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

Friday 9/6/2024

Maine Association of Conservation Districts – Maine State Technical Committee Report

Good Morning, all ~

On behalf of the Maine Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) Executive Committee and Soil and Water Conservation Districts, thanks so much to Maine Natural Resources Conservation Service for the opportunity to share updates with the Maine State Technical Committee.

First of all, we're so proud of the Spruce Mountain High School 'Green' team who represented our state at the National Conservation Foundation International Envirothon competition in New York this summer. North America's largest student environmental competition hosted more than 50 teams from the United States, Canada, Singapore, and China. Maine's Green Team members were Brenden Veilleux, Leah Burgess, Lily Fortier, Hannah Dube, and Natalie Furka. Team Advisors Ken Baker, Rob Taylor, and Amy Poland also attended the event and supported the team.

The teams' scores placed them 20th in the world overall. Of particular note, the team scored 97/100 on the Aquatics test and their Current Issue Oral Presentation on the topic, "Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future", was based on a plan they conceived to aid farm diversify by adding a maple syrup operation while adopting conservation practices and renewable local energy systems.

Maine Association of Conservation Districts and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts are so proud to continue hosting Maine Envirothon events which engage high school aged students in hands on, science based environmental and natural resource team competition and are so grateful to the many contributors, volunteers, and supporters that make this annual event such a success.

I'd also like to share a few examples of the work Maine's Soil and Water Conservation Districts have been undertaking to serve landowners and residents on local priorities that are of primary concern. In Washington County, SWCD District Director Nate Pennell has begun field training for a new employee including erosion control projects, stream culvert replacement work, planning for a grant project on the Upper Narraguagus, and an introduction to ME NRCS programs to expand outreach and assistance to the agency in the Downeast area. In addition, Washington County SWCD has had several conservation news articles published and is expanding that outreach.

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Franklin County SWCD is preparing to welcome hundreds of school aged children to the Farmington Fairgrounds for their annual Ag Day on September 16. This event introduces students from Franklin and neighboring counties to a wide variety of demonstrations, samples of agricultural products, conservation education, hands on activities, and more. In addition, Franklin County SWCD hosts a range of workshops on erosion control, winter soil disturbance, gravel road maintenance, septic system installation, and pond workshops in addition to promoting ME NRCS technical assistance.

As a final example of the scope of work done by Maine's Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the St. John Valley SWCD has teamed up with the St. John Valley Technology Center to hold classes offering Pesticide Certification Credits to licensed applicators in their area. Casey Cote, St. John Valley SWCDs Development and Grants Coordinator, specializes in providing educational outreach connecting and working with diverse audiences.

As Maine's board member to the National Association of Conservation Districts, I attended their Summer Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts which ran in tandem with the NACD Northeast Regional Meeting.

In addition to NACD officers and staff, speakers at the event included remarks and updates from industry, non-profit organizations, and Federal Agencies, including USDA NRCS Chief Terry Cosby, and USDA Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, Robert Bonnie.

Also of interest, was a discussion on the bipartisan efforts to pass a new Farm Bill, offered by congressional staffers who represent Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow and Ranking Member John Boozman. NACD has, and will continue to, provide input and testimony on the organization's top priorities for the Farm Bill - to integrate remaining conservation investments into the conservation title permanently increasing funding for voluntary conservation programs.

The staff members' perspective was, "… House and Senate agriculture committee leaders support the request on a bipartisan basis but need to pass a farm bill this year to take advantage of this historic opportunity." However, they acknowledged that this is uncertain during a Presidential election year.

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National Association of Conservation Districts conferences and events provide insight into the strong partnership between Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. In fact, the unique, long-standing relationship at the national level was highlighted as a model for partnerships. These meetings also afford the opportunity to share concerns – and compliments – to USDA National leaders about how conservation is being delivered in our State.

Finally, I'd like to remind you all that later this fall, Maine Soil and Water Conservation Districts will be announcing the dates for Local Working Groups, which they host annually. At these meetings local residents provide input on conservation priorities in their area, help determine how federal funds are allocated by the NRCS Field Offices, and make recommendations on prioritized conservation practices. The reports from these meetings offer critical localized input to assist the State Technical Committee with decision making.

If you're unable to attend these meetings, please contact or stop in and speak with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts and share your concerns, thoughts, and opinions which can be recorded and presented by the Districts at 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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