



# Vermont Association of Conservation Districts

*Our Land. Our Water. Our Future.*

TO: Vermont House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry  
FROM: Vermont Association of Conservation Districts  
RE: FY23 Funding Request  
DATE: March 8, 2022

Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts respectfully submit this memo as a follow-up to questions we were asked in policy committees about our [FY23 Budget request](#). Thank you for your consideration of our request for \$1.5 million in base funding as well as \$2.348 million in one-time funding. We hope you will be able to support the request, and that this memo helps explain the urgent need for funding. We are available to provide any additional information if needed.

## **Conservation Districts' Current Sources of Funding (Revenues)**

The only dedicated funding that Districts receive from the state for general operational expenses is an annual grant of \$112,000 in the Agency of Agriculture's budget, which results in less than \$8,000 per District and minimal administrative support for the Vermont State Natural Resources Conservation Council.

*Tree Sales* – 8 of the 14 Conservation Districts host annual tree sales that can bring in about \$1,000 per District per year. However, these events are primarily community service and outreach events to get more native and pollinator-friendly plants distributed into the area, and not foundational funding. As such, this event can actually be a net loss for Districts to host, as has been the case for a number of Districts over the years.

*Municipal Appropriations* – 10 Districts receive appropriations and/or grants from local government (i.e. towns or Regional Planning Commissions), ranging from less than \$1,000 to \$20,000. The larger amounts are primarily grant funding contingent on specific deliverables, which therefore cannot be used to sustain ongoing operations. For example, the Windham Conservation District received a Design & Implementation Block Grant in the amount of \$23,746 from the Southern Windsor Regional Planning Commission to complete preliminary design work for a floodplain restoration project on the Ellis Brook in Dover and Wilmington. Of this amount, over \$20,000 went directly to a contracted environmental services contractor for site survey, modeling and design work.

*Grant Funding* – Conservation Districts are almost entirely grant funded and receive funding through a piecemeal approach of utilizing private, state, and federal grants. Last year, Vermont's 14 Conservation Districts wrote a total of 195 grants. The Poultney Mettowee District alone holds 40 different grants, which helps recruit and retain invaluable staff but is unsustainable to administer. In order to do our work effectively and efficiently, it is critical that we transition away from piecemeal grant funding to reliable base funding from state appropriations. Please see Appendix A for a list of major grants that Conservation Districts receive.

## **Conservation Districts' Role in Achieving State Agricultural and Conservation Goals**

Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts are subdivisions of state government that were established by landowners through the petitioning process laid out in the [Soil Conservation Act](#), and they operate under the authority of the Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) to assist in the implementation of conservation practices at the local level. Under 10 VSA 703, the NRCC and its districts are designated an "agency of the state." Each District has a Board of Supervisors who are all local residents elected by the public to that position.

Conservation District staff members are non-regulatory government employees who live in the communities they serve. Our uniqueness lies in the neighbor-to-neighbor relationships we have with the landowners we provide services to. We are often the middleman that connects and helps landowners apply to the programs and grants that are administered by the Agency of Agriculture & Food Markets, the Agency of Natural Resources, UVM Extension, VHCBC, and others. For example, we have a contract with VAAFAM to implement the Pay for Phosphorus program at the local level, which is a natural continuation of our role of connecting the farmers and landowners in our communities to such opportunities. We are also the only group to have statewide representation: Conservation Districts serve every region and town in Vermont.

The Vermont Association of Conservation Districts is part of the [Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership](#), which is a formal partnership with an MOU signed between USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts, US Fish & Wildlife Service, UVM Extension, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, the Vermont Housing &

Conservation Board, and the Lake Champlain Basin Program. That partnership has a framework at the state level and local level to collaborate and coordinate efforts, and Conservation Districts hold that framework at the local level as regional coordinators.

In addition to providing a wide range of technical and financial services, Vermont's Conservation Districts represent community members and landowners in advising government agencies in the development of natural resources programs and policies through Local Work Groups. For example, the White River Conservation District is currently facilitating farmer-led Work Groups to inform the policies being developed around Payment for Ecosystem Services. Other Districts hold community forums to gather public input on town stormwater projects.

### **Sustainability of Our FY23 Funding Request**

Given our unique role in state government and our statutory charges, it is our hope that the Legislature and Administration can identify and secure the funds needed to sustain the \$1,388,000 increase to VAAFMs' NRCC base budget for a total annual state appropriation of \$1.5 million. It is also our hope that such an increase would not have to result in a programmatic or staff reduction at VAAFMs.

In terms of our one-time funding requests, we believe that these requests are sustainable for the following reasons:

- *\$248,000 for capital improvements* – this money will help equip Conservation Districts with the resources we need to do our work well, and many of these resources are true one-time expenses that will last many years. For example, we have identified a serious need for District-owned trucks with a mounted hydraulic soil sampler and associated precision agriculture software to conduct soil sample farm visits. Currently only the Poultney Mettowee District owns a truck, which was purchased from a generous donation by the Vermont Land Trust.
  - Also, the bulk of this one-time funding request is \$100,000 for the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District to purchase an office building in their community. The Poultney Mettowee District is not co-housed with NRCS and lost their office space in 2019 when Green Mountain College closed. They have an opportunity to purchase a small, 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.
- *\$2.1 million for Agricultural Resource Specialist (ARS) Training Program* – we have calculated that this amount will allow us to run the training program for 3 years, so the program would already be sustained for three fiscal years if appropriated. This program will help us build our current capacity, which may allow us to access other sources of funding for this service in the future. Also, training funds can help us leverage more federal funding, further sustaining operations.

Again, thank you for your consideration. Please know that our request is based on the real budgets of Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts. We worked together building this request as a statewide network of governmental subdivisions and we ask for your support.

Signed,



D. Jill Arace, Executive Director, Vermont Association of Conservation Districts  
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## APPENDIX A - GRANT FUNDING

### Sources of Income for Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts

Bennington County NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 17</b>
<b>Total FY21 Income: \$86,522</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 1</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
VAAFM AgCWIP
DEC Project Development
DEC Design & Implementation
DEC/NRCS Wetlands/Natural Resources O&E
NRCC Trees for Streams (Pur Project)
High Meadows Fund
USFS Batten Kill Watershed Alliance (Anticipated)
Other Anticipated Funding
Donations
Town of Bennington
Town Appropriations
Interest

Caledonia County NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 17</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$241,403</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 1</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
VAAFM AgCWIP
DEC Design & Implementation (Rte 14 Drainage Channel)
DEC Design & Implementation (NVU Gravel Wetland)
DEC Design & Implementation (South Prospect Design)
DEC Design & Implementation (Undercliff Road Gully)
DEC Design & Implementation (North Main Hardwick)
DEC Project Development
USFWS Culverts
NRCS RCPP Nutrient Management Planning
DEC & NRCS Wetlands/Natural Resource E&O
NRCC Administrative Contract
Local Government Hydroseeder Share Program
Miscellaneous Interest

Essex County NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 22</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$149,899</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 1.6</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
VAAFM AgCWIP #1
VAAFM AgCWIP #2
DEC Project Development
DEC Design & Implementation (Town of Concord)
DEC Design & Implementation (Maidstone Lake)
Upper Connecticut Basin Plan
Maidstone Lake (FY19)
Maidstone Lake (FY20 Northwoods for Ron Reed Project)
Canaday Foundation Pre-Proposal (UCCISMA)
LISFF Nitrogen Study
USFWS UCCISMA Cooperative Agreement
DEC & NRCS Wetlands/Natural Resources E&O
NFWF LISFF Wetland Grant
Windham Foundation Grant Nursery Proposed
VAAFM Tile Drain Agreement (OCNRCD)
Conservation Field Day
Town of East Haven REI
Town of Concord REI
Appropriations

Franklin County NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 16</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$225,807</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 2</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
VAAFM AgCWIP
DEC Project Development
DEC Design & Implementation
VTWSR
DEC & NRCS Wetlands/Natural Resources E&O
VAAFM Tile Drains
NRCS RCPP Nutrient Management Planning
NRCC Trees for Streams
LCBP BMPs Dam Removal
LCBP COVID
Contributions
Sales

Grand Isle County NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 7</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$22,279</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 0.2</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
NRCS Capacity Building
Training Reimbursement
Other Grant/Project Income
Event Income
Interest

Lamoille County NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 16</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$317,650</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 2</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services (2019)
VAAFM District Core Services (2020)
DEC Tactical Basin Planning (2020)
DEC Tactical Basin Planning (2019)
VAAFM AgCWIP
DEC Project Development
DEC Design & Implementation (Copley Park)
DEC Design & Implementation (Brewster)
DEC Design & Implementation (Hyde Park)
DEC Design & Implementation (Hyde Park)
NRCC Trees for Streams Project Development
NRCC Trees for Streams Project Development (2)
NRCC Trees for Streams (2020)
NRCC Trees for Streams (2020, Fall)
NRCC Trees for Streams (2021, Spring)
NRCS RCPP Nutrient Management Planning (2020)
DEC & NRCS Wetlands/Natural Resource E&O
Elmore Lake Assessment
Johnson SWMP
LUHS GSI Install #1
Boy Scout Camp
LCBP Emergency Grant
AOP Program Design Grant
AOP Implementation Grant
Capital Grant No-till Drill
Coop Agreement (16)
Coop Agreement (20)
Education General
Education Outreach
Edu School
Envirothon
Camp
Playgroups
Watershed Series

Orleans County NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 11</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$160,812</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 1.6</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
VAAFM AgCWIP
DEC Project Development
DEC LeRosa Water Quality Monitoring
VAAFM Tile Sampling (FNRCD)
VTWFD Watershed
DEC Lakewise Assessments
VTWFD Memphramagog Riverian Lands
VAWQP Regional Coordination
LCBP Lake Watershed Action Plan (Caspian Lake)
NRCS RCPP Technical Assistance & Conservation Planning
USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife
NRCS RCPP Nutrient Management Planning
Greenboro Association Lakewise
Town of Newport Center (TA for roads)
Town of Derby Line (TA for roads)
Equipment Rental
Fee for Service Soil Sampling
Interest Income
Donations
Plant Sale

Ottauquechee NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 12</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$25,303</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 0.2</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
DEC Design & Implementation
Donations

## APPENDIX A - GRANT FUNDING CONTINUED

### Sources of Income for Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts

Otter Creek NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 18</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$58,400</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 1</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
NRCC Trees for Streams (Starksboro Buffer)
CWIP Buffer Assessments
PFW Grant
Town Contributions
Tree Sales
Supplies Sales

Poultney Meadows NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 15</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$505,665</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 5</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
VAAFM AgCWIP
VAAFM ACAP
DEC Project Development
DEC Design & Implementation
NRCC Trees for Streams (PUR Projct FY19)
NRCC Trees for Streams (PUR Projct FY20)
NRCC Trees for Streams (Butler)
VAAFM Agronomy & Conservation Assistance Program
VAAFM Tile Drains
NRCS RCPP Nutrient Management Planning (19-20)
NRCS RCPP Nutrient Management Planning (20-21)
Lake Champlain SeaGrant LEAP
LCBP Pollution Prevention (LakeWise LSC)
LCBP Pollution Prevention (Driveways)
LCBP Pollution Prevention (Forestry Practices)
Lookout Foundation
ANR Poultney River SWMP
High Meadows Fund Flower Brook Flood Resiliency (Part 3)
USFWS Culvert Assessment Ranking
Watershed Grant Lakewise Assessments
USFS Aquatic Passage
USFWS Habitat Restoration
NRCS Aquatic Passage
DEC LaRosa Water Quality Monitoring
LCBP Org Support Strategic Planning
LCBP Emergency Relief Rent & Services
ERP for Traverse Farm
ERP for Waite Farm
ERP for Bretton
Watershed Grant
Champlain Valley Native Plant Restoration Nursery
Nursery Tree Sale
Donations & Town Allocations
Slate Valley Trails office sublease

Rutland NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 6</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$108,751</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 1</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
DEC Project Development
DEC Design & Implementation (Rotary Park)
ERP FY17 (Cold River Berm Removal)
ERP FY18 (Cold River Berm Removal)
ERP 2020 (Youngs Brook Dam Removal)
LCBP BMP Enhancement (Town of Brandon)
Southern Windsor RPC Block Grant (Wallingford Elem School)
P3 Public Partnership Project (WCA)
Tree Sales
Trout Sales
Town Contributions
Skidder Bridge Rentals

White River NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 15</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$78,583</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 3.1</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
VAAFM AgCWIP
DEC Project Development
NRCC Trees For Streams
NRCS RCPP Nutrient Management Planning
DEC & NRCS Wetlands/Natural Resources E&O
NACD Technical Assistance
NFWF LISFF Wetland Grant

Windham NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 8</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$115,406</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 1.76</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning
VAAFM AgCWIP
DEC Project Development
NRCC Trees for Streams
NRCS RCPP Nutrient Management Planning
DEC Grant in Aid: Aquatic Invasive Species & Greeter
GRHydro: Greeter Program
LRA: Greeter Program
Town of Wilmington: Greeter Program
New England Grassroots Environmental Fund
DEC & NRCS Wetlands/Natural Resources O&E
Watershed Grant: Lake Raponda O&E
Watershed Grant: Sweet Pond American Eel Sign
Southern Windsor RPC: Design & Implementation
LISFF Micro-Wetlands Planning and Prioritization (Possible?)
Tree & Shrub Sales
Trout Sales
Interest
Workshops
Skidder Bridge Rental

Winooski NRCD
<b>FY21 # of Grants Written: 15</b>
<b>TOTAL FY21 INCOME: \$265,380</b>
<b>FY21 FTEs: 3</b>
<b>Budgeted Income Items:</b>
VAAFM District Core Services
DEC Tactical Basin Planning (19/20)
DEC Tactical Basin Planning (20/21)
VAAFM AgCWIP
DEC Project Development (19/20 - 1)
DEC Project Development (19/20 - 2)
EcoAmericorps Professional Training
ERP (Hands Mill Dam 30%)
VAAFM Tile Drains Agreement (FCNRCD)
FPR-EAB (20)
LCBP Commission Trainings
LCBP COVID
NRCC Trees for Streams (NFWF)
NRCC Trees for Streams (19)
NRCC Administration
NRCC Capacity (20/21)
NRCC CWBG (Morse Farm 100%)
NRCC CWBG Shady Hill IMP
RRST (FY20)
SWG (Hands Mill Dam 30%)
USFWS (FY19-ADMIN)
UVM Lakewise
NFWF LISFF Wetland Grant
VACD Mini Tasks
NRCS RCPP Nutrient Management Planning
Tree & Trout Sale
Interest
Municipal Support
Other
Expense Reimbursements

Acronyms
AFT - American Farmland Trust
AgCWIP - Agency of Agriculture Clean Water Initiative Program
ANR - Agency of Natural Resources
AOP - Agriculture Outreach Plan
BMP - Best Management Practice
CISMA - Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas
CWIP - Clean Water Initiative Program (funded by VT Clean Water Fund)
DEC - Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, under ANR
DPS - Vermont Department of Public Safety, part of Vermont Emergency Management
EAB - Emerald Ash Borer
E&O - Education & Outreach
EPA - US Environmental Protection Agency
ERP - Ecosystem Restoration Program
FPR - Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, also under ANR
GMNF - Green Mountain National Forest, US Forest Service
GSI - Green Stormwater Infrastructure
LCBP - Lake Champlain Basin Program
LIS - Long Island Sound
LISFF - Long Island Sound Futures Fund
LRA - Lake Rescue Association
NEIWPCC - New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission
NACD - National Association of Conservation Districts
NFWF - National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
NRCC - State Natural Resources Conservation Council
NRCS - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
PFW - Partners for Wildlife
RCP - Regional Planning Commission
REI - Road Erosion Inventories
SWG - State Wildlife Grant
SWMP - Stormwater Master Plan
TA - Technical Assistance
UCCISMA - Upper Connecticut River CISMA
USFS - US Forest Service
USFWS - US Fish and Wildlife Service
VAAFM - Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets
VAVQP - Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership
VTFWD - Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
VTWSR - Vermont Wild and Scenic Rivers

## APPENDIX B - TESTIMONIALS FROM THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

*"It cannot be overstated how much the Vermont Land Trust relies on Conservation Districts to maintain our farmland conservation program; many projects simply would not meet water quality thresholds without their help. Please make this investment and keep this lean, high-functioning, water-quality partner strong and nimble."*

- Donald Campbell, Vermont Land Trust, January 2022

*"Thank you for your service, as we wouldn't be where we are without it. Our changes have been gradual, but steady. We were able to pass our (farm) inspection with minimal fixes. Without your help, our inspection would have been overwhelming and may have ended with the sale of the cows."*

- Hilda Haines, Fisk-Haines Farm LLC, Danby, January 2022

*"The support and resources offered by the Poultney Mettowee Conservation District to our farm have been invaluable. Our small size means we don't have access to, or the means to purchase equipment such as the no-till drill and Jennifer Alexander's knowledge, expertise, and willingness to assist us whenever we need it has been a huge help to us."*

- Dan and Laurie Brooks, Wayward Goose Farm, West Pawlet, January 2022

*"As Vice President of the Lake Elmore Association (LEA), I write to commend the Lamoille County Conservation District (LCCD) for its efforts, in conjunction with the LEA, to preserve our beautiful lake for future generations. They have been consistently working to prevent erosion and the detrimental stormwater runoff into Lake Elmore. The LCCD's commitment to Lake Elmore has been instrumental in securing residents' interest in and commitment to doing their part to preserve and improve the quality of our Lake. It is our hope that necessary funding for Vermont's Natural Resource Conservation Districts will be provided so that they can continue with their amazing work of protecting the natural resources that define our community and the state of Vermont, making Vermont a chosen destination for countless tourists."*

- Cheryl Barkley, Vice President Lake Elmore Association, Elmore, February 2022

*"Fitzgerald Environmental regularly partners with many of Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDs) to plan, scope, and implement water quality restoration projects. The NRCDs are essential partners in these water quality restoration efforts for many reasons. The NRCDs provide the critical on-the-ground link between the water quality stakeholders and the larger group of funders, regulators, and designers. The NRCDs also bring resources to bear on projects, such as planting stock and connections with volunteer groups. Without NRCD staff doing the hard work at the ground level to make the link between these two groups, many projects we've worked on would have never gotten off the ground. Given the anticipated increases in Clean Water Funding over the coming years, NRCDs will be essential to helping the State of Vermont meet its TMDL clean water targets and meeting the needs of water quality stakeholders across the State."*

- Evan Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald Environmental Associates, Colchester, March 2022