



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NRCS Puerto Rico State Technical Committee Meeting



December 11, 2024
University of Puerto Rico, Arecibo Campus

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

Agenda

1. **Director's Welcome & Introduction to STCM** – *Ricardo Colón*
2. **Roll Call** – *Némesis Ortiz Declet*
3. **Recap & Initial Survey Results Discussion** – *Némesis Ortiz & Ricardo Colón*
4. **Open Business** – *Mario Rodriguez*
 - a) NRCS Financial Programs Update – *Ricardo Colón*
 - b) Priority Watersheds Discussion – *Yilia Baucage Bou*
 - c) Caribbean Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) for Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) – *Javier Cruz / Action Item*
 - d) Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) FY24 projects & priorities, timeline and new Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) - *Mario Rodriguez / Action Item*
 - e) Open discussion
 - f) Schedule next meeting (March 2025)
5. **Adjournment**

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Recap & Initial Survey Results Discussion

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September 11, 2024 – PR STC Meeting Recap

1. Open Business

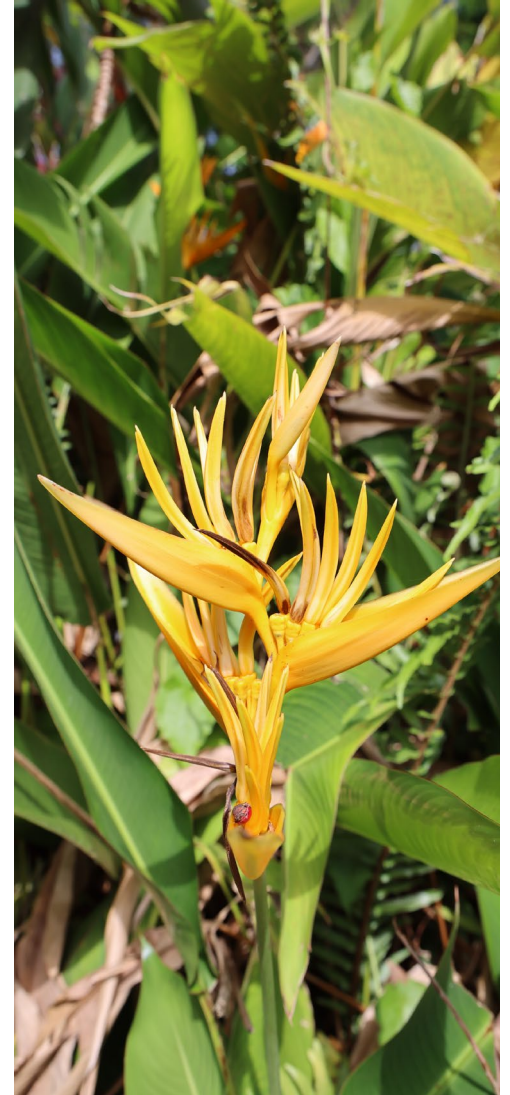
- a) NRCS Financial Assistance Recap – Frank Velazquez
- b) NRCS & Puerto Rico Conservation Districts Association Cooperative Agreement – Sheila Hernández
- c) NRCS Engineering Projects updates – Yilia Baucage Bou
- d) Equity Subcommittee updates – Némesis Ortiz Declet
- e) Technical Service Providers Subcommittee updates – Miguel Oliveras
- f) Wildlife, Wetlands & Forests Subcommittee updates – Iván Llerandi
- g) Caribbean Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) for Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) – Javier Cruz / Open Discussion

2. New Business

- a) P.R. Department of Natural and Environmental Resources & Environmental Quality Board – Priority watersheds according to environmental quality – Ángel Meléndez
- b) Agricultural Cooperative Extension – Identifying high priority production areas & collaboration opportunities – José Torres Castillo
- c) U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
 - National Wildlife Refuges System updates – Silmarie Padrón
 - Caribbean Ecological Sciences Field Office updates
- d) State Agencies Identified Priorities for 2025 – Open Discussion

Survey Key Questions

- What are the top three priorities you believe the NRCS State Technical Committee should focus on? (Please rank in order of priority)
- Which region(s), watershed(s), or municipalities would you consider a priority for NRCS programs, services and resources?
- What improvements would you suggest for enhancing collaboration within the NRCS State Technical Committee?



Survey Response Categories

What are the top three **priorities** you believe **the NRCS State Technical Committee should focus on?**

- **Equity, Access & Outreach** – streamline the farmer assistance process and enhance conservation plans access, increase outreach & education, create a small-scale producer ranking pool
- **Funding** – increase funding and access for farmer needs and in the appropriate ranking pools, support state agencies, match priorities, increase CSP funding level, speed up the funding process
- **Restoration** – coastal & critical fish & wildlife habitat
- **Soil Health** – plant health & water quality

Survey Response Categories

What are the top three **priorities** you believe **the NRCS State Technical Committee should focus on?** (Continued)

- **Climate Change** – disaster preparedness, education about climate-smart commodities, plan development, sustainable agriculture, adaptation & mitigation
- **Conservation Practices** – develop & apply strategies, waste management, agroforestry, reduce animal production environmental impacts, improve natural resources
- **Water** – quality, flooding, fisheries, watershed action plans, soil & water management plans, increase connectivity
- **Other** – small farmers assessments, Farm Bill implementation recommendations, collaboration, land protection through acquisitions or easements, info-share, conservation districts development, strategize solutions for efficient service, priorities determination

Survey Response Categories

Which region(s), watershed(s), or municipalities would you consider a priority for NRCS programs, services and resources?

Regions

1. Central Mountains (6 responses)
2. Southwest (3 responses)
3. Northwest (2 responses)
4. Southeast (1 response)
5. Northern Karst (1 response)

Survey Response Categories

Which region(s), watershed(s), or municipalities would you consider a priority for NRCS programs, services and resources?

Watersheds

- Carraizo, La Plata
- Culebrinas River
- Fajardo River
- Guanajibo River
- Guayanilla, Yauco and Loco Rivers (3x)
- Gurabo River
- Herrera River
- Humacao River
- Juan Martin River
- Lajas Valley
- Río Grande
- Río Grande de Añasco
- Río Grande de Arecibo
- Sabana, Espiritu Santo, and Mameyes Rivers (2x)

Survey Response Categories

What **improvements** would you suggest for **enhancing collaboration** within the NRCS State Technical Committee?

- Increase meetings frequency
- Enhance communication – among agencies & with stakeholders
- Find synergies & collaborate – define common goals
- Enhance data sharing and transparency
- Develop new committees or focus groups (such as Water and a Roads committees)
- Implement feedback mechanisms

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NRCS Financial Programs Update

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FY 2025 Programs Implementation Schedule

EQIP and CSP

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FY 2025 Program Implementation Schedule

Caribbean Area NRCS Program Implementation Schedule FY2025							
Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)							
Fund Pools	Application Acceptance Deadline	Eligibility Deadline (All documents submitted to FSA)	WPT (Screening) (FO)	CART Assessment & Ranking Deadline (FO)	Application Preapproval (SO)	Contracts Submitted for Obligation Review	Last Day of Obligation (ASTC-P)
EQIP IRA (Act Now): General, BFR, Soil Health & Livestock (Sign up 1)	29-Nov-24	31-Jan-25	NA	1-Mar-25	8-Mar-25	3-May-25	30-May-25
EQIP FA (Act Now): JCLRP, NWQI, Disaster, General, BFR (Sign up 1)	29-Nov-24	31-Jan-25	7-Feb-25	1-Mar-25	8-Mar-25	3-May-25	30-May-25
EQIP FA: SDFR, Wildlife, CPA-DIA-CEMA (Sign up 1)	29-Nov-24	31-Jan-25	7-Feb-25	1-Mar-25	8-Mar-25	3-May-25	30-May-25
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)							
Fund Pools	Application Acceptance Deadline	Eligibility Deadline (All documents submitted to FSA)	WPT (Screening) (FO)	CART Assessment & Ranking Deadline (FO)	Application Preapproval (SO)	Contracts Submitted for Obligation Review	Last Day of Obligation (ASTC-P)
Renewals (Signup 2025-1)	3-May-24	8-Nov-24	NA	8-Nov-24	15-Nov-24	13-Dec-24	20-Dec-24
CSP IRA (Act Now) (Signup 2025-1)	31-Jan-25	14-Feb-25	NA	9-May-25	14-May-25	1-Aug-25	22-Aug-25
CSP Classic (Signup 2025-1)	31-Jan-25	14-Feb-25	NA	9-May-25	14-May-25	1-Aug-25	22-Aug-25
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)							
Fund Pools	Application Acceptance Deadline	Eligibility Deadline (All documents submitted to FSA)	WPT (Screening) (FO)	CART Assessment & Ranking Deadline (FO)	Application Preapproval (SO)	Contracts Submitted for Obligation Review	Last Day of Obligation (ASTC-P)
Project x	TBD	TBD	NA	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)							
Fund Pools	Application Acceptance Deadline	Eligibility Deadline (All documents submitted to FSA)	WPT (Screening) (FO)	CART Assessment & Ranking Deadline (FO)	Application Preapproval (SO)	WRPO Finalized and Cost Estimates in CD	LO Deadline to Respond
ACEP (Signup-1)	29-Nov-24	TBD	NA	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
TBD							
*Field offices are responsible for maling intent to proceed letters and completing field verifications after application preapproval.							
*Fund pools with a deadline under the WPT column, will require a the WPT to be completed on ALL eligible and pending applications for which participant submitted all documentation to FSA but is still appears ineligible in our business tools. Only HIGH priority applications will be ranked in first funding cycle. If funds are still available, we will reallocate funds and open a second funding cycle period to evaluate "high" and "medium" applications. In the second round, the applications will be selected by ranking score regardless of the priority. Applications with a medium priority CANNOT be ranked in the first funding cycle. Funding Assessment dates: February 7, 2025 / April 4, 2025 / June 6, 2025.							



Act Now Sub Accounts and Threshold Scores

EQIP and CSP

FY25 Act Now Sub-Accounts and Threshold Scores

Ranking Threshold Scores for Act Now Accounts in FY2025	
Sub accounts	Threshold Score
EQIP FA	
CB FY25 EQIP General (Act Now)	80
CB FY25 EQIP Beginning Farmer (Act Now)	60
CB FY25 EQIP Disaster/Emergency (Act Now)	60
FY25 JCLRP (Act Now) Interconnecting the Coastal	80
CB FY25 EQIP NWQI (Act Now)	15
EQIP-IRA FA	
CB FY25 IRA General (Act Now)	30
CB FY25 IRA Beginning Farmer (Act Now)	40
CB FY25 IRA Livestock (Act Now)	60
CB FY25 IRA Soil Health (Act Now)	30
CSP-IRA FA	
CB FY25 CSP IRA AgLand (General, BFR, SDFR)	30
CB FY25 CSP IRA NIPF (General, BFR, SDFR)	30

Action Item

- Do you agree with the Act Now Sub Accounts and Threshold Scores that NRCS is proposing?
- Scan the QR code to vote

FY25 Act Now Sub-Accounts and
Threshold Scores



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Priority Watersheds Update State Technical Committee Dec '24

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AGENDA

- Summarize other Agencies Watershed priorities
- Update on analysis to define NRCS Priority Watersheds
- Next Steps

A graphic on a black background featuring the words "TODAY'S AGENDA" in a white, hand-drawn, chalk-like font. The text is slanted upwards from left to right. Below the text are two parallel white diagonal lines.

Local Priorities

- DRNA
 - Non-point source priorities
 - Vision 2022
- Fish and Wildlife Services

PS High Priorities

Basin	Sub-basin	
Rio Grande de Loiza	Rio <u>Gurabo</u>	
Rio La Plata	Rio La Plata	
Rio Grande de Loiza	Rio <u>Caguítas</u>	
Rio Bayamon	Rio Guaynabo	
Rio <u>Culebrinas</u>	Rio <u>Culebrinas</u>	
Rio La Plata	Lake La Plata	
Rio <u>Guajataca</u>	Lake <u>Guajataca</u>	
Rio Grande de Loiza	Rio Grande de Loiza	
Rio Grande de Arecibo	Lake Dos Bocas	
Rio <u>Cibuco</u>	Rio <u>Cibuco</u>	
Grande de Loiza	Rio Grande de Loiza	

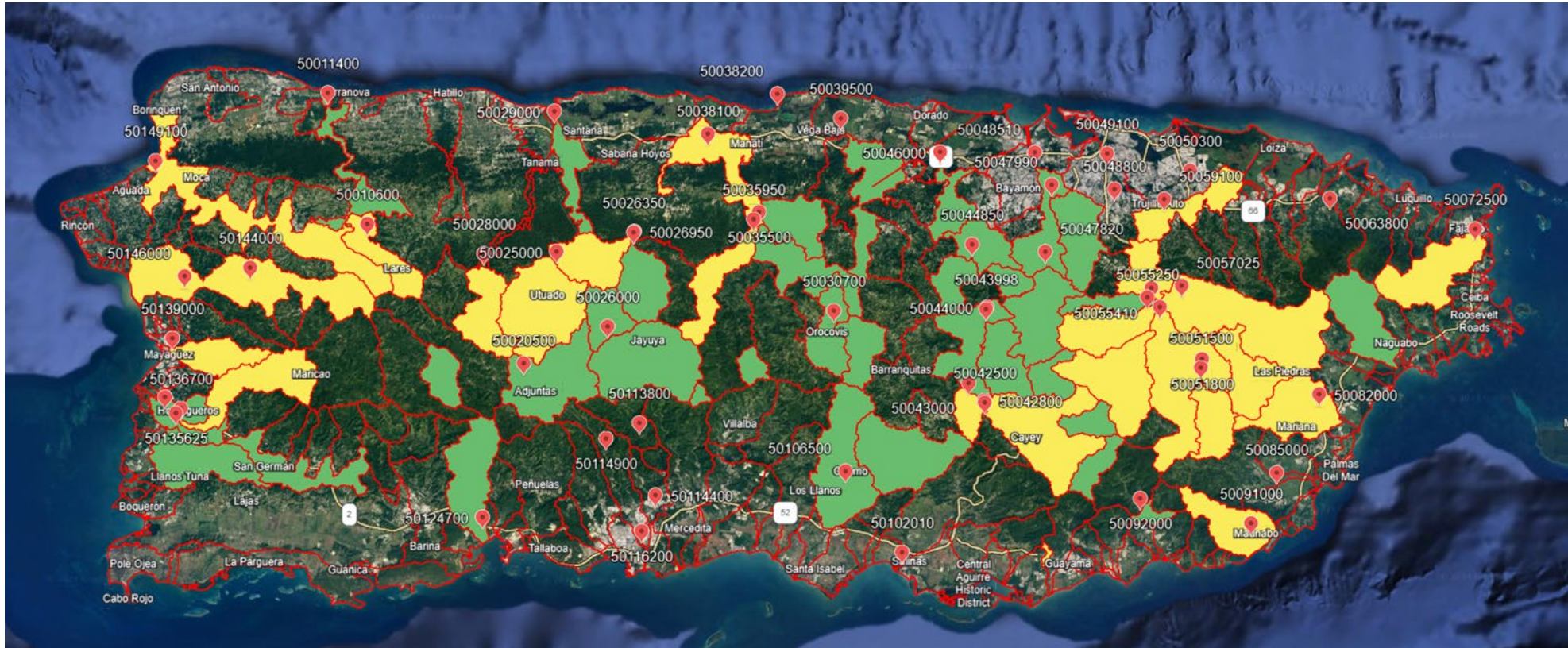
DRNA – High Priority Non-Point Source



DRNA – High Priority Non-Point Source

1. Rio Bayamon
2. Rio Blanco
3. Rio Cibuco
4. Rio Coamo
5. Rio Culebrinas
6. Rio Grande de Añasco
7. Rio Grande de Arecibo
8. Rio Grande de Loiza
9. Rio Grande de Manatí
10. Rio Grande de Patillas
11. Rio Guajataca
12. Rio Guanajibo
13. Rio Guayanilla
14. Rio La Plata
15. Rio Yaguez

DRNA – Vision 2022 Priorities



DRNA – Vision 2022 Riorities

1. Rio Grande de Loiza (8)
2. Rio Grande de Arecibo (3)
3. Rio Grande de Manatí (2)
4. Rio La Plata (2)
5. Quebrada Melania
6. Rio Culebrinas
7. Rio Fajardo
8. Rio Grande de Añasco
9. Rio Guajataca
10. Rio Guanajibo
11. Rio Humacao
12. Rio Maunabo
13. Rio Yaguez



US Fish and Wildlife Services + TNC

1. Cabo Rojo Community Watershed Plan
2. Culebra
- 3. Rio Fajardo**
4. Corredor Ecologico del Noreste
5. Bahia Guanica (Updated)
- 6. La Plata** – In Development



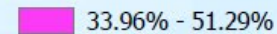
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Priority Watersheds Analysis Update

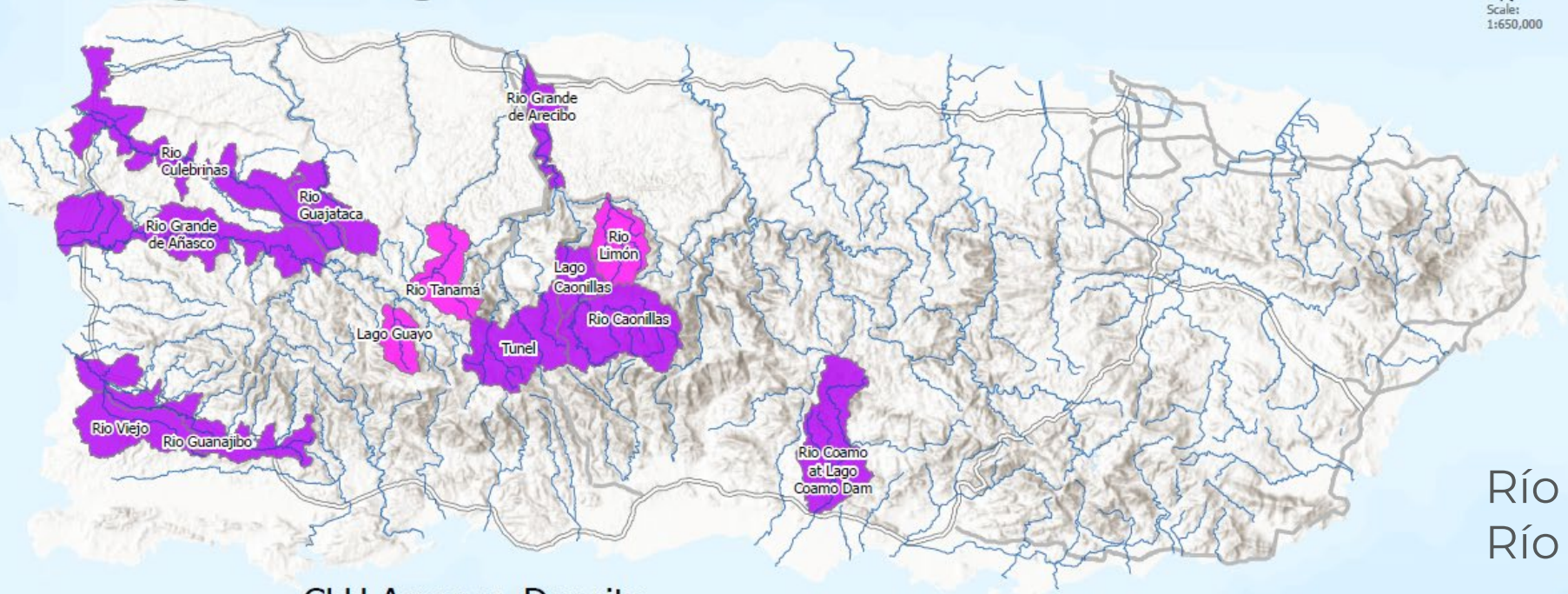


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Scale:
1:700,000



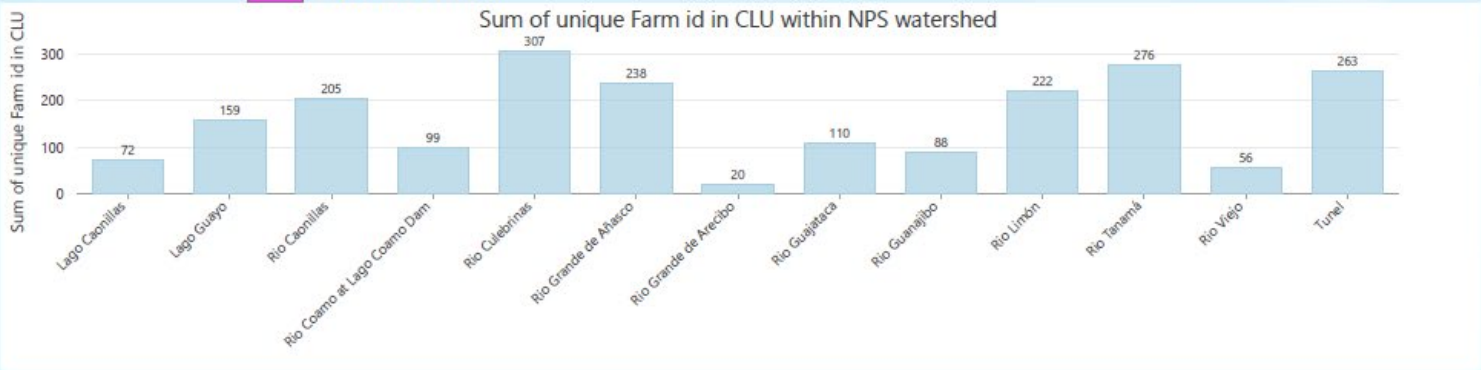
Active CLU within Watershed identify by Non-Point Source Management Program Prioritization



CLU Acreage Density

Percentage of CLU within NPS Watershed

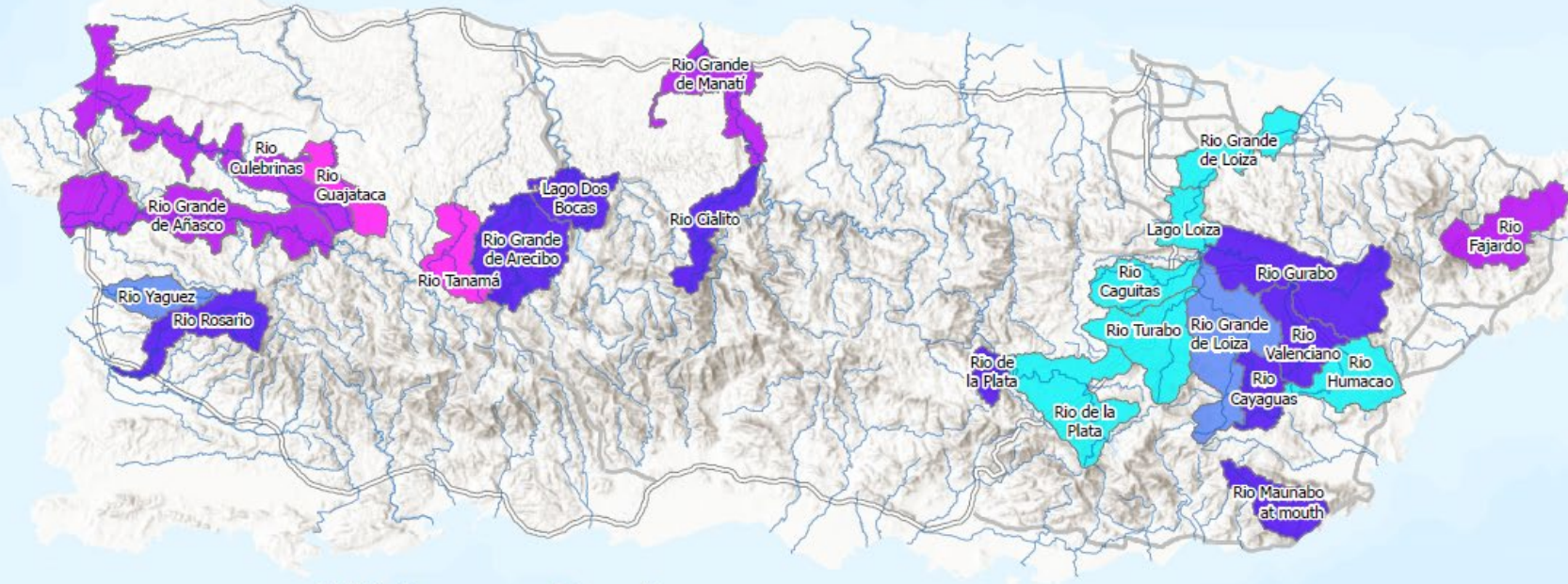
- 19.54% - 33.95%
- 33.96% - 51.29%



Río Grande de Arecibo - 782
Río Grande de Añasco - 673

Río Coamo - 99
Río Culebrinas - 307
Río Guajataca - 110
Río Guanajibo - 144

Active CLU acreage density within Watershed identify by Vision 2022 New Priority List



CLU Acreage Density

Percentage of CLU within DRNA Priority Watershed

0.15% - 5.64%

5.65% - 8.66%

8.67% - 17.14%

17.15% - 28.09%

28.10% - 43.13%

Rio Grande de Arecibo
Rio Guajataca

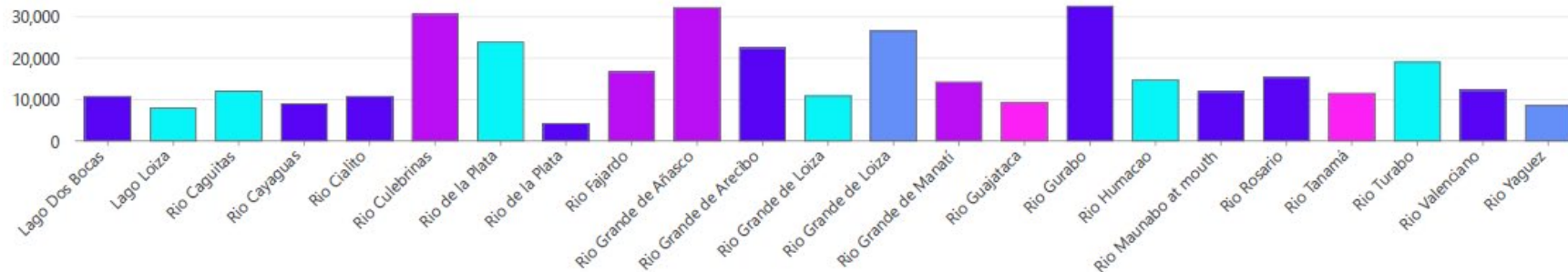
Rio Grande de Añasco
Rio Culebrinas

Rio Fajardo

Rio Grande de Manatí

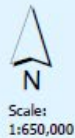
Watershed HU12 Area in acres

Watershed Area ac,



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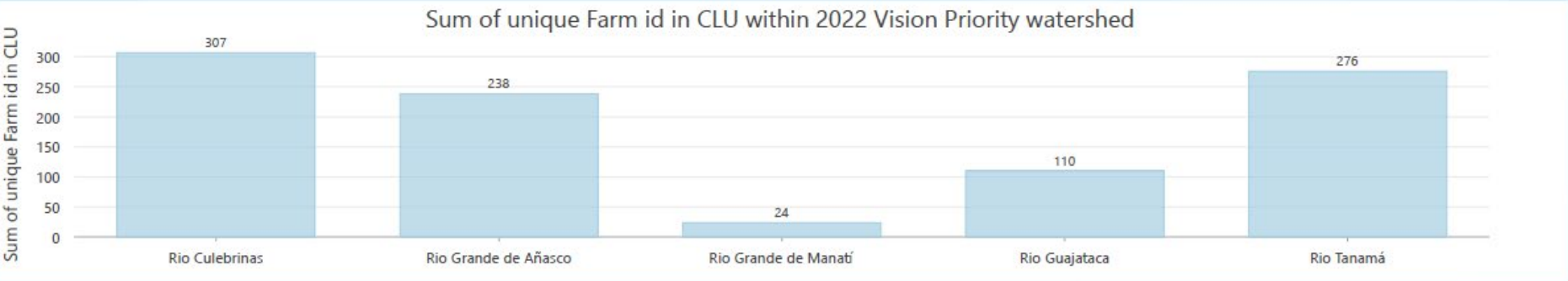
Active CLU within Watershed identify by Vision 2022 New Priority List



CLU Acreage Density
Percentage of CLU within DRNA Priority Watershed

- 17.15% - 28.09%
- 28.10% - 43.13%

- Rio Grande de Arecibo - 276
- Rio Guajataca - 110
- Rio Grande de Añasco - 218
- Rio Culebrinas - 307
- Rio Fajardo**
- Rio Grande de Manatí - 24





Next Steps

- Assess current watershed work within the ID watersheds
 - NRCS EWP
 - USACE
 - Reach to reef
- Assess potential sources of erosion and livestock operations within NRCS client base and confirm these are covered by this Watershed assessment
 - i.e. karstic areas not ID as watersheds
- Gather more detail on FWS and TNC to identify cooperative opportunities beyond Rio Fajardo watershed

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A wide-angle photograph of a lush green wetland landscape. In the foreground, there's a large, gnarled tree with sparse green leaves. The middle ground is filled with vibrant green grass and small, scattered pools of water. In the background, rolling hills and mountains are visible under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

Caribbean Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) for Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

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Wetland Reserve Easements Programs

GARC

- Each fiscal year the State Conservationist, in consultation with the State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC), must establish a process to determine easement and 30-year land use contract compensation values.
- ACEP-WRE policy guidance is found in the ACEP Manual, 440CPM Part 528, Subpart M, Section 528.122. The basis for the compensation offers for permanent easement or 30-year contract enrollments will be determined based on the lowest of the followings:
 1. The fair market value (FMV) of the land using either of the following: a Uniform Standards for Professional Appraisal Practices (USPAP) individual appraisal.
 2. An area wide market analysis (AWMA) or survey.
 3. The geographic area rate cap (GARC).
 4. An amount voluntarily offered by the landowner.

GARCS from High Cost Living Areas in the US

- CT \$9,850/ac
- MA \$13,500/ac
- NJ \$10,450/ac
- PA \$7,124/ac to \$11,890/ac near Philadelphia
- RI \$16,625/ac
- VA \$7,000/ac to \$16,000/ac Coast
- CA \$7,700/ac to 16,000/ac
- IL Chicago Metro \$7,560/ac
- Hawaii \$45,000/ac (Molokai) to \$360,000 (Kauai)

2025 Proposed GARC for Puerto Rico

- 95% of FMV, NTE \$20,000/AC
- For Both 30 year and Permanent Easements
- **Under WRE, the landowner is only retaining the right to quiet enjoyment and non-impact recreation.**
- **All agricultural and development rights are forfeited.**

Examples of Current Land Values in PR Real State Websites:

Quebradillas PR: 95 ac @ \$375,000 = \$3,947/ac

Guayanilla PR: 100 ac @ \$299,000 = \$2,990/ac

Ponce PR: 8 ac @ \$120,000 = \$15,000/ac

Luquillo PR: 32 ac @ \$46,153 = \$1,442/ac

Naguabo PR: 9 ac @ \$260,000 = \$28,888/ac

Fajardo PR: 20 ac @ \$2,300,000 = \$115,000/ac

Action Item

- Do you agree with the dollars per acre increase that NRCS is proposing?
- Scan the QR code to vote

Caribbean Geographic Area Rate
Cap Wetland Reserve Easement



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2025 Caribbean Area CIG UPDATE



Mario Rodriguez, *State Resource Conservationist*
Caribbean Area
Dec 2025

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Objectives

- To **Inform** about the Caribbean CIG program and its priorities
- To **educate** about the specifics within local priorities and needs
- To **persuade** applicants to present project proposals to compete
- To **motivate** those not yet convinced into submit projects and ventures

SUMMARY INFORMATION

- The Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program is authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) (16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8).
- **To stimulate the adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies on farms, ranches and forest lands**

SUMMARY INFORMATION

- CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of
 - conservation technologies,
 - management systems, and
 - innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) to agricultural producers, into government technical manuals and guides, or to the private sector.
- CIG generally funds pilot projects, field demonstrations, and on-farm conservation research.
- Project outcomes **should benefit a region of a state/territory or the entire state/territory** and not just benefit one farm.

ELIGIBILITY

- Applications are accepted from **eligible entities** (Section C) for projects carried out in the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico (PR) and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI)).
 - **All U.S. non-Foreign, non-Federal entities and individuals are eligible**
 - **US Federal agencies are not eligible** to apply to this opportunity or impart their work to non-federal portion of the budget.
 - **Individuals that are business owner/operators cannot apply as individuals.**

FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

- NRCS Caribbean Area expects to award approximately \$500,000
- Projects may be between one and three years in duration on an estimated project start date of September 1, 2025
- The agency expects to make 5 award(s).

Historically Underserved (HU) Producers

The CLG program provides special consideration to projects substantially involving or benefitting HU producers

- To be eligible for the set aside, applicants must be:
 - A HU producer;
 - A community-based organization working with HU producers
 - An entity targeting historically HU
 - An 1890 or 1994 land grant institution, Hispanic serving institution, or other minority-serving institution,

NOTE: An applicant seeking the HU set aside must identify as such on the cover page

Matching

- The budget narrative must show the amounts and sources of match (including both cash and in-kind contributions).
- **CIG requires applicants to match at least 50 percent of total project costs** (includes Federal and non-Federal).
- HU Applicants are eligible for a **reduced project match of one-third of the total project budget**, or 50 percent of the Federal request

Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities

Projects or activities under CIG must;

- Use a technology or approach that was **studied sufficiently** to indicate a **high probability for success**;
- **Demonstrate, evaluate, and verify the effectiveness**, utility, affordability, and usability of natural resource conservation technologies and approaches in the field;
- **Adapt and transfer conservation technologies**, management, practices, systems, approaches, and incentive systems to improve performance and encourage adoption;
- **Introduce proven conservation technologies and approaches** to a geographic area or agricultural sector where that technology or approach is not currently in use.

Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) Priorities

For FY 2024, NRCS is only accepting proposals that address **one or more** of the listed priorities:

- Priority 1: Water Quality
- Priority 2: Water harvesting on dry lands
- Priority 3: Climate-Smart Agriculture
- Priority 4: Conservation in Urban Agricultural Systems
- Priority 5: Invasive Species Control
- Priority 6: Innovative Local Scale Waste Management Systems

NOTE: Each proposal must clearly identify a primary priority

Action Item

- Do you agree with the FY24 Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) Priorities for FY25?
- Scan the QR code to vote

CIG Priorities Survey



How to submit an application

- Applications must be submitted electronically through www.Grants.gov
- Submissions must be received by the time and date due.
- Late submissions will not be reviewed or considered.
- The agency will rely on system generated date and time receipt documentation for submission made

Review and Selection Process

- Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of NFO notice.
- Incomplete, noncompliant, and/or applications not meeting the formatting criteria may be eliminated from competition.
- The agency intends to select and award without conducting any discussions or allowing applicants to correct deficiencies or omissions in their applications.

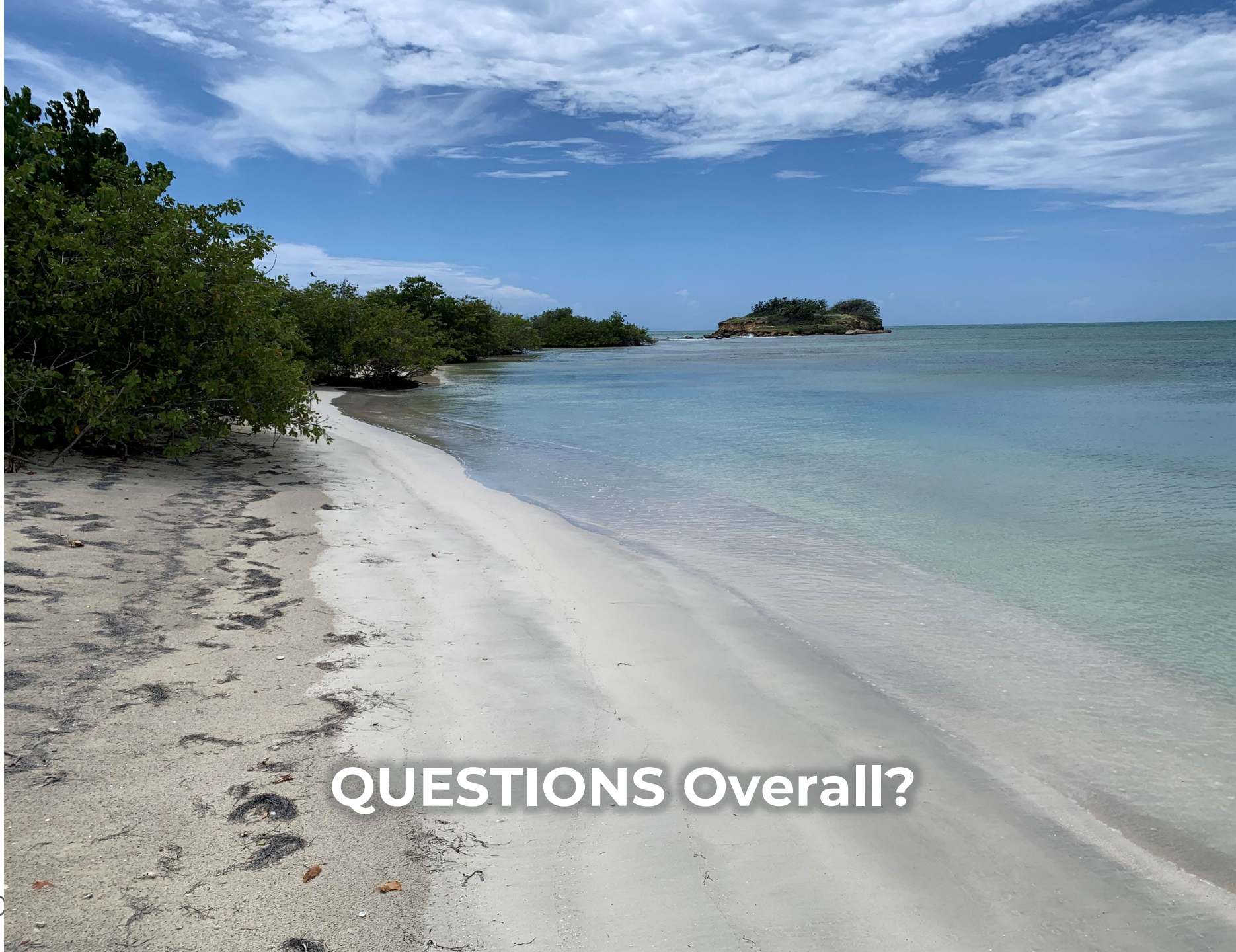
Review and Selection Process

Proposals that pass the initial screening are then evaluated using a two-part process:

1. Technical peer review panels composed of subject matter experts evaluate the proposals.

Proposals are evaluated against the CIG Proposal Merit Criteria. The technical peer review panels forward their recommendations to the Caribbean Area Director.

2. The Caribbean Area Director makes the final award selections based on the recommendations of the peer review panels.



QUESTIONS Overall?



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

THANKS!!!



12/12/20

Agenda

1. Director's Welcome & Introduction to STCM – *Ricardo Colón*
2. Roll Call – *Némesis Ortiz Declet*
3. Recap & Initial Survey Results Discussion – *Némesis Ortiz & Ricardo Colón*
4. Open Business – *Mario Rodriguez*
 - a) NRCS Financial Programs Update – *Ricardo Colón*
 - b) Priority Watersheds Discussion – *Yilia Baucage Bou*
 - c) Caribbean Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) for Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) – *Javier Cruz / Action Item*
 - d) Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) FY24 projects & priorities, timeline and new Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) - *Mario Rodriguez / Action Item*
 - e) Open discussion
 - f) Schedule next meeting (March 2025)
5. Adjournment





Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Open Discussion

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

Agenda

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Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NRCS Puerto Rico State Technical Committee Meeting



December 11, 2024

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

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