



Minutes of the Regular Meeting –September 19, 2024  
ZOOM MEETING [https://zoom.us/j/955\\_752\\_1162](https://zoom.us/j/955_752_1162)  
Meeting 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), Lilian Ruiz (CT Council), Simon Levesque (DOAG), Leigh Whittinghill (CAES), Melissa Mostowy (CT DEEP), Chris Sullivan (SWCD), Cheryl Cappiali (SWCD), Amelia Magistrali (UConn Extension), Joanna Shapiro (NCCD), Thomas Morgart (NRCS), Christian Swanson (CT RC&D), Annette Lott (NWCD), Kate Preston (CRCCD).
2. INTRODUCTION  
Savageau opened the meeting, did a round of introductions and confirmed the quorum.
  - A. Minutes - Minutes of 06/20/24 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 September 12, 2024, was reviewed. It was approved as presented as per Robert's Rule and placed on file.
  - C. Chairman's Report  
Savageau mentioned that the board has been actively working to fill the position of Secretary-Treasurer, following Jeff Folger's decision to step down. Jeff had continued fulfilling his duties in the role until a replacement was found, managing all responsibilities behind the scenes, for which the board expressed deep gratitude. Cheryl Cappiali, a board supervisor with the Southwest Conservation District, was asked to step in as the interim Secretary-Treasurer. Cheryl agreed to take on this role, ensuring a smooth transition during Jeff's departure. Savageau expressed appreciation for Cheryl's willingness to assume these responsibilities and proposed a motion to officially elect Cheryl as Secretary-Treasurer for the Council.
3. NEW BUSINESS
  - A. Election of Treasurer/Secretary- nominee Cheryl Cappiali  
Savageau proceeded to the election of a new Treasurer/Secretary to fill the role previously held by Folger. The Council unanimously voted in favor of Cheryl Cappiali's appointment as Treasurer/Secretary, with no oppositions or abstentions. Cheryl expressed gratitude for the Council's confidence in her. Savageau thanked Cheryl for accepting the role and noted Jeff's valuable service as Treasurer until now, especially during a period of transition.
  - B. Grant Opportunities  
Savageau highlighted that there are available grant opportunities provided by both the Long Island Sound Futures Fund (LISFF) and NACD. Savageau invited anyone with information on additional grant opportunities to share.

Chris Sullivan shared a link in the chat to the Long Island Sound Community Impact Fund, noting that a new Request for Applications (RFA) was released recently, although he was unsure of the due date. He highlighted that the Southwest district currently has an active grant with the fund for the 2024 awards, which focuses on estuary work and environmental justice communities. Chris emphasized that it's a valuable opportunity, with an administrative structure similar to the Long Island Sound Futures Fund.

Savageau highlighted another grant opportunity currently available through Forest Service. She mentioned that the Division of Forestry plans to submit a grant which is intended to be used as match for the forestry programs that NRCS funds under EQIP. The application for this grant is due at the end of September. The Council would assist DEEP as a partner if this grant is awarded.

Savageau highlighted the Landscape Scale Restoration Grant as another valuable funding opportunity, particularly for broader watershed projects. She noted that many water utilities have successfully utilized this grant in the past, making it an option worth considering. Savageau also mentioned that a link to the Forest Service grant opportunities will be shared in the chat, as there are currently several funding options available. While the focus is often on NRCS and Long Island Sound grants, she emphasized the importance of staying informed about the Forest Service grants, as they offer significant funding opportunities.

#### 4. OLD BUSINESS

##### A. Legislative Updates

Savageau mentioned that the upcoming 2025 legislative session, a long session, is expected to focus on passing a Climate Change Bill. She mentioned that legislators are nature-based solutions into the bill. Debate continues on whether to consolidate these components into one comprehensive bill or to separate them into individual bills. Savageau explained that one viewpoint is that individual bills are easier for people to understand and may gain more support. Many people back the work on resiliency and working lands, which is important to accomplish. However, the other perspective is that separating out the bill can lead to the more difficult tasks repeatedly being delayed. In contrast, a comprehensive bill that includes both simple, easier components and more challenging ones keeps everything together, allowing people to view and consider the entire package at once. Savageau mentioned that she had been informed by some legislators that a climate bill will be introduced, though the specific contents remain uncertain. She expressed confidence that it will likely address areas related to sustainability, resilience, and nature-based solutions, including efforts such as healthy soils, wetlands protection, and open space forestry.

Thomas Morgart mentioned discussions with DEEP about the NRCS's Emergency Watershed Protection Program, which assists towns in recovering from disasters that pose immediate threats to life or health, and lack of state funding/match. He provided examples, such as helping remove rocks piled up under bridges or protecting homes at risk of falling into streams. However, he noted that many towns struggle to cover the required 25% federal match, resulting in millions of federal dollars going unused in Connecticut. Morgart asked Savageau if there might be potential language in the legislation to help towns meet this matching requirement for disaster recovery. Savageau responded that there is potential for addressing the issue of funding match requirements. She noted that the challenge lies in determining whether it would be a bonding issue or an appropriations issue, and how to create a fund or mechanism to assist with this match. She mentioned that in her discussions with legislators, the issue of matching funds for federal grants has been raised, not just for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP), but for all federal grants. The challenge is finding the local match, and while some legislators are aware of this issue, others are not. She suggested that it may be beneficial to raise awareness about this issue and proposed that the group consider sending a letter to the Governor and legislative leaders

as the state's budget is being developed, advocating for a solution to the match problem. She emphasized that this issue has been identified by the Council, particularly because it includes federal representatives who are advisors, and thus is more attuned to the intersection of federal dollars and matching funds. She asked for thoughts on whether the Council should move forward with sending a letter on this matter. Joanna Shapiro agreed with the idea, noting that historically, Connecticut DEEP was able to provide the match for some of these programs, but that this practice has been lost. She mentioned that there is a history of the state stepping up to assist with matching funds. Leigh Whittinghill (CAES) added that match funding can also be a challenge for research institutions like hers. She explained that in some cases, salary can count toward the match, but since her salary is paid by the state, it cannot be used in this way, emphasizing that the struggle is real. Denise Savageau acknowledged the real struggle with match funding, pointing out that sometimes the match is relatively small, such as a 10% match in a 90/10 or 25% in a 75/25 scenario. She noted that by not funding these programs, a lot of federal dollars are left unused. She suggested that not everyone may be aware of this issue, and unless there is opposition, she proposed drafting a letter to address it. She emphasized the importance of sending the letter out in a timely manner as the budget process is underway. Savageau explained the funding process, stating that the Governor submits the budget, and the legislature acts on it. While the legislature can modify the budget, she stressed the importance of getting the administration's attention as they develop the final budget presentation. She noted that individual agencies likely have their budgets due by October 1st, but that the OPM and the Governor's office would be handling the final distribution of funds. Savageau reassured the group that sending out a letter within the next couple of weeks would still allow time to influence the budget. She warned that waiting until December would be too late but believed that if the letter went out soon, it could prompt the Governor's office and OPM to start thinking about the issue.

Savageau also mentioned that legislators are increasingly focused on "resiliency" due to recent flooding events, which has brought the issue to the forefront. She concluded by thanking Thomas Morgart and indicating that, at the very least, they would be able to inform the Governor and legislators about the challenges with matching funds. She reiterated the role of her agency as a collaborator in this effort.

#### **B. Training for Conservation and Inland Wetland Commissions.**

Savageau mentioned that there will still be a push regarding riparian areas and riparian legislation, as heard from the Water Planning Council and its partners. They will be revisiting these issues and also focusing on the funding for training Wetland Commission members, which remains unresolved and did not pass, a development that surprised them. She highlighted the importance of working with DEEP on training for conservation and Inland Wetland Commissioners and stressed that this discussion should happen sooner rather than later, as legislation will be crafted soon. She suggested that involving Cooperative Extension, Conservation Districts, the Council, and DEEP in the conversation could help shape the direction of the training. She emphasized the importance of having this discussion now to help influence the structure of the Wetland Commissioner training. Thomas Morgart from NRCS mentioned that NRCS recently trained DEEP on wetlands because DEEP no longer had anyone available to provide that training.

Savageau mentioned that, in terms of wetland soils, there used to be two soil scientists at DEEP who led the program for many years. However, both have retired, and their skill set has not been replaced at DEEP. As a result, DEEP now lacks a soil scientist, even though they have a whole wetlands program that is based on soils. She emphasized that they are working on addressing this gap and have made progress by bringing UConn back on board to help with understanding soils. Additionally, efforts are underway to ensure DEEP also understands the importance of soils in wetlands.

Savageau pointed out that while it has been a busy summer, it's crucial to keep moving forward with the

discussions on wetland training. She referred to the feedback from municipalities, noting that they are still calling for better training for Inland Wetland Commissioners. Specifically, municipalities feel that online training does not meet their needs, particularly for those without a background in soil science. She stressed the importance of having in-person instruction, especially field training, to help commissioners better understand wetland soils. She recalled past productive workshops where participants were taken to locations like Dinosaur State Park to observe the transition between wetland and upland soils and engage in hands-on learning with soil augers to identify the boundary. Savageau emphasized that this kind of field-based, interactive training is critical for understanding the complexities of wetlands and soils, particularly in the context of climate resiliency and sustainability. She indicated that while there is still much work to be done, the issue remains a priority, and she will follow up on the matter with Graham Stevens and others involved.

Savageau expressed the importance of having soil courses that go beyond online learning. She emphasized that it is crucial for Connecticut to have new soil scientists, particularly those who are knowledgeable about the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act. She noted that in the past, soil scientists who understood this legislation played a significant role in managing wetlands. Savageau suggested that part of the discussion moving forward should focus on how to ensure there are soil scientists—like Cynthia Rabinowitz—who specialize in both soil science and wetland science. She stressed the need to have these professionals actively working in the field.

Lilian Ruiz shared a request from the Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Wildlife. They are seeking input on the goals and objectives of the State Wildlife Action Plan. Ruiz provided a link to the draft and an input survey, asking for feedback by the 27th of the month. She also mentioned she would forward the email and the link to the Council's email list for review. Denise Savageau suggested that the email be sent to the Council members, so they can review the plan and provide their feedback on the goals and objectives.

### **C. LISS Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan Update.**

Savageau shared an update on the Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan, which is being revised and will be released on September 23rd. Savageau explained that a primary focus of the Long Island Sound efforts is to improve both water quality and water quantity. It's important to ensure that water is not quickly discharged into Long Island Sound but instead flows through the proper filtration channels, which improves the system's overall health. As the focus moves up the watershed, new opportunities arise for addressing broader watershed health. Currently, projects in the upper watershed are limited to nitrogen removal, but the updated plan introduces a category that considers additional aspects of watershed health, including forest protection through riparian buffers, soil health, and land conversion. While nitrogen removal is crucial, improving it also leads to benefits like carbon sequestration. The plan emphasizes maintaining forests, reducing impervious surfaces, and implementing stormwater management practices. This comprehensive approach to watershed health is something Savageau wanted to highlight.

Savageau emphasized the importance of receiving comments on the role of soil health within the watershed. She pointed out that many participants in the Long Island Sound study come from marine backgrounds and may not fully understand the broader perspective of watershed health. Therefore, it's crucial to have input from people who grasp the bigger picture, including soil health. Savageau also shared that the updated plan will be released on September 23rd, with workshops on September 25th and October 1st to provide more information and instructions on how to comment. She stressed how important this process is for the work being done, especially in relation to funding opportunities. The Long Island Sound Futures Fund currently receives around \$40 million annually, which will increase to over \$60 million with additional funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for the next few years.

Savageau highlighted that some of the funding for projects related to Long Island Sound comes through Sea Grant, UConn, and DEEP (Department of Energy and Environmental Protection), with additional funds allocated through the Long Island Sound Futures Fund. She emphasized the importance of discussing watershed health, particularly for researchers working more up in the watershed, as there is a perceived gap in information. Denise also noted that these discussions may influence future funding opportunities.

#### **D. Soil Health Committee**

Ruiz provided an update on the Soil Health Committee, highlighting that significant progress has been made this summer. She noted that the committee hired an intern, a recent master's graduate from Ohio State University, who focused on conservation practices. Her work, centered around training farmers through a peer-to-peer model, has been a valuable contribution to the committee's efforts. Ruiz provided an update on the progress of the Soil Health Action Plan, noting that during the meeting last week, most members of the Soil Health Committee were present. At that meeting, the latest version of the plan was presented, which is now complete with sections covering all landscapes. The next step, as Ruiz explained, is to refine and finalize the priorities and goals. She acknowledged that this process will involve multiple iterations and collaboration between different authors and organizations to ensure all perspectives are integrated.

Ruiz shared that the Wildlife Action Plan is currently under discussion, and a request for input has already been made. She mentioned that, in the near future, the committee plans to seek input from a wide range of stakeholders on the Soil Health Action Plan as well. The next steps, according to Ruiz, involve finalizing the goals, objectives, and priorities for the plan, after which input will be gathered.

#### **E. ENVIROTHON**

Chris Sullivan provided an update on the Envirothon program, noting that the international competition took place in July in Geneva, New York, at Hobart and William Smith College. The Connecticut team, representing Marvelwood School in Kent, finished 39th out of 50 teams. Sullivan shared that the week-long event included training, testing, a fun day trip to Niagara Falls, and preparation for an oral presentation on renewable energy sources, which all teams delivered on Friday. The top three teams then re-presented to an audience of about 450-500 people. Sullivan also mentioned a recent debriefing session with students and advisors from Marvelwood to gather feedback on the event, including what worked well and areas for improvement. He is still reviewing the video footage from this session.

Sullivan also shared that next year's international competition will be held in Alberta, Canada, and the winning team will need passports to participate. Additionally, Sullivan announced that the program had successfully secured a grant from the National Environmental Program to create educational kits for schools. These kits, which include a wildlife, forestry, soils, and aquatics kit, will be available for loan through local conservation districts. The kits will contain items such as game cameras, rubber scat samples, and track identification materials to help students engage in hands-on learning activities alongside the workshops provided each year.

Melissa Mostowy provided additional updates, noting that the educational kits being developed will also include guidance on how to use the materials. This will ensure that students are not left without instructions on how to engage with the kits effectively. Mostowy also announced that a workshop will be held at Chatfield Hollow State Park on October 26th, with an open invitation for anyone to attend. The workshop will cover topics in aquatics and forestry, with aquatics sessions in the morning and forestry sessions in the later morning and early afternoon. For any questions about the event, attendees can reach out to Mostowy, Chris Sullivan, or Kelsey.

#### **F. Stormwater and E&S Guideline Updates**

Savageau provided an update on the stormwater erosion sediment control guidelines, highlighting the ongoing need for training and updates in this area. While the stormwater manual has been updated, the erosion sediment control guidelines have not yet seen similar updates. Savageau discussed her recent conversations with Dave Dixon at UConn Clear and noted that summer was not an ideal time to address these issues, but plans are in place to follow up and continue discussions on necessary training related to erosion sediment control guidelines, especially as it pertains to stormwater management. Savageau emphasized the importance of understanding the potential long-term damage caused by poor erosion sediment control, particularly in areas like solar sites, where improper practices can lead to significant harm to the watershed. She stressed the need for increased attention to this issue and plans to continue collaborating with stakeholders such as UConn Clear and the Conservation Districts on this training. Regarding next steps, Savageau mentioned that she would be following up with Dave Dixon and others involved in the training and encouraged any feedback or thoughts from the committee on working with municipalities and other partners on this topic.

#### **G. Grant Updates**

- DoAG Grant: Conservation Planning for PDR Easement Holders

Savageau provided an update on the ongoing discussions regarding conservation planning for PDR easement holders. She explained that currently, landowners with farmland preservation easements may not have conservation plans in place. The conversation has begun with the Department of Agriculture, and talks are also underway with NRCS. However, NRCS is not able to handle all of the work related to conservation plans and is exploring ways to collaborate with other partners. Savageau emphasized that the planning process is still in the early stages, and there are ongoing discussions with the Conservation Districts to move forward. She noted that the next step will be to finalize the date for a meeting to further discuss the details of this initiative and gather input from stakeholders. Savageau emphasized the need for input from stakeholders to move the process forward.

Ruiz added that the goal is to ensure PDR holders receive the appropriate conservation plans, as there are two types of PDR easements—those funded by NRCS and those funded by state funds. The stewardship requirements for these easements vary, so the team is working to assess how many falls under each funding source to better understand the demand for conservation plans. Ruiz explained that some easement holders may need to start from scratch, particularly in areas where erosion risk hasn't yet been assessed. She noted that the Conservation Districts are ideally suited to deliver this work, and increasing their capacity to develop conservation plans is key to effectively distributing state and federal funds for conservation planning.

Levesque emphasized that the Conservation Districts are well-suited for the conservation planning work related to PDR easements, particularly given their long history of partnership with NRCS on easements dating back to the late 1990s. He pointed out that one of the challenges with stewardship reports is that modifications to the land, such as soil disturbance, may occur without a conservation plan in place. This is a concern, especially when the stewardship reports are conducted sporadically, sometimes years apart. Levesque explained that on farms not partnered with NRCS, it may take several years before they can get back to conduct a report, and in some cases, they may struggle to contact the landowners due to leasing arrangements. He stressed the importance of proactively addressing these issues to prevent landowners from unintentionally degrading the land, such as stripping topsoil or filling in wetlands. Levesque concluded by noting that many of these easements are decades old, underscoring the need to ensure that conservation plans are implemented on all farms with PDR easements.

Savageau acknowledged the importance of the ongoing discussions and highlighted that not only do the

Conservation Districts provide a strong avenue for this work, but the goal is also to ensure that the NACD technical assistance grants, which currently fund conservation planners in the districts, can be expanded to support this new initiative. She emphasized that this project would require a long-term partnership with the Department of Agriculture, as there will be a continuous need for conservation plans and updates. Savageau noted the importance of securing a stable funding source for conservation planners, especially in light of potential changes to the NACD technical assistance grants. This initiative, she explained, aims to solidify state funding for conservation planning, ensuring its sustainability moving forward. She concluded by stating that there will be a more in-depth discussion on this matter soon.

Ruiz emphasized two key points. First, she highlighted the importance of the conservation partnership at play, noting that the collaboration between NRCS, the Department of Agriculture, and the Conservation Districts demonstrates the effective functioning of this partnership. She expressed excitement about the Council's involvement in supporting this initiative. Second, Ruiz stressed the critical need for highly trained conservation planners at the Conservation Districts. While the current planners are receiving training, she noted that they are not yet fully certified. She underscored the importance of ensuring that conservation planners reach the highest level of certification to effectively carry out their roles in this project.

Savageau thanked the group and noted that the approach being discussed has been successfully implemented in states like New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey for years. She highlighted that Connecticut is now looking to ramp up efforts in a similar direction. She mentioned that a meeting has been scheduled specifically to discuss the details of this initiative and address any questions related to the Conservation Districts as the program develops.

- NACD Grants

Savageau provided an update on the NACD grants, noting that one, the NACD Technical Assistance Grant, is moving forward and up for renewal. She mentioned that the new technical assistance grant had just been released, and the team will be reviewing how it aligns with their ongoing work. Additionally, she highlighted the U.S. Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration Grant, which NACD applied for, involving 13 states from Ohio and West Virginia to Maine. Connecticut is one of the pilot states, receiving \$175,000 for the project. She mentioned about talking about this with the districts in more detail again at that at their joint meeting. The funding will support both planning and implementation of forest and riparian restoration projects in public drinking water supply watersheds. She mentioned that they are currently seeking a match for the grant. Savageau has been in discussions with a foundation from the Long Island Sound Funders Collaborative, exploring ways to secure the match so that local implementers won't have to contribute it themselves. The grant provides \$175,000 for the project, with the goal of securing a 50/50 match, totaling \$350,000 for implementation. She emphasized that this funding would allow conservation districts and implementers to directly carry out the restoration work on the ground. Savageau noted that they are continuing to work closely with forest stakeholders and will provide further updates as discussions progress.

Savageau provided further details on the landscape scale restoration grant, explaining that the Council and the Connecticut Association of Conservation Districts (CACD) are key partners in the project. The grant brings together foresters and water resource professionals to collaborate on forest and riparian restoration efforts, particularly in the Long Island Sound and Connecticut River watersheds. She highlighted an upcoming workshop on November 20th and 21st, hosted by the South Central Regional Water Authority, for foresters, watershed experts, and water utility professionals involved in the partnership.

Additionally, NACD has received a second round of funding to continue the partnership and bring in more pilot states. Vermont and Massachusetts are also planning to join the initiative to explore similar restoration efforts in their regions. Savageau noted that this grant focuses on landscape scale restoration, aiming to protect forests and water resources across these large regions. The grant, which runs through 2027, will allow for the implementation of these projects, with more discussions and planning to take place with the conservation districts and foresters in the coming months. Savageau emphasized the importance of continuing collaboration and leveraging these partnerships to achieve the goals of the restoration effort.

- **NRCS Grants**

Lilian Ruiz shared an update on the recruitment process for a new grant position. As of the meeting, interviews were already taking place for the position in Danielson, with similar positions planned for other district offices. Although the process had a challenging start, the team is now moving forward. Ruiz expressed hope that the candidates required for these roles will be found and hired soon, starting with Danielson. She encouraged questions or comments from others, particularly for those unfamiliar with the details of the recruitment process. Thomas Morgart from NRCS expressed his anticipation for successfully hiring someone for the position. Lilian Ruiz explained that the current grant aims to support NRCS by helping to hire project assistants for district offices and district conservationists. These are entry-level roles focused on tasks like data gathering and data entry, intended to aid NRCS efforts. Though these hires will technically be employees of the conservation districts, they'll be stationed within and overseen by NRCS. She noted the complexities in setting up this arrangement but mentioned progress is now being made.

Denise Savageau thanked Lillian for her persistence in navigating the complexities of this grant. She explained that the new program assistants will support NRCS district conservationists in administering EQIP grants across various districts. This assistance is intended to relieve planners from administrative tasks like data entry, allowing them to focus more on planning.

- **LISS Watershed Operations Grant- Council/DEEP**

Denise Savageau provided an update on the LISS Watershed Operations Grant, noting that the report had just been submitted to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). This grant aims to bring the PL-566 Watershed Operations Program to Connecticut, modeled after the Cape Cod Water Restoration Project, which addressed issues such as fish passage, tidal flushing, salt marsh restoration, and protecting shellfish beds from stormwater runoff. Savageau highlighted that this is the first initiative of its kind in the United States, employing NRCS's Watershed Operations funding for Connecticut's needs. Through funding from the Long Island Sound Study and DEEP, they gathered data to allow NRCS to assess the feasibility of the program. Over 82 relevant projects were identified, focusing on stormwater management, shellfish and salt marsh restoration, tidal flushing, and culvert work. Savageau praised the contributions from Sea Grant, NERR, and partners at UConn, who helped organize three workshops over the summer to gather input and engaged municipalities and local shellfish commissions to compile project needs. She emphasized that more projects are likely to be identified as collaboration continues.

Savageau informed attendees that the final report for the Long Island Sound Watershed Operations Grant would be distributed soon. Additionally, she noted that they have secured a small additional amount of funding to further refine the list of projects by collaborating closely with DEEP. This process will involve vetting each project to confirm its fit within the program, facilitating clearer dialogues around specific initiatives, and ensuring no project is overlooked.



The report has already been provided to Jim Lyons at NRCS, and they hope to move forward with the Watershed Operations Program application. Savageau emphasized that, similar to the 319 program, having an approved watershed plan qualifies projects for additional funding. She explained that once NRCS assesses the plan's feasibility and it is fully developed, funding opportunities will become more accessible.

Savageau expressed excitement about the quality of the report and gratitude for everyone's contributions. EA Engineering was the consultant on this project, and UConn and local conservation districts also provided invaluable support, especially in outreach.

- **Other Grants- Districts**

Savageau mentioned there would be available funds for conservation districts to continue working with municipalities on outreach efforts, which will be discussed further in upcoming meetings.

Savageau provided an update on a collaborative effort with the forestry department involving a grant aimed at expanding the number of Technical Service Providers (TSPs) in forestry. She explained that the division of forestry has received funding to support TSP training, though there are currently few TSPs in the state. Savageau reported that the Division of Forestry encountered challenges in efficiently distributing grant funds to Technical Service Providers (TSPs). To address this, the Council will serve as a conduit, facilitating the training and onboarding of additional TSPs to expand their availability in the state. Savageau noted that the Division of Forestry has received a grant for this purpose, which will be implemented through the Council, presenting another opportunity for the Council's involvement. Further details on the rollout of this initiative are expected soon.

## **AGENCY REPORTS**

### **A. DEEP: Melissa Mostowy reported.**

- Job Posting for Environmental Analyst: Position within the Watersheds Program, focused on 319 grant projects and environmental reviews, intended to refill Eric Thomas's role; job posting closes at midnight on the meeting day.
- Long Island Sound Public Comment Information Sessions: Scheduled for September 25th at 6 PM and October 1st at noon.
- The EPA recently approved the Connecticut Non-Point Source Management Program plan, illustrating the efforts to address non-point source pollution by DEEP and other partners. The deadline for the plan was September 1st, and we were unable to hold a public comment period due to an extensive review period between the EPA and DEEP.
- 2023 Rifle Bio Assessment by Volunteers (RBV) Report: Now available in a web-based format; 2023 data submitted to the Water Quality Exchange and accessible via the Water Quality Portal.
- The Water Planning Council's Outreach and Education Committee is hosting a lunch-and-learn workshop titled Source Water Protection and Emerging Contaminants. It's scheduled for September 24th from 12 to 1; link to registration will be provided.
- Aquifer Protection Area Web App: A web app is being created to integrate the aquifer protection area map with the aquifer potential map, allowing for an overlay to view the two layers in tandem. It was noted that the aquifer potential map is difficult to use in its current PDF format, and municipalities have expressed the need for a more user-friendly version. In response, this solution was developed. The app is currently in draft form, with the GIS team working on adjustments and the geologic survey team verifying any necessary revisions to the aquifer potential portion of the map. By the end of the year, the tool is expected to be

released on the website and made accessible to the public.

#### **B. DOAG: Simon Levesque reported**

- The conservation planning for PDR easements was discussed briefly. All of the NRCS easement monitoring was recently completed at the end of last month. This is an annual task, requiring us to go out, put boots on the ground, and take pictures. A drone is now available for use, providing excellent aerial imagery that can be referenced in our reports.
- A plan to grow the stewardship team is currently in place, as it is well needed at this time. There are really five of us, and Lance, our stewardship coordinator, retired late last month. The team is hoped to be expanded, especially with over 450 easements now in total. Time is being split between stewardship and new PDR applications, and additional help is needed. Work on this expansion is in progress.
- The stewardship technology is also going to be brought up to snuff. Gis is familiar, and proficiency in it is held by most of the team. However, advantage is going to be really taken of some of the new Arcgis pro technology that was recently got last year. This is going to help the stewardship as well.
- Three new NRCS ALE applications are planned to be applied for the early October deadline. Some applications are being worked on right now. Another deadline is in December. About 8 applications are currently held, but one or two more may be received. The outcome will depend on how things go at the beginning of that configuration process.
- The Climate Smart Grant is moving along. The contract for Climate Smart Ag is being handled by Eileen, with Holly Lalim taking over in Eileen's absence. Coordination is being done with private environmental engineering firms contracted to develop the plan for each of the grantees. Climate smart policies, water management, energy management, and healthy soil practices are being implemented by them. Efforts are being made right now to move these along. By the time of the next Soil and Water Council meeting, more substantial updates on these projects should be available. That should conclude the updates from the Department of Ag.

#### **C. UConn Extension: Amelia Magistrali reported.**

- She will make a point of just talking to Amy about what makes sense. If it is useful for her to be kind of a deputy, or if it's better for her to just be on the Soil Health Committee. She introduced herself at the last meeting, she's the new soil health Educator at UConn. And she started in May. So, she's still getting a bit of a sense of who's who and this role hasn't existed before. So, she's getting to kind of figure out with other service providers and definitely with the extension community what makes sense for programming.
- There are some things developing that she'll be getting involved with. The ag team is working on developing methods and interpretation for soils with high organic matter. This is particularly in high tunnels or raised beds. They are looking at how to provide a testing service through the soil nutrient analysis lab. They also need to provide advice and guidance when the material is called soil, but it is often compost or material that has developed on-site.
- There has been a lot of talk within her team about how they can respond to extreme weather events. They are working on expanding the resources they can provide and defining clear roles for responding, particularly after floods or large hail events. She mentions there may be more to report on this in the future. Additionally, she encourages anyone who hasn't had a conversation with her in her new role to reach out, as she is still learning who everyone is and figuring out what her role will look like at UConn.

#### **D. NRCS: Thomas Morgart reported.**

- They are working to finish up their fiscal year, which ends on September 30th, and they are close to obligating \$20 million this year, which is double the amount from the previous year. This increase is due to additional IRA funding. They have already announced sign-up deadlines for programs like EQIP, AMA, and CSP, with October 15th deadlines.
- They have already heard from the Department of Agriculture about reapplying for their easement deadlines, and they are working off national deadlines this year. There are two dates for those deadlines. Normally, they would announce their own deadlines, but due to the large amount of AMA (Agricultural Management Assistance) money coming through the ASAP (Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme) program, they decided to follow national deadlines because there will be many obligations to manage. He doesn't have the breakdowns for his state yet, but he knows the large national budgets they will receive for IRA funding: \$325 million for the ASAP program, \$765 million for the CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program), and \$2.1 billion for EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program). These numbers are much larger than their regular work. For comparison, they received \$1.2 billion for EQIP this year. He estimates they will receive about \$14 million for EQIP next year. These are very large numbers, and they have a lot of work ahead. They are doing extensive outreach and also mentioning that a new practice, rare defining habitat, has been added this year, which includes oyster reefs as eligible practices. They are doing outreach on this new practice as well.
- They have also been doing a lot of work on flood-related issues. Engineers have been out assessing the flooding that occurred from Oxford to Southington, caused by storm with 12 inches of rain in 4 hours, which led to significant destruction. They are focusing on the farm side and have received some applications from producers looking for help to recover from the flooding event and address their resource concerns. On the EWP (Emergency Watershed Protection) side, they are also looking at towns requesting assistance. He mentions that many towns don't have the match required for a project; if a project costs \$2 million, the town would need to contribute around \$500,000, either in actual cash ("real money") or through in-kind activities. Many towns do not have this extra \$500,000 available in their budgets. As a result, they either find a way to complete the project without the needed funds, or the project doesn't happen at all. That's where the match can really be helpful.

#### **E. CAES: Leigh Whittinghill reported.**

- Their plant health fellow program, in partnership with Southern Connecticut State University, ran from June 10th to August, ending right after Plant Science Day, which was on August 7th. The program went well, and they had a great group of students.
- Lindsey Triplett will be stepping down from running the program soon, and a few scientists will take over to help share the responsibilities.
- Plant Science Day experienced rain, which caused attendance to be lower than usual, with 743 attendees instead of the usual closer to 1,000. Despite this, those who attended found the event informative and valuable, especially as it provided a chance for the public to interact with scientists.
- She also mentioned that the postdocs are organizing another symposium in October, which will help them gain more experience and enhance their resumes. Currently, they are transitioning into a quieter season, with more focus on lab work and writing.
- She also shared a recent exciting event at the farm when a young adult black bear was spotted for the first time. Although she missed seeing it, they ensured the safety of visitors and added signage about Black Bear safety. The bear was near one of the apple orchards, and they've been advised that the black bear population is increasing in Connecticut, with more human-bear

interactions occurring at this time of year as young males are kicked out by their mothers.

**F. CT RC&D: Christian Swanson reported.**

- She proceeded to give a quick highlight of what they have going on with the ERT - Connecticut Environmental Review Team. There is a Seymour ERT environmental review of a property coming up on September 23rd. A nice team has been compiled, and she is looking forward to it as it will be her first ERT visit. The property is described as a neat one, featuring a dam, a reservoir, and plans to utilize the land for passive recreation. She also mentioned that they have acquired some conservation land in Oxford that is already being utilized. Chris Sullivan will be involved in that as well.
- Regarding their sub-grant from the DOAG Climate Smart Grant, the second round of grant recipients for climate smart and soil health practices has been announced. A press conference was held last week at Clovernook Farm in Bethany, and the event went very well. They're considering seeking more funding to continue this successful program. Additionally, the purchases for the equipment hub have been finalized, and most of the equipment is now on farms, except for a compost tea making trailer, which is being worked on with Connecticut NOFA and should be ready in the next couple of weeks.
- On October 10th, a workshop will be held at Artza Mendi Farm in Sprague, Connecticut, run in collaboration with Connecticut NOFA, focusing on compost tea making and BCS tractor training for walk-behind units, with the event scheduled from 1 to 5 pm.
- She also mentioned an upcoming USDA REAP grant deadline on September 30th for providing technical assistance to farms and small businesses. While there are fewer applicants this round compared to March, they're looking forward to processing the applications and helping implement more climate smart practices.

**G. NCCD: Joanna Shapiro reported**

- They have a new natural resource specialist, Alyssa Barroso. They are working on getting her through the paperwork to obtain a link pass so she can work on the NACD CTA (Conservation Technical Assistance) work with NRCS.
- They have two Long Island Sound Futures Fund grants going on at the same time. They are nearing the end of their North Branch Park River watershed plan update and green infrastructure design project. Just yesterday, their project team, including engineers from Fuss and O'Neill, presented to the Greater Hartford Flood Commission. The presentation was to both share the findings and preliminary designs, as well as to present an alternative to a recent proposal by MDC (Metropolitan District), which involved more heavy-handed in-stream work, whereas they are focusing more on floodplain restoration.
- Their other Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant is the Broad Brook Ag Waste project. They are very grateful that Tom and Denise helped set up a meeting with officials to troubleshoot some of their major hurdles. They have a contractor on board but are still working to see if they can get the project built this season, as time is running short. There are many hurdles, including waiting on a building permit and other moving parts.
- They are working on a Food Forest demonstration planting, which is currently in the planning stage. They have worked out a location along Gages Brook, a tributary headwater to the Tankerhoosen. They have hired horticultural consultant Eric Tonesmeyer, a well-renowned agroforestry expert, to help with the planning and are already working on a plant sale.
- She mentioned about efforts to promote agroforestry. They are looking to include some chestnut hybrids in their plant sale. Additionally, they are planning to bring back Eastern hemlock seedlings to the sale. This decision came after attending the ag experimentation event,

where she spoke with a researcher who has been working on the species over the years. The researcher was excited because people have been asking for them, as they had been a part of the sale in the past but were not available in recent years. They are hopeful that the return of these seedlings will be well-received and generate interest.

#### **H. SWCD: Chris Sullivan reported**

- The Southwest Conservation District (SWCD) is managing several active grants with the DEEP for various projects. Recently, they received new grants, including grant for work in the city of Norwalk. This grant will fund outreach in a targeted environmental justice neighborhood for installing residential rain gardens. The funding will cover the purchase of materials and plants for the rain gardens and include peer-to-peer marketing at the homes that receive them.
- They received an NACD urban agriculture grant a week ago. This funding will be used to hire an intern to help build a stakeholder group for urban agriculture in the greater New Haven area. While no activities have started yet, the goal is to extend their capacity and create a network where people can come together to discuss the challenges they face and potential solutions.
- At the end of last week, they received notice that they have received funding and have a partner and subcontractor to revise and enhance the Norwalk watershed-based plan through the UConn Sea Grant program, like a resiliency grant. So, they're actually going to do all the administration of the grant. They are going to be working with the stakeholders on the Norwalk River Watershed Association and Initiative to update that plan, which is critical because the existing plan is 14 years old, and all the projects that are proposed in it are no longer functional or totally outdated. So, it's actually not a plan worth anything. So having this update will open up those doors.
- They have been continuing water quality monitoring with their bacteria lab, conducting monitoring in New Haven, Hamden, Cheshire, Wallingford, and expanding into West Haven. The season is wrapping up this fall, but the lab has been going really well. Some school groups are coming in for training, and they have a good partnership with Quinnipiac, where the lab has been incorporated into some of their biology classes.
- Sullivan mentioned that they have a lot of residential properties where people are reaching out for assessments on various issues, including stormwater problems, invasive plants, and pollinator gardens. Sometimes it's a combination of issues, and they recommend installing a rain garden on the property. He added that there is no shortage of work for them at this time.

#### **I. NWCD: Annette Lott reported.**

- She mentioned that they have been quite busy and are working on similar grants. Their Long Island Sound Futures Fund project with the Freund farm in East Canaan is moving along smoothly, and they are really thankful for the progress. The project should be finishing soon.
- She shared that they are also holding their annual meeting to highlight the Long Island Sound Futures Fund project in that region. They are working on the Long Island Sound Urban Waters Grant, which all the districts have, and doing a small food forest planting at a local park in one of their DEI communities, which will happen sometime in October. They also did library programming throughout the summer, which ended recently but went really well.
- They continue to address resident and town concerns, similar to what Chris mentioned, especially in areas with heavy rainfall. They've been out to a couple of properties to address those concerns, some of which were quite intense. Additionally, the cover crop challenge has been ongoing for three years now, and this year they have been rolling out cover crop seeds to farms.

- She mentioned that with the grant they are under, they will be involved in soil sampling for the farms participating in their district as part of the equipment hubs.
- They are looking to hire a new program administrator/coordinator and offered to send the job details out if anyone in the network knows someone who would be a good fit for the region.

**J. CRCCD: Kate Preston reported.**

- She reported that in August, they completed the 11th year of their summer water monitoring activities for the Coginchaug River watershed and the CT River Watch program. The samples are analyzed for E. coli bacteria. They also assisted with the annual bio-assessment volunteer training for the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Watershed and the Salmon River watershed partnership, which included indoor presentations and fieldwork at Devil's Hopyard State Park.
- In addition to the two solar facilities where they've been conducting stormwater inspections, they received requests for three new facilities in Berlin and Durham. Currently, inspections are being conducted with Eastern District's engineer, Paul, but Kate recently received her qualifications for stormwater inspections and will likely take a more active role in that in the future.
- They've also received numerous homeowner requests, mostly concerning stream bank erosion, and are continuing to coordinate with DEEP, Trout Unlimited, and their fluvial hydrologist at Princeton Hydro on a revetment project at Wadsworth Falls State Park.
- mentioned their upcoming Environmental Film Series, with screenings scheduled for October 28th at Wesleyan to show Follow the Drinking Gourd, February 1st at Russell Library in Middletown for Farming While Black, and March 31st at Wesleyan for The Condor and the Eagle.

**K. CACD/NACD: Denise Savageau reported.**

- CACD brings together all the conservation districts. Unlike the Council, CACD is not a state agency, but rather a nonprofit that represents the districts on the Water Planning Council. The Water Planning Council brings together DEEP, the Department of Public Health, the Office of Policy & Management (OPM), and the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA). CACD is working closely with these agencies and has been discussing the education and outreach program.
- They are looking at getting an updated State water plan at some point. One of the things they are working on is a paper on source water protection, which will highlight the gaps and provide recommendations. CACD has been leading the charge on source water protection and is working closely with the Source Water Collaborative on this effort.
- They are very engaged with the Long Island Sound study. CACD represents the districts on the Long Island Sound study, which is why she was on the watershed writing team. In addition to this, they are working on nature-based solutions and want to ensure that this remains part of the legislature, so they will be paying attention to that moving forward.
- CACD is the representative to the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). This year, the NACD had their annual summer Board meeting in Boston, where there were great workshops and networking opportunities. It was nice to have NACD members visit the northeast region. The field trips during the event included urban agriculture work in Boston, which was impressive, as well as visits to cranberry bogs, where they were able to see a unique agricultural operation. Another field trip took them to an Agricultural High School in Massachusetts, which Denise described as unbelievable in terms of what they are doing

- with students. The school has a strong environmental science focus and is preparing students for jobs in natural resource and agricultural systems. Denise offered to send the link to the school for those who haven't seen it yet. While Connecticut has some amazing agricultural high schools, this one was described as exceptional.
- She mentioned that discussions on green jobs and workforce development are happening. This is a topic they are also discussing with the legislature. While talking about nature-based solutions, Denise noted that sometimes legislators are unsure of how to proceed, but they are aware of the economy. She emphasized that there are plenty of job opportunities in these fields, but it's challenging to find enough people to fill them, ranging from entry-level to more advanced roles.
  - There's a focus on workforce development in the state, and this is something that everyone can relate to. She believes there will be opportunities in the legislative session to address this. She also shared her experience as president of CACD, noting that some people, like Kelsey Siddell, serve with her on various committees, including the Water Planning Council. Denise emphasized that while others focus on many different issues, they often are the only ones who truly understand nonpoint source pollution and watersheds, making their work crucial. She ended by noting the importance of this work.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – no comments

6. ADJOURN –The meeting was adjourned at 12:02 PM.