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## Message From State Conservationist Roylene Rides at the Door



*NRCS has reorganized the management of field staff as a way to provide conservation assistance to Rhode Island partners and landowners. This new 'Watershed Approach' divides the state up into two watershed areas, Upper Narragansett Bay Watershed and Lower Narragansett Bay and Coast Watersheds. This approach fits into the National USDA-NRCS Strategic Plan unveiled last year, which provides a template and vision for NRCS conservation strategy.*

*The Upper Narragansett Bay Watershed includes all of Providence County and portions of Washington, Kent and Bristol Counties. These areas cover the Northern RI Conservation District, portions of Southern, and Eastern Conservation Districts. The major river systems in the Upper Bay include the Blackstone River, Pawtuxet River, Ten Mile, Woonasquatucket & Moshassuck Rivers, Tributaries to Greenwich Bay and the Warren River.*



*The Lower Narragansett Bay Watershed includes all of Newport County and portions of Washington, Kent and Bristol Counties. These areas cover all portions of Southern and Eastern Conservation Districts. The major river systems in the Lower Bay include the Wood-Pawcatuck River, Chipuxet River, Narrow River, Saugatucket River, Tributaries to the Salt Ponds and embayments along the islands and the RI portions of Mt. Hope Bay.*

*NRCS in Rhode Island has reorganized the management of field staff to provide more effective and efficient conservation assistance to Rhode Island partners and landowners.*

*I hope you enjoy Rhode Island NRCS's activity report. If you have any questions or need further information, please let me know.*

**ROYLENE RIDES AT THE DOOR**  
State Conservationist

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## Field Staff Happenings/State-wide

by Michael Merrill, District Conservationist

### Upper Narragansett Bay - Joslin Farm Project

A very successful outreach workshop was held in early October to discuss wildlife habitat restoration plans for the Joslin Farm Property in Scituate. This property is owned and managed by the City of Providence's Water Supply Board and they have worked with NRCS to develop a restoration plan for the property. This outreach effort was a team effort with the Northern RI Conservation District, Water Supply Board, NRCS, Audubon, DEM-Division of Fish & Wildlife, URI, and the Town of Scituate Conservation Commission. Almost 100 people attended the workshop, which featured speakers discussing the project, habitat restoration, and inventories that were conducted. Multiple After these short talks, attendees broke up into four small groups to walk the property and talk further about the property and some of the plant and animal species present.

The loss of farming in New England has resulted in a sharp decline of grasslands in the area. Lands that were once hayfields and pastures have either become forested or developed. As a result, many species that are dependent upon grasslands for food and cover have also been in decline. Songbirds such as the bobolink and Eastern meadowlark, which build their nests on the ground, require grasslands for breeding, while during fall migration, warblers and sparrows will descend upon meadows and fields to feed upon wildflower and grass seeds. The New England cottontail, a species of state concern, also depends on grasslands.

Providence Water, with financial and technical assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), will be bringing back grasslands to Joslin Farm. This area had been hay and pasture in the early 1900's, but currently about 15 acres are still open. The goal of this project is to expand the existing grasslands of Joslin Farm to approximately 50 acres with a shrub/sapling edge. Grasslands of this size are more likely to attract species dependant upon them than smaller ones, in fact some grassland dependent species, such as the grasshopper sparrow are only breed in grasslands of 40 or more acres. To improve further, the area's wildlife value, the newly cleared areas will be seeded with warm season grasses, such as little bluestem and Indian grass. These warm season grasses, unlike many of the traditional cool season pasture and hay grasses are native to the U.S. and as their name implies mature later in the summer. These grasses provide valuable food as well as cover year round to wildlife.

As an added bonus to the project, the Roger Williams Zoo has partnered with Providence Water to cut and remove some of the invasive species, *Autumn Olive* (see photo). This will help with the removal of the invasive species and will make ready for the planting of the warm season grasses. The zoo intends to feed the animals at the zoo with the branches and berries, it is a real treat for the animals, but not their only food source. They freeze it, and in the winter, they feed it to the animals, it gives them greens that they would not normally have in winter. Left, are the berries of the *Autumn Olive* that are delicious, sweet and a little tart, I hear they make wonderful pies!





However, do not expect the field to become a haven overnight. Warm season grasses generally take a few years to get fully established and it may take time for some species to find their way to Joslin Farm. However, with some time and the proper management (mowing no more than once a year and after August 1 to ensure adequate cover), Joslin Farm will be well worth the effort, benefiting a variety of birds and other species.

## Lower Narragansett Bay and Coast Watershed Activities

*by Michael Kenyon, District Conservationist*



Outreach for fiscal year 2007 programs continued with workshops offered in two locations within the Lower Narragansett Bay and Coast Watershed. Although not attended by a significant number of individuals, an abundant number of individuals have been visiting the district and NRCS offices over the last couple of months signing the applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

Implementation of various Best Management Practices (BMPs) has increased due to the push to make the Energy Initiative deadline of December 31, 2006. Rhode Island has been dealt with mild weather over the last couple of months allowing for construction to continue. However, the month of November has been extremely wet and this has affected some of the projects from moving forward.



## Barton Farm, First Wetlands Reserve Program Easement Purchase

One milestone in the Lower Narragansett Bay and Coast Watershed was the purchase of the first Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easement in RI. The Barton Farm, which was bought by the city of Warwick in 2000 for \$1.6 million to protect it from development, was the site of a ceremony on October 20, 2006 to celebrate this event. A permanent easement on 30.4 acres of the 68-acre farm will be the site where NRCS expects to spend \$240,000 over the next several years creating marshes, trails, and removing invasive vegetation. Mayor Scott Avedisian stated that "Bit by bit, we're creating a real multi-use area here." These efforts will improve the habitat and offer educational opportunities for those individuals that will be walking the trails.



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## Economics - Happenings

*by Reena Shaw, Economist*

The updated Fiscal Year 2007 RI NRCS Conservation Programs Cost List was completed on September 28, 2006. All conservation practices listed to receive a cost share of 50% or more in the EQIP program were approved by National Headquarters on November 20, 2006.

The FY 2007 cost list is currently available to the public on the RI NRCS websites for our EQIP and WHIP Farm Bill Programs. <http://www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov/programs>.



Applications to the EQIP program are currently under review to insure



that the applicants meet the definition of an agricultural producer, which is in part determined by the value of the agricultural product that the client did or could have sold. To date 14 out of 15 applications to the EQIP program have been verified as meeting the monetary definition of an agricultural producer.

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## Cultural Resources - Happenings

*by Reena Shaw, Economist*

The Cultural Resources Coordinator (CRC) is currently coordinating consultation between RI NRCS, the RI State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)/RIHPHC, and the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation (ACHP) with regard to two river restoration projects located at the Dyerville Dam, and at the Rising Sun Dam along the Woonasquatucket River, Providence. The proposed project will require removing the remnants of the Dyerville Dam and installing a fish ladder to the Rising Sun Dam.

A Phase 1(c) Cultural Resource Survey was conducted at both sites in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act from which a finding of Adverse Impact was issued. Our consultation with SHPO/RIHPHC continues to be favorable and we are working together to develop a Memorandum of Agreement regarding mitigation actions that need to be taken to off-set any loss in cultural resources that may result from the proposed project.

In accordance with 36 CFR Part 800, the finding of Adverse Impacts necessitates that RI NRCS consult with the ACHP in order to obtain comments regarding the proposed project and the Memorandum of Agreement. Our office anticipates that these river restoration projects will be able to proceed.

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## NEPA - Environmental Assessment Flow Diagrams

*by Reena Shaw, Economist*

The State Economist continues to work with representatives from the other New England States and staff from the ENTSC to complete Environmental Assessment (EA) flow diagrams to meet NEPA requirements. The State Economist attended a working meeting in mid-October that was also attended by NRCS Representatives from the other New England States. At this time, the State Economist agreed to review and format the flow diagrams and information sheets for 9 additional cost share practices. This work has since been completed. Background and technical information required for publishing in the Federal Register was also reviewed during this meeting.

The first draft of the complete EA is anticipated to be completed by the first of the year at which time the State Technical Teams (STT) for all of the participating states will be provided with an opportunity to review the drafted EA. Once comments are received and considered from the STT, the EA will be submitted for publication in the Federal Register.

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## Biological Sciences - Happenings

*by Andrew Lipsky, State Biologist*

### **RI Rivers Council Watershed Stewardship Course**

NRCS has been partnering with the RI Rivers Council over the past two years to develop curriculum for the Watershed Stewardship Class for the fall 2006 course offering. NRCS staff members taught elements of the course this past fall. These classes include two classes in Stream Visual Assessment Protocol- led by Andrew Lipsky; Anadromous Fish Restoration in the Woonasquatucket River- led by Joseph Bachand; and Managing Protecting Lands, Vernal Pools, and Invasive Species, led by Kate Giorgi.



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## Ecological Sciences - Update

*by J. Eric Scherer, State Resource Conservationist*

### **Field Office Technical Guide:**

The latest Notice of the NATIONAL HANDBOOK OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES (450 (VI, NOTICE 141) has been reviewed by the NRCS staff and State Technical Team at its November 2, 2006 meeting. A summary of the new or revised National Conservation Practice Standards (NCPS) and action to be taken can be obtained from the State Resource Conservationist, J. Eric Scherer by contacting him at the RI NRCS office. The conservation practices covered in this notice included the following:

- Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (Code 395)
- Fish Passage (Code 396)
- Fishpond Management (Code 399)
- Above Ground, Multi-Outlet Pipeline (Code 431)
- Irrigation System, Micro irrigation (Code 441)
- Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane (Code 521A)
- Land Reclamation, Abandoned Mine Land (Code 543)
- Land Reclamation, Currently Mined Land (Code 544)
- Nutrient Management (Code 590)
- Watering Facility (Code 614)
- Wetland Enhancement (Code 659)



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## Engineering - Update

*by Frank Vogel, Assistant State Engineer*

### **Pocasset Floodplain Management Study (FPMS)**

Review of final draft received and approved by the State Conservation Engineer. Incorporation of final comments is ongoing. The public meeting for distribution and discussion of the FPMS will be scheduled in the late January or early February timeframe. Thirty percent design plans from GZA Environmental have been received and approved for work at selected critical flooding areas for floodwalls, flood proofing and storm water modifications.





## Engineering Services

Engineering services are continuing for design, permitting and construction services to be performed by Fuss and O'Neil on several fish passage/dam removal projects along the Woonasquatucket River.

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## Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI)

*by Michael Merrill, GLCI Coordinator*

The National GLCI Conference in St. Louis, MO was announced, two staff from NRCS will be attending, and up to two partner participants will be attending as well. We are currently beginning to develop an agreement with RC&D Council to assist NRCS in managing and coordinating some of the GLCI activities statewide. Continued discussion on the Forage Suitability Groups in New England is occurring despite the cancellation of an initial meeting that was to be held in Amherst, Massachusetts. This meeting has been rescheduled for a later date.

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## Earth Team Volunteer Program - Update

*by Jeanne Comerford, State Volunteer Program Coordinator*

This fiscal year, RI had 39 volunteers for 1669 volunteer hours, worth a total value of \$30,108., according to the Independent Sector, who value volunteer hours at \$18.04 per hour.

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## Farm Bill Programs - Update

*by Joseph Bachand, Resource Conservationist, and Mike Coombs, Resource Conservationist*

### Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

The application period for the FY 2007 WHIP Program was closed on December 1, 2007. NRCS RI received 50 applications for a variety of projects throughout the state. Ranking will begin on December 4, 2006 and be completed by February 15, 2007. All eligible contracts will be pre-approved or approved in the Protracts contracting system by March 15, 2007. All funds will be obligated in Protracts by June 1, 2007.

### WHIP Ranking Tool

The Draft WHIP Ranking tool is completed in Protracts. All application will be ranked using the Ranking Tool in Protracts. For detailed information regarding the Ranking Tool, contact the RI State Office and request RI Bulletin 300-7-4 LTP – Protracts Ranking Tool – Resource Concerns, and Practices used for Ranking Tool Cost Efficiency Calculations, and National Priorities.

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The application period for the FY 2007 EQIP Program was closed on December 1, 2007. NRCS RI received 50 applications for a variety of projects throughout the state. Ranking will begin on December 4, 2006 and be completed by February 15, 2007. All eligible contracts

will be pre-approved or approved in the Protracts contracting system by March 15, 2007. All funds will be obligated in Protracts by June 1, 2007.

### Wetland Reserve Program

Wetland Reserve Program application are currently being accepted in RI. Applications will be accepted until **March 1, 2007**. Applications will be ranked and approved for funding by March 15, 2007. All funds will be obligated into contracts by June 1, 2007.

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## Operations

*by Jackie Pashnik, Management Analyst*

### Personnel Actions

- Vicky Drew, Resource Conservationist, was selected as the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs for Vermont NRCS, effective 10/16/2006
- Michael Merrill was selected as the District Conservationist for Upper Narragansett Bay, effective December 10, 2006
- Michael Kenyon was selected as the District Conservationist for Lower Narragansett Bay, effective December 10, 2006
- Peter Bonome, Soil Conservationist, has voluntarily changed to a Permanent Intermittent appointment, effective December 24, 2006.
- Intermittent appointments of Suzanne Enser, Michelle Marasco, and Meaghan Shaffer were extended through 12/31/2006
- Assistant State Conservationist for Programs position has been advertised and will close on December 13, 2006, anticipated selection and start date in early 2007
- Michael Combs' detail as Acting Program Manager will end December 15, 2006

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## Performance Update

*by Jackie Pashnik, Management Analyst*

Performance Measures	Program	Goal
Conservation plans written, acres	CTA	5,000
	CTA-GLCI	400
Watershed or area-wide conservation plans developed, number	CTA	2
	RC&D	4
Soil surveys mapped or updated, acres	SOILS	1,000
Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality, acres	AMA	28
	CTA	150
	EQIP	450
Land with conservation applied to improve water quality, acres	CTA	100
	CTA-GLCI	100
	CRP	10
	EQIP	500



CNMP written, number	EQIP	9
CNMP applied, number	EQIP	7
Land with conservation applied to improve irrigation efficiency, acres	AMA	20
	CTA	100
	EQIP	150
Grazing and forest land with conservation applied to protect and improve the resource base, acres	CTA	100
	CTA-GLCI	200
	EQIP	300
Non-federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality, acres	CTA	200
	EQIP	500
	WHIP	1,000
Wetlands created, restored or enhanced, acres	CTA	100
	WRP	30
Farmland, forestland, and grazing lands protected by conservation easements, acres	FRPP	219
	GRP	12
Prime, unique, or important farmland protected by conservation easements, acres	FRPP	109
Land and water resources benefited by RC&D projects, acres	RC&D	2,000
Local businesses created in rural communities, number	RC&D	2



## Training, Conferences, and Meetings - update

*by Jackie Pashnik, Management Analyst*

- Harmony Workshop, Rides at the Door, South Dakota
- National NRCS Appraisal Training, Modisette, Rides at the Door, Bachand
- East Region Technology Workgroup, Scherer
- National GLCI Conference in St. Louis, MO, Merrill

## Outreach and Communications-Happenings

*by Jeanne Comerford, State Public Affairs Specialist*



Event	Date	Attendees
Northern RI Conservation District project tour	10/2/2006	7
Joslin Farm Tour, WHIP Project, (press)	10/3/2006	120
Mapcoast Tour, (Channel 10 watershed)	10/5/2006	12
RI River & Stream Project	10/10/2006	20
Barton Farm Media Event, GRP Project, (Press)	10/19/2006	7
Roger Williams Zoo Harvesting <i>Autumn Olive</i> at Joslin Farm, (will feed to the animals) (Press)	10/19/2006	7
Eastern RI Conservation District Farm Bill workshop	October 25, 2006	4

Mussachuck Creek Project Media Event, ground breaking, (Press)	October 27, 2006	15
Southern RI Conservation District Farm Bill Workshop	October 31, 2006	5
Farm Bill Workshop in Warwick	November 8, 2006	8

## Soils Program - Happenings

*by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist*

Jim Turenne and Maggie Payne presented papers about the Rhode Island's Mapping Partnership for Coastal Soils and Sediment at the 2006 American Society of Agronomy annual meeting in Indianapolis Indiana. The papers were presented during the symposium for subaqueous soils as part of the S10 hydric soils division.

The work of MapCoast was featured on NBC Channel 10's Watershed Watch segment during the 6:00 news broadcast. Television segment the field team including Dr. John King (URI-GSO) and Dr. Jon Boothroyd (URI Department of Geosciences) they demonstrated sediment profiling imagery (SPI) and side-scan sonar techniques used by MapCoast to map the sea floor of Wickford Harbor.

Fieldwork has been continuing right through December, collecting subaqueous soils data on Quonochontaug Pond, Wickford Harbor and Greenwich Bay. Fifteen cores were collected on these resource areas and are being analyzed by URI soils laboratory. You may visit MapCoast's web site at [www.mapcoast.org](http://www.mapcoast.org)

Student Intern Michelle Marasco completed a PDF document of the 1981 published Soil Survey of Rhode Island and the document and maps are online at <http://nesoil.com/ri> and may be downloaded. Michelle also worked to digitize the index map for the soil atlas sheets so users can link to the mapping using a geographic information system.

## Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) *by Chris Modisette, RC&D Coordinator*

### Rhody Warm Project

Blanket production has been finalized and the Rhody warm blanket will be rolled out in a ceremony on December 6, 2006.

### RI Farm Bureau – Farm Watch Television Program

RC&D participated in the taping of their TV show, which is aired on Cox Cable. The taping took place at the Cox Cable TV studio on June 28 and September 27, 2006 at 6:00 pm in Johnston. One segment of the show featured the Rhody Warm project while the other segment featured RC&D.



## Rural Fire Protection

Finalize a Cooperative Agreement with the Department of Environmental Management, Division of Forest Environment and the RC&D Council, Inc., the Grantee, for conducting the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program (VFA) in the State of RI.

Under this agreement, RC&D will conduct an assessment of need for dry hydrants and cisterns in the wild-land urban interface and rural lands of the state of RI. They will also provide for the administration of grants to eligible rural volunteer fire departments to be funded at a cost-share rate of 50/50 for the installation of dry hydrants and cisterns in rural areas defined as high risk for wild-land fire as approved by and in cooperation with the RIDEM Division of Forest Environment (DFE). The RC&D will also provide technical assistance to fire departments as well as project oversight, verification of local match obligations, and final inspections.

The total amount of federal funds available under the VFA project period July 25, 2006 through September 30, 2007 is \$18,625.

## Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP)

Encourage forest management actions to promote and conserve wildlife habitats that will meet identified needs of the state's wildlife in order to encourage species diversity)

- Provide administrative support for the FLEP program partnership between RI RC&D and RIDEM
- In 2006, 20 landowners owning a total of 1,737 acres received \$15,786 of cost-share assistance for the preparation of forest stewardship plans. To date the program has enrolled 3,452 acres of forestland involving 45 forest landowners who received \$23,037 of cost-share assistance.

## Rhode Island Stream Continuity Project

From November 2005 – September 2006, TU volunteers surveyed 138 bridges and culverts in the Upper Wood River watershed.

- Completed survey of 138 stream crossing sites in the Upper & Lower Wood River watersheds. Of these crossings, sixty-two (62) have been identified as severe barriers for fish and wildlife passage. These crossings have been ranked for their restoration potential based upon the amount of habitat, which could be re-connected both upstream and downstream from the restored crossing. Ten crossings have been identified as having high restoration potential and five of these crossings occur in Richmond.
- Entered all data into the UMASS Stream Crossing database
- Finalized prioritization of culverts within the Upper Wood River watershed in terms of being replaced or maintained
- A mailing to communities within the project area was sent identifying the project and the opportunity to apply for WHIP for a project to address the identified stream barriers. Four applications were received.

## Forest Legacy Program

RI RC&D is represented on the RI Forest Stewardship Committee, which, in part, implements the **Forest Legacy Program** in RI. The



Forest Legacy Program provides grants to the State of RI through the USDA Forest Service, to acquire land or interests in land from willing sellers. The fair market value of interests acquired is determined by standardized federal appraisal methods. Acquisitions are based on the concept of "willing seller, willing buyer". There is no condemnation of land involved

### Rhode Island Forestry Centennial Celebration

Assisted with the organization of the **"100 Gifts from Rhode Island's Forest"** event for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Forestry in RI to increase public awareness of the "working" forest resource and the role that forests play in producing the goods and services used by society. The event was held on November 15, 2006. The event featured *"Forests and People: Partners Through Time"*, a collection of color photos by noted local and national photographer Salvatore Mancini documenting the forests of RI, CT, and MA; and Objects of art created with wood from RI forests by selected RI artists.

### RC&D Council Training

In conjunction with the National Association of RC&D Councils, the RI RC&D Council organized a workshop RC&D Council Members to assist them in understanding basic organizational and financial responsibilities of an RC&D Council Member. Twenty-four RC&D Council members from four southern New England RC&D Council attended the training.

### New England RC&D Annual Fall Conference

Two RC&D Council members attended the Annual Fall Conference of the New England RC&D Council, which was held in Fairlee, VT, October 26-28, 2006.

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## Upcoming Events & Deadlines

*by Jeanne Comerford, State Public Affairs Specialist*

### Farm Viability Grants RFP

The DEM Division of Agriculture announces the availability of Farm Viability Grant funds for enhancing the competitiveness of specialty crops grown in RI. Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts and nursery crops (including floriculture). A total of \$70,000 is available for projects with no match required; awards will be made in amounts of \$3000 - \$15,000 for each project. Applications must be postmarked by January 31, 2007. Contact Stephen Volpe, RIDEM, Deputy Chief, for additional information at 222-2781 ext 4501, or [stephen.volpe@dem.ri.gov](mailto:stephen.volpe@dem.ri.gov).

### Direct Marketing Conference And Trade Show

The New England Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference and Trade Show, February 28 - March 1, 2007, sponsored by the New England State Departments of Agriculture and partners. Additional information at [www.harvestnewengland.org](http://www.harvestnewengland.org), or contact Stephen Volpe, RIDEM, Deputy Chief, 222-2781 ext. 4501, or [stephen.volpe@dem.ri.gov](mailto:stephen.volpe@dem.ri.gov).

