Helping People Help the Land

for our Conservation Partners

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June-July 2007

Message from State Conservationist Roylene Rides at the Door



s we wind down fiscal year 2007 and begin to think of the next, we can't help but wonder what challenges the new Farm Bill will bring. The new Farm Bill will take us through 2012, and will dictate what direction NRCS will take. Last years farm forums held across the nation, including Rhode Island, helped to realize what the people wanted at the local level in the new Farm Bill. Conservation will still most definitely be one of our top priorities.

This fiscal year Rhode Island farmers and land-

owners were allocated \$8.1 million statewide for conservation cost share practices on their land. 84 farmers applied and were ranked, 44 were pre-approved for funding this year under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for a total of \$2.3 million allocated. The EQIP is a voluntary program, which assists farmers to implement conservation on their land, and provides financial and technical help. Cost-share rates of 75 percent, and up to 90 percent for limited resource farmers.

Under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) 42 applications were received and 10 projects were funded for at total of \$2.5 million Rhode Island was a major contributor to assisting NRCS Nationally to meet a \$5 million requirement for 396 practices (Fish passage projects). We approved 5 fish passage projects on the Blackstone and Ten Mile rivers. The WHIP is a voluntary program for people who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land. The WHIP provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

The State has developed a new plan to accept applications, rank applications, develop and sign contracts early in the fiscal year. It is our hope that this will allow us time to ensure that funds are spent wisely and not returned until all of RI resource issues are address.

I will update you on the new Farm Bill progress in future activity reports.

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ROYLENE RIDES AT THE DOOR State Conservationist



Manure storage structure

"A bubbling delirium of ecstatic music that flows from the gifted throat of the bird like sparkling champagne",

Field Staff Happenings/State-wide Upper Narragansett Bay By Michael Merrill, District Conservationist Wright's Dairy Farm - Manure Management Projects

One of our conservation cooperators, Wright's Dairy Farm in North Smithfield recently won the title of "Outstanding Dairy Farm of the Year" as designated by the RI Green Pastures Committee which is coordinated by the RI Division of Agriculture. The Wright Family has been an integral part of the community in Northern RI, not only because of their wonderful dairy products and delicious bakery items, but also because of their conservation ethic and care for the land and its natural resources.

Through an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) project they have completed the barnyard improvements as laid out in their Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP), which details how they manage the manure on the farm and utilize it most efficiently as a nutrient source for the corn and hay crops they grow in their numerous fields spread throughout the area in Northern RI. As part of the CNMP, this past winter they finished a number of large projects which will help protect the Cedar Swamp and Cherry Brook which are adjacent to the headquarters on Woonsocket Hill Road. Not far from the farm, Cherry Brook runs into the Blackstone River, an important natural resource for the region. One of the projects included a covered manure storage facility which will allow them to store the manure they clean out of the barn each day. This is also saving them time and money because now they do not have to load the manure into dump trucks and truck it to fields for stockpiling on a daily basis. Instead, they just scrape the barns and push off the manure into a sealed and covered manure storage structure.

They also constructed a composting pad on which they mix of a certain proportion of sawdust, horse bedding and their dairy manure. The structure is built to collect the runoff from the pad and recycle the water to aid in the composting process. More subtle projects, but just as important are the regrading projects which direct clean roof water away from areas with manure, ensuring the clean water stays clean and limiting the amount of 'dirty' water on the farm.

NRCS would like to congratulate the Wright Family for the "Outstanding Dairy Farm of the Year" award, and for their conservation efforts.



male bobolink at Avondale



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Lower Narragansett Bay

By Kate Giorgi, Biologist

Welcomed Sights and Sounds at Avondale

The Westerly Land Trust, with financial and technical support from NRCS, has been working to create a 40 acre plus haven at Avondale Farm for wildlife and people alike. Right along the coast, the property is ideally situated to attract an array of both breeding and migratory birds, as well as a host of other animals. The majority of the site has been dedicated to open grassland habitat, featuring native warm season grasses and wildflowers. Over the past several years, the land trust has diligently battled invasive shrubs while nurturing their grasses and flowers in order to create a wonderful meadow that has now begun to attract those animals dependant on grassland habitats.

During a site visit to the Avondale farm one morning this past June, I caught a snippet of a wonderful, yet not very often heard, sound in RI – the song of the bobolink! "A bubbling delirium of ecstatic music that flows from the gifted throat of the bird like sparkling champagne", is how ornithologist A.C. Bent once described the unusual song of the bobolink, a species that requires grasslands. A second site visit in July yielded even more to get excited about. Not only are bobolinks using the field at Avondale, but it appears there is at least one breeding pair, as both a male and female were noted defensively chattering away.

But providing grassland habitat, no longer very common in RI, is just one phase of the land trust's work at Avondale. In a continual effort to enhance the wildlife value of the property, this past spring the land trust, aided by a team of volunteers, planted 750 shrubs along the grassland/marsh boarder. And that's just the beginning; two more years of shrub plantings are planned! (Continued on next page)

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The species of shrubs planted: high bush blueberry, shadbush, bayberry, arrow-wood and Virginia rose, are all native species chosen for their wildlife value, particularly as a food source for migratory song birds. So, not only will Avondale provide a place for many birds to nest, but also a good spot to fatten up prior to the long journey south many birds take in order to winter in warmer climes.

Interested in learning what the bobolink sounds like? A recording of the song, as Interested in learning what the bobolink sounds like? A recording of the song, as well as other interesting facts about this species, can be found at the following link:

http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Featured_Birds/

Economics-Happenings

By Reena Shaw, Economist

The State Economist is currently preparing the cost data sheets for quality review by the National office. This is part of a new process that requires all of the states to transform the cost list into a Practice Payment Schedule. As reported in the previous activity report, beginning FY 2008 NRCS will begin providing clients an incentive payment to install a conservation practice or begin using conservation management strategies. This will be in lieu of the traditional cost share method that the agency has used in previous years.

The first formal draft of the cost data sheets will be provided to members of the

Cultural Resources - Happenings

By Reena Shaw, Economist

The Rhode Island State Office is happy to be hosting an Archaeological detailee, Dana Vaillancourt, employed by South Dakota NRCS. Dana began working on cultural resource projects here in Rhode Island on July 11, 2007 and will be with us until August 10, 2007. Dana is providing our office with cultural resource review of potentially sensitive projects to insure that we meet all the requirements of Section 106 of the Historical Preservation Act. Dana is also assisting our office with streamlining the cultural resource process.

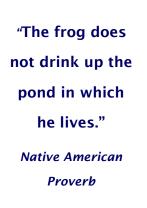
NEPA-Environmental Assessment Flow Diagrams By Reena Shaw, Economist

The Notice of Availability (NOA) for the New England Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was published in the Federal Register on May 8, 2007.

The public had 30 days from the publication date to submit comments through the <u>www.regulations.gov</u> website or to send comments to the Maine State Office and this review period has now been completed. Our office is currently working with the other New England states to establish a net meeting time in August to provide the field staff with training regarding proper use of these flow diagrams to meet NEPA standards for environmental review.









Fish passages



Ecological Sciences-No Update

By J. Eric Scherer, State Resource Conservationist

Engineering-Update

By Meagan Walters, Hydraulic Engineer

Pocasset Floodplain Management Study (FPMS)

NRCS has received the Draft Watershed Plan from the engineering consultant. Final updates to the report will be completed by the end of September.

Wood-Pawcatuck Optimization Project

NRCS continues to work with USGS and the National Water Management Center to finalize the technical report. Chris Modisette of RC&D has taken over the outreach portion of the project.

Fish Passage Projects

The engineering staff has been working in conjunction with Dick Quinn, Hydraulic Engineer for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, on conceptual designs for several fish passage projects. Two of these projects, Breakheart Brook rock ramp and the Town of Hopkinton's culvert replacement, resulted from the Stream Continuity project, in which volunteers examined structures for their ability to pass fish and wildlife.

Engineering Services

This summer has been a busy one, as we oversee construction of current projects and survey new projects. One of our more innovative projects is an aquaculture wastewater capture system at American Mussel on Quonset Point. This project involves the storing aquaculture waste, or "biofouling" material, and reuse of the wastewater to clean shellfish cages. Construction was completed in June 2007.

The engineering staff has also been working on Emergency Response planning. Teams have been formed that will work with state and local officials in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency event. We expect to conduct a training drill by the end of September.



Construction site



Mussel Farm

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.

> Henry David Thoreau



RI NRCS Staff

Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI)

By Michael Merrill, GLCI Coordinator

Staff from NRCS, RC&D and the Eastern RI Conservation District met to begin implementing the agreement was signed by RC&D Council and NRCS to provide technical assistance to landowners who are managing pastures and grazing systems. The group met to propose and update to how we compile information for landowners into a "Prescribed Grazing Plan".

Earth Team Volunteer Program-Update

By Jeanne Comerford, State Volunteer Program coordinator

We have two new volunteers working on the Clear River Watershed Stream Continuity Project, they are, Roland Gauvin and RayLippe.

Farm Bill Programs-Update

By Michael Moorman, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

Conservation Security Program (CSP):

2007 CSP payments were completed on the seven CSP contracts this year. No FY 2008 watershed nomination was developed this year due to the pending Farm Bill. 2007 Payments to producers were limited by the continuing resolution. Funds have been appropriated to pay the remainder of the earned payment and will be completed by August 30.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):

Many meetings were held with staff to begin development of the FY 2008 Cost List, which will become Practice Payment Schedule. Once this document is implemented program cost share rate will no longer be evident on contractual documents. The producer will see only the amount he will be paid when he completes the practice. Rhode Island NRCS has completed their list and is waiting for approval from the national office.

6 EQIP Conservation Innovation Grant applications have been have been received, ranked and are being finalized by the grant recipients for final signature.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP):

One application on 11 acres is nearing completion, and will close prior to the end of the FY.

Farm and Ranch lands Protection Program (FRPP):

All applications were ranked, and 3 of the 3 eligible applications were selected for funding, fully obligating the FY 2007 FRPP funds. Cooperative agreements were developed and signed by the entities.

Amendments to two prior year cooperative agreements were made during this period to accommodate changes in negotiations with farms previously selected for funding and expected closing dates. FRPP allows for a substitution of a new parcel for prior approved parcels where negotiations with the landowner have stalled or ended.

Program manager is working with other NRCS staff to update the FRPP database to accommodate new data requested by the national office, such as the number of forested and nonforested wetland acres on each parcel. Some of this data, such as the average length of time it takes to close on easements, will be used next fiscal year by the national office to determine how much FRPP money to allocate to each state.

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP):

One application was received for restoration and perpetual easement. The appraisal has been completed and the offer to continue has been sent to the applicant.

Grazing at the Watson Farm in Jamestown





Manure waste storage on the Howard Farm

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Rob Tunstead and Maggie Payne installing a monitoring well for the NETCHS hydric soil tour.



Maggie Payne entering subaqueous soil data on board the research vessel Doerner



Maggie Payne and Kim Devlin (URI Soil Lab) preparing IRIS tubes for the hydric soil study.

Operations

By Jackie Pashnik, Management Analyst

Personnel Actions:

- Meghan Walters has accepted the GS-9/11 Hydraulic Engineer position, effective June 25th.
- Garrett Timmons has accepted the GS-7 Soil Conservationist (CIP) position, effective July 23rd.
- Susan Smith has accepted the summer intern position, effective June 11th.
- Michael Petrarca has accepted the summer intern position, effective June 25th.
- Advertised Civil Engineer position was offered and declined. Panel was returned.
- Jade Nield has accepted a lateral reassignment to GS-12 Agricultural Engineer, effective September 3rd.

Performance Update

By Jackie Pashnik, Management Analyst

「「「「」」	Performance Measures	Program	Goal	Progress
	Conservation plans written, acres	СТА	5,272	8,305 (158%)
		CTA-GLCI	100	147 (147%)
	Watershed or area-wide conservation plans developed, number	СТА	1	1 (100%)
16		RC&D	4	3 (75%)
		PL06	1	
-	Soil surveys mapped or updated, acres	SOILS	5,000	3,400 (68%)
	Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil qual- ity, acres	AMA	25	26 (104%)
		СТА	137	168 (123%)
el		EQIP	500	341 (68%)
	Land with conservation applied to improve water quality, acres	СТА	1,800	2,489 (138%)
		CTA-GLCI	222	90 (40%)
		EQIP	500	544 (109%)
		WRP	74	74 (100%)
-	CNMP written, number	EQIP	9	8 (89%)
	CNMP applied, number	EQIP	7	2 (29%)
THE REAL	Land with conservation applied to improve irrigation efficiency, acres	AMA	20	7 (35%)
		СТА	20	88 (441%)
-	enciency, acres	EQIP	150	150 (100%)
ALC: N		СТА	150	201 (134%)
	Grazing and forest land with conservation applied to protect and improve the resource base, acres	CTA-GLCI	200	88 (44%)
1997	protect and improve the resource base, acres	EQIP	300	808 (269%)
SE M	Non-federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality, acres	СТА	358	593 (166%)
		EQIP	350	1,033 (295%)
		GRP	20	62 (311%)
		WHIP	2,800	4,221 (151%)
	Wetlands created, restored or enhanced, acres	СТА	200	2,246 (1,231%)
		WRP	30	37 (123%)

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Farmland, forestland, and grazing lands protected by conservation easements, acres	GRP FRPP	12 219	114 (52%)
Prime, unique, or important farmland protected by con- servation easements, acres	FRPP	109	114 (105%)
Land and water resources benefited by RC&D projects, acres	RC&D	2,000	
Local businesses created in rural communities, number	RC&D	16	6 (38%)

Training, Conferences, and Meetings-Update By Jackie Pashnik, Management Analyst

Civil Rights Compliance in Program Delivery was attended by Bachand, Bonome, Comerford, Kenyon, Moore, Moorman, Pashnik, Scherer, and Shaw on June 13-14 in Sturbridge, MA. - Microsoft Excel, Venable, July 19-20 in Warwick, RI.— National Leadership Team Meeting, Rides at the Door and Moorman, July 9-12, in Washington, DC.— 7/18/07 – Tim Pindell and Eric Scherer of NRCS attended the first meeting of the State Technical Team Subcommittee on strategies to manage the resident Canada Goose,



Maggie Payne using a YSI meter to measure water quality

Soils Program-Happenings

By Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist

Our Envirothon Interns from the Wheeler School, Chris and Cameron Musco have started work for the summer. Chris and Cameron have been collecting soil transect data on tidal marsh soils, assisting with remote sensing data collection, and digitizing historic soil data into a GIS program. Chris and Cameron will be here through the summer.

Maggie Payne represented the MapCoast Partnership (www.mapcoast.org) during a Coastal/Marine Ecological **Classification Standard** (CMECS) meeting in Myrtle Beach, SC. MapCoast is working to incorporate its coastal and shallow water mapping into the CMECS system. The Coastal/ Marine Ecological Classification Standard (CMECS) is a classification of the habitats of the estuaries, coasts and oceans of North America. Developed through a

collaboration between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and NatureServe, the CMECS framework extends from the head-oftides in the coastal zone to the deep ocean. This encompasses estuaries, wetlands, rivers, shorelines, islands, the intertidal zone, the entire benthic zone, and the entire water column from the shore to the deep ocean (<u>http://</u>

www.natureserve.org/ getData/CMECS/ index.htm).

The MapCoast field crew has begun mapping the subaqueous soils in Point Judith Pond. Bathymetric mapping, soil coring, bottom video, and side-scan sonar (acoustic) surveys have been made during the period, work on the pond will continue through the fall.

The RI Soil Staff partici-

pated in the New England Technical Committee for Hydric Soils summer hydric soil tour. The purpose of the tour was to review the data collected for developing specific hydric soil indicators for sandy soils that are mapping in the region (see the April - June report). This data will be used for the upcoming Regionalized Wetland Delineation Manual. The 2 day tour began in New Hampshire and ended in Plymouth County, Massachusetts.

Onsite Assistance: Thee soil on-site investigations were completed during the June – July period, the on-site investigations concerned hydric soil delineations and cultural resource assistance.



Alex Salisbury (URI Graduate Student) collecting salinity data for a soil core.



Soil pit at the RI Envirothon 2007



Aquaculture Workshop held in Warwick, RI

Date	Outreach Events	People Reached
June 1	BioBlitz, Washington County, a three day environmental camp out	200
June 27	Fish Passage training workshop	30
June 12	Soils and NRCS Overview pre- sented to 4th Grade class at Community School in Cumber- land	25
June 13	Society of Soil Scientists of Southern New England – Recent Advances in Soil Science (talks about NRCS Soils Program and MapCoast Partnership).	90
June 19-20	CMECS Meeting (see Soils Up- date)	30

Outreach and Communications-Happenings

By Jeanne Comerford, State Public Affairs Specialist

Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) By Chris Modisette, RC&D Coordinator

The following report on the activities of the Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Area (RI RC&D) is submitted for your consideration.

Meetings/Events (Attendance/participation at the following events)

Event	Date
Forestry & Wood Expo. Mtg	June 7
Woonasquatucket Watershed Council	June 7
RC&D Exec. Committee Meeting	June 14
Rhody Warm Wool Collection Day, Urban Edge Farm, Cranston	June 16
NE RC&D Conference Committee meeting	June 27
USFS Detailee for Dry Hydrant Program	July 3-13
Meeting with Narragansett Indian Tribe	July 3
Rhody Warm at Roger Williams Park Fun on the Farm Day	July 8
Little Compton Fire Dept. meeting re: Dry Hydrants	July 9
RC&D Council meeting	July 11
Potterville Fire Dept. meeting re: Dry Hydrants	July 12
RI Monthly Best of RI Ceremony	July 19
RI Christmas Tree Growers Assoc. meeting	July 24, 2007

14 events with approx. 1,300 people



Chris and Cameron twin interns conducting transect on tidal mash soils



Conference at URI

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Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) (cont'd) "Rhody Warm" Project

- Rhody Warm selected as 2007 Best of Rhode Island Winner by Rhode Island Monthly Magazine. Harriet Powell and Irene Nebiker attended a recognition reception on July 19, 2007 sponsored by RI Monthly to recognize 2007 Best of RI winners.
- Thirty-two wool producers brought in 2,000 pounds of wool at the 2nd Annual Rhody Warm Wool Collection Day held at the Urban Edge Farm on Saturday, June 16, 2007. This represents an increase of 12 producers and 600 pounds of wool over our 1st wool collection in 2006;
- Wool shipped to Faribault Mills in Minnesota for cleaning on June 19, 2007;
- Participated in Roger Williams Park Fun on the Farm Day, held on Saturday, July 7, 2007, and designed new logo for 2007 blanket;

EPA Technical Assistance Grant (TAG)

The TAG has been officially closed out as of June 25, 2007. Three agreements were approved by NRCS and returned to the Council for implementation:

RC&D/NRCS Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

This MOU defines the service and assistance each party will provide to implement the strategies, goals, and objectives listed in the Council area plan and annual plan of work as jointly agreed upon by the Council and NRCS for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2007

Grazing land Conservation Initiative Agreement

The Council, through this one (1) year cooperative agreement, will provide technical assistance and educational opportunities to clients and grazing lands managers on behalf of and in coordination with NRCS and GLCI. The Council will work closely with NRCS and the Eastern RI Conservation District to help grass-based farms address natural resource concerns while enhancing the economic viability and social stability of grazing land enterprises.

Development of grazing plans has begun on six (6) farms identified by NRCS staff.

Pawcatuck Optimization Outreach and Communication Project

The Council, under this agreement, will assist with the development, coordination and implementation of specific components of Outreach and Communication Plan for the Pawtucket River Watershed Optimization Project, in cooperation with NRCS, the Rhode Island Water Resources Board (Board) and the US Geological Service (USGS).

Rhode Island Rural Fire Protection

The RI RC&D Council (Council) has a current agreement to assist the RI Division of Forest Environment (RIDFE) with the implementation of its Volunteer Fire Assistance Program through the RI Rural Fire Protection Program. Under this program the Council is working with RIDFE to coordinate the installation of dry-hydrants across the state, develop training programs for rural firefighters and to conduct a survey of rural fire companies to identify future fire fighting needs. The survey is scheduled to be mailed to fire companies in mid-July 2007.State Forester Catherine Sparks and the USDA Forest Service (USFS) provided an intern to assist the Council with the development and distribution of the Wildland Fire Service Survey. This individual was detailed to the RC&D Council from July 3-13, 2007. This individual will be working out of the Council office with the RC&D Coordinator at 60 Quaker Lane in Warwick.





Rhode Warm sheep cooperative



Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) (cont'd)

Work accomplished included:

- A Review of program eligibility requirement for rural fire departments;
- Update of contact list for rural fire departments; and
- Design and development of survey

RI River and Stream Continuity Project Meeting

- NRCS summer intern Michael Petrarca was hired to work with RC&D to continue the stream continuity project in the Queens River watershed. To date, Mike and Lawson Cary from Trout Unlimited have mapped approximately 85 potential barriers to fish passage in the Queens River watershed and have inventoried 80;
- We have been working with the Northern RI Chapter of Trout Unlimited to expand the project to the Clear River watershed in northwest RI. Work has included:
- Mike has mapped 167 potential stream barriers for the Clear River;
- Mike conducted training in stream inventory methods with members of the Northern RI Chapter of Trout Unlimited on July 5, 2007.

RI Soil Erosion & Sediment Control Manual

At their June 13, 2007 meeting, the State Conservation Committee authorized the Rhode Island Resource Conservation & Development Area Council (Council) to develop an agreement, to be signed by the State Conservation Committee (Committee), to provide technical assistance for the update of the *Handbook*; and for the Committee to assist with the identification of financial resources to implement this project. The RI Soil Erosion & Sediment Control Manual was last updated in 1985.

RI Blueways Project

The Council recently agreed to work cooperatively with the RI Blueways Project and the Woonasquatucket Watershed Council to develop a series of canoe launches on the lower Woonasquatucket River in Johnston and Providence, RI.

UPCOMING EVENTS

USDA NRCS and the Conservation Districts Will Sponsor Four Workshops To Provide Information About Our Cost-share Conservation Programs

These programs help landowners implement conservation practices on their land through technical and financial assistance.

The workshops will be held on:

- Wednesday, September 12, 2:30 4:30, in the USDA Conference Room, 60 Quaker Lane, Warwick, RI
- Tuesday, October 9, at 4:00 pm at the Laurel Grange, Harmony, RI
- Wednesday, October 10, at 4:00 pm at the Eastern RI Conservation District office, 2490 Main Road, Tiverton, RI
- Thursday, October 11, 4:00 pm at the Richmond Grange, Route 138, Kingston, RI



