



Minutes of the Regular Meeting – June 17, 2021  
ZOOM MEETING [https://zoom.us/j/955 752 1162](https://zoom.us/j/9557521162)  
Meeting ID: ID: 955 752 1162 +1 929 205 6099

1. Call to order: 10:02 a.m. by Denise Savageau, Chair.

Attendance: Members: Denise Savageau (CRCCD Board), Simon Levesque (DoAg), Cheryl Cappiali (SWCD Board), Erik Bedan (CT DEEP). Ex-officio members: Tom Morgart (NRCS) and Abigail Maynard (CAES). Staff and guests: Lilian Ruiz, (CT Council), Amanda Johnson (CTRCD), Dan Mullins (ECCD), Chris Sullivan (SWCD), and Cynthia Rabinowitz (NWCD).

2. INTRODUCTION

Savageau opened the meeting and attendees introduced themselves.

3. REGULAR BUSINESS

- A. Minutes - Minutes of 03/18/21 were reviewed. Motion to approve with the following corrections: i. Jeanne Davies was listed as “staff and guests” - must be “ex-officio” ii. CT RC&D updates should read “cover crop seed giveaway” and “12th year anniversary of the CT Farm Energy Program”- by D. Mullins, C. Rabinowitz second. Unanimously approved as corrected.
- B. Treasurer’s Report  
Jeff Folger has stepped down from his position and the Council is looking for a new Secretary-Treasurer. In the meantime, the executive director is doing the routine work. LR presented the Treasurer’s report for the 06/17/2021 meeting was reviewed. Date corrected to 06/17/2021. Motion to approve with date correction and put it on file by C. Rabinowitz, C. Cappiali second. Unanimously approved.
- C. Chairman’s Report  
Very busy with Legislative session. Council being recognized as soil and water conservation steward for the state, bringing all entities to the table. Denise thanked everyone’s support with the legislative process.

4. NEW BUSINESS

- A. FY 2022 Plan of Work  
Savageau and Ruiz went over changes proposed on the plan of work goals: stress the importance of certain landscapes, replacing soil health with soil resources to include land preservation and including the interface between rural and urban agriculture. All members were asked to review and submit any recommendations to them. The plan will be

submitted to vote on the September meeting. A discussion ensued. The proposed budget was not discussed. Members were asked to review it for the September meeting. Budget has not changed much- and it is still cash positive. Increased Envirothon dollars back to 20k as it is expected that the event will be in person this year.

**B. Elections**

Savageau is willing to stay as chair for one more term. The Council needs a new Secretary Treasurer and all were encouraged to volunteer. It could be 2 different positions. Elections will be held in September.

**C. Subaqueous Soil Survey Funding Request**

Council has requested \$10.5 MM over 5 years in direct funding for completion of the Coastal Zone Soil Survey in Long Island Sound. This is part of the new Congressional direct funding requests in the appropriations process. Senator Murphy is supporting this request. Funding will go directly to the NRCS if approved.

**5. OLD BUSINESS**

**A. Administration**

**a. Council/District Reporting**

Districts need to submit reports to the Council. Denise will coordinate reporting with the DEEP (Erik Bedan).

**B. 2021 Legislative Session**

**a. Passport to Parks**

Savageau reported that Appropriations to P2P didn't change, in spite of attempts to include many exemptions and exceptions. Districts and Council will be submitting a new invoice in July 2021.

**b. Soil Health- HB 6496**

HB 6496 An Act Concerning Certain Soil Initiatives was signed by the Governor. Now the term Soil Health was included under the mandate of the Council and in the language for the Erosion and Sediment Control Guidelines. Denise thanked everyone for the support in passing the bill. This bill is now included in Public Act 21-88. T. Morgart pointed out the Bylaws will need to be changed.

**c. Climate Change – HB 6441**

Governor's Bill 6441 AN ACT CONCERNING CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION has passed. This bill provides funding to municipalities for creating Stormwater Authorities, conveyance fee to protect open space and other climate resiliency work. It also allows the Green Bank to fund green infrastructure (including Soil Health) and to create carbon and ecosystem services markets.

**C. Solar Siting on Working and Natural Lands**

Ruiz reported on the DEEP scoping meeting- where the scope (grid scale projects) and

objectives for the development process were shared and stakeholders had an opportunity to comment. Good comments by WLA, The Audubon Society and others, stressing the need to avoid prime and important farmland. Comments are due June 25<sup>th</sup>. The Council will submit comments on the proposed "STEPS for Solar Development". Savageau commented on the Integrated Resource Plan Committee (IRP), and the need to have a representative from the Council in that committee. A discussion ensued on the IRP representation, whether it would be better to approach it individually or together with the CACD. NACD will have a review of all its policies this year and the citing of solar will be part of that review.

D. Soil Health Committee

Lilian reported. The Committee is meeting regularly and working on an action plan for SH in CT based on the reports submitted to and resulting from the GC3 work. During the last meeting in June, the group decided on a few actions: come up with a standard presentation on SH to be used to disseminate the information, as well as other outreach materials to be produced (videos, etc). In addition, work on an inventory of current initiatives. The Committee is meeting again in July. Denise invited anyone who's interested to join the Committee.

E. CT River Valley – Farmland Protection Project

Denise reported. New initiative to protect farmland in the valley, working with NRCS and AFT. Group likely to convene in the fall.

F. ENVIROTHON

Sullivan reported that competition ended in May and was all virtual with 14 or 15 teams participating. Google classroom exams with each of the topics: soils, aquatics, wildlife, forestry. Teams could login and submit a power point for the work with the current issue. This year the topic was water resources: a scenario where a town reported ground water contamination and the teams were "hired" to track down the source of the contamination. Marvelwood School, in Kent was the winner. They will be representing CT in the National Competition in July, in NE. The event will also be virtual. A video of the event was shared in the chat.

G. Update of the E&S Control Guidelines

E. Bedan had issues with his microphone so Denise gave an update, reporting that Erik, Kathleen Knight have been moving forward with the work with the contract and updating everyone. She thanked the participation of the CDs and the Council on feedback about the parameters to be included on the update, as the limited budget needs to be applied to priority items. Next meeting in the Fall.

H. Grant Updates

a. LISW-RCPP Progress Update

Ruiz reported. Contract was closed on May 13. Now working on final reporting and billing.

b. Source Water Protection Cooperative Agreement

Ruiz reported. Metrics meetings to refine metrics for ranking. NRCS and UConn participated in defining metrics related to soils. Sullivan reported on the Farm River portion of the grant. The Plan is being drafted and some parts have been shared with stakeholders for feedback. The next chapters to be released in the next weeks. Stakeholder meeting scheduled for the end of the month. One month extension

requested to finish plan by the end of August, to guarantee that stakeholders' feedbacks are taken into account. Implementation of some of the recommendations seems likely due to the level of interest of stakeholders involved as the project was able to bring together many important contacts in the region. Dan Mullins updated on the ECCD portion of the grant. Doing assessments on farms and compiling a list of the agriculture on the Little River valley. GIS work creating some new maps and two stakeholder meetings.

- c. NACD Technical Assistance Grant  
Ruiz reported. Council applied for the 2021 grant and was awarded the same amount for the same scope of work. Good track record in reporting helped us qualify for the grant. Districts are able to keep staff, which is helping with work on the ground and also administrative work.
- d. LISS Watershed Operations Grant – Council/DEEP submitted  
Savageau reported. Create a PL566 watershed operations plan for LIS similar to the one operating in Cape Cod. We are being funded 100k for DEEP, The Council and the Audubon CT. It will develop a Watershed Operations PL-566 to protect shellfish beds in the LIS, by looking into the water quality of the stormwater coming into the sound to understand how stormwater affects them. Another action on the grant is to look into shellfish restoration relating to different habitats. These funds can be used with municipalities, as opposed to farm bill dollars, which cannot be used on public lands. Next steps are finishing the contract with DEEP/EPA, and starting to work on the plan with the NRCS. Audubon CT (Rob LaFrance) was instrumental in getting the grant and also set up work with some Yale interns to move the work forward.
- e. LISFF Grant – district submitted  
C. Sullivan reported. Same grant submitted to the Stewardship Fund in the past, for the districts to receive some equity and diversity training for members of the board and staff, and also target water quality work on distressed or low-income housing municipalities (urban watersheds). Haven't heard back yet.

## 6. AGENCY REPORTS

- A. NRCS: Tom Morgart reported.
  - i. NRCS is working on financial assistance program obligations. Interest in NRCS program is large this year, it is amazing how much interest there is in conservation when farm incomes are up.
  - ii. EQIP has a budget of 6.1M and we have 4 million dollars in applications that are unfunded right now. AMA, it is likely that we will only be able to fund 50% of our applications. Evaluation work continues on CSP.
  - iii. Three RCPP projects were funded that benefit Connecticut. The Connecticut Land Conservation Council received funding in the amount of 6.7 million dollars for easement with DEEP and other partners. American Farmland Trust received an award covering Western New England for work primarily in the Connecticut River watershed the focus will be on soil health and water quality. The third proposal funded was with Rensselaer Plateau Alliance (NY, CT, MA) and the proposal brings

funding for conservation easement and land management activities in western CT.

- iv. NRCS has been and is in a hiring boom. We hired a State Conservation Engineer and an Assistant for Management and Strategy, a Natural Resource Specialist in Danielson and an intern in Norwich. We are interviewing for an archeologist (state office), an engineer (Danielson), and a soil conservationist (Torrington). There will be additional opportunities for employment to work with NRCS through the RC&D Council. Two comprehensive nutrient management specialists will be hired, replacing staff that have moved on to new jobs. District staff getting access to computers but security issues, headquarter will block access to staff that doesn't log in for more than 45 days.

B. DEEP: Erik Bedan Reported

- i. 319 Projects: using uncommitted funds to help with inflationary pressure on the cost of the projects.
- ii. LISS: focusing on modeling along the shoreline.
- iii. Working with EPA on approving these grants for this year.
- iv. Awards should be communicated during the summer.
- v. NWQI: looking for updates on those plans.
- vi. Trying to fill Phil Trowbridge's position.
- vii. Many retirements coming up. Refill rate much lower, so department losing staff.

C. CAES: Abigail Maynard reported.

- i. Ag Experiment Station fully open for visitors, everyone should be back at their desks July 1<sup>st</sup>.
- ii. Three new scientist positions:
  - Urban Ag and Food Security for the Dept of Forestry and Horticulture to work with developing and improve alternative ag techniques to sustain food security in urban areas.
  - a. Environmental Science Dept looking for an Ag Sciences/Engineer addressing impacts of agriculture in the environment.
  - b. Dept of Analytical Chemistry looking for a Chemist to work on regulatory and testing for food contaminants and fraud, food safety and non-targeted contaminants of the soil.
- iii. 26% of staff is eligible for retiring and many are leaving. There will be a reorganization going on,
- iv. In person Plant Science Day on August 4, 2021. Only bus tours are cancelled.
- v. Mosquito testing started in 108 locations from June 1<sup>st</sup> and end of Oct.
- vi. Beech leaf disease affecting American, European or Oriental beeches. Widespread in CT, can kill a tree and spreading all over the state except Hartford County. Control options researched did not turn out effective this far. Everyone should report infection.

D. CTC&D: Amanda Johnson reported.

- i. Launched the Tour Des Farms ride for bicycles, motorcycles or car this year. Eight routes across the state through Oct 1<sup>st</sup>. Half of the proceeds of the passport will go to support the Tour and half will go to supporting food insecurity initiatives- working with UCONN.
- ii. ERT Hydrilla Project: Jeanne Davies participated in a press conference with Sen.

- Blumenthal. He is looking to get 100MM over the next 4 years in a multi-state effort to fight hydrilla. Produced an executive summary and a video, which can be found here: <https://ctrcd.org/?s=Hydrilla> - Hydrilla - CT River ERT Video and Report Link.
- ii. Soil Health: Regenerative Agriculture workshop happening on July 16 featuring O'Donnell Farms' work, which was done in partnership with the NRCS.
  - iii. Veteran Farmer event: asked everyone to reach out to any veteran farmers and registrations are on the website. The goal is to network and reach out to the national coalition
  - iv. Partnering with NWCD and NRCS on a Seed Giveaway. Information forthcoming.
- E. DoAg: Simon Levesque reported.
- i. Working with a large amount of interest on easement projects, Community Farm Program and Farmland Preservation Program with a lot of applications from all over the state.
  - ii. Ramping up stewardship report efforts to USDA/NRCS.
  - iii. Looking to close 10-15 easements by years' end.
- F. SWCD: Chris Sullivan reported.
- i. NACD Technical Assistance grant paying for executive assistance Melissa Moskowitz, which has been working really well.
  - ii. Actively and successfully rebuilding the network with municipalities. Melissa and Chris doing site visits in conjunction with the NRCS.
  - iii. Working on board approving the budget and on operation plan to present to the Council.
- G. ECCD: Dan Reported
- i. Green Schoolyard initiative with funding from Community Foundation Eastern CT. They will build green schoolyards in Windham and Putnam.
  - ii. Project Oceanology received grant from NOAA for constructing outdoor learning spaces on 6-10 schools in Eastern CT over the next several years. The district will be doing the infrastructure piece and Project O will be doing the education piece.
  - iii. 319 Project: The cost went up 182k from the original budget. Thanks to the flexibility offered by the DEEP, funds from other sources could be redirected to this project. DEEP has also committed some un-allocated funds to allow this project to be completed.
  - iv. Doing the first solar inspections by Conservation Districts in the state. Doing the Nexterra inspection in Brooklyn and Canterbury, and will start one in North Stonington by CS Energy.
  - v. Notified by DEEP that they'd be participating in that grant, so the district is rushing to review its stormwater pollution control plan to get a crew in site as soon as possible.
  - vi. Asked about the process, Dan explained that once the project is approved, the district is notified by CT DEEP and receives a down payment from the contractor. They provide their stormwater pollution control plan, then a site visit and a meeting with the contractor is set.
- H. NWCD: Cynthia Rabinowitz reported.
- i. Busy with educational programming and outreach, and installation of raingardens.
  - ii. Kelsey Sudol's work with aquatics segment for the Envirothon has been talked about.
  - iii. Karen Nelson is the secretary of the steering committee and did a great job with the

Envirothon.

- iv. New ag technician Sarah Ammirato funded by the NACD grant is now working directly for the district as well 2 days a week. She has already applied for a grant for doing an urban gardening project as a summer program for kids in Winstead, an underserved community. Project involves raised beds planted with flowers and vegetables, in a mixture of pollinating habitats and food production.
  - v. Everyone is back in the office and it has been very lively.
  - vi. Whole team worked on fixing a raingarden.
  - vii. Two agroforestry plantings in the region. One of them was planned and implemented by the NW Permaculture Community an edible forest garden.
  - viii. Thanks to Chris Sullivan for the amazing work on rewriting the LISFF grant for the districts.
  - ix. Another urban gardening project for downtown Torrington. Container gardens fully planted were distributed to the community.
- I. CACD/NACD: Denise Savageau reported.
- i. Following the work on appropriations with NACD and LIS Citizens Advisory Council and WPAG boards, where Denise sits representing the CACD.
    - a. 40MM for LIS in the presidents' budget
    - b. Increased budget for 319 by a couple of million.
    - c. Increased NRCS dollars.
  - ii. NACD is focused on increasing not only farm bill dollars but also conservation technical assistance dollars for the districts.
  - iii. Hydrilla: CACD looking to support the finding that is being requested by Sen. Blumenthal.
  - iv. Stressing that the Hydrilla piece is very important for cyanobacteria- creates a problem in the watershed for many other reasons, but also creates a problem of water quality as a host for cyanobacteria.
  - v. She plans to attend the NACD Summer Meeting in Chicago- it is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of when NACD was formed in Chicago.
  - vi. She plans to attend NACD Regional meeting Oct 31-Nov 2<sup>nd</sup> in Portsmouth NH.
  - vii. USDA calls for urban ag grants. Deadline is end of July.

7. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – no comments

Denise announced that Abigail Maynard will retire today. This is her last Council Meeting, and her replacement should be announced soon. She worked on 41 Plant Science Days and will not be present this year. Denise expressed the Council's gratitude for her work with the Council and the Soil Health Committee.

8. ADJOURN –The meeting was adjourned at 12:28 PM.