

Core Functions of Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCs)

NRC staff members are **non-regulatory government employees** who are embedded 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 liaison that works directly with landowners to identify and apply to the programs and grants that best meets their needs. These programs and grants are often administered by the Agency of Agriculture & Food Markets, the Agency of Natural Resources, UVM Extension, VHCB, and others. **Conservation Districts act as local outreach and implementors.**

Below are just a few examples of our core work:

- **Pay for Performance Program** - NRCs have a contract with VAAF to *implement* the Pay for Performance program at the local level, which is a natural continuation of our role of connecting the farmers and landowners in our communities to opportunities to reduce phosphorus and stormwater runoff, enhance riparian corridors, plant native species, etc.
- **Stormwater** - Many of Vermont's NRCs are stormwater project *implementers*. We use Stormwater Master Plans and our relationships with municipalities to help advance water quality initiatives in stormwater. Many NRCs hold community forums to gather public input on town stormwater projects.
- **Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership** - all 14 NRCs are part of the Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership, which has a framework at the state level and local level to collaborate and coordinate efforts. NRCs hold that framework at the local level as *regional coordinators*.
- **Tactical Basin Planning** - NRCs are one of three entities required in statute to be involved in the State's Tactical Basin Planning process (NRCs, RPCs, and watershed groups). NRCs not only contribute to the development of the tactical basin planning process in their local basin(s), but many take significant leadership roles in developing these plans and/or conduct most of the community outreach needed to develop the plans.
 - 10 V.S.A. § 1253(2)(F) requires the Agency of Natural Resources to ensure that NRCs are involved in the basin planning process, and [10 V.S.A. § 1253\(3\)](#) instructs the Secretary of ANR to "issue performance grants" to NRCs, RPCs and watershed groups "to assist in or to produce a basin plan".
- **Wetland Protection and Water Resources Management** - [10 V.S.A. § 905b\(2\)](#) requires the DEC to "Cooperate with natural resources conservation districts" in water-related issues.

Below is a case study to highlight where Conservation Districts fit into the overall universe of services and technical assistance to working landscapes:

The Franklin County NRC recently met a farmer at an event *hosted by the District regarding grant opportunities for on-farm equipment*. After meeting him at the event, the District Manager realized that they had been trying to get a hold of the farmer to help with the farm's Nutrient Management Plan because it was out of date (this is known using the **NRCS farm data**). Meeting at the event allowed the District to start working with this farm, and they were able to help enroll the farmer in the Regional Conservation Partnership Program's Nutrient Management Planning (NMP).

While enrolled in this program, the Franklin County NRC **completed the farm's Land Treatment Plan** and helped coach the farmer through the NMP course with UVM Extension. Franklin NRC staff has since **worked with the farmer on two grant applications** - one for a grant administered by VAAF and another by VHCB - to secure funding for a piece of equipment that the farm needs. Conservation Districts help navigate and understand those grant processes at the hyper local level. The Nutrient Management Plan written with the support of District staff will help this farm achieve Organic certification.