

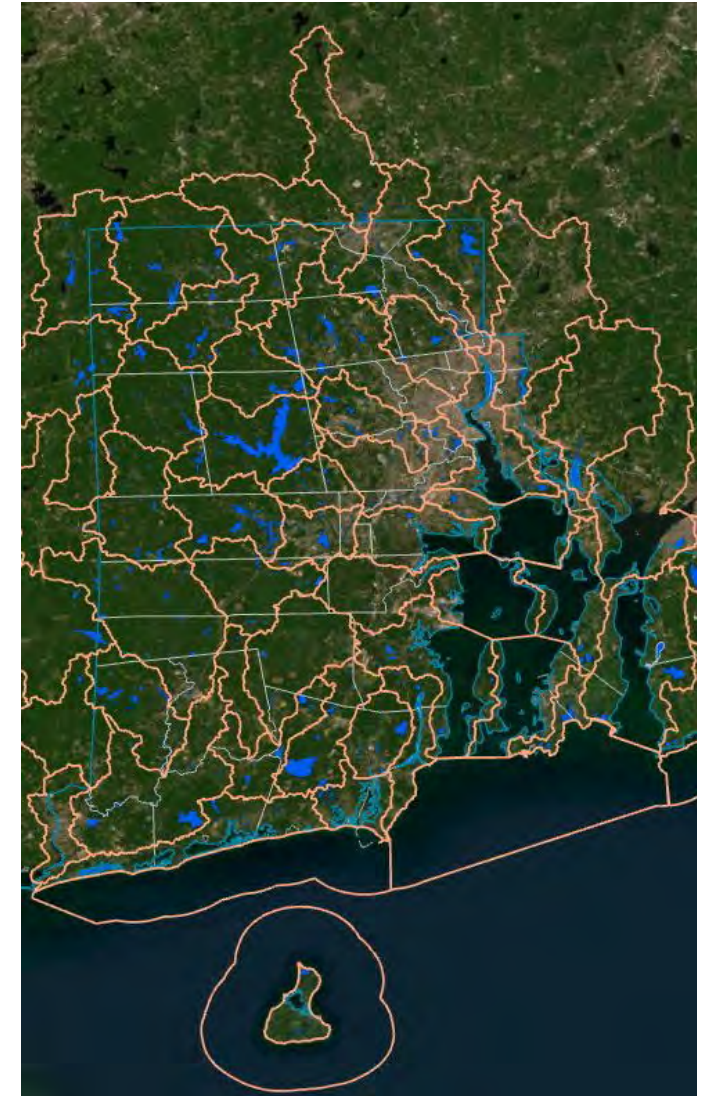
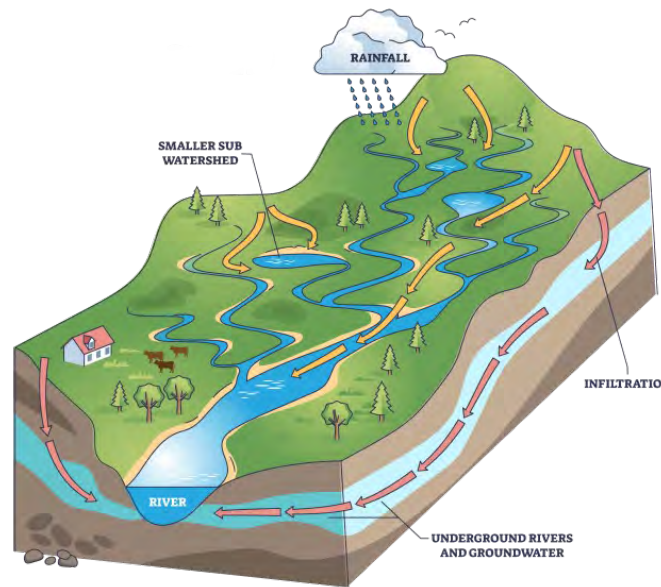


Ecological Sciences Team Report

Cassius Spears
State Resource Conservationist

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)

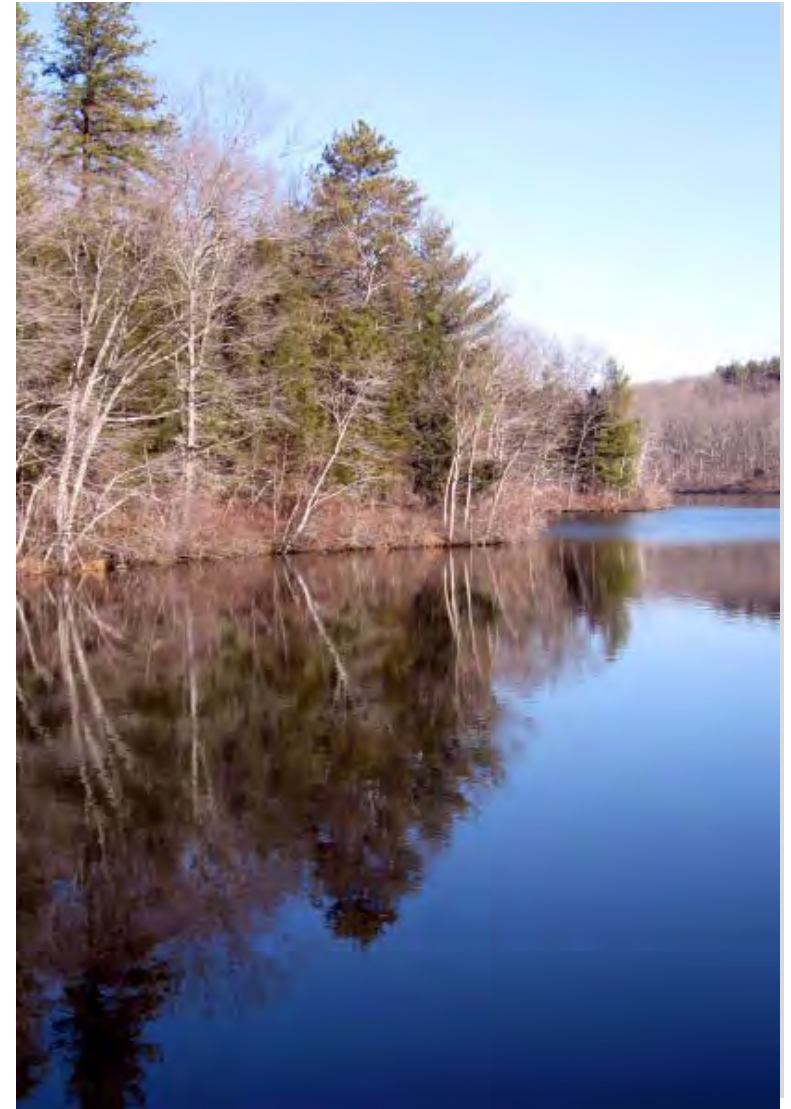
- Joint initiative with State water quality agencies (RI DEM) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Address agricultural sources of water pollution in priority watersheds throughout the country through voluntary conservation .
- Watershed Assessments
 - 5 completed and 2 in progress



National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)

Addressing Management Concerns in the Watershed:

- **Cropland Management:**
 - Reduced Tillage; Cover Crops; Mulching; Nutrient Management; Forest Buffers, Irrigation
- **Grazing Land Management:**
 - Prescribed Grazing; Fencing; Pasture & Hay Planting; Watering Facilities
- **Animal Waste Management:**
 - Waste Storage Facility; Composting Facility; Roofs & Covers; Roof Runoff Structure
- **Gully Control:**
 - Diversion; Critical Area Planting; Grassed Waterway; Lined Waterway or Outlet





Reduced Tillage



Cover Crop & Soil Health Practices



Fencing



Critical Area Planting



Waste Storage Facility



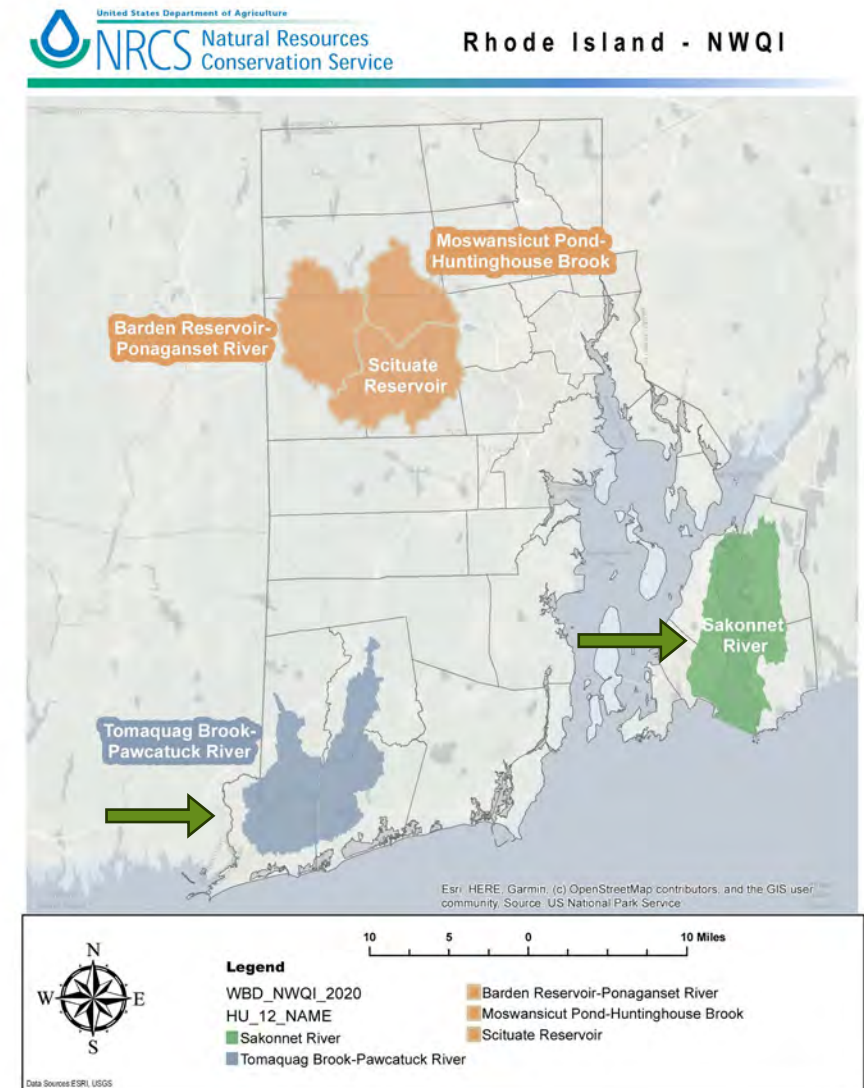
Mulching

Selected Conservation Practices for Rhode Island

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)

Current Implementation

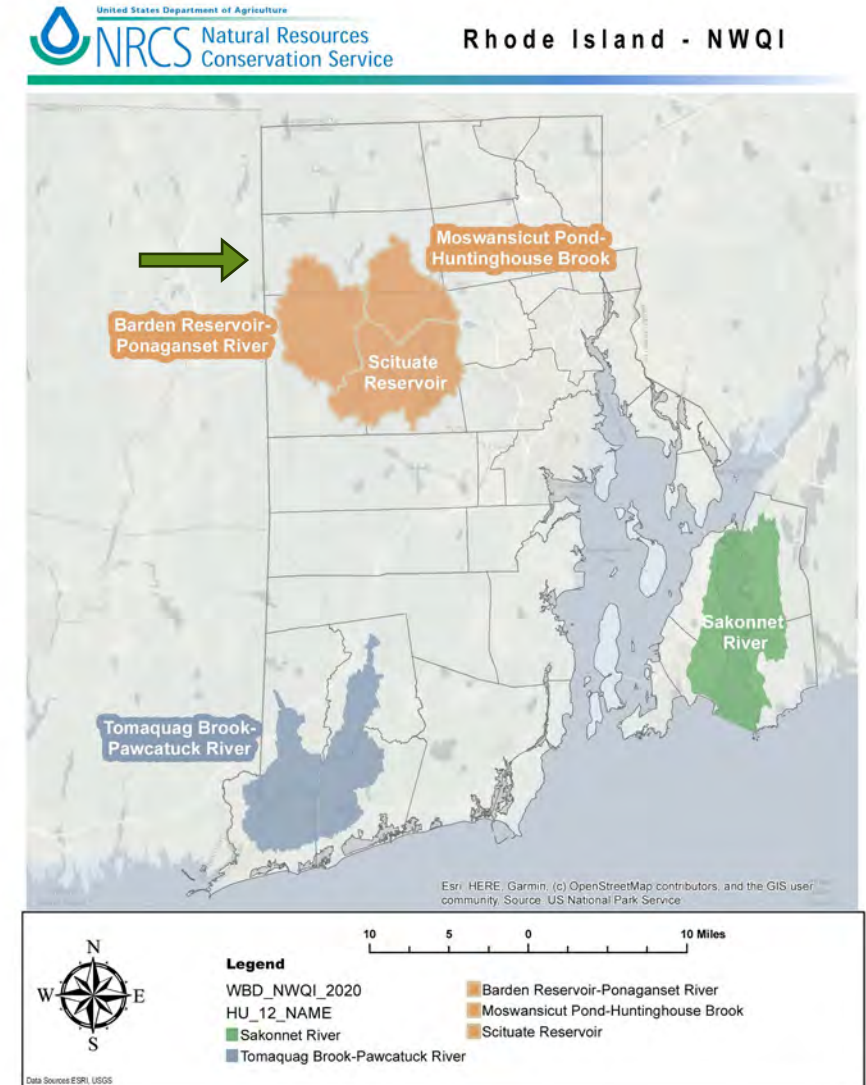
- Sakonnet River Water Quality Project - Eastern RI
 - Sakonnet River Watershed
 - HUC-12 ID: 0109-000-40910
- Tomaquag Brook-Pawcatuck River Water Quality Project - Southern RI
 - Tomaquag Brook-Pawcatuck River Watershed
 - HUC-12 ID: 0110-0007-0205



National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)

★ New Implementation – FY 26

- Ponaganset River Water Quality Project -Northern RI
 - Scituate Reservoir Watershed
 - HUC-12 ID: 0109-0004-0606
 - Barden Reservoir-Ponaganset River Watershed
 - HUC-12 ID: 0109-0004-0605
 - Moswansicut Pond-Huntinhouse Brook Watershed
 - HUC-12 ID: 0109-0004-0604

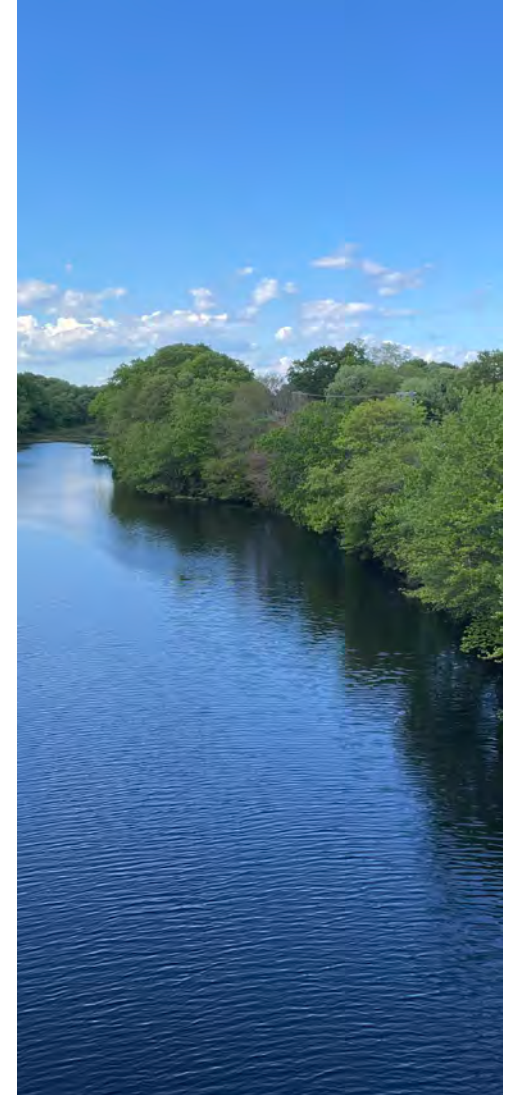




National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)

Watershed assessments underway:

- Chipuxet River-Pawcatuck River Watershed – Southern RI
 - HUC-12 ID: 010900050201
- Usquepaug River Watershed – Southern RI
 - HUC-12 ID: 010900050202



New Conservation Practice Standards

Soil Carbon Amendment (336) - 2025

- Application of carbon-based amendments derived from plant materials or treated animal byproducts.

Forest Farming (379) - 2025 - Implementation Requirements

- Managing or establishing stands of trees or shrubs in coordination with the management and/or cultivation of understory plants or nontimber forest products.



Non-timber specialty products like goldenseal can be cultivated beneath a tree canopy. (Photo by Katie Trozzo) USDA-Forest Service

New Interim Conservation Practice Standards

Amending Soil Properties with Lime (805) - FY2026

- Adjust the soil pH with lime to change physical and chemical properties of the soil to achieve a conservation objective.

Low Tunnel Systems (821) - FY2025

- An enclosed polyethylene, polycarbonate, plastic, or fabric covered structure that is used to cover and protect crops from sun, wind, excessive rainfall, or cold, and to extend the growing season or to reduce pest pressure.



Northeast Strawberry Production Season Extension Using Low Tunnels
USDA-Agricultural Research Service

New Interim Conservation Practice Standards

Strategic Harvested Forage Management (827) - FY2025

- The planned feeding of livestock by controlling access to harvested forages arranged in a predetermined pattern on the landscape to address specific resource needs.

Wildlife Habitat Site Preparation (828) - FY2026 - Implementation Requirements

- Implementing land-treatment measures to create conditions suitable for planting herbaceous vegetation alone or in combination with woody vegetation for wildlife.



New Interim Conservation Practice Standards

Nonruminant Livestock Outdoor Management of Vegetative Cover (822) - FY2026

- Managing the disturbance of soil and vegetation with nonruminant livestock to achieve specific ecological, economic, and management objectives.

Culturally Significant Plantings for Soil Health (825) - FY2026

- Managing and improving a soil ecosystem by growing two or more culturally significant plants together using cultural and biological strategies that improve soil health, foster the cycling of resources and promote biodiversity.



Free range meat chickens - NRCS Kentucky



Conservation Practice Highlight

Oyster Restoration (CPS 643)

- Obligated 11 contracts for a total of \$2.5 million in 2025
 - Ongoing restoration work continues in Winnapaug Pond, Quonochontaug Pond, Ninigret Pond, Potter Pond, Great Salt Pond, Bissel Cove, and Town Pond

Biofouling Control (CPS 400) reintroduced in FY24

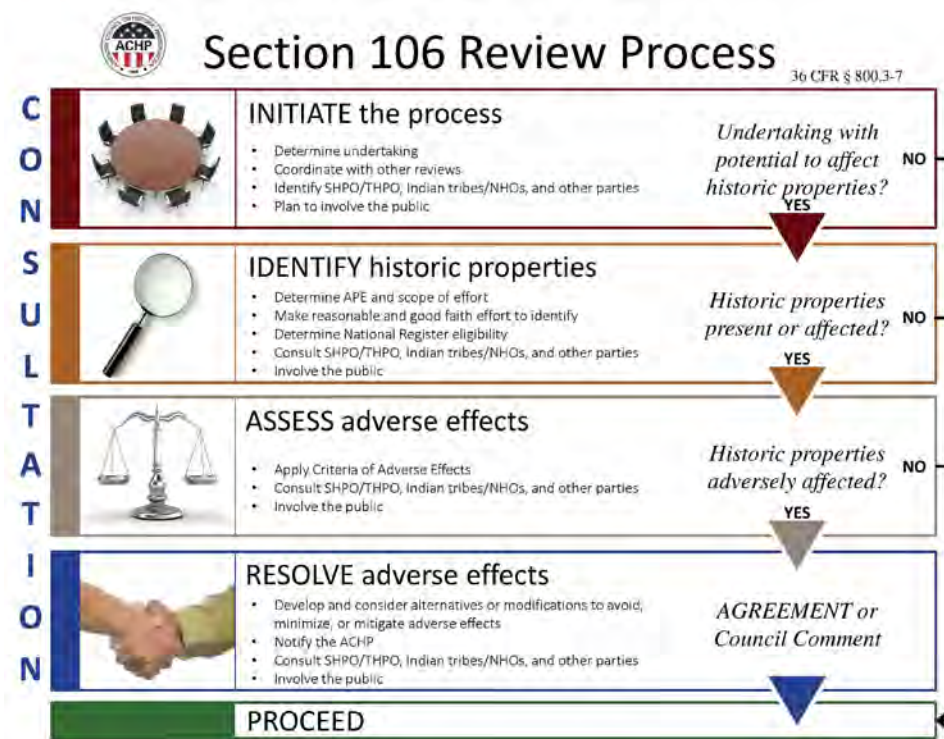
- Obligated 16 contracts with 15 different growers to implement this practice in 2024 and 2025
 - Addresses a water quality resource concern by keeping biofoul material out of the water body



Environmental Compliance

National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 Consultation

- NY Archeologist is supporting RI.
- PPA exemption request will be sent for another 14 practices.
- Completed 103 project reviews
 - Submitted 33 consultations to SHPO for concurrence
 - 122 reviews are pending



Environmental Compliance

Endangered Species Act, Section 7 Consultation

- Completed 264 T&E species project reviews in FY25
 - Submitted 27 consultations to USFWS for concurrence
 - Includes review of impacts to Northern long-eared bat (federally endangered) and Tricolored bat (proposed endangered)
 - Completed 3 site surveys for small whorled pogonia (federally threatened)
 - Projects receiving RI NRCS funds need to abide by time of year restrictions for tree cutting:
 - No cutting June 1 – August 15 (with concurrence from USFWS)
 - Projects still under review with USFWS need to wait until October 1 to start cutting
 - If terrestrial habitat is the primary resource concern being addressed, no cutting between March 1 and November 1

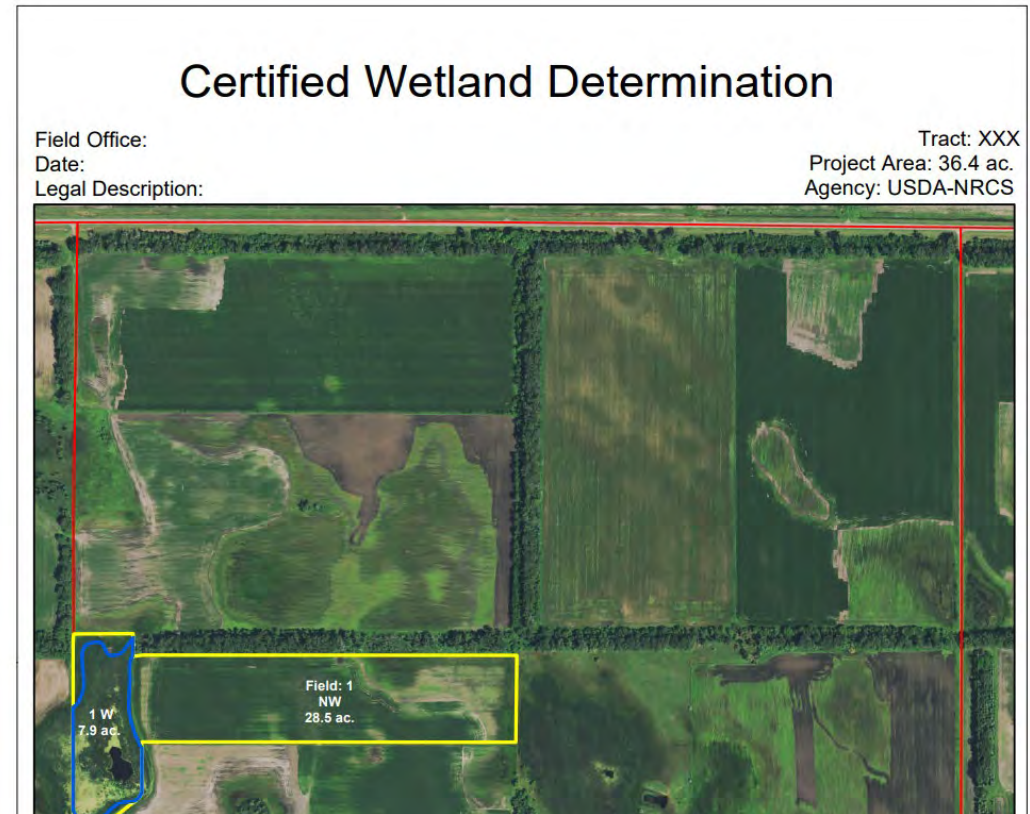


Environmental Compliance

Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended

FSA Compliance Team Completed:

- 25 Highly Erodible Land (HEL) Determinations
- 11 Wetland Determinations
- Appeal for 1 HEL determination
- 2 Field Reviews for Wetland Mitigation Plans



Conservation Planning Training & Assistance

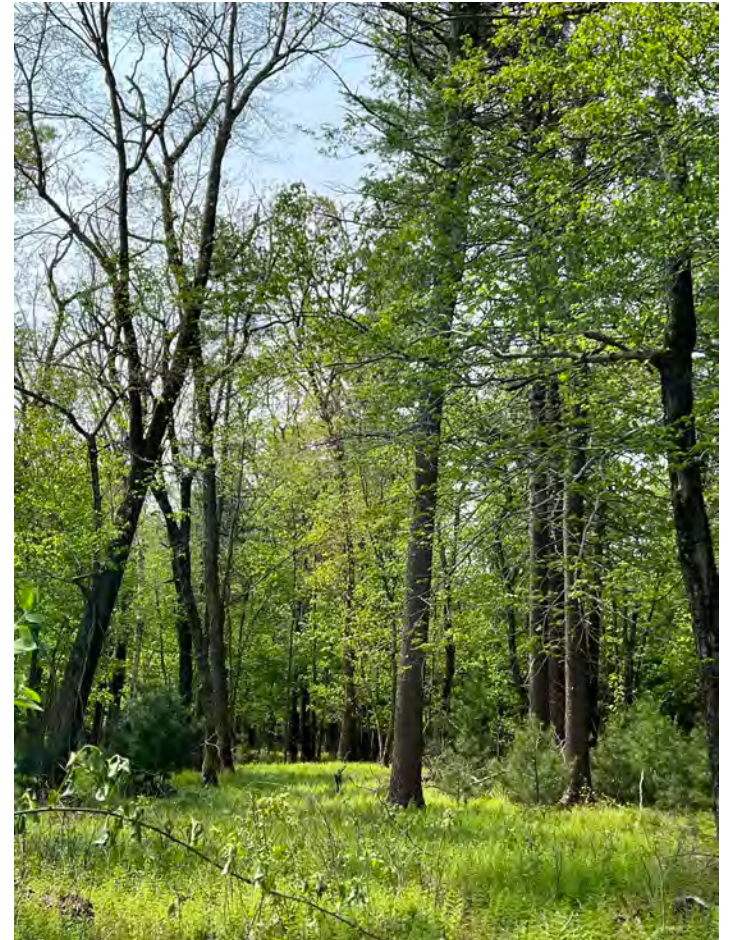
- Support staff with:
 - Conservation Planning
 - Tools and Guidance
 - Environmental Compliance
 - Practice Implementation Requirements
 - Knowledge Skills and Abilities
 - Ecological Sciences Job Approval Authority
 - Planner Level Certifications and Requirements



Conservation Planning Training & Assistance

Wildlife & Forestry Training Provided FY25

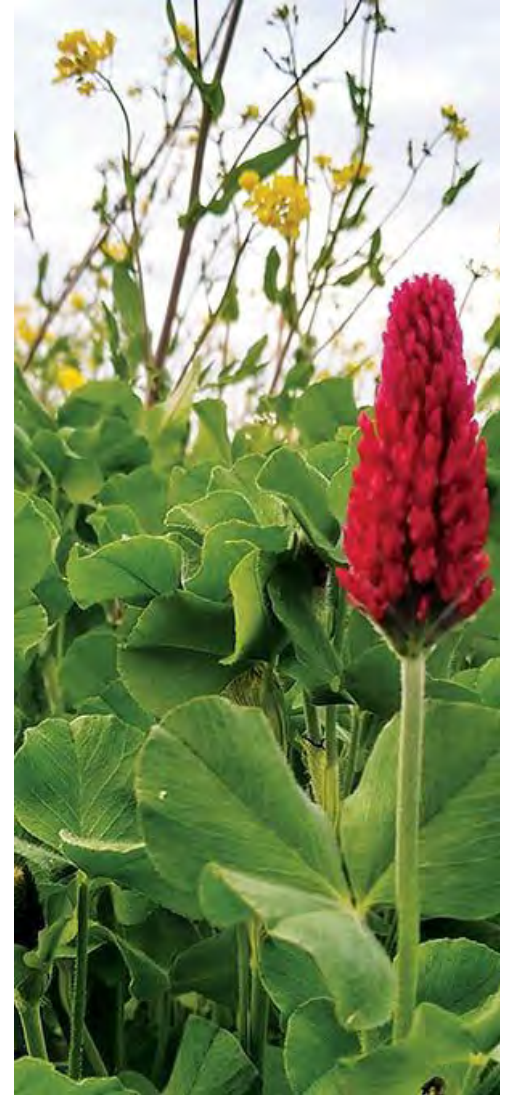
- Implementation of CSP Practice E666R (Forest Songbird Habitat Maintenance)
- Forest Stand Improvement
- Unpacking a Forest Management Plan
- Growing Season Plant Identification
- Small Scale Forestry
- Forestry Technical Service Provider Updates
- NEPA CPA-52 Training



Conservation Planning Training & Assistance

Agronomy Trainings Provided FY25

- Low Tunnel Implementation
- Cover Crop Planning
- Livestock Production & Animal Husbandry
- Coming soon:
 - Pasture ID
 - Pasture Health & Paddock Calculations
 - Soil Health with New Jersey
 - Agronomy 101
 - Basics of Conservation Planning





Ecological Science

Name	Position	Phone Number	Email
Cassius Spears, Jr.	State Resource Conservationist	401-822-8833	Cassius.Spears@usda.gov
Liz Camps	State Agronomist	401-822-8810	Liz.Camps@usda.gov
Melissa Hayden	State Biologist	401-822-8847	Melissa.Hayden@usda.gov
Chris Modisette	ACES Forester	401-822-8840	Christopher.Modisette@usda.gov

Soils

Name	Position	Phone Number	Email
Jim Turenne	Assistant State Soil Scientist	401-822-8830	Jim.Turenne@usda.gov

Partner Agreements

- RI NWQI Watershed Planning
 - To develop watershed level assessments to meet the Planning Phase requirements of the National Water Quality Initiative NWQI.
- URI Agriculture and Forestry
 - Technical assistance including forestry, agronomy, livestock and pasture systems, and soil science
- RI RC&D Technical Support for Forestry, Wildlife, Water Quality
 - Technical assistance with outreach and training to support delivery of Farm Bill Programs
- ACES Forestry and Appeals Review Assistance
 - Technical assistance with forestry and Farm Bill Program appeal processes
- Boston University Oyster Reef Biogeochemical Related Ecosystem Services
 - Research project to investigate impacts of oyster reefs on nitrogen and carbon cycling

Thank you!

■ Questions?



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