



Minutes of the Regular Meeting –March 21, 2024
ZOOM MEETING https://zoom.us/j/955_752_1162
Meeting ID: ID: 955 752 1162 +1 929 205 6099

1. Call to order: 10:05 a.m. by Denise Savageau, Chair.
Attendance: Members: Denise Savageau (CRCCD Board), Chirs Martin (DEEP), Cheryl Cappiali (SWCD), Joanna Shapiro (NCCD), Jane Brawerman (CRCCD), Lola Szydlo (NWCD) 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), Melissa Mostowy (DEEP), Kate Preston (CRCCD).
2. INTRODUCTION
Savageau opened the meeting, did a round of introductions and confirmed the quorum.
 - A. Minutes - Minutes of 01/25/24 were approved as presented as per Robert’s Rule and placed on file.
 - B. Treasurer’s Report
Savageau and Ruiz reported. The Financial report for March 15, 2024 was reviewed. It was approved as presented as per Robert’s Rule and placed on file.
2. NEW BUSINESS
 - A. Training for Conservation Inland Wetland Commissions
Savageau highlighted the importance of a comprehensive training program that includes both online and in-person sessions. Jane Brawerman confirmed the need for diverse training methods, and Christopher Martin indicated DEEP's participation. Savageau plans to coordinate with DEEP after the determinations. Tom Morgart from NRCS emphasized the distinction between federal and state wetland requirements, and Denise agreed to include NRCS representatives in the work group.

 - B. Grant Opportunities
Savageau emphasized the success of the districts in being awarded LISFF for watershed conservation efforts. She urged everyone to consider this fund for future projects and discussed comprehensive planning initiatives. Savageau also reminded participants of the upcoming deadlines for various NACD grants, particularly the urban community agriculture grants. She invited anyone with additional grant information to share.

Jocelyn Lahey mentioned the climate smart grant, which focuses on soil health initiatives and energy awards, with amounts up to \$50,000. She noted that new and beginning farmers could receive up to \$25,000 and provided information on eligibility and deadlines.

Christopher Martin introduced urban forestry grants, which cover a range of projects including riparian restoration and community woodlot health. He also discussed an upcoming IRA State allocation grant, which includes funding for training and recruiting technical service providers, aimed at effectively

43 Davenport Drive, Stamford, CT 06902
203-424-8469 ctcouncilswc@gmail.com

utilizing federal funds in Connecticut.

Thomas Morgart discussed Conservation Innovation Grants aimed at advancing climate-smart agriculture. He noted that these grants could award up to \$250,000 from a total pool of \$500,000. Morgart also mentioned that agroforestry projects with training components could be considered for these grants, confirming the potential for diverse and innovative proposals.

3. OLD BUSINESS

A. Legislative Updates

Savageau gave a summary of the contents of a packet sent out earlier. She highlighted a bill concerning the Passports to the Park program, explaining its importance for funding various environmental initiatives and noting that she had submitted testimony to ensure no adverse changes were made. This bill aims to include cost-of-living increases to make the program sustainable. She also mentioned other bills, including those affecting wetlands, with some potentially undermining the Wetlands Act, and others promoting additional training. Furthermore, Savageau discussed two significant climate change bills, Senate Bill 11 and Bill 5004, both of which include resiliency and nature-based solutions components. In addition, Jane Brawerman raised a concern about a potential bill reducing funding for agricultural science programs. Denise expressed interest in this issue, emphasizing the importance of training the next generation in environmental and agricultural fields and highlighting the job opportunities linked to nature-based solutions.

B. Integrated Water Resources Management Plan Update.

Savageau provided an update, highlighting the Council's submission of testimony emphasizing the need for a focus on source water protection. The current plan prioritizes swimming, bathing, and nutrient management but lacks explicit priorities for drinking water. Savageau advocated for including drinking water protection, drawing attention to the work funded by USDA on source water protection. Graham Stevens responded positively, indicating potential inclusion of these concerns in the plan.

C. LISS Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan Update.

Savageau discussed the update of the Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, noting a shift to address upstream watershed issues more aggressively. The focus is expanding beyond near-shore coastal areas to include upstream watersheds in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. This shift is in response to feedback, particularly from environmental justice communities. The draft plan is currently being written, with public hearings and final adoption expected in early 2025. Savageau encouraged participation in the public hearings and feedback on the draft plan. Jane Brawerman added that the Long Island Sound Study has released a brochure to encourage public involvement, which she plans to share. The update information is accessible through a dedicated webpage.

D. Soil Health Committee

Ruiz provided an update on the Soil Health Committee, noting that progress has been slow due to other pressing issues. The Department of Agriculture, in collaboration with the American Farmland Trust (AFT), is developing a soil health action plan, which is more of a checklist rather than a detailed document. Ruiz has been coordinating with the Department to ensure efforts are not duplicated. Documents have been exchanged, and conversations held to align their complementary efforts. Eileen Underwood added that while she attended a Soil Health Conference, her colleagues are directly involved in the plan, which focuses on networking and creating action steps. The coordination between the Department and the committee has been beneficial, and Ruiz plans to convene a meeting soon to discuss updates and next actions. Ruiz and Underwood emphasized the importance of such collaborative

meetings for effective conservation efforts.

E. Board Elections and Vacancies Update

Savageau shared exciting news about recruiting someone for a governor-appointed vacancy on the Council, Latha Swami, representing an NGO and associated with the Working Lands Alliance. The next step is securing the Governor's approval, hoping she will participate in the June meeting where elections will occur. Savageau emphasized the importance of diversifying leadership and holding elections in June. She mentioned being willing to serve as chair for another year but stressed the need for new leadership. Progress has been made in strengthening the Council, but more work remains. Collaboration with partners like the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection was highlighted. Ruiz noted the need to re-engage the University of Connecticut (UConn) and appoint a representative to the Council. Savageau suggested setting up a meeting with the new Director of Extension at UConn to address this.

F. ENVIROTHON

Joanna Shapiro provided updates on upcoming events and activities for the Envirothon. Field Day is scheduled for May 23 at Lockwood Farm in Hamden, a week later than usual to avoid conflicts with AP Science exams. Savageau cannot attend due to the date change. The combined Soils and Wildlife Workshop was held at Sessions Woods with moderate attendance. Still trying to increase school participation post-pandemic. A new grant from NACD, Hands-on Kits for Schools- awaiting payment to develop the project. The National Envirothon is taking place in Geneva, NY at the end of July. Volunteers from the steering committee are encouraged, with room and board covered for volunteers. This is a chance to support future environmental leaders. Melissa Mostowy mentioned a career fair during the Field Day event, inviting participation for tabling and student interaction, emphasizing job opportunities related to environmental fields. Savageau noted the importance of the career fair and commended Cheryl Cappiali for securing the Lockwood Farm venue.

G. Grant Updates

- US Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration

The contract with NACD is signed, and activities will resume after a break for April due to seedling sales. A workshop will be scheduled for conservation districts and partners.

- Technical Assistance Grants:

No update on the first payment for 2023.

- Climate Smart Marketing Grant:

The Northwest Conservation District submitted an application focused on hemp production, highlighting its benefits for carbon sequestration and soil quality improvement.

- Source Water Protection Grant:

The grant is nearing completion, with a presentation on GIS work with UConn CLEAR scheduled for the Connecticut Land Conservation Council's annual meeting. Ruiz noted this is the only water-related panel at the conference, underscoring its significance. The work supported by NRCS is gaining attention, including from Oklahoma, showing the project's broader impact and potential for ongoing benefits.

- NRCS Conservation Planning Support Grant

To hire a Resource Conservation Assistant (RCA) in each district field office.

Each district will hire an RCA or Planning Assistant. The Council is preparing job descriptions and an RFP for HR services to facilitate the hiring process. The plan is to finalize these documents before rolling out the hiring process. This process is unique and has not been done before, so lessons are being gathered from similar grants (RC&D Job Jump Start). Next Steps are finalizing job descriptions, engaging an HR firm, and forming an interview team. Outreach to districts will follow, ensuring a smooth hiring process without being a burden to the districts.

- LISS Watershed Operations Grant – Council/DEEP

The Watershed Operations Grant is progressing with several key points. Multiple meetings have been held to assess the status and plan the next steps. A series of workshops will be hosted in late spring and early summer to develop a draft outline for the project's direction. A draft outline must be submitted to DEP by September 1st, with a second contract extending work into the fall. Exploration of contractor involvement is underway to support project execution. The project involves collaboration with the three Long Island Sound districts, who have been actively participating in calls and planning sessions. The project is making steady progress and aims to meet key milestones by the end of summer and continue into the fall.

- LISFF Grant – Districts

Any district-specific updates will be included in district reports. One challenge has been the federal contracting and procurement process. This issue has been escalated, with discussions held at higher levels, including with the newly appointed regional conservationist, Casey Taylor. Efforts are being made to streamline the process between the NRCS and EPA, especially when working with farmers. Although there are no immediate solutions, steps are being taken to reduce the burden of this process in the future.

Ruiz reported that The Long Island Sound Futures Fund is allocating part of its funds to engage consultants from Trowel Environmental to assist with grant writing. This support will help districts and other applicants by simplifying the application process and narrowing down the project scope. The goal is to ensure funds are effectively directed and to increase the number of successful applicants.

- LISFF Grant – DEI

Grant work focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Savageau has been invited to join the Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council's water subcommittee, which is starting to do urban work. There will be collaboration with Chris Sullivan to report on the grant and provide updates. More details will follow as the project progresses.

- Stormwater and E&S Guideline Updates

The updated Storm Water and Erosion Sediment Control Guidelines are now effective as of March. Efforts are needed to inform stakeholders about the new guidelines. These updates include a new threshold for treating the first flush of 1.3 inches of rain, aimed at addressing climate change challenges. Outreach and education efforts will be increased, including potentially organizing a conference in the fall to educate a new generation of professionals on these guidelines, particularly the erosion and sediment control during construction phases.

AGENCY REPORTS

A. DEEP: Chris Martin and Melissa Mostowy reported.

- On April 2-4, 2024 there is a conference happening called the Northeast Conference on The Science of PFAS: Public Health & The Environment in Marlborough, MA. The Northeast Waste Management Officials' Association (NEWMOA) has partnered with the Northeast Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPC) and the Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management (NESCAUM), the Northeast Recycling Council (NERC), and others to organize the second regional science conference on PFAS.
- On April 10-11, 2024 there will be an Annual NPS Meeting in Old Saybrook, CT. CTDEEP and NEIWPC co-hosting. This year's conference theme is Climate Resiliency through Nonpoint Source Outreach and Implementation. The Annual NPS Conference is the premier forum in the Northeast for sharing information and improving communication on NPS pollution issues and projects.
- The Aquifer Protection Area Program at DEEP has been working with Naugatuck Valley COG to host an educational program series to inform municipalities about strategies to achieve compliance. This is open to any municipality or anyone who works closely with municipalities,

especially those who have Aquifer Protection Areas in their service area. If anyone is interested in learning more or attending one of the workshops, here is the link:

<https://nvcogct.gov/event/aquifer-protection-areas-moving-towards-compliance-workshop-series/2024-01-17/>

- NPS Management Plan - Goal for the draft to be complete is later this spring and it will be out for public comment sometime this summer. Reach out to Erik Bedan for more info.
- 2024 Integrated Water Quality Report - Water Quality team is still working on it and hopefully will be out for public comment this summer/fall. Reach out to Traci Iott for more info.

B. DOA: Eileen Underwood reported.

- Recently closed on the climate resiliency grant and will announce approximately 20 awardees in the next week or two.
- Several projects are either soil or water-based. Soil scientists will verify the projects before contracts are written. More details will be shared at our next meeting.

C. NRCS: Tom Morgart reported.

- NRCS continues to hire staff and partner employees. We currently have 60 NRCS employees and 18 affiliates (partner employees) working with NRCS to implement conservation funding.
- The application deadline for NRCS programs, EQIP and CSP will be April 1st.

D. CAES: Leigh Whittinghill reported.

- Plant Science Day is scheduled for August 7th
- Preparations are underway for seasonal activities and the growing season.
- Additionally, the Ag Science Fair will be hosted at the beginning of May.
- There are no new grants or hires to report.

E. CT RC&D: Jocelyn Lahey reported.

- Attended Ag Day where they announced that one of their veteran farm partners received the Young Farmer of the Year award. It was also the first time they showcased the full veteran farming marketing initiative display, which attracted a lot of attention.
- Progressing with the Climate Smart Grant and working on an equipment hub initiative funded by Connecticut DoAg. This initiative involves setting up equipment hubs at various locations, allowing farms to use equipment for free to facilitate soil health and climate-smart farming practices.
- Actively hiring, with 9 job jump starters currently in NRCS offices, increasing to 10 in the next few weeks. The new ERT program coordinator, Chris, will be promoting the ERT program at the upcoming CLCC event.
- Attended the Connecticut Association of Wetland Scientists Annual Meeting, which helped raise awareness about the ERT program and resulted in several inquiries for spring site visits.

F. NCCD: Joanna Shapiro reported.

- The plant sale is in full swing, growing significantly each year since 2021, potentially tripling pre-pandemic levels.
- Facing challenges using the funds from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, especially given the need to break ground on a project next month.
- Working with other districts and reaching out to Joe Courtney's staff for support in utilizing the funds.
- Progressing with the North Branch Park River watershed plan update and green infrastructure design, collaborating with various partners.
- Regular stakeholder meetings are being held, with plans for a Town Hall style meeting to get

community input on concept designs.

- Seeking landowner buy-in for projects to bring to permit level design, dealing with multiple agencies and complex negotiations.
- Increasing outreach and workshops, with staff member Jenny Patson holding tree planting and pruning workshops.
- Considering an Agroforestry demonstration project, potentially integrating it into the current 319 Grant or applying for a larger CIG Grant.

G. NWCD: Lola Szydlo reported

- Currently preparing for the plant sale, a major task and Lola's first since joining six months ago.
- Officially activated the Long Island Sound Futures Fund Grant with Freund's Farm and submitted the first reimbursement request.
- Received smaller grants for children's gardening programs at Beardsley Library and New Milford Library, to be implemented this summer.
- Submitted a big grant application for the One Freedom Hemp project, awaiting results.
- Highlighted these as the main activities in the Northwest region.

H. CRCCD: Jane Brawerman reported

- Co-hosting a virtual pool workshop for land use commissioners with the Connecticut Audubon and Roger Tory Peterson Estuary Center. Presenters: Denise and her husband Michael. Date: Saturday, April 6th. Workshop is almost fully booked.
- Facing contracting issues with the Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant for a nutrient management project at Wheatfield Hill Farm. Progress is delayed, but the farmer is now ready to sign the subcontract.
- Planning a project at Wadsworth Falls State Park on the Coginchaug River with Trout Unlimited. Focus: Conifer revetment stream bank stabilization. Coordinating with DEEP on permitting and permissions.
- Collaborating with Middletown Regional High School ag science program to develop a land lab and school farm.
- Native plant sale is underway. Ordering available via web store or mail. Sale Date: Last weekend in April at Chester Fairgrounds.
- Published a newsletter in February on the importance of stream side vegetated buffers as nature-based solutions.
- Promoting stream side buffers with a new or updated brochure. Will distribute brochures at the CLCC meeting on Saturday.

I. CACD/NACD: Denise Savageau reported.

- CACD represents conservation districts on various boards, including the Water Planning Council Advisory Group, Long Island Sound Study Citizens Advisory Group and actively follows and participates in legislation discussions and national events.
- Denise and Cheryl attended a highly successful and progressive national meeting in San Diego hosted by NACD, where there were discussions about the Farm Bill and legislative appropriations with lawmakers.
- NACD's summer board meeting in Boston, combined with the Northeast Regional meeting: topics include landscape scale restoration grants and capacity building.
- Information on these events will be shared as it becomes available.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – no comments

5. ADJOURN –The meeting was adjourned at 11:43 AM.