

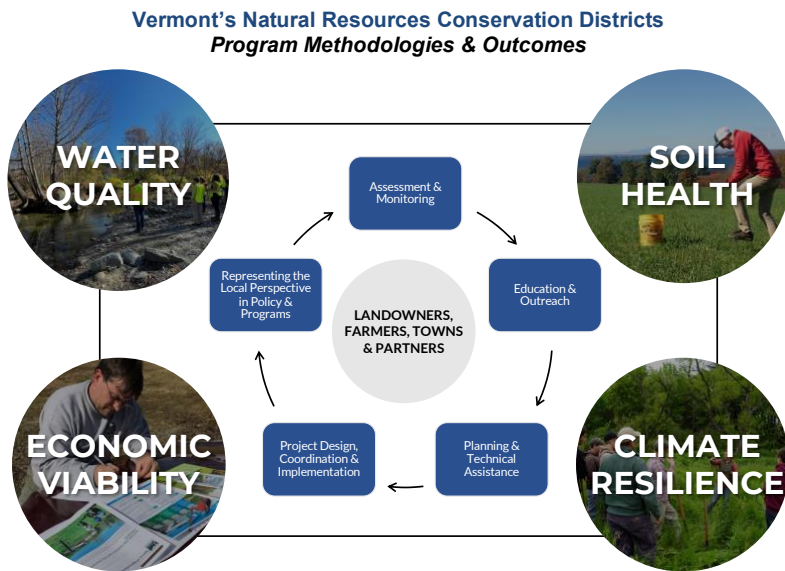


Vermont Association of Conservation Districts

Our Land. Our Water. Our Future.

FY 2024 Appropriations Request for Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Districts

The Vermont State Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) was established in 1939 under Vermont's [Soil Conservation Act](#) "to provide for the conservation, development, and use of the natural resources of this State" in a way that "protects and promotes the health, safety, and general welfare of its people." Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts are governmental subdivisions that operate under the authority of the NRCC and their elected Boards of Supervisors to connect people, organizations, and resources to steward our land and water resources for the future. We are rooted in communities, and those roots help to strengthen and support the environment. The Vermont Association of Conservation Districts, established in 1980, is the membership association of Vermont's Conservation Districts.



Vermont's Conservation Districts are trusted and effective members of the agricultural and conservation communities. District Managers and staff are well-equipped with technical ability, training, and knowledge to address the unique needs of local land stewards as well as state natural resource concerns. Operating with boots on the ground, Conservation Districts partner with state Agencies and Departments to help implement programmatic and policy goals at the hyper local level. We are intimately aware of the stresses posed to landowners and food producers, and we help land stewards make conservation practice decisions that change the landscape for people and the planet. However, unlike Conservation Districts in many other states, Vermont Districts do not receive adequate funding through state or municipal appropriations, and our potential is limited by a lack of resources.

State appropriations are dispersed to Conservation Districts through the NRCC line item within the Vermont Agency of Agriculture and Food Markets' budget. Currently, this funding is the only source of state funding that specifically provides for the operational and organizational infrastructure required for the State NRCC and the Conservation Districts to deliver the core services mandated by Vermont State Statute: 10 V.S.A Chapter 31. While we are grateful for the additional \$250,000 appropriated to the NRCC line item in the FY23 state budget (*Act 185 Sec. B.225*), funding from the state is still insufficient for Districts to meet their statutory obligations. As critical members of the state's conservation delivery system, Conservation Districts have been asked to take on a wide range of new initiatives in recent years, and further appropriations are necessary for District Managers to effectively meet their existing and increased demand.

Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts request a base appropriation of \$3,000,000 starting in FY24 to cover ongoing operational costs necessary to meet statutory obligations.

Categories of Funding and Estimates of Costs:

Core distributions to Districts - \$1,370,000

- Purpose: to help facilitate compliance with statutory obligations and relieve the burden placed on District Managers to apply for and manage multiple grants, which reduces capacity to work on the ground.

Agricultural Resource Specialist (ARS) Training - \$200,000

- Purpose: to strengthen Vermont's workforce of agricultural specialists and conservation planners to grow our capacity to provide technical assistance and implement projects on farms and other agricultural lands. Additional capacity is needed to meet the increased demand in connecting producers and land stewards to available funding for climate initiatives through the recent federal Inflation Reduction Act and other programs. This funding would be used to support staff time to participate in a range of training programs that are currently available for Conservation Districts, but which Conservation Districts do not have the operational budgets to support.

Community Engagement and Outreach - \$450,000

- Purpose: to develop public participation plans and increase community assessments and outreach. The NRCC is named as a member of the Environmental Justice Advisory Council established in Act 154 of 2022, and Conservation Districts stand ready as governmental subdivisions to better incorporate the state's new environmental justice goals into their community outreach. Conservation Districts already bring awareness to communities regarding the environmental benefits of conservation projects and anticipate acting as an on-the-ground liaison for state environmental justice work through our Local Working Groups.

Board and Supervisor Compensation - \$50,000

- Purpose: to fund supplies, mileage, and per diems related to Supervisor and Board participation. Current funding from the state is insufficient to support per diems for all Supervisors, which results in many Supervisors not taking advantage of this entitlement specifically to preserve the amount of operational funding available for other District core services. Providing proper compensation for both District Managers and Supervisors is critical for increasing equity and diverse participation in the state's conservation delivery system.

Equipment and Facility Upgrades - \$98,000

- Purpose: to have flexible funding to purchase needed equipment and software upgrades for programming and projects at the District level. We have identified \$98,000 worth of equipment and facility improvement needs among Vermont's 14 Conservation Districts for the 2024 fiscal year, including a work vehicle for the Windham Natural Resources Conservation District, technology upgrades to support hybrid meetings and outreach events statewide, GPS units, and hardware for recruitment efforts.

NRCD Leadership Expenses - \$30,000

- Purpose: to fund the newly created District Manager Representative and District Manager Representative Alternate positions, which will ensure smooth communication and collaboration between NRCC, VACD and Vermont's 14 Conservation Districts and their staff and Supervisors.

3 Positions at NRCC - \$313,000

- Purpose: to fund 3 FTEs to provide organization administration, capacity building, district support, and communications services. NRCC has a statutory obligation to provide support and oversight to Vermont's natural resources conservation districts, but current staffing is tied to grants management, which strains staff capacity to provide core services or respond to emergent needs. Stable funding for core positions would also provide increased flexibility to hire new staff to meet the needs of future initiatives and leverage additional federal funding.

Capacity Development & Overhead - \$489,000

- Purpose: to fund operational costs not funded through competitive grant funding sources, such as software upgrades, strategic planning, and professional training.

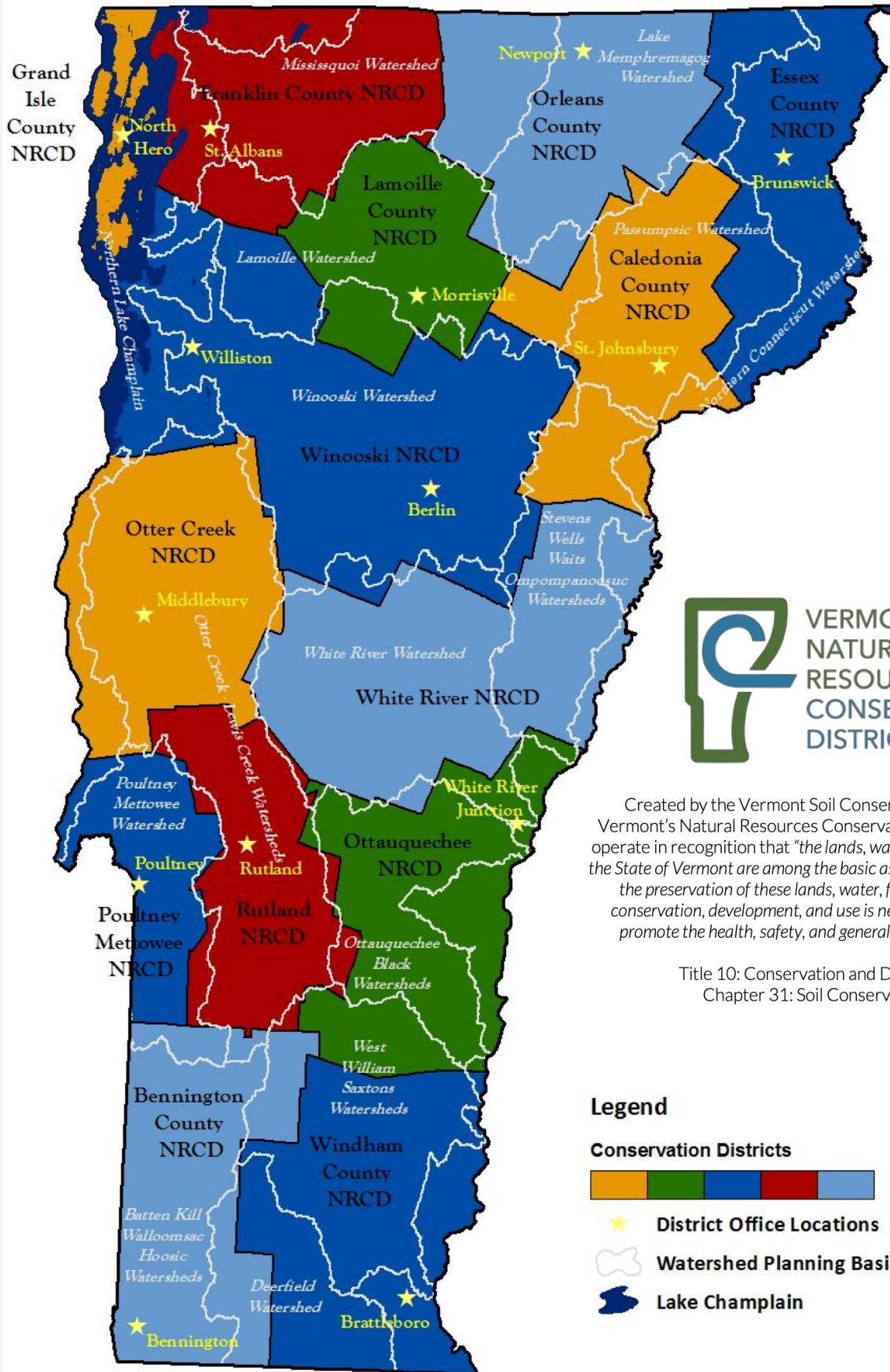
Thank you for your consideration of this request. We are prepared to answer any questions you may have and/or provide additional information about our request.

Signed,



Executive Director, Vermont Association of Conservation Districts

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**VERMONT
NATURAL
RESOURCES
CONSERVATION
DISTRICTS**




Created by the Vermont Soil Conservation Act of 1939, Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCs) operate in recognition that "the lands, water, forests, and wildlife of the State of Vermont are among the basic assets of the state, and that the preservation of these lands, water, forests, and wildlife by conservation, development, and use is necessary to protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of its people."

Title 10: Conservation and Development
Chapter 31: Soil Conservation Act

Legend

Conservation Districts



-  **District Office Locations**
-  **Watershed Planning Basins**
-  **Lake Champlain**



Organization Chart of Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Districts

