

Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts



House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency & Forestry
Thursday, April 27

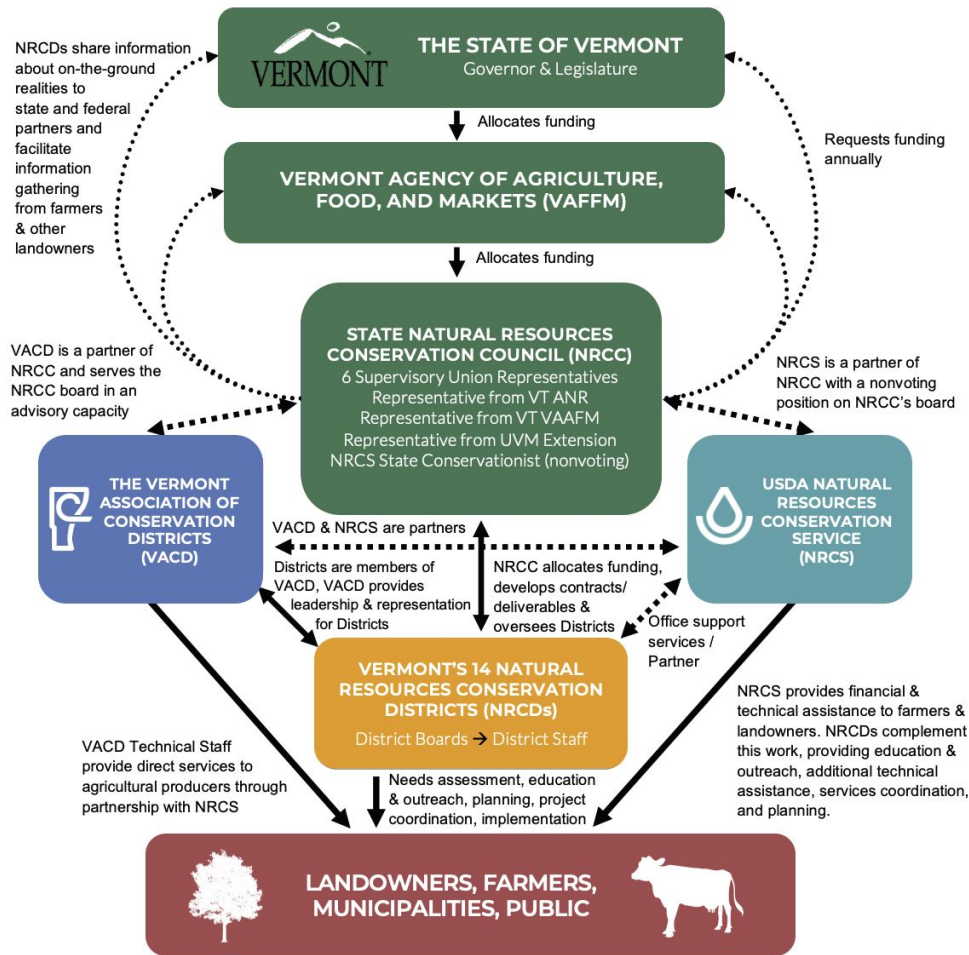
Goals of reviewing enabling statute:

- Educate the General Assembly about the **statutory role** of Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDs) and how we operate, and understand what questions legislators have
- Explain the original legislative intent around Conservation Districts and modern day practice
- Raise awareness of our state's existing locally-led conservation infrastructure the opportunities it provides
- Long term: identify a **sustainable revenue source** to help Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts carry out their statutory obligations

Enabling Statute, Soil Conservation Act, 10 V.S.A. 31

§ 701. Policy

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Legislature to provide for the conservation, development, and use of the natural resources of this State and 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. (Amended 1967, No. 303 (Adj. Sess.), § 1, eff. March 22, 1968.)



§ 703. State Natural Resources Conservation Council; members

*“A State Natural Resources Conservation Council is hereby established to serve as an **Agency of the State** to perform the functions conferred upon it in this chapter...”*

§ 709. Petition to organize district

Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDD) were established across the country in response to the Dust Bowl environmental crisis. In the 1940s, Vermont landowners followed the petitioning process laid out in § 709 through § 713 of the Soil Conservation Act to establish Vermont's 14 Conservation Districts. The first District to be established was the Poultney Mettowee NRCDD in **June of 1940**.

Today, Vermont's 14 NRCDDs cover and serve every corner of Vermont. These sections of the enabling statute may only become relevant again if landowners were to petition for a District to divide into two or more Districts, or other such similar circumstances.

§ 719. Elections

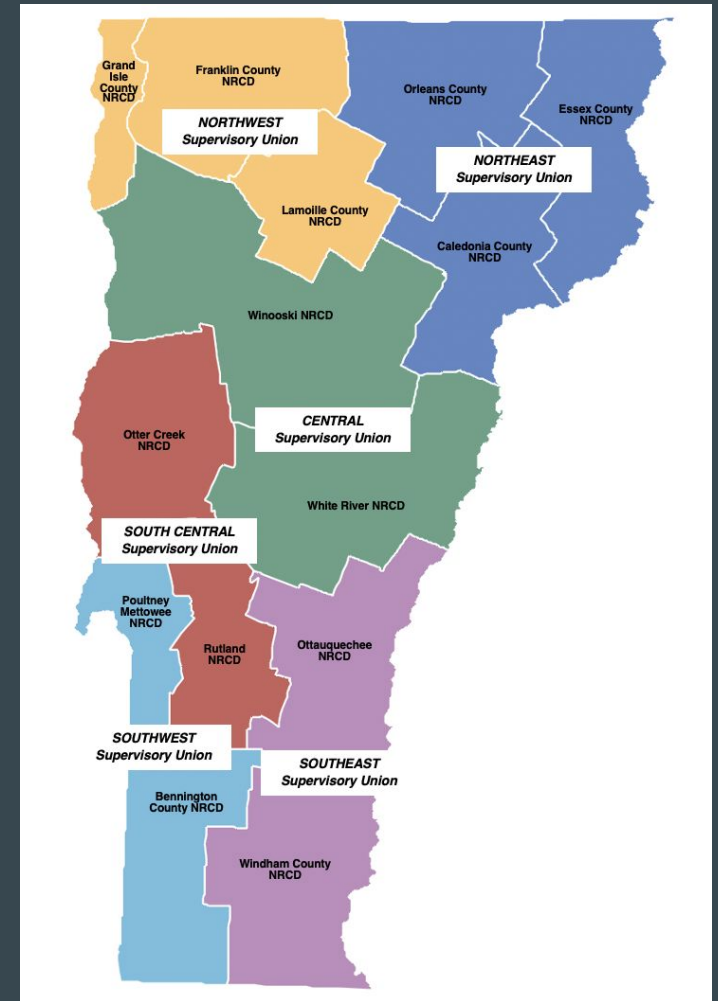
As governmental subdivisions, Vermont's 14 NRCDs operate more like municipalities than nonprofits. If our constituents are not happy with the services they receive from their local NRCD, they hold the power to vote acting Supervisors out of their position. In current practice, Supervisors follow the election process to either become elected or appointed to their position, while District Managers are hired by the Board.

NRCDs are responsible for holding their own elections which currently do not align with other local elections.

§ 720. Supervisors as governing body of district;

*“The governing body of the district shall consist of five supervisors, **elected or appointed** under this chapter. The supervisors shall be persons residing within the district...”*

- Supervisors are not required to be landowners
- Supervisors have broad statutory power to execute conservation projects in Vermont; they do not practice all functions in current practice
- There are 6 Supervisory Unions that cover all Districts, which are made up of 2+ Boards



§ 723. Powers of supervisors (examples)

(1) “To conduct surveys, investigations and research” regarding soil erosion and its prevention

(2) “To conduct demonstration projects within the district” that shows “the means, methods and measures by which soil erosion, in all its forms can be prevented”

*** (3)** “To carry out measures for the prevention and control of soil and stream bank erosion and the protection and conservation of natural resources within the district including, engineering operations, methods of cultivation, the growing of vegetation, and the changes in use of land”

*** (6)** “To make available...to landowners within the district, agricultural and engineering machinery and equipment, fertilizer, seeds, and seedlings, and such other material or equipment as will assist the land owners to carry on operations upon their lands for the conservation of soil resources, control of soil and stream bank erosion, and protection and conservation of natural resources”

(7) “To construct, improve, and maintain such structures as may be necessary or convenient for the performance of any of the operations authorized in this chapter”

*** (9)** To administer...any soil conservation or natural resources conservation project located within its boundaries that are undertaken by the United States or any of its agencies; to manage as agent of the United States or any of its agencies, any soil-conservation or natural resources conservation project...to act as agent for the United States, or any of its agencies, in connection with the acquisition, construction, operation, or administration of any soil-conservation or natural resources conservation project within its boundaries”

§ 715. Establishment of district as governmental subdivision;

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.



§ 706. Funds; allocation of by Council

*“...any funds appropriated by the State or any federal agency to the State Natural Resources Conservation Council for allocation to districts organized under the provisions of this chapter **shall be available for the administrative and other expenses of the districts.**”*

Unlike Conservation Districts in many other states, Vermont Districts do not receive adequate funding through state, county, or municipal appropriations, and our potential is limited by a lack of resources. We hope to use the information from our enabling statute to demonstrate why additional funding from the state is needed.



After 80+ years, Poultney Mettowie NRC D has a home!

One-time funding from the state in fiscal year 2023 made it possible for the Poultney Mettowie NRC D to purchase a small, previously vacant office building on Main Street in Poultney, **increasing their visibility and accessibility of programming** to the community while contributing to Poultney's economic revitalization.

The District secured the new office building and relocated there in April 2022.

Questions?



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