



Minutes of the Regular Meeting –September 21, 2023
ZOOM MEETING https://zoom.us/j/955_752_1162
Meeting ID: ID: 955 752 1162 +1 929 205 6099

1. Call to order: 10:04 a.m. by Denise Savageau, Chair.

Attendance: Members: Denise Savageau (CRCCD Board), Eric Thomas (DEEP), Cheryl Cappiali (SWCD), Joanna Shapiro (NCCD), Cynthia Rabinowitz (NWCD), Chris Sullivan, and Simon Levesque (DOA). Ex-officio members: Nancy Ferlow (NRCS), Leigh Whittinghill (CAES) and Jocelyn Lahey (CT RC&D). Staff and guests: Lilian Ruiz (CT Council), Julie McGivern (NRCS), Eileen Underwood (DOA).

2. INTRODUCTION

Savageau opened the meeting, did a round of introductions and confirmed the quorum.

3. REGULAR BUSINESS

A. Minutes - Minutes of 06/15/23 were reviewed. Motion to approve C. Rabinowitz, J. Shapiro second. Approved unanimously.

B. Treasurer's Report

Savageau and Ruiz reported. The Financial report for September 15, 2023, was reviewed. Motion to approve and put it on file by C. Rabinowitz, S. Levesque second. Approved unanimously.

C. Chairman's Report

- Council intends to fill out board vacancies with representatives from underserved communities. Rabinowitz suggests inviting someone from the Urban Forest Council for the board. Lahey suggested members of the Green Village Initiative. Ruiz suggested Dr. Mark Mitchell from Yale and CLF board. Thomas suggested members from the DEEP EJ Program.
- The Council needs to hold elections in the following meeting.

4. NEW BUSINESS

A. LISS Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan

Savageau reported the LISS continues to receive large amounts of funding. It is important to update the plan that directs how funds are used. There seems to be a growing consensus that the focus might not only be in nutrient management but on watershed health, moving upstream than just the coastal area. This more comprehensive approach on watersheds will help guide the type of projects we may design going forward.

B. Grant Opportunities

- NRCS Connecticut Conservation Planning and Support

Savageau and Ruiz reported that the council just signed a new contract with the NRCS for \$1MM, to hire support staff for conservation planners in every district. Districts will also have an annual stipend for outreach focused on underserved communities. The Council will form a committee to review applications for the Planning Assistant positions.

- Other

Savageau reported that with the IRA in full swing, the NRCS has more opportunities for technical assistance with grants coming out for different types of programs, as the collaboration between the NRCS and the US Forest Service. The deadline is soon approaching but there will be a new round in the spring.

Long Island Sound Community Impact Fund: Sullivan reported that applications up to \$100k will be accepted. There will be 2 years of funding from the Restore America's Estuaries for smaller projects in watershed management, similar to LISFF projects.

OLD BUSINESS

A. Legislative Updates

Savageau reported that discussions about the next legislative sessions have started. It will be a short session, so there shouldn't be any changes to the Passport to Parks, but we will monitor. Topics to focus on: Riparian Buffer Legislation, moving forward with GC3 recommendations. She asked members to bring legislation of interest to the Council's attention.

B. Soil Health Committee

Ruiz reported. There are several updates for the Soil Health Action Plan. She met with the authors of the SH Plan in Maine, to which she contributed. That Plan is already being developed through a Program and can serve as a source of information for our actions in CT when we start to design a delivery system for our plan. The Soil Health Action Plan (SHAP) draft is nearing completion, with contribution from expert authors for each of the landscapes- Elisabeth Ward in Forestry, Cynthia Rabinowitz in Wetlands, Leigh Whittinghill in Recreational Spaces, Itamar Shabtai in Agricultural soils and Carbon, and our intern Shelley Rose who organized the document and contributed with content and policy recommendations for all landscapes. The Committee will meet again in October.

C. ENVIROTHON

Sullivan reported. The NCF occurred in New Brunswick and our CT Nonnewaugh High School team finished 31 out of 49 teams. They did really well in aquatics and wildlife and were great ambassadors for our state. We started organizing this year's event with outreach to get teams to register. Competition will be on May 21st or 22nd with the theme Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future and the NCF event will be held in Geneva NY July 28-Aug 3rd. Sullivan invited members to volunteer as well as to help with outreach. Savageau suggested that we could run a career event that could help recruit for conservation jobs and serve as fundraising for the Envirothon.

D. Update of the E&S Control Guidelines and Stormwater Manual.

Savageau reported. DEEP is incorporating all the comments received and the document is almost finished. She praised the work of Kate Knight. The goal is to have the manual online by October 1st. There will be some delays in implementation of the Stormwater Management Manual, because of the changes in metrics that will require some time for stakeholders to comply with permitting requirements. Denise thanked the Districts for their work with these materials.

E. Grant Updates

- a. Landscape Scale Restoration with NACD

Savageau reported. The award was officially announced, and the Council will be receiving \$175k for CT to put together a pilot project on riparian restoration (new plantings) in public drinking water supply watersheds as part of a region wide application with US Forestry Service for 600k total. With a 50% match, we will have \$350k to work on forest and riparian restoration statewide. We are working with Chris Martin at the DEEP to apply for the Climate Smart Ag and Forestry grant to fund our match with state funds.

b. Source Water Protection Cooperative Agreement

Ruiz reported. UConn CLEAR will deliver the GIS tool and the final model in October, and the Council is hosting a webinar to showcase the tool and its applications. This will be the final event for the GIS portion of the grant. The Council hosted a training session for the Local Work Groups, as part of the outreach and preparations to hold the meetings in November and December. The are webinar was presented by Denise Savageau, Dick Went (RI) and Molly Allard (RI). Districts will hold 5 meetings (instead of 2) with funding from NRCS and support from the Council.

c. NACD Technical Assistance Grant

Savageau explained the grant to members. For the 2023 round, we are looking to complement the funds that we requested for technical assistance and outreach, and we are waiting on their decision for the awards. Ruiz reported on the application process and on the great impact the grant is having in the entire NE Region, as seen during the latest NE Regional Meeting in Maine.

d. LISS Watershed Operations Grant – Council/DEEP

Savageau reported. The contract was just signed by the Council and the DEEP, and we are in the process of putting together an advisory group to develop a watershed operations plan for the LIS for restoration of tidal areas for shellfish beds and the quality of the stormwater that goes into these beds. The work will be done together with the Audubon Society (Rob LaFrance) and will consist of putting a plan together to be submitted to the NRCS, where it will in turn be completed as a PL-566, which includes a NIPA review. Denise met with the State Engineer Jim Lyons to discuss the project. This is directed to our coastal districts.

e. LISFF Grant – Districts

Sullivan reported: All districts collaborated on an application for DEI training for staff and board members, as they aim at doing more work with underserved communities as well as recruiting more diverse membership and personnel. The training will happen next week and will be followed by targeted outreach and training sessions in each of the districts.

The announcement for the new grant will be in early November. All 5 districts applied for funding for infrastructure for nutrient management. Shapiro reported on the North Branch Park River Watershed Planning Project to update a 2010 watershed base plan to make it more dynamic and web based. Outreach is underway and technical meetings are being hosted. Fuss& O’Neill is working on mapping. Rabinowitz reported on a nutrient management installation project resubmitted from last year, and they are waiting on the announcements next week.

AGENCY REPORTS

A. DEEP: Eric Thomas reported.

- Stormwater Manual rollout webinar will be held on September 26, 2023 at 1:00 PM, notices have been sent out.
- DEEP Water Programs will be updating the Integrating Water Planning Process, which guides the biannual water quality assessment. Public notice for hearing sessions will be sent out.
- Integrated Water Resource Management IWRM will be updated with public input. Public

feedback sessions will be scheduled.

- The Bureau of Water Monitoring program participated in the EPA's National Rivers and Streams Assessment Program.
- EPA Watersheds Program 319 grants FY24 will be announcing an RFP in October. Agents interested in submitting a proposal are encouraged to reach out to DEEP for feedback on the application.

B. DOA: Simon Levesque reported.

- Ag Development team is an exhibitor at the BigE.
- Ag Land Preservation protected 3 farms for a total of 415 farms and 48,540 acres for the program.
- Preparing legislative package, we will receive that when it gets approved.
- Farmland Restoration Flood Response Grant application period is closed.
- Farmland Restoration grant application is coming up in the fall. Requirements will now include Climate Resilience components.
- CT Ag Report has the latest updates on events, grants and other opportunities.

C. NRCS: Nancy Ferlow reported.

- On October 26th the NRCS Chief will be coming to CT.
- Completing its contract workload and grants agreements before the deadline of September 29th.
- Training program for new and partner staff on Mondays.
- New state engineer Jim Lyons is catching up on pending issues.
- Acting Conservationist Machel Simmons will be staying through the end of October.

D. CAES: Leigh Whittinghill

- Plant Science Day happened in the beginning of August with almost 1,200 visitors.
- Wrapped up the Plant Health Fellows program in August. Had a great group of undergraduate students from around the country.
- Winding up field seasons, been busy in the lab and not necessarily writing papers and grants.

E. CT RC&D: Jocelyn Lahey reported.

- The sub grant program is open for application through October 31st for funding from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.
- \$500,000 of the funding will be sub granted to farmers who are interested in implementing climate smart practices specifically on farm energy efficiency and renewable energy and soil health equipment and or practices for up to \$50,000 in funding.
- RC&D had a lot of help from the department of AG to put out a grant guidance document and host a webinar.
- There will be another round in the spring.

F. NWCD: Cynthia Rabinowitz reported.

- Year three of the Climate smart AG projects for soil health and agroforestry in partnership with RC&D, NRCS and Berkshire agricultural ventures which has provided funding for two years. Each year the district gives out free cover crop seed to farms. This year 22 farms received free seeds did soil testing attended an educational workshop.
- The first year was during COVID so the workshop was virtual and very well attended. The second year it was a live event at UConn Torrington and this year they're doing a farm tour and educational meeting at Adama farm in Falls Village, with a 3 acre chestnut planting and market garden operation.

- Continued educational outreach to kids through summer programs at libraries. Two of the libraries are identified as underserved communities, Winstead and New Milford. This program is funded by local grants from various local foundations.
- Events include community gardening for the kids and then also teens and families get involved and get all the materials necessary for the gardening to take place. Each week a different educational component is presented.
- local Montessori school program teaches middle school age kids about soil health, which includes various aspects of soil science and soil health and water quality and watershed information.
- One Siting Council solar project in Norfolk.
- Close to wrapping up a 319-implementation project in Bethel along the Lime Kiln brook watershed.

G. NCCD: Joanna Shapiro reported.

- North Branch Park River LISFF Grant was reported above. The other part of that project is not just updating the plan but furthering large scale green infrastructure design.
- Looking at floodplain restoration (parking lots and the floodplains), which might be more important at this point than dredging of the North Branch
- Working on 3 Siting Council level solar projects that they're actively inspecting, including the gravel pit solar project that's 1800 acres of mostly farmland in east Windsor. There's also one in Ellington and one in Enfield.
- Helping the Department of Agriculture with this special round of farmland restoration work in response to the flooding.
- Staff has sent out packets to all of the high schools in the state trying to engage more schools for the Envirothon.
- Applications sent out to Long Island Sound Futures Fund for a have a large ag waste project that already has funds from DEEP and from NRCS to cover the shortfall of the high project cost.

H. SWCD: Chris Sullivan reported.

- Finished up small watershed planning efforts in the Quinnipiac on Wharton brook 10 Mile River and Muddy River. Finalized plans will be posted on District website. They're not full nine element plans, but rather an appendix but done with a lot of involvement from municipalities and local stakeholders.
- Received second round of funding from DEEP for urban waters work which helps fund the bacteria lab in Hamden. They are processing samples with the help of an intern from Quinnipiac doing sampling. School groups will collect samples and learn how to process them.
- Working with a group in the West River watershed in West Haven to start doing some sampling.
- The sound school in New Haven has been collecting water in New Haven harbor and processing it in the lab. Those same students are also doing outreach and educational events at other schools in New Haven and also along Long Wharf as public outreach events.
- A lot of requests for municipalities to do peer reviews and guidance for their land use commissions for development projects that come in.

I. CRCCD: Lilian Ruiz read Jane Brawerman's report.

- Construction of the 319 grant funded Deerfield Farm stormwater management project is wrapping up today! Reporting and other deliverables will be completed soon.
- Our annual environmental film series will begin this year with an October 19 screening of The Seeds of Vandana Shiva at Wesleyan University
- We are co-hosting a Coginchaug River cleanup this Saturday at Veterans Park in Middletown as

part of the CT River Conservancy Source to Sea cleanup

- We completed our 12th season of our Coginchaug River watershed water monitoring program in August (also 319-grant funded), with the help of community water sampling volunteers, in collaboration with the watershed towns, and with assistance from the State Public Health Lab, which analyzes our samples for E. coli.
- Our annual meeting will take place in early November (details forthcoming), and production of our annual report is underway.

J. CACD/NACD: Denise Savageau reported.

- CACD Represents districts at both the Long Island Sound Study Citizens Advisory Committee and the State Water Plan.
- There's a lot of discussion at the State Aater Plan on outreach and education to focus on source water protection.
- It is the 50th anniversary of the Safe Drinking Water Act as well as the 20th anniversary of the Aquifer Protection Act
- Working with Kelsey Sudol with the state water plan implementation folks to get some programs on that.
- State Water Plan should be looking into new topics to incorporate into the plan, not only updating what's already included there.
- Need for training in inland wetlands. The council has offered to do that training.
- Looking at the role of conservation districts as technical transfer agencies that can provide training.
- Attended the NACD Regional Meeting. Thanked Rob Hathorne for attending from NRCS.
- Participating in these meetings and bringing NRCS staff to see the work helps the state continue to get grants.
- Ruiz and Cappiali reported on the importance of attending Regional Meetings.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – no comments

6. ADJOURN –The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 PM.