



Vermont Association of Conservation Districts

Our Land. Our Water. Our Future.

Request for state appropriations for Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts

Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts request a \$3,000,000 base budget in FY2026 to address the systemic underfunding of Vermont's conservation delivery system and support ongoing operations.

Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCs) are county-level **local government units** that operate under the authority of their elected Boards of Supervisors and the Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) to connect people, organizations, and resources to steward our land and water resources for the future. NRCs 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 the communities we serve since our inception in 1939, and those roots help to strengthen and support the environment and promote resilient communities.

Vermont's NRCs are trusted and effective members of the agricultural and conservation communities. We are local government that serves and represents constituents in every city and town across the state of Vermont. Our unique structure and close relationship with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) allows for local communities to have a real say in federal policy and spending priorities and enables districts to easily leverage federal funds on behalf of their constituents. 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 around natural resources management at the local level.

THE NEED: In recent years, Vermont's NRCs have been asked to take on a wide range of initiatives as the state's long standing 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 critical State partners in implementing new ways of accounting for ecosystem services and reaching underserved populations. Consequently, the work of the NRCs 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 and flood resilience, **Vermont's NRCs need additional state support to fulfill our statutory role as effective community-based partners for natural resources and environmental planning, decision making, policy development, and program delivery.**

Since 2018, Vermont NRCs have collectively added 34 FTEs in staffing in an attempt to meet the increased demand for our programs and services. Vermont's 14 NRCs also manage over 200 different grants 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. NRCs need more core administrative support 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 NRCs leverage federal dollars.**

A base budget of \$3,000,000 for Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Council would enable:

- Increased core distributions to each NRC to deliver high quality conservation services to their constituents and match federal grant opportunities;
- 4 FTEs associated with the State NRCC to increase both financial and programmatic efficiency among all NRCs through shared administrative practices, infrastructure, resources and systems, and to better ensure consistency and quality in services statewide.

This money is the only public funding allocated to conservation districts to operate as county-level units of government. Each year since calendar year 2022, Vermont's NRCs 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 systemic underfunding, but the need for a \$3 million base budget remains for Districts to meet their statutory obligations.

State Natural Resources Conservation Districts Fiscal Year 2026 Operational Budget Proposal

Revenue	FY25	Proposed FY26
Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets	\$612,000	\$3,000,000
Expense		
Contractual		
NRCD Statutory Responsibilities		
FY25 - \$35,500 per NRCD x 14	\$497,000	
FY26 – Allocated based on identified need		\$2,312,625
NRCC Operational Expense		
Supplies, Equipment & Admin Expense	\$20,900	\$98,905
Supervisory Union Representation & Supervisor Per Diems	\$3,300	\$3,300
NRCC Personnel (Contractual)		
NRCC Administration		
FY24 - District Manager Leadership	\$23,595	\$23,595
Capacity Building & Professional Development Support	\$17,205	\$164,935
Total	\$612,000	\$3,000,000

Conservation Districts exist in every U.S. State and Territory and are often funded through county or state tax revenues.

Unfortunately, Vermont Districts do not receive adequate funding through state appropriations or voluntary 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](#). We recognize that the jump from \$612,000 to \$3,000,000 is large (an increase of \$2,388,000), but it represents real need and backfills decades of underfunding. **Vermont’s 14 NRCDs stand ready to put this funding to use immediately and effectively as the State’s conservation delivery system.**

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.

Signed,



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