North Central Conservation District

Annual Report

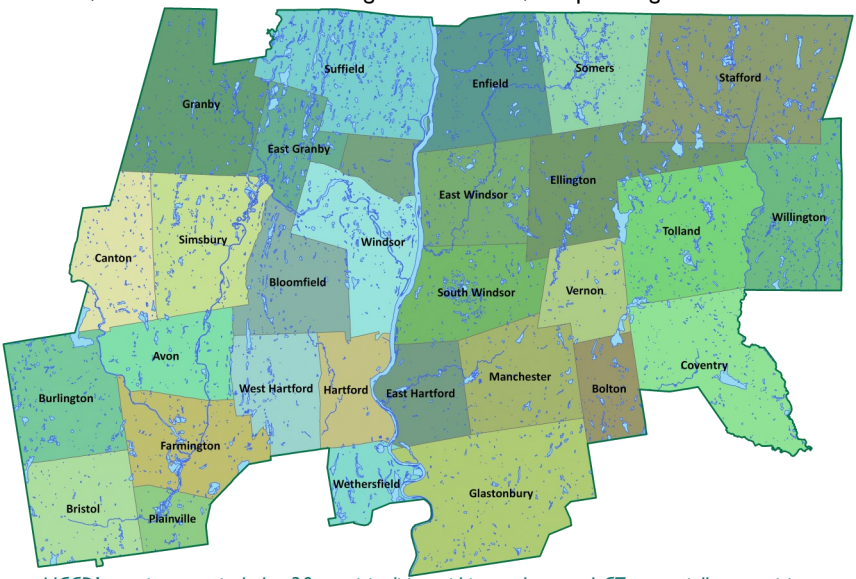
Fiscal Year 2020-2021

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 2020-2021 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. Long-time Vice Chair, Jeff Folger, an incredibly active board member with tremendous knowledge and contributions, stepped down from the NCCD board in October 2020. The District was thrilled that board member Jane Seymour took on the role of Vice Chair. As for staff, Mindy transitioned out of her full-time position, into a part-time role.

Board of Supervisors

Jack Collins, *Chair*	Enfield
Jeff Folger, *Vice Chair**	Ellington
**Stepped down October 2020*	
Jane Seymour, *Vice Chair*	Tolland
Lin Marino, *Secretary/Treasurer*	Tolland
Dan Camerota	West Hartford
Bob DePietro	Bolton
Harold Eastwood	Somers
Michael Mocko	Stafford Springs
Robert Morra	Bolton

Staff

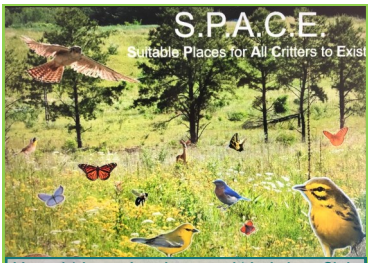
Joanna Shapiro	Executive Director
Barbara Kelly	Program Coordinator
Mindy Gosselin	Natural Resource Scientist*
**Transitioned to part-time coordinator in May 2021*	
John Dudula	Natural Resource Specialist
Ruth Miller	Landscape Specialist
Tina Pelletier	Bookkeeper

Year in Review

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact typical staff and board operations throughout the fiscal year. While District work continued without interruption, for the safety of staff and board members, work and meetings abruptly continued largely in remote and virtual settings, with some increased office presence toward the end of the fiscal year, as vaccination rates increased and the Tolland County Agricultural Center and town halls loosened restrictions. Throughout these varying conditions, 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, and also Coventry for most of this fiscal year. 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 troubleshooting, navigation of local regulations, and conservation and financial assistance programs* available for agricultural producers and landowners.

Native plugs & shrubs ready to be put in orders

NCCD held its second pandemic *Plant and Seedling Sale* in April. The sale was once again by pre-order only. This year, the plant sale was a tremendous success, with unprecedented sales. A limited number of NCCD staff and volunteers from the Master Gardener program helped organized curbside pickup of plant orders. The extremely high volume of plant material was overwhelming, with staff and volunteers contributing many extra hours to ensure a smooth pre-order pick-up. The event promoted *native plants, ecological landscaping,* and open space enjoyment.



Virtual Native Landscaping Workshop Slide

This year, we were able to offer a *Native Landscaping Workshop* leading up to the sale, albeit a virtual workshop this year. While an in-person workshop is ideal, the virtual platform seemed more convenient for residents, as attendance was significantly higher than average. The Wintonbury Land Trust once again generously allowed us to use their beautifully restored barn for our west-of-the-river plant pick-up. We also co-sponsored guided trail walk at Hawk Hill Farm at the conclusion of the plant sale.

Members of CT Envirothon Steering Comm.

NCCD coordinated the *Connecticut Envirothon program*, a natural resources competition for high school students. Due to the pandemic, all workshops were held virtually, training students in the subjects of aquatics, forestry, wildlife, soils, and the current issue topic for 2020-2021: "Water Resource Awareness, Connections and Impacts". The CT Envirothon Steering Committee improved upon the prior year's virtual program, with more sophisticated workshops and testing formats. Teams completed objective station tests via a virtual platform, and submitted Current Issue PowerPoint presentations in lieu of the usual oral presentations. Of 12 teams, Marvelwood School earned the top score, and competed in a virtual North American Envirothon competition.

Winning Advisor&Team from Marvelwood School

Open for project information

Grant/Project Work

Project Updates

This fiscal year, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, NCCD was able to pursue project 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). NCCD also continued partnering on North Branch Park River Watershed work, Farmland Restoration work with CT Department of Agriculture, and Conservation Technical Assistance with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and National Association of Conservation Districts..

Broad Brook Implementation—This fiscal year, NCCD secured its largest Section 319 grant award to date, to implement tremendous water quality enhancement measures on a local dairy farm. This project represents our second implementation award following recent completion of Broad Brook Watershed Based Plan Phase 2. NCCD partnered with NRCS, UConn Extension, and agricultural producers to identify priority projects, many of which involved agricultural land. Following completion of the first implementation project last fiscal year, we worked this year alongside our partners at CT DEEP and NRCS to secure funding and work toward a contract for our next project. This pending 319 project is intended to both eliminate livestock access and dramatically reduce associated pollutants to a tributary of Broad Brook, which runs through the farm and milking herd pasture. A complete transformation in the management of livestock and waste on the farm is necessary to achieve this result, as identified in the Broad Brook Watershed Based Plan Phase 2, and as further detailed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) during development of a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan. Two key structural solutions are proposed as the first and most important step to drive necessary changes in the management of land, animals, and waste on the farm. A suitable freestall barn is key to this transformation, necessary to contain the milking herd and associated waste, away from the brook and riparian areas. Additionally, a waste storage facility and associated infrastructure are needed as a means of collecting and storing manure from the barns until it is needed for crops. Implementation of this project will allow effective management of the farm's waste stream, with a goal of reducing nutrient and bacteria sources to wetlands and watercourses in the Broad Brook watershed.

NCCD has been working toward a contract for the initial design phase, which has required many meetings and discussions with project partners. A construction contract will follow once the design is complete.

The aerial photo to the right depicts the site. This project focuses primarily on area 13, the winter heavy use area; 14, the southern pasture; and 5, the laneway. The project will also provide manure storage for all other areas of the farm. Additional portions of the property will hopefully be addressed using future funding.

The photos above depict key portions of the southern pasture, used by the milking cows in the summer months. The first two photos depict a heavily utilized portion of the southern pasture, adjacent to the stream, where milking cows tend to loaf under the trees, as well as the bare soil that continues up the hillside. The rightmost photo shows the cows accessing Kimballs Brook directly, using it not only as a crossing into the pasture, but also as a water source and a place to linger, directly introducing bacteria and nutrients into the watercourse. In the background of the rightmost photos, the winter heavy use area, which at the time of the photos was planted with corn for the summer, is visible. A new barn constructed within the northern portion of this field will exclude the cows from the brook and would allow adequate separation between the pollutant source and the brook. Manure storage attached to the new barn will further control pollutants.

Red-Twig Dogwoods planted by channel

North Branch Park River—NCCD has partnered with the North Branch Park River Watershed Coordinator on many water quality enhancement projects over the past decade. Via this ongoing partnership, NCCD administers designated funds to perpetuate implementation of the North Branch Park River Watershed Plan, and further its goals. Using these funds, the North Branch Park River Watershed Coordinator continues to build and maintain partnerships with many local stakeholders; disseminate information via presentations, discussions, and website; apply for further project funding with NCCD; monitor and maintain prior projects; and other watershed work. To the left are updated photos of a prior multi-phase Section 319 water quality project at UConn School of Law and Hartford Seminary. The most recent phase of this green infrastructure project was implemented last year, and the Watershed Coordinator has since been able to monitor the bioretention basins and buffer plantings.

Shrubs thriving within recently repaired Basin 3

Native shrubs and perennials maturing within Basin 1

Conservation Technical Assistance Grant—Along with all five Conservation Districts in CT, NCCD has been utilizing a grant through the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) to assist the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) work. This grant allows for capacity building of District staff, who are able to complete comprehensive training and assist agricultural producers and landowners with Conservation Planning. Significant District staff time is spent participating in the extensive ongoing training required for Conservation Planners. Below are photos taken from an NRCS Soil Health training: a rainfall simulator demonstrating the beneficial soil health impacts of reduced-till production, soil layers within a soil pit, and a sloped field planted in a cover crop.

Farmland Restoration Grant—NCCD 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, screen for any natural resource issues, and prepare initial site inspections and Restoration Plans. This unique opportunity has allowed District staff to assist many farms throughout the state. Below are examples of two completed projects from this fiscal year.

Trees being cleared to expand cropland in Somers | *After-Newly expanded field completed and planted in corn*

Temporary fencing & rocks in Ellington/So.Windsor | *After-Permanent fencing will exclude animals from wetland*

NORTH CENTRAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT, INC.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT*

July 2020—June 2021

Income

State of CT	100,000
CWA Section 319 Grant Projects	35,677
Fee for Service	62,297
Plant/Seedling Sale	85,544
Park River—State of CT	20,000
CT DoAG Farmland Restoration	17,608
Town Contributions	28,447
NACD Technical Assistance Grant	44,555
Interest/Unrealized Investment	35,468
Total	**429,596**

Expenses

Salaries & Benefits	186,098
Plant/Seedling Sale	52,851**
Contracted Work (FLRP & Park River)	21,683
Taxes and Insurance	16,685
DEEP Grant Projects	10,696
Rent for Office Space	8,208
Office Expenses/Postage/Equipment	6,066
Financial Review/Accountant	2,500
Auto Expenses and Mileage	1,782
Employee Development	370
Dues/Marketing/Misc	307
Total	**307,246**

*Cash basis. Detailed accrual-based financial statement available upon request.

**A portion of this expense paid early in following fiscal year.