

**STATE SOIL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES
March 9, 2026**

The March 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

Joe Atchison III, 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
Louise Davis*
John Kocubinski
Michael Rigolizzo

Members absent

Ed Wengryn

Others Present

Andrea Farparan, Freehold SCD*
Janet Rekesius, HEP SCD*
Jessica Wyatt, Gloucester SCD*
Marissa Appolonia, Gloucester SCD*
Jennifer McCulloch, Morris SCD*
Paul Califano, Freehold SCD*
Christine Raabe, Ocean SCD*
Robert Reitmeyer, Burlington SCD*
609-839-1575*
Sandra Myers, Upper Delaware SCD*
Sara Mellor, NJDA
Diana Diaz, NJDA
John Matos-Ramos, NJDA
Nicholas Lund, NJDA
Kelly Doyle, NJDA
Tim Thomas, Freehold SCD
Michael Kent, DeAtlantic SCD
Rick Dovey, NJACD, DeAtlantic SCD
Ines Zimmerman, NJACD
Karol Blew, Cumberland Salem SCD
Michael Bonham, Cumberland Salem SCD
Matt Ward, HEP SCD

***Attended virtually**



MEETING MINUTES FROM JANUARY 12, 2026

A vote was called to accept the draft meeting minutes from the January 12, 2026, meeting. Joe Lomax made a motion to approve the minutes. Cormac Morrissey seconded; John Kocubinski and Louise Davis abstained; all other Committee members voted in the affirmative.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairman Joe Atchison III:

- Secretary Wengryn cannot attend due to commitments related to the Governor's budget preview.
- The Governor emphasizes departmental collaboration, efficiency, and reducing bureaucratic delays.
- The Department is optimistic about increased cross-agency coordination under the new administration, as we have been with NJDEP, Health, Travel and Tourism
- Secretary attended a retreat with the governor and other cabinet officials.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY'S REPORT

Frank Minch reported the following:

A. Fee Schedule Revisions

1. Cumberland–Salem SCD

- Proposal to increase hourly rate from **\$95 → \$120**.
- Rationale: increased inspection complexity, staffing demands, higher benefit costs, and updated cost-analysis tools.
- Ray Cywinski asked if the reason for fee schedule changes more result of smaller applications meaning smaller fees in addition to costs rising. Mr. Minch replied it is combination of factors; time expenditure, health care cost increase, and cost to run the office. Minch asked the district to continue to monitor their fees and expenditures.
- Chairman called a vote all members responded in the affirmative.

2. Upper Delaware SCD

- Proposal affects a specific project category, minor single-family residential. No change to hourly rate; reflects increased time needed for review and inspections.
- Motion to approve made by Cormac Morrissey, second by John Kocubinski. All other committee members approved, with one recusal by Sylvia Kovacs

B. Rulemaking Update – N.J.A.C. 2:90 (Erosion & Sediment Control + Cost Share Programs)

- DAG legal review complete.



- Package preparing for Governor’s Office review.
- Executive order has paused new regulations, yet this set is still moving forward.
- Updates include restructuring chapters, clarifying erosion control standards, cost share programs, and process improvements.

C. District Board Expansion (S2064)

- Proposal would expand district boards beyond current five-member limit.
- Previously passed Assembly; reintroduced this year. Committee members encouraged to seek Senate support.
- Chairman commented there is a new Assembly Ag Committee chair, Andrea Katz, in Burlington County, very enthusiastic supporter of agriculture.

SOIL EROSION AND SEDIMENT CONTROL ACT

John Matos-Ramos, Kelly Doyle, Nicholas Lund reported on the following:

Engineering Report

A. Engineering Updates - Kelly Doyle

- Staff attended Watershed Institute Annual Conference that was one day virtual and one day in person; noted a project that was shared about had real-world impacts when off-site stability standards are not followed.
- Districts are continuing to host local working group (LWG) meetings; participation is strong. Kelly attended Burlington and Cumberland Salem, John and Nick attended Somerset Union and DelAtlantic.
- Collaboration example regarding Burlington SCD erosion project design. A gorge was forming between two houses with potential concern for neighboring homes. Stone shoot, geo bags, and soil erosion barrier placement were effectively discussed among NJDA, the district and engineer to land on a solution.

B. Technical Bulletin 2024-1.0 Reissuance - John Matos-Ramos

- Reissued to encourage use of **digitally signed & sealed documents**, which improves efficiency for technical reviews.

C. Administrative Bulletin 2011-2.0 Reissuance - Nicholas Lund

- Updated guidance to comply with **Public Law 2025, Chapter 72** on electronic public notices.
- Districts must:
 - Effective March 1, 2026
 - Post notices via homepage hyperlinks
 - Keep notices available online at least one week
 - Create an archive page by July 1, 2026
 - Advertise availability twice per month in 2026

D. 5G3 Letter Update

- A standardized template will be issued for district use statewide.

NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)



Julie Hawkins reported the following:

Key updates included:

- Leadership changes:
 - Walt Whitcomb was named Assistant Chief for Northern Region.
 - Liz Ortiz was selected as Acting State Conservationist for Utah, as of April 5.
- New national initiative: **Farmer roundtables** for direct input on conservation practices by those who installed practices will be installing practices. Farmer host roundtables have at least 10 farmers attend. Farmers said timing is not good. First roundtable will be hosted at Rancocas Creek Farm in Burlington County. Focus on what technology is out there and need to be incorporated in NRCS practices.
- 2026 sign-up: **~1100 applications** under review; awards expected late April which includes the new regenerative program
- Upcoming events:
 - State Technical Committee – June 2, Tuckerton Seaport – featuring aquaculture work
 - Rain date – June 9
- District MOUs: New template approved; first submitted for review in new federal process.

NJ ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (NJACD)

Rick Dovey reported on the following

- Districts actively hosting local workgroups.
- Number of District members attended the National conference in San Antonio, good discussion to move the viability of NJACD forward
- Regional supervisor meetings scheduled:
 - April 14 (Central)
 - April 16 (Southern)
 - April 22 (Northern)
- Advocacy planning underway for Washington DC Fly-In.
- NJ Envirothon planning on going

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (NACD)

Ray Cywinski reported on activities

- Fly-In on March 25, with virtual advocacy training March 16 and 19.
- Recap of San Antonio national meeting: key topics included district relevancy, board governance, funding diversification, and training.
- Notable recognition:
 - NJ students won three national poster contest categories
 - Joe Lomax was inducted into NACD Hall of Distinction

DISTRICT EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION



Matt D'Alessandro unable to attend Frank Minch reported on his behalf

- In-person staff training planned for **June 3** (technical + administrative).
- Exploring certification opportunities via EnviroCert.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Dennis Contois reported the following:

- On January 19 REAL regulations went through (Flood Hazard, Freshwater Wetlands, Coastal).
- New elevation standards, specifically the raising of the tidal 100-year FEMA flood elevation of four feet and if building a structure, it needs to be five feet, which has prompted public controversy and appeals. Implementation deadline: **July 20, 2026**.
- Ongoing staffing and infrastructure updates, more staff needed to backfill empty positions
- Looking to streamline NJDEP permit process

RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION (RCE)

Mr. Haberland reported on the following:

- Department of Entomology is seeking to fill a staff position in the NJ Pesticide Safety Education Program. They are looking for someone who enjoys developing presentations, bulletins, fact sheets and training manuals

SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES (SEBS)

Dr. Murphy reported on the following:

- Soil testing lab expecting seasonal increase in samples.
- Participated in community garden event in Morristown, and will attend the home gardener school next weekend
- Preparing for Rutgers Day, April 25 <https://newbrunswick.rutgers.edu/rutgers-day>
- Research collaborations underway on circular bioeconomy, food waste reduction, aquaculture byproduct reuse.
- Attended Webinar, Zoom into Soil: Soil Security – A Holistic Framework Beyond Soil Health'. Presented by the British Society of Soil Science, featuring Australian soil scientists. "The Soil Security framework expands beyond indicators such as carbon, recognizing that soil functions, services, and vulnerabilities depend on multiple interacting dimensions, check link for recording <https://soils.org.uk/videos/zoom-into-soil-soil-security/>

Public & Agency Comments

Public Comment – Matt Ward

- Asked when will performance standards will be released, hopeful for 2026.
- Expressed concern about sharp increases in medical insurance and pension costs impacting district budgets.

Committee Response



- Performance Standards are being worked on by the executive board, goal to be ready in 2026
- Benefits cost issue, fee schedule updates are one tool to address rising costs.
- Districts encouraged to monitor finances regularly and adjust incrementally where possible.

Additional comments were heard from Andrea Farparan of the Freehold SCD about upcoming Employees Association activities.

- April 9, 2026, is the next Employees Association virtual meeting
- June 3, 2026, there will be an in-person training at the Freehold SCD in their conference rooms with offerings for both administrative and technical staff. Topics to include:
 - Bridges, culverts channel stability
 - OPRA, Robert's Rules, Open Public Meeting

Next meeting 4/13/2026 in Trenton

A motion was made by Joe Lomax to adjourn and was seconded by Michael Rigolizzo. The meeting ended at 10:41 AM unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Minch, Division Director

