North Central Conservation District

View of Hartford Skyline from Connecticut River

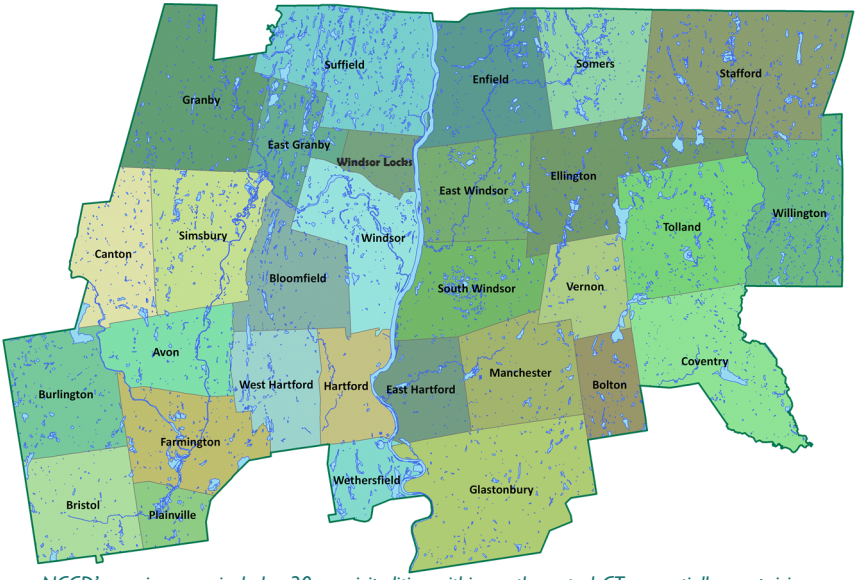
Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2023

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 2022-2023 fiscal year. NCCD is one of five 501(c)(3) non-profit Conservation Districts created by state statute, amended in 2021 to specify that 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 by the State of CT (Passport to Parks), municipal contributions, US EPA-funded grants (administered by CT DEEP and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation), technical assistance contracts with the CT Department of Agriculture and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (via the National Association of Conservation Districts), inspections under the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Construction General Permit, 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, either virtually or at the Tolland County Agricultural Center, 24 Hyde Avenue, Vernon. Visit www.conservect.org/northcentral or call (860) 875-3881 for more. FY23 was a year of staff transition, with the addition of two new full-time staff in place of four part-time staff. As John Dudula and Mindy Gosselin transitioned into new roles, and long-time (each over 20 years) key staff members Barbara Kelly and Ruth Miller edged toward retirement, we were thrilled to welcome Ginny Patsun and Cameron Covill to our staff, bringing tremendous skillsets. At the end of FY23, we were very fortunate to gain a valuable new board member, Anthony Patelunas!

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
Anthony Patelunas	Glastonbury

Staff

Joanna Shapiro	Executive Director
In alphabetical order:	
Cameron Covill	Natural Resource Specialist
Barbara Kelly	Program Coordinator **Semi-Retired in 2023*
Ruth Miller	Landscape Specialist* **Retired in December 2022*
Ginny Patsun	Soil Conservation Specialist
Tina Pelletier	Bookkeeper

Year in Review

This fiscal year, with pandemic restrictions lifted and new staff in place, office operations returned to normal, with staff working together in-person. Board meetings have been hybrid.

The District provided valuable *technical services* to municipalities. Our primary services to towns included assistance to land use staff and commissions throughout the local regulatory process, *reviewing development plans* to evaluate proposed *erosion control measures, stormwater management, and wetland impacts*, as well as *verifying wetland boundaries*. District staff also served as municipal *wetland agent* to inland wetland agencies in Somers and Bolton. The District also assisted area residents with natural resource issues; providing technical support related to *invasive plant control, native planting guidance, pond issues, navigation of local regulations,* and promoting *conservation programs* for farmers and landowners.

Organizing Plant Sale Orders

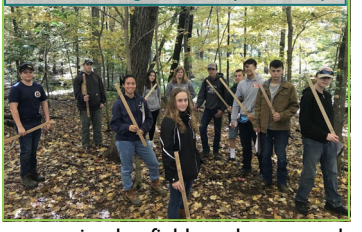
NCCD held its pre-order spring *Plant and Seedling Sale,* with order pick-up in April. For the third year in a row, sales exceeded that of any prior year, despite facing challenges transitioning the responsibilities of the plant sale from retiring staff. The volume of material and number of orders again challenged our capacity. The sale was held in two locations, Tolland County Agricultural Center in Vernon and Hawk Hill Farm in Bloomfield. NCCD staff and wonderful volunteers from the CT Master Gardener program organized plant orders for curbside pickup. The event raised funds for programs and promoted *native plants, pollinators, ecological landscaping,* and *open space enjoyment*.

Tree Planting Workshop-W.Hartford

New this spring, NCCD held a *tree planting workshop* at Westmoor Park in West Hartford. The training was co-sponsored by West Hartford Tree Project, which raises money to purchase trees for residential and open space plantings to enhance West Hartford's tree canopy. NCCD has been helping the group's efforts for several years by selecting and sourcing trees. This year's workshop, led by our on-staff certified arborist, further demonstrated and instructed on proper planting of bare root and potted trees, and pruning and maintenance after.

We held a virtual *native landscaping workshop* prior to the sale, *"Landscaping for Birds, Bees, and Butterflies Using Native Plants,"* with compelling presentations from both Jane Seymour and Pamm Cooper. High attendance levels continued with the virtual format. We also co-sponsored a *Guided Trail Walk* at Hawk Hill Farm at the end of the plant sale.

Students during the Forestry Workshop



NCCD coordinated the *Connecticut Envirothon program*, a state-wide natural resources competition for high school students. In-person workshops were held in the subjects of aquatics, forestry, wildlife, soils, and the current issue topic for the 2022-2023 school year: "Adapting to a Changing Climate". The 2023 CT Envirothon statewide competition was held on May 18th at the Kellogg Environmental Center in Derby. 22 teams from 18 Connecticut high schools participated in the event. Teams completed objective station tests in the field, and gave oral presentations. Acting DEEP Deputy Commissioner Tracy Babbidge joined us and helped to present awards. The Nonnewaug High School team won first place overall, and represented Connecticut in the international NCF Envirothon competition in New Brunswick, Canada in July.

Winning Team & Advisor from Nonnewaug H.S.

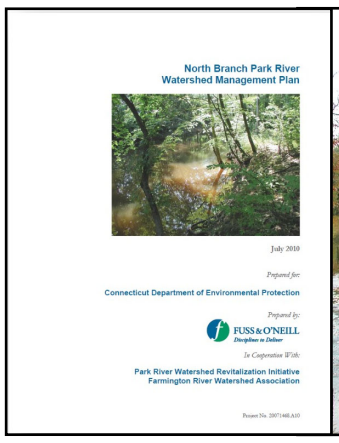
Open for project information

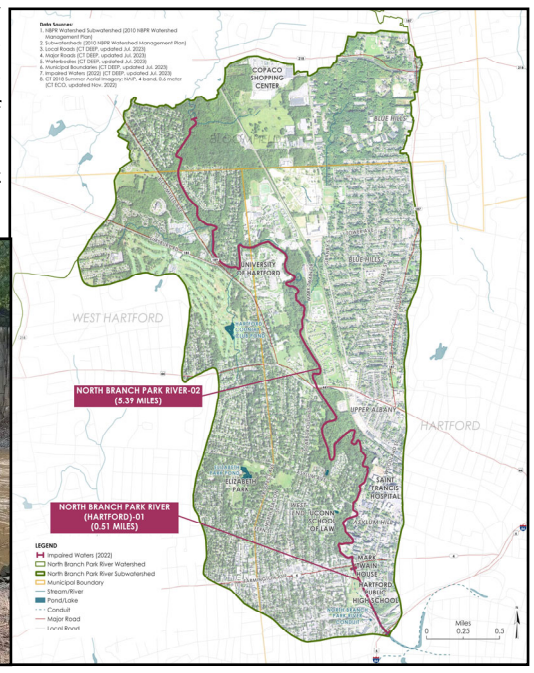
Grant/Project Work

Project Updates

This fiscal year, NCCD continued to pursue and work on ongoing water quality enhancement projects, highlights provided below. In addition to these projects, NCCD continued to assist CT Department of Agriculture (DoAg) by providing technical assistance for the Farmland Restoration program, which is expected to expand in the next fiscal year. NCCD is also part of a statewide effort, partnering with all of the Conservation Districts in CT on a Long Island Sound Future Fund (LISFF) grant to incorporate social and environmental equity into our organizations and work. As part of our ongoing watershed planning efforts, NCCD provides fiduciary support to the Bolton Lakes Watershed Conservation Alliance (BLWCA), and staff participates in monthly meetings.

North Branch Park River (LISFF)—NCCD, together with a Project Team including perennial partners North Branch Park River Watershed Coordinator (NBPRWC) and engineering firm Fuss & O'Neill, and our newest partner Trust for Public Land, began work on a large planning project for the North Branch Park River. We 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," is in-part a comprehensive update to the original 2010 Watershed-Based Plan, and also a means to put forth high-impact green infrastructure and floodplain restoration projects. In addition to a typical report format, the plan update will also utilize a dynamic web format, as an accessible "living" version of the plan. Project work began this fiscal year, with regular meetings of both a Project Partners group, largely consisting of key municipal and agency stakeholders with technical involvement, and a Project Advisory Group, consisting of community groups and organizations and private landowners with interest and input to guide this planning effort. We are conducting significant community engagement throughout this effort, including meetings and site walks and outreach events within the watershed. Trust for Public Land is included as a subawardee of this grant, to ensure that we are reaching and engaging diverse members of the community. In addition to meetings that have commenced, Fuss & O'Neill has been working on gathering data and updating the watershed mapping, as well as beginning to identify priority parcels for project design. We are coordinating closely with The Metropolitan District Commission and the City of Hartford, hoping to incorporate the findings of current studies aimed at significant flooding in the watershed.

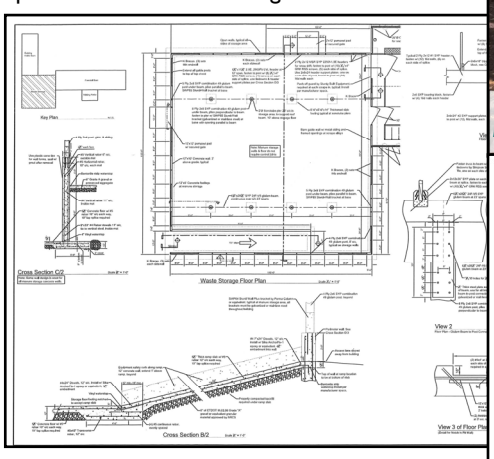




Broad Brook Implementation (319)—NCCD continued to work through design, planning, and funding issues throughout the fiscal year on our largest Section 319 Clean Water Act grant (EPA funds locally administered by CT DEEP) award to date, to implement significant water quality enhancement measures on a local dairy farm. This project is another high priority recommendation from the Broad Brook Watershed Based Plan Phase 2, which we also completed using Section 319 funding, with partnership and assistance from CT DEEP, NRCS, UConn Extension, and local agricultural producers. The project will 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 agricultural 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.

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

The project was divided into two 319 contracts. The first, completed last fiscal year, allowed for development of an engineered design for this site. 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 will contain the milking herd and their waste, away from the brook and riparian areas. Additionally, the waste storage facility will collect and store manure and milkhouse waste until timing is suitable for spreading on fields. Implementation of this project will allow effective management of the farm's waste stream, to reduce nutrient and bacteria sources to wetlands and watercourses in the Broad Brook watershed. The second contract for construction of the project has stalled due to inflated costs and insufficient funds. NCCD and the farm, with support from NRCS and CT DEEP, pursued multiple funding opportunities with CT Department of Agriculture (Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry grant, and Farm Transition Grant), and with NFWF (LISFF). The farm received the maximum $49,999 award for the Farm Transition Grant, but we unfortunately were not awarded funding from the Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Grant. We await word on whether our LISFF grant application will be funded.



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. With a change of CTA staff at the start of the fiscal year, new staff has largely been engaging in training opportunities this past fiscal year, and looks forward to assisting NRCS and agricultural producers and landowners with conservation planning and contracts next fiscal year. Photo to the left of a Stream Visual Assessment Protocol 2 (SVAP2) training, which our staff participated in.

In addition to participating in trainings, NCCD staff now includes a licensed arborist, who has provided training opportunities for NRCS. A tree planting training was held at TAC, attended by NRCS staff and property owners (photo to the right). NCCD plans to develop a tree planting training program for municipalities as well, in addition to workshops open to the public, held in conjunction with our plant sale.

Solar SWPPP Inspections—While not grant related, a new and significant role that the District has expanded this year has been inspections of several solar sites for compliance with their stormwater pollution prevention plan (SWPPP) and the General Permit for the Discharge of Stormwater and Dewatering Wastewater from Construction Activities (General Permit) on behalf of the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Stormwater Division. The Connecticut Conservation Districts have been written into the General Permit as a 3rd party inspector, and solar developers are required to utilize the Districts. This helps DEEP's Stormwater Division inspect multiple sites across the state on a more regular basis. NCCD currently inspects 3 sites in our district, including the largest commercial solar development site in New England. This site is located in East Windsor and consists of approximately 800 acres of former tobacco fields and a former gravel pit, currently under development. We also started inspections at a site in Ellington on the edge of East Windsor. This site is owned by a local farmer and was forested at the time of the preconstruction meeting held in Fall of 2022. Trees were cleared and mounts for the panels are being pile driven. The other half is currently well-vegetated. Our newest site for inspection is located in Enfield and is a former golf driving range. The preconstruction meeting took place in Spring of 2023. Erosion controls are in place, in preparation for site work.

Pre-existing massive gully erosion at a future solar site.

Rills and gullies forming down a slope at a solar site..

Vehicle access & heavy rain causing erosion on solar site.

Basin flooded by stormwater, topping, emergency spillway

NORTH CENTRAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT, INC.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT*

July 2022—June 2023

Income

State of CT	100,000
CWA Section 319 Grant Projects	120,160
LISFF Grant Projects	15,028
Fee for Service	44,700
Plant/Seedling Sale & Donations	114,231
Town Contributions	29,997
NACD Technical Assistance Grant	34,555
Interest/Unrealized Investment	6,915
Total	**465,586**

Expenses

Salaries & Benefits	190,317
Plant/Seedling Sale	74,108**
CWA Section 319 Grant Projects	70,000
LISFF Grant Projects	10,819
Contracted Work (FLRP & Park River)	20,874
Taxes and Insurance	16,236
Rent for Office Space	9,044
Office Expenses/Postage/Equipment	5,948
Financial Review/Accountant	2,500
Auto Expenses and Mileage	3,241
Employee Development	3,125
Dues/Marketing/Misc	245
Total	**406,457**

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

**Included an expense paid the following fiscal year.