North Central Conservation District

Annual Report

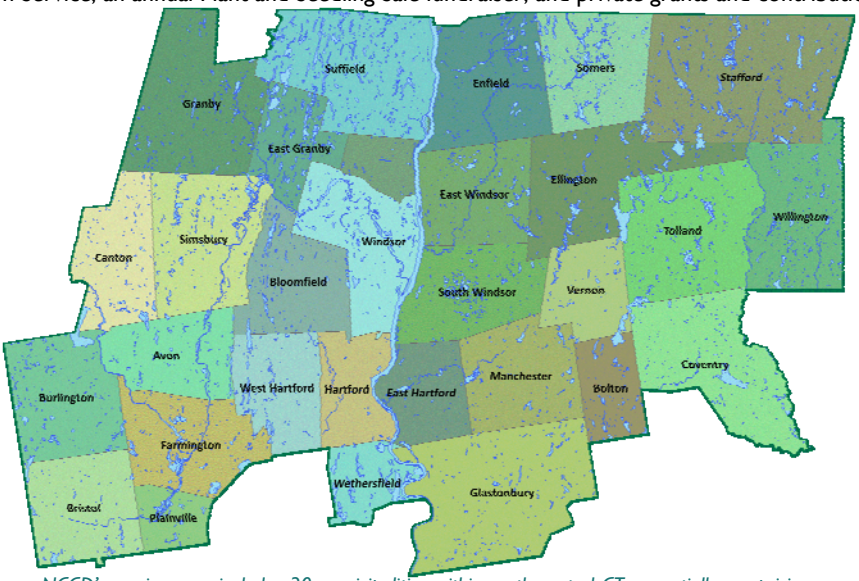
Fiscal Year 2019-2020

www.conservect.org/northcentral

North Central Conservation District

Introduction

This Annual Report summarizes work performed by the North Central Conservation District (NCCD, or the District) during the 2019-2020 fiscal year. NCCD is one of five Conservation Districts created by state statute to "assist the Commissioner of Environmental Protection in identifying and remedying the problems of soil and water erosion," and is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. NCCD is funded through State of CT funding (Passport to Parks), municipal contributions, US EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 non-point source grants, technical assistance contracts with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, an annual Plant and Seedling Sale fundraiser, and private grants and contributions.



NCCD's service area includes 30 municipalities within north central CT, essentially comprising the area within the northern Connecticut River watershed. NCCD's office is located in Vernon.

The District is governed by a volunteer board of directors comprised of local landowners with expertise and interest in the management and protection of our natural resources. The District is an active member of the CT Envirothon Steering Committee, CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation, CT Association of Conservation Districts, and CT Resource Conservation and Development Council. Meetings are open to the public and are typically held at 7:00pm on the fourth Wednesday of each month at the Tolland County Agricultural Center, 24 Hyde Avenue, Vernon (currently virtual due to the pandemic). Visit www.conservect.org/northcentral or call (860) 875-3881 to learn more. The District welcomed a new board member this year, Robert Morra, who brings bright new perspective to the board. The District also established a new staff position of Natural Resource Scientist, and we were delighted to welcome Melinda (Mindy) Gosselin to our team, who immediately began contributing to our work, despite the pandemic.

Board of Supervisors

Jack Collins, *Chairman*	Enfield
Jeff Folger, *Vice Chairman*	Ellington
Lin Marino, *Secretary/Treasurer*	Tolland
Dan Camerota	West Hartford
Bob DePietro	Bolton
Harold Eastwood	Somers
Michael Mocko	Stafford Springs
Robert Morra	Bolton
Jane Seymour	Tolland

Staff

Joanna Shapiro	Executive Director
Barbara Kelly	Program Coordinator
Mindy Gosselin	Natural Resource Scientist
John Dudula	Natural Resource Specialist
Ruth Miller	Landscape Specialist
Tina Pelletier	Bookkeeper

Year in Review

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a significant concern in the middle of the fiscal year, and impacted typical staff and board operations. While District work and staffing levels continued uninterrupted, for the safety of staff and board members, work and meetings abruptly shifted to remote and virtual settings starting in mid-March. The Tolland County Agricultural Center and the town halls that we work within were closed to the public, and office hours were adjusted to limit contact. Nevertheless, the District provided valuable *technical services* to municipalities by *reviewing development plans* and *verifying wetland boundaries*. District staff also served as municipal *wetland agent* to inland wetland agencies in Somers, Bolton, expanded to Coventry this fiscal year, and continued to serve as interim wetland agent in Tolland as well. Our primary services to towns included assistance to land use staff and commissions throughout the local regulatory process, and evaluating proposed *erosion control measures, stormwater management, and wetland impacts* of development projects. The District also assisted many area residents with natural resource issues; providing technical support related to *invasive plant control, native planting guidance, pond maintenance, navigation of local regulations, and conservation and financial assistance programs* available for agricultural producers and landowners.

Despite the pandemic, NCCD held the only Conservation District *Plant and Seedling Sale* in CT during the last weekend of April. The sale was by pre-order only. A limited number of NCCD staff and volunteers from the Master Gardener program wore masks and organized curbside pickup of plant orders, which went remarkably smoothly. Patrons were grateful for a safe opportunity to purchase native plants and to begin working in their yards. The event promoted *native plants, ecological landscaping,* and open space enjoyment.

Plant Sale Pre-Orders Arranged in rows within TAC's Green Barn

Curbside Plant-Sale Setup at the Barn at Hawk Hill Farm

This year also marked our first plant sale in a new west-of-the-river location, Hawk Hill Farm in Bloomfield. The Wintonbury Land Trust generously allowed us to use their beautifully restored barn for plant pick-up. Due to the pandemic, we were unable to hold our native landscaping workshop before the plant sale, or a co-sponsored guided trail walk at Hawk Hill Farm during our plant sale.

NCCD coordinated the *Connecticut Envirothon program*, a natural resources competition for high school students. The academic year began as usual, with statewide hands-on workshops held throughout the year, training students in the subjects of aquatics, forestry, and soils, yet the wildlife workshop scheduled for the end of March and field day event scheduled for May were canceled due to the pandemic. The current issue topic for 2019-2020 was "Water Resources Management: Local Control and Local Solutions". The CT Envirothon Steering Committee quickly adapted and moved the competition online. Teams completed objective station tests via a virtual platform, and submitted Current Issue PowerPoint presentations in lieu of the usual oral presentations. Ultimately, 12 teams from 9 schools participated. Prizes and T-shirts were awarded to each team, with special recognition to the top 3 scoring teams and station winners. Northwestern Regional #7 High School earned the top two places.

Winning team from Northwestern Regional 7

Open for project information

Grant/Project Work

While the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in cancelation of several planned native landscaping projects, NCCD hopes to continue this work next fiscal year. NCCD was fortunate to be able to continue Clean Water Act 319 Nonpoint Source Projects and Farmland Restoration Grant assistance, as depicted below.

Clean Water Act Nonpoint Source Project Updates

This fiscal year, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, NCCD completed several projects with crucial contributions from partners and stakeholders, and primary funding through the EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 nonpoint source program, locally administered by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP).

Broad Brook Implementation—Following completion of the Broad Brook Watershed Based Plan Phase 2, 319 funding was secured to implement the first of many potential water quality enhancement projects within the watershed. NCCD had partnered with NRCS, UConn Extension, and agricultural producers to identify priority projects, many of which involved agricultural land. The first project was completed this fiscal year, targeting removal of two unlined manure pits and converting heavy use livestock areas into no-till agricultural fields. These areas closely abut Broad Brook, as well as associated wetlands and tributaries, and the project was designed to reduce nutrient and bacteria levels within Broad Brook. Over a century of intensive agricultural usage has contributed to impairments, yet producers are now committed to improving water quality.

Views of Area 1 pasture, feed lot, and unlined manure pit pre-construction:

Views of Area 1 incremental grading during construction, and leveled and planted in no-till crops following construction:

Views of Area 2 pasture and unlined manure pit pre-construction; during construction; leveled and seeded and germinating post-construction; and following first cutting hay harvest:

North Branch Park River—The District, in partnership with the North Branch Park River Watershed Coordinator, completed work on two CWA Section 319 nonpoint source contracts, continuing the multi-phase project adjacent to parking areas serving UConn School of Law and Hartford Seminary. Under one of these contracts, repairs were made to an existing basin that had been impacted by a large recurring sinkhole and invasive plants. This is one of three bioretention basins on site, designed to treat polluted stormwater from the adjacent parking areas before reaching an eroded stormwater channel along a wooded slope and discharging into the North Branch Park River. Restoration work completed included investigation and repair of the sinkhole, resetting of the curb, removal of invasive plants, and replanting of the basin with native plants. Under the second contract, an engineered plan was designed to repair the eroded channel that receives runoff from the parking areas. Several years following initial implementation of the three bioretention basins, the eroded receiving channel has begun to stabilize naturally, and now project partners and regulatory agencies have agreed to pause the permitting process. Remaining 319 funds allowed installation of native plants along the channel, to further improve stability.

View of the sinkhole and invasive plants pre-construction, and the repaired area immediately following construction.

A variety of native shrubs, grasses, and trees were planted both in the basin and channel.

Farmland Restoration Grant

The District has continued to assist the Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAG) with implementation of the popular and prolific Farmland Restoration Program, intended to increase food and fiber production state-wide, and help farmers and landowners to reclaim former production farmland or to expand existing farmland. The program can fund various practices that will expand agricultural production, including tree removal, well development, stump removal, access improvement, and fence installation. The District's role in the program is to provide technical assistance to producers, complete initial site inspections, and prepare Restoration Plans. This unique opportunity has allowed District staff to assist many farms throughout the state. Below are two examples from this fiscal year—including invasive and overgrown plant removal, and drainage improvements in East Windsor; and six acres of tree/brush/stump removal to expand cropland in Ellington.

Before-Overgrowth & drainage issues in East Windsor

After-Overgrowth removed, swales repaired to improve drainage

Before-Woodland abutting cropland in Ellington

After-Newly expanded field cleared and ready for crop production

NORTH CENTRAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT, INC.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT*

July 2019—June 2020

Income

State of CT	100,000
CWA Section 319 Grant Projects	78,815
Fee for Service	65,568
Plant/Seedling Sale	43,185
Park River—State of CT (FY19&20)	40,000**
CT DoAG Farmland Restoration	35,501
Town Contributions	32,697
Environmental Review Team Grant	20,000
NACD Technical Assistance Grant	4,000
Interest/Unrealized Investment	-1,323
Donation Income	51
Total	**418,494**

Expenses

Salaries & Benefits	176,664
DEEP Grant Projects	62,057
Seedling/Fish	32,072
Contracted Work (FLRP & Park River)	27,536
Taxes and Insurance	14,537
Rent for Office Space	8,208
Office Expenses/Postage/Equipment	6,162
Auto Expenses and Mileage	3,692
Financial Review/Accountant	2,500
Employee Development	2,177
Dues/Marketing/Misc	608
Total	**336,213**

*Cash basis. Detailed financial statement available upon request.

**FY 18-19 funding deposited at start of FY 19-20, resulting in two years of funding reflected.