedures that govern and guide NRCS to effectively work, interact, and provide technical assistance to American Indians in the use and care of our natural resources.



The workshop included representatives from several Tribes and NRCS staff from nine states throughout the nation.

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## Soils Program

by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist

### **New version of the RI Soil Survey completed:**

Coming this fall there will be a new version of the RI Soil Survey which will contain many improvements in the spatial and tabular data. Changes include completing the entire coastal soils (beaches, dunes, and marshes) for all of RI and several coastal ponds as part of the on-going Coastal Zone Soil Survey. All of the major rivers have been edited to match the hydrology (a spatial shift caused the water boundary not to match up), numerous errors have been fixed, and thanks to the recent state-wide Lidar elevation products numerous improvements to wetland soils were made. The 30 plus year old RI soil survey is currently undergoing these yearly edits to modernize the survey to today's standards. Once the new data have been posted on the official USDA Web site, a version will be created for the RIGIS data with the full attribute data found in the RIGIS soils data.

### **RI and CT NRCS assist the Providence Police:**



**Jim Turenne, Asst. State Soil Scientist, and Deborah Surabian, State Soil Scientist, speak with Sandra Kittell of the Bureau of Criminal Identification. They used ground penetrating radar to scan the ground for anomalies such as other possible bodies or evidence. (Photo Sandor Bodo of the Providence Journal.)**

The URI crime lab contacted the RI Assistant State Soil Scientist to see if the ground-penetrating radar (GPR) unit could be used to help out with an investigation that was underway by the Providence Police. GPR provides high resolution images of subsurface features and is frequently used to help locate human remains in soil and under concrete. With the help of the State Soil Scientist located in the Tolland CT office, the two soil scientists profiled the basement of a building to determine if additional information could be collected for the investigation.

The work was featured in the Providence Journal newspaper.

Link: <http://www.providencejournal.com/breaking-news/content/20130807-forensic-analysis-unearths-clues-to-skeleton-found-buried-at-former-providence-mill.ece?ssimg=1135651#ssStory1135653>