

State Conservation Committee

February 18, 2016 Consent Agenda

District/ Agency/ Organization Reports

Belknap/ Carroll County Conservation District, Earle Chase

Belknap County Conservation District

Critical News

BCCD's funding is under threat by the Belknap County Delegation, along with all other *'Outside Agencies'.

- The Belknap County Delegation cut BCCD's budget last year by 5%.
- BCCD's funding request for 2016 is \$92,400 and reflects level funding after last year's cut.
 - This pays for the salary, retirement and a portion of health insurance for 1 Full Time Employee
 - Provides funding for a Part-time Assistant and/or funding to hire natural resource specialist to help develop and support grant driven projects.
- Cutting BCCD's funding by half to \$49,160 reflects the intention of the Belknap Delegation to see BCCD have only 1 Part-time Staff person at 25 hours a week and offering no benefits. (The Delegate most vocal about this cut in funding outlined BCCD's new employment arrangement until he was reminded by the Delegation Chairman that Delegates do not have the authority to dictate how the funds will be spent within individual departments or outside agencies.)
- BCCD has been gathering letter of support in anticipation of the next Delegation meeting scheduled for February 16th.

*Outside Agencies in Belknap County are: BCCD, UNH Cooperative Extension, Genesis Behavioral Health, Belknap Economic Development Council, Community Action Program, Greater Lakes Child Advocacy.

Other News

- BCCD Board of Supervisors is in the process of completing a 5 year Strategic Plan for the District.
- BCCD Program Coordinator has been busy. Some, but not all, of the activities include:
 - Coordinating resources to address BCCD's funding threat
 - Assisting the Lakes Region Food Network with outreach to farmers and consumers
 - Continued work on the Gunstock Brook streambank restoration project in Gilford
 - Preparing annual Tree and Shrub Sale materials
 - Working with the NH – Gleans network to improve statewide coordination of this produce and fruit harvesting program that has Districts donating thousands of pounds to local food pantries
 - Grant writing for several local projects involving both non-profits and municipalities
 - Still wrestling with the office relocation last summer to yet a smaller space; just can't fit it all in.

Cheshire/ Strafford CCDs, Pete Throop

Cheshire County Conservation District

Soil

- We have created a Cover Crop Survey to be administered to Cheshire County Dairy Farmers in March of 2016. We are aiming for 100% participation through one on one interviews. The results will be instructive to the future of our equipment rental program and soil health education.
- Equipment Committee has put together an education plan for 2016. This will include an Equipment Field Day in April, Cover Crop workshop in June to include a roller crimper demonstration, and an interseeder workshop in September/October to see the results of a demo plot of cover crops at a local farm.
- Two forums were held on farmland conservation in partnership with the Monadnock Conservancy and USDA NRCS.

Water

- Offering rentals of three skidder bridges and researching another skidder bridge building workshop where we would create a fourth bridge to offer as a rental. Hoping to do this in Fall of 2016.
- Finalizing the Kemp Brook/Boyce Pond riparian plantings and will be submitting the final report to the State Conservation Committee in the Spring.

Wildlife

- Cheshire County Pollinator Initiative – the first year of monitoring has been completed on four sites in the County and of the 272 individuals there were 47 species identified. We are working to continue management of existing habitat and establishment of new habitat in 2016. There is an education plan in place for 2016 that will include four workshop on pollinator habitat establishment and pollinator identification.

- Falls Brook Culvert Removal and bridge construction, permit is submitted to DES for a project focused on aquatic organism passage in partnership with Trout Unlimited, The Harris Center and the Town of Swanzey. Construction is slated to begin in June 2016. This will remove the 2nd priority barrier in the Ashuelot River Watershed and open up 10 miles of aquatic habitat.

Farm Viability

- Continuing work with Farmer's Markets of Keene and Picadilly Farm to double SNAP benefits through the Granite State Market Match Program, and working with the NH Food Bank through the NH Nutrition Incentives Network.
- Continuing work with partners to run Monadnock Menus – the aggregation and distribution program for wholesale food buyers and farms in the region. Sales were \$101,000 in 2015 and we just held a successful annual meeting with 50 buyers and producers in attendance. Our 2016 sales goal is \$150,000.
- Currently we are accepting applications and donations for the Jeffrey P. Smith Farm Scholarship program. We hope to offer 25 scholarships to youth to attend farm camp in 2016.
- Working on finalizing case studies on conserved farmland access for lessees with the Monadnock Conservancy and Land For Good as part of a USDA SARE Partner Grant.

The Conservation District Board of Supervisors is undertaking a strategic planning process in February that should result in a 3 year strategic plan for the organization.

The Annual meeting for 2016 is set for October 25, 2016 at the Keene Country Club.

Hillsborough/ Merrimack CCDs, Jack Parker

In the past quarter, HCCD has accomplished the following:

- worked with NRCS to complete the first phase of construction on the Souhegan River Streambank stabilization project in Merrimack partially funded by a Moose Plate grant.
- Kerry and Roger gave an overview presentation of the Hillsborough County Conservation District and NRCS programming opportunities to the Peterborough Grange.
- Participated in the Local Foods Access for All project stakeholder follow-up meeting and assisted in the writing of the final report that was completed in December.
- Participated along with the HCCD Board in the NRCS Milford Field Office review in early December.
- Attended the CDEA-NH quarterly meeting in December.
- Hosted the HCCD 2015 Annual Meeting in January featuring guest speaker Rebecca Rule, NH humorist. Presented 2015 Cooperator of the Year award to Steve Normanton of Normanton Farms, Litchfield. Presented 2015 co-Educator of the Year awards to Kap Siddall of Beaver Brook Association and Janet Altobello of the Harris Center of Conservation Education.
- Provided ongoing administrative assistance to the NRCS Milford Field Office through a contribution agreement.

- Planning the annual spring plant sale fundraiser.
- Planning the annual Hands-On Web Soil Survey workshop in Manchester in late March.

In the past quarter, MCCD has accomplished the following:

- Presented District programs and the flash freeze unit to the Tri-County (Belknap, Grafton, Merrimack) Small & Beginner Farmers Group in Canterbury in early January.
- Did a soil field day with fifth graders at Pittsfield Elementary School in late-November
- Completed, reviewed, and accepted the 2016 Annual Plan of Work
- Participated in the Local Foods Access for All project stakeholder follow-up meeting and assisted in the writing of the final report that was completed in December.
- Participated along with the MCCD Board in the NRCS Concord Field Office review in early December.
- Attended the CDEA-NH quarterly meeting in December.
- Planning the annual spring plant sale fundraiser.
- Planning the annual Hands-On Web Soil Survey workshop in Pembroke in late April.
- Planning a Wholesale Success Workshop in March with FarmFamily.Org.
- Planning an erosion control and Envirocert series in March/ April 2016.
- Planning mobile markets with ORIS for 2016 or 2017 at housing developments in low-income areas and WIC clinics.
- Added the Contoocook and Danbury Farmers' Markets to our Granite State Market Match program.
- Working with the Merrimack County delegation and commissioners on our 2016 budget.

Rockingham/ Strafford CCDs, Bob Goodrich

Rockingham CCD

The Rockingham County Conservation District dedicated most of its efforts in December to wrapping up the previous year grant reports and financial documents. RCCD is currently working with the county commissioners and delegation to maintain level funding from county. Additionally RCCD is working on the beginning and planning phases of many projects that will be implemented in the spring and the summer. RCCD also recently sent a staff member to the National Association of Conservation District Meeting in Reno, NV.

In partnership with the Strafford County Conservation District, the RCCD is preparing for the 2nd (Permeable Reactive Barrier) PRB installation this winter at the single family home in Durham, NH. This is part of a feasibility project to test the use of a technology to be used with septic systems to treat nitrogen and thereby reduce the amount of nitrogen in our ground and surface waters. This project was funded through the NH Department of Environmental Services Watershed Assistance Grant.

RCCD is gearing up for its seventh year of restoration at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye. This year's focus is the restoration of soil to historic pH levels. This is funded through the SCC Moose Plate Conservation Grant Program and the NH Department of Agriculture Markets and Foods IPM program. The RCCD was recently awarded \$50,000 in funding from the NH Department of Environmental Services Coastal Program for continued restoration in 2016 and

2017. The primary focus of the restoration will be approximately 11+ acres of coastal upland forest and state imperiled maritime shrub thicket using a combination of integrated pest management techniques (IPM), including mechanical, cultural, and chemical methods to control invasive species and to re-vegetate with native species.

RCCD is preparing for its fifth year of work on NRCS Wetland Reserve Easements, assisting in restoration projects including invasive plant control, trail stabilization, and hydrologic improvements. In addition to these projects, the district has on worked stewardship of RCCD's existing easements and developing projects for 2016.

Strafford CCD

This winter, work began on a New England cottontail habitat restoration project on Strafford County property. Trees are being cut down to encourage the growth of native shrubs. SCCD has been preparing for several other projects and events for 2016, including the annual plant sale, a hayfield re-seeding demonstration, and soil health and equipment workshops. 2015 was the busiest year yet for the ash spreader, no-till seeder, and aerator equipment rental program, and 2016 promises to be at least as productive with the addition of two new pieces of equipment, the Yeomans plow and a fence post pounder. SCCD staff have been working to become certified to write Nutrient Management Plans, to help farmers efficiently utilize and conserve nutrients on their farms. And lastly, the District moved to a new office at the Strafford County complex in December.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rick Ellsmore

1. Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) awards will be announced on 2/12/16 by Secretary Vilsack.
2. NACD Fly In – March 15th in DC
3. NH Watershed Conference – 3/18
4. NH Drinking Water Conference – 5/11
5. Staffing
 - Don Keirstead – State Resource Conservationist
 - Brandon Smith – National Soil Quality Team
 - Matt Brown – State Conservation Engineer
 - Retirements –

Conservation District Employees' Association- NH Chapter, Amanda Littleton

The last meeting of 2015 was held in December. Partner updates were received from USDA NRCS, NHACD, and NACD. District employees discussed the status of ongoing collaborative projects, including the conclusion of the pollinator grant. Planning is currently underway for the 2016 USDA NRCS and NHACD demonstration project agreement.