

**STATE SOIL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 14, 2025**

The April meeting of the State Soil Conservation Committee was called to order by Sylvia Kovacs at 9:34 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; mailed to Courier Post and Asbury Park Press and filed with the Secretary of State.

The Flag Salute was recited.

Call of the Membership Roll indicated the following:

Members Present

Sylvia Kovacs, Chairwoman
Frank Minch, Executive Secretary
Joe Lomax
Julie Hawkins, NRCS
Dr. Stephanie Murphy (rep. L. Lawson)
Ray Cywinski*
Louise Davis*
Mike Rigolizzo*
Dennis Contois, NJDEP
John Kocubinski
Cormac Morrissey

***Indicates attended via Microsoft Teams**

Others Present

Allen Carter, Cape-Atlantic SCD*
Angelo Caruso, Bergen SCD*
Raymond Bukowski, Ocean SCD*
Jean Baluski, Ocean SCD*
Karol Blew, Cumberland Salem SCD*
Matthew D'Alessandro, Somerset Union SCD
Theodora Wang, Mercer SCD*

Others Present

John Showler, SSCC, NJDA
John Matos, SSCC, NJDA
Sara Mellor, SSCC, NJDA
Diana Diaz, SSCC, NJDA
Tameko N. Webster, NJDA
Mike Kent, Cape-Atlantic SCD
Tim Thomas, Freehold SCD
Ines Zimmerman, NJACD
Rick Dovey, Cape-Atlantic SCD, NJACD
Jennifer McCulloch, Morris SCD
Matt Ward, HEP SCD, NJACD
Carl Mecky, Bergen SCD*
Bob McEwan, Morris SCD*
William Pollock, Ocean SCD
Christine Raabe, Ocean SCD*
Robert Reitmeyer, Burlington SCD*
Sandra Myers, Upper Delaware SCD*
Janet Rekesius, HEP SCD*
Elizabeth Vollavanh, HEP*
Tom Tedesco, Cumberland Salem SCD*
Valerie Brown, Camden SCD, SJRCD
Freehold SCD*
973-214-4676*

MINUTES FROM MARCH 10, 2025 MEETING



A vote was called to accept the draft meeting minutes from the March 10, 2025 meeting. Joe Lomax made a motion to approve the minutes. John Kocubinski seconded. Cormac Morrissey abstained; all other Committee members voted in the affirmative.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

In the absence of Secretary Edward Wengryn, Frank Minch spoke briefly on topics he may have touched on if present. The Assembly budget hearing was on Wednesday last week. The Department of Agriculture goes in with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), DEP received most of the questions from legislatures. They did ask about some concerns with conservation plan delivery, food and nutrition, and farmland preservation. Senate budget hearing is on April 29.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY'S REPORT

Frank Minch reported the following:

1. 2:90 rule amendment update- Mr. Minch reported the 2:90 amendment update is still in legal review, moved on from chapter 1 and are now into the cost share chapters. Hope it moves quickly and can put in in the register for proposal.
2. Supervisor appointment(s) – supervisor reappointment letters will be going out soon, make sure if you have supervisor's terms are expiring at the end of June. Performance measures have not changed, the executive committee still needs to get together to work on revisions. In advance of the letters move on your supervisor's reappointment or appointments. All nominations need to be ready for the June meeting to be effective July 1.
3. Audits- Still waiting for some audits from the last fiscal year. Freehold received theirs, yet the board had some questions they are working on addressing. Hunterdon requested an extension. Waiting for Bergen's. Ray said they would be having a meeting tonight; in the prior meeting the auditor was almost complete with the 2024 audit. Chairwoman Kovacs requested Ray to inform the board the State Committee is inquiring about the timeframe and how soon they can get it in.
4. Department staffing update- Bittersweet this will be the last Committee meeting with Mr. John Showler our Senior Engineer. John has served us and the Department really well. He is always willing to work with everybody, teach everybody what he knows and is a reliable member of the staff. Chairwoman Kovacs expressed her gratitude for the assistance Mr. Showler has provided the Upper Delaware Conservation District.
5. District Consolidation: Cape-Atlantic and Camden SCD's are still working through their merger. At our last Committee meeting it was voted to allow districts to investigate the aspects of the merger. Mike Kent reached out to the Upper Delaware District Manager Sandra Myers to gain insight on how they did their merger. One main point that came out of the discussion was for the merger to happen by July 1 to avoid fiscal issues. Ms. Kovacs requested a motion to allow for the Committee to vote on the merger of Cape-Atlantic and Camden SCD's which will be known



as Del Atlantic Soil Conservation District. Stephanie Murphy motioned, **seconded** by Dennis Contois and then Ray Cywinski asked for a discussion. The question was regarding the need to go to legislation about a change in the number of supervisors by combining three counties. It may affect another SCD that has three counties. There is a bill being introduced to the assembly prepared for introduction to allow a district to expand board membership, not require, through committee approval to expand the number of members on the board. There is no senate companion bill at this time. First, we need to get it introduced, then a companion sponsor in the senate, once that happens, we do not foresee any problem. We need to get it done before summer recess. If a district is going to expand they will need to provide justification to the Committee. Roll call to merge Cape Atlantic and Camden SCDs effective July 1, 2025;

Yes

Sylvia Kovacs
Dennis Contois
Ray Cywinski
Stephanie Murphy
John Kocubinski

Recused

Joe Lomax
Mike Rigolizzo
Cormac Morrissey

SOIL EROSION AND SEDIMENT CONTROL ACT

1. Engineering Report Mr. Matos

- Infiltration in the Standard for Offsite Stability technical bulletin was finalized and distributed, it provides guidance to staff on application infiltration practices at various levels of complexity, and how they apply to standard of offsite stability
- Preparing a presentation geared to newer staff for an Employees Association Training. Topics to be covered include basins, stormwater management applications and how they apply to chapter 251 sediment basins
- Technical assistance highlight, we are working with Somerset SCD assisting on a Hillsborough residential project, with eight bioretention basins and corresponding outfalls. Assisting engineers and staff to make sure outfalls comply with standard for offsite stability.
- Continue to field emails and calls from consultants, SCDs regarding technical questions and hydrological modeling.

2. Engineering Report Mr. Showler

- Second Quarterly Report for fiscal year 2025 October through December
 - 1,503 new applications and a little bit more than that in land certifications
 - 2.19 million in fees received
 - 2,753 Disturbed acres/220 Restored acres almost 10%
 - 2,034 reports from clients
 - 13,600 inspections
 - 25,562 staff hours
 - These numbers are typical of quarterly reports



- Supplemental report (last report to the SSCC)
 - Began in 1987 at the Freehold District- out lasted Ines in the program
 - 37 years 9 months total
 - 31 years 7 months at NJDA took over for Hunter in 2008
 - Travel voucher visiting districts- 38,778 miles=1.5 times around the Earth, most of it was to Freehold and Ocean SCDs
 - Proudest statistic is all the friends made over the years

Tameko Webster, Chief of Staff, NJDA- Introduced by Chairwoman Kovacs

- Passionate about being good stewards of the earth

NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

Julie Hawkins reported the following

1. New Chief Audrey Bettencourt reported April 7. Her goal is to keep farmers farming. We need a machine to highly deliver. Reliable internet is like indoor plumbing of the century. Keep farmer at the center to get recognition and credit for conservation. Wants the agency to modernize the farmer.
2. The 90th anniversary of NRCS is in April, the plan is to celebrate all year.
3. Louis Aspey a was offered the associate chief position again and he accepted
4. NRCS NJ is down 18 positions, 24% since January 17
5. 9 people have signed up for the deferred resignation program (DRP 2.0), all need to be on Admin Leave by 4/30/2025
6. Other states stats on the number of employees loss; (unofficial numbers)
 - a. Connecticut 17
 - b. Massachusetts 13
 - c. New Hampshire 18
 - d. Vermont 24
 - e. Maine 26
 - f. Rhode Island 16 (50% staff potentially leaving)
7. Associate chief – the plan that went to the department he wants three things
 - i. Agreements with our partners to be able to do conservation, proven success for over 25 years
 - ii. IT need with better infrastructure and contract support for software development
 - iii. Better business from the business center that has been stood up since 2019
8. Training delivered- 3/20 & 4/3 conservation planning policy training Field Office specific technical training topic days offered for staff and partners, 4/4 forestry training
9. Upcoming training- 6/23 Pasture and Fence training, week of 8/18 Basic Soils and Web Soils to Interpret Land Capabilities and Limitations, week of 9/8 Conservation planning 2 training
10. 15 Planners certified in the last two quarters, nine at level one that includes two partners Riley Blankenship and Kelly Steimle, four at level two, and 10 at level three
11. Hackettstown is moving to Mount Olive
12. Looking forward to five staff members participating in the NJ Envirothon



13. Cape May plant material center celebrating 60-year anniversary

NJ ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Rick Dovey and Ray Cywinski reported on the activities

NJACD

1. Thank you to Ines Zimmerman and Matt Ward for the coordination of the Washington DC fly-in on 3/26/2025, several supervisors from around the state participated, success was we were able to visit all congressional offices except for Senator Bookers office. Excellent report to present to staff at each office. Follow-up letters were sent to each office after.
2. Looking forward to 2025 Regional Supervisor Meeting dates and locations:
 - a. 4/17/2025, South, Vineland
 - b. 4/22/2025, Central, Bordentown
 - c. 4/29/2025, North, Mountain Lakes
3. 5/17/2025 Envirothon, hosted by the Burlington SCD, planning has continued, sponsors and staff are in place. 19 teams are registered, getting closer to the amount that participated pre-Covid.

NACD

1. Regular updates have been shared out from what has been received from NACD regarding executive order impact, Ray would like to know if it is duplicative, includes lots of info and impacts on our partners. Results of a survey that went out about impacts to districts around the county were recently included in an update.
2. Planning for the summer meeting in Milwaukee on 7/30/2025 continues.

DISTRICT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

Mr. D'Alessandro reported on activities

1. Continuing virtual meetings every two months, with regular email communication in between sharing topics and ideas amongst employees, working to gain more uniformity.
2. 5/12/2025 in person meeting scheduled for Freehold, administrative and field worker training. Frank will present in the morning admin topics. John Ramos and John Showler will present in the afternoon on the basics of basin, sediment basins, and review the technical bulletin of offsite stability.
3. Will continue to ask the employees throughout the state for training needs and for topics of interest at every Association meeting to request and coordinate those trainings and events.
4. A few workers in the state program are seeking CPESC certifications after a presentation done at a recent Employee's Association meeting by the company Envirocert. The price for CPESC is significantly discounted at \$200 for the SCD offices. Public cost is \$700-930. You must ask for the test to be sent to your office or ask Envirocert to send a proctor to your office. Opposed to going to a proctor and taking it or you will incur an additional \$212 fee if you do not pass the test and need to retake it.



5. Big THANK YOU to Andrea Farparan and Courtney Davidson for running this Association behind the scenes

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Dennis Contois reported on the following:

1. Commended John Showler for being an exceptional employee for NJDA. On behalf of the Commissioner, we congratulate you on your retirement and wish you the best of health.
2. REAL regulation that is August, we will see how that goes.

RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Mr. Haberland could not attend yet reported on the following:

1. Dr. Raman Sharma joined ANR on April 1 as the Salem Ag agent.
 - *Dr. Sharma holds a PhD in Plant and Soil Sciences with a specialization in Agronomy, Agribusiness Management, Agricultural Economics, and Agricultural Engineering. His research focuses on sensor-based fertilization, crop-climate link assessment, and optimizing management practices such as variety selection, seed density, row configurations, planting dates, and soil amendments.*
2. We have a target date of July 1st for Dr. Hassan Warriach to start as the Warren Co. Extension agent. He's a veterinarian by training and will focus in the areas of livestock and pasture management.
3. Applications are being accepted for the Atlantic Co., County Agent III (Assistant Professor) vacant position - Commercial Agricultural Production. Thru 4/28.
4. We are beginning campus visits and interviews for an agronomy specialist this week. We anticipate that this position will be instrumental in leading research & trials in areas related to soil health, precision ag tech, and other areas.

SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Dr. Murphy reported on the following:

1. A lot of searches in the county offices and on campus. I am on an extension agronomist position search committee; we have not had one in over 20 years. We are pushing through our recommendations because we were warned hiring freeze will be coming.
2. Extension position overlap not only do they have to do outreach, but they are also excepted to do research and teaching in the classroom.
3. Soil testing lab has been very busy, over 1800 samples since March 1
4. Rutgers University Institutional Planning and Operations (IP&O) are in the process of completing a \$4 million renovation project of a dam at the NJAES Specialty Crop Research and Extension Center located in Cream Ridge, the facility that conducts research focusing on increasing production efficiency and the protection of fruit crops from disease, including apples, strawberries, peaches and more. Funding for this project was provided by the State Legislature



to NJAES as part of a larger initiative to improve its off-campus research and extension facilities. The research center had relied on the dam for irrigation yet due to its degradation it has been using a secondary source. Once the work is complete the center will once again be able to use the dam for irrigation and discontinue use of tap water, reducing costs of irrigation for the specialty crops research.

5. Next IP&O plan to do dam work in Hammonton at the cranberry research center.
6. On March 21, 2025, local and national experts representing a wide range of stakeholders gathered on the Rutgers University-New Brunswick campus for the conference, “Sustaining Innovation in New Jersey Climate Policy – Past, Present and Future,”. The conference was hosted by the New Jersey Climate Change Resource Center at Rutgers University, and agenda covered New Jersey’s state climate policies and climate goals and assessed the challenges and opportunities to accelerate efforts addressing climate change in New Jersey.
7. New Hires
 - Jennifer Sun, an assistant professor in the Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology, will be teaching “Microbial Biochemistry” in the fall.
 - In the fall, Javier Zavala-Garay, assistant professor in the Department of Marine and Coastal Sciences (DMCS), will be co-teaching “Geophysical Data Analysis” and “Physical Oceanography” with Professor Robert Chant.
 - Melissa Crawford, an assistant professor in the Department of Animal Sciences, who just came to SEBS in January, is busy setting up her lab through the remainder of 2025, and is looking forward to teaching undergraduate physiology at the whole animal and/or at the cellular and molecular level in Fall 2026.
 - Tianming Yao, assistant professor in the Department of Food Science, is already deeply engaged in the classroom this spring doing several guest lectures in the “Food Biology Fundamentals” graduate course. He’s eager to continue these teaching assignments in Fall 2025 and share his knowledge.
8. Soil Science Society of America and the Agronomic Research Foundation \$500 grant opportunity is open to K-12 educators for purchasing necessary equipment and supplies for conducting soil science lessons in their classrooms. Link to application <https://forms.gle/iikKY2n1kdqiUbQM8> Informal educator programs such as 4-H, FFA, etc. are eligible to apply. The deadline for applying is April 22.
9. Ag field day/Rutgers day will be April 26
10. At Fiddlers Elbow, Rutgers Golf Classic fundraiser for NJ Turfgrass will be May 5.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ray Cywinski extended his gratitude for the service John Showler has provided him and the Bergen District.

Matt Ward extended his thanks to John Showler for the engineering services provided to HEP SCD over the years. At the Spring Fly in, I had the pleasure to speak a number of people on the Hill including the lead environmental person for Senator Booker’s office and Poe’s office. House is looking at a 1.5 trillion cut. We only have three people on the Republican side on the Hill for NJ; the democrats can’t even put a lunch order in on the Hill. There is a wave coming that will impact us. HEP does not want to see urban agriculture cut from the farm bill.

Chairwoman Kovacs responded to Mr. Ward’s comments stating 1) this is not a political issue, this is not a venue where a political agenda is brought forward, state committee is apolitical 2) everyone should be reaching out to your congress people and senators 3) the points you have brought up



should be brought up at NJACD, SSCC is apolitical, and we will not discuss this from a political point of view.

The next SSCC meeting is scheduled for June 9, 2025.

A motion was made by Joe Lomax to adjourn and was seconded by Cormac Morrissey. The meeting ended at 10:56 AM unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Minch, Division Director

