

**STATE SOIL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES
January 12, 2026**

The January meeting of the State Soil Conservation Committee was called to order by Ed Wengryn at 9:33 A.M. Frank Minch stated that the Open Public Meetings Act requirements have been met. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq. adequate notice of this meeting was provided by giving the time, date, and location and to the extent known the agenda of this meeting. At least 48 hours in advance this notice has been posted on the front door of the 200 Riverview Building in Trenton; by emailing media resources for the Cherry Hill Courier Post, courierpostonline.com, and The Times of Trenton and filed with the Secretary of State.

The Flag Salute was recited.

Call of the Membership Roll indicated the following:

Members Present

Ed Wengryn, Chairman
Frank Minch, Executive Secretary
Joe Lomax
Julie Hawkins, NRCS
Dr. Stephanie Murphy (rep. L. Lawson)
Sylvia Kovacs
Michael Haberland (rep. B. Schilling)
Cormac Morrissey
Ray Cywinski
Dennis Contois, NJDEP

Members absent:

Louise Davis
John Kocubinski
Michael Rigolizzo

Others Present

Sara Mellor, NJDA
Diana Diaz, NJDA
John Matos-Ramos, NJDA
Tim Thomas, Freehold SCD
Michael Kent, DelAtlantic SCD
Rick Dovey, NJACD, DelAtlantic SCD
Jennifer McCulloch, Morris SCD
Robert Reitmeyer, Burlington SCD

Others Present Online

Freehold SCD
Janet Rekesius, HEP SCD
Jessica Wyatt, Gloucester SCD
Karol Blew, Cumberland Salem SCD
Marissa Appolonia, Gloucester SCD
Matthew D'Alessandro, Somerset Union SCD
Michael Bonham, Cumberland Salem SCD
Paul Califano, Freehold SCD
Valerie Brown, DelAtlantic SCD
Ines Zimmerman, NJACD
Nai NG, NJDOT
Rick Dovey, DelAtlantic SCD
Theodora Wang, Mercer SCD
Michael Kent, DelAtlantic SCD

Ramon Mejia, Ocean SCD
Audrey Winzinger, Burlington SCD
Gina Berg, Burlington SCD
Casey Sheridan, Gloucester SCD
Christine Raabe, Ocean SCD
Elizabeth Vollavanh, HEP SCD
Phillip J. Roehrich, Morris SCD
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MEETING MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 8, 2025

A vote was called to accept the draft meeting minutes from the December 8, 2025, meeting. Joe Lomax made a motion to approve the minutes. Ray Cywinski seconded; all other Committee members voted in the affirmative.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairman Wengryn wished all a Happy New Year.

- Noted next week is the NJ Agricultural Convention and Ag Expo in Atlantic City.
- Governor Murphy's final State of the State scheduled for tomorrow, 1/13/2026; Governor-elect Sherril will be sworn in next Tuesday, 1/20/2026.
- Two legislative bills that look like they are moving revisions to Farmland Evaluation Committee (FEC) and an Invasive Species bill. FEC updates expand authority on fees and charges in the hands of the Committee to include forestry. The Invasive Species bill will form an Invasive Species Council with roles of enforcement between NJDA and NJDEP, related to nurseries, growers and producers selling and raising invasive species, manage list of exempt plants that can be sold. Plants that were encouraged to be used are now on an invasive species list. Need recommendations of people for the Invasive Species Council.

RESOLUTION HONORING THE LATE GARY MOUNT

Full resolution read into the record by Executive Secretary Frank Minch. Motion by Joe Lomax, and second by Ray Cywinski / Cormac Morrissey, the remaining committee members voted with unanimous approval. The resolution to be forwarded to the Mount family, Mercer SCD, and Governor Murphy.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY'S REPORT

Frank Minch reported the following:

- Supervisor appointment for Gloucester SCD to fill vacant position through 2028. Nomination of Joseph Vitale, nurseryman and engineer, Comac Morrissey motion, Joe Lomax second, approved unanimously by the remaining committee members.
- Pilot Conservation Planning Program initiated with DeAtlantic, Freehold, and Morris districts to provide conservation services in conjunction with SADC. SADC has a large need for conservation planning for preserved farms. Given issues with NRCS and staffing, this would be a way to get districts back into conservation planning efforts. These districts have conservation staff currently; end goal would be to open this up to all districts. Working closely with NRCS.
- Legislative updates: District board expansion bill was stalled; potential for reintroduction. Need to get into this again when the new legislative session starts, need to get statue changed.
- Working with BPU on dual solar-use pilot program and how it will affect erosion. This will require districts to have inspection responsibilities.



SOIL EROSION AND SEDIMENT CONTROL ACT

John Mato-Ramos reported on the following:

Engineering Report

No major updates since last month. Continuing to support districts by providing technical assistance with questions related to the standards. District visits to resume with John, Kelly, and Nick.

NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

Julie Hawkins reported the following:

- National batching period closes January 15, includes Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP).
- 25% EQIP and 25% CSP funds targeted to RPP.
- Chief's five national priorities
 1. Preserve and Protect Agricultural Land
Goal: Reduce the loss of productive farmland and safeguard the long-term viability of America's agricultural landscapes.
 2. Modernize NRCS Infrastructure and Technology
Goal: Transform NRCS into a digitally agile agency that empowers staff and farmers through modern tools and systems.
 3. Recenter Field Engagement and Technical Assistance
Goal: Re-establish NRCS's presence in the field to deliver hands-on, personalized support to farmers.
 4. Strengthen Partnerships by Streamline Processes and Accountability
Goal: Leverage partnerships as force multipliers while reducing internal friction to accelerate conservation outcomes.
 5. Shift to Outcome-Based Conservation and Farmer Empowerment
Goal: Measure success through outcomes and empower farmers with data, recognition, and market access
- New USDA general terms and conditions for agreements released memorandum 1078-021 strengthens oversight on grants and cooperative agreements. New internal control and review effort required regional assistant chiefs. RCCP Watershed Projects CIG are not affected by this.
- Planning aquaculture-focused State Technical Committee tour for June.
- Compiling Congressional report information for NJACD
- Working with districts on Local Working Group materials for upcoming meetings.
- Committee member raised a that wildlife habitat projects on some farms—especially nonprofit-owned land—might increase deer pressure on neighboring farms and divert conservation funding away from agricultural operations. NRCS explained that nonprofits are eligible for programs, deer issues are largely driven by statewide habitat fragmentation rather than NRCS activities, and NRCS does not fund food plots or aim to increase deer populations. By law, 10 percent of EQIP funds must go to wildlife practices, which in New Jersey focus mostly on rare species and forest biodiversity. NRCS noted that degraded natural areas and over-browsing contribute to deer problems and expressed willingness to collaborate further to address these ongoing concerns.

NJ ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (NJACD)



Rick Dovey reported on the following

- Planning to attend mid-February NACD Annual Meeting
- March Fly-In to Washington DC preparations by Ines, NRCS, Sara to compile annual Congressional Report
- Planning and preparation stages for the NJ Envirothon and Poster contest
- Would like to gather a committee to schedule time and location for next year's annual conservation partnership meeting either in November or October
- Regional supervisor meetings will be coordinated

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (NACD)

Ray Cywinski reported on activities

- No Agro-Drain scholarships for first time attendees to the annual NACD meeting San Antonio
- Several NJ folks going, 60 breakout sessions at the annual meeting
- Thursday tour to San Antonio Food Bank farm, 50-acre farm in cooperation with the national park service, feeds up to 100,000 people per week, organic, cover crop and crop rotation is practiced
- With the fly in NACD prepares white papers which will be forthcoming

DISTRICT EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION

Matt D'Alessandro reported on activities

- Had Employees' Association meeting on 1/8/2026
- Training planning; looking to have two in-person trainings per year, will include admin topics and field topics. Looking forward to have one in May
- CPESC (erosion control certification) managers or HR at districts can learn how to proctor, scheduled for 1/26/2026
- Donation request, thank you to the districts who donated, looking to avoid bank fees

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Dennis Contois reported the following:

- Resilient Environments and Landscapes (REAL) new rules and regulations pushed from 1/5/2026 to 1/19/2026 with implementation six months following.
- Shared his respect and admiration for the family-oriented farm Gary Mount and his family have created with Terhune Orchards

RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION (RCE)

Mr. Haberland reported on the following:

- Atlantic County Office in Mays Landing, has a new Faculty County Agent, Dr. Patrick McMullen from Cornell, his specialty is in Soil Born Pathogen Management and Healthy Crop Establishment. His extension program will focus on sustainable vegetable production.

SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES (SEBS)



Dr. Murphy reported on the following:

- Still holiday break for students, staff are back working hard
- Lab updates, currently low number of samples which allows time to dedicate to research projects. Received new equipment, expands ability in analysis, automation in digestion step will increase opportunity for growers to have plant tissue analysis, tree fruit and blueberry recommendations. Will update the committee when it will be offered to everyone.
- Department of Ag Food and Resource Economics hosted in December a Circular Bioeconomy and Regenerative Food Systems workshop, about reducing waste with focus on economics and sustainability. Aquaculture and waste, conversations of fish waste and shellfish waste and how they can be utilized as fertilizers and other resources.
- Upcoming virtual workshop for NJ Agricultural Technical Service Providers on 2/11/2026, Extreme Weather and Climate that will focus on preparing New Jersey agricultural professionals to address the impacts of extreme weather and climate change. Key topics include: Nutrient management during storm events, Drought planning and irrigation strategies, Crop heat tolerance and air quality considerations, Soil health practices that improve resilience, Mitigation approaches and emerging opportunities such as agrivoltaics, Frameworks for farm disaster preparedness and long-term climate adaptation and mitigation planning
- 3/19/2026 35th Annual Rutgers Turfgrass Symposium being hosted by the Center for Turfgrass Science, Rutgers University- highlights modern research approaches in turfgrass science. The keynote address, "Investigating New Strategies for Turfgrass Survival in a Changing Winter Climate," will be delivered by Dr. Eric Watkins of the University of Minnesota. Agenda and registration are available at <https://turf.rutgers.edu/>
- 6/23-25/2026 Regional Cooperative Soil Survey Conference being hosted by USDA-NRCS and Rutgers University. Theme will be Sustaining Soil from Urban to Forests
This regional meeting will explore soil sustainability across diverse landscapes. Organizers are now considering holding the event in person, including a field trip component. May request site visit suggestions from Soil Conservation Districts or NJDA.

Public & Agency Comments

None

Next meeting 3/9/2026 in Trenton

A motion was made by Joe Lomax to adjourn and was seconded by Cormac Morrissey. The meeting ended at 10:34 AM unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Minch, Division Director

