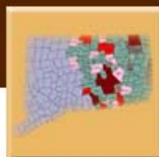
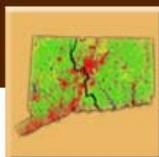




Eastern Connecticut

RC&D Area, Inc.



Area Plan

2006-2011



What is the RC&D Program?

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) is a program of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). It was created by a provision of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962.

The Secretary of Agriculture gave the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) [formerly the Soil Conservation Service] responsibility for administering the program. RC&D is unique because it is led by local volunteer councils that help people care for and protect their natural resources in a way that improves the local economy, environment, and living standards. RC&D is a way for people to work together to plan and carry out activities that will make their area a better place in which to live.

RC&D is based on a number of concepts that make it a truly unique government program. These concepts include:

- The value of public/private partnerships in making the best use of limited resources.
- The value of grassroots involvement in making decisions about local areas.
- Bringing USDA agencies together to focus on the same problems and opportunities.
- Leveraging limited federal dollars with private funds to accomplish goals.
- Working toward the goal of community sustainability.
- Achieving a balance between rural economic development and natural resource protection.

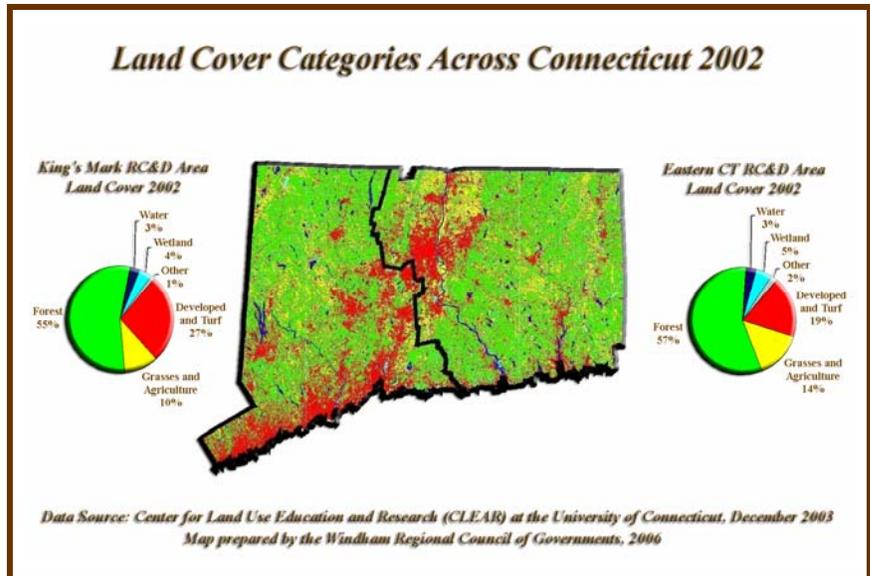
The Secretary of Agriculture authorized the first ten RC&D areas in 1964. Presently, there are 375 authorized areas in the country.

Interest in creating the Eastern Connecticut RC&D Area first started after an organizational meeting called by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources on August 22, 1965. Broad support for the RC&D area was evident by the letters of endorsement received from many organizations – both public and private – throughout the proposed RC&D area. An application for assistance was prepared and submitted in June 1967 to the Secretary of Agriculture for planning authorization. This authorization was received in August 1968. In August 1982, the Eastern Connecticut RC&D's Executive Council completed an application to enlarge the area. In April of 1983, the application was approved by USDA and NRCS.

The focus of the Eastern Connecticut RC&D Program is to help people care for and protect their natural resources, improve local economies, and sustain a high quality of life. The program derives its success from its ability to connect individuals, communities, government entities, and grassroots organizations. These connections and partnerships enable the development of shared visions and resource networks that work toward a healthy future for Connecticut.

What is the Purpose of an Area Plan?

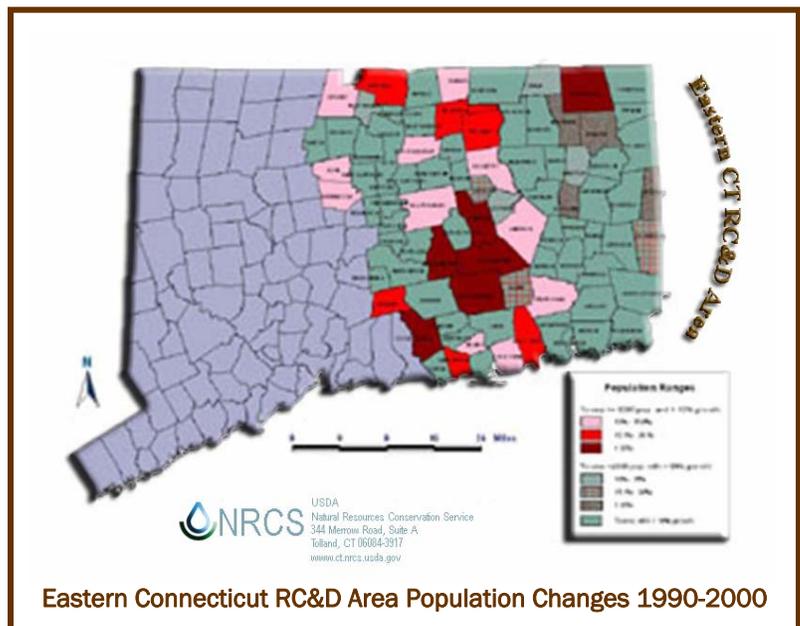
Planning and implementation are the central functions of an RC&D area. Strategic planning can improve the organization's ability to capitalize on changing conditions, improve overall productivity, and make better strategic decisions that result in the implementation of a more efficient and effective program. A well developed area plan provides a basis and direction for the Council to serve the area to the best of its ability. The plan is open ended and dynamic, and outlines the tasks the council wants to accomplish. It identifies needs and opportunities, as well as broad and specific objectives to reach each goal.



What is the Eastern Connecticut RC&D Area?

The Eastern Connecticut RC&D Area is in the north-central and eastern portion of Connecticut, and includes all of Tolland, Windham, Middlesex, and New London Counties, and a portion of Hartford County. The RC&D Area is coterminous with six regional planning agencies, and three of the five soil and water conservation districts.

This RC&D Area is sponsored by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Regional Planning Agencies, and/or Councils of Government, along with member organizations including, but not limited to, the following:



- Incorporated cities and towns
- Non-profit organizations/agencies based in the RC&D area
- Chambers of Commerce
- Private or corporate non-profit foundations
- Native American tribal bodies

Sponsoring members maybe added or deleted at any time, as determined by a two-thirds vote of the Council.

At-Large Members:

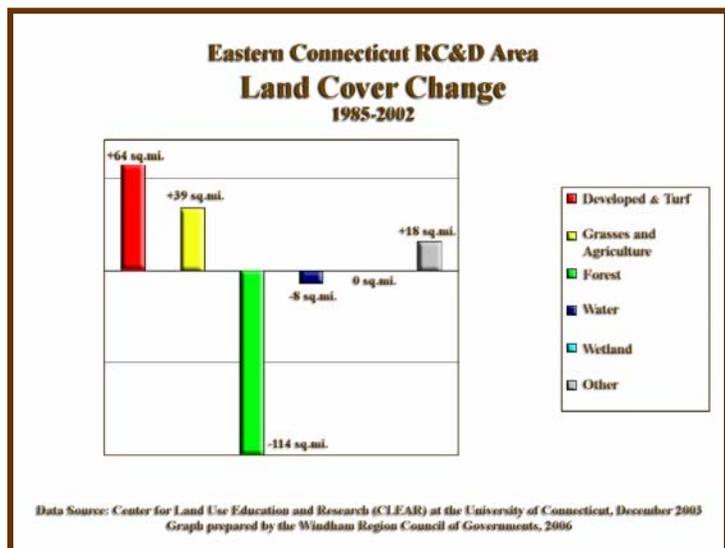
Individuals, private companies, corporations, and organizations with a desire to be actively involved in the corporation, and to whom the Council has offered this category of membership. At-large members may be added or deleted at any time, as determined by a majority vote of the Council.

Ex-Officio Participation may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA, Forest Service
- USDA, Farm Service Agency
- Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
- Connecticut Department of Agriculture
- Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service

Encompassing 1,655,000 acres, the Eastern Connecticut RC&D Area is made up mostly of small towns surrounding urban areas. Nearly 57% of the area is forested and largely under private ownership. Agricultural ownership represents about 12% of the area. The remaining land use is split between urban lands and water (tidal and inland wetlands).

There has been a progressive decline in the number of farm operations in the area. At first, this decline was due to the absorption of farmland by other farms, and the amount of farmland acreage actually lost was minimal compared to the decrease in the number of farm units. This trend is no longer evident. Today, when farm operations are closed, the acreage is converted to non-farm uses and the land is lost from production.



Much recognition has been given to the importance of preserving and protecting the state’s agricultural lands for their value as a source of local food supply and for the aesthetic appeal they lend to the Connecticut landscape.

In the eastern section of the state, Connecticut has done much to develop its parks and recreation areas. Many scenic and recreational areas have been preserved for present and future generations to enjoy. However, in such a small, densely populated state, there is a limited land and water resource base. Continued growth and development is creating an increased need to conserve and preserve the character and quality of the physical environment. The growth in demand for swimming, boating, fishing, wildlife, camping, and trail activities indicates a need for additional facilities and the rehabilitation, preservation, and careful management of existing areas.

Eastern Connecticut has experienced economic changes brought on by energy costs, business cycles, and the shift in national growth away from the northeast to the southern and western regions. In response to these changes, Connecticut has substantially improved its competitive business environment and introduced targeted innovative programs to address the needs of urban centers.

This plan was developed by the Eastern Connecticut RC&D Council with the assistance of resource committees and numerous local, state, and federal agencies. It is a summary of facts and data revealing natural resource conditions which provide the framework for the future. The Eastern Connecticut RC&D objectives that follow provide the direction and emphasis of the RC&D area's activities.

Vision Statement

The key to sustaining the uniqueness and high quality of life of Eastern Connecticut is to acknowledge and embrace the fundamental interdependence of urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Eastern Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) is to identify and champion initiatives that sustain that which makes our communities and environment unique, and to build upon our strengths and potential for a healthy future.

Creation of Standing Committees

A discussion of the mission and the vision of RC&D led to a process of discernment among Council members and key individuals about how best to channel resources and energy in the coming months and years. This was a process of identifying needs and opportunities. Focusing on providing options to established growth patterns, preservation of key cultural, natural, and economic resources, and building upon existing strengths, the Council established the following standing committees, which would advise the structure of both the Annual Work Plans and the Area Plan:

- Livable Communities
- Greenways
- Agricultural Viability
- Environmental Review Team (ERT)

These committees also represent the key areas of focus for the Council and the general approaches it has decided to take in addressing the major goal areas of the National RC&D Program.

Outreach Strategy

RC&D's Board recognizes that its membership (consisting mostly of representatives from conservation districts, councils of government, regional planning agencies, and other nonprofit organizations) cannot adequately gauge or address the needs of the entire eastern Connecticut area on its own. As a result, an effective strategy of outreach to residents and organizations is

crucial to success. As established by their policies and practices, the RC&D outreach strategy will include the following basic elements:

- **Open Board Meetings:** All Board Meetings of the Eastern Connecticut RC&D Council are free and open to the public. Agendas of these meetings are distributed and made available to the public. Meeting agendas, minutes, by-laws, and other updates are posted on the RC&D's website, as well.
- **Maintaining Key Governmental Partnerships:** The ongoing support provided by NRCS (through staff time and ex-officio participation) to the Council is essential to its success. As a result, NRCS staff is kept closely involved in the programs. Representatives from the State of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and staff members from regional planning agencies and municipal government are also invited to participate in programs, committees, and planning activities, and are kept informed of RC&D progress.
- **Open Committee Structure:** The standing committees of the RC&D Council, with the exception of the Environmental Review Team (ERT) Committee, are designed to be open in nature. While Board members participate in all committees, their strength lies in their ability to invite input and regular participation from outside. Individual citizens, farmers, non-profit board members and staff, municipal government staff, and state and federal government staff have all contributed to these committees, and will continue to do so.
- **Forging Partnerships:** The Council seeks to take on very few unilateral projects. Recognizing the membership of the Board and all of its committees is a strictly voluntary activity and staff support is from the good will of NRCS, partnering on projects with other individuals and organizations is useful. On a project-by-project basis, the Council, through its committees, seeks to identify and engage key partners to maximize efforts for the overall good of Eastern Connecticut.

Meeting the Goals of the National RC&D Program

In section 1528(1) under Public Law 107-171, an Area Plan developed for an RC&D Area must include one or more of the following elements:

1. A land conservation element, the purpose of which is to control erosion and sedimentation.
2. A water management element that provides one or more clear environmental or conservation benefits, then the purpose of which is to provide for:
 - (a) the conservation, use, and quality of water, including irrigation and rural water supplies;
 - (b) the mitigation of floods and high water tables;
 - (c) the repair and improvement of reservoirs;
 - (d) the improvement of agricultural water management; and
 - (e) the improvement of water quality.
3. A community development element, the purpose of which is to improve:
 - a) the development of resources-based industries;
 - b) the protection of rural industries from natural resource hazards;
 - c) the development of adequate rural water and waste disposal systems;
 - d) the improvement of recreation facilities;

- e) the improvement of the quality of rural housing;
 - f) the provision of adequate health and education facilities;
 - g) the satisfaction of essential transportation and communications needs; and
 - h) the promotion of food security, economic development, and education.
4. A land management element, the purpose of which is:
- a) energy conservation, including the production of energy crops;
 - b) the protection of agricultural land, as appropriate from conversion to other uses;
 - c) farmland protection; and
 - d) the protection of fish and wildlife habitats.

Many of these elements were designed to address the most pressing concerns in rural portions of the nation several decades ago. The Eastern Connecticut Area is relatively unique in the national RC&D Program, in no small part because of its level of development and stark contrasts. While a great portion of Eastern Connecticut is a thriving, agriculturally based collection of communities, it also (as a whole) is one of the most densely populated areas of the nation, and lies halfway between the huge metropolitan areas of New York City and Boston. Because of these special circumstances, the approach of the Council relative to the above guidelines is necessarily different from many other areas of the nation. Following are descriptions of the general goals of each of the RC&D's area of focus, and how they relate to national program elements:

Agricultural Viability

Recognizing that protecting and preserving farmland is only part of the battle, this area focuses on the additional issue of maintaining the competitiveness of farming as a business and a way of life against other competing pressures. This approach specifically addresses the land management element of agricultural conversion to other land uses.

Livable Communities

The work of the Council in this area will include the element of land management, specifically farmland protection, including an annual bicycle ride to raise funds and awareness for agricultural protection. It will also focus on community development, from the specific aims of improving transportation options, food security, recreation opportunity, and coordination across municipal and regional boundaries on issues of improving community quality and sustainability.

Environmental Review Team

The Council's continued support and guidance of this program most directly addresses the national program guideline elements. The teams, assembled from experts in the fields of wetlands, storm water management, fisheries, wildlife habitat, planning, soil conservation, water quality and others, provide guidance to municipalities to make better land use and development decisions. These teams are capable of providing expertise on virtually all of the elements in the national guidelines. In Connecticut, this service is particularly useful in the more rural communities where town staff often lack the staff, expertise, and budget to perform the type of in-depth and broad analysis the ERT performs for no charge.

Greenways

Given the fractured nature of Connecticut's municipalities, the Council decided to forge inter-municipal and inter-regional partnerships focusing on the development and preservation of green corridors, particularly along waterways. This will address the elements of land conservation, water management from the issue of water quality, community development from

the issue of recreational opportunities, and land management from the issue of protecting wildlife habitats.

The following pages present the guiding principle, goals, strategies, and project tasks for RC&D over the length of this Area Plan, as developed by the standing committees. The mission of the ERT was established through state statute and the previous RC&D administration, and remains unchanged. The ERT will continue to function as a service of the RC&D to provide communities with an expert and impartial analysis of environmental impacts of development and conservation strategies.

Agricultural Viability

Guiding Principle

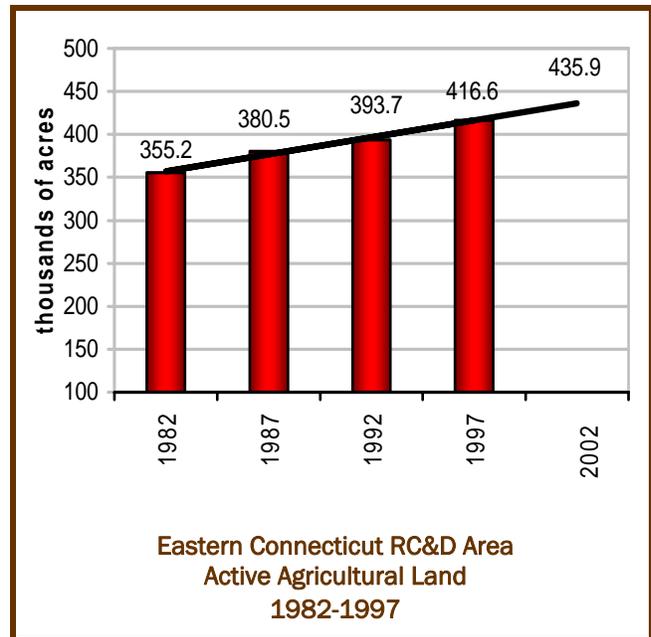
Agriculture provides critical goods and services to Connecticut's citizens and ecosystems. The benefits of a viable agriculture include economic development, cultural heritage, natural resource protection, food security, and a high quality of life for the state's residents.

Goal

To increase the viability and profitability of the Connecticut agricultural industry and landscapes.

Objective

1. Facilitate and coordinate emerging efforts by organizations, citizen groups, and governmental bodies to develop a statewide strategy to increase agricultural profitability and viability.
2. Develop linkages between agricultural interest groups and statewide efforts to develop green infrastructure and livable communities.
3. Initiate and support efforts to educate the general public, government officials, and the agricultural community on the benefits of a viable agriculture in Connecticut, and the tools available to ensure its survival.



Outside one of many local Connecticut farm stands.

Strategies

1. Develop and initiate grant project to promote the economic and cultural importance of farmland protection to municipal officials and decision-makers (2006-2011).
2. Coordinate the development of a regional Agricultural Viability Plan (2006-2011).
3. Work with like-minded organizations in agriculturally related public outreach efforts (2006-2011).
4. Utilize Clean Water Act, Section 319h, Nonpoint Source grant, funding to develop two regional nutrient management feasibility studies. Develop business plans and marketing strategy for products developed through the nutrient management initiative (2006-2009).
5. Develop a fiscal impact study with the Town of Woodstock to analyze the importance of farm land to the community and the impact of development and other land use changes. This study will be a model for other communities in the RC&D Area (2006-2008).
6. Support legislation to preserve and protect farm land in Connecticut (2006-2011).
7. Partner with the Celebrating Agriculture event to showcase the benefits agriculture provides to the region, as well as, the challenges farms face today (2006-2011).
8. Provide support to agricultural groups, producers and distributors to develop and improve marketing strategies for local producers (2006-2011)



Livable Communities

Guiding Principle

Promoting more livable communities is key to maintaining the unique quality of life in the rural, suburban, and urban communities of eastern Connecticut. Development pressures and sprawling growth are currently threatening the historic, natural, and economic resources of these cities, towns, and villages.

Goal

To promote regional cooperation in economic development and resource conservation to preserve the unique quality of life that makes eastern Connecticut a place where people want to live and work.



A participant of the very first Connecticut Tour des Farms, pulls into a farm stand in Glastonbury.

Objectives

1. Promote smart growth principles and regional planning through education of municipal officials and community groups.
2. Support the revitalization of downtowns and town green areas.
3. Support efforts to preserve open space and farmland.
4. Aid towns without planning staff, in conducting natural resource inventories.
5. Support plans for transit-oriented development.
6. Assist with grant writing for towns working on smart growth projects.
7. Assist with education projects on environmental and historic resources.

Strategies

1. Plan and administer *Connecticut Tour des Farms* bicycle ride in support of farmland preservation (annual and ongoing).
2. Support statewide GIS mapping of existing open space and build-out scenarios (2006-2008).
3. Building off the RC&D Municipal Capacity Survey, continue an ongoing schedule of meetings and encourage the exchange of ideas among the boards of each Council of Governments, Regional Planning Agency and other regional organizations in the RC&D Area (2006-2011).
4. Partner with the Ecological Landscaping Network to assist landowners in implementing ecological landscaping practices (2006-2011).
5. Partner with like-minded state organizations to monitor state agriculture and Smart Growth legislation and keep elected officials and the general public updated on current issues that affect the quality of life in eastern Connecticut (2006-2011).
6. Foster the Connecticut Land Use Leadership Alliance (LULA) training program to support sustainable community development (2006-2011).

Environmental Review Team Program (ERT)

Guiding Principle

The Council recognizes that Connecticut municipalities may face conservation and development projects that require additional objective technical assistance. The ERT is designed to meet that need in a cost effective and professional manner by coordinating a group of environmental professionals drawn from a variety of federal, state, regional and local agencies to form multidisciplinary environmental study teams to assist municipalities in review of sites proposed for development, conservation or preservation.

Goal

To meet the challenges of development and conservation through knowledge of the land, its resources, and the probable effects of development by providing a written report to assist land-use decision-makers at the local level.

Strategies

1. Eastern CT RC&D will continue to support and provide the administrative maintenance for the statewide ERT program in cooperation with the King's Mark RC&D Area Council (annual and ongoing).
2. Maintain 1-2 years cash reserves for program operation (annual and ongoing).
3. Continue to foster communication and cooperation among the organizations receiving "Fee Bill" money (annual and ongoing).
4. Develop and implement a strategy to retain existing team members and agency(s) support and obtain new team members as necessary (annual and ongoing).
5. Incorporate GIS mapping and analysis into ERT reports (2006 -2011).
6. Maintain a separate ERT program website (ongoing).
7. Continue to assess and modify the ERT program by evaluating and reporting on yearly project surveys (annual and ongoing).
8. Continue to update brochures and distribution lists (annual and ongoing).
9. Continue dialog with the CT Department of Environmental Protection officials for continued support and innovative use of the ERT program (ongoing).
10. Provide for the posting of ERT reports on the web (2006-2011).
11. Develop a searchable data base for the public that will provide more detailed information on reviews conducted (2006-2008).

Greenways

Guiding Principle

Greenways provide prime opportunity to connect people and communities, linking rural, suburban, and urban portions of eastern Connecticut while providing habitat protection and expanding open space and recreational opportunities.

Goal

To increase the focus on the development of greenways as a method of connecting rural, suburban, and urban communities – particularly along river corridors.



Participants look over information at a Greenways meeting.

Objective

1. Investigate potential open space and greenway linkages across municipal and regional boundaries, with a special focus on river corridors and watersheds.
2. Find and coordinate interested citizens, groups, organizations and governmental bodies to participate in greenway development.
3. Support the development of greenways through resource coordination, grant initiatives, establishment of watershed or greenways organizations, pursuit of greenways designation and educational outreach.

Strategies

1. Plan and complete a greenway trail along South Branch of Park River in Hartford (2006-2011).
2. Partner to develop connections into and through Hartford by building on the South Branch initiative (2006-2011).
3. Assist in the development of a watershed group along the North Branch of the Park River in Hartford (2006-2011).
4. Partner with The Green Valley Institute, The CT Department of Environmental Protection and others to develop a model to assist communities with their greenway and open space mapping and planning initiatives (2006-2011).
5. Continue to coordinate and partner on greenway and trail identification and statewide mapping efforts (2006-2011).

“The Eastern Connecticut RC&D Council agrees that the RC&D Program will be conducted in compliance with the non-discrimination provisions as contained in Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-259) and other nondiscrimination statutes; namely, Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and in accordance with the regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7CFR-15, Subparts A and B) that provide that no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or handicap/disability be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial (or technical) assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture or any agency thereof.”

The Eastern Connecticut RC&D Council agrees that the signing of this document constitutes agreement to comply with Federal laws concerning restrictions on lobbying, a drug-free workplace, and responsibilities for non-procurement, suspension, and debarment, and State review.

The Eastern Connecticut RC&D Council hereby adopts this RC&D Area Plan and agrees to use effectively the assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to realize the goals and objectives outlined herein.
Eastern Connecticut RC&D Council, Connecticut

By: _____
Chairperson Date

Attest: _____
Council Secretary

This action authorized at an official meeting of the Eastern Connecticut RC&D Council on

Date

U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service

The State Conservationist hereby acknowledges the attached Area Plan of _____
as meeting the requirements under Public Law 97-98 to receive assistance from USDA.

Acknowledged by:

State Conservationist Date