



Minutes of the Regular Meeting – December 18, 2025
ZOOM MEETING <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9557521162>
Meeting ID: 955 752 1162 +1 929 205 6099

I. Call to order and introductions

Attendance: Members: Denise Savageau (CRCCD Board), Melissa Mostowy (DEEP), Simon Levesque (DoAg), Amy Harder (UConn Extension), Leigh Whittinghill (CAES), Dan Mullins (ECCD), Joanna Shapiro (NCCD), Annette Lott (NWCD). Ex-officio members: Tom Morgart (NRCS), Jocelyn Weir (CTRC&D). Staff: Lilian Ruiz (CSWC), Kate Knight (DEEP), Sam Dow (DEEP), Alice Colman (DoAg).

The meeting was called to order on Zoom at 10:03 AM, followed by quorum confirmation and introductions.

II. Approve minutes

Minutes of the prior meeting were approved as presented by unanimous consent.

III. Treasurer's report

The Treasurer's Report and Financial Report were reviewed and accepted. Motion by Mullins; second by Joanna; carried unanimously.

IV. Chairman's report

Sost Chairman's Report items were already covered in the agenda, so Savageau moved directly into new business

V. New Business

- a. Erosion and Sediment Control Manual Updates: Kate Knight (CT DEEP) presented proposed updates to the Erosion and Sediment Control Manual to recommend more wildlife-friendly materials and practices, in response to concerns that some blankets and mats can trap wildlife. The discussion focused on revising guidance on several manual pages to encourage natural materials where feasible and to reference alternative best management practices when permanent turf reinforcement mats are not appropriate. Members discussed material availability, performance, and the need to balance wildlife protection with site-specific stabilization needs. Denise Savageau summarized that the manual should emphasize wildlife-friendly erosion and sediment control, whether through materials or alternative practices. The Council also briefly discussed a possible January 15 funding opportunity related to identified riparian areas, with

- b. Elections: Savageau reported that the Council is still seeking a Vice Chair and had circulated information to members. No vote was taken in December 2025. She explained that the Vice Chair must be a current Council member, drawn from one of the five conservation districts, DEEP, the Department of Agriculture, UConn Cooperative Extension, or the member-at-large category. Denise noted the role is intended primarily to fill in for the Chair and provide additional oversight. She encouraged members to consider serving and to speak with board members and other eligible Council representatives. Denise and Lilian said they would continue outreach and recruitment.
- c. Grant Opportunities: Simon Levesque announced the upcoming Transition Grant for farmers, with an application deadline of January 12, 2026. He said the program supports farmers transitioning to value-added products and can fund items such as equipment, facility upgrades, and farm stands, with awards up to \$50,000 and smaller micro-grants of \$5,000 to \$10,000 for new and beginning farmers. He encouraged Council members to share the opportunity with local farms. Separately, Denise Savageau discussed the Council's ongoing DEEP forestry grant outreach, noting that farmers with forestland may be able to combine NRCS and DEEP funding to cover 100% of eligible climate-smart forestry practices, including forestry BMPs and riparian buffers.

VI. Old Business

- a. Council Website: Lilian reported on plans to redesign and modernize the Council website after a grant requirement exposed the need for a more functional and user-friendly platform. The Council discussed the cost of the redesign, ease of future updates, and the need to move quickly to support grant-related program pages. The Council approved increasing the website budget line from \$500 to \$3,500.
- b. Training for Conservation / Inland Wetlands Commissions: Savageau reported that training for inland wetlands commissioners remains an active topic, particularly in connection with riparian buffers discussions. She said the Council has previously offered to help provide training and noted that multiple organizations—not only DEEP—could play a role. She also said commission members and agents are seeking more in-person training opportunities and that possible changes to the Wetlands Act may provide greater flexibility in how training is delivered.
- c. Legislative Updates: Denise reported on two main legislative items. First, she discussed the riparian buffers legislation, explaining that it created a task force charged with preparing a report for the upcoming legislative session; she noted that she serves on the task force along with other conservation district representatives. Second, she reviewed House Bill 5004 on nature-based solutions, which calls for a report evaluating existing programs and identifying ways to improve implementation of climate-beneficial practices such as wetlands protection, soil health, biodiversity, and climate resilience. Denise said a public hearing was expected in late May, with a final report due by July 1. Looking ahead to the coming session, she said members should expect continued attention to riparian buffers and possible changes to inland wetlands training requirements.
- d. Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan update: Savageau reported that she is chairing a Nature-Based Solutions work group as part of the Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan update. She said the group is developing recommendations on watershed health and best practices, with an emphasis on landscape-scale measures such as forest conservation and soil health, in addition to traditional stormwater practices.

- e. Soil Health Committee: Lilian reported that the committee is finalizing major sections of a proposed Connecticut Soil Health Action Plan and is also contributing soil health content to the Nature-Based Solutions Plan. She said the committee's work to date has been largely volunteer-based and that additional funding will be needed to complete the plan.
- f. Grant updates: Ruiz reported progress on the Council's NRCS outreach work and the DEEP forestry grant, including upcoming forester trainings, strong enrollment, and near-finalization of subawards that will allow eligible woodland owners to combine NRCS and DEEP funding for full reimbursement of climate-smart forestry practices. Denise Savageau also reported ongoing outreach to farmers and noted that the Long Island Sound Watershed Operations Grant has been closed out, with next steps focused on advancing the operations plan. Lilian added that work is continuing on the Department of Agriculture conservation planning grant for PDR easement holders.

VII. Agency Reports

DEEP: Melissa Mostowy reported that DEEP had limited updates following the shutdown and was still catching up on work and coordination.

DoAG: Simon Levesque reported that Alice Colman would replace him as the Department of Agriculture's representative to the Council. Alice introduced herself and briefly described her background in geology, farming, and stewardship work in the Farmland Preservation Program.

NRCS: Thomas Morgart reported that NRCS had received full funding and announced a January 15 first-round signup deadline for EQIP, CSP, AMA, and ACEP/ASEP programs. He also shared current funding levels and noted that he is serving as acting state conservationist for Rhode Island in addition to Connecticut.

CAES: Leigh Whittinghill reported on website accessibility compliance work, research and recognition awards, and the upcoming Connecticut Small Fruit and Vegetable Conference on January 8, 2026.

CT RC&D: Jocelyn reported that RC&D had two items to share, including an upcoming Soil Health Symposium on February 10. She also highlighted a business-development opportunity for farmer veterans through an SBA-supported cohort led by farm business consultant Holly Aker.

NCCD: Joanna reported that the district is planning its plant sale and moving into implementation of the North Branch Park River Watershed Plan. She said the district had applied to the DEEP Long Island Sound Ecosystems grant and planned to apply for the Climate Resilience Fund for another Park River-related project. She also reported that, through NACD/NRCS technical assistance work, the district is focusing outreach on agroforestry, building around a newly installed edible riparian buffer at the Tolland County Agricultural Center.

ECCD: Dan reported on several active projects, including a headwater restoration project in the Anguilla Brook watershed funded by DEEP, where invasive species have been removed and native plantings are planned. He also reported a dam removal project in Willimantic, for which engineering studies are underway, and said the district continues to manage several 319 grants,

including one in North Stonington involving tree filters, bioretention basins, rain gardens, and outreach.

CRCCD: Jane reported on an upcoming film event at the Middletown Public Library focused on plastic pollution, with Kat Owens serving as discussion leader. She said the district is nearly finished updating its watershed water quality story map with 2025 data, had completed its annual report and annual meeting in early November featuring a program on dam removal, and had presented its annual conservation awards. She also reported ongoing solar projects, including new work in Salem and Old Saybrook, and said the district is planning its plant sale.

NWCD: Annette reported that NWCD expects progress in late winter or spring on its Long Island Sound project at Lower Brook in East Canaan, after delays caused by NRCS engineering staff turnover. She said the district has been working with the Bantam Watershed Coalition on a watershed pledge and additional grant applications for watershed work. She also noted that staff have partnered with Flanders Nature Center on a permaculture certificate program.

VIII. Public participation

No public comments were offered.

IX. Adjourn

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:08 PM.