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

Wednesday 12/11/2024

Maine Association of Conservation Districts – Maine State Technical Committee Report

Good Morning, all ~

Thank you so much to Maine Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for allowing Maine Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) time on the State Technical Committee agenda to share Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) highlights.

Just last week, Maine Association of Conservation Districts held its 2024 Annual Meeting here in Bangor. Our thanks to ME NRCS State Conservationist, Matt Walker, for approving the attendance of State Leadership Team members and Field Office District Conservationists. It was great to meet the new NRCS staff and reconnect with those who are familiar.

Special thanks to Tom Kielbasa, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, who enabled a virtual component to the MACD Annual Meeting. This allowed those who experienced weather related travel issues to join us.

During the Annual Meeting, Soil and Water Conservation Districts vote for the Maine Association of Conservation District Executive Committee. Last year's officers were re-elected for the 2025 term: Andy Reed, President, Steve Follette, Vice-President, Howard Dupee, Treasurer, Mark Hedrich, Secretary, Merle Ring and Duane Theriault, Members at Large. In addition to their service on the Maine Association of Conservation Districts Executive Committee, they also serve locally as SWCD Supervisor Chairs.

The MACD Annual Meeting also provides an opportunity for the Maine Conservation District Advisory Council to hold a, "meeting within a meeting". Soil and Water Conservation District council appointees make endorsements on Supervisor elections and appointments, plus provide recommendations to the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, Amanda Beal.

I'm excited to report that four new to Soil and Water Conservation District employees have been hired – in Washington County, Matt Kelley, in St. John Valley, Henok Wehib, in Knox-Lincoln, Cindy Wright, and in Kennebec County, Stephanie Taylor.

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One of the speakers at our Annual Meeting this year was Nika Colley, the National Association of Conservation District's Northeast Region Representative. National Association of Conservation Districts represents and advocates for over 3,000 conservation districts, promoting responsible voluntary management of natural resources through locally led priorities.

Nika shared updates on programs, grant opportunities, and efforts to elevate conservation concerns in Washington, DC. For example, this year the National Association of Conservation Districts has issued letters and provided public comments to Congress in multiple areas such as urging disaster relief legislation, Congressional appropriations for conservation operations, implementation of greenhouse gas technical assistance, and – of course – the New Farm Bill to the House Committee on Agriculture.

Reports concerning the Farm Bill speculate that, since the previous extension expired at the end of September, Congress will potentially pass another extension. With a new administration in Washington, DC, there is uncertainty about future funding for working lands conservation projects and practices.

Maine's Soil and Water Conservation Districts have scheduled – and in some cases, held – their Local Working Group meetings. These meeting, hosted locally by Districts, provide an opportunity for residents to voice natural resource concerns and priorities in their county or service area.

I've attended two Local Working Group meetings so far. While some issues appear to be similar, such as the increased number of requests for high tunnels, other priorities are unique to the service area. This underscores the importance of the Local Working Group process, that when it comes to site specific conservation, one size does not fit all.

Dates and locations of the Maine Soil and Water Conservation District Local Working Group meetings are available on the Maine NRCS webpage, specifically for FY 2025, or by contacting your Soil and Water Conservation District. Comments, concerns, and priorities can be shared with SWCD staff or Supervisors, as well. Information is collected and recorded in the meeting minutes that are available to this State Technical Committee.

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Maine Soil and Water Conservation Districts have had a busy year providing natural resource assistance, resources, education, and programs to Maine residents. Whether wildlife habitat management, a prescribed forest harvest demonstration, invasive species surveys and management planning, assistance in reducing runoff and soil erosion, nutrient management plans, improvements to water quality within watersheds, classroom education in stormwater cycles, and much more, Maine's Soil and Water Conservation Districts continue to work to provide for the conservation and environmental needs identified by residents.

To learn more about the work being done by your local Soil and Water Conservation District, reach out to them for more information or check out their website. Most Districts also have a social media presence. Call, email, or stop in at their local office to chat with staff. Attend a Board meeting and learn about the process used for governing their District.

In closing, I'll share that there are some interesting programs, projects, and partnerships that Maine Association of Conservation Districts and Maine Soil and Water Conservation Districts are working on. As they have for the past 80 years, Soil and Water Conservation Districts work as non-regulatory leaders in conservation, working to assist, educate, and inform residents on the importance of natural resources.

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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