



Minutes of the Regular Meeting – 26 June, 2025
ZOOM MEETING <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9557521162>
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), Cheryl Cappiali (SWCD), Melissa Mostowy (DEEP), Amy Harder (UConn Extension), Leigh Whittinghill (CAES), Dan Mullins (ECCD), Joanna Shapiro (NCCD), Annette Lott (NWCD). Ex-officio members: Tom Morgart (NRCS), Jocelyn Lahey (CTRC&D). Staff: Lilian Ruiz (CSWC), Chris Sullivan (SWCD), Sam Dow (DEEP), ZZ Khalid (NWCD).
2. INTRODUCTION
Savageau opened the meeting, did a round of introductions and confirmed the quorum.
 - A. Minutes – Minutes of 06/26/25 were approved with corrections noted (program name and town spelling) per Dan Mullins; already applied. Motion to accept minutes with corrections: Amy Harder; second: Cheryl Cappiali; carried by voice vote.
 - B. Treasurer's Report
Savageau and Ruiz reported. The Financial Report for June 17, 2025, was reviewed. On track within all budget categories, year closed as expected. Motion to accept and place on file: Joanna Shapiro; second: Melissa Mostowy; passed unanimously.
3. NEW BUSINESS
 - A. FY 26 Budget
Savageau and Ruiz reported. Travel line discussed (budgeted \$8,000; ~\$2,400 used this year; keep as-is for conferences/networking). Motion to approve budget as presented: Joanna Shapiro; second: Melissa Mostowy; passed unanimously.
 - B. Operations Plan
Plan approved as presented; members need to discuss and come up with alternative language for the statement in Primary Initiatives/Goals: "The Council will continue to identify new opportunities to support climate change actions, education and outreach, and support projects and messaging that provide for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, especially in those areas in Connecticut identified as being in an Environmental Justice area.". Dates for upcoming September meeting will be decided as the standard date (third Thursday) conflicts with important events.
 - 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.
4. OLD BUSINESS
 - A. Legislative Updates: Savageau reported that Council and Districts funding through the Passports

to Parks program is secure. HB 5004 (climate change) established a task force for nature-based solutions; aligns with ongoing Council/district work and prior GC3 efforts. DEEP's Eric Hammerling will lead the discussion. New legislation mandates training for all members and staff of local Inland Wetlands agencies; DEEP to provide online training (not exclusively), with UConn CLEAR engagement. Riparian buffers: initial discussion about amending the Inland Wetlands Act shifted to creating a task force. The bill establishing the task force passed; participation is named but not exclusive, and the Council/districts will seek seats. Senate Bill 9 (community resiliency): focuses on climate resilience, especially flooding; overlaps with HB 5004 and encourages towns to update Plans of Conservation and Development to address climate change. Bill 5002 passed but was vetoed by the Governor. Aim was to change local land use to increase affordable housing; broad concerns from COGs and planners regarding "as-of-right" provisions. Emphasis that affordable housing and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive.

Action items:

- Continue coordination with DEEP on implementing mandatory Inland Wetlands training; follow up with DEEP (incl. Dave Dixon) on how the Council/districts can assist.
 - Monitor formation of the riparian buffers task force and request participation for the Council and conservation districts.
- B. Siting Council:** Savageau reported that the DEEP, working with UConn CLEAR, released the CREST tool to support proper siting of large-scale solar. The first release did not include source-water protection layers; following coordination with the Department of Public Health and Water Planning Council, CREST now includes source-water protection areas. The tool usefully aggregates land-use information, but the Siting Council must still weigh all factors; conservation districts' field inspections remain important. Link to CREST will be shared; members are encouraged to review and note any recommendations for use.
- C. LISS Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan Update:** Savageau reported that the "Long Island Sound Study" has been rebranded as the "Long Island Sound Partnership" and released an updated Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) that adds a Healthy Watersheds objective; she will chair the Healthy Watersheds subcommittee (Nature-Based Solutions subgroup) under the Clean Water & Healthy Watersheds workgroup. The update expands focus beyond the coast to the full watershed—moving past a sole emphasis on nitrogen—and will leverage UConn CLEAR assessment tools and indicators such as biodiversity, riparian corridors, well-stewarded forests, and invasive species control. New partners are being engaged, including foresters (e.g., Tom Worthley and DEEP's urban forester) and land protection stakeholders, to strengthen land stewardship. She noted that National Estuary Program funding (~\$40M) remains intact at the federal level, offering support for nature-based solutions and nonpoint-source work, and invited interested members to join ongoing discussions.
- D. Soil Health Committee:** Lilian Ruiz reported the committee met about three weeks ago as the Recreational Spaces & Developed Lands Subcommittee (Lilian, Leigh Whittinghill (CAES), Lijing Wang, and Amelia Magistrali from UCONN) to strengthen that grant section. Leigh is leading and has completed substantial edits, with plans to add green-infrastructure content and a brief urban soil-health literature summary supported by a research-for-credit student; UConn CLEAR has been contacted to provide mapping layers for inclusion, and Amelia will reach out to UConn turf/lawn specialists for additional input. Immediate needs are to add charts, figures, photos and finalize formatting, and to convene a stakeholder group to distill the plan into clear recommendations. Denise noted growing recognition of soil's role within nature-based solutions and said the Council may explore a modest budget allocation next fiscal year to help push the plan over the finish line as grant admin funds come in.
- E. ENVIROTHON:** Chris Sullivan reported that Connecticut held its Envirothon state competition in May with about 30 teams and strong volunteer support, thanking NRCS staff for assisting on a

rainy event day. The Marblewood School (Kent) won and will compete at NCF-Envirothon in Alberta, Canada in July, which now draws some international teams (e.g., China). Several Connecticut representatives, including Chris and Cheryl, will help run the Alberta event as part of early planning to host NCF-Envirothon in Connecticut in 2028. For the 2025–26 academic year, the Current Issue topic will be nonpoint source solutions. Chris requested state-branded items (keychains, stickers, pins, pencils, hats) for the teams' trading session and asked groups to contact him to coordinate. In Q&A, he confirmed next year's host is Mississippi and noted their use of 319 funding to support the event.

F. Grant Updates

USFS Landscape Scale Restoration: Grant remains intact; funds available for riparian restoration. A partner meeting will be convened to restart implementation. Match strategy is still being worked.

NACD Technical Assistance (TA): 2022 round has a ~\$6,500 balance that will be fully spent this final reporting cycle; grant will close on time with no funds left unspent. 2023 billing will begin; spending deadline has been extended ~6 months. 2025 MOU is signed; funds expected soon, though the award is smaller due to billing lag. TA funds the conservation planners and their training.

NRCS Conservation Planning Support: One staff member continues at the Eastern CT Conservation District with DC Bill Purcell; also assisting with Farm Bill—specialist tasks. Additional hiring is on hold pending funding constraints; districts could access outreach dollars with a joint plan, but outreach is difficult until planner capacity stabilizes. IRA “fund integrity” limits are affecting spend; NRCS is exploring options.

Long Island Sound Watershed Operations (LIS Partnership): \$100k project structured in two parts—\$75k phase completed with final report; the \$25k phase is now active to refine the draft with DEEP. Meetings with DEEP restoration and water-quality units are set for July 10 and 17, followed by an advisory committee session. NRCS PIFR was nearly complete but delayed; expected to resume. This work will also inform LIS Partnership and other funders' project lists.

DEEP Forestry: Advancing TSP training in coordination with NRCS; a complementary cost-share program will help close landowner funding gaps for forest practices. Working closely with Andrea at DEEP; progress is strong.

Department of Agriculture (discussion): Exploring conservation-planning support, including for PDR easement holders; follow-up planned post regional meeting. Funding appears available with a focus on easement holders.

AGENCY REPORTS

CT DEEP: Melissa Mostowy reported.

- Noted a June 20 event marking 40 years of Long Island Sound progress and announcing a new 10-year roadmap; link to be shared.
- EPA update: Nikki Tachiki is acting director; Mark Tedesco retired; new web page for the Long Island Sound Partnership.
- Staffing: Susan Peterson retires July 1; financial assistance opportunities remain posted; DEEP will keep partners updated on funding.
- Monitoring: DEEP participating in EPA's National Coastal Condition Assessment (with NARS lakes/rivers/streams); volunteer opportunities—contact Melissa Sarnowski; links to follow.

UConn Cooperative Extension: Amy Harder reported.

- FY26 outlook: Smith-Lever funding held constant; some tech programs reduced; overall cautiously optimistic. University has approved a process that may include RIFs; operational details TBD; expect

near-term uncertainty.

- Leadership: Dean departs end of month (starts as provost at Arkansas July 1); interim dean appointed for a year; search to begin in fall; interim associate dean for research (Dr. Akjun) starts in August; Extension department-head search underway; transition expected next year; Bonnie remains assistant director.
- Program shift: Climate resiliency program placed in deferred status by USDA-NIFA; new cross-program focus on disaster preparedness, aiming to coordinate resources and partner roles more effectively; broader EDEN network and ag-damage assessment models (FL/GA) will inform approach.

NRCS: Tom Morgart reported.

- Federal reorganization is stayed by court order; Supreme Court requested filings; outcome/timeframe unknown. Anticipated reductions to 2019 staffing levels; CT would drop from 69 to ~44, with significant engineering retirements; temporary reassignments in effect to maintain service.
- President's budget scenario: nationwide headcount from ~12,000 to ~8,000; major changes to CTA (planning funds largely removed; soils and snow survey retained).
- Funding/programs: Possible "one bill" approach would boost Farm Bill baseline by ~\$2B/year (repurposing IRA funds) while staffing shrinks. EQIP \$13.8M nearly fully obligated; CSP \$1.1M with ~\$350k left and \$650k more requested; CSP's \$4k minimum benefits small producers.
- Emergency Conservation Program: funding swap now allows agreements to aid towns hit by last year's severe storms (Southington/Southbury/Newtown).

CAES: Leigh Wittinghill reported.

- Public health/pests: monitoring longhorned tick with ehrlichiosis pathogen; first West Nile positive mosquito of the season found in Bridgeport.
- Events: Plant Science Day scheduled Wednesday, August 6; station's 150th anniversary.
- Programs/grants: Plant Health Fellows (8 fellows) running; seeking renewal when RFP opens; recent awards include three HWA grants and an IPM grant on strawberry anthracnose; staff awards and early-career funds (to Yingzhi "Charlie" Yu and Leigh) supporting urban-farm nutrient/irrigation work.
- Capacity/facilities: ~70 seasonal staff on for summer; New Haven greenhouse renovations completed and experiments underway; multi-state urban agriculture Hatch project adjusting language to fit current funding climate.

CT RC&D: Jocelyn Lahey reported.

- CT RC&D reported a successful annual meeting held at Massaro Community Farm, a site for their Climate-Smart Agriculture project funded through the DoAg Climate-Smart Ag & Forestry grant. Two awards were presented: to Steve Munno (Massaro Community Farm) and Pat Young (project coordinator for the Salmon River Watershed Partnership and Eightmile River Wild & Scenic). RC&D also released a biennial impact report summarizing all programs from the past two years; a link will be shared for reference.

NCCD: Joanna Shapiro reported.

- Long Island Sound Futures Fund project to update the North Branch Park River watershed plan is complete, subcontractors have been paid, and minor edits are underway before submitting to EPA for 9-element approval; the district aims to keep momentum with partners and sustained community engagement through design to support floodplain restoration and neighborhood amenities.
- On a second LISFF project (a large agricultural site), construction advanced with concrete poured for a waste-storage facility; NRCS also approved two additional EQIP contracts, allowing DEEP 319

funds to shift toward purchasing manure-management equipment and site restoration ahead of the August grant deadline while juggling three overlapping grants. Cash-flow remains tight because the funder now reimburses only after receiving EPA dollars, so the farm has been fronting some costs while NCCD coordinates reimbursements and contractor payments.

- Other ongoing efforts include an edible riparian buffer project and municipal wetlands/land-use support.

SWCD: Chris Sullivan reported.

- East Haven 319 project: installing green stormwater infrastructure at a municipal site along the Farm River, stemming from the DEEP/NRCS Farm River watershed-based plan; construction advancing.
- NACD Urban Ag grant: hired an urban agriculture intern; shifted from stakeholder meetings to hands-on skillshare workshops at producer sites in Greater New Haven (2–3 completed; more scheduled this summer).
- Water-quality program: two interns sampling and processing bacteria data; presentations to municipalities led to likely identification of failed sewer lines causing dry-weather bacteria spikes; towns notified; summer focus on source tracking to pinpoint cracks.
- Norwalk River watershed-based plan: managing plan updates with a subcontractor; coordinating with the Norwalk River Watershed Initiative; first public outreach session targeted for September.
- Technical assistance: responding to residential/municipal requests (recently Naugatuck, Milford, Southington); wetland restoration plan completed in Woodbridge.

NWCD: Annette Lott reported.

- Summer programming underway; event today. Summer intern onboard; newest staff member Audra (started ~January) is settling in well.
- LISFF dairy project in Canaan nearing completion; contract finalized to begin a second LISFF dairy project with a neighboring farm after budget/relationship format revisions.
- Awaiting decision (expected late June) on NACD climate-smart commodities partnership grant (name recently changed); proposal initiated in 2023 with a partner—still delayed.
- Outreach: launching weekly “gardening club” that embeds soil and water conservation topics; additional one-off outreach events; active technical assistance and education with watershed and lake groups to strengthen local stewardship.
- Solar inspections: ongoing; a large, challenging site is wrapping up its construction phase. Concern noted about limited DEEP enforcement for prolonged winter discharges; stabilization improving with the growing season. New smaller solar inspections are beginning.

CACD/NACD: Denise Savageau reported.

- Presented “Watershed 101” and district work in urban communities to DEEP’s Equity & Environmental Justice Council (CJAC) Water Subcommittee; ongoing engagement and representation on that subcommittee.
- Continuing representation on the Water Planning Council Advisory Group and the Long Island Sound Partnership Citizens Advisory Group, with emphasis on nature-based solutions and source-water protection.
- National engagement: NACD Summer Board meeting in Milwaukee (late July); Denise will attend.
- Regional engagement: NACD Northeast Region meeting in Syracuse (third weekend of September; registration forthcoming).
- Legislative outreach: continuing meetings with state legislators over the summer to highlight Council, district, and partner roles; preparing for the next legislative session.

- Solar siting: districts supporting DEEP's stormwater program with inspections; activity is ramping up and a new permit is forthcoming.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – no comments

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