

**STATE SOIL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE  
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES  
September 8, 2025**

The September meeting of the State Soil Conservation Committee was called to order by Ed Wengryn at 9:32 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**

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

**Others Present**

Sara Mellor, SSSC, NJDA  
Diana Diaz, SSSC, NJDA  
Ines Zimmerman, NJACD  
Tim Thomas, Freehold SCD  
Charles S. Buscaglia, Freehold SCD  
Michael Kent, Del-Atlantic SCD  
Rick Dovey, NJACD, Del-Atlantic SCD  
Jennifer McCulloch, Morris SCD  
W. Scott Ellis, Mercer SCD

**Others Present Online**

Audrey Winzinger, Burlington SCD\*  
Bob Amberg, Somerset Union SCD\*  
Christine Raabe, Ocean SCD\*  
Freehold SCD\*  
Janet Rekesius, HEP SCD\*  
Jessica Wyatt, Gloucester SCD\*  
Karol Blew, Cumberland Salem SCD\*  
Matthew D'Alessandro, Somerset Union SCD\*  
Michael Bonham, Cumberland Salem SCD\*  
Paul Califano, Freehold SCD\*  
Robert Reitmeyer, Burlington SCD\*  
Sandra Myers, Upper Delaware SCD\*

**\*Indicates attended via Microsoft Teams**



## **MEETING MINUTES FROM JUNE 16, 2025**

A vote was called to accept the draft meeting minutes from the June 16, 2025, meeting. Ray Cywinski made a motion to approve the minutes. Cormac Morrissey seconded; all Committee members voted in the affirmative.

### **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

Secretary Wengryn announced that there was the first farm closing under the new farmland preservation formula recently, which increases offers by 25–30%. The new formula takes in account the natural resources of the farm this allows the local farm economy be recognized for their value. He continued to share that there are over 200 applications in the pipeline, with 80 already receiving valuations. This additionally creates an opportunity for conservation districts to assist with conservation planning as federal support declines. Wengryn also shared he would be attending an upcoming national meeting and will focus on the importance of including conservation priorities in the next farm bill. A final remark he indicated agencies are preparing transition plans for the next gubernatorial administration.

### **EXECUTIVE SECRETARY'S REPORT**

Frank Minch reported the following:

- **Staffing:** Interviews were conducted to backfill position of employees who retired fill two key positions, an Erosion Control Specialist and an Erosion Control Engineer.
- **District Audits:** The SSCC Executive Committee went through and evaluated all the district audits. Letters were sent to all districts with audit findings, awaiting responses from three districts.
- **Transparency Reminder:** All audits must be posted online per state law.

### **SOIL EROSION AND SEDIMENT CONTROL ACT**

Frank Minch reported the following:

**Bernards Township (Somerset County):** Requested to relinquish exempt status and return program oversight to the Somerset-Union Soil Conservation District due to staffing issues and additional challenges. We want a smooth transition. This requires an action to be taken by the Committee.

- Effective date proposed: November 1, 2025.
- Motioned by Sylvia Kovacs, seconded by Mike Rigolizzo, passed unanimously to approve the transition.
- District manager, Matthew D'Alessandro confirmed they have all necessary documentation and staffing to assume plan review and full enforcement.

### **Engineering Report**



Frank Minch provided the report and stated in the absence of John Matos who is on leave Paul Schiariti from the Mercer SCD has picked up engineer questions received at NJDA.

- No major updates to report; engineering support continues during staff transitions.
- Rule revisions are still underway for The Standards for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control in New Jersey 8th Edition. The process is moving slower than anticipated. The revisions include new standards for offsite stability and introduction to new standard for solar projects that deal with stormwater erosion problems. These are in legal review and will be presented for committee vote once finalized.

### **NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)**

Julie Hawkins reported the following:

Had the first in person National leadership team meeting of the agency with NRCS Chief Aubrey Bettencourt emphasized a “Farmer First” strategy with **four pillars**, one farmer one file:

1. Technological upgrades-staff and farmers served
  2. Field-based service revival- staff in field with farmers
  3. Enhanced data use
  4. Program financing and simplification
- NRCS Plant Materials Center 60th Anniversary in Cape May on 9/25/2025 will feature the Chief as a speaker.
  - USDA and NRCS reorganization is on hold; comment period extended through September.
  - FY25 Farm Bill Program Summary:
    - 335 contracts
    - \$15.6 million obligated
    - 41,090 acres
    - 40% reduction in contracts from FY 24 yet we di have a 35% increase in applications
    - Nationally only able to fill one in every six applications
  - MOU with SSCC and districts is under review with subject matter experts developing a template.
  - Conservation planner certifications increased from 3 in June to 7 now in September

### **NJ ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (NJACD)**

Rick Dovey reported on the following

- Annual Conservation Partnership Meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 24, 2025, at Mercer County College. Planning is getting underway to compile an agenda.

### **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (NACD)**

Ray Cywinski reported on activities

The summer meeting was held in Milwaukee with low attendance due to federal travel restrictions.



- Concerns raised about USDA regionalization and lack of Northeast representation.
- Subcommittee meetings are continuing a monthly or bi-monthly basis. The most recent meeting topic discussed was invasive species in particular spotted lanternfly, research at Penn State shows milkweed has been shown to be toxic to them so go out and plant the native milkweed.
- Northeast meeting scheduled for Syracuse, NY 9/21/2025, registration is low. A pivot to hybrid options may be more of the norm due high cost of travel.

### **DISTRICT EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION**

Matt D'Alessandro reported on activities

- Continuing to work with EnviroCert to bring Professional Erosion Control Certification exam proctoring to NJ.
- Next meeting will be virtual, October 9, 2025
- Reduced meetings to four virtual and one in-person annually.
- Happy to help with planning the training sessions for the NJACD Annual Conservation Partnership Meeting

### **DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Dennis Contois reported the following:

- Flood Hazard Rule revisions are paused for public comment
- Proposed changes include reducing elevation increase from 5 to 4 feet and exempting film industry from certain requirements. NJ Is trying to be the Hollywood of the East.
- The hope is the rules will be adopted 12/31/2025 with implementation six months following.

### **RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION (RCE)**

Mr. Haberland reported on the following:

- Dr. Hassan Warriach, Veterinarian by training is the new Warren County Extension Agent will focus on pasture management and livestock
- Dr. David Lubic is the new Burlington County Agent where he will be supporting commercial vegetable and general crop production
- Atlantic County Agent interviews were completed in August focusing on commercial ag production
- Now accepting applications for senior program coordinator pesticide safety education program in entomology department
- A new Ag Viability Specialist, Dr. Seowoo Lee, began August 1
- On January 1, 2026 new agronomy specialist and fruit pathologist will begin

### **SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES (SEBS)**

Dr. Murphy reported on the following:



- Classes began last week, so it is a busy time on campus. Teaching Soils and Society with 17 students in the class, two offer soils courses are going on too.
- New Publications co-authoring
  - FS1374 Payment for Ecosystem Services and Climate Change  
<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.php?pid=FS1374>
  - FS1375 Sequestration of Carbon on Agricultural Lands  
<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.php?pid=FS1375>
- Rutgers won the National AgriVoltaics Award for [“Solar Farm of 2025”](#).
- Rutgers released new “Scarlet Sunrise” grape tomato. It was developed over 10 years through research done by Peter Nitzsche and Tom Orton. It is a sweet, crack-resistant tomato with a golden hue and a reddish blush.
- Forest restoration research shows southern oak genotypes outperform local ones. Research for this was headed by Myla Aronson, director, Hutcheson Memorial Forest, allowed research ecologists to experimentally test forest restoration strategies to enhance forests in New Jersey. Funding for the researched provided through a 1962 McIntire Stennis Act.
- [Study on Superfund site vulnerability to climate change](#) written by Hilary Sigman, an affiliate of the Rutgers Climate and Energy Institute and professor in the Department of Economics. The study reviewed more than 1,400 EPA cleanup decisions between 1980 and 2017. The results showed only limited evidence of adaptation. For example, EPA was slightly less likely to choose “no action” at sites in flood zones, meaning they put some physical safeguards in place. Extreme weather events expected by climate change can lead to pollution leaking into water, soil, and the air.

## **COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENT**

Ray Cywinski

- Inquiry posed on Bergen and Morris pending supervisor reappointments and performance standards.
- SSCC Executive Committee to review audit findings, supervisor reappointments supervisor performance standards finalize decisions.

A motion was made by Mike Rigolizzo to adjourn and was seconded by Stephanie Murphy. The meeting ended at 10:42 AM unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Minch, Division Director



