



Minutes of the Regular Meeting –January 25, 2024
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), Chirs Martin (DEEP), Cheryl Cappiali (SWCD), Joanna Shapiro (NCCD), Dan Mullins (ECCD), Jane Brawerman (CRCCD), Chris Sullivan, and Eilleen Underwood (DOA). Ex-officio members: Tom Morgart (NRCS), Leigh Whittinghill (CAES), and Jocelyn Lahey (CT RC&D). Staff and guests: Lilian Ruiz (CT Council), Julie McGivern (NRCS), Melissa Mostowy (DEEP), Chris Swanson (CTRC&D)

2. INTRODUCTION

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

3. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Minutes - Minutes of 09/21/23 were reviewed. Motion to approve D. Mullins, J. Shapiro second. Approved unanimously.
- B. Treasurer's Report
Savageau and Ruiz reported. The Financial report for December 31, 2023, was reviewed. Motion to approve and put it on file by Dan Mullins, J. Shapiro second. Approved unanimously.
- C. Board elections and vacancies discussion
Savageau discussed opportunities for filling out positions for chair, vice chair, secretary, and treasurer. Savageau is willing to go for another term if there are no candidates. There's a need for someone to fill the secretary-treasurer role, although Jeff Folger is currently serving as treasurer. We may have a potential candidate from urban agriculture pending confirmation. Vacancies from other agencies, such as UConn, are also discussed. She emphasized the importance of having representatives from these organizations as voting members on the council. Additionally, the Chair plans to hold elections and encourages individuals to step into leadership positions. The vice chair position is highlighted, as the Chair could use some assistance, and it is a position that doesn't require much time commitment but would be helpful to the council.
- D. Integrated Water Resources Management Plan
Savageau highlighted the importance of the Integrated Water Resources Management Plan (now referred to as Integrated Water Planning Management) and encouraged everyone to review it. The plan focuses on watershed management and nonpoint source pollution, crucial aspects for soil and water conservation work. She attended a public forum on the plan hosted by DEEP and mentioned the opportunity for submitting comments until mid-February. There is

concern about the plan's lack of emphasis on source water protection and we should advocate for its inclusion. Despite the Clean Water Act's focus on delisting, they stress the need for watershed protection, especially by DEEP. The text of the plan must underscore the importance of integrating water resource plans with land use regulations and nonpoint source pollution management.

E. Grant Opportunities

i. NACD Climate Smart Marketing Grant:

Savageau: The NACD has a grant available for climate smart, with a focus on marketing. The Conservation Districts are applying for a grant specifically focusing on hemp marketing. C. Rabinowitz is working to organize a workgroup for this initiative. The grant emphasizes marketing outreach alongside traditional conservation practices. NRCS oversees this initiative, collaborating with NACD. There is also a possibility under this grant to do work on agroforestry projects, particularly in urban settings, as potential grant proposals. The emphasis is on integrating marketing strategies into conservation efforts, such as promoting agroforestry as a viable urban agriculture solution.

ii. Other:

Sullivan: NACD also has their Urban and Community Conservation grant due April 1st. A couple of the conservation districts have received awards from them in the past for that program. There's also the DEEP Recreational Trails Grant is available, and that's due on March 11, and can be used for planning and or implementation.

Lahey: The Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Council (CT RC&D) will be opening the second round of its Climate Smart Agriculture Grant next Friday, offering \$250,000 for climate smart projects. The funding will be available online, and it's open to various entities, including nonprofits, municipalities, and others primarily engaged in climate smart agriculture implementation. She encourages sharing this information to spread awareness about the grant opportunity. They will provide the link for more details and emphasize the relevance of this announcement in the context of climate smart initiatives.

Braverman: 319 Grants- next round is accepting applications, due in February.

4. OLD BUSINESS

A. LISS Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan Update

Savageau reported. The Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan is undergoing an update, with a significant focus on watershed management. The plan aims to extend beyond the coastal boundaries and include upper watersheds in its conservation efforts. Savageau will be part of the writing team for the watershed section, and others may also be involved. There are several sections within the plan, including science and technology and community resilience. She encouraged awareness of this ongoing process and mentioned potential outreach efforts in the future, inviting comments from individuals involved with DEEP regarding the plan update.

B. Legislative Updates

Savageau reported that conservation districts are maintaining funding in the budget through the Passport to the Parks program. The upcoming legislative session is anticipated to be brief, with no significant changes expected to the budget. However, considerations for requesting additional funding to keep up with inflation may be explored in the future. Legislative focus this year includes climate change initiatives, with a push for nature-based solutions and resilience efforts. Proposed legislation includes the creation of task forces on riparian buffers and nature-based solutions, emphasizing the importance of natural resources in climate work. Additionally, there's a mention of

an event by the Farm Bureau, providing an opportunity for interaction with federal legislators, which is crucial for understanding and advocating for federal funding, especially related to the Farm Bill. Ruiz reported on a panel discussion at the CT League for Conservation Voters featuring Savageau, Amy Patterson, Alicea Charamut and Robert Lafrance, and two legislators, focusing on nature-based solutions. Additionally, there's mention of a plan to reassess and potentially revamp the Siting Council to enhance its effectiveness and responsiveness in regulating the placement of solar energy installations across Connecticut. Efforts may also be made to incentivize the installation of solar panels on roofs and canopies.

C. Soil Health Committee

The Soil Health Committee continues to meet, with the last meeting held in December. The authors are actively working on adding sections to the plan, and there is now a rolling list of tasks to track progress. The last meeting was postponed, but the next one is scheduled for next Wednesday, with hopes for updates on the to-do list items. Latha Swami, the Director of the Food System Policy Division for the town of New Haven, has been invited to contribute to the plan, specifically on environmental justice and soil health topics. The goal of the plan is to guide and inform policies and programs that promote soil health in Connecticut, with the aim of adoption by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and other relevant agencies. If adopted, it will serve as a guide for fostering soil health in the state.

D. ENVIROTHON

Sullivan reported. The steering committee meeting was held yesterday, and updates were provided on various workshops and events. The aquatics workshop took place two weeks ago at the River Academy in East Hartford, while the wildlife workshop is scheduled for March at Sessions Woods. The competitive event is set for May 23rd at Lockwood Farm in Hamden, with volunteers needed to help out and potentially host tables for a career fair. The National Envirothon will be held in New York in Geneva from July 28th to August 3rd, with volunteers invited to assist after the event. Additionally, the Connecticut program received a grant to build station kits for each conservation district, which will be distributed to schools to facilitate learning about environmental topics. These kits aim to recruit new schools into the program and provide assistance to those with financial limitations. If anyone is interested in volunteering or has questions about environmental initiatives, they can contact Chris for more information.

E. Grant Updates

- i. NACD Grants
 - US Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration

Savageau reported. The US Forest Service landscape-scale restoration project is progressing, although a signed contract with NACD is still pending. Once the contract is finalized, the project will receive \$175,000 for implementation. This funding will be used for forest restoration work in Connecticut, overseen by the soil and water conservation districts. A matching fund of \$175,000 is also required, totaling \$350,000 for the project. Strategies to secure the matching funds include exploring opportunities from other grants or local sources. Although the application for funding from the Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Grant has not yet been announced, alternative options for obtaining the required match are being considered at the state or local level. C. Martin congratulated the Council for the success on a very competitive process and

- NACD Technical Assistant Grants

Savageau, Ruiz and Morgart reported. TA from NACD are used for funding staff in local conservation districts working on conservation planning. These grants have become increasingly competitive over the years, with stricter requirements and more deliverables needed for successful applications.

Connecticut received 75% of the funding requested in the latest round of grants, indicating the growing competition for these resources. It was noted that Connecticut had fewer deliverables attached to its application compared to other states, which may have impacted the amount of funding received. Moving forward, it's essential for Connecticut to focus on meeting the requirements and filling in all necessary deliverables to increase competitiveness and secure funding for future years. This may involve expanding the scope of work and demonstrating tangible outcomes such as acres of conservation planning practices installed.

ii. NRCS Grants

- Source Water Protection Cooperative Agreement

Savageau and Ruiz reported. There are only a few deliverables to be completed on this grant. Savageau, the UConn CLEAR team and Eric McPhee will be presenting the GIS tool produced under this grant at the CLCC Conference on March 23rd, replication the presentation of the Workshop held in November 2022. This was really successful grant in bringing in connections and new partnerships. Savageau was invited to present at the upcoming National Water Program work group in Oklahoma. The tool has been well received and has many applications. Morgart thanked the Council for the completion of this work.

The locally led work groups, one in each conservation district, were held in December 2023. The focus was on compiling information and sharing it with the NRCS. Some key takeaways included the need for improved communication about programs, land use and land protection concerns, and support for urban areas. Concerns over environmental justice communities highlighted the necessity for programs specific to these communities. The meetings were well-attended, with 140 participants statewide. Attendees emphasized the importance of utilizing the information gathered and reporting back on actions taken. Denise's moderation of all five meetings was appreciated.

- NRCS Conservation Planning Support Grant

Savageau reported. The Conservation Planning Support Grant aims to hire support staff to assist the NRCS. These staff members will handle tasks like application intake and computer work, serving as program assistants. Progress on the grant has begun, with discussions ongoing. There's an opportunity to collaborate with UCONN, which has been training Bipoc farmers as leaders of color in farm bill programs. These trained individuals could potentially assist in outreach efforts funded by the planning grant. Further discussions are planned with Tom's staff and conservation districts to explore this collaboration.

iii. LISS Watershed Operations Grant – Council/DEEP

Savageau reported. The Watershed Operations Grant, a PL 566 grant focused on the LIS, is progressing. Collaborating with various stakeholders including the EPA and DEEP, efforts have been made to identify areas suitable for PL 566 projects. Despite initial delays due to process changes, momentum has picked up since the addition of an engineer to the team. An advisory group has been established to guide the project, with a focus on water quality, shellfish restoration, tidal restoration, and stormwater management. Projects are being vetted with the help of the work group, and public meetings are planned for further input.

iv. LISFF Grant – Districts

All districts recently received funding, totaling approximately \$3 million, with a significant portion allocated for addressing ag waste. While this funding is substantial, it also presents challenges as it requires compliance with federal purchasing and procurement requirements. Efforts are underway to navigate these challenges, and input from partners may be sought. The funding is particularly crucial for addressing the financial constraints faced by dairy farms in dealing with ag waste. Shapiro commented on the difficulties of complying with federal procurement requirements. Sullivan reported that all districts are engaged in a LSFF grant aimed at promoting racial equity and diversity efforts. Last fall, district staff and

board members participated in training sessions with a coaching group hired through the grant. Currently, arrangements are being made for further meetings with these coaches to personalize outreach efforts and project work in underserved communities. A key objective of this initiative is to diversify board membership, with progress marking the halfway point. Savageau emphasized the importance of the work being done by the districts.

v. **Stormwater and E&S Guideline Updates**

Savageau reported. The Stormwater and E&S Guideline have been completed and updated, with a new consideration from fish and wildlife agencies regarding the use of materials that do not harm wildlife. Kate Knight is collaborating with NRCS and fish and wildlife agencies to ensure alignment on these guidelines. Additionally, UCONN is conducting workshops on stormwater management, while plans are in place to organize workshops specifically focused on erosion control guidelines, likely scheduled for the fall. Savageau emphasized the importance of reinforcing compliance with erosion control measures under stormwater construction general permits.

vi. **Other:**

Sullivan and Underwood reported on the Resiliency and Restoration Program grant's first year. It offers a unique model where applicants don't submit detailed plans or budgets but instead discuss their commitment to climate resilience and their long-term vision. Selected producers receive access to a soil scientist who creates a farmland restoration and climate resiliency plan for their entire farm. The plan is paid for by the grant. After the plan is completed and verified, detailed budgets and scopes of work are developed. This approach is a pilot program, and its success will determine if it continues in future years.

AGENCY REPORTS

A. DEEP: Melissa Mostowy reported.

- There will be an Aquifer Protection Area 20th anniversary celebration workshop on March 6, 2024. It will be held virtually from 12:00-1:00 PM. Zoom link will be distributed closer to the date
- 319 Grants – RFPs will be open until February 8, 2024
- NWQI – We are looking forward to the Little River plan update
- Eric Thomas is retiring and his last day will be sometime next week or early the following week

B. DOA: Eileen Underwood reported.

- Farmland restoration, climate resilience, and preparedness grant applications are due by the end of the month.
- Priority areas for funding include practices that increase soil health and organic matter, promote biodiversity, and improve water management to enhance climate resilience.
- Projects sought for funding may involve improving soil structure for increased infiltration, reducing compaction, repairing land management, and enhancing water runoff patterns.
- Some colleagues in the Research Resource Conservation unit received an award from the American Farmland Trust for soil health stewardship.
- They attended a three-day training in Vermont hosted by AFT in October and are currently developing a soil health stewardship action plan for the state.

C. NRCS: Tom Morgart reported.

- Tom Morgart expressed his gratitude for being back after a 10-month detail at headquarters.
- He discussed the Inflation Reduction Act, which allocated nearly \$20 billion to NRCS for implementing climate-smart mitigation practices.
- Connecticut's budget saw a substantial increase, with \$7 million for EQIP and an additional \$11

million for EQIP IRA.

- Other programs, like CSP, received around \$1.5 million in funding.
- Easement programs are being handled at the national level, providing opportunities for climate-smart practices.
- The Agricultural Management Assistance Program has \$115,000 available, with significant interest from applicants.
- Round one and two of the programs have been completed, with more applications than funds available, especially for the Climate Smart side.
- An announcement is forthcoming regarding the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, offering opportunities for additional funding.
- Tom highlighted the importance of nature-based solutions and incorporating indigenous knowledge into conservation efforts.

D. CAES: Leigh Whittinghill reported.

- The Connecticut Vegetable and Small Fruit Conference held on 01/09 was a success. She serves on the committee.
- Feedback suggested that the change in location to UCONN was mostly well-received, despite a few minor issues.
- The seminar series for the spring is currently underway at the station.
- Several labs are providing research experience for credit to students from local universities and colleges, including the University of New Haven, Quinnipiac, and Albertus Magnus.
- Applications for the plant health fellowship for the summer are now being accepted.

E. CT RC&D: Jocelyn Lahey reported.

- The Climate Smart Agriculture grant completed its first round, funding 8 projects totaling about \$870,000 for implementation, funded by the State of Connecticut DOAG.
- A press conference for the grant awardees is scheduled for next Friday at one of the recipient's locations.
- Only about 20 out of 37 applications were funded in the first round, with the second round opening next week.
- The CT RC&D has been working on a Small Business Administration grant for outreach with farmer veterans, establishing an online and in-person resource hub and promoting the "Homegrown by Heroes" label.
- They have a program called Job Jump Start funded by a cooperative agreement with NRCS, which includes positions like conservation planners, soil technicians, and an archeology field technician.
- Seven staff members will be placed in NRCS offices across the state through this program.

F. NCCD: Joanna Shapiro reported.

- Working on the Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant received in 2021, updating the North Branch Park River watershed-based plan and large-scale green infrastructure design.
- Subcontractor faced delays in fieldwork due to persistent wet weather during the summer, but has since resumed activities.
- They are evaluating various projects to determine feasibility and landowner interest, with stakeholder meetings ongoing.
- The team has been busy with town work, recently adding a third town where they serve as the town wetland agent.
- Currently focused on finalizing a plant sale brochure amidst a busy period of activity.

G. SWCD: Chris Sullivan reported.

- Continuing urban waters initiative work funded by the EPA, focusing on bacteria lab operations and partnerships in the Mill River in New Haven.
- Planning to expand this work to include the Quinnipiac and West Rivers in New Haven, with collaboration from the Sound School in New Haven involving student monitoring in New Haven Harbor.
- Some students are presenting their work at a conference in Maine, showcasing their efforts.
- Exploring the development of Greenway trails along parcels of land owned by the town of East Haven along the Farm River, with an application for official Greenway designation underway.
- Received news from the Long Island Sound Community Impact Fund regarding an invitation to submit a full proposal for outreach efforts in Norwalk, focusing on stormwater and rain garden installation potential in neighborhoods and residential areas, with the proposal due in March.

H. CRCCD: Jane Brawerman reported (Ruiz read notes)

- We have hired a new Natural Resource Specialist, Kate Lily Preston, who will be starting in February. Her work will complement that of Kelly Starr, our existing Natural Resource Specialist who focuses on working with the ag community.
- We received a Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant to work with a Salem beef operation, Wheatfield Hill Farm, on a nutrient management project. The grant will provide supplemental funds for an EQIP contract to build a bedded-pack facility
- We completed our stormwater management project with a small dairy in Durham, Deerfield Farm, funded by a 319 grant.
- We also completed a habitat assessment and management plan under contract with the town of Westbrook for a 300 acre open space property to support their in the town's goals of protecting water resources and special natural habitats through open space acquisition and preservation
- We have a film coming up this Saturday as part of our collaborative Environmental Film Series, The Biggest Little Farm. The screening will take place at the public library in Middletown at 2pm. One of our farmers, Jess Stone at Cold Spring Farm, will be facilitating the post-film discussion.
- We are gearing up for our native plant sale, which will take place the last weekend in April at the Chester Fairgrounds!

I. ECCD: Dan Mullins reported.

- Collaborating with Project Oceanology on the Green Outdoor Learning Alliance grant to install infrastructure at two schools.
- Working on the Green School Yard version 2.0 grant from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut at Jenny School in New London, focusing on improvements such as rain gardens and raised bed gardens.
- Combining the Urban Waters and Underserved Populations grant from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund with the Green School Yard grant to enhance funding for joint school projects.
- Initiating various projects funded by the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, including rain garden installations, buffer repairs, and water quality improvements along coastal corridors.
- Supporting the Weckquaesgeek Clean Water Coalition with funding from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, including assessments and progress in the Cove area.
- Implementing projects funded by the Long Island Sound Futures Fund for repairing buffers and installing planters at the Cove Condominium Association in Stonington.
- Moving forward with the fishway project at the Shewville Dam securing additional funding through the Inflation Reduction Act.
- Planning and implementing projects funded by grants from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, such as installing a free stall barn with manure management facilities in Lebanon and North

Stonington, Connecticut.

- Collaborating with the Town of Thompson on a 319 grant from Connecticut DEEP for installing a large bar retention area and pervious pavers at the Thompson Library.

J. CACD/NACD: Denise Savageau reported.

- She provided updates on her involvement in various committees and initiatives:
- Long Island Sound Citizens Advisory Committee: Denise serves on this committee and is actively engaged in providing updates and input (see above for the Long Island Sound Comprehensive conservation and management plan update).
- State Water Plan Implementation Work Group: She is part of this ongoing group, particularly involved in the outreach and education work group working on aquifer protection.
- She invites anyone who needs engagement on source water protection or the state water plan to reach out to her as she is active on these 2 committees.
- National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Annual Meeting: Savageau and Cappiali will attend this meeting in February, focusing on appropriations budget and the farm bill.
- New England Conservation District Leadership Meeting: she discussed the importance of this meeting for networking and program transfer among states. It has been on hold due to COVID-19 but is expected to restart in 2025.
- She encouraged sharing information about these meetings with local partners and expressed her willingness to assist in organizing the New England leadership meeting. These meetings facilitate coordination among states and provide a platform for collective communication with federal legislators.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – no comments

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