

State Office

451 West Street

Suite 1

Amherst, MA 01002

MASSACHUSETTS STATE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

November 26, 2024

9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Meeting Held Virtually

Welcome and Opening Remarks – Dan Wright, NRCS/USDA

The meeting was called to order at 9:00am by Dan Wright, Massachusetts State Conservationist. Dan welcomed everyone and requested attendees enter their Name, Agency, and Title into the Chat.

Minutes from the July 23, 2023, meeting of the State Technical Advisory Committee was accepted.

Dan took a few minutes to reflect on Thanksgiving and realizing how much of the food on our tables oftentimes comes from domestic producers and how many of those producers likely have had some support from the NRCS and its partners.

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) summer conference was held in Boston, MA. The NACD showed off a lot of their great work that was completed in Partnership with NRCS MA, from Urban Ag in Boston to some large-scale drone operations in Southeastern MA. Kira Jacobs with the EPA was involved with the planning of the conference.

We do not have an approved budget from Congress or a new Farm Bill yet. We are currently working with some interim rules and guidance and operating with available funds. There are funds that are currently available that we are trying to utilize and obligate as soon as possible, specifically IRA funds.

There are two very big RCPP projects in progress. One Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA) Agreement and one regular RCPP project. We're looking forward to working with the partnership on those to do some great work across the state.

Farm Bill Programs – Rita Thibodeau, NRCS/USDA

Rita provided the initial program allocations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) = \$12,041,724
 - increase of ~\$7,000,000 from FY24
- EQIP Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) = \$6,355,104
 - Reduction of ~\$2,700,000 from FY24

- National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) = \$231,445
 - Increase of ~\$161,445 from FY24
- EQIP Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) – National Website [Conservation Innovation Grants \(CIG\) | USDA](#). We were unable to roll CIGs out in FY24 due to issues with the language for IRA funding. Consequently, there was no opportunity to announce.
 - FY25 Proposed CIG funding:
 - EQIP IRA-\$600,000
 - EQIP Classic \$155,000
- Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program = \$155,000
 - MA is one of sixteen states that receives AMA funding since we don't have much disaster money for crop.
 - We may also receive an allocation of Risk Management Agency (RMA) AMA funding of ~\$200,000.
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) = \$1,270,000
- CSP IRA = \$600,000
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
 - Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) = \$1,922,068
 - Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) = \$797,215
 - WRE Stewardship = \$12,500
 - ACEP IRA = \$2,443,591

Application Cutoff Dates:

- EQIP / CSP / AMA / RCPP / NWQI
 - Round 1 – 10/11/2024
 - Round 2 – 1/10/2025
 - Round 3 – 4/11/2025
- ACEP IRA
 - Round 1 – 10/4/2024
 - Round 2 – 12/20/2024
- ACEP Classic / RCPP 2325
 - Round 1 – 12/20/2024

ACEP WRE Area Wide Market Analysis Geographic Area Rate Cap (AWMA GARC) Region I – Barnstable, Bristol, & Plymouth Counties

Region	Acres	Cranberry	Other
I	≥ 200	\$13,500	\$7,200
I	> 200	Appraisal	\$7,200
II	All	\$7,200	\$7,200

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP): [Regional Conservation Partnership Program | Natural Resources Conservation Service](#)

- 3 Proposals were entered for FY24

-
- RCPP 2311 with American Farmland Trust is accepting applications.
 - RCPP 2325 with Rensselaer Plateau Alliance – Sheffield Land Trust is in the process of submitting two easement applications.
 - RCPP 3801 with Mass Audubon - AFA - \$25,000,000
 - RCPP 3940 with MA Executive Office of Environmental and Energy Affairs (EOEEA) - \$20,835,000

For information on RCPP Easements: [RCPP Easements | Natural Resources Conservation Service](#)

State Resource Conservationist – Catherine Magee, NRCS/USDA

FY2025 – Ten Priority Resource Concern Practices:

- 449 – Irrigation Water Management
- 400 – Bivalve Aquaculture Gear and Biofouling Control

*The following Priority Resource Concern practices are on the Climate Smart Ag and Forestry list and can be used for the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

- 313 – Waste Storage Facility
- 340 – Cover Crop
- 367 – Roofs and Covers
- 374 – Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation
- 442 – Sprinkler System
- 345 – Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till
- 666 – Forst Stand Improvement
- 314 – Brush Management

*All applications for any of the 10 Priority Resource Concerns practices would receive a 90% cost share rate.

FY2025 – Interim Practices

- Phosphorus Removal System
- Raised Beds
- Organic Management
- Amending Soil Properties with Lime
- Low Tunnel Systems
- Strategic Harvested Forage Management
- Annual Forages for Grazing Systems
- Nonruminant Livestock Outdoor Management of Vegetative Cover
- Wildlife Habitat Site Preparation

*Practices are now on a regional payment schedule. Payment Schedules can be found here: [Payment Schedules | Natural Resources Conservation Service](#)

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) Program - We currently have four Projects in progress.

- Implementation Phase
 - Unkety Brook (Third Year)
 - Westport River (Third Year)

-
- South River (First Year)
 - Planning Phase
 - Manhan River
 - Proposed Project – Mill River

Source Water Protection Areas (SWPA) – SWPA locations specifically target improving drinking water.

- MA is densely populated and 29.7% of our state is in SWPA.
- NRCS customers located in a SWPA will receive a 90% cost share rate for any practice that is deemed to help improve water quantity or water quality.

*NWQI areas often have source water protection areas.

FY24 New Agreements Selected = \$2,000,000

- Energy
 - UMASS Amherst – Will write 10 improvement plans per year for NRCS customers to address energy improvements such as greenhouse energy.
- Integrated Pest Management
 - UMASS Amherst - Will write 10 improvement plans per year for NRCS customers focusing on orchards and vegetable producers but can work on other areas as well.
- Project Management
 - New England Consulting Services – Will write 5 comprehensive nutrient management plans per year for NRCS customers and will assist us with some certifications of practices that have been implemented.
- Southeastern MA
 - Cranberry Growers Association – Will write 10 whole farm plans per year for southeast MA specifically. Whole farm plans look at every aspect of a farm instead of just resource concerns.
- Shellfish
 - The Nature Conservancy (TNC) - Will help us get 5 shellfish, salt marsh, or eelgrass restoration projects for our customers.

Soil Scientist – David Zimmermann, NRCS/USDA

Staff Updates:

- Maggie Payne, State Soil Scientist, is on detail 6/2/24-TBD (Not to exceed 1 year) – Could possibly be renewed for multiple years. - She is working with the Soil and Plant Science Division on Soil Carbon Monitoring Network Project.
- Resource Soil Scientist – Morgan McKee

SSURGO Portal – Updated 11/12/2024: [SSURGO Portal | Natural Resources Conservation Service](#)

- Manage soil survey data
 - Geospatial SQLite SSURGO template databases
- Now includes
 - Soil Data Viewer, Version 1.0
 - Vector and Raster data

-
- STATSGO 2 data

NCSS Partners Seminar Playlist: [NCSS Partners Seminars - YouTube](#)

Soil Carbon Monitoring and Research Network: [Soil Carbon Monitoring and Research Network | Natural Resources Conservation Service](#)

- Came out of IRA funding
- Purpose: To account for and monitor soil carbon in agricultural pasture and range lands throughout the country.
- 5 sites in MA for FY25
 - 9 to 15 soil cores across a 10-acre site
- Revisit every 5 to 10 years
- Led by NRCS Soil and Plant Science Division
- [AA#1 - Soil Carbon Monitoring and Research Network with an above-ground perennial biomass component](#)

Easement Subcommittee – Chair, Jamie Potters, AFT

Background:

- Established a couple years ago.
- Meet quarterly
- 20-25 attendees
- Great educational opportunity for Land Trusts, MDAR, and NRCS-MA Easements Staff to get together and share their knowledge of ACEP-ALE farmland protection tools as well as sharing updates on funding and deadlines.

October 23, 2024, Meeting Notes:

- ~20 Attendees
- Rita Thibodeau provided a summary of figures from FY24 and what is projected for FY25.
- Katharine Otto, MDAR, provided updates on the farmland action plan.
- Dave Viale, MDAR, presented on the private Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) mechanism, which essentially is a restriction that a Land Trust would hold instead of MDAR. We may consider how using this tool can dovetail nicely with the ACEP-ALE tool. This may encourage Land Trusts to consider how we may bring these mechanisms together potentially leading to more projects in the ACEP-ALE pipeline.
- Next Meeting scheduled for Wednesday January 22, 2025, 10:00am-12:00pm. Register here: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0kdOyqzMoEtRyQaFzNATbGrMschHGGJ5BI>

Contact Catherine.Magee@usda.gov if you are interested in joining one of the subcommittees listed below:

- Easements
- Urban Agriculture
- Soil Health
- Forestry and Wildlife

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Drinking Water Protection Coordinator, Kira Jacobs

Northeast Mid-Atlantic Partnership for Forests & Water: [Northeast Mid-Atlantic Partnership for Forests and Water – Healthy Forests = Clean Water](#)

- Interagency, multi-partner collaborative to enhance concerted, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes to improve water quality and quantity in 13 states in the Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic United States. (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio)
- Created in 2022
- Funded by the Landscape Scale Restoration Program from the US Forest Service (USFS)
- History – Began with conversations between EPA and USFS in 2019. A virtual forum was held in June 2022 with federal, state, and non-profit attendees. More than 80 attendees joined the meeting and expressed support for the concept. NACD developed an LSR grant with support from Partners and all thirteen State Foresters. The LSR grant of \$600,000 was awarded in the summer of 2023 and the official launching of the Partnership took place in May 2023.
- Mission: *To create a collaborative network that leverages resources to manage, restore, and conserve forests and protect water resources.*
- Vision: *Resilient and well-managed forests that improve water resources and create healthy watersheds.*
- Long-term Goals:
 - Foster Collaboration between the Forestry and Water Sectors
 - Build Capacity to Increase Work in the Region
 - Increase Implementation of BMPs
 - Align Communication and Outreach
- In June 2024, the NACD was awarded a second LSR grant which will enable the Partnership to increase collaborative efforts, expand, develop and disseminate additional resources, and implement new projects in West Virginia and Pennsylvania.
- What's Next:
 - Connecticut: Implementers will continue to support collaborative partnerships that equip landowners with the resources and knowledge necessary to make informed decisions about their forest lands.
 - Ohio: Implementers will provide oversight and guidance to conservation efforts in approx. 30 counties within the Appalachian region that are classified as “most disadvantaged” or “disadvantaged” by the university of Michigan’s “Index of Deep Disadvantage” equity maps.
 - Pennsylvania: Partners will establish at least four riparian buffer demonstration sites. These efforts, including associated state outreach will reach at least 5,000 private forest landowners, partners, and stakeholders.
 - West Virginia: Implementers will meet to identify priority forested areas and critical watersheds for potential implementation projects that serve local communities. Implementers will also support projects that target wildlife habitat improvements, state forest action plan priorities, and water quality protection.

Information on Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Network:

<https://wildlandsandwoodlands.org/rcpnetwork/about-the-rcp-network-2/the-rcp-network-gathering/>

Dan Wright thanked everyone for participating in the state tech committee meeting and for providing input on NRCS programs.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30am.

About the State Technical Committee

The State Technical Committee advises the NRCS State Conservationist on the technical guidelines necessary to implement the conservation provisions of the 2018 Farm Bill. Committee membership includes representatives from federal and state agriculture and environmental agencies, agricultural producers, UMass Extension, nonprofit organizations, and agribusiness.

State Technical Committee meetings are open to the public and are held as often as necessary to advise and implement NRCS conservation programs. For information about upcoming meetings, please contact Catherine Magee at the NRCS State Office at 413-253-4365 or catherine.magee@usda.gov. More information and meeting minutes are available on the MA NRCS web site: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/massachusetts/massachusetts-state-technical-committee-0>