

## **Little River Healthy Watershed Collaborative & Source Water Protection Project Kickoff**

### **Meeting Notes, Feb. 23, 2021 (Zoom)**

**Meeting Attendees:** Co-hosts: Maura Robie, Jean Pillo, ECCD; Farmer panel: Matt Peckham, Elm Farm; Eric Young, Woodstock Orchards; Yoko Takemura & Alex Carpenter, Assawaga Farm; Dan Mullins, ECCD; Kira Jacobs, US EPA; Steven Winnett, US EPA; Eric McPhee, CT DPH, Drinking Water Division; Bill Purcell, USDA NRCS; Elaine Sistare, Putnam Town Administrator; Maureen Nicholson, Pomfret First Selectman; Hillary Kenyon, Northeast Aquatic Research; Maureen Marcoux, Northeast District Department of Health; Eric Lindquist, CT Office of Policy and Management; Laurie Barefoot, Woodstock Conservation Commission; Ruby Senkowski, Woodstock Conservation Commission; Paul Miller, Fairvue Farm, Woodstock Agriculture Commission; Jon Hermonot, Fairholm Farm, Woodstock Agriculture Commission; Robert Chang, Echo Farm; Jon Gradie, TLGV WQM volunteer; Bill Scalise, TLGV WQM volunteer; Leslie Holland; Ron Petro; Abigail Pinter; Marc Cohen, Atlantic States Rural Water and Wastewater Association (retired)

#### **Welcome and introductions – Maura Robie, ECCD**

#### **PowerPoint presentation, Description & Updates for Little River Healthy Watershed Collaborative – Jean Pillo, ECCD**

- Little River in Woodstock and Putnam has known water quality issues and it is a source of drinking water for the town of Putnam.
- Several past planning documents required for US EPA Clean Water Act § 319 grant funding to address the water quality issues, including:
  - 2006 - Little River Source Water Protection Plan
  - 2009 - Muddy Brook / Little River Water Quality Improvement Plan
  - 2018 - Roseland Lake Management Plan
- In 2013, USDA NRCS, US EPA, CT DEEP and the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) designated the Little River Watershed as a National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) watershed leading to:
  - Dedicated Farm Bill funds to assist agriculture producers to address natural resource concerns.
  - Larger conservation projects on farms managed by ECCD and funded by CT DEEP 319 grants to address non-point source pollution (NPS), farm owners and cost share from NRCS conservation planning contracts.
- In 2018, NRCS updated the standards for a watershed based plan and the Muddy Brook / Little River Water Quality Improvement Plan did not meet the new requirements, Little River lost its NQWI designation.
- ECCD has received NRCS funding to update the Plan to meet the new standards. Focus will be primarily on addressing agricultural conservation needs, but will also include updates on achievements since the 2009 plan.
- Overview of several large agriculture projects in Woodstock that benefited from Farm Bill cost share funds coordinated with US EPA Clean Water Act § 319 NPS funds from the CT DEEP managed by ECCD.

## PowerPoint presentation, CT Source Water Protection Project – Maura Robie, ECCD

- Project to update the 2009 Muddy Brook / Little River Water Quality Improvement Plan with focus on Agriculture to restore NWQI status and dedicated funding to farmers in the watershed.
- Plan updates funded by NRCS, *CT Source Water Protection Grant* to CT Council on Soil & Water Conservation and two RCPP grants.
- A few important updates to the plan (not a complete list):
  - Cost-benefit analysis calculation of what NRCS practices or set of practices (on farm improvements to reduce natural resource concerns) work best to reduce Phosphorus, Nitrogen, Ammonia in relation to cost and provide water quality goals.
  - On-site farm inventories of potential needs and farmer willingness/ability to adopt practices. ECCD staff asking to visit farms over next six months to identify potential natural resource issues and provide practicable suggested solutions.
  - Create an action plan to identify strategies to work with farmers to meet the water quality goals. ECCD seeking farmer and stakeholder input on additional farmer and community education and outreach.
- ECCD engaging with farmers and other stakeholders in the Little River watershed to guide & inform the plan update, **this is your plan as a community**.
- National Water Quality Initiative is a partnership among NRCS, state water quality agencies and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to identify and address impaired water bodies through voluntary conservation. Locally the NQWI team includes NRCS, CT DEEP, CT Department of Public Health Drinking Water Division, ECCD and others.
- Supporting Voluntary NRCS practice implementation to promote soil health, reduce erosion and lessen nutrient runoff with practice examples such as filter strips, grassed waterways, cover crops, reduced or no-till management and manure management to slow runoff, infiltration into soil & reduction of pollutants entering waterways.
- Goals looking to provide dual purpose: 1) benefitting natural resources and water quality and 2) increasing agricultural productivity and profitability with improved soil health.
- Nationwide successes since 2012: 3,700 farmers applying conservation practices on nearly 1 million acres, 11 impaired waterbodies had successful water quality improvement including North Running Brook in Woodstock. 2016 data shows about 1/3 of NWQI watersheds improved in at least 1 pollutant with about 80% of those from agricultural conservation practices implemented.
- UConn Extension/USDA Solid Ground farmer training workshop series, Feb-March: [newfarms.uconn.edu/solidground/](http://newfarms.uconn.edu/solidground/)

## Farmers Panel – USDA NRCS practices implemented with farmers

### Matt Peckham, Elm Farm

Matt, as a dairy farmer, thinks a lot about conservation and feels dairies in the watershed have a big role. He and his family are ‘active environmentalists’ instead of ‘environmental activists’! Started many years ago with a project working with ECCD & UConn covering manure piles with hay in the winter and was amazed at the difference in runoff that made. Matt has implemented many conservation practices with NRCS & ECCD over the years including adding roof gutters, a manure & leachate storage system and aerated compost facility. They are currently working with NRCS, ECCD and other partners on

improving their operations infrastructure and adding conservation practices to further protect Little River and Roseland Lake. He believes social media is a good way for farmers to communicate what is happening on their farms with the community. He and his family also offer many items from the farm at Farm to Table Market.

### **Eric Young, Woodstock Orchards**

Eric spoke of learning about soil health at SUNY-Cobleskill College, but really putting it into practice open urging of his mentor, Ray Covino an NRCS District Conservationist, as inspirational with his enthusiasm and knowledge of soil health and was impressed by NRCS conservationists' willingness to meet at the farm at 6:00 am! They started with NRCS about 5+ years ago doing no-till and rolling and planting directly into the cover crop. Worked really well on previous orchard ground, but took a bit longer with past vegetable fields as they had to fight off the seed bank for 3-4 years. Currently they are looking at better ways to eliminate erosion under fruit trees possibly with grass strips and a special mower and eliminate heavy herbicide use to control invasive species and weeds in kill (herbicide) strips. Added high tunnels recently as well with amazing results in vegetable quality.

### **Yoko Takemura & Alex Carpenter, Assawaga Farm**

Yoko & Alex have a small scale, no-till, organic vegetable farm is nestled between 2 rivers in East Putnam just outside the Little River Watershed and consider themselves 'soil farmers', explaining the need for having a healthy balance of macronutrients, trace nutrients and microbes and using inoculants. They grow about 160 types of vegetables for their seasonal farm stand and farmers markets and plant 3-4 different perennial cover crops to utilize living root and other soil health benefits. They are experimenting with cover crops and cash crops. They started off using a broad fork to prepare the soil which is a lot of work initially, but it gets easier. They've worked with NRCS for irrigation needs and are planning to add pollinator habitat, hedgerows & perennials. Four guiding principles are: maximize photosynthesis, increase biodiversity above / below ground, keep ground covered at all times and no till. They have a CT NOFA sponsored virtual Farm Tour to view on YouTube.

### **Agency member updates or statements focused on Little River watershed**

Kira Jacobs, US EPA – Looking at source water protection over the long-term. EPA, NACD, NRCS and other partners are active members of the national Source Water Protection Collaborative. One of the communication materials developed is two toolkits for partners on "How to Work with Conservation Districts" and "How to Work with NRCS." For more information on protecting sources of drinking water with partners, <https://www.sourcewatercollaborative.org/>. There are a lot of resources committed at a watershed level, state and federal. Free "Forestry Learning Exchange" webinar series. March 10th: highlights a variety of resources that focus on the critical role well managed forests play in watershed health and in ensuring safe and reliable supplies of drinking water. Visit the new SWC Forestry Learning Exchange web page at <https://sourcewatercollaborative.org/connect-with-others/learningexchange/>. If questions for EPA, [Jacobs.kira@epa.gov](mailto:Jacobs.kira@epa.gov), 617-918-1817 and [winnett.steven@epa.gov](mailto:winnett.steven@epa.gov) or 617-918-1687.

Bill Purcell, USDA NRCS - NRCS takes applications throughout the year. There are a few manure management projects currently in process in the watershed. They have various programs including

AMA, EQIP and CSP, which is taking environmental stewardship to the next level for farmers already in the EQIP program. He will be reaching out to let you know about an event to learn more.

Dan Mullins, ECCD - Thanked farmers for sharing great information and reiterated ECCD staff is on board to assist farmers in this project and asked all to spread the word to neighbors and colleagues.

Eric McPhee - CT DPH, Drinking Water Division – there is statewide GIS project being worked on by the CT Council of Soil and Water Conservation partnering with UConn CLEAR, US Forest Service, NRCS and others for developing a GIS mapping protocol to assess values and risks for land in sourcewater watersheds. This protocol will be used for scoring future grant applications for the CT DEEP Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA).

Jean Pillo - The Last Green Valley Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program Roseland Lake team was limited in the type of data collected in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. One shoreline sample was collected and sent to the US EPA lab in Chelmsford for cyanobacteria analysis, including microcystin concentration, last summer, but the results are still pending. Roseland Lake monitoring in 2021 will include a repeat of the shoreline sampling, and possible secchi disk readings.

**Next steps:**

- Reminder to contact us over the next 6 months if you'd like us to do a farm visit. We're looking forward to meeting you & helping in whatever ways we can.  
Maura's contact info: maura.robie@comcast.net or 860-319-8807
- We'd like to meet with this group quarterly, Save the date for our next meeting on May 5, 9:00 – 10:30 am.
- Links:  
YouTube zoom meeting recording <https://youtu.be/ndp91xpaLBY>

Mail Chimp sign up for meeting info and project updates <http://eepurl.com/hrsTjn>

Little River Source Water Team on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/Little-River-Source-Water-Team-115596970565754>