

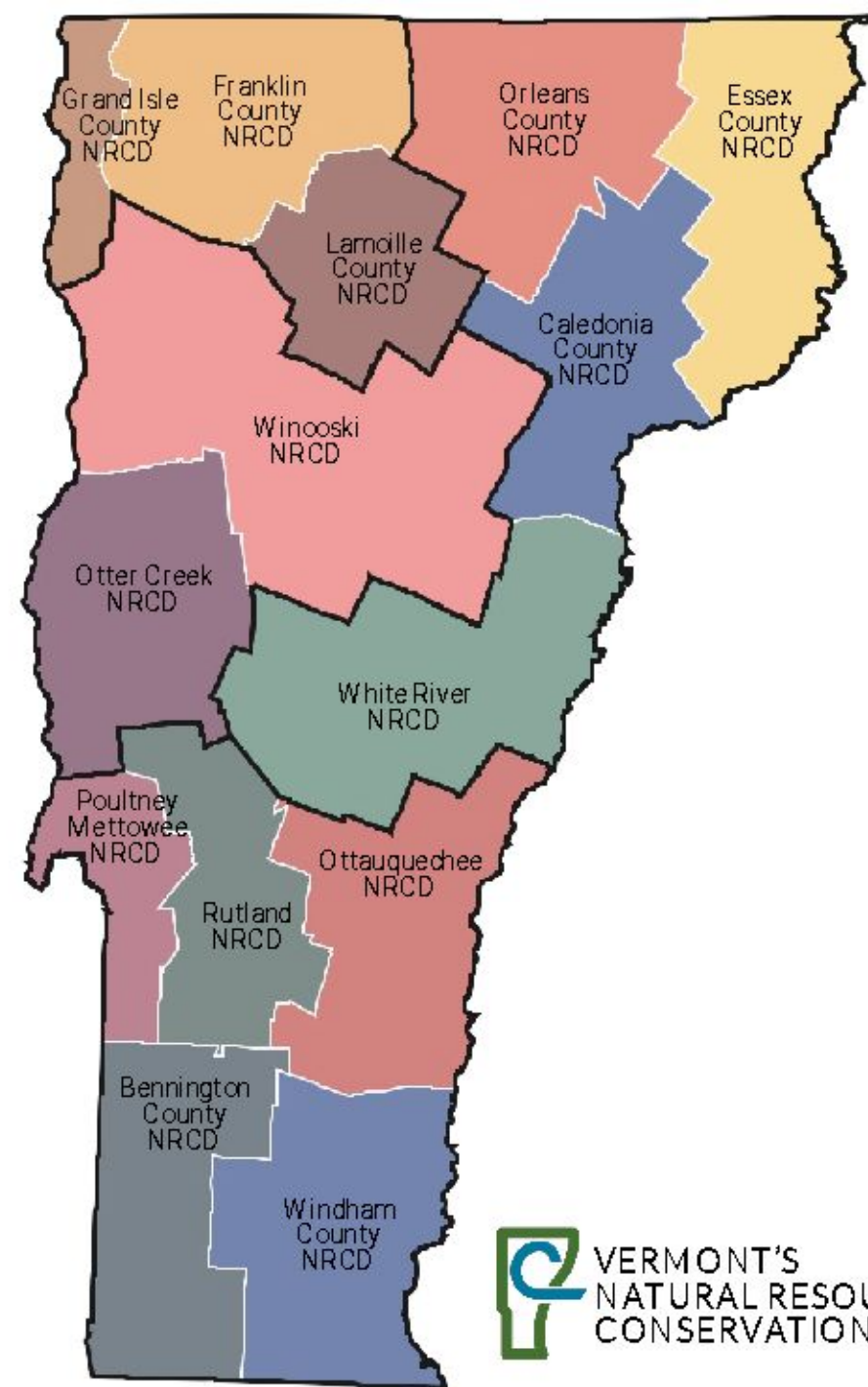
VERMONT NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION DISTRICTS



FEBRUARY 2024

Vermont's natural resources conservation districts are trusted and effective members of the agricultural & conservation community.

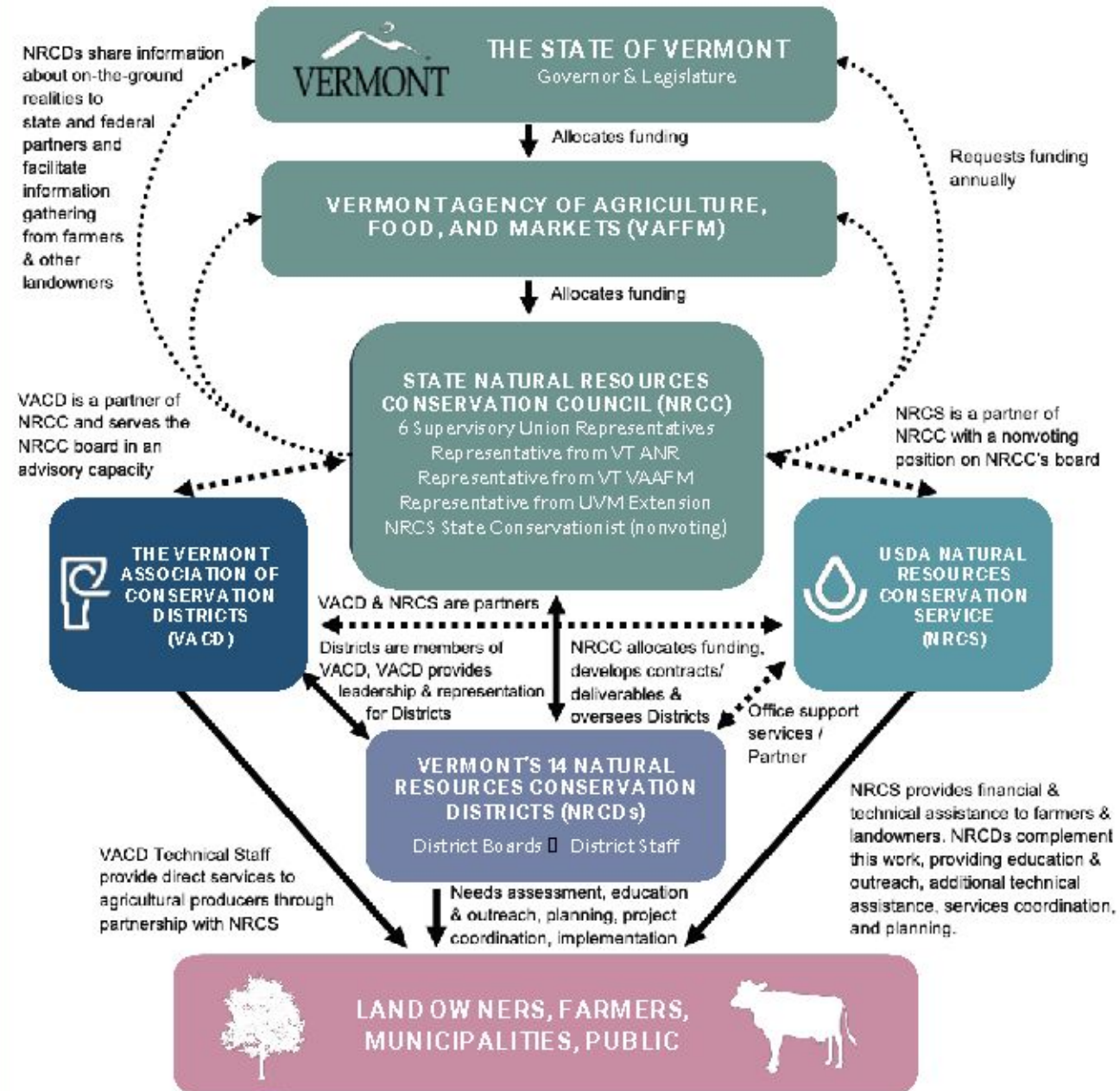
- We are rooted in communities and cover all geographic regions of Vermont.
- We work at the grassroots level and act as liaisons between government and local stakeholders.
- We help landowners make management and conservation decisions that improve the landscape for people and the planet.
- We connect people, organizations and resources to steward our land and water resources for the future.



Vermont's natural resources conservation districts are organized to lead local efforts to protect soil health, water quality, and other natural resources.

§ 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...”



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.)”

§ 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.



Relationship between NRCDs & NRCS



Collectively, Vermont's Conservation Districts hold over 1,000 written agreements with NRCS which authorize the following functions:

- Cost-share of office space and technology
- Access to NRCS data and tools
- Facilitate Local Working Groups to inform NRCS funding priorities
- Achieving National Conservation Planner status
- Federal-State Cross Participation
- Written Agreements to Share Work

While Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts are critical state partners for NRCS, the federal government does not contribute meaningfully towards operational expenses outside of shared office space and technology. The federal government's support does not include any salary or benefits for staff, travel reimbursements, necessary equipment for on-site technical assistance, etc.

Conservation District Program Areas



Natural Resources
Conservation & Restoration



Stormwater Remediation



Education & Outreach

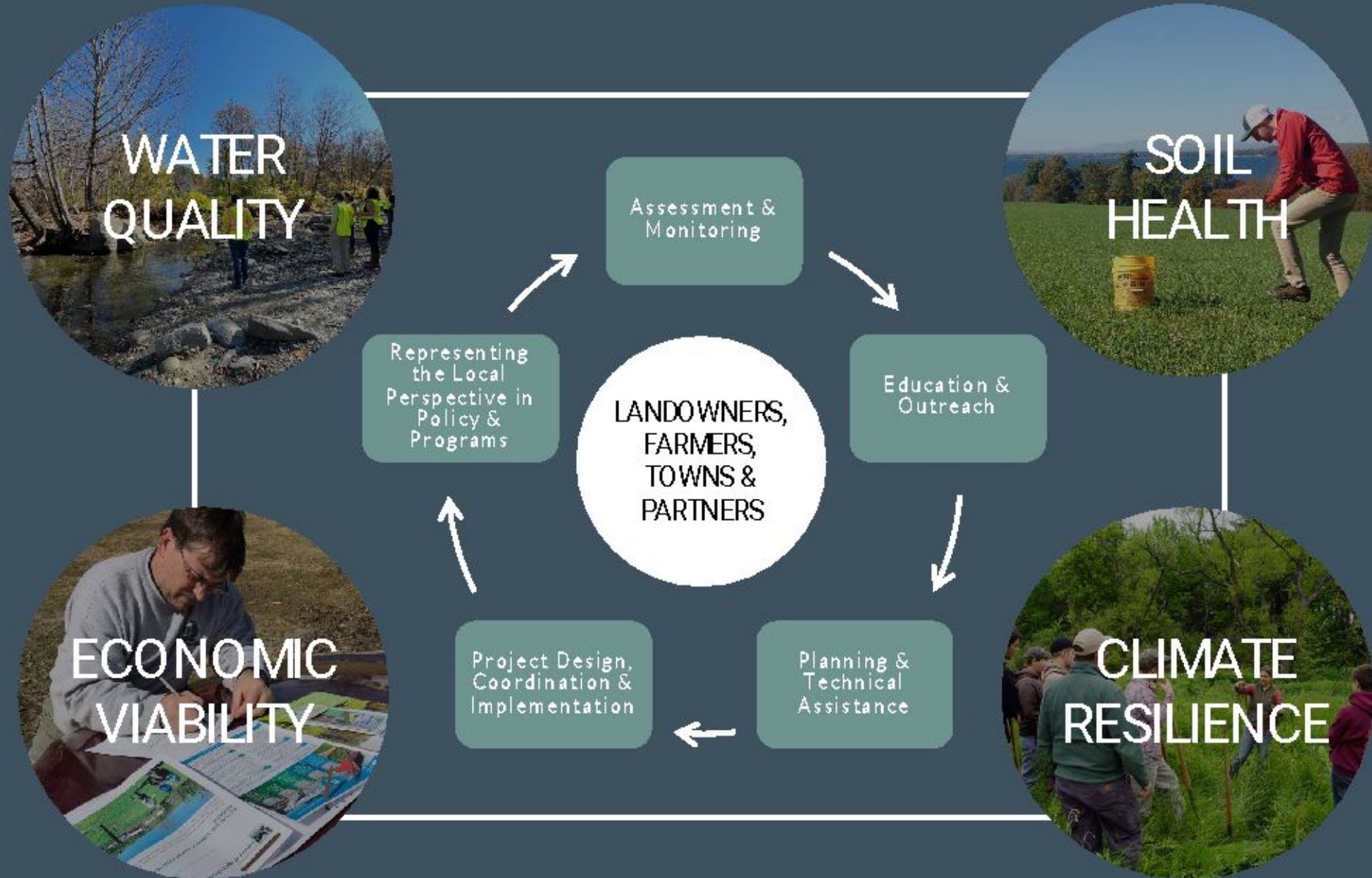


Agriculture

NRCD's Role in Achieving State Natural Resources Conservation Goals

- **Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership** - NRCDs are part of the Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership, which has a framework at the state level and local level to collaborate and coordinate water quality efforts. NRCDs hold that framework at the local level as regional coordinators.
- **Pay for Performance Program** - NRCDs have a contract with VAAFPM to implement the new Pay for Performance program at the local level, helping connect farmers to opportunities to reduce phosphorus and stormwater runoff, enhance riparian corridors, plant native species.
- **Stormwater** - NRCDs are stormwater project implementers. We use Stormwater Master Plans and our relationships with municipalities to help advance water quality initiatives in stormwater. NRCDs hold community forums to gather public input on town stormwater projects.
- **Community Engagement** - NRCDs advise government agencies in the development of natural resources programs and policies through Local Work Groups. For example, the White River NRCD facilitated Local Work Groups to inform the policies around Payment for Ecosystem Services. The Bennington NRCD facilitated Local Work Groups around PFAS.

Program Methodologies & Outcomes





Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts request a base appropriation of \$3,000,000 starting in FY25 to cover ongoing operational costs necessary to meet statutory obligations.



Last year, the Legislature appropriated an additional \$250,000 to the state Natural Resources Conservation Council for a for a total appropriation of \$612,000. This enabled us to increase the core funding for each District to \$35,500 per year. Unfortunately, the VT Agency of Agriculture has reduced our base budget by \$112,000 for a FY25 recommended budget of \$500,000.

Increasing NRCC's base budget to **\$3,000,000** would support the administrative and operational costs of Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts.

- Salary & Benefits for 1 FTE for each NRCD
- Recruitment, training and retention of Vermont's agricultural and conservation specialist's workforce
- Per Diems and Reimbursements for Board and Supervisor Participation
- Outreach & Community Assessments for New State Programs and Policies (i.e. Payment for Ecosystem Services)
- Technology Needs & Software Upgrades
- Increased Administrative and Grant Management Capacity at NRCC



§ 706. Funds; Allocation 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. The information from our enabling statute demonstrates why additional funding from the state is needed.

Base versus Grant Funding

- NRCDs receive funding through a piecemeal approach of utilizing private, state, and federal grants, but do not currently receive adequate state funding dedicated to core organizational and administrative functions.
- Funding from grants is limited, inconsistent, and does not offer secure finances for long-term planning. The need to perpetually identify and apply for funding from various sources has put a major strain on NRCD budgets.
- Grant funding is competitive and requires significant amount of staff time to apply, manage, and report.
- District functions are limited to the specifications of various grants, which means we do not have the flexibility to purchase much needed equipment and software for our programming and projects, or compensate administrative work properly

THANK YOU! QUESTIONS?



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