



Vermont Association of Conservation Districts

Our Land. Our Water. Our Future.

Impact of Federal Funding Freezes & Cuts April 7, 2025

Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCs) form a statewide conservation delivery system designed to work directly with communities to identify local natural resources concerns and help individual land stewards secure technical expertise and funding to address those concerns. To do this work, NRCs partner closely with federal agencies, particularly the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). While conservation districts have been able to leverage federal funding towards project work and provide technical services to farmers, municipalities, and other land stewards, this reliance on federal agencies paired with insufficient base funding has left them vulnerable to federal funding freezes, government shutdowns, and potential future funding cuts.

Currently, about **\$4.75 million** of funding to NRCs and the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD) is in jeopardy, including **\$400,000 in cancelled grant awards** and **\$3.6 million of frozen payments and frozen grant agreements**.

Services to Farmers, Landowners, & Other Land Stewards

NRC and VACD staff provide technical assistance to farmers and other land stewards to assess natural resource concerns on their lands, identify solutions, navigate permitting processes, and secure funding for project installation. NRC and VACD staff also provide administrative support to USDA NRCS, DEC, and VAAFM, enabling these agencies to run certain programs and execute contracts and grant agreements with farmers and other land stewards.

- **\$2.1 million is frozen** to the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts for technical assistance to farmers and NRCS program assistance statewide. This includes **\$500,000** in frozen outstanding invoices for work already completed.
- **\$263,000** for technical assistance to farmers in Essex, Caledonia, Orange, Windham, Windsor, and Bennington counties through White River NRC and Windham NRC is currently on hold under an NRCS RCPP agreement through American Farmland Trust (AFT).
- **\$400,000** that supported a Climate Corps workforce development program through White River and Bennington NRCs has been cancelled. This program was aimed at training young people in skills needed to support agricultural producers in implementing practices that help mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events and adapt to a changing climate.

If federal funding is reduced in the future, the Natural Resources Conservation Districts and VACD would lose capacity to provide direct services to farmers for things like conservation planning, GIS and drone services, soil sampling, and federal program navigation. If federal funding is eliminated, we would lose approximately **27 FTEs** statewide, which would result in a significant reduction of services to farmers and other working lands managers.

Infrastructure & Clean Water Projects

NRCs are project implementers for the state's Clean Water projects, including culvert replacements, dam removals, stormwater system installations, wetland restorations, and floodplain reconnection projects. Many of these projects – particularly large-scale infrastructure projects – include federal funding as part of the overall budget. Currently, **\$1.23 million** is frozen that would support culvert replacements in conjunction with state Clean Water Funds.

- **\$1.19 million** to Essex NRC through a US Fish and Wildlife Service grant to promote fish passage. This project supports a new culvert in the town of Lunenburg and replacement of
- **\$40,000** to Orleans County NRC for culvert replacements in the Upper Missisquoi.

Federal funding for clean water, stormwater, and flood mitigation projects comes through a variety of sources, including the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). If those funding sources disappear, this would reduce districts' ability to do this work by roughly **50%**. We would see increased demand on the Clean Water Fund and other state funding sources to compensate for the absence of federal funding.

Signed,

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**Financial Impacts of Federal Actions on
Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCs), the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD), and
the State Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC)
April 7, 2025**

Recipient	Funder	Grant Name or Purpose	Federal Funding Source	Amount Frozen	Status	Notes/Questions
VACD	NRCS	Local Conservation in Action Program	IRA	1,779,450	On Hold	Agreement # NR231644XXXXC005 between VACD and USDA NRCS ("Farm Bill Support" / "Locally Led"). This agreement includes both IRA and non-IRA funds, but all funds are frozen. As of the end of March 2025, VACD is owed over \$500,000. The staff funded by this agreement do essential work that enables NRCS to make conservation grants to Vermont farmers and other land stewards. Given outstanding invoices, VACD will need to stop work on this grant until invoices are paid.
VACD	DEC	RCPP Technical Assistance	IRA	300,000	On Hold	Contract fully executed, but then notified it's on hold. Contract #48916 between VACD and the VT Dept. of Environmental Conservation. This is a subcontract on agreement #PPA-3273-A-1485 Supplemental-3273-A-1658 between VT DEC and USDA NRCS. This \$10.5m new RCPP program through DEC is entirely IRA funds.
VACD	GMNF	Envirothon	IIJA (?)	5,000	On Hold	\$5,000 agreement #25-CS-11092000-003 between VACD and the Green Mountain National Forest (USFS). This agreement was partially signed when we were notified it was on hold. Supports an annual competition for high school students in environmental and natural resources topics.
VACD	NACD	NRCS passthrough funding for Technical Assistance (TA) - 2023	Other	39,259	On Hold	Funds technical staff positions that support farmers and other land stewards. Although these are not IRA funds, NACD is not making payments because they're short on cash due to the federal funding freeze. We expect to get paid for outstanding invoices under this agreement, but don't know when.
VACD & Districts	NACD	NRCS passthrough funding for Technical Assistance (TA) - 2024	Other	732,590	Uncertain	Funds technical staff positions that support farmers and other land stewards. Impacts VACD and 6 districts: Bennington, Caledonia, Essex, Orleans, White River & Winooski. Revised workplan & budget in process for Memorandum of Agreement development. NACD has said these are not IRA funds and they will go ahead with TA 2024 agreements. NACD has said we can charge retroactively to 1/1/2025. However, we're nervous because NACD has delayed payments on TA 2023 due to overall cash availability due to freezes on other funding sources. Uncertainty is holding up hiring decisions and work.
Essex County NRCD	USFWS	Fish Passage Culvert Replacement	IIJA	1,193,875	On Hold	New culvert at no cost to Town of Lunenburg, 2 replaced structures in Brighton & Ferdinand. ~\$200k match from State (NRCC Enhancement Grant) allocated for same project. Currently ECNRCD has paid out \$65k to TU from completed structure but has not been able to be reimbursed by USFWS
White River & Bennington NRCDs	NRCS	Working Lands Climate Corps	IRA	400,000	Cancelled	The Corps Network has terminated this program effective 3/13 and has cancelled next year's Climate Corps program. White River/Bennington Districts' 30 Farm Force members in VT and the US Virgin Islands have had their positions terminated. WR NRCD is owed \$200k in expenses that are frozen.
Orleans County NRCD	VTFWD	State Wildlife Grant	EPA?	40,000	Uncertain	Not sure where this funding stands. This is part of our conglomeration of funding for a priority Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) culvert replacement in the Upper Missisquoi.
White River NRCD	NRCS	AFT RCPP	Unknown	100,000	On Hold	AFT says they have not been paid by NRCS, so they won't pay us until then.
Windham NRCD	AFT	AFT RCPP	Unknown	162,816	On Hold	We are continuing to accrue expenses under this agreement but do not know if we'll be paid
Bennington NRCD	USDA	Expanding the Market for Organic Chestnuts in the Northeast U.S.	Unknown	-	Cancelled	BCNRCD is not the primary grant holder, but was working in collaboration with partners in New York State on this project by providing technical assistance to farmers growing blight-resistant chestnuts. While the district is not directly impacted, this project would have supported about \$228,000 in net income for farmers in Vermont in the near-term with a potential to support up to \$1.33 million in gross farm revenue and other associated economic activity per year by the mid-2030s.

Total at Stake	\$4,752,990.21	
Total Uncertain	\$772,590.00	<-- Often these have a delay in payment or contract execution, but no communication has been received as to why. In other cases, this indicates a general lack of confidence in the funder's ability to pay.
Total On Hold	\$3,580,400.21	<-- No stop work order received, but payments are not being processed and/or contracts are not being executed until further notice.
Total Cancelled	\$400,000.00	<-- Stop work order received and/or contract has been cancelled or funding officially retracted

Acronyms

AFT	American Farmland Trust
DEC	Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
GMNF	Green Mountain National Forest
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (also known as BIL -- Bipartisan Infrastructure Law)
IRA	Inflation Reduction Act
NRCC	Natural Resources Conservation Council
NRCD	Natural Resources Conservation District
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
RCPP	Regional Conservation Partnership Program
TA	Technical Assistance
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USFS	United States Forest Service
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
VACD	Vermont Association of Conservation District
VTFWD	Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department