

Minutes

Maine NRCS State Technical Committee (STTC)

6 September 2024 0830-1100

Bangor, Maine

In attendance:

A. Matt Walker State Conservationist welcomed the group.

He noted that FY24 was a very good and heavy workload year and that 2025 promises to be bigger based on the projected allocation. In 2023 NRCS did about \$12 million in financial assistance (FA) in the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). In 2024 NRCS did about \$24 million. We expect an allocation as high as \$36million for 2025.

He touched on 3 things to open:

1. Local Working Group importance and appreciation for Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) that administer those.
2. Noted that we are expanding “ACT NOW”, which is a program where applications are accepted for certain practices throughout the FY (budget allowing). More specificity to come later in the meeting from Leslie and Tony.
3. Reiterating that despite the large FA allocations, that NRCS is a technical assistance agency and stressing the importance of maintaining technical quality.

B. Carol Weymouth read the Maine Association of Conservation Districts report.

- a. Transcript attached.

C. Leslie Nelson, assistant state conservationist for programs.

- a. Noted NRCS Maine has funded 695 applications for a total of around \$27million for 2024.
- b. 2025 Proposed Fund Pools*
 - i. Statewide wildlife pool in 2025
 - ii. Local pools proposed to be Ag Waste, Cropland, Forestry, and Pasture.
- c. ACT NOW Proposed setup
 - i. Planning Activity Pool (same as 2024)
 - ii. Climate Smart Ag and Forestry Pool
 1. Under **EQIP IRA***: Soil Health ACT NOW Pool: 327 (Critical Area Planting), 328 (Conservation Crop Rotation), 336 (Soil carbon amendment), 340 (Cover Crop), 484 (Mulch), 512 (Forage & Biomass Planting).

2. Considering 329 (No Till) and 345 (Reduced Till) in EQIP IRA ACT NOW

- d. Slides attached/linked.
- e. Discussion: Matt notes that states will get an easement allocation, that Conservation Stewardship Program minimum payment is \$4000 now, and a big thank you goes out to Field Offices (FOs).

D. Guest speaker Emlyn Emerok “Family Forest Carbon Program”

E. Subcommittee Reports:

- a. CSAF – Rachel – suggested linking the CSAF materials.
- b. Forestry – Nicole – welcome aboard Nicole! She noted they will meet soon. Tony noted the variety of things that are now desired in forest management plans (FMPs) and for Nicole to keep pressure on NRCS to help TSPs be prepared to incorporate them (e.g. CSP, carbon stuff, wildlife).
- c. Source Water Protection Areas (SWPAs) – Keira discussed at length, see transcript/recording.
 - i. Would like to see outreach meetings to promote.
 - ii. Would like to see an updated map of \$ used for SWPAs.
- d. Wildlife: Jeremy for Joe, more next time.
- e. Urban – Carrick not present.
- f. Irrigation – George – nothing to report.

F. Tony – discussion of ACT NOW*, payment schedule, and CSAF eligible practice list.

G. Sense of the STTC* and STC closeout:

- a. Thank you for your help to NRCS in prioritizing, advertising etc.
- b. Next meeting 11 December 2024 same time.

*Please send any input on the items asterisked in Leslie’s section (or anything else you want to relate) to Thom or Tony, preferably in the next week. Tony