North Central Conservation District

Photo of community participants in a Park River cleanup, as part of our LISFF grant.

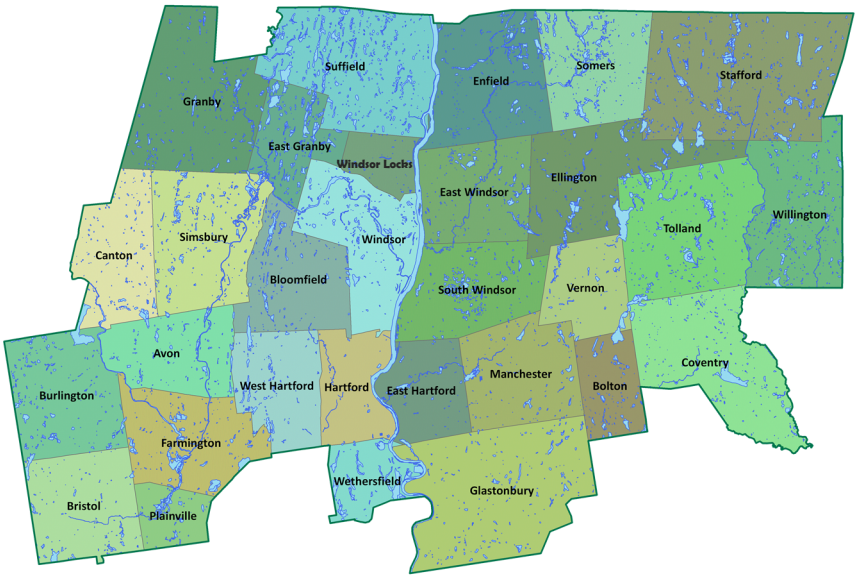
Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2024

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 2023-2024 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), fee for service (including inspections of solar installations under the CT DEEP Construction General Permit), an annual Plant and Seedling Sale fundraiser, and private grants/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. Toward the end of FY24, our Natural Resource Specialist, Cameron Covill, left our staff for an out-of-state position. We began a hiring effort, and were fortunate to identify an ideal candidate, Alyssa Barroso. While Alyssa did not begin work until shortly after the end of the 2024 fiscal year, she is included in the list below as part of our current staff. We are very grateful that Barbara Kelly has continued to lend her technical knowledge as needed, and to help transition and mentor new staff.

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:	
Alyssa Barroso	Natural Resource Specialist **Beginning July 2024, after FY24*
Cameron Covill	Natural Resource Specialist **Left NCCD in May 2024*
Barbara Kelly	Soil Scientist/CPESC/Mentor **Limited technical/mentor work*
Ginny Patsun	Soil Conservation Specialist
Tina Pelletier	Bookkeeper

Year in Review

This fiscal year, our newer staff grew more familiar with District work, experiencing annual events and responsibilities for the second time, and contributing meaningfully.

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 plants before assembling orders

NCCD held its pre-order spring *Plant and Seedling Sale,* focusing on native plants, as well as food-bearing plants and evergreen seedlings. The sale was held in two locations, the Tolland County Agricultural Center (TAC) in Vernon and Hawk Hill Farm in Bloomfield (Traprock Ridge Land Conservancy). For the fourth year in a row, sales increased to a new record high. We pushed the limits of staff and space, requiring a professional tent rental in Bloomfield. NCCD staff and incredible volunteers from the CT Master Gardener program went above and beyond to assemble orders for curbside pickup. The event raised funds for programs and promoted *native plants, pollinator gardens, ecological landscaping,* and *open space enjoyment*.

This April, leading up to the plant sale, NCCD held a *tree planting and pruning workshop* at TAC. The training, led by our on-staff certified arborist, included a classroom presentation and a hands-on outdoor demonstration with instruction on proper planting of both bare root and potted trees, as well as pruning and maintenance. Participants practiced pruning techniques with guidance.

Tree Planting and Pruning Workshop–TAC

Envirothon students examining the soil pit

We also held a very well attended virtual *native landscaping workshop* prior to the plant sale, *"Landscaping for Birds, Bees, and Butterflies Using Native Plants,"* with an inspiring presentation by Jane Seymour. We also co-sponsored a *Guided Trail Walk* at Hawk Hill Farm just after the sale.

NCCD coordinated the *Connecticut Envirothon program*, a state-wide natural resources competition for high school students. Workshops were held in aquatics, forestry, wildlife, soils, and the current issue for the 2023-2024 school year: *Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future*. The 2024 CT Envirothon statewide competition was held on May 23rd at Lockwood Farm in Hamden. 25 teams from 16 CT high schools participated in the event. Teams completed objective station tests in the field, and gave oral presentations. Acting DEEP Deputy Commissioner of Energy Hank Webster helped to present awards. The Marvelwood School "Hawks" team, won first place overall, and represented Connecticut in the international NCF Envirothon competition in Geneva, New York in July.

Winning Team & Advisor from Marvelwood also won a very special Neil Picone Memorial Wildlife award.

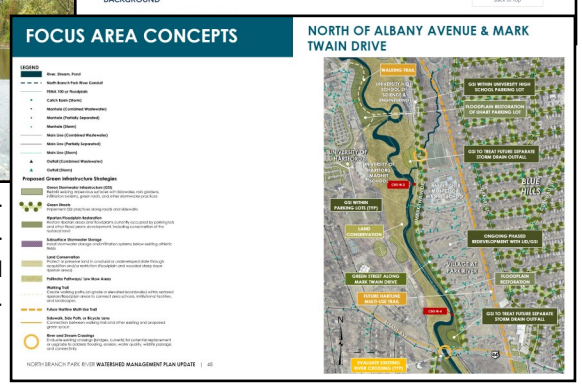
Open for project information

Grant/Project Work

Project Work Overview

This fiscal year, NCCD made significant progress toward implementation of two very impactful water quality enhancement projects; updates provided below. In addition to these major projects, 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. NCCD continued to assist CT Department of Agriculture (DoAg) by providing technical assistance for the Farmland Restoration program, specifically on flood-impacted farms. NCCD also has a grant through the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) to provide Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) to assist the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), along with agricultural producers and landowners within our district, and we have been engaged in training and building staff capacity to provide meaningful assistance. 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. In support of the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), NCCD provides inspections of large solar array installations. NCCD has also initiated an outreach effort to promote Agroforestry, including assembling and distributing a newsletter to a growing database, giving educational presentations, and is planning a demonstration food forest.

North Branch Park River (LISFF)—The NCCD Project Team, including familiar partners/subcontractors, the North Branch Park River Watershed Coordinator and engineering firm Fuss & O'Neill, and newer partner/subawardee Trust for Public Land, continued work on a large planning project for the North Branch Park River. This project is entitled "Planning to Reduce Pollution in the North Branch Park River Watershed" and is funded via the Long Island Sound Futures Fund (LISFF), administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Work includes a comprehensive update to the original 2010 Watershed-Based Plan, and development and design of 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.



During this fiscal year, we were in the heart of the project, with regular meetings of our Project Partners, 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 engaging the diverse community via meetings and site walks and outreach events within the watershed. This engagement has helped inform green infrastructure design strategies. We have also been coordinating and sharing data with The Metropolitan District Commission and the City of Hartford, as they simultaneously have been studying flooding issues in the watershed. Data collected by Fuss & O'Neill last year progressed into many conceptual designs for potential projects in the watershed, and we are now working to select several key projects for further development, with community and landowner buy-in. Project work is scheduled for completion by December 2024.

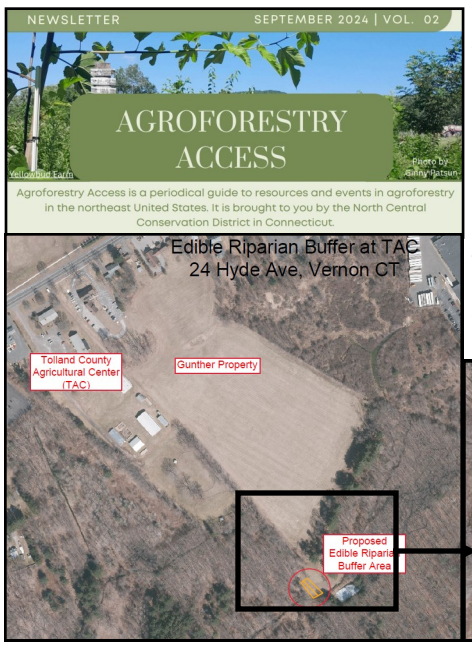
Milking herd accessing Kimball's Brook, south of project site

Broad Brook Implementation (319)—NCCD staff has been working for years to help construct this consequential water quality project on a local dairy farm, amidst many compounding hurdles. The project will eliminate livestock access, and dramatically reduce pollutant loading, to 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 (completed by NCCD in 2017 using 319 funds, in partnership with CT DEEP, NRCS, and UConn Extension), and as further detailed by the NRCS during development of a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan. NCCD was subsequently awarded our largest Section 319 Clean Water Act grant (EPA funds locally administered by CT DEEP) to date in late 2020, to design and construct the project. These funds supplement NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds awarded to the farm.

Site plan showering future improvements, on an Aerial View

The 319 project was divided into two contracts. The first, completed in FY22, was for development of an engineered design. The design yielded two primary 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 allow for collection and storage of 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 319 contract for construction of the project is still in progress, and has experienced delays, initially due to inflated costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. NCCD and the farm, with support from NRCS and CT DEEP, pursued multiple funding opportunities in pursuit of additional funding, both 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 during FY23, but we unfortunately were not awarded a Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Grant. We then pivoted and applied to the Long Island Sound Futures Fund (LISFF) through National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) at the end of FY23. That brings us to this fiscal year, when we were elated to receive word that our project was selected for the full funding requested. Reinvigorated with sufficient funding, planning resumed at full force.



Agroforestry Outreach—NCCD has been working NRCS with to promote agroforestry in Connecticut. NCCD led two field trips to educate NRCS staff on agroforestry practices at a chestnut orchard in Stafford. In addition to the training, our on-staff certified arborist facilitated a class, *Agroforestry; Permaculture with Trees*, for the UConn Extension Master Gardener Program in January. NCCD is the founding editor of *Agroforestry Access*, a periodical newsletter highlighting agroforestry events and articles; NCCD distributes the newsletter via email to a growing listserv.

NCCD, utilizing Clean Water Action Section 319 Nonpoint-Source funding via CT DEEP, is designing and will establish an Edible Riparian Buffer (ERB) on the Tolland County Agricultural Center (TAC) grounds along Gage's Brook, a tributary of the Tankerhoosen River. The ERB is also a food forest, an agroforestry practice, and an NRCS-recognized climate-smart practice. It will also be used as a demonstration planting to engage and educate community members about food forests and the importance of maintaining riparian buffers to preserve the health of waterbodies. The TAC grounds contain other demonstration gardens, maintained by the CT Master Gardener Program, and this will be a wonderful addition.

Solar SWPPP Inspections—This year, Connecticut's Conservation Districts continued to inspect solar sites under construction throughout the state for compliance with their individual Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and the General Permit for the Discharge of Stormwater and Dewatering Wastewater from Construction Activities ("Construction General Permit") on behalf of the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Stormwater Division. This partnership helps DEEP's Stormwater Division to regularly monitor installation of large, siting-council scale solar arrays across the state.

NCCD currently inspects four solar sites within its district, including two in Enfield, one in Ellington, and one in East Windsor. The East Windsor site is the largest in the state, including 500 acres of solar panels on an 800-acre site, yet has developed rather smoothly, and is nearing completion.

Stormwater ponding in an unstabilized area

Solar installation nearing completion, vegetated

NORTH CENTRAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT, INC.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT*

July 2023—June 2024

Income

Plant and Seedling Sale	116,567
State of CT	100,000
LISFF Grant Projects	90,942
Fee for Service	63,181
CWA Section 319 Grant Projects	32,800
Interest/Unrealized Investment	31,837
Town Contributions	25,947
CT DoAg Farmland Restoration Work	14,481
Donations and Private Grants	2,579
Total	**478,334**

Expenses

Salaries & Benefits	193,843
LISFF Grant Projects	132,581
Plant/Seedling Sale	82,180**
Taxes/Insurance/Fees	15,364
Contracted Work (FLRP & Solar)	14,619
Rent for Office Space	9,120
Office Expenses/Postage/Equipment	5,637
Financial Review/Accountant	2,500
Auto Expenses and Mileage	3,949
Employee Development	1,120
Dues/Marketing/Misc	245
Total	**461,158**

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

**Not including an expense for the prior fiscal year.