

**STATE SOIL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES
April 13, 2026**

The April 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; by emailing media resources for the Star Ledger, Cherry Hill Courier Post, courierpostonline.com, and nj.com 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)
Sylvia Kovacs*
Michael Haberland* (rep. B. Schilling)
John Kocubinski
Ray Cywinski*
Louise Davis

Members absent

Michael Rigolizzo
Cormac Morrissey
Dennis Contois, NJDEP

***Attended virtually**

Others Present

Robert Reitmeyer, Burlington SCD
Jennifer McCulloch, Morris SCD
Ramon Mejia, Ocean SCD
Sara Mellor, NJDA
Diana Diaz, NJDA
John Matos-Ramos, NJDA
Nicholas Lund, NJDA
Kelly Doyle, NJDA
Tim Thomas, Freehold SCD
Michael Kent, DelAtlantic SCD
Rick Dovey, NJACD, DelAtlantic SCD
Ines Zimmerman, NJACD
Francisco Orsini, NRCS
Matt Ward, HEP SCD
Andrea Farparan, Freehold SCD*
Janet Rekesius, HEP SCD*
Karol Blew, Cumberland Salem SCD*
Michael Bonham, Cumberland Salem SCD*
Paul Califano, Freehold SCD*
Christine Raabe, Ocean SCD*
Sandra Myers, Upper Delaware SCD*
Valerie Brown, DelAtlantic SCD*
Bob McEwan, Morris SCD*
Matthew D'Alessandro, Somerset Union SCD*
Joseph Lockwood*
Lisa Bernard, Somerset Union SCD*
Ana Olarte-Gonzalez, Somerset Union SCD*
Phil Roehrich, Morris SCD*
Robert Fenton, DelAtlantic SCD*

MEETING MINUTES FROM March 9, 2026



A vote was called to accept the draft meeting minutes from the March 9, 2026, meeting. John Kocubinski made a motion to approve the minutes. Joe Lomax seconded; all other Committee members voted in the affirmative.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairman Ed Wengryn:

- Rutgers University recently hosted a Climate & Weather Symposium, bringing agencies together to discuss climate impacts and policy considerations.
- Rutgers also held a Mental Health in Agriculture event addressing stresses on farm families and resources such as farmer-operated hotlines.
- Department of Agriculture worked with Vegetable Growers, Farm Bureau and Ag Society to put together a Women in Agriculture Leadership event that honored women agricultural leaders and practitioners.
- The Department continues advancing urban agriculture initiatives, especially those supporting farms under five acres to strengthen food access and community distribution systems.
- Preparation continues for upcoming State budget hearings, April 21 and April 27.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY'S REPORT

Frank Minch reported the following:

NJDEP Stormwater Rule – Major Agricultural Development

Detailed clarification on responsibilities under N.J.A.C. 7:8 (Stormwater Management):

- Municipalities have recently attempted to conduct stormwater reviews for Major Agricultural Development, causing inconsistencies. N.J.A.C. 7:8 Govern major development activity which is .25 acre of impervious 1 acre of land disturbance not tillage disturbance. For ag development to qualify also parameters oversite from CABD, SADC, to qualify via a wetlands permit, flood hazard permit or some kind of municipal permit trigger points to bring it into compliance.
- Minch confirmed that Districts retain primary review authority and must forward agricultural major development applications to NJ Department of Agriculture, especially when engineering review is required.
- Municipal parallel review is redundant and inconsistent with rule intent; NJ Department of Agriculture continues coordination with NJDEP to resolve jurisdictional confusion.
- Districts encountering municipal challenges should redirect inquiries to NJ Department of Agriculture or continue applying long-standing procedures.



SOIL EROSION AND SEDIMENT CONTROL ACT

Nicholas Lund reported on the following:

A. Exempt Municipality Review

- Districts were reminded of the April 15, 2026, submission deadline for Exempt Municipality Review materials.

John Matos-Ramos and Kelly Doyle, reported on the following:

B. Engineering Report

1. Gloucester District Visit – March 18

Staff visited Gloucester SCD to:

- Provided in-office plan review training, including emphasis on the Off-Site Stability Standard.
- Reviewed a warehouse project and offered technical comments.
- Conducted a site visit to the Silvergate Project, where improper contractor work caused runoff to bypass sediment controls and flow onto a state highway.
- Corrective measures (diversion swales, berms) were implemented after the district meet with the contractor and engineer.

2. Ocean District Visit– March 19

Met with a private engineering firm that has submitted several applications to the district

- Numerous unresolved comments and procedural misunderstandings were discussed.
- Some issues remain open; follow-up will continue.

3. Recertification Case – Legacy Project

A historic project originally approved before the Off-Site Stability Standard was in effect, subsequent site conditions revealed significant sedimentation problems after a rain event requiring revised engineering.

- NJ Department of Agriculture reaffirmed that major revisions affecting drainage may trigger applicability of newer standards.
- Hopefully the engineering team can communicate with one of two state departments to either tap into an existing NJDOT inlet or a wetland complex they can use by reaching out to NJDEP
- Districts must conduct complete first-level reviews before elevating submissions to State engineers.

4. General Engineering Reminders



- Districts must not rely on NJ Department of Agriculture to perform full reviews when basic plan completeness checks are missing.
- Repeated unresolved comments are not acceptable; districts should enforce compliance requirements, including denial where appropriate.

Frank Minch reported the following:

C. Report of Compliance (ROC) – Guidance Clarification

- Conditional Reports of Compliance (CRCs) may be issued only when seasonal or site constraints prevent immediate compliance.
- Districts must follow up by the compliance date, then issue a full ROC if all conditions are met.
- Final ROCs are strictly reserved for fully completed projects, not per-lot or phased approvals.
- Misuse of ROC categories could create legal vulnerabilities; a formal statewide bulletin will be issued.

Nicholas Lund reported on the following:

D. Erosion Control Ordinance – Peapack Gladstone

A 2024 municipal ordinance was reviewed after concerns raised by Somerset–Union SCD.

- NJDA determined that the ordinance conflicts with District authority under Chapter 251, particularly regarding plan reviews and inspections.
- A response letter was issued; the borough has not yet replied
- Matt D’Alessandro clarified it was a proposed land grading ordinance with a lot of erosion control language that cited particulars of our act.

E. Chapter 251 Policy & Procedures Manual Update

A revision workgroup is being established to modernize and update the Chapter 251 Manual.

- The first meeting is expected within the coming weeks.

NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

Julie Hawkins reported the following:

- Introduced **Francisco Orsini**, newly assigned from NRCS Indiana. Taking over for Liz Ortiz who is serving as acting state conservationist in Utah
- Assistant Chief Whitcomb and Deputy Assistant Chief Boozer are conducting state visits; NJ is expected within 30 days.
- A Producer Roundtable in Burlington County was well attended and extended to three hours; 11 farmers showed up, input from farmers who use NRCS practices, which is important to address concerns and new technology to consider that will help shape conservation practice standards.



- 1100+ applications received for the 2026 program are under review; pre-approvals and awards are being issued.
- State Technical Committee meeting in collaboration with the Ocean SCD: June 2, 2026 (aquaculture), with June 9 as rain date.
- The District–NRCS MOU agreed to by NJDA was submitted to the NRCS Assistant Chief on March 10, 2026, awaiting final approval.

NJ ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (NJACD)

Rick Dovey reported on the following

- Reported on the Washington D.C. fly-in, noting high engagement and productive meetings.
- Regional Supervisor Meetings scheduled: April 14, 16, and 22.
- Continued planning for the 2026 NJ Envirothon, with high school participation increasing.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (NACD)

Ray Cywinski reported on activities

- Stewardship week April 26 - May 3
- Reported national poster contest successes by 3 NJ students who will receive checks for their recognition from NACD.
- nacdnet.org webpage highlights [DelAtlantic forestry initiative](#) – compacity building, education and outreach, serving other districts
- Highlighted agenda items for the NACD Summer Meeting in Grand Rapids, MI (July 17-21). including urban/rural outreach examples addressing food insecurity in Kent County, and forestry initiatives.
- Northeast Regional Meeting will be August 24-27 in Willington, DE. Registration is open.
- April 14, 2026 marks 91 years Black Sunday that began the dust bowl

DISTRICT EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION

Matt D'Alessandro reported:

- Updated the Committee on June 3, 2026, statewide staff training being planned. Topics will include: OPRA, Robert's Rules, legal notice requirements, technical training (culverts, bridges, channel stability), off-site stability, exempt municipalities, soil compaction. Roundtable in the afternoon like the annual conference.
- Training is only for District employees, not supervisors or exempt municipalities.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Dennis Contois not present to report

RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION (RCE)

Mr. Haberland had nothing to report



SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES (SEBS)

Dr. Murphy reported on the following:

- Soil testing laboratory experiencing seasonal backlog due to volume and staffing shortages.
- Announced Rutgers events including the Tree Planting Festival (April 18), which is part of a research project turning gray infrastructure to green infrastructure. Plan is to plant 3000 trees of native species to create a Miyawaki Method forest on postal Plaza in Piscataway on the Livingston campus. It is on the footprint of an abandoned roadway that had pavement removed. Soil restoration was initiated using the scoop and dump method of decompaction with organic matter incorporation.
- Ag Field Day/Rutgers Day (April 25)
- Graduation/convocation events (May 17–18)
- May 4 Rutgers Turfgrass Research Golf Classic, the 30th anniversary, this year to support the Center for Turf Grass Science at Fiddler's Elbow Country Club in Bedminster. Funds that are go to faculty research, grants, scholarships and more for the Turf Grass Center.
- Provided updates on student service projects and research initiatives. Including 'RU Engaged' Byrne seminar, a one-credit course focused on the issue of food security. A group of 20 first-year students spent their Spring Break in New Brunswick completing a weeklong service program, where they built raised garden beds, unloaded and distributed food, served clients at the Unity Square Choice Food Pantry, and prepared meals with Elijah's Promise.
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Public & Agency Comments

Public Comment –

- Ocean SCD announced an April 22 Roundtable Event in Waretown and encouraged participation.

Next meeting 6/15/2026 in Trenton

A motion was made by Louise Davis to adjourn and was seconded by John Kocubinski. The meeting ended at 10:39 AM with a unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Minch, Division Director

