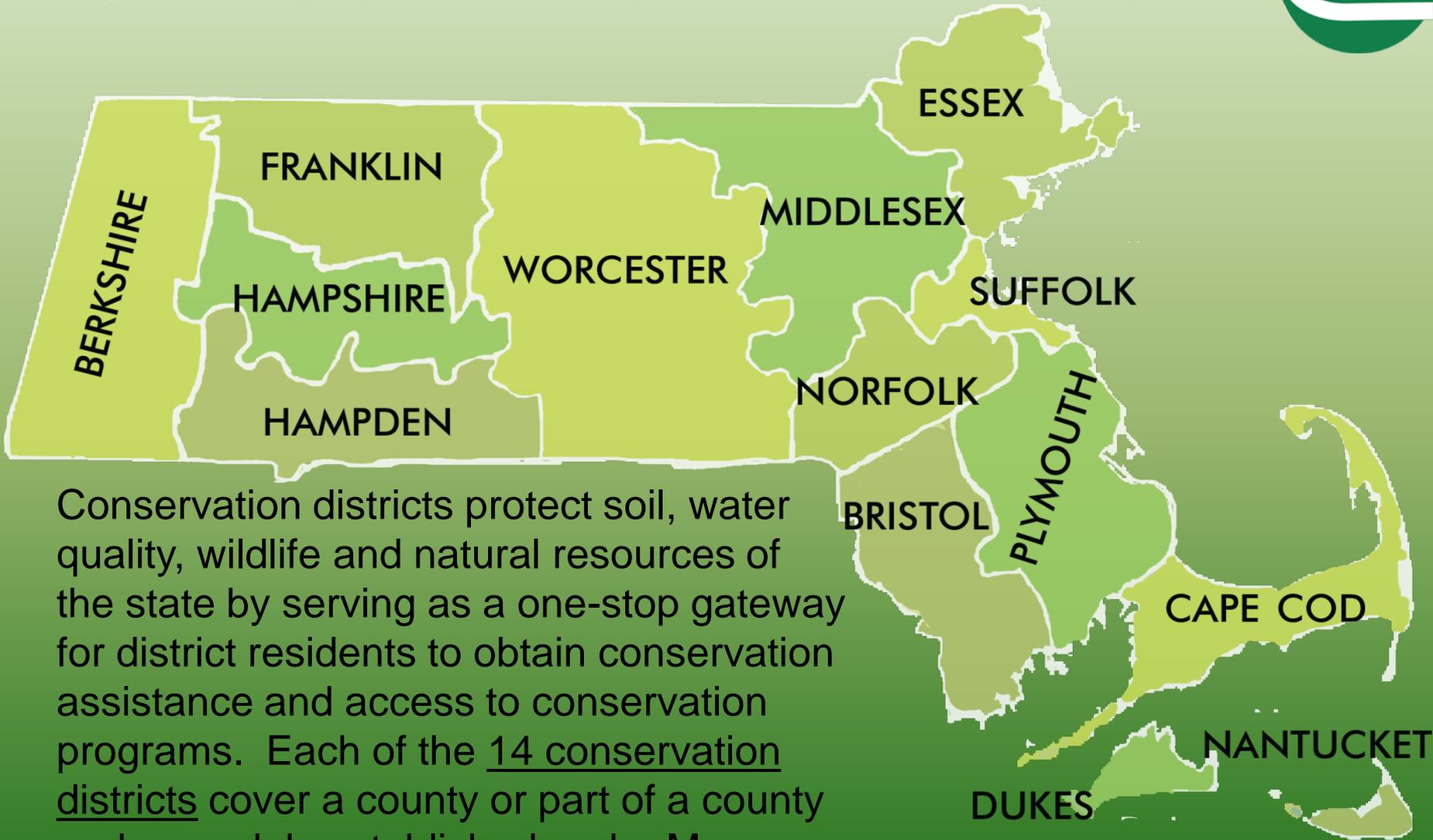


# Massachusetts Association of



# Conservation Districts

# Conservation Districts



Conservation districts protect soil, water quality, wildlife and natural resources of the state by serving as a one-stop gateway for district residents to obtain conservation assistance and access to conservation programs. Each of the 14 conservation districts cover a county or part of a county and were duly established under Mass General Laws Chapter 21, Section 21.

**BACKGROUND:** MACD and NRCS/MA formed a partnership to establish model Local Working Groups within the conservation districts of Massachusetts, in accordance with provisions of the Farm Bill, to more effectively and more efficiently deliver federal, state and local resources to meet the highest priority conservation needs within the state.



LWGs  
FY 2010

# Locally Led Conservation



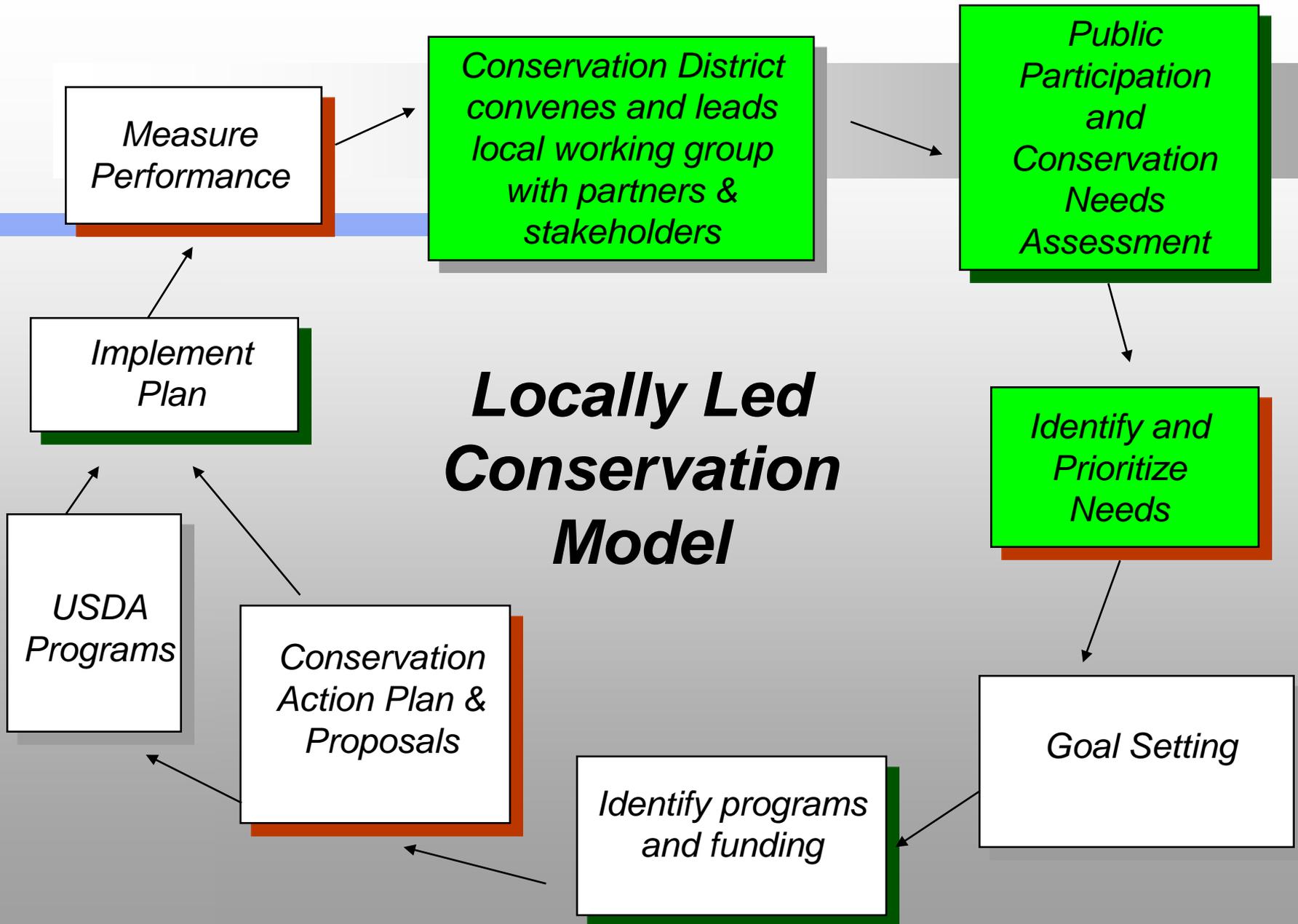
**“Locally Led Conservation brings people together to assess their home place, to set goals, and to identify programs and other resources that can be used to create the home place they want”**

Past NRCS Chief Paul Johnson, “A Geography of Hope”



# Locally Led Conservation

- **Opportunity to involve partners and build new coalitions for our conservation program**
  - Needs assessment
  - Critical natural resource issues
  - Geographic areas of concern
  - Priorities
  - Program recommendations



# LWGs



**PROCESS:** Conservation Districts convene a model LWG to bring together all interested parties to obtain the broadest public participation to

- Assess local conservation needs through public engagement with all district and community stakeholders
- Prepare a natural resources inventory for the district
- Identify and prioritize conservation needs within the district
- Set goals and identify programs & resources to apply to conservation needs
- Develop district-wide action plans and proposals
- Articulate the district's natural resources inventory and prioritized needs to NRCS through the State Technical Committee
- Implement action plans at the local level in cooperation with federal, state and local partners
- Measure performance against documented and prioritized conservation needs and plans

**BACKGROUND:** MACD and NRCS/MA agreed to create four model Local Working Groups in FY 2011. An RFP was issued to all districts. We chose five districts instead of four, and Cape Cod Conservation District was already engaged in a Local Working Group process through its CCWRR Project.



# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Berkshire:



Bristol-Plymouth:



Cape Cod:



Middlesex:



Worcester:



# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Each report was generated by a unique local process and spiced with unique local flavor. The prime objective in the first year was to energize the Local Working Group process by re-engaging stakeholders in an open dialog.

I will NOT discuss these reports in detail, but will simply quickly click through a few outline slides to illustrate the thrust of these distinct local efforts.

Copy of these slides, which extract a core outline of each report, are available through the State Technical Committee.

Electronic copies of the detailed reports themselves are available upon request.

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Berkshire:

## ***Assets***

Stakeholders identified the following list of key natural resource assets for Berkshire County:

- High quality streams, rivers, lakes and ponds
- Priority natural habitat, both water and land
- Scenic beauty and open space
- Capacity to produce food and wood
- Agriculture
- Rare and declining species
- Resilient forests
- Corridors and connectivity
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Berkshire:

## ***Concerns, Opportunities*** -- Aquatic and Wetlands:

- Water quality – non-point and point source pollution, including road salt, agriculture and road runoff
- Water quantity, including ground water withdraw
- Habitat quality – invasive species, stream bank erosion, maintaining desired characteristics
- Habitat fragmentation and loss

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Berkshire:

## ***Concerns, Opportunities*** -- Upland Habitat, Forests and Forestry:

- Habitat fragmentation and loss
- Habitat quality – invasive species, maintaining desired characteristics
- Recreation use
- Next generation of landowners and foresters
- Limitations with Forest Reserve Protection Program with forest lands
- Pests and Pathogens
- Overpopulations of deer
- Fear of over-regulation with rare species and permitting for habitat management
- Landowners do not know how to manage land
- Strengthening links between landowners and foresters
- Promoting forest management on private lands

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Berkshire:

## ***Concerns, Opportunities*** -- Wildlife:

- Habitat fragmentation and loss
- Habitat quality – invasive species, maintaining desired characteristics
- Recreation use
- Fire suppression
- Inappropriately timed haying
- Wildlife diseases
- Released domestic animals
- Increasing road mortality
- Lack of good data
- Funds only help animals, not plants
- Lack of research to help Best Management Practices

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Berkshire:

## ***Concerns, Opportunities*** -- Energy:

- Improper siting for wind energy
- Boston driving policies in Berkshire County
- State policies on Biomass.

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Berkshire:

## ***Concerns, Opportunities*** -- Other:

- Development, sprawl, zoning bylaws, and lack of land planning tools
- Pesticide use – residential and agricultural\*
- Illegal hunting and trapping
- Wildlife-human interactions and public perception
- Decline in sportsmen
- Lack of access for hunting
- Lack of diversified funding sources
- Fear of over-regulation with rare species
- Lack of technical assistance to landowners
- Landowners do not know how to manage land
- Conflicting priorities between landowners and NHESP
- Restoration does not qualify as prime soils
- Permitting for habitat management
- Lack of good data
- Lack of research to help BMPs

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Berkshire:

## ***Concerns, Opportunities*** – Across All Natural Resources

- Promoting next generation's exposure
- Summer camp – getting kids in the environment
- Education – examples of NY DEC and conservation camp (DFW)
- Get on the ground with landowners
- Prioritize funding to maintain ecological integrity
- Tax on recreational gear – Missouri example
- Public access funding
- More showcasing good examples
- Strengthening links between landowners and foresters
- Changing the burden of landowners with NHESP
- Increase funding landowners managing land

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Berkshire:

## ***Concerns, Opportunities*** – Across All Natural Resources (continued)

- Increase funding for NHESP, DCR and DFW
- Increase USDA/NRCS and NHESP technical assistance
- Riparian buffer easements
- Bundling projects with other funding
- 10 yr. implementation incentive similar to CRP
- Increase site visits
- Bundle properties together for projects, i.e. invasive control
- Increase awareness that planning is available

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Bristol-Plymouth:

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: Natural Resource Priorities Identified**

1. General Conservation Technical Assistance, in the form of planning and engineering, is needed to assist private landowners with their farm and forest resource problems ... (including aquaculture)
2. Some annual practices need to be re-instated to promote soil health, improve natural fertility and reduce pesticides.
3. Criteria for EQIP selection must focus on local resource concerns, with a ranking system that provides an appropriate point spread to reflect local priorities.
4. Much more collaboration between USDA agencies is needed as well as with state and local agencies.
5. Need to improve farm efficiencies and establish value to farm properties for the farmers and to the community at large; need an orderly succession of new farmers.

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Bristol-Plymouth:

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: (continued)**

6. Focus on developing a “Foodscape” system to reflect local small farm to table needs; micro farming, organic farming, cooperative marketing and agricultural commissions need strengthening.
7. A system to encourage new approaches and technologies for conservation needs to be identified and supported; may consist of web-based tools that are vetted, endorsed and supported by USDA and MDAR.
8. USDA and MDAR renewable energy projects need to be broadened to include tractors, trucks, farm vehicles and equipment.
9. Farmers and managers of private lands need planning assistance with storm water management and water storage management; assistance also needed to protect farm and forest lands from deleterious effects from residential development and poor storm water management.
10. FSA conservation loan program to provide up-front funding for construction projects needs to be fully funded so that all farmers can benefit from reimbursable cost-sharing.

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Cape Cod:

## ***CCWRR Project***

Stakeholders identified key natural resources and prioritized needs as an integral component of the Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project.

These stakeholder mechanisms remain in robust existence today to manage and to advance CCWRR to successful conclusion.

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Middlesex:

## ***Resource Concerns***

Stakeholders identified the following list of key natural resource concerns for Middlesex County:

- Loss and lack of access to agricultural land
- Lack of local and high quality food production
- Loss of open and recreational space
- Water and environmental quality
- Food security and safety

## ***Main Focus***

*“Preserving a diverse, agricultural, functioning landscape supporting the health of the people, environment, and local economy”*

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Middlesex:

## **Loss and lack of access to agricultural land**

### ***Resources available:***

- State conservation and agricultural land preservation restrictions program
- Land trusts
- Municipalities owning land within their borders
- Beginning farmers with energy for farming and agriculture
- Conservation commissions

### ***Possible solutions and strategies:***

- Work with New Entry Sustainable Farming group to support their available farmland cataloging project
- Work with municipalities and land trusts
- Purchase agricultural land when it becomes available

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



## Middlesex:

### **Lack of local and high quality food production**

#### ***Resources available:***

- Beginning farmers with energy for farming and agriculture
- Organizations and experts already working with existing farmers
- Diverse production already occurring throughout the county
- Demand in urban and suburban areas
- Variety of mechanisms to get produce to consumers: Community supported agriculture (CSA), traditional farmers markets, restaurants, distributors and grocery stores with increasing interest

#### ***Possible solutions and strategies:***

- Education for children as to where food comes from
- Adult workshops or publications for deciphering food and production terms such as organic and natural
- Promoting and supporting community gardens in urban and suburban areas
- Events to connect local consumers to the farms in their community
- Farm crawls to recognize farms implementing innovative practices and still producing food
- Structured farmers' groups to provide quantities needed to address markets

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Middlesex:

**Loss of open and recreational space**

***Resources available:***

- Nature preserves and facilities for education
- State conservation restriction program

***Possible solutions and strategies:***

- Education and activities at all levels: elementary school to retirees
- Guided walks during different seasons to connect with wildlife, natural changes that occur, and diversity that is offered
- Day camps for children at natural areas to develop environmental stewardship at a young age

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Middlesex:

## **Water and environmental quality**

### ***Resources available:***

- Conservation commissions
- Organizations already working to improve water quality in some areas

### ***Possible solutions and strategies:***

- Low impact development workshop for municipalities or developers
- Combine informational campaigns with lower cost supplies for the promoted practice such as reduced cost cover crop seed with information about cover crops
- Water quantity management, such as retention ponds, for farmers who, because of the volatility of more recent weather patterns, alternate between too much and too little water
- Demonstration project for natural filtration water-treatment
- Stamp or certification that can be given to a farm to use as a marketing reward for their practices, such as “Certified conservation-conscious farm”

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Middlesex:

## **Food security and safety**

### ***Resources available:***

- Local farms already producing high quality food in the county
- Organizations hosting GAP trainings

### ***Possible solutions and strategies:***

- Connecting people to the local farms may also facilitate understanding, and lessen fear
- Water quality projects
- Flood protection projects
- Proper manure storage and management projects or technical assistance
- Education for best practices if desired resources or classes are not available through other groups

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Middlesex:

## **Other Suggestions**

- Target the growing backyard gardening movement with projects and education
- Work with communities to develop programs and policies:
  - ❖ Municipal composting
  - ❖ Low-impact development
  - ❖ Holistic habitat management plan
- Hosting a competition in urban areas to bring out competitive nature of individuals such as “greenest block in Cambridge”

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Middlesex:

## **Other Concerns**

- Invasive plant species management
- Energy Conservation
- Need for education regarding:
  - ❖ organics
  - ❖ buying local
  - ❖ supporting local economy
  - ❖ outdoors/animals
  - ❖ environmental curriculum in schools
- Too many groups splitting interested individuals
- Lack of publicity/knowledge of events
- Deer over-population
- Storm water management
- Forest land management and urban forest preservation
- Water run-off and flow management issues
- Lack of technical and capital assistance for farmer infrastructure, such as energy
- Air quality

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Worcester:

## *2008 Identified Five (5) Top Resource Concerns*

1. Protecting water quality
  - a. Protecting drinking water supplies (surface water and groundwater)
  - b. Controlling water pollution, particularly erosion and sediment from construction
  - c. Combating eutrophication
  - d. Protecting wetlands
2. Energy issues
  - a. Energy crops – growing and producing
  - b. Use of alternative fuels
  - c. Decreasing use of fossil fuels
  - d. Increasing use of renewable energy

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Worcester:

## ***2008 Identified Five (5) Top Resource Concerns (continued)***

### 3. Invasive plants and pests

- a. Land management as a tool for controlling (unused land, particularly land under state management or conservation restrictions can serve as invasive species breeding grounds)
- b. Protection of forests and crops from dangerous invasive pests (Asian longhorned beetle in Worcester)
- c. Money, tools, assistance to landowners wanting to control invasive plants

### 4. Loss of open space to development and misuse

### 5. Supporting working landscapes

- a. Locally grown products
- b. State should set example on own lands, particularly forestlands
- c. Support viability of agricultural/forestry businesses.

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Worcester:

## ***2011 Most Important Natural Resource Issues in Next Decade***

1. Agricultural Land Conversion
2. Agricultural Sustainability
3. Renewable Energy
  
4. Water Quality
4. Storm Water Management
4. Nutrient Management
4. Food and Fiber Production

# LWGs FY 2011 Reports



Worcester:

## ***2011 Five Most Important Products and Services***

1. Conservation Planning
2. Cost-Share Programs
3. Information (Databases)
4. Rural Development
5. Engineering Designs

**BACKGROUND:** MACD and NRCS/MA agreed to expand to at least eight district LWGs in FY 2012. Eight have already signed agreements; Cape Cod district continues its CCWRR Project working group; and three other districts are still in negotiations . Based on STC guidance from Spring 2011, STC members will be alerted to FY 2012 LWG outreach meetings.



LWGs  
FY 2012

# Contact Information



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