

## Natural Resources Conservation Districts Funding

**FY27 Request: +\$336,200 (Total Appropriation of \$948,200 to the Natural Resources Conservation Council)**

### A total appropriation of \$948,200 provides:

- **\$53,357** to each District in core operational funding for Districts to use as match for competitive grants that best serve the needs of their local communities and retain
  - Most NRCs use this funding to retain the staff who assist farmers, municipalities and residents in implementing a wide range of conservation projects with multiple benefits such as reducing non-point source pollution into waterways, improving farm viability, and mitigating drought or flooding risk.
  - Currently, this funding is the **only source of base operational funding** for Vermont's 14 NRCs to deliver the core services mandated by Vermont State Statute.
- **\$74,200** to the Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) to support baseline staffing and operations, including Board and committee meetings and district support.
- **\$40,800** retained by NRCC to provide centralized administrative services to all Districts including HR policies, complying with open meeting laws, and other operational necessities. These dollars also fund contracts with "District Reps" to engage in statewide policy and program work with partners.

### Brief History of Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts

- The Vermont State Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) was established in 1939 under Vermont's [Soil Conservation Act](#), in response to the Dust Bowl.
- Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRC) are **subdivisions of state government** and operate under the authority of NRCC to assist in the implementation of conservation practices at the local level.
- Conservation Districts exist in every U.S. State and Territory and are **often funded through county level government, a dedicated portion of a state tax or fee, or a state general fund allocation.**

### State Funding for Vermont's NRCs

Prior to our recent engagement in the legislative process, the base budget for the 14 NRCs and NRCC was level funded at \$112,000 for decades and was occasionally cut entirely. With increased funding, Vermont's districts have been able to stabilize.

- Every district now has 1 FTE – this enables Districts to assist more farmers, help municipalities upgrade more culverts, remove dams, restore more flood plains, and mitigate Vermont's risk to both drought and flooding.
- **Demand for our services continues to grow as a direct result of state policy and goals. Conservation Districts are the boots on the ground.** We are foundational to the state's agricultural community and to Vermont's ability to meet conservation and disaster mitigation targets.
- NRCs are the primary providers of direct technical assistance to private landowners. We work "behind the scenes", but our technical assistance gets conservation and natural resources projects done on public and private lands across our state.

**Leveraging Federal Dollars:** NRCs have an excellent return on investment. For every \$1 invested in state operational funds, NRCs leverage another \$9 in competitive grant funding. **Every District uses state funding to match additional federal and private grant funding**, allowing state dollars to stretch further.

- That \$9 includes funding we draw down for project implementation such as the **\$1.2M project to upgrade three culverts in Lunenburg.**
- It does not include the millions of dollars in USDA funding we help farmers access each year or the funds we help forest and other private landowners access for conservation and water quality projects on their lands.

## Recent Past Appropriations - How increased funding has been spent to date

In recent years, we have increased our base from \$112,000 to \$612,000. This base increase has already brought on an additional **10.5 FTEs** across all Districts (due to match), including conservation and agricultural specialists. This means that more work is getting done out in our communities.

Here are some testimonials from Districts about what the additional funding to date has meant for them:

*“Our new equipment has helped us **enhance riparian buffers** in our District, which are critical to increasing flood resilience, maintaining water quality, and benefiting wildlife.”*  
-Winooski NRCD District Manager

*“The increased appropriation, paired with additional grant funding, also allowed us to hire an agricultural specialist to assist farms in our district. We also used our appropriation to apply to a number of state, federal, and private grants for projects. This includes a \$1.5 million dollar project to **improve stream crossing structures** in the county; \$300,000 to hire a new staff member to train local contractors and road crews to **control invasive species** in our area.”*

- Essex NRCD District Manager

*“I can not stress how important these funds were in terms of helping us have the confidence we needed to hire much needed staff. One new staff member assists with **water quality** data management, report writing, and general grant assistance in the winter months, in addition to helping to run our native plant nursery.”*

- Poultney Mettowee NRCD District Manager

*“Our new staff position has greatly increased the district’s capacity to develop and pursue **restoration projects** (trees for streams, floodplain restoration, stormwater projects, etc) and has also made it possible for us to take on a greater role in **public outreach**. With our increased state funding, we have brought in more than \$18,000 in additional grant funding, allowing us to expand our leadership role in local conservation efforts and develop new partnerships that include the Vermont River Conservancy, and the Brattleboro and Marlboro Conservation Commissions.”*

- Windham NRCD District Manager

*“In the past we were not able to consider hiring a full-time Conservation District Manager for our District, but the increase in funding has made this possible. The full-time manager will allow the district to develop more projects to **preserve and protect the water quality** in the district and to provide more assistance to landowners.”*

- Ottauquechee NRCD District Manager

*“Increased state funding has allowed our District Manager and other staff to better **respond to partners and landowners’ requests for assistance** that do not easily fall under our current grants.”* - Orleans NRCD District Manager

## Core Functions of Vermont’s Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDs)

NRCD 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. Below are just a few examples of our core work:

- **Disaster mitigation** – This is the heart of NRCD work. Nearly everything NRCDs do from helping farmers improve soil health to replacing culverts and restoring floodplains helps to mitigate the impact of floods and droughts.
- **Stormwater & Clean Water** - Many of Vermont’s NRCDs are stormwater project *implementers*. We use Stormwater Master Plans and our relationships with municipalities to help advance water quality initiatives in stormwater.
- **Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership** - all 14 NRCDs are part of the Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership; NRCDs hold that framework at the local level as *regional coordinators*.
- **Tactical Basin Planning** - NRCDs are one of three entities required in statute to be involved in the State’s Tactical Basin Planning process. Many NRCDs hold leadership roles in developing these plans and/or conduct most of the community outreach needed to develop the plans.
- **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.
- **Locally Led Conservation** - Districts are named in federal law as the entities responsible for engaging the public each year to determine local conservation priorities and share that information with the NRCS.