



State Conservation Committee

PO Box 2042 • Concord NH 03302-2042

nh.gov/SCC

APPROVED MINUTES

August 17th, 2023 – 9:00am to 12:00pm

Hosted by Department of Natural & Cultural Resources

Concord, NH

Members/Designees/Advisors/Staff present at Department of Natural & Cultural Resources

Dea Brickner-Wood, Moose Plate Grant
Coordinator

Ian Hanley, SCC Executive Director

Donna Hepp, Belknap and Carroll CCDs/ NH
Association of Conservation Districts

Shawn Jasper, NH Department of Agriculture,
Markets & Food

Richard (Dick) Lutz, Rockingham and Strafford
CCDs

Betsey McNaughten, NH Department of Fish
and Game

Barbara Richter, NH Association of
Conservation Commissions

Sabrina Stanwood, NH Department of Natural
and Cultural Resources

Pete Throop, Cheshire and Sullivan CCDs

Members/Designees/Advisors/Staff Attending via Zoom

Anton Bekkerman, NH Agricultural Experiment
Station

Darrel Covell, UNH Cooperative Extension

Scott DeBlois, Coos and Grafton CCDs

Jeff Holmes, USDA Farm Service Agency State
Executive Director

Emily Nichols, NH Department of
Environmental Services

Members/Designees/Advisors/Staff Not Present:

Rob Larocque, Merrimack and Hillsborough
CCDs

Rebekah Lauster, USDA NRCS Acting State
Conservationist

Guests Present at Department of Natural & Cultural Resources:

Rep. Judy Aron, NH House of Representatives,
Environment & Agriculture Comm.

Rep. Peter Bixby, NH House of Representatives,
Environment & Agriculture Comm.

Robert Johnson, NH Farm Bureau

Amanda Littleton, Cheshire CCD

Sen. Howard Pearl, NH Senate, Energy &
Natural Resource Comm.

Sen. David Watters, NH Senate, Energy &
Natural Resource Comm.

Guests via Zoom:

Pam Gilbert, Grafton CCD

Lisa Morin, Belknap CCD

Minutes Recorder:

Ian Hanley

Chair Throop opened the meeting at 9:10 am and welcomed the group. In-person and virtual attendees introduced themselves.

Minutes of the May 18th, 2023 Quarterly Meeting

Hepp moved to approve the minutes from May 18th, 2023. Richter seconded the motion.

Role Call Vote

Bekkerman- Aye

Deblois- Aye

Covell -Abstain

Hepp-Aye

Jasper-Abstain

Lutz-Aye

McNaughten- Aye

Nichols-Aye

Richter-Aye

Stanwood-Aye

Throop- Aye

The motion carries.

Supervisor Appointments and Re-appointments

Jasper motioned to approve the below listed supervisor appointment nomination received in the past quarter.

- Dean Anson, Belknap CCD (re-appointment ending 7/31/2026)
- Amy Bodwell, Cheshire CCD (re-appointment ending 7/31/2026)
- Dorn Cox, Strafford CCD (re-appointment ending 7/31/2026)
- William Hunt, Strafford CCD (re-appointment ending 7/31/2026)
- Jamie Irving, Belknap CCD (re-appointment ending 7/31/2026)
- Richard Sugatt, Rockingham CCD (re-appointment ending 7/31/2026)
- Rick Walling, Grafton CCD (re-appointment ending 7/31/2026)
- Denis Ward, Grafton CCD (re-appointment ending 7/31/2026)

Hepp seconded the motion. Hepp spoke about the contributions of Anson and Irving to Belknap CCD. Gilbert spoke about the contributions of Walling and Ward to Grafton CCD. Lutz spoke about Sugatt, Cox, and Hunt's contributions to their respective districts. Throop described Bodwell's contributions to Cheshire CCD.

Role Call Vote

Bekkerman- Aye

Deblois- Aye

Covell -Aye

Hepp-Aye

Jasper-Aye

Lutz-Aye

McNaughten- Aye
Nichols-Aye
Richter-Aye
Stanwood-Aye
Throop- Aye

The motion carries.

SCC Conservation Moose Plate Grant Program Quarterly Report

Brickner-Wood reported that all FY2023 grants were approved by Governor and Council. FY 2024 request for proposals was released on June 30th, 2023, and applications are due September 15th, 2023. The application review subcommittee will be meeting on November 8th, 2023. Moose plate sales have increased 8.19%. Jasper reported that Brickner-Wood's contract renewal was approved by the Executive Council.

Executive Director's Report

Hanley reported that House Bill 308 was recently signed into law by Gov. Sununu, and goes into effect on October 3rd, 2023. HB 308 reduces the number of state-level committee members required to be attending in-person to 1/3 of the total members of the body and allows members attending remotely to count towards the committee's quorum requirement. At the beginning of a meeting the committee will need to vote to allow remote members to participate. Hanley stated that by his understanding of the law the State Conservation Committee will be able to utilize this law, but county conservation districts will not. He further stated he has reached out to the SCC's Attorney General's Office counsel for interpretation on this point, and for clarification about if the vote to allow remote participation is taken by all committee members or just those attending in-person.

Hanley reviewed progress of annual plan outcomes. He highlighted Outcome #7, stating that agency representatives would need to prepare ideas for how conservation districts can more closely collaborate with state agencies, and suggested this may be a discussion topic for the February meeting. He then discussed Outcome #12, and suggested that the Committee explore opportunities for public-facing branding and the need for a logo. A discussion was had on different options for logo development. He also suggested that the Committee consider promoting supervisor recruitment opportunities at public outreach events. Finally, he discussed Outcome #13 saying that a subcommittee should form to develop a statement of conservation priorities, in following with the strategic plan's long term goals and objectives. Multiple Committee members suggested the November-February quarter may be the best time for availability.

Lutz asked about the Committee's available budget for the year. Jasper suggested that he and Hanley meet with Michelle Thibeault (NH DAMF Office of the Commissioner Administrative Assistant) to review available funds and present more information at the November meeting.

Hepp asked Hanley is he is planning on attending the National Association of Conservation District's Northeast Regional Meeting in September. Hanley stated he is planning on attending.

Throop called for a pause in the meeting so that guests could be seated.

Partnerships in Conservation Spotlight:

Throop resumed the meeting and welcomed the legislative panel. Introductions of those in attendance in-person and virtually were done. Throop passed moderating responsibility for the panel discussion to Hanley. Hanley gave an overview of the responsibilities of the Committee and how engaging with the legislative process and communicating with legislators is targeted within the strategic plan. Hanley overviewed suggested topics for the discussion including reviewing legislative activity from the recent session, potential state-level support for the climate resilience grant program, and future activity.

Sen. Pearl thanked the Committee for the invitation to speak and stated that he's interested in hearing about the needs of agricultural producers throughout the State. Rep. Aron thanked the Committee for the invitation to speak. She stated the House Environment and Agriculture Committee dealt with 27 bills in the 2023 session: focusing on landfills; food safety; and other topics. She expects landfill related bills to continue in future sessions. Rep. Bixby thanked the Committee and discussed the Agricultural Land Preservation program bill (HB 221) to allow NH DAMF to utilize funding to conserve agricultural land. Rep. Bixby also described the work related to a bill about improving energy efficiency on farms. Sen. Watters said they are following work in Maine related to PFAS and biosolids. They are also following larger scale issues related to biodiversity, agro-voltaics, and Inflation Reduction Act funding. He also described some preliminary thoughts on establishing a climate resilience council within the State and how other states have modeled similar bodies.

Littleton provided a summary and description of the NH Conservation District Climate Resilience Grant program, stating it was designed to fill the gaps in existing federal and state support for New Hampshire farmers. Rep. Aron asked what kinds of projects were funded. Littleton responded by saying primarily water management and soil health. Rep. Aron suggested that 0% interest or low interest grants from the State Treasury may be a successful strategy to pursue. Sen. Pearl remarked that the problem with 0% or low interest loans is that farmers who have had crop damage, such as the flooding seen during the summer, need a way to recover the money invested in the damaged/destroyed crops, not take on more loans. He praised the work of the conservation districts' rental programs to meet farmers' needs. Sen. Watters requested that Littleton follow up with the references and resources on soil health bills that have been created in other states. Sen. Watters questioned if a \$5 additional fee on real estate transfer funds through LCHIP might provide funding for soil health initiatives.

Rep. Bixby asked how much of crop damage is covered by flood insurance and other federal aid sources, what the timeframe is from application to farmers receiving funding, and what gaps exist that a state program could address. Holmes stated that accounting for damage is usually not started until after the growing season. He added that the FSA is looking to secure additional funding from Congress, and federal programs are not widely utilized by farmers. Rep. Aron stated that the federal government moves at too slow a pace, and cited flood damage from 2 years ago in Acworth that hasn't received FEMA reimbursement. She stated she is hearing from her constituents that they don't want to deal with FEMA. She would like to establish an emergency relief fund for the state, which would not require a federal disaster declaration. She

would also like to see matching grants available for available Climate Resilience Grant funds. Jasper said the state needs to develop a disaster fund, and he's been in communication with the Governor's Office about what kind of needs are most pressing. He continued to say he's hearing that federal programs are designed around the crop's wholesale value, and wholesale is only a portion of New Hampshire fruit and vegetable growers' income. He also stated farmers concern around the cost of crop insurance, and the return when filing claims. Sen. Pearl suggested that a combination insurance and grant program may be a successful model. Sen. Pearl said the soil temperatures have remained low due to high water content and its impacting when fruits and vegetables are ready to go to market. This may impact the cost of produce as they compete with other crops if they are outside their usual market window. This means that producers have a full crop, but can't sell it at market and aren't eligible for crop insurance claims. Rep. Aron suggested money for a program could come from the "rainy day fund." She continued that she has looked into other state's programs and that many states have emergency relief funds established. Sen. Pearl reiterated the importance of New Hampshire food security.

Hepp suggested leveraging federal funds becoming available over the next decade and making state funds available to match federal dollars. Rep. Aron suggested that the federal delegation could be helpful in acquiring federal funds to assist with the state emergency relief fund creation. Sen. Watters said working with Senators Hassan and Shaheen could be helpful in getting leftover funding from other programs that have expired. Hepp also discussed the work of the Committee and the NHACD to apply for congressional earmark funding and the work of the NHACD partner planners.

Lutz stated he would like to see the amount of New Hampshire-produced food at grocery stores continue to increase. Sen. Pearl said he would like to see a focus on developing local businesses, initiatives, and systems that support New Hampshire producers, such as seed and fertilizer producers and retailers. He stated he thinks this is an area that conservation districts may be able to provide significant benefit to local producers.

Littleton thanked the panel for their thoughtfulness, their interest in developing an emergency relief fund, and further suggesting it could be tied to investment in climate resilient practices. Sen. Pearl reminded the Committee that any legislative action requires a lot of work, and that every state dollar receives multiple requests from other areas of need (mental health, housing issues, public safety). Sen. Watters encouraged people to think of creative ways of acquiring funding, and developing an emergency relief fund over time may be more successful than a bill suggesting an immediate and large fund be created. Rep. Aron said that recent legislation around emergency relief for municipalities allowed for either a Presidential disaster declaration or a Gubernatorial disaster or state-of-emergency declaration. Throop stated that without the ability to get a disaster declaration and aid, many small farmers, who are particularly vulnerable to large percentage crop loss, as at high risk of going out of business. He also suggested that the declarations should be appropriately scaled (state, county, town) to allow those impacted to get relief. Jasper stated that any language in potential legislation be specific to allow the Governor to declare a regional disaster, and suggested a committee be formed to oversee how the funding is allocated.

Throop thanked the panel for their participation and consideration of the issues discussed. Hanley thanked the panel as well, and offered support for the Senate and House Committees' work in the future. Sen. Watters suggested that the Committee bring ideas for needed legislation to them so they can be aware on pressing issues.

Public Comment & Other Business

Hanley described a letter received from Grafton and Coos CCDs earlier in the day. The letter asked the SCC to consider revising membership requirements to allow the five conservation district representatives on the SCC to have alternate representatives who could come to SCC meetings if the appointed representative is not available. It was generally agreed that this would require a legislative change to RSA 432, and hopefully the new in-person attendance requirement from HB 308 would help alleviate this issue. Gilbert suggested looking into ways to make attendance more feasible for representatives who live in Grafton and Coos counties. Morin added that the district representatives are volunteers, as opposed to state agency staff who are on the Committee as part of their job, and to have a designee for those volunteers makes sense.

Lutz requested a meeting of the five district representatives in order to standardize what the responsibilities of the district reps are.

District/ Organization/ Agency Updates

Districts, agencies, and organizations discussed their particular program highlights.

- Covell reported that Amy Gaudreau is out on maternity leave. He reported that **UNH Cooperative Extension** is looking to fill Amanda Stone's previous position of community conservation state specialist, due to her retirement. Extension is also filling the Strafford County forester position (covers both Strafford & Belknap counties). Extension and Sea Grant has secured funds to hire a climate resilience state specialist.
- Nichols reported that **NH Dept. of Environmental Services** received 14 grant requests for restoration projects. 6 were recommended to proceed for full applications (due August 31st).
- Deblois reported that **Coös County Conservation District** has been working with farmers and Farm Service Agency to report recent flood damage. CCCD helped host a public timberland harvesting program that was well attended.
- Bekkerman reported that the **NH Agricultural Experiment Station** has lost some experiments due to frost, and experiment infrastructure issue due to storms. Three new faculty will be starting this year focusing on protected agriculture, dairy research specialist, and aquaculture. They are also working with NRCS to build workshop programs, and biochar trials with Strafford CCD in spring 2024.
- Holmes reported the **Farm Service Agency** has been working on activities related to disaster declaration for the spring freezes for 8 counties (excluding Carroll and Coos). FSA is working with farmers to get them into the USDA system to take advantage of NRCS programs. FSA is still working on relief efforts from previous years. Dairy margins are at an all time program low, and most farmers are part of FSA programs and are getting relief. Crop insurance isn't as well utilized.
- Lutz reported that **Rockingham County Conservation District** Manager is going on maternity leave, and the project at Odiorne State Park is progressing well.

- Hepp reported that **Belknap County Conservation District** received an urban agriculture grant. Stream restoration and town forest conservation plan projects are ongoing. Annual meeting is October 5th. Jamie Irving is the District's new Chair.
- Hepp reported that the **New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts** has received two proposals for NACD-Technical Assistance Grants. One is from NHACD for a continuation of the conservation planner program. The other is from Merrimack, Hillsborough, and Belknap CCDs for a conservation planner. Sarah McGraw-Small has resigned as conservation planner to join NRCS. NHACD is working on revising the cooperative agreement with NRCS and all ten districts have submitted plans for demonstration projects. The annual meeting is being planned for the fall.
- Jasper reported that the **NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food** are continuing to work towards finalizing the full time statewide Invasive Species Coordinator. This will be an in-house hire. DAMF is working with NOFA-NH to explore options for organic certification. NH is part of a northeast region group that has received a \$32 million grant. Jasper will follow up on what that will bring to the state later. NH has received a \$2.6 million grant for processing equipment and distribution, which they'll partner with UNH Extension for implementation of. The department is working on the Farm-to-School program.
- Hanley reported that **Sullivan County Conservation District** has been working with the Claremont Growers' Collaborative. Educational and outreach programs over the summer have been well attended. They are planning a demonstration project through the NHACD-NRCS Cooperative Agreement.
- Littleton reported that the **Conservation District Employee's Association of New Hampshire** have been meeting quarterly. The summer meeting was well attended and had a guest speaker from UNH Extension.
- Throop reported that the **Cheshire County Conservation District** held an integrated pest management and Pollinator-Palooza, which were well attended. 34 camp scholarships were awarded. All 5 application to the NH Farm Future Fund program were awarded funding. Funding for the Climate Resilience Grant 2024 grant round is ongoing. Veterans' Appreciate Month is upcoming in September. Multiple workshops and other events are upcoming.

Adjournment

With no other business to discuss, Throop closed the meeting at 12:06.