

**STATE SOIL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 10, 2025**

The March meeting of the State Soil Conservation Committee was called to order by Secretary Edward Wengryn at 9:31 A.M. Mr. 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

Edward Wengryn, Chairman
Frank Minch, Executive Secretary
Joe Lomax
Julie Hawkins, NRCS*
Dr. Stephanie Murphy* (rep. L. Lawson)
Ray Cywinski*
Louise Davis
Mike Haberland* (rep. B. Schilling)
Dennis Contois, NJDEP
John Kocubinski
Sylvia Kovacs
Mike Rigolizzo*

***Indicates attended via Microsoft Teams**

Others Present

John Showler, SSCC, NJDA
John Matos, SSCC, NJDA
Sara Mellor, SSCC, NJDA
Diana Diaz, SSCC, NJDA
Janet Rekesius, HEP SCD
Mike Kent, Cape-Atlantic SCD
Tim Thomas, Freehold SCD
Ines Zimmerman, NJACD
Rick Dovey, Cape-Atlantic SCD/NJACD
Jennifer McCulloch, Morris SCD
Scott Ellis, Mercer SCD
Jon Janowicz, USGS
Tim Oden, USGS
Mike Bonham, Cumberland, Salem SCD*
Christine Raabe, Ocean SCD*
Robert Reitmeyer, Burlington SCD*
Sandra Myers, Upper Delaware SCD*
Janet Rekesius, HEP SCD*
Marissa Appolonia, Gloucester SCD*
Daniel Pace, Mercer SCD*
Allen Carter, Cape-Atlantic SCD*
Ben Jorritsma, Upper Delaware SCD*
John Tiedemann, Ocean SCD*
Freehold SCD*
609-685-3144*



MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 9, 2024 MEETING

A vote was called to accept the draft meeting minutes. Ray Cywinski brought to attention two proposed edits:

- 1) Under Soil Erosion & Sediment Control the dates should be July 1, 2024, through Sep. 30, 2024, not 2025
- 2) Under NJACD - The registration fee for the NACD annual meeting for Geoffrey Allen is to be paid by Agri-Drain. This "scholarship" is for first time attendees to an NACD annual meeting. A limited number of scholarships are awarded by Agri-Drain and only one scholarship can be awarded per state.

Chairman acknowledged the proposed edits, and asked with those corrections all in favor, motion made by Sylvia Kovacs seconded by Joe Lomax followed by ayes from the other Committee members. The minutes of the December 9, 2024, meeting were approved.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Mr. Wengryn kept comments short. He acknowledged it has been an interesting time since January. He noted the role of our districts should be helping partners in agriculture, our conservation partners, and farmers. The State Committee wants to be an asset to the districts and help them go into the program areas we need to address particularly our farming producers.

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 discussion with legal counsel and the attorney general's office. Erosion Control Rules, Soil Erosion and Water Cost Share Rules, Conservation Cost Share Program (CCSP), need to get the updates completed and to the governor's office by the end of June, working to make it happen, a lot of moving parts including restructuring.
2. District staffing update- Karol Blew resigned from the position of District Manager at the Gloucester County SCD and has taken a position at the Cumberland Salem SCD. The Gloucester SCD is using district staff to run the office in the interim. An advertisement has been posted for a new manager.
3. Department staffing update- Tim Fekete retired at the end of February after 29 years of service with the NJDA! We are in the process of doing the paperwork to bring on a new erosion control specialist.
4. Supervisor appointment(s) – action: Supervisor Robert McEwan from the Morris SCD was in a probationary period, he has fulfilled all the outstanding performance measures. Improved attendance and gained training points. Mr. Minch asked to put him on a full-time status, motion



by Syliva Kovacs was seconded by Joe Lomax, chairman asked if there was any further discussion, none, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

5. District Consolidation: Cape-Atlantic and Camden SCD's are still working through their merger. They would like to have an option to increase the number of supervisor board members beyond five. To do that a statutory amendment is required, they are looking into it.

SOIL EROSION AND SEDIMENT CONTROL ACT

1. Engineering Report:

- Mr. Showler shared an example project request for assistance from Somerset-Union SCD that is very complex. It calls for the restoration of a stream with a buried culvert from decades ago, yet historic info of the area was lost. The package includes watershed analysis to calculate, significant drop in stream gradient, super critical flow, hydraulic jumps, rip raps, soil bioengineering, stream channel stabilization, all together about 1/3 of our standards wrapped up in one package. High level engineering. SCD are handling more than just hay bales and silt fence, staff are tackling high level engineering.
- Mr. Matos disclosed the assistance he provided to the Burlington County SCD in Pemberton Township at a farm where there was gully erosion. Met design consultant in the field to discuss possible solutions such as permeant diversions, slope stabilization outfall locations compliant with offsite stability.

2. USGS presentation: USGS New Jersey Water Science Center: Streamflow Data & Statistics Overview for NJ Soil Conservation Districts given by John Janowicz

- Covered USGS Mission and Vision- "deliver actionable information at scales and timeframes relevant to decision makers."
- Overview of NJ WSC- office in Lawrenceville (Mercer County), 70 staff, about 40 Cooperators (biggest NJDEP), over 225 real-time monitoring and over 300 discrete network sites, over 30 ongoing studies
- Programs and Projects-
 - Networks:
 - Surface water: Low flow network- been using it to monitor the drought conditions we have been facing. Data is readily available on the internet. Water quality
 - Streamflow Characteristic- statistics behaviors of streams throughout the state



- Surface water: charged with measuring water surface and discharge making it readily available, 174 real-time surface water gages (set up on bank of the stream or river, measuring water level sending data to satellites every 15-minutes data- useful for recreational to water supply management.
- 17 Crest-Stage Gages (for annual peak stage)- flood info
- 160 Discrete Low Flow discharge measurements per year from over 700 sites that helps establish the conditions during drought
- Groundwater Levels
- Groundwater Quality
- Water Quality (Two Bridges)
- Precipitation
- Provided useful links to access data
 - usgs.gov/streamstats
 - maps.waterdata.usgs.gov/mapper/index.html
 - dashboard.waterdata.usgs.gov/app/nwd/en/

NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

Julie Hawkins reported the following

1. Status of NRCS Operations- number of changes since the new administration has taken office

NRCS Staffing Update – 15% reduction

Position	Departmental Action	Duty Station
SO Asst SCE	Job Offers Revoked	Hamilton Square
Field Engineer (1)	Job Offers Revoked	Frenchtown
Field Engineer (2)	Job Offers Revoked	Frenchtown
Woodstown CET	Vacancy Canceled	Woodstown
STEM DHA Engineer	Vacancy Canceled	Columbus
Program Assistant	DRP ("Fork") by employee	Frenchtown
Program Assistant	DRP ("Fork") by employee	Freehold
Program Assistant	Resignation	Vineland
District Conservationist	Vacancy Canceled	Freehold
RCPP Program Manager	Termination	Hamilton Square
Planner	Termination	Hackettstown

2. Engineering/Technical capacity took the biggest hit



NRCS Engineering Technical Capacity*

Permanent Position Type	Staffing Structure	Status	% Change
Civil Engineering Technicians	4	3	↓ 25%
Engineers	6	2	↓ 67%

3. Detrimental losses with engineering will not allow NRCS to do the Farm Bill Program work that is on the books, the engineering backlog extends back to 2023.
4. NRCS was down 2,300 positions Nationwide during the first Trump Administration
 - Uncertain how long and how many positions NRCS will be down.
5. Hiring freeze will be a minimum of 90 days
6. Will impact partners, some partner staff have been laid off or furloughed
7. Doing statutory mandated work- mission critical
8. Required to compile a workforce optimization plan – agencies are required to develop a reorganization plan and a reduction enforced plan
9. IRA funding for new obligations is still on pause, fortunately we are able to pay those with an existing contract to complete existing work
10. May encounter leadership changes, and other workforce
11. Travel restrictions in place, meetings, trainings, and conferences have been canceled
12. Notified FY25 recipients that they will need to hire their own PE, NRCS does not have the capacity to do the work
13. Moving staff around to fill voids
14. Helping neighboring states fill their voids- example NJ assisting public affairs for CT
15. Looking to change funding priorities to deal with the lack of capacity
16. 2026 Cooperative Soil Conference – intent is for NRCS to attend and be a part of
17. Anticipating \$600,000 loss for NRCS NJ
18. Concerns where IRA is the sole funding source for partners
19. There will be an impact state cost share program

NJ ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Rick Dovey and Ray Cywinski reported on the activities

NJACD

1. Congressional Fly-in 3/26/2025
2. 2025 Envirothon will be 5/17/2025, being hosted by the Burlington SCD, planning and preparation are in full swing



3. Banking account access for members has been ironed out
4. 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

NACD

1. Regular updates on conservation funding rapidly changing; withdrawn, frozen...
2. Reaching out to congressional leaders to get some clarification on funding
3. National Conference in Salt Lake City- time adjustment in agenda allowed board members to attend more breakout meetings this year
4. Gary Blair elected to NACD president role
5. Great Salt Lake Tour– at 37% capacity, drought has caused drier lakebed, plus additional water withdraws from rivers that feed the Salt Lake

DISTRICT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

Mr. D'Alessandro submitted a report read by Frank Minch

1. The meeting will be March 13, 2025, Mr. Frank Minch is scheduled to speak on OPRA (Open Public Records Act), the Open Public Meeting Act and the requirements of Record Retention. These topics were requested from several employees throughout the state at our last Association meeting. It will be beneficial for both administrative and technical staff, especially Custodians of Record in each office.
2. The NRCS/SCD Meet and Greet has been cancelled at the request of the NRCS.
3. 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 for the SCD offices.
4. Andrea Farparan, V.P. will speak and give an update on the 2025 Envirothon on Thursday's meeting.
5. Matthew D'Alessandro will continue to ask the employees throughout the state for training needs and for topics of interest every Association meeting so he may work directly with the NJDA and NJACD to request and coordinate those trainings and events.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Dennis Contois reported on the following:

1. Personnel wise NJDEP hired engineers just before the hiring freeze, therefore at capacity
2. NJDEP Violation at Berkley Heights – NJDEP would not issue a modification without SCD approval was provided
3. Princeton landfill requested a modification for over two years, again NJDEP would not issue until SCD permits resolved gave approval- example of how SCD and NJDEP work cooperatively
4. NJDEP does use USGS StreamStats for the flood hazard program, in NJ if a stream has a drainage area of over 50 acres- engineering goes with what the flood hazard elevation is



5. Mr. Contois attends emergency response meetings four times a year. The last topic was about the World Cup coming to NJ at MetLife Stadium in 2026, there will be a 45-day fest at Liberty State Park for viewing of the games June/July 2026 via Jumbotron. NJDEP oversees the park, they are working on the planning and will be there for the fest.

RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Mr. Haberland reported on the following:

1. Projecting ongoing and likely increasing rate of retirement from cooperative due to anticipated budget austerity
2. Stakeholder input will continue to be important to use to id faculty and extension hires
3. Searching for four assistant extension specialists
 - a. Agronomy- vacant for 20 plus years
 - b. Fruit pathology
 - c. Farm viability
 - d. Marine aquaculture
4. Ongoing faculty search for a county agent in Burlington County
5. Perceived to also begin searches for agents in Atlantic and Burlington counties to replace newly retired staff

SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Dr. Murphy reported on the following:

1. This is busy time of year at the soil testing lab.
2. State Climatologist Dr. David Robinson has a site, <https://climate.rutgers.edu/usfs/soil-console.php> to go to simple soil “console”. The console includes present water content and temperature data from 11 of Rutgers’ well-instrumented NJWxNet stations. It updates every five minutes. May be useful to farmers and gardeners.
3. Research will most likely be impacted due to federal agency funding freezes.
4. Indication of potential impact: Rutgers received \$560.1 million in federal funding for research in the 2024 FY.
5. Rutgers maximum indirect cost rate has been lowered to 15%
6. Rutgers University does not fund research, grants mainly fund research
7. University funds positions, yet to do the research they need grants
8. Christopher Obropta, extension specialist in the Department of Environmental Sciences, was awarded \$10,160,893 for projects related to Stormwater Management and Neighborhood Resilience for Disadvantaged Overburdened Communities – Newark, Paterson, and Perth Amboy – and for Green Infrastructure Training and Enhanced Entrepreneurship. Funding was part of an award of \$72,493,449 to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Significant cuts have been announced for NOAA.
9. Dr. James White, Professor in the Department of Plant Biology, and members of his lab were recognized with the Rutgers Agriculture Innovation Award for “innovations regarding endophytic microbes with applications in agriculture.” Root invading fungi that help make crops more resilient to drought and nutrient deficiencies.
10. Mettler’s Woods, a Rutgers-managed forest that is part of the William L. Hutcheson Memorial Forest Center, a 500-acre preserve managed by Rutgers and one of the state’s last remaining



virgin forests, was chosen for preservation by the Old-Growth Forest Network, a national organization with the goal of identifying old-growth, native forests and ensuring their protection. The Rutgers-managed forest, was inducted during a simple ceremony held on site under a canopy of trees, some of which have stood since the Revolutionary War.

11. The Soil Science Society of America and the Agronomic Research Foundation will be announcing a grant opportunity to K-12 educators for purchasing necessary equipment and supplies for conducting soil science lessons in their classrooms. Incorporating soil science lessons into classrooms helps students gain knowledge about soils. This grant program will provide up to ten K-12 educators per year with up to \$500 each to purchase supplies and materials, either one-time supplies or permanent equipment needed to conduct current lessons or lessons from SSSA's Soils 4 teachers website. The official announcement will be in the SSSA's News You Can Use email on March 13. For an early preview, here is the link: <https://forms.gle/iikKY2n1kdqiUbQM8>

12. Regional Soil Science Conference will be hosted in NJ 2026, working with Edwin Muniz to plan

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

The next SSCC meeting is scheduled for April 14, 2025.

A motion was made by John Kocubinski to adjourn and was seconded by Louise Davis. The meeting ended at 10:50 AM unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Minch, Division Director

