



April 22, 2021

TO: The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System

This letter of cooperation from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is in reference to St. Michael's College's enrollment of 160.681 acres of land in the USDA NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Wetland Reserve Easement component (ACEP WRE). By enrolling the land in ACEP WRE the College made an in perpetuity commitment to manage those 160.681 acres as restored wetlands and riparian areas to maximize wildlife habitat and water quality benefits by selling and extinguishing the development and agricultural use rights via a conservation easement with the Federal government. The College additionally agreed to collaborate with the USDA NRCS in the restoration of the wetlands and riparian areas within the easement.

The USDA NRCS in Vermont currently holds 68 wetlands easements on 5,063 acres and the College's is the first with an academic institution of any kind in Vermont. This is also the first USDA NRCS Vermont wetlands easement along the main stem of the Winooski River and it is located in an ecologically diverse area. The wetlands restoration work will involve restoring pre-agricultural manipulation wetlands hydrology in addition to significant riparian area restoration, including the reforestation of approximately 50 acres of agricultural fields. These fields have been in continuous corn production for decades with little to no cover cropping and significant erosion issues. Now with the easement in place, these areas are naturally regenerating into trees and will have supplemental tree and shrub plantings to increase species diversity as well. This unique collaboration with the College will allow for ongoing research to occur on the easement that can inform wetlands and riparian restoration projects throughout Vermont and New England.

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The USDA NRCS in Vermont looks forward to collaborating with St. Michael's College in restoring the wetlands and riparian areas and implementing robust ecological monitoring of the flora and fauna within their ACEP Wetlands Reserve Easement.

Sincerely,

James Eikenberry
Wetlands Specialist

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