

Meeting called by: **Becky Ross, NH State Conservationist**

Facilitated by: **Jeremy Fowler, NH NRCS**

Attendees

In-Person: Tracy Boisvert (NRCS), Kelly Boland (NRCS), Tom Boyd (NRCS), Jeremy Fowler (NRCS), Heather Grybas (NRCS), Ian Hanley (SCC), Don Keirstead (NRCS), Stacy Lemieux (U.S. Forest Service), Marques Munis (NRCS), Kimberly McCracken (NRCS), Brigid O'Brien (NRCS), Becky Ross, (NRCS), Steve Scapicchio, (NHACD), Brook Stubbs (NRCS).

Virtual Attendees: Sarah Allen (UNH Extension), Richard Amore (USDA Rural Development VT/NH), Andrea Bye (USDA Farm Service Agency, NH State Office), Erin Cotton (Office of Senator Maggie Hassan), Jeremy DeLisle (UNH Extension), Joshua Dera (NRCS, ME), Wendy Johncheck (UNH Extension), Ryan Karb (American Farmland Trust), Stephen Landry (DES), Melissa Lang (DES), Matt Leahy (Forest Society), Jeffrey Lougee (The Nature Conservancy), Christopher Mann (NRCS), Audrey Mayer (US Fish & Wildlife Service), Elizabeth McKenna (Senator Shaheen's Office), Peg Merrens (UPLT), Lisa Morin (NACD), Julicia Myers (NRCS), Bethany Reinholtz (GDS Associates), Steven Roberge (UNH Coop Ext, Jessica Rock (NRCS), Gabe Roxby (NRCS), Sabrina Stanwood (DNCR), Sara Waring (RD VT), Lauren Zielinski (Connecticut River Conservancy).

Becky Ross, State Conservationist - Overview of State Technical Committee

- The State Technical Committee facilitates collaboration among conservation partners, focusing on aligning farm bill funding priorities and integrating Inflation Reduction Act funds. Partners include conservation districts, land trusts, other conservation organizations, units of government and educational institutions. Local working groups, led by conservation districts, gather input to set state and county funding priorities.

Becky Ross, State Conservationist - Opening Remarks

- An upcoming EPA webinar will address the impact of Per- and poly- fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS or “forever chemicals”) on farm products.
- NRCS is undergoing leadership transitions, with Louis Aspy serving as Acting Chief.
- The Farm Bill has received another extension, waiving payment limitations for conservation funding, benefiting farmers. NRCS is working to allocate \$14 million for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) funding, promoting early implementation of conservation practices.

Jessica Rock, RCCP Coordinator - RCCP Update

- Funded projects include stream bank restoration and climate-smart forestry practices, with a focus on local engagement. Information sessions for FY25 funding will be held in early February.

Tracy Boisvert, Easement Specialist - Easement Updates

- FY25 ACEP funding is nearly double that of the previous year, with significant allocations for Wetland Reserve Easements and Agricultural Land Easements. Applications are being processed, with a batching date set for February 28, 2025.

Marques Munis, Assistant State Conservationist (Programs) - EQIP & CSP Update

- EQIP and CSP funding has increased due to support from the IRA. CSP applications remain open, with a focus on forests and implementation of nutrient management plans.
- Local Work Groups (LWG) Overview: LWGs provide local recommendations on conservation needs, addressing issues such as soil erosion and water quality. Meetings are scheduled through May 2025, culminating in recommendations for NRCS at the State Technical Advisory Committee meeting on May 25, 2025. Recommendations will be incorporated into the FY26 program structure and presented at the State Technical Committee meeting on August 20, 2025.

Don Keirstead, State Resource Conservationist/Soil Scientist - Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) Update

- CIG funds are allocated for demonstration projects designed to benefit farmers and forest owners. There is a ceiling of \$300K available for eligible producers. Notice of Funding Opportunity will be released in late winter/spring and posted on grants.gov. These projects have proven successful in other locations and features a robust outreach component. Includes historically underserved producers.

Andrea Bye - Farm Service Agency Update

- Marilyn Milne is currently serving as the Acting State Executive Director. A one-year Farm Bill extension continues legacy programs, and Congress has allocated \$31 billion for disaster assistance. Marketing assistance for specialty crops has been launched.

Sarah Waring - Rural Development

- New leadership is transitioning, with team expansions to better handle program inquiries. A new Timber Production Expansion Program is available to support wood processing facilities.

Elizabeth McKenna (Office of Senator Shaheen) & Erin Cotton (Office of Senator Hassan)

- Updates on disaster relief funding and ongoing reconciliation discussions in Congress.

Matt Leahy - Forest Conservation Program in the New Farm Bill

- A proposed new program would fund easements on privately owned forest land, with strong support from New Hampshire's congressional delegation.

Jeremy Delisle - NEWA Network Update

- The NEWA network supports growers with pest management, showing high adoption rates. Growers seek additional training and models to improve practices.

Audrey Mayer - Monarch Butterfly Update

- The monarch butterfly is proposed for threatened listing, with a public comment period open until March 12, 2025. No critical habitat is anticipated in the Northeast.

Stacy Lemieux - U.S. Forest Service Update

- A new Deputy Forest Supervisor has been introduced. Efforts focus on forest management, invasive species, and flood risk assessment. Special emphasis given on the Zealand River's Floodplain Project which opened channels to allow water to return to its floodplain which has begun to attract beavers and foster ecological recovery.

Lauren Zielinski - Connecticut River Conservancy

- Stream restoration and habitat improvement projects are underway in the Connecticut River watershed through RCPP. Collaborating with large landowners who are receptive to innovative ideas and new practices.

Jeff Lougee - The Nature Conservancy

- Recognition of contributions to climate resilience projects, with plans for statewide expansion through RCPP.

Adjournment

- The meeting adjourned at 11:00 am, with the next meeting scheduled for May 21, 2025, which will include presentation from LWGs.