

Maine State Technical Committee meeting Dec. 11, 2024

The first Maine State Technical Committee meeting for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 was held in-person at the USDA State Office in Bangor and via Microsoft Teams.

Attending in person were:

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Matt Walker
State Resource Conservationist Tony Jenkins
Assistant State Conservationist for Programs Leslie Nelson
Executive Director of the Maine Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) Carol Weymouth
Ag Engineer/Maine Potato Board George McLaughlin
NRCS Agronomist Julie McGivern
Landowner and STTC Subcommittee Member Felix Blinn
NRCS Public Affairs Specialist Thomas Kielbasa

The meeting commenced at 8:30 a.m.

Matt Walker began the meeting and noted:

NRCS is still under a Continuing Resolution (CR) until Dec. 20, 2024

NRCS-Maine is nearly fully staffed with 103 employees

Unofficial NRCS Programmatic Data from FY24

Application Deadlines for FY25 and FY26

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP): Dec. 6, 2024 (PAST)

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program for Inflation Reduction Act: Dec. 20, 2024

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Act Now: March 7, 2025

Application Deadlines for Fiscal Year 2026

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): Aug. 22, 2025

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA): Aug. 22, 2025

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): Aug. 22, 2025

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP): Aug. 22, 2025

NRCS is using **Act Now** to deliver conservation contracting faster.

The Act Now process allows NRCS to approve and obligate a ranked application in a designated ranking pool when an application meets or exceeds a state-determined minimum ranking score without waiting until the NRCS field office ranks all applications in the ranking pool.

Applications eligible for the Act Now ranking pools will be accepted on a continuous sign-up basis in the order received until **March 7, 2025**. Any application that ranks at or above the NRCS-ME established minimum ranking score of 75 points will be preapproved as long as funds are available.

EQIP FY25 applications will be using ACT NOW for the following ranking pools:

FY25 MAINE ACT NOW-Climate Smart Agriculture

Conservation Cover (code 327)

Conservation Crop Rotation (code 328)

Soil Carbon Amendment (code 336)

Cover Crop (code 340)

Mulch (code 484)

Residue & Tillage Management, No-Till (code 329)

Residue & Tillage Management, Reduced Till (code 345)

FY25 Maine ACT NOW Conservation Planning Activities (CPAs), Design and Implementation Activities (DIAs), and Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMAs)

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

In FY24 NRCS obligated \$1.7 billion in IRA funds nationally.

In Maine, we obligated \$13,090,116 (CSP and EQIP IRA) for nearly 18,000 acres

If Inflation Reduction Act unspent funds are pulled back, NRCS will:

- Proceed with producer contracts that have already been obligated.
- Continue to work with farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to implement conservation through Farm Bill funding.

Adjust our plans and operations accordingly.

Briefing from MACD Executive Director Carol Weymouth, who discussed MACD annual meeting held Dec. 5-6, 2024, in Bangor.

Briefing from Assistant State Conservationist for Programs Leslie Nelson on NRCS programs in FY24 and Program Delivery for FY25.

Briefing from Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) State Soil Scientist Matt Boucher on the “Maine Healthy Soils Program.”

Subcommittee reports:

Source Water Protection – Kira Jacobs (Environmental Protection Agency) not present, but encouraged via email anyone interested in next meeting in January to [contact her](#) about joining the next subcommittee meeting.

Urban Agriculture – Carrick Gamble (UMaine and NRCS) briefed on supporting urban agricultural producers.

Forestry – Nicole Rogers (Maine Forest Service) briefed. Forestry subcommittee met last week, and group will be meeting quarterly. Tony Jenkins explained recent change in policy regarding utilization of Technical Service Providers (TSPs) in Forestry practices. Jenkins also noted there will be updates to considerations of Northern Long-Eared bat in Forestry practice implementation. Subcommittee also noted they are discussing silvopasture/agroforestry in meetings.

Wildlife – Jeremy Markuson (NRCS). Will announce next subcommittee meeting date.

Discussion regarding delayed mowing practices dates and whether it is applicable to Act Now. State Conservation Walker noted Fish and Wildlife Service proposal to list monarch butterfly as “threatened.”

Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry – Sean Horan (UMaine and NRCS) and Felix Blinn briefed on most recent subcommittee meeting. Next meeting March 7, 2025.

Irrigation – George McLaughlin (Maine Potato Board) explained subcommittee needs to schedule next meeting to discuss drought relief funds and irrigation permitting.

In other Committee business, Tony Jenkins noted:

Soil Carbon Amendment is among the Act Now practices

Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMAs) available to help provide soil health testing.

Committee discussed and decided to refer to State Technical Committee by the acronym STAC instead of STTC.

Next meeting tentatively scheduled for March 12, 2025.

Meeting ended at 10:45 a.m.