



# Vermont Association of Conservation Districts

*Our Land. Our Water. Our Future.*

## Vermont Association of Conservation Districts Request for state appropriations for Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts

**Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts request an increase in base funding of \$2,500,000 for a total base budget of \$3,000,000 in the FY2025 State Budget to fill the funding gap and address systemic underfunding of Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts.**

Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDs) are governmental subdivisions that operate under the authority of their elected Boards of Supervisors and the State Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) to connect people, organizations, and resources to steward our land and water resources for the future. NRCDs deliver a suite of services that meet existing and emerging community, natural resources, and environmental needs by providing education, outreach, program navigation services, and technical assistance support for landowners, land stewards, residents, municipalities, and organizations. We have been rooted in communities since our inception in 1939, and those roots help to strengthen and support the environment and promote resilient communities.

**Vermont's NRCDs are trusted and effective members of the agricultural and conservation communities.** We are the locally-led government affiliates of the federal USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Services Agency (NRCS), and we serve and represent constituents in every city and town across the state of Vermont. District Managers and staff have the 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 local level.

**THE NEED:** In recent years, Vermont's NRCDs have been asked to take on a wide range of initiatives as the state's conservation delivery system, including serving as frontline outreach and education, technical assistance, and implementation providers for clean water projects, Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs), and more. We are also partners in implementing new ways of accounting for ecosystem services and reaching underserved populations. Consequently, the work of the NRCDs has been continuous and growing due to increased demand. As the State continues to undertake a range of new and pressing initiatives such as environmental justice, the 30x30 Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act, invasive species management, and flood resilience, **Vermont's NRCDs will need additional state support to be effective partners as the State's community engagement resource for natural resources and environmental planning, decision making, policy development, and program delivery.**

Since 2018, Vermont NRCDs have added approximately 28 FTEs in staffing in an attempt to meet the increased demand for our programs and services. Collectively, Vermont's 14 NRCDs manage over 200 different grants per year to fund their staff and programmatic work, which reduces staff capacity to be in the field responding to local needs and results in high inefficiencies as staff time is disproportionately spent on grant management and reporting. NRCDs need more core administrative support from the NRCC to meet the increased demand for our work in a way that is focused on serving our constituents. In addition, we are keenly aware of the federal money poised to make its way to Vermont to fund natural resources and climate change work, and **additional state support is needed to help leverage federal dollars.**

### **A NRCC base budget of \$3,000,000 would enable:**

- Increased core distributions to each NRCD to deliver high quality conservation services to their constituents and match federal grant opportunities;
- District Managers to participate in NRCC leadership in the newly created District Manager Representative and District Manager Representative Alternate positions;
- 2 FTEs associated with NRCC to increase both financial and programmatic efficiency among all NRCDs through shared administrative practices, infrastructure, resources, and systems, and to ensure consistency and quality in services statewide.

Each year since calendar year 2022, Vermont's NRCDs have approached the General Assembly with a request to increase base funding for Vermont's NRCC to \$3 million. In response, the Vermont Legislature appropriated an additional \$250,000 in base funding in the FY23 and FY24 State Budgets. We are grateful for these base increases after decades of being level funded, but the need for a \$3 million base budget remains for Districts to meet their statutory obligations.

**State Natural Resources Conservation Districts  
Fiscal Year 2025 Operational Budget Proposal**

Revenue	FY24	Proposed FY25
<b>Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets</b>	\$612,000	\$3,000,000
<b>Expense</b>		
<b>Contractual</b>		
<b>NRCD Statutory Responsibilities</b>		
FY24 - \$35,500 per NRCD x 14	\$497,000	
FY25 – Allocated based on identified need		\$2,716,000
<b>NRCC Operational Expense</b>		
<b>Supplies &amp; Admin Expense</b>	\$20,900	\$20,900
<b>Supervisory Union Representation &amp; Supervisor Per Diems</b>	\$3,300	\$3,300
<b>NRCC Personnel (Contractual)</b>		
<b>NRCC Administration</b>	\$50,000	\$219,000
<b>FY24 - District Manager Leadership</b>	\$23,595	\$23,595
<b>Capacity Building &amp; Professional Development Support</b>	\$17,205	\$17,205
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$612,000</b>	<b>\$3,000,000</b>

**Conservation Districts exist in every U.S. State and Territory** and are often funded through county level government or state tax revenues. Unfortunately, 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 Vermont's 14 NRCDs through the NRCC line item within the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, 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 14 NRCDs to deliver the core services mandated by Vermont State Statute: 10 V.S.A Chapter 31, [Vermont's Soil Conservation Act](#).

If you are interested in learning more about the history of Conservation Districts, please [click here](#) to read an interview with Philip Glick, who was an Undersecretary of Agriculture under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) and was largely responsible for drafting the standard Soil Conservation District law which FDR promoted to state Governors in his famous letter of 1937, in which FDR noted that the Nation that destroys its soil, destroys itself.

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.

Sincerely,



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