Maine Association of Conservation Districts
Working for Maine's Conservation Districts
PO Box 541 Portland, ME 04112

Thursday 12/7/2023

Maine Association of Conservation Districts – Maine State Technical Committee Report

Good Morning, all ~

Thank you, Pete and Tom, for affording me agenda time to update the State Technical Committee on what's been happening with Maine Association of Conservation Districts and Maine Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the past few months.

Maine's sixteen Soil and Water Conservation Districts across the state have or will soon host Local Working Group meetings, assembling residents, landowners, cooperators, conservation professionals, agency and department representatives, and elected officials to identify conservation priorities within their service area.

While the Local Working Group meetings were 'formalized' by the Agricultural Act of 2014, commonly known as the 2014 Farm Bill, the reality is that Soil and Water Conservation Districts have provided the NRCS with this information for over eighty years. Whether sharing successes about their harvests, changes that improved yield – or trials and tribulations – at the local Grange, over coffee at the village store, or while meeting at seed and supply stores, SWCD Supervisors willingly shared concerns and information with the ME NRCS staff and the agency used that information to promote conservation that was important at the local level.

These days, as in the past several years, Local Working Group reports are provided to Maine NRCS as well as the State Technical Committee to understand local priorities and technical assistance needed to these diverse service areas.

Additionally, Local Working Groups highlight the vital importance of conservation efforts as bottom up, rather than top down, to utilize resources that will improve and support projects based on priority at the local level, rather than the broad brush of 'one size fits all'. For example, here in Maine, we know that natural resource conservation that is necessary in The County is vastly different from the needs identified in the Knox-Lincoln service area.

Local Working Group meetings also provide early detection of changes on the landscape. The information shared at these meeting, just as it did at those Grange Halls, helps guide Soil and Water Conservation Districts to monitor areas of concern, respond to priority issues through technical assistance, and provide information, education, and resources to assist with identified areas of interest.

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As we have all come to realize, the ease and efficiency of virtual meetings, emails, and texts have changed the way we've discussed, collected, and shared information. But, in recent months, MACD has hosted two events that highlight the importance of face to face, in-person meetings.

The National Association of Conservation Districts North East Regional Conference, held in Portland this past September, was a gathering of Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors and staff and partner agencies from the twelve states in the region, who assembled to discuss natural resource issues, tour conservation sites, and hear from our own Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, as well as conservation professionals.

In addition, last week MACD held its Annual Meeting which includes not only the Maine Association of Conservation District elections, but also the Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry SWCD Advisory Committee meeting. Speakers included department and agency representatives with updates on programs, training on invasive species, and even the debut of the inflatable ME NRCS Soil Health Tunnel.

These in-person events provided not only the information, training, and reports listed on the agenda, but also the opportunity for side conversations, networking, meeting new employees, and those all-important, 'let's step into the hall' meetings that often accomplish the most.

In closing, I encourage you - again, as I have done at previous State Technical Committee meetings – to visit your local SWCD. Check out the programs and workshops they offer, attend their Board Meetings, as well as the Local Working Group meeting.

Thank you so much, to Maine NRCS and all members of the State Technical Committee, for your time.

Carol Weymouth, Executive Director

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