

State Technical Committee



Natural Resources Conservation Service

New Jersey State Technical Committee
220 Davidson Avenue 4th Floor, Somerset, NJ 08873

Meeting Date: Wednesday, June 8, 2022

Meeting Location: Hunterdon County Library

Evan Madlinger gathered all participants at the Hunterdon County Library and directed the group to the Field Tour portion of the meeting. Sites for the visit included Frenchtown Park and Gunson Farm.

Those present included:

Alyssa Bright
Bruce Eklund
Cali Alexander
David Clapp
Elizabeth Freiday
Emily Allen
Evan Madlinger
Fran DeFiccio
Gail Bartok

George Cassaday
Hilary Trotman
Julie Hawkins
Kaitlin Farbotnik
Kathy Hale
Kristin Adams
Lauren Finnegan
Lauren Lapczynski
Lee Fiocchi

Liz Thompson
Michael Flood
Michael Kent
Morgan Devine
Nicholas Saumweber
Rachel DeFlumeri
Samantha Loscalzo
Sarah Fenwick
Tara Walker
Virginia Lamb

The Field Tour began at Frenchtown Park. Hilary Trotman provided pictures and examples of the damage sustained to the Nishisakawick Creek during Hurricane Ida and showed the group the where the issues were located. She went on to discuss the plans for repair.

Eight inches of rain fell within a very short period of time causing severe erosion and sandbar deposits. This storm and subsequent damage were considered a natural disaster, which triggered the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program to kick in. We received 36 inquiries regarding the EWP program after the storm. NRCS put together a damage team to evaluate each inquiry, which found that many of the sites had multiple damage areas. Within 60 days of request, the initial evaluation, a plan of action to remedy the damages, and eligibility all needed to be completed.

The premise of the EWP program is to restore streams to pre-storm conditions (reduce the threat to life and property). We needed to save a house, restore a road, ensure debris is out of the way to restore capacity of the stream, and ensure the pump station is not in danger of falling into the stream via bank stabilization with gabion basket (wire basket filled with rocks, coated in PVC, and includes vegetation). The plan is to have these baskets installed by July with NRCS covering 75% of the cost with the sponsor covering the remaining 25% to reimburse construction costs. In addition to the one spot Hilary took everyone to, she also had us drive down Creek Road, where there is erosion directly under the road that needs to be stabilized with gabion baskets as well.

The EWP program does not allow for private land owners to apply and make requests; this program requires sponsors in form of local towns, townships, and cities (to name a few). The reason for this is because if streamlining; it is easier and



more efficient to do long stretches of rehabilitation instead of piecemealing. Also, by having a large sponsor like a town, the town is able to provide their own forces in kind, such as labor and equipment.

The next stop on the tour was Gunson Farms, hosted by Diane and Roger. The farm started off as horse dedicated. However, after the great recession, horses were not a hot commodity. They essentially traded the horses for cows, specifically the British White as Diane had learned the genetic diversity of cattle was bottlenecking. Most people don't know where their commercial beef comes from. The US imports from 25 countries, not just Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, and Australia, but Uruguay and Nibia, just to name a few.

One of the highlights to this farm is the application of prescribed grazing. The pastures at Gunson Farms are always immaculate and show the results of when properly administered grazing is applied. There is approximately 200-300 feet of stream behind the farm (with many bends and turns) which have experienced "bad" storms once approximately every 10 years. The most recent storm flooded the stream just down the road from the farm where water levels had risen over the usual threshold and up over the fourth board. During the time when the storm took place, Diane had given her cows a vast area to roam for ample shade and water. As a result of the grazing area being so vast and the stream flooding, the cows escaped the property. Multiple neighbors called to let her know her cows were free roaming the streets, but before she could get out there, a different neighbor let her know the bull had taken a look around and decided it was time to go home and brought the entire herd with him. The six weeks following the storm and the cow jail-break were spent with a chainsaw whittling down the debris and fallen fence boards. Within a few days, an NRCS employee went to the farm and walked the riverbanks with Diane to inventory the damage.

In addition to the livestock, Diane and Roger are very passionate about the grasses and trees on the farm. They utilize mesh tubes to help the growth of the young plantings. However, the problem with the mesh is the leaves grow through so if a tube needs to be taken off for weeding, it can kill the plantings. White oaks, honeylocust, pussy willows (peach leaf, black, silky), stream cord, and red-osier dogwoods are all native trees that they've planted on their property. Willows traditionally have an 80-85% successful growth rate while dogwoods have a 40-45% successful grow rate. No fertilizer has been used within the past two years and they do not bale their own.

Finally, Diane showed the group one of four concrete dams on the property. While they're not certain why they were put in, they have a few theories. Diane believes they have something to do with flood control or moving the water to the mill. Roger theorized that previous landowners utilized the sloping hill to pump water uphill elsewhere. There is an old stone house on the property that was built in 1799 in an area on the property that does not flood. NJ averages 44 inches of rain a year. During the last two hurricanes NJ faced, Gunson Farm received 14 inches in just a few hours.

1:30 Julie Hawkins started the meeting portion of the day by thanking Evan for organizing the meeting, Hilary for the field tour, and Diane for the tour of Gunson farm. Julie went on to discuss two items briefly:

1. NRCS State Office is in the process of relocating to coexist with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Office towards the end of calendar year 2022; and
2. NRCS has brought on new State Urban Conservationist Morgan Devine (and with additional funds being provided for salary the agency will also be bringing on 13 additional employees within the next 60-90 days).

1:32 December 2021 Meeting Minutes Review and Acceptance – Evan Madlinger, NRCS

Evan brought up the Minutes from the December 2021 meeting on the projector to see if there were any corrections, additions, or revisions needed. None were referenced.

1:34 FY22 Farm Bill Programs Update, Gail Bartok, NRCS

Gail started her presentation with an overview of FY22 Programs Funding allocations.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) had \$996,948; Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE) for categories general and Bog Turtle had \$565,878; ACEP-WRE Stewardship (existing easements if they need maintenance for their restoration work) received \$86,000. There were some troubles selling ALE this fiscal year (COVID, land prices for example). As a result, we had to send back \$800,000. For FY23, the plan is to increase outreach for this program in hopes that it will generate parcels. For WRE, we sent back \$200,000; we only had one eligible parcel for FY22 and is currently going through the appraisal process. Other things we are planning on spending our WRE General money is an area-wide market analysis for FY23. This area-wide market analysis will provide costs up front instead of waiting for appraisals throughout the year and finding out at that moment the plan will not work.

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) received \$197,941 (which is only available to 16 states); Agricultural Management Assistance - Risk Management Agency (AMA-RMA) received \$166,446 and was spent on high tunnels

alone; Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) received \$5.613 million with an additional allocation of \$2.371 million added later in the year; The Environmental Quality Incentives Program – National Water Quality Initiative (EQIP-NWQI) received \$350,006; Golden Winged Warbler (GWW) received \$100,000 primarily in the northern part of the state; EQIP - Disaster received \$41,000 and we applied all of that to replacing roofs after a tornado touched down during Hurricane Ida; Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Renewals (2017 contracts given an opportunity to renew) received \$322,794; CSP Classic received \$1 million; and CSP Organics received \$200,000.

After Gail went over the allocations, she went on to talk about how the allocations were going to be spent. For ACEP-ALE, we expect one parcel for FY22, and we reserved \$100,000 for that. For ACEP-WRE, we have one eligible application which we reserved \$45,000 for, and no applications were received for Bog Turtle.

EQIP Ranking Pool for Source Water Protection received \$300,000 and was spent on 16 different practices: waste storage facility, conservation cover, critical area planting, field border, grassed waterway, prescribed grazing, heavy use area protection, tree/shrub establishment, agrichemical handling facility, fence, lined waterway, forage and biomass planting, livestock pipeline, roof runoff structure, watering facility, and underground outlet. Gail shared a slide that had a list of all the core and supporting practices (and their corresponding codes) for source water protection:

Core-

Waste Storage Facility	313C
Animal Mortality Facility	316C
Composting Facility	317C
Conservation Cover	327C
Conservation Crop Rotation	328C
Contour Farming	330C
Contour Orchard and Other Perennial Crops	331C
Contour Buffer Strips	332C
Critical Area Planting	342C
Waste Facility Closure	360C
Field Border	386C
Riparian Herbaceous Cover	390C
Riparian Forest Buffer	391C
Filter Strip	393C
Grade Stabilization Structure	410C
Grassed Waterway	412C
Access Control	472C
Prescribed Grazing	528C
Drainage Water Management	554C
Heavy Use Area Protection	561C
Trails and Walkways	575C
Nutrient Management	590C
Terrace	600C
Vegetative Barrier	601C
Tree/Shrub Establishment	612C
Waste Treatment	629C
Waste Recycling	633C
Waste Transfer	634C
Vegetated Treatment Area	635C
Water and Sediment Control Basin	638C

Supporting-

Agrichemical Handling Facility	309S
Alley Cropping	311S
Sediment Basin	350S
Diversion	362S
Roofs and Covers	367S
Silvopasture Establishment	381S
Fence	382S
Hedgerow Planting	422S
Lined Waterway or Outlet	468S
Mulching	484S
Forage and Biomass Planting	512S
Livestock Pipeline	516S
Roof Runoff Structure	558S
Access Road	560S
Spring Development	574S
Stream Crossing	578S
Strip cropping	585S
Structure for Water Control	587S
Cross Wind Trap Strips	589C
Integrated Pest Management	595S
Herbaceous Wind Barriers	603S
Watering Facility	614S
Underground Outlet	620S
Water Well	642S

Next item on Gail's list was the EQIP Ranking Pools. Beginning Farmer category is set to spend approximately \$2.121 million and Socially Disadvantaged is set to spend \$337,467. It should be noted that the Beginning Farmer is not exclusive to EQIP but all ranking pools (livestock farmers, high tunnel for example). Other funding in the EQIP ranking pools include activity plans like forestry, CNMP, NMP, and other. Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CMNP) has seven contracts for \$79,635; Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) has three contracts for \$15,118; Forestry has 93 contracts for \$163,747; Other has five contracts for \$15,564 (the other category has energy, organic, and pollinator as the specifics); Organics has seven contracts for \$154,449; Aquaculture has eight contracts for \$1.065 million; Bobwhite Quail has one contract for \$1,731; Golden Winged Warbler has two contracts for \$71,672; Soil Health has four contracts for \$149,402 (two contracts include 810 annual forage for grazing systems); Livestock has 16 contracts for 1.241 million; High Tunnel has three contracts for \$479,858; and Irrigation has three contracts for \$511,338. Gail then went over local EQIP Ranking Pools. For the North, this included Forestry with 24 contracts for \$107,193, Wildlife with seven contracts for \$63,524, and Water Quality with 12 contracts for \$370,768.

In Central New Jersey, this includes Forestry/Wildlife with three contracts for \$8,105 and Local Workgroup with seven contracts for \$411,467. In the South, this includes Forestry/Wildlife with three contracts for \$6,036 and Local Workgroup with 13 contracts for \$787,833. In addition, there is also a NWQI ranking pool in the South, local workgroups with Upper Salem having one contract for \$118,118 and Upper Cohansey with two contracts for \$99,097. New to us this fiscal year is Conservation Incentive Contracts (CIC). Per policy, NRCS is supposed to set aside 5% of the EQIP General allocation, which is \$280,000. It focuses on management practices only. This year we received three applications and the payment rate comes directly from the EQIP cost table for practice rates (cover crop, reduced tillage, Irrigation Water Management (IWM), and Nutrient Management), however, the timing of payments is similar to CSP (October through May).

AMA Ranking Pools is next on the agenda. We had a total general allocation of \$198,000 with \$62,851 spent via five contracts for High Tunnel and \$118,656 via five contracts for Cropland (cover crop, drip irrigation, and pollinator). AMA-RMA additional allocation had \$166,000 and all of that money was spent on seven contracts. CSP Renewals had 13 contracts that spent \$322,974 and the CPS Classic sign-up ended in March, and we have received 34 contracts.

2:02 Outreach Updates, Lauren Finnegan, NRCS

Lauren explained that many USDA factsheets translated into different languages could be found at: [Farmers.gov/](https://farmers.gov/) translations. There is a list of 12 languages that are offered. If there is something you need translated and you don't see it on the list, please contact Lauren Finnegan or anyone at a field office and they will gather the information needed. Information needed for a translation is: what the document is, what language is needed, and a date when needed. Standard turnaround time is 30 days but if there is an emergency, they can produce the translation quicker.

In December, NRCS NJ created an Outreach Committee comprised of one representative from each Service Center as well as two from the State Office. The mission is to provide leadership to ensure all programs and services are made accessible to all NRCS customers, fairly and equitably, with an emphasis on reaching underserved and socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and landowners. They will be soliciting feedback, guidance, and suggestions to help. Currently they have an internal outreach plan for the state that each field office will be working on. If anyone is interested in helping or has any suggestions, please let Lauren or anyone on the committee know.

Committee members and their locations include: Kimmie Dalton from Hackettstown, Kara Hasko from Frenchtown, Morgan Devine from Freehold, Becky Watson from Vineland, Katelyn Haggard from Columbus, Mona Peterson from Woodstown, Scott Snell from Cape May Plant Materials Center, and Nick Saumweber and Coleen Churchill from the State Office. The first big project from the committee was putting together a "Beginning Farmers" brochure. The first section explains how to get started with NRCS and what we can do for you. Then, on the next page, there is a roadmap which explains all the technical and financial steps needed to be taken. There is also one page that explains what technical assistance is, as well as a page that discusses establishing your farm (linked to FSA as well as their contact information). There is a self-evaluation page that guides the user to determine if they qualify as a historically underserved producer, EQIP information, advanced payment options for EQIP, conservation compliance, how to get started on farmers.gov, GovDelivery to receive press releases (urban agriculture or wildlife), and Programs Crosswalk (which provides information for all the programs we offer). On the last page is a map of all our service centers statewide, our Youtube channel information, twitter, our site, and the farmers.gov website. This booklet will be printed and will be available at all our service centers and the state office. There is also a digital version available to be posted that can be sent out to anyone interested.

2:11 Urban Update, Evan Madlinger/Morgan Devine/Kaitlin Farbotnik, NRCS

Evan started by congratulating Morgan on her new position as Urban Conservationist. She will be the point of contact (POC) for urban producers. Evan asked Morgan to introduce herself and give a little about her background.

Morgan has been with NRCS for approximately five years in Indiana but started here in New Jersey back in September 2021. She has always had a personal passion for small farms and urban ag. She is very excited to be in this position and solicited all attendees for information (site visits, for example), please reach out.

Evan is putting together a sub-committee for urban agriculture (under the State Technical Committee (STC)). First, as chair of this urban ag subcommittee, Evan adopted a charter for New Jersey. July is the time frame they are looking at to have the subcommittee start and have their first official meeting. The primary objective of the committee is to serve as primary advisory to the STC on urban agriculture. A few of the goals they have put together already include defining local urban agriculture needs, local barriers in the urban setting, innovations, recommendations for different outreach towards producers we haven't worked with in the past and advise on opportunities to revise policies in NRCS urban small-scale producers. Back in March they held sign-ups for volunteers, which closed in April. The list of volunteers includes some in attendance: Bruce Eklund, Mike Kent, Rachael DeFlumeri. While the volunteer list is great, there are hopes to expand the

group to include an extension, more academia, and more producers.

Morgan started her presentation with current open grants. There is a current urban conservation grant available until June 17. The focus on the grant is soil and water districts, non-profits, local governments (not for producers, more community focus to establish community gardens and pollinator plots). All information for this grant can be found on Grants.gov. There is \$250,000 total with a \$25,000 ceiling per application. The allocation per application can be used for things like tools, equipment, seeds, pretty much anything that is needed to establish a garden or farm plot. Morgan is in the process of putting together a selection committee for this part of the plan. It is unknown how many applications have been received as we haven't reached the deadline, but we can fund up to 25 applications. This grant is for both new and pre-existing producers but we'd like to focus on community gardens and organizations. As an agency we have been working on practice standards to help urban folks. Part of that is working with people in these types of groups and organizations and asking questions such as "What are your priorities?" and "Where can we help?"

Kaitlin let us know that we have a new finalized standard, "Raised Bed 812". This is to construct and manage raised beds for areas where soils are either compacted (to the point we can't renovate with other soil health practices), contaminated (where we can put a barrier on top/above the ground), or if there is an unsuitable substrate (pushed into an old foundation and no way to grow on it). This gives us means to help folks to still produce food on these areas. Some of the purposes for this standard include soil health knowledge of concentration of salt & chemicals, reduction of in-field particulate emissions, and increased plant productivity and health. This standard is different from the high tunnel standard (which allows raised beds up to 12 inches) where we can now go up to 24 inches in height. There are no minimum or maximum requirements on size. This standard is not just for urban settings; this can be used anywhere that has highly compacted soils, contaminated soils, and unsuitable substrates. As an interim standard, 2022 is the first year we are offering the raised bed 812 in the state of New Jersey. This information and more can be found in the Field Office Technical Guide, navigate to New Jersey, Section 4. The raised beds are paid by square foot, with or without a barrier, and framed or unframed. There are not many limiting factors to this standard as we want flexibility to see what will work and what needs to be rethought.

Every interim standard needs a state to sponsor it. Raised beds as a standard was something we here in New Jersey wanted to do so we stepped up to sponsor it. We wrote it, got it through the system, got it approved. There are other times when a standard needs a sponsor, and we will be approached to do so. Low tunnel is one standard that was brought up and a few states stepped up to sponsor.

2:28 Farm Service Agency Program Update, Sarah Fenwick, FSA

Sarah presented about what the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is from Farm Service Agency (FSA). CRP is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers to take environmentally sensitive land out of agricultural production and devote it to conservation benefits. Participants are paid annual rental payments during the contract duration between 10 and 15 years.

There are three sign-up types within CRP: General, Continuous, and Grasslands. Each sign-up has different conservation practices. General Sign-up occurs annually during an announced enrollment period. Offers are ranked based on the Environmental Benefits Index. This index includes environmental benefits such as wildlife habitat, water quality, air quality, etc. Continuous Sign-up has no enrollment period so producers can sign up at any time and offers are not subject to competitive bidding.

SAFE is the "State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement" Initiative and the purpose of this sign-up is to restore vital habitat and create food sources. Through SAFE, participants establish wetlands, grasses, and trees to enhance important wildlife populations. SAFE is only available in certain areas of the state. The SAFE Mission Projects are Grassland SAFE, Raritan Piedmont SAFE & Agricultural Heritage SAFE.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is designed to help farmers reduce damage from agricultural water runoff sources in an effort to improve water quality along streams. Federal funds are supplemented with non-federal funds cost share the projects. Grassland Conservation Reserve Program contracts with participants to protect grassland including rangeland and pastureland while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. This program is a working lands program, meaning that the land remains in production while farmers enhance the sustainability of their operation.

As of this reporting date, Sarah provided updates to sign-up types, acres, and acreage percentage.

- Continuous: 21.62 acres, 1%. This number compared to the last meeting has stayed the same.
- Continuous CREP: 657.92 acres, 36%. This number has gone down from the previous report.
- Continuous SAFE: 812.51 acres, 45%. This number has gone down from the previous report.
- General: 148.56 acres, 8%. This number has gone up from the previous report.
- Grasslands: 172.53 acre, 10%. This number has gone up from the previous report.

The total CRP acres is 1,813.14 at 100%. Total number of contracts is 312 (which went down from the previous report), number of farms included is 184 (which went up), and average rental rate is \$90/ac (which also went up from the previous report).

In addition to the updates on current signup types, Sarah also provided a five-year overview of expiring acres.

- Expiring 09/30/2022: 325.77 acres, 55 contracts, 43 farms.
- Expiring 09/30/2023: 130.42 acres, 25 contracts, 18 farms
- Expiring 09/30/2024: 55.19 acres, 11 contracts, 11 farms
- Expiring 09/30/2025: 182.38 acres, 30 contracts, 20 farms
- Expiring 09/30/2026: 138.35 acres, 33 contracts, 18 farms

Due to the war in the Ukraine, a National Notice went out that allows farmers to terminate their contracts early without repercussions. Many of these contracts might expire prior to October.

The total number of Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) contracts is 236 with an average rental rate of \$153.02 per acre. The State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) is mostly found in the western part of the state. There are three different proposals: Development of Landscape Scale Agricultural Heritage and Habitat Conservation Plans (NJAS) with 221.34 contract acres; Grassland Habitat Restoration and Management (CWF) with 297.35 contract acres; Raritan-Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership (RPWHP) Implementation of Grassland Conservation Plan with 293.82 contract acres. The total number of CRP Grassland contracts is five with an average rental rate of \$20.19 per acre.

There were two new emergency programs approved for this fiscal year: Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP). ECP provides emergency funding and technical assistance to farmers to rehabilitate farmland and conservation structures damaged by natural disaster. This program is being used currently in Hunterdon & Somerset Counties. We disbursed \$14,525 to producers who have damage caused by Hurricane Ida. EFRP assists owners of non-industrial private forests restore forest health damaged by natural disasters. Currently Mercer County is reviewing their applications for tornado damage that occurred July 29, 2021, and Gloucester County is reviewing their applications for tornado damage that occurred September 1st, 2021.

FSA worked with partners and stakeholders to create a proposal for the SAFE program in early 2000. By 2005 the proposal was approved and with the help of partners, stakeholders, and outreach, they implemented the proposal via the SAFE program. In 2020 the FSA National Office put out a new template and asked for revisions to the proposals. Sarah's predecessor updated the proposal and then Sarah took over. Recently, FSA National has asked for another round of revisions and to see if there is any interest in the program. SAFE is voluntary and not every state offers this program (NJ is one of 26 states). FSA needs the State Technical Committee approval before submitting the proposal as part of the next step. Sarah is seeking advice and input to make sure the information is correct. She has information on printouts listed in red that are the finer points that need expert eyes (habitat, ecoregions, urban land, other land use information, etc....).

SAFE offers opportunities to local producers to implement anything in the CRP and allows them to be removed from the ranking process and given the offer. Currently in SAFE there are 100 acres. Those contracts will continue, however, if the stakeholders do not pick up the proposals and revise them, we will lose SAFE. Previously, this program was based mostly on grasslands but during revisions we can include additional concerns we'd like as a focal point.

Sarah gave the group a list of partners that have been previously included. If anyone is not listed here and are interested in participating, please contact Sarah. Partner list: NJ Audubon, D&R Greenway, Conservation Resources, Conserve Wildlife Inc., Upper Raritan Watershed Association, Food Shed Alliance, American Littoral Society, Mannington Preserve Citizens Committee, Ducks Unlimited, Duke Farms, NJ Division of Fish & Wildlife, NJ Division of Fish & Wildlife Endangered & Non-game Species, NRCS, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and NJ Pheasants Forever.

2:45 Field Operations Update, Nick Saumweber, NRCS

Nick introduced provided updates on the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). NRCS NJ had three five-year RCPP projects funded in FY22 for a total of \$1.7 million. For the next round of sign-ups, we received one project which is currently being evaluated at National Headquarters. We hope to hear about the outcome shortly.

Next topic on Nick's agenda was local working groups. Local working groups are designed to bring feedback and recommendations from a local area that has been fed to the State Conservationist and the State Technical Committee to make recommendations on how we prioritize programs. The local working groups set the priorities that Gail discussed earlier in the presentation (livestock, forestry, etc.) and then set the priorities within each of those. For example, wildlife in the North may have a priority of invasive species control whereas wildlife in the South may have a priority of improving tree density. It really depends on what each local group states as a priority, which is then taken into account via the ranking system for each area. Since this is the first time we have been able to come together as a group, the lack of

in-person interactions has hindered the ability to process and deliver the local working group meetings. Last year they did a questionnaire in lieu of a meeting to gather feedback. The focus for this year is urban agriculture both on a broad view as well as specifics, which will be sent out through an online questionnaire, 10 questions in total. This questionnaire will be provided to all participants of the State Technical Committee. Please answer all the questions and encourage others to do the same as well. If anyone knows of farmers or producers that would be interested, let them know and also have them fill it out. Next winter the local working groups will reconvene in person. The hope is by holding the meeting in the winter our constituents and local farms and producers will be able to attend and provide direct feedback. Of course, they all are always invited to the virtual meetings and of course the phones are always open for a chat with the local field office or the state office.

2:51 State Resource Conservationist Update, Evan Madlinger, NRCS

Evan started his section with Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG). It was determined that New Jersey would offer CIG on an every-other-year basis. With staff changes last year, we were unable to offer it, however, we did offer it this year. It was published on Grants.gov with a deadline of May 23 to apply. In total we received three good applications with \$275,000 dedicated for this program, and we are restricted to a percentage of the raw farm bill dollars. We assemble a few review teams to review the applications to make sure they meet all the criteria and then a decision will be made on or before July 15.

Source Water Protection (SWP) is the next topic Evan went over. NRCS has a bulletin talking about how we can revise SWP for the next fiscal year. We have a big area of watersheds where SWP occurred back in 2019. In 2021, National asked that we cap it at 20% of the state. The bulletin is giving NRCS an opportunity to update the high priority areas.

Some of the risk factors that need to be taken into consideration when selecting areas where agriculture land uses may impact source water include nutrients, sediment, pathogens, pesticides identified water quality resource concerns at watershed areas, reported or likelihood of harmful algal blooms, water system violations, size of population served by Source Water Protection Areas (SWPAs), ground water systems served by an aquifer designated as "sole source," known areas of aquifer depletion or ground water management areas, and other risks that may impact source water (karst geology, highly erodible soils, degraded habitat, livestock access to surface water, and wildfire risk). Evan had a meeting within the past week with the sub-committee from the State Technical Committee to discuss this and the meeting included NJDEP, EPA, NJ Water Supply, to start the process of looking at how we came up with our watersheds in the past and see if there are ways to re-prioritize or look at things differently for FY23. There is an idea to consider forestry practices to help farmers get more cost-share. There is also a need to consider changing climate. Evan presented the fact sheet for "Increased Financial Assistance for Source Water Protection." This fact sheet has a map of the current source water protection areas for FY21 and FY19 as well as information about the increased payment rates for both core and supporting practices.

Nationwide there is a massive transition of people. Many have retired, a lot have moved up into new positions, and now there is an increase in hiring new soil conservationists. Evan went to Minnesota for a week to participate in a workshop from soil districts, RC&D, and NRCS discussing new tools, cross-training, reinvigorating the planning process for National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCP). We want to make sure we are providing employees with good technical skill sets.

Nancy Paolini is retiring on July 2, 2022. Evan has interviews coming up to cover some of Nancy's workload as well as some of Rosylind's workload (conservation roles). Evan asked Nick to briefly discuss a new position. Nick talked about the Area Resource Conservationist (ARC) position. This person would be an experienced planner designed to provide direct support assistance to the field office, as well as help with contract management. This is a new position for New Jersey, we have never had this position on our full-time staff, but we did a test run last year for this position and it worked out great. Other states have implemented this position successfully, so we feel confident in our forward progress. We have chosen Craig Chianese from the Frenchtown Field Office and he will be starting his position in the end of July of this year. In addition to the ARC position, Evan also mentioned this year we were able to advertise for a forestry position on staff. This position is very much needed; as the State Biologist, Evan had to act in the POC for forestry but there is just far too much going on with the SRC position to be the POC for forestry as well. Also, in addition to the positions in the State Office, we are looking to fill approximately 11 positions in the Field Offices with advertisements coming out in the next 60 to 90 days.

There are plans for field training first week in October at the PMC for district staff and partners to focus on tillage and other areas. There is also "conservation planner 2" training available being held by the State instead of National, as it has in the past. Once we get the forester in place, along with our Urban Conservationist, ARC, and Resource Conservationist, we will be able to look at offering more trainings this upcoming fall.

Another item on the board is "Planning Policy." This needs to be updated and the new Resource Conservationist will be tasked with helping finalize those updates. NRCS is working with NJ Audubon, NJ Forester Service, Forest Fire Service, NJ Fish & Wildlife to look at bringing in additional funding and attention to the Pinelands region with a focus on T&E species, water quality, and prescribed fire. The deadline for this is August 5.

Sentinel landscape with DOD and US Fish & Wildlife Service is the next topic. Applications won't be started until next fiscal year. This project allows NRCS, DOD, USFWS to work with private landowners and agricultural resources around military bases (via preservation or implementing conservation keep farms viable). This helps the military as it buffers their bases, it helps NRCS as we are able to help farmers, and it helps Fish & Wildlife as it works with T&E species. Right now, federal agencies are the only ones working on sentinel landscapes, but you will hear more about it the further in the year.

We extended our agreement with SHPO for the next five years last summer. We are being flagged for phase one on a lot of our projects so we hope that by reevaluating our practices and utilizing SHPO, we can spend less and have less flags.

3:13 State Engineer Update, Hilary Trotman, NRCS

Hilary let the group know there are three watershed programs that NRCS offers: Watershed & Flood Prevention Operations Program (WFPO) (provides state, local and American Indian tribal governments vital options to protect watersheds and vital infrastructure, benefiting communities in every state and territory in the nation), Watershed Rehabilitation Program (REHAB) (provides technical and financial assistance to rehabilitate and extend service life of dams originally constructed with assistance of NRCS Watershed Programs), and Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) (provides emergency repairs and restoration recovery assistance when sudden watershed impairments occur that creates an imminent threat to life or property). These programs were recently funded through the Infrastructure Bill. Distribution of funds includes Operations receiving \$500 million, Rehabilitation receiving \$130 million, and EWP receiving \$130 million. To link this information to the field trip from earlier in the day, we saw Emergency Watershed Protection at Frenchtown Park.

WFPO is managed by NRCS and must contain a program purpose, such as public recreation, watershed protection, flood prevention, water quality management, municipal and industrial water supply, agricultural water management, and public fish and wildlife. There are some guidelines/rules to these programs: the watershed projects must be led by a sponsor (while NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to the sponsor to complete a project), project size cannot exceed 250,000 acres per sub-watershed, 20% of the benefits must be rural/agricultural related, and an NRCS authorized watershed plan Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement (EA/EIS) is required.

Watershed projects can be sponsored by one or more local organizations. The State Technical Committee requires that at least one sponsoring local organization (SLO) of each project provide for the following functions: power of eminent domain, permits and licenses, authority to levy taxes, land treatment above reservoirs, public participation, financial, watershed management, municipal and industrial water, operations and maintenance, and storm and sanitary sewers. The purpose of flood prevention is to reduce or prevent floodwater damages by reducing runoff, erosion, and sediment; modifying the susceptibility of improvements in the floodplain to damage; removing damageable property from the floodplain; or reducing the frequency, depth, or velocity of flooding. Watershed protection consists of onsite treatment of watershed natural resources concerns for the primary purpose of reducing offsite floodwater, erosion, sediment, and agriculture-related pollutants.

Project measures for watershed protection include land treatment practices installed by land users to conserve and develop any of the following: soil, water quality and quantity, woodland, fish and wildlife habitats, energy, recreation, and scenic resources. Public recreation developments may be included in a watershed project plan when the SLO agrees to operate and maintain a reservoir or other area for public recreation. Project measures must include only minimum basic facilities needed for public health and safety and access to and use of the area. Minimum basic facilities may include picnic areas, sanitary facilities, fishing piers, shelters, cooking grills, parking areas, swimming beaches, access roads, water, and trails. Also included are practices to provide needed access, water, and power. Fish and wildlife development areas may be included in a watershed project plan when the SLO agrees to operate and maintain a reservoir or other area for public fish and wildlife access. Measures installed for public use of areas developed to improve the habitat or the environment for the breeding, growth, and development of fish and wildlife may be included in a watershed project plan. In areas where water is scarce, they offer agricultural water management. This includes drainage, ground water recharge, irrigation, water conservation, water quality improvement, and agricultural (including rural communities) water supply.

Measures planned for these purposes are installed on non-Federal land by the SLO to benefit groups of landowners and communities. They also assist with municipal and industrial water supply. Generally, the term "municipal water supply system" refers to reservoirs, canals, ditches, flumes, laterals, pipes, pipelines, and other surface facilities or systems that collect, impound, store, transport, or distribute drinking water. Water quality management measures provide water storage capacity in reservoirs for regulation of stream flow to improve water quality in streams.

There are four phases to the funding requests: Preliminary Investigation and Feasibility Report (PIFR), Planning, Design, and Construction. The PIFR phase can take up to 12 months and this is where the problems and possible solutions are identified. A letter from the Sponsor and STC request letter to the Deputy Chief of Programs are needed for the request for funds to proceed to the next phase. The Planning phase can take up to 18 months and this phase is where you develop the Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. The Design phase can take up to 24 months and submission for the EA/EIS is sent for authorization by the Chief. NRCS takes a lot of the responsibility during this phase, leaving the sponsor to cover 30% of the construction cost. The final phase is the Construction phase. This can take anywhere from two to five years in total. All land rights and permits must be obtained, and designs must have been approved by the SCE.

Hilary shared a slide showing an example Water Resources Restoration, a project from Cape Cod. The Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project (CCWRRP) Watershed Plan addressed environmental degradation of water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. This will have a long-term, beneficial effect on restoring the water resources and ecosystems along the coastal and inland areas of Cape Cod. Some of the goals for this plan include improving water quality for over 7,300 acres of shellfish growing areas, restoration/improvement of access to 4,200 acres of spawning, nursery, and juvenile habitat for anadromous fish, and restoration of 1,500 acres of degraded salt marsh.

As an overview, there have been 11,850 NRCS/SCS constructed dams in 1,271 watersheds since 1948. We had a big construction surge in the 1960s and now they are reaching their 50-year lifespan. There are concerns with that fact; over time rainfall changes (lighter and heavier), dams need to be updated to withstand the changing precipitation. The REHAB program assists in updating the dams to meet State requirements. There is also increase of sediment in the dams as well as structural deterioration. There is a public law on the books (83-556, Section 14) which provides technical and financial assistance to rehabilitate NRCS project dams that do not meet current NRCS and State design and safety criteria, performance standards, and extends service life.

Eligibility for REHAB include dams originally constructed through a NRCS Watershed Program (PL83-566, PL 78-534, Pilot Watershed Program, Resource Conservation and Development), can be past their evaluated life, and written operation and maintenance (O&M) plans must be current. This is also a lengthy process, and it includes four phases: Assessment (up to 12 months), Planning (up to 18 months), Design (up to 24 months), and Construction (2 - 3 years).

Hilary shared another slide showing a project map of the Assunpink Creek Watershed in Mercer and Monmouth Counties consisting of eight dams that were constructed between the 1960 and 1980s. NRCS NJ is currently assisting with the rehabilitation of dams in the Assunpink Watershed. Currently we are in the planning phase of Dam 8 in Hamilton Township. We completed the plan last summer and just received a contract with a consultant to work on the design. Construction is estimated to be \$4 million. The problem with Dam 8 is with the upgraded rainfalls, erosion will occur at the emergency spillway, potentially causing unravel back through the dam and breach. This dam protects approximately 935 people. The plan is to install a berm across the spillway and put in a structure (labyrinth weir – a larger capacity structure than the emergency spillway) and design flow will go through the concrete structure and out to the Assunpink Creek.

We recently received a request from NJ Fish and Wildlife (primary sponsor) to prepare a plan to rehab Dam sites 4, 5, 6, 18 and 19. The dams provide flood protection and fish and wildlife benefits. Dam Sites 4 and 18 are high hazard dams and out of compliance with state and NRCS criteria. The other dams will be examined as a unit with dam sites 4 and 18.

3:29 Soil Health Activities, Kaitlin Farbotnik, NRCS

Kaitlin began her presentation with an update to the Soil Health Strategic Plan - Cropland. Phase 3 will be commencing soon and will consist of reviewing information from Phases 1 (data collection) and 2 (a group of people reviewed the data collection to create a list of priority areas) and then making a decision about if any of those priority areas will be addressed as well as making recommendations (as recommendations are a big part of how the plan is created). At this time, Phase 3 is on hold until contracting for planners has been addressed. NRCS is looking for people to take part in the recommendation part of this plan, to include agricultural partners, non-profits, government agencies, and others. Some of the information we are looking for includes grants, outreach, initiatives, and research to name a few. We are also looking to hold local meetings so instead of one big meeting, there will be smaller ones located throughout the state. Anyone interested, please let Kaitlin know.

A short update on The Low Tunnel Standard (821). This standard is a temporary covering over individual crops, which is still in progress. This could include temperature control to extend the season, pest management issues, etc. The Low Tunnel Standard has been controversial within our agency, so we hope to get this one through.

Kaitlin is excited about a Soil Health Tech Note for Urban Soil Health Planning. This Tech Note will help any planners and conservationists really go through the steps of conservation planning (step 1, step 2, etc....). Right now, they have made it

to step 5. They are formatting the Tech Note for review this week. The National Office of Urban Ag is involved, along with the Tech Centers.

Kaitlin will be recommending an Urban Project with NACD through the Soil Health Champions. This is in the works, but the proposal has not yet been submitted.

EQIP Soil Health Initiative has been expanded this year to integrate livestock. Not many states allow grazing of cropland and provide financial incentives to set up a place to graze the cropland. We have received two applications for this initiative.

If anyone is interested in a conversation about soil health, they come out once a month. June 18 is the next scheduled conversation with Edwin presenting on EQIP Soil Health Testing. When we work on cover crop, we like to include soil health testing both before and after. Often the conversation steers to adaptive management in New Jersey. If anyone is interested in receiving updates, please let Kaitlin know so she can add you to the list.

Soil Carbon Practices have received numerous comments. As a result, Soil Carbon Amendment 336 will be replacing the Soil Carbon Amendment 808. Soil Carbon Amendment 336 is in the Federal Register for review with comments due by June 16. If you are interested, you can find it with this information: ID NRCS-2021-0005-0001. There is some confusion as to when you should use the Soil Carbon Amendment vs. other practices. Kaitlin brought up a few other practices found in Section IV of the FOTG, including Woody Residue Treatment 384, Mulching 484, and Nutrient Management 590. Woody Residue Treatment 384 allows for the creation of biochar and is a great option when natural events create downed woody debris. We can use this practice not just for application of biochar but creation as well. Mulching 484 has been used interchangeably with 336 but it comes down to application: mulching of natural materials like leaf mulch, wood chips, etc. Nutrient Management 590 would be used when manure/compost is to be applied.

If anyone knows about Soil Health Tech Note 450-03, you will be pleased to hear that a companion tech note will be released as well. It will include recommended soil health indicators and associated laboratory procedures. This will connect soil testing with planning and implementation and will focus on goal-oriented solutions. For example, someone has already done the soil testing, they have their results, what does it all mean and which ones are important for the resource concerns that producers or NRCS are most concerned about. This companion tech note will walk someone through analyzing the tests more so than the original tech note does.

3:48 Open Discussion/Questions for presenters, Evan Madlinger, NRCS

NRCS Programs wants to discuss possibly moving up application cutoff as in the previous few years, it has been the third week in October and that is just too late.

George Cassady spoke up on behalf on the Salem County Board of Ag, asking that some priorities be addressed. They are pleased with the programs offered historically but need more conversations with the farmers directly. The programs haven't been user friendly the past few years and as a result, farmers do not want to sign up. The local field office is viewed as being understaffed and payment schedules for practices haven't been updated recently considering COVID and the rising cost of goods.

NRCS Staff answered that staffing has been addressed via the Workload Analysis and that more positions are being advertised. Payment schedules are updated yearly with a national team and the state agency has no control over cost.

4:30 Adjourn, Julie Hawkins, NRCS