

MASSACHUSETTS STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

USDA-NRCS

Minutes

Wednesday, May 25, 2011

Doyle Conservation Center

Leominster, MA 01453

Present: Christine S. Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist; Barbara Miller, NRCS State Resource Conservationist, Deborah Johnson, NRCS Asst. State Resource Conservationist; Diane Petit, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, Carol Rickless, NRCS Secretary; Dick Starkey, Greenfield Conservation Commission; John Devine, USDA-FSA; Heather Baylis, USDA-FSA, Don Lewis; MA Conservation Districts (MACD); Jane Peirce, MA Dept. of Env. Protection; Maryjo Feuerbach, EPA; Kira Jacobs, EPA; John O'Leary, MA F&W; Jeff LaFleur, CCCGA; Cris Coffin, American Farmland Trust; Sam Johnston, Terraclime Geothermal; 16 in attendance. This meeting was recorded.

Welcome & Opening Remarks

The meeting began at 9:00 am with opening remarks from Christine Clarke, State Conservationist. Christine asked the committee members to introduce themselves.

Chris asked STC members for last minute additions to the agenda. WRP discussion was added. She invited questions and comments from the committee members

December 2010 State Technical Committee Action Items Review:

Chris gave a summary of steps taken by NRCS to complete action items from the December meeting.

Action: Five subgroups will be established under the State Technical Committee.

Five Subcommittee Subgroups

Data and data sharing – Aaron Dushku – aaron.dushku@ma.usda.gov

Programs – Deb Johnson – deb.johnson@ma.usda.gov

Forestry – Kate Parsons – kate.parsons@ma.usda.gov

Target species and pollinator – Beth Schreier – beth.schreier@ma.usda.gov

Outreach – Diane Petit – diane.petit@ma.usda.gov

Outcome: In process: Chris explained that the subcommittees were created to discuss each subcommittee's specific focus in depth. The Data and Outreach subcommittees have been organized and are currently communicating. The Programs, Forestry and Target Species and Pollinator subcommittees have not met at this point. Christine added that any STC member may participate on the subcommittees.

1. Action: If STC members want NRCS to fund a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) next year; the CIG must fund one of the categories or themes set forth by NHQ. What area of focus or theme does the STC think would best utilize CIG funds?
Outcome: No input regarding CIG since the meeting in December 2010. To clarify what CIG is Barbara explained Conservation Innovation Grant is a vehicle which funds innovation in new technology – CIG is both a national and state grant. Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is a voluntary program intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. The link for CIG is: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>
2. Action: STC members to generate ideas on how NRCS can encourage landowners to utilize Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) funds in the western part of the state.
Outcome: In process and continuing. Chris invited STC members to email or call her with ideas.
3. Action: Add State Tech Committee members to eBlast distribution list.
Outcome: Complete.
4. Action: Tim Smith of Apex Orchards asked why some contracts are not being implemented in Worcester County. Walter Albarran will contact Tim with Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) implemented rates statewide and answer his questions.
Outcome: Complete.
5. Action: Chris stated that she wants a meeting scheduled on a regular basis (physically or by phone) with MA DEP's Jane Peirce and a Conservation District representative. District Conservationists will help encourage the conservation districts to attend.
Outcome: In process and continuing.
6. Action: Barb requested statewide resource assessments by the agencies who attend the state tech committee meetings. She would like to discuss Massachusetts resource needs from STC members point of view at the next STC meeting.
Outcome: In process and continuing. To be discussed later in the meeting.
7. Action: Create a subcommittee to meet to discuss water quality issues.
Outcome: The water quality issues will be addressed by the Programs subcommittee.
8. Action: Christine and Jane Peirce suggested that they meet after 6 months for a status check to see if their meetings are reaching their objectives.
Outcome: In process and continuing.
9. Action: Christine will share Conservation Effects Assessment Project or CEAP national contact information with EPA.
Outcome: Completed – info shared with EPA.

A short question and answer with discussion regarding Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) occurred. John O'Leary of MA Div. of Fish & Wildlife, Mary Jo Feuerbach and Kira Jacobs of

EPA and Chris discussed CEAP. Chris explained the timeline for CEAP data to be released has been delayed possibly due to peer review. CEAP data helps the agency define the value of conservation practice implementation across the US. The data can help government agencies prioritize their resources so funding can aid target areas. In summary, the CEAP data shows there is value in conservation practices.

Action: Share the latest schedule of CEAP reports for the nation and national contact information with interested STC members. Web link for CEAP:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/ceap/>. Action completed by Christine Clarke, June 2011.

Kira Jacobs of EPA shared teleconference info relating to Chesapeake Bay CEAP data and invited STC members to listen in to learn more.

Cris Coffin of American Farmland Trust had a question about the 2011 Conservation Stewardship Program funding in the December minutes. Barbara explained that CSP is a hard sell. NRCS has only 5 or 6 contracts currently, a total of approximately \$20K.

Action: Christine asked the STC members for ideas on how NRCS can improve the participation of landowners of CSP in the state.

No further comments were added regarding the December 2010 minutes.

Christine commented on the US Budget cuts and their effect on NRCS. The Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Program has been cancelled due to FY2011 budget cuts by Congress. She discussed how the closures affected the RC&D Program Coordinators. They have been assigned to support the delivery of Farm Bill Programs in the state. RC&D may be revived if funded again in future. All three RC&D councils have decided to stay active and are still working on projects they had planned.

Other impacted projects include Watershed Operations. The funding for these projects has been reduced significantly. The Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project (CCWRRP) is funded under American Recovery Reinvestment Act (ARRA) this year but it is unlikely that future funding will be obligated for CCWRRP. Out of a total of 76 projects only 29 will be funded. NRCS is working to maximize the budget allotted.

NRCS has utilized all regional equity allotted to Massachusetts programs. Christine thanked Barb Miller and her staff in Programs and the District Conservationists for their part in allocating regional equity.

Christine brought up a Civil Rights Review of USDA. USDA has recently reached settlements of suits claiming historical mistreatment of Blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics and woman farmers and is taking steps to rectify the situation. The report's recommendation for NRCS is to increase the diversity of the state technical committee by paralleling the demographic of Massachusetts and enhance outreach capability. Chris asked the STC for assistance in increasing diversity in the committee. She added the

conundrum is that the agricultural demographics of the state do not parallel the population demographic of the state.

Action: STC members assist in increasing diversity within the State Tech Committee.

Farm Bill Funding – Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

Funding Accounts EQIP General FA	Land Use Target	Total Allocation \$6,380,505	Number of Contracts		
			No.	%	
Air Quality & Energy		\$751,639	11.78%	13	5.9%
CAP - Energy Management		\$42,107	0.66%	19	8.6%
Cropland	36%	\$1,567,876	24.57%	40	18.1%
Cropland - HT Pilot		\$229,021	3.59%	24	10.9%
HU - *Beginning Farmer		\$823,241	12.90%	29	13.1%
HU - *Socially Disadvantaged		\$32,496	0.51%	1	0.5%
HU - Limited Resource		\$233,320	3.66%	10	4.5%
Farmstead	13%	\$991,036	15.53%	10	4.5%
Farmstead-Milkhouse Waste		\$111,594	1.75%	2	0.9%
Pasture & Hayland	9%	\$644,814	10.11%	18	8.1%
Forestland	41%	\$914,253	14.33%	34	15.4%
CAP-Forest Management				21	9.5%
Reserve		\$1,464			
Sub Totals	99.0%	\$6,342,861	99.39%	221	100.0%
<i>Balance</i>		<i>\$9,073</i>			
EQIP - Organic Initiative (OI)		Total Allocation = \$269,735		No.	%
Organic - Certified		\$92,146	34.16%	11	79%
Organic - Transition		\$27,716	10.28%	3	21%
Total		\$119,862	44.44%	14	
<i>Balance</i>		<i>\$149,873</i>			
Grand Totals (EQIP 2011)		\$6,491,294			

Barbara Miller presented a Power Point slide on EQIP Farm Bill funding in Massachusetts and gave a brief explanation of the figures. Barbara elaborated on Conservation Activity Plan (CAP), funding pools and ranking applications. She added some funding accounts are a hybrid of land use basis and resource concern basis which makes it challenging to figure out which fund pool to use. NRCS must separate the money out to all groups equitably. Total funded amount at present is approx \$6.3M including regional equity out of a total of \$11M in applications.

Barbara also talked about the EQIP Organic Initiative. Organic application numbers are lower in 2011 for a total of \$119K in applications. Some of MA organic producers have hit the funding ceiling of \$80K which may be a reason why there are fewer applications this year.

Cris Coffin asked Barb to clarify the Farmstead vs. Farmstead-Milkhouse Waste categories. Barb explained that Farmstead-Milkhouse waste is a pilot NRCS has with DEP to work on developing standards to modify groundwater regulations. It is a separate pot of money for projects to collect data for DAR and DEP. Farmstead funds are for manure storage, barnyard, heavy use areas and runoff control.

Farm Bill Funding – Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

Funding Accounts	Total Allocation	Number of Contracts		
		No.	%	
WHIP General FA	\$897,622			
Aquatic	\$56,289	11.78%	6	19.0%
Essential Habitat Agreements	\$37,776	0.66%	1	3.0%
NE/NY Forestry Initiative	\$696,593	24.57%	25	78.0%
Sub Totals	\$6,342,861	99.39%	32	100.0%
<i>Balance</i>	<i>\$9,073</i>			
	\$790,658			

Cris Coffin also asked about CAP Forest Management under EQIP. Barb explained CAP funding is only for plans and Forestland funds are for implementation. Jeff LaFleur asked about the numbers in forestland applications this year. Barb said there is approximately a 300% increase in forest land applications. She added that \$1 million in EQIP went to forestry.

Barb explained there was extra money through WHIP to fund forestry for the NE/NY Forestry Initiative (\$700K). There are applications pending that didn't get funded. More than 65% of Massachusetts is forested (private land ownership).

Cris Coffin asked, "What is the most common practice for EQIP beginning farmers?" Deb Johnson answered that the practices are mostly cropland based - vegetables, cranberries, and orchards. Barb

added that there is a national mandate through Farm Bill to use 5% of the funds on beginning farmers and 5% on socially disadvantaged farmers. Massachusetts has lots of applications from beginning farmers due to the policy of accepting applicants who have not farmed more than 10 years, so it is not hard to meet the 5% threshold.

Jeff Lafleur asked for an update about NRCS national mandates. Barb answered that in FY2011 there were 24 high tunnels. Numbers were lower than in FY2010. A new mandate is increasing livestock related applications under EQIP. The national benchmark for livestock operations is 60%. MA never hit the 60% mark due to size of the state. Larger states report 90% livestock, so percentages average out for smaller states like MA. NHQ mandated that MA must report on livestock percentages and wanted an increase from the previous year. . In FY2010 – MA reported 30% and in 2011 – 32%.

NRCS has allocated most of its WHIP (\$700K) money. A small amount is left that is not yet obligated. NRCS has asked for another \$300K in WHIP. Some WHIP money went to fund essential habitat NE Cottontail projects – this FY no separate amount was allocated for NE Cottontail under WHIP.

Christine Clarke explained what the NE/NY Forestry Initiative is about. It is a multi-state plan to enhance collaboration to focus on forestry in New England. WHIP funding is helping to support this initiative.

Barbara gave additional information about other NRCS programs funding:

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) - \$33K funded but there was \$300K in applications in 2011. Less money allocated to AMA this year. NRCS put in a request for more AMA funds in case more money is released.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) - \$100K received to fund grazing land restoration projects. There are no easements in MA only rental restoration properties, NRCS works with FSA to monitor the rental restoration properties.

Farm & Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) - \$5.5M allocated in FY11. NRCS has requested additional FRPP money. Barb mentioned that this year was the first year NRCS received an application from someone other than the Massachusetts Dept. of Agricultural Resources (DAR) for Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program (APR).

Mary Jo Feuerbach asked about funding land use concerns over resource concerns. Has this policy impacted the states resource concerns? Barb answered generally, no, though it has created more categories for NRCS staff to rank.

John O'Leary asked for clarification on the land use categories. Deb Johnson responded the slide on the EQIP funding shows the categories. Cropland, farmstead, pasture, hay land, and forestland are primary land uses. Ranking questions in each category get at core concerns and then statistical analysis is used to get top ranking applications.

Cris Coffin asked how are funding targets set for land use. Deb answered NRCS pulls land use data for statewide analysis of private lands to set funding targets. MA is a small state and we have to justify

statewide funding vs. county based funding. Massachusetts NRCS has presented a methodology to NHQ to ask for dispensation to use the statewide funding method.

John O'Leary asked how water quality relates to the target of land use? Is the funding actually being used for the objective of improving water quality? Barb explained that there are five national priorities and water quality is the first one. She added the question John asked is why we have been asked to collaborate on a state resource assessment.

Jeff LaFleur asked about who decides funding in each category. Barb answered NRCS ranking is a process using statistical analysis – standard deviations above the mean. NRCS strives to use measurable, not subjective, criteria to make funding decisions. The process must be defensible to NHQ.

Jane Peirce questioned whether forest projects are as competitive in the ranking process? Barb answered that they are not, due to the fact that forest practices do not have the same direct impact on resource concerns that practices on cropland do. The ranking for all land use categories have a National set of questions that do not necessarily fit as well with forestry as they do with other land uses. But, forestry does have its own fund pool, so these applications are ranked against other similar ones. Mary Jo Feuerbach asked if there is flexibility in prioritizing areas for funding. Barb answered there is a mechanism to prioritize. Deb added that the funding pools are limited by who is applying which makes it a self selecting process.

State Resource Assessment (SRA)

Barb distributed a paper showing information on the State Resource Assessment. There is a June 1, 2011 deadline to submit the SRA to NHQ. She explained each resource concern is mandated by NHQ and there are a number of questions we need to answer. Should we be targeting our resources to specific areas? Are we getting the work done? What acres need treatment? What are the priority areas for each specific resource concern and land use? . We are using GIS data to research and determine our priorities.

NRCS is asking for input from local conservation districts and from NRCS partners (STC members) to help gather data for the State Resource Assessment. Chris explained this assessment is a first step and is a work in progress. It needs more refinement and may take some time to complete. She added that the data from the assessment is slated to be used to create more fair and efficient models to help put the funding where it is needed. This data may enlighten legislators when budgeting dollars for future Farm Bill Programs. In the future, the data gathered from SRA can also be shared with other agencies.

Jeff LaFleur asked about the regional equity provisions and NHQ's reticence toward offering this money to Massachusetts. Could there be an underlying agenda to get rid of regional equity? Chris answered she does not believe the intent of NHQ in doing the SRA is to remove regional equity.

Kira Jacobs commented on EPA's prioritization of funding of joint conservation activity plan applications across state lines (New Hampshire) for the Salmon Falls Watershed. Barbara added that for

NRCS to help target specific areas needing funding extra ranking points can be given to applications coming from within the target areas.

Action: Email STC members a copy of the Massachusetts State Resource Assessment and the documentation of GIS data from Aaron Dushku.

Chris Coffin mentioned she fears that the SRA will not capture the social/human side of issues that are creating loss of habitat/farmland/forestland.

Christine Clarke added that her vision would be the creation of a statewide map consistent across state boundaries targeting priority areas and to define state, federal and local programs that would preserve/enhance the quality of land in those areas. The map would include data on how to access these programs and funds allocated to these programs.

John O'Leary of MA Div. of Fish and Wildlife brought up the Bio-Map GIS project which is an aid to sustain wildlife populations in the state. He suggested that the Bio-Map could be a base map with NRCS SRA GIS data as an overlay. He also suggested the Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) to fund a methodology to create a GIS map which would collaboratively share federal, state and local agencies/organizations data layers.

Barb and Deb both agreed that there have been many projects funded through CIG that do not fit the specific categories and criteria for CIG. They will look into CIG to see if the idea is viable.

Christine added that Conservation Districts local work groups should be able to assist NRCS with the SRA. She stated that Chapter 21 of MA General Law maintains that the Conservation Districts must create a comprehensive resource assessment for the state of MA. The CD SRA would be given to NRCS to use as a guide to direct NRCS resources to achieve conservation goals in Massachusetts. Up to now, the Conservation Districts have never completed an SRA. The fact that a SRA by the MA Conservation Districts are mandated by law may help our position if and when we apply for CIG funding for the collaborative GIS data layer project.

Mary Jo of EPA added that other types of data could be added as well. These include science, social indicators and identifying areas primed for recovery. Barb and Chris mentioned additional sources of data such as the forestry resource assessment, information from MA Audubon and American Farmland Trust.

In summation, Massachusetts NRCS plans on using the information generated from the research and data generated from the State Resource Assessment to better reach the goals of conservation in this state.

Action: Notify the STC with follow up information on the viability of CIG funding for a project to create a methodology for a GIS map which would collaboratively share federal, state and local agencies/organizations data layers.

Landscape & Programmatic Initiatives

Types of NRCS Conservation Initiatives

- Landscape Initiatives
 - Water Quality-based (Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds)
 - Species-based (Sage Grouse)
 - Ecosystem-based (Longleaf Pine)
- Programmatic Initiatives
 - Statutory (Organic)
 - NRCS Special (Spill Prevention, Control, Countermeasure)



Barb explained the purpose of the NHQ landscape initiatives. The initiatives are to stimulate interest in specific objectives, such as water quality in watershed areas, and to focus on larger geographic regions targeting ecosystem/species preservation. The initiatives are not bound by state lines, rather they are multi-state collaborations. Additional resources from partners can be utilized to expand capacity and promote greater conservation implementation. NRCS has dedicated funding for the initiatives to help accelerate progress. Finally the monitoring, evaluating and modeling the new data will help NRCS determine the outcomes of the initiatives.

New England/New York Forestry Initiative

New England/New York Forestry Initiative

- Covering over 52 million acres, the forests of New England and New York make up the largest contiguous temperate forest in the country
- Forests are vital to the rural economies
- These forests are under continual threat from habitat fragmentation, invasive species, soil erosion and water quality concerns



The New England/New York Forestry Initiative is a collaboration of seven states to protect forest land including private lands. The initiative includes the state of Massachusetts as part of the region. This initiative has been funded through WHIP in previous years but in FY2012 the EQIP program may also offer funding of over \$1M. Leadership at the national level is looking at funding the initiative through multiple programs like EQIP and WHIP.

New England/New York Forestry Initiative

- **Geographic area:** Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont
- **Objective:** Protect the region's forest land and ensure its sustainability
- **Conservation practices:** Forest Stand Improvement and Tree and Shrub Establishment



In the short term NRCS NHQ has agreed to fund Technical Assistance or TA dollars of \$140K for an agreement with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for assistance with forestry projects. Quantifiable results are being looked at on the NHQ level to continue funding for the initiative.

The NE/NY regions state foresters were asked to determine geographic target areas in need of funding – they created a report for each of these areas. The outcome was they identified two geographic areas in Massachusetts. One is *Quabbin-to-Cardigan (Q2C)*; <http://q2cpartnership.org/>. The two-state (New Hampshire-Massachusetts) Quabbin-to-Cardigan region spans one hundred miles from the Quabbin Reservoir northward to Mount Cardigan and the White Mountain National Forest. Encompassing approximately two million acres, the region is one of the largest remaining areas of intact, ecologically-important forest left in New England. The second is the Conte Wildlife Refuge, encompassing the Connecticut River Valley. A valuable resource for forest assessment which was mandated by the Farm Bill is an *Assessment of Forest Resources*; the report is through MA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation website

http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/forestry/docs/Assessment_of_Forest_Resources.pdf

NRCS is looking at these reports and will reassess targets for forest protection and focus funding on these areas in the future.

Subcommittee Reports

Outreach Subcommittee: Diane Petit, Chair of the Outreach Subcommittee, reported on the progress and outcome of their teleconference. She distributed the subcommittee meeting notes and an informational materials packet. Outreach subcommittee members are Marianne Piche, MA Wildlife, Nancy Garrabrantz, Director, UMass Extension, Richard Starkey, Greenfield Conservation Commission, and Ruthie Davis, Program Specialist, NRCS. The outreach subcommittee finalized its charter. Its focus will be reviewing NRCS informational materials and communication plans to ensure clarity, readability and thoroughness of the information/publications. They will be discussing ways to help the public (landowners) better understand their own responsibilities when applying for NRCS programs, demystify the ranking process and enhance outreach methods to show landowners what NRCS programs can do for them. The group is also working on collaborative outreach. The subcommittee will meet twice a year prior to the State Technical Committee Meeting.

John O’Leary suggested another goal for the outreach subcommittee: to increase diversity in the State Tech Committee membership as well as increasing NRCS program applicant’s diversity. Christine advised a gap analysis to target what actions are needed regarding the lack of diversity issue. She recommended the subcommittee review the questions “what is NRCS doing or not doing to gain the attention of diverse groups?” What have we done to date? And, what can we do in the future?” She suggested the outreach subcommittee report to the STC their findings.

Action: Outreach subcommittee – perform gap analysis regarding lack of diversity in the State Tech Committee membership.

Dick Starkey added that it can be difficult to get the word out about NRCS Programs and Initiatives. As an NRCS Earth Team volunteer in Greenfield he is working to target those groups who may not know about how NRCS programs can fit into their mission. He is meeting with loggers, water department staff, birding groups and those individuals who are interested in land/forest/water conservation on some level. He added that these groups often ask why NRCS field staff do not do outreach themselves – why is a volunteer doing outreach? He told the STC that his answer is that staff are busy trying to keep up with the day to day work of conservation which leaves little time for outreach. He said that NRCS publications are good at explaining and showcasing NRCS Programs. Additional publications relating to conservation, but non-NRCS generated, such as those on invasive species, “*Mistaken Identity*” is also well received by the groups.

Data & Data Sharing Subcommittee: Mary Jo Feuerbach, EPA reported for Chair, Aaron Dushku. Maryjo listed the members of the data subcommittee as Dave Szczebak MA Dept. of F&W, Dake Henderson, MA DAR; Marianne Piche, Dept. of F&W/Heritage, Aaron Dushku- Chair, NRCS and herself. The committee discussed how partner agencies programs can better use the data that NRCS collects. A proposal was to have applicants provide better locational data on the forms. This would give NRCS better ability to compile and analyze data. The committee also talked about the types of data NRCS gets and privacy restrictions. An extensive list of data fields will be sent to committee members

to decide what data is most relevant and how best to share the data given the privacy restrictions. The members conferred about NRCS partner agencies wish to maintain privacy when the data is shared. A suggestion was made about creating an MOU relating to privacy restrictions when data sharing. A draft of the privacy MOU will be created.

Action: Aaron to send a list of data fields to data subcommittee members to determine what data is most relevant and how best to share the data given the privacy restrictions.

Action: Data subcommittee - create a draft of the privacy MOU.

The Programs subcommittee, Forestry subcommittee, and Target Species and Pollinator subcommittees are in the process of forming. No reports were given for these subcommittees.

Local Working Groups (LWG) Subcommittee – Don Lewis, Massachusetts Conservation Districts (MACD) gave a brief report. He explained the 14 Conservation Districts (CD) in MA are autonomous, grassroots organizations that are not funded. NRCS is working with MACD to fund an initiative to create model local working groups throughout Massachusetts. The four model working groups are Berkshire County CD, Middlesex County CD, Plymouth County CD and Worcester County CD. In addition, MACD funded the Bristol County CD working group. Cape Cod CD has also been added as a local working group but not funded. Bristol CD and Plymouth CD are jointly meeting and collaborating. Six out of 14 CD's are active local working groups. Don said his two most important duties are to maintain enthusiasm and manage expectations. The Local Working Groups are setting up infrastructure, hiring staff, and holding district-wide meetings. They are inviting new people to attend the meetings and speak out. There is excitement that there is a platform for people to voice their environmental concerns at the local level. The Local Work Groups are in the process of working on needs and resource assessments for each district which ultimately will be sent to NRCS and its partners.

Action: Invite State Tech Committee members to the Local Working Group meetings. Don will notify NRCS when LWG meetings are scheduled.

Mary Jo Feuerbach of EPA asked about how to become a member of a Conservation District. Dick Starkey answered you can attend the annual board meeting and be elected to the board. Don Lewis added that the Local Working Groups invite all the landowners in the district to the meetings. Attendees could be representatives of towns, cities, organizations, or individual land owners.

Jeff LaFleur stated that anyone interested in conservation in their district should attend one of the Local Working Group meetings. He said that it helps the private individual to understand Federal policy and rules/laws governing conservation measures and makes the individual realize that the process to create change can't be completed all at once.

Dick Starkey mentioned many landowners are uninformed regarding the Farm Bill. He says that there are complaints from the public about how funding is being appropriated and spent. He added the LWG is a great opportunity to learn and voice concerns or ideas that will get back to legislators.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

Barb Miller stated that in FY11 NRCS has seen a substantial increase in applications for WRP from SE Massachusetts cranberry producers. The perception seems to be that WRP is a cranberry buy-out program. Landowners want to take their bogs out of production. New challenges are appearing in how to approach the growers, handle the ranking issue and the increased workload caused by the numerous WRP applications while reassessing these sites as a priority area.

Comments from State Tech Committee members and visitors:

Sam Johnston an Alternative Energy Program Manager with Terraclime Geothermal said he came to the meeting to represent the company and also to satisfy his own curiosity. He stated he was impressed with the scope and depth of topics the State Tech Committee covers. He gave a brief explanation about Terraclime Geothermal. The company is an engineering group with the Division of Environmental Compliance Services – there are 200 engineers on the east coast. Mr. Johnston has a family farm in Northfield, MA where he installed a geothermal system three years ago to lessen his use of Number 2 fuel oil to heat his circa 1798 colonial wood frame house. After installing the geothermal system he went from using 1800 gallons a year to 0 gallons which is a six to one reduction in cost. To demonstrate geothermal power he used refrigeration as an analogy. The black coils in the rear of the refrigerator is an example of how geothermal works. He discussed his interest in the various technologies that are in the planning stages that can generate energy (electricity/heating/cooling). Sam is researching the use of other alternative energy sources such as coal and bio-char to drive generators, steam for windmills and ceramic batteries (size of a home freezer) that can store 1000 kwh of power. He claimed that he is at the meeting to make the committee aware that the geothermal process is viable and that using this process can reduce dependence of fossil fuels resulting in less pollution. He mentioned the Bascom Dairy Farm in VT that is currently using 65,000 gallons a year of oil. The Terraclime Geothermal Company is working with the farm on heating/cooling. The goal is to reduce consumption of fossil fuel by using alternative energy sources. He is interested in publishing the research he is doing on alternative energy sources and is looking for guidance from STC agencies.

Action: Chris suggested that NRCS staff, Sam Johnston and other Terraclime Geothermal staff make a plan to meet to discuss how our agency and other agencies in the STC can open a dialogue.

Kira Jacobs commented that EPA and MA DEP held a Geothermal Policy Summit in March. She said there was much interest by industry in the newly formed New England Ground Source Heat Pump Association. The summit was held in partnership with NE Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission based in Lowell. An issue the summit focused on is regulation of ground water contamination issues associated with Geothermal in NE. She added that she could give contact information from the Geothermal Policy Summit to Sam.

John O’Leary asked if there is any guidance from USDA on climate change. He mentioned a vulnerability assessment based on climate change projections. John asked if the committee could set aside time to discuss the climate change issue and how it could affect the kind of work our agency is doing to conserve the environment. He also suggested that CIG may be a vehicle to create a planning tool for climate change projections.

Kira Jacobs added she will share the URL for EPA's *Conserving Habitat* with interested STC members.

Don Lewis, MACD Executive Director stated that the Conservation Districts NE Regional Conference will be held from August 7 to 9, 2011 in Plymouth, MA. Don asked STC members to contact him for topics to add to the agenda. His email address is: don_lewis@post.harvard.edu

Proposed Actions:

1. STC members to generate ideas on how NRCS can encourage landowners to utilize Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) funds in the western part of the state.
 2. Meeting with Mass. DEP to be scheduled on a regular basis (physically or by phone) with MA DEP's Jane Peirce or other representative and a Conservation District representative. District Conservationists will help encourage the conservation districts to attend.
 3. Statewide resource assessments by agencies who attend the state tech committee meetings are requested by NRCS. NRCS would like to discuss Massachusetts resource needs from STC members point of view at the next STC meeting.
 4. Share the latest schedule of CEAP reports for the nation and national contact information with interested STC members. Web link for CEAP: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/ceap/> .
Action completed by Christine Clarke, June 2011.
 5. STC members input needed on how NRCS can improve the participation of landowners of CSP in the state.
 6. STC members assist in increasing diversity within the State Tech Committee.
 7. Notify the STC with follow up information on the viability of CIG funding for a project to create a methodology for a GIS map which would collaboratively share federal, state and local agencies/organizations data layers.
 8. **Data subcommittee** - create a draft of the privacy MOU. Aaron Dushku to send a list of data fields to data subcommittee members to determine what data is most relevant and how best to share the data given the privacy restrictions.
 9. Email STC members a copy of the Massachusetts State Resource Assessment and the documentation of GIS data from Aaron Dushku.
 10. Invite State Tech Committee members to the Local Working Group meetings. Don will notify NRCS when LWG meetings are scheduled.
 11. NRCS staff, Sam Johnston and other Terraclime Geothermal staff make a plan to meet to discuss how our agency and other agencies in the STC can open a dialogue.
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Christine Clarke adjourned the meeting at 11:35 am.

Secretary: Carol Rickless

A digital recording of the meeting is available.

State Tech Committee members should send comments to:

Christine Clarke, State Conservationist

USDA-NRCS

451 West St.

Amherst, MA 01002

Christine.Clarke@ma.usda.gov

Attachment:

STC052511.pptx - Power point Presentation