



Minutes of the Regular Meeting –March 27, 2025
ZOOM MEETING <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9557521162>
Meeting ID: 955 752 1162 +1 929 205 6099

1. Call to order: 10:03 a.m. by Denise Savageau, Chair.

Attendance: Members: Denise Savageau (CRCCD Board), Cheryl Cappiali (SWCD), Melissa Mostowy (DEEP), Amy Harder (UConn Extension), Leigh Whittinghill (CAES), Latha Swamy (WLA), Dan Mullins (ECCD), Joanna Shapiro (NCCD), Jane Brawerman (CRCCD), Annette Lott (NWCD). Ex-officio members: Tom Morgart (NRCS), Jocelyn Lahey (CTRC&D). Staff: Lilian Ruiz (CSWC), Chris Sullivan (SWCD), Sam Dow (DEEP), Kate Preston (CRCCD).

2. INTRODUCTION

Savageau opened the meeting, did a round of introductions and confirmed the quorum. Latha Swamy, Director of Food and Agricultural Policy for the City of New Haven was introduced as the new Governor's Appointee to the Council representing a non-profit (WLA).

Motion to add "Plan of Work" to the agenda was made by Joanna Shapiro, seconded by Melissa Mostowy was unanimously approved.

A. Minutes – Minutes of 12/19/24 were approved with one abstention (Dan Mullins) as corrected by a motion made by Amy Harder and seconded by Cheryl Cappiali and placed on file.

Corrections made: Jane Brawerman and Kate Preston added to the attendee list, corrected the name of Sen. Cathy Osten, Holly Lalime and Tighe and Bond.

B. Treasurer's Report

Savageau and Ruiz reported. The Financial report for March 12, 2025, was reviewed. Motion to approve by A. Harder; J. Shapiro seconded. Unanimously approved and placed on file.

C. Chairman's Report.

Savageau reported on what's happening at the national level in terms of grants funding and the impact on partners' programs.

3. NEW BUSINESS

D. Events: Ruiz reported on Ag Day at the Capitol, the CLCC Conference and the Northeast Leadership Meeting held in New Hampshire, where the Council participated with a table and outreach materials, and also participation on a panel about Local Work Groups.

E. Farm Bureau and WLA Leadership: Ruiz reported on the in-person meeting at the Capitol where WLA held a special session to say farewell to Chelsea Gazillo who's moving to AFT in California, and Joan Nichols who retired from the Farm Bureau.

F. Grant Opportunities: Savageau reported NACD has is offering an urban agriculture grant in addition to its technical assistance grants, which are moving forward. DEEP 319 funds seem to be on track as well. Shapiro reported that the LISFF seems to be a little delayed in its rollout.

G. Plan of Work: Savageau and Ruiz asked members to review the Council's Plan of Work and send comments. The FY26 Plan will be voted on during our June 2025 Meeting.

4. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Legislative Updates: Savageau reported that Council funding through the Passports to Parks program seems secure, and we are supporting bills on nature-based solutions and updating the State Water Plan. A new bill on riparian buffers (Bill 7174) would expand the Inland Wetlands Act to include riparian zones.
- B. Siting Council: The Council provided input on the Siting Council review of large-scale clean energy facilities, particularly regarding source water protection. The testimony was helpful to other organizations that are engaged in the review. Mostowy shared a link of the [final report](#).
- C. Training for Conservation and Inland Wetland Commissions and Erosion and Sediment Control Guidelines: Savageau discussed the challenges with the inland wetland commissions' training program. She expressed concerns about the lack of DEEP staff assigned to assist local commissions and the need for more comprehensive training beyond the current online platform. She also mentioned the potential impact of legislative changes on the training program and the need for flexibility in how training is provided. The Council has offered to assist DEEP with the training and suggested that the program should include in-field training and training from soil scientists. Mostowy added that the online training platform is currently unavailable due to an ongoing issue with the MOU. There was general consensus by Council members on the need for a more robust training program that includes both online and in-field training.
- D. LISS Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan Update: The plan, which includes language on healthy watersheds and nature-based solutions, was adopted. A major achievement is the inclusion of watershed health as a key objective. Savageau is leading a work group on this, bringing together Long Island Sound folks and others. The plan will inform the EPA's Long Island Sound funding including the Long Island Sound Futures Fund.
- E. Soil Health Committee: Lilian reported. The Committee continues to work on a statewide soil health action plan, with a draft nearing completion and can be shared. The goal is to have the plan adopted by DEEP and/or DOAG to serve as a guide for programs and policies to protect the soil in CT. The committee is seeking funding to finalize the project.
- F. ENVIROTHON: Sullivan reported on the Envirothon program, which received \$20,000 from the Council. The competitive event will be held in May, and the winner will represent Connecticut at the International Competition in July. Mostowy shared that a career fair event will be held during the competition day. The NCF International Competition will be hosted in Connecticut in 2028.
- G. Grant Updates
 - a) DoAG Grant: Conservation Planning for PDR Easement Holders: the grant is still in discussion, with no funds allocated yet.
 - b) NACD Grants
 - US Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration: Savageau reported that the project spans several years, with a tentative end date around 2028, allowing time for execution. The grant is secure and will be used for riparian restoration in Connecticut.
 - NACD Technical Assistant Grants: grants for 2024 are expected to come in soon, while the 2025 grant launch is uncertain, but should happen in the summer. The 2023 grant has been extended for six months, which will allow us to spend more of those funds.
 - c) NRCS Grants
 - Conservation Planning Support Grant: IRA funds are frozen, so this grant is only supporting the one project assistant working in Danielson.

- d) LISS Watershed Operations Grant- Council/DEEP: Finished the 1st round of the grant. We just finished the contracting for some additional dollars to continue support work and coordinate with DEEP.
- e) DEEP Grants
 - TSP Program: a TSP provider training program for foresters. The Council will manage the grant and we are in the contracting phase.
 - Cost Share Program: to bridge funding gaps for forest management plans and practices. The Council will manage this grant.
 - Mostowy reported that DEEP has access to all the funds that they have obligated they don't expect any changes.
- f) Other Grants

AGENCY REPORTS

A. DEEP: Melissa Mostowy reported.

- Staff changes in Water Monitoring Program:
 - Tracy Lizotte-retired 3/1/2025
 - Chloe Edwards, Volunteer Monitoring coordinator, left DEEP January 2025
- Contacts for water volunteer monitoring
 - Mary Becker mary.becker@ct.gov
 - Melissa Czarnowski Melissa.m.czarnowski@ct.gov
- New hires in Watershed Program
 - Jenna Barthlomew
 - Samantha Dow
- DEEP Grants and Financial Assistance
 - Check out our website for grant and financial assistance opportunities -
 - [https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Business-and-Financial-Assistance/Grants-Financial-](https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Business-and-Financial-Assistance/Grants-Financial-Assistance/Grants-and-Financial-Assistance)
- Assistance/Grants-and-Financial-Assistance
 - DEEP still has access to funding that has been obligated to us
- DEEP online training
 - Online training is not available currently while changes are being made/MOU is being finalized.
- MM will communicate with DEEP staff the need for field training to supplement the online training.

B. NRCS: Tom Morgart reported.

- The agency has obligated over 50% of Regular EQIP funds—an all-time record, compared to typical obligations of 15–20% by this time of year.
- IRA EQIP funds are about 25% obligated; new IRA obligations are currently paused, though a significant amount was secured before the pause.
- CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program) obligations have also progressed under both Regular and IRA funding.
- There is high demand: 255 unfunded applications remain in Regular EQIP alone.
- If IRA funding is retained, the agency expects to fully utilize all available funds.
- Staff have been working diligently to process and obligate funds efficiently.
- The Continuing Resolution passed for the rest of the fiscal year maintains a flat budget, similar to last year.
- While the exact state budget is not yet available, funding levels should be stable.
- NRCS is preparing a significant reorganization, though specific impacts are not yet known.
- Staff losses to date:

- 3 voluntary resignations
 - Several early retirements (VERA), including Vivian Felton, retiring Monday.
 - 5 probationary terminations, expected to return briefly on May 7 for an additional ~45 days of pay.
- Concerns exist over potential restrictions on staffing through agreements (e.g., with districts or councils), due to federal preferences to eliminate contractor-like roles.
 - Despite uncertainties, staff morale and performance remain high.

C. UConn Extension: Amy Harder Reported:

They were part of Ag Day and brought over 20 4-H students plus chaperones. She shared updates on their programs, including the hiring of Amelia as a soil health educator. They are ramping up programs, workshops, and trainings across all program areas. This is heading into what's typically our busiest time of year. She also expressed concerns about federal funding, particularly the Smith Leaver dollars that drive their budget.

D. CAES: Leigh Whittinghill reported.

Events:

- 2nd Annual Postdoctoral Symposium, hosted by our Postdoc Association. It includes posters and presentations and judged so that there is a winner in both categories.
- More info from station news on the winners: "Jessica Brown, Ph.D. (Dept. of Environmental Science & Forestry) won the oral presentation competition with her talk ""Understanding host-tick interactions in three small mammal species" followed by Jing Yu-an, Ph.D. (Dept. of Environmental Science & Forestry) with her talk "Nanopore Sequencing for Corn Rhizosphere Soil Microbiome Affected by Phosphorous Nanoparticle Fertilizers". Poster presentation winner was Stephen Taerum, Ph.D. (Dept. of Plant Pathology & Ecology) presenting "Protists help shape plant microbiomes" and followed by Godfrey Indinda Nattoh, Ph.D. (Dept. of Entomology) presenting "The scavenger receptor protein class B type 1 (SR-B1) mediates dengue virus infection of Aedes aegypti mosquito" and Ravikumar Patel, Ph.D. (Dept. of Plant Pathology & Ecology) presenting "Soil protists harbor diverse novel bacteria that modulate growth via auxin signaling"."

Grants:

- New grants have been won by station staff on:
 - Tick ecology and control
 - Salt marsh resilience and sediment additions
 - PFAs uptake and accumulation by plants and animals
 - Nanoplastics
 - Aquatic invasive species (2 grants)
 - Fire blight
 - Soil micro predators for pathogen control
 - Spotted wing drosophila
 - Urban Agriculture- MultiState Hatch grant for the northeast region.

Some of these are smaller grants, others are larger grants for which CAES will gain a portion of the awarded funds for research.

- Publications: This years publications total about 150. This quarter's topics include:
 - Nanotech and fertilizers, plant stress reduction, and nanopesticides
 - Ticks and Tick bourn illness
 - Mosquito bourn illness
 - Monarch butterfly movement ecology
 - Hemlock Wooley adelgid
 - Plant pathology, including fire blight

- Food safety
- Fertilizers and biochar
- Invasive species
- Forestry
- Fungi
- Nanoplastics

E. CT RC&D: Jocelyn Lahey reported.

- CT RC&D in collaboration with the CT Compost Alliance is hosting a composting tour at Long Table Farm on March 27 from 4-6PM. This program is part of CT RC&D's CT Soil Health Initiative funding by an NRCS Cooperative Agreement. The CT Compost Alliance will be hosting composting tours around CT in 2025. Information about upcoming events will be posted here: <https://www.ctcompostalliance.org/2025composttours>.
- CT RC&D offers two scholarships each year at its Annual Meeting. These are for graduating high school seniors pursuing further education or for students currently matriculated in agriculture or conservation programs. These can be 2 or 4 year programs at technical schools, colleges, or universities. Each award is \$750. Application information can be found here: <https://ctrctd.org/about-us/scholarships-awards/>
- CT RC&D participated in this year's legislative session by providing written and verbal statement regarding the Environmental Review Team Program, funded by the Passport to the Parks Program. Jocelyn thanked Denise and Lilian for their support in participating in the process. Jocelyn highlighted that the in-kind value of the volunteer services provided by Environmental Review Team members over the last five years is estimated at \$625K, or 125% of the funds received by CT DEEP. Jocelyn thanked the volunteers, and particularly the Conservation Districts who have provided their staff time and expertise on the site visits and reports.
- The USDA Rural Development office reached out on March 26 to inform CT RC&D that obligated REAP grants have been cleared for payment. RD will be sending out an email for grant recipients to request changes to their contract or certify that there are no changes since their award. CT RC&D staff have contacted all farms supported by their CT Farm Energy Program to let them know of the news.

F. NCCD: Joanna Shapiro reported.

- North Branch Park River Watershed Plan: Final documentation for the Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant is due by end of the month. Wrapping up reporting now. Long-term implementation will require coordination with CT DEEP, multiple stakeholders, and likely 319 funding to move complex projects forward.
- Ag Waste Project (LISFF Grant): Ongoing collaboration with NRCS continues. Delays persist, but additional funding has been allocated to help offset rising costs. Design revisions are in progress as the project approaches the construction phase.
- Edible Riparian Buffer Project: Ground prep is underway at TAC. Workshops are planned alongside the spring plant sale (pre-orders due April 9). Popular plants include Chinese chestnut hybrids (new this year) and Eastern hemlocks (returning).
- Solar Projects: Four new solar sites are launching, in addition to several existing installations, the momentum continues in this program area.

G. Eastern Connecticut Conservation District: Daniel Mullins reported

- Recently received several executed contracts, including:
 - LISFF grant for silage bunkers at a farm in Baltic
 - Four 319 contracts, including a “?” BMP project, and an NPS Management grant,
 - Pervious pavers at Washington Park (Groton)

- Natchaug River Watershed Advisory Board
- Continuing LISFF projects for freestall barns in North Stonington and Lebanon
- RFP released for Lebanon barn—currently seeking qualified contractors
- Hallville Fishway opened two weeks ago; live camera is operational
- Shoeville Dam Fishway completed in December—part of the same system; fish expected to reach Amos Lake and Avery Pond this spring.

H. Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District: Jane Brawerman reported

- Staff have been active at various conferences, bringing displays and engaging with the public.
- A new version of the Invasive Plant Guide is in progress. Working with CIPWG to finalize the addition of four new species, including *callery pear*, *wisteria*, and *honeysuckles*.
- Currently monitoring five solar development sites, with a sixth site to be added in April.
- Entered a partnership with Native Plant Trust. A joint workshop is scheduled for May 10 with Kathy Connolly on *site prep for landscape transformation*.
- Plant sale orders are open; deadline is April 6.
- Collaborating with Fish with CARE program for events in Middletown.
- Successful screening of *Farming While Black* in February. Next film, *The Condor and the Eagle*, will screen on Monday.
- Kelly is continuing ag-related efforts and is progressing toward certification as a conservation planner.

I. SWCD: Chris Sullivan reported.

East Haven Green Infrastructure Project implementation has begun using 319 funding. Initial soil testing revealed shallow groundwater in some areas, which may require plan revisions.

Urban Ag Program & Intern: An NACD-funded intern is helping build an urban producer network in New Haven. The team is collaborating with regional partners to organize skills-based sessions on local farms and develop pathways for urban growers to engage with NRCS programs long-term.

Water Sampling Program: Preparations are underway for spring/summer sampling. The district is hiring two lab assistant interns to collect and analyze water samples. There has been strong interest from local university students; additional candidates are welcome to apply.

J. NWCD: Annette Lott reported.

- Hired a new Program Administrator, Audra, a former board member. Summer intern hiring is also underway.
- Ongoing weekly library programs and prepping for expanded summer programming.
- Managing two LISFF grants for manure storage projects with dairies in North Canaan.
- Awaiting response on Climate Smart Commodities Grant (as subawardee); possible budget restructuring in discussion with NACD.
- Preparations ongoing for plant sale. Educational materials from partners are welcome, especially for farmers and general public attendees.
- Two new smaller solar sites pending monitoring.
- Ongoing issues with a large 200-acre site that discharges runoff during rain events—calling for stronger enforcement via general permit with financial penalties to encourage compliance.
- District scholarship application is open; seeking help with outreach and distribution.

K. CACD/NACD: Denise Savageau reported.

Several initiatives continue to support DEI:

- Serving on the CT Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council (CEEJAC) on the Water

Subcommittee. Recently conducted a Watershed 101 training course for the board members and will follow up with conservation district presentations on the work they do with watersheds, particularly urban (March 31st).

- A Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant coordinated by Chris Sullivan supported DEI/EJ training for all conservation districts
- An Environmental Justice Board is forming within the districts. While grant funding may lapse, the commitment to equity and justice continues.

At the New England Leadership Meeting, Savageau emphasized the need to maintain regional equity in USDA funding, especially as federal reorganizations proceed—ensuring that baseline funds reach all states, not just the Midwest. States Discussed strategies to avoid retrenchment during uncertain funding—focusing on mutual aid, inter-agency support, and ensuring continuity of public service in local food security and water protection.

Savageau urged ongoing outreach to federal agencies and Congress to underscore that conservation work is vital public infrastructure—supporting clean water, local food, and community resilience.

As Regional Chair of the National Association of Conservation Districts, she maintains regular communication with NRCS leadership, ensuring Northeast concerns are heard at the national level.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – no comments

6. ADJOURN –The meeting was adjourned at 12:06 PM.