North Central Conservation District

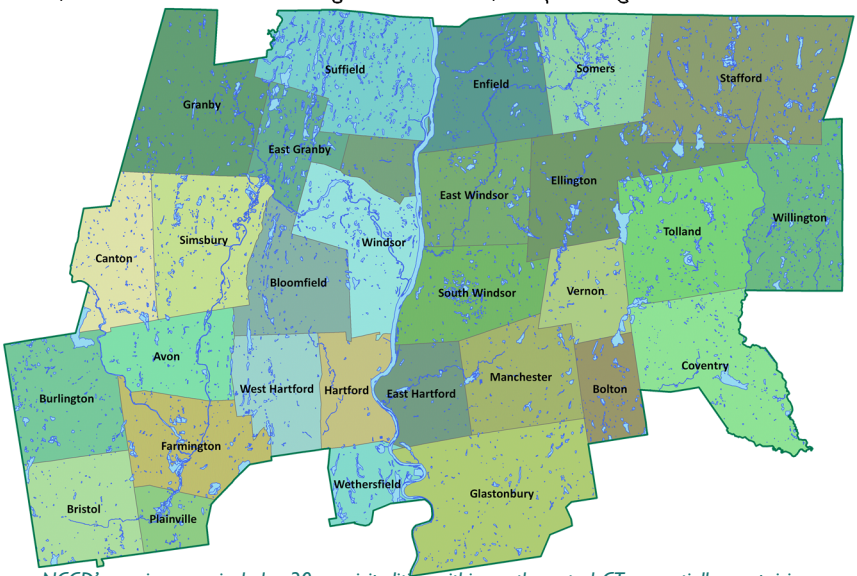
Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2022

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 2021-2022 fiscal year. NCCD is one of five 501(c)(3) non-profit Conservation Districts created by state statute, which was updated in 2021 to include soil health. Public Act 21-88 affirms that the Conservation Districts "shall advise the commissioner [of DEEP] on matters of soil and water conservation, soil health, erosion and sedimentation control and shall assist the commissioner in implementing programs concerning such matters." 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 CT Department of Agriculture and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Construction GP inspections as required by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, 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 (occasionally virtual since the pandemic). Visit www.conservect.org/northcentral or call (860) 875-3881 to learn more. The end of FY22 brought significant staff changes, as John Dudula began a role with NRCS in VT, and both Barbara Kelly and Ruth Miller made progress toward well-earned retirements. The hiring subcommittee worked into FY23 to fill these key positions.

Board of Supervisors

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

Staff

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

**Left NCCD just after this fiscal year, in July 2022, after which Ginny Patsun and Cameron Covill joined NCCD*

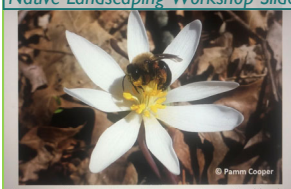
Year in Review

This fiscal year, restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic lifted somewhat, with less impact on typical staff and board operations. District work continued with a mix of in-person office hours and remote work, while most meetings continued to be held virtually. Activities and staff presence at the Tolland County Agricultural Center gradually resumed. 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 and Bolton. 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.

A small area of plants in our tight Bloomfield space

NCCD held its spring *Plant and Seedling Sale* in April, once again by pre-order. Following the unprecedented demand of the prior year, there was speculation as to whether sales may decline, yet 2022 sales ended up being slightly higher than that of the 2021 record-breaking sale. NCCD staff and volunteers from the Master Gardener program helped organized curbside pickup of plant orders. Once again, the volume of material and number of orders challenged our capacity. The Wintonbury Land Trust again generously allowed us to use their beautifully restored barn, and outside space for tents, for our west-of-the-river plant pick-up.
The event promoted *native plants, ecological landscaping,* and open space enjoyment.

Native Landscaping Workshop Slide



This *Megachile spp.* emerges every year when native bloodroot *Sanguinaria canadensis* blooms and will be active until late summer

We held a virtual *native landscaping* workshop prior to the sale, *"Landscaping for Birds, Bees, and Butterflies Using Native Plants,"* with wonderful and dynamic presentations from both Jane Seymour and Pamm Cooper. Attendance was once again elevated, although we hope to return to more interactive in-person workshop formats in the future. We also co-sponsored a *Guided Trail Walk*, led by Peter Picone, Ron Pitz, and Zellene Sandler at Hawk Hill Farm at the end of the plant sale.

Winning Advisor & Team from Housatonic Valley High School with DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes

NCCD coordinated the *Connecticut Envirothon program*, a state-wide natural resources competition for high school students. Workshops were held virtually, yet this year, hands-on workshop kits were distributed to help train students in the subjects of aquatics, forestry, wildlife, soils, and the current issue topic for 2021-2022: "Waste to Resources." We were thrilled to be able to hold the first in-person field day competition since the start of the pandemic, on May 19 at the Tolland County Agricultural Center, despite the rainy weather. Teams completed objective station tests in the field, and gave in-person PowerPoint presentations. DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes also joined, and helped to present awards. Housatonic Valley Regional High School earned the top score, and competed in an in-person North American Envirothon competition in Ohio, despite two students unfortunately not being able to participate due to COVID.

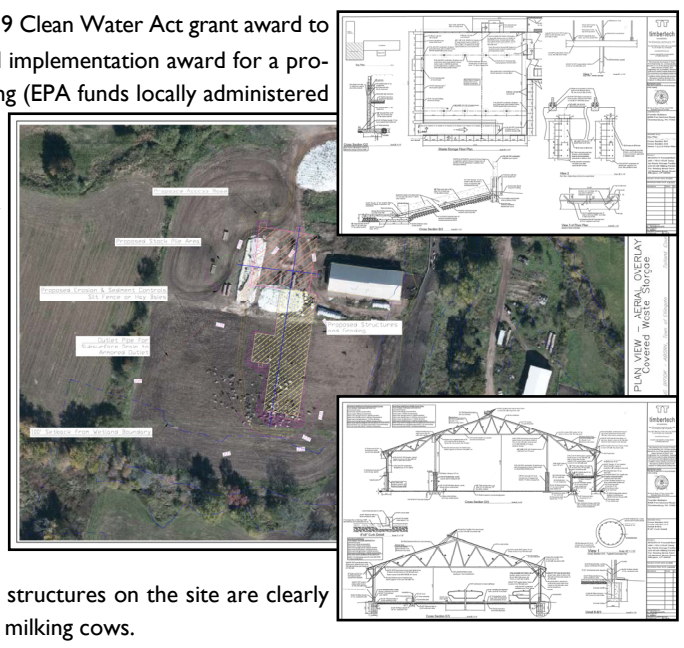
Open for project information

Grant/Project Work

Project Updates

This fiscal year, as concerns and restrictions associated with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic alleviated somewhat, NCCD continued to pursue water quality enhancement projects. Planning and design work continued on a large EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 nonpoint source program, locally administered by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), in close partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Connecticut. NCCD also applied for and secured funding through the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, for a significant planning project in the North Branch Park River Watershed, in partnership with the North Branch Park River Watershed Coordinator and Fuss & O'Neill, as well as local stakeholders. Additionally, Conservation Technical Assistance with NRCS via the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) continued, as well as Farmland Restoration work with CT Department of Agriculture (DoAg). We also embarked on our new role of inspecting large solar site installations during and after construction, as required under CT DEEP's Construction Stormwater General Permit.

Broad Brook Implementation (319)—NCCD worked throughout the fiscal year on our largest Section 319 Clean Water Act grant award to date, to implement substantial water quality enhancement measures on a local dairy farm. This project represents our second implementation award for a project recommended within the Broad Brook Watershed Based Plan Phase 2, which we also completed with Section 319 funding (EPA funds locally administered by CT DEEP), with partnership and assistance from CT DEEP, NRCS, UConn Extension, and local agricultural producers.



This fiscal year, we worked with CT DEEP, NRCS, and the dairy farm to execute and complete a contract for the design phase of this monumental project. The resulting design is intended to both eliminate livestock access to, and dramatically reduce associated pollutants in, 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 NRCS during development of a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan. The completed design yielded two key structural solutions, a freestall barn with milkhouse and a waste storage facility, to drive necessary changes in the management of land, animals, and waste on the farm. The freestall barn is key to this transformation, necessary to contain the milking herd and associated waste, away from the brook and riparian areas. Additionally, the waste storage facility is needed as a means of collecting and storing manure and milkhouse waste until it is suitable timing to spread on crop fields. 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.

Now that the design and earthwork plan are completed (partial images on right), details of the project and orientation of the structures on the site are clearly defined. The updated pre-construction photos below depict key portions of the project site, currently used as pasture for the milking cows.

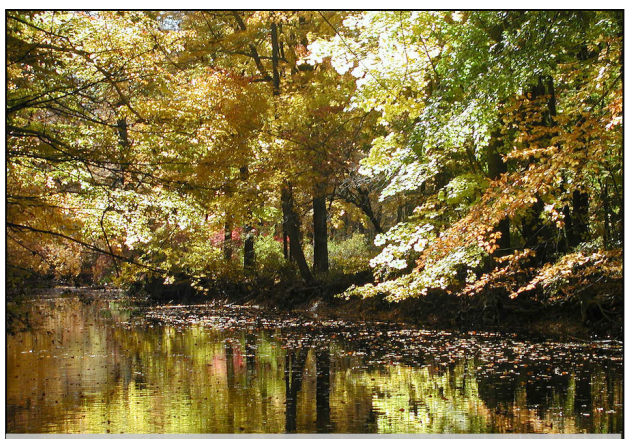
View east toward the existing heifer barn; new waste storage facility will be constructed adjacent to and adjoining the near end of barn.

View from heifer barn south toward Kimball's brook; future site of the new freestall barn, will also adjoin the new waste storage facility.

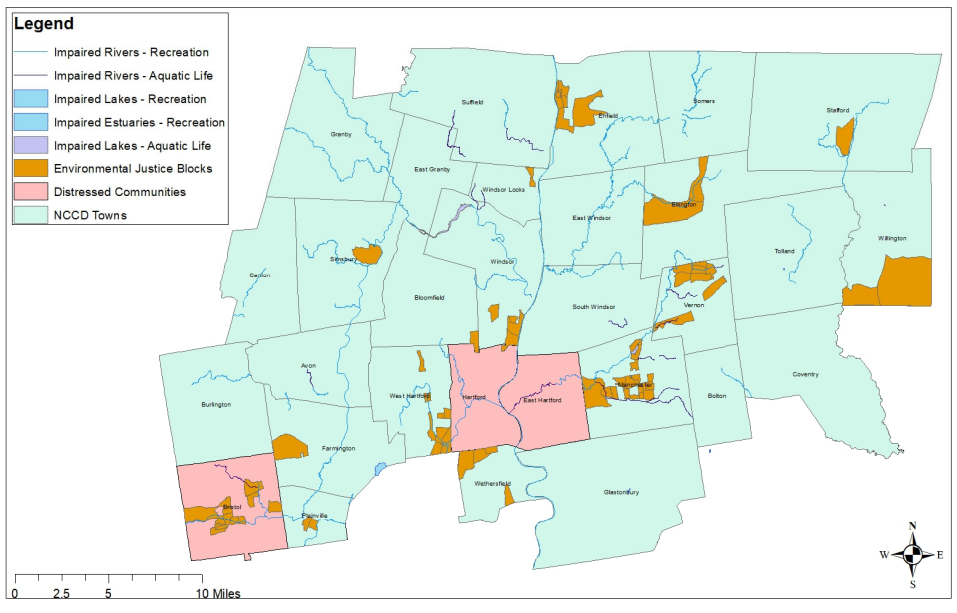
Milking herd accessing and lingering around Kimball's Brook, south of the project site; access will be discontinued following construction.

As we worked toward completion of the design contract, the construction contract was prepared, with the hope of beginning construction in the summer/fall of 2022. Unfortunately, many delays and obstacles were encountered along the way. Most significantly, inflation, rising costs of diesel fuel, and scarcity of certain building materials significantly increased the projected cost of this construction project. We have been working with the farm and other agency partners to identify possible supplemental sources of funding, to move this important construction project along.

North Branch Park River (LISFF)—NCCD again partnered with the North Branch Park River Watershed Coordinator (NBPRWC), as we have for many years on water quality enhancement projects in the watershed. We have typically worked on Section 319 nonpoint source Clean Water Act projects together, but planning funds are scarce through that program. This year, we applied for and were awarded grant funds via the Long Island Sound Futures Fund (LISFF), administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). This project, entitled "Planning to Reduce Pollution in the North Branch Park River Watershed," largely involves updating the North Branch Park River Watershed Based Plan, originally completed in 2010, using a dynamic online format that will be more readily accessible. Along with the update, green infrastructure projects will be identified and designed, with a few high priority projects reaching a very high level of design. Additionally, significant community engagement will be conducted, including meetings and events within the watershed, as well as coordination with key municipal and utility stakeholders. Aside from NCCD and NBPRWC, crucial partners on this project include Fuss & O'Neill and the Trust for Public Land. Much work this fiscal year was expended on learning the contracting process with NFWF, achieving compliance with the uniform guidance, and we are now working toward finalizing subcontracts and subawards.


The North Branch east of Scarborough Street, courtesy Mary Rickel Pelletier

North Central Environmental Justice Map



Urban Waters Grant (LISFF)—All five Connecticut Conservation Districts collaborated on a proposal to the Long Island Sound Futures Fund (LISFF) program through NFWF, which was selected for funding. The project is entitled "Partnering with Communities in Urban Waters to Enhance Stewardship of Long Island Sound," and will allow for Conservation District staff and boards statewide to engage in equity training and improve our ability to work within distressed communities to improve water quality and access in impaired urban watersheds. We will also implement projects and hold events (rain gardens, rain barrels, plantings, stream walks, clean-ups) within distressed communities, facilitate diversity training for Connecticut's Conservation District boards, and incorporate environmental justice into our water quality work.

Conservation Technical Assistance Grant—NCCD continued providing Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) to assist the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and agricultural producers and landowners within our district, utilizing grant funds from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). 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. We had a change in CTA staff just after the fiscal year ended; new staff will begin training under this contract in FY23.

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 typically funds 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.

During much of this fiscal year, there was somewhat of a lull in our work on this project, as state funds dwindled and fewer projects were funded. Exciting updates are underway, though, thanks to new legislation, which NCCD supported, that greatly expands the Farmland Restoration Program. The main benefit of this legislation is that Climate Smart Agriculture measures can be funded under this program in the future, once the changes have been implemented. We look forward to working with farms to implement practices that will help mitigate the impact of climate change.

NORTH CENTRAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT, INC.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT*

July 2021—June 2022

Income

State of CT	100,000
CWA Section 319 Grant Projects	30,000
Fee for Service	39,400
Plant/Seedling Sale	96,698
Park River—State of CT	20,000
CT DoAG Farmland Restoration	9,025
Town Contributions	29,947
NACD Technical Assistance Grant	43,037
Interest/Unrealized Investment	2,586
Total	**370,693**

Expenses

Salaries & Benefits	153,317
Plant/Seedling Sale	71,506**
Contracted Work (FLRP & Park River)	19,365
Taxes and Insurance	13,212
Rent for Office Space	8,208
Office Expenses/Postage/Equipment	4,317
Financial Review/Accountant	2,500
Auto Expenses and Mileage	2,175
Employee Development	680
Dues/Marketing/Misc	405
Total	**275,685**

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

**Included some expenses from the prior fiscal year.