

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Maine



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New State Conservationist joins USDA in Maine

BANGOR, Maine (Oct. 7, 2020) – The USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently selected an experienced wildlife biologist and conservationist for its top position in Maine.



*NRCS-Maine State
Conservationist Matt Walker*

Matt Walker, who has served with NRCS for 14 years, took over as the State Conservationist of NRCS-Maine in September. In this position he oversees 14 NRCS field offices and more than 60 soil conservationists, engineers and program administrators throughout the state.

Walker replaced NRCS-Maine State Conservationist Juan Hernandez, who was selected as the NRCS State Conservationist for Florida earlier this year.

“It’s an honor to join this team of NRCS professionals, and I look forward to helping expand the already strong commitment to natural resource conservation here in Maine,” Walker said. “I’m a strong proponent of the NRCS maxim of ‘helping people help the land,’ and this is best accomplished through active partnerships with federal, state and local agencies. Collaborative efforts between the USDA, local Soil and Water

Conservation Districts, and – most importantly – landowners themselves will continue to yield positive results for Mainers across the state.”

Walker was born and raised in the agricultural tobacco country of Western Kentucky. He grew up with an appreciation and understanding of the value of natural resource conservation, and subsequently entered a career that would allow him to help America’s farmers and landowners preserve those resources.

“Growing up in Kentucky farm country gave me insight into how easily agriculture can deplete the soil if we fail to manage it properly,” Walker explained. “Tobacco farming can exhaust the soil after a few years – from loss of nutrients and to loss of microorganisms – so I saw how natural resource management can heal the damage of intensive and improperly controlled agriculture.

“That is the same for nearly any crop or soil type,” he added. “If we continue to provide a solid foundation of sound conservation practices here in Maine, our forests, fields, streams, and lakes will remain pristine and productive far into the future. But NRCS is just one small part of that effort; while this agency can provide the technical and financial assistance, it is up to our partners, landowners and communities to implement those best practices like cover cropping or erosion control.”

Walker earned a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from Murray State University in 2000 and a M.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from Mississippi State University in 2003. In 2003 he started with the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as a wildlife agency partner biologist, serving in both Kentucky and Montana before transitioning solely to NRCS as an area biologist.

Walker subsequently served in positions of increasing responsibility with NRCS including: Acting District Conservationist; Area Biologist; State Biologist; Acting Area Conservationist; Acting Assistant Director of Technology; and Acting State Conservationist, in Kentucky, Montana, Hawaii, and Tennessee. From 2016 to 2020 he served as the NRCS-Tennessee State Resource Conservationist, overseeing conservation planning, technology, ecological sciences job approval authority, and other ecological responsibilities. Walker was recognized for his efforts with a 2019 Under Secretary’s Award for Accomplishments in Support of USDA Strategic Goals and Objectives.

As the new state conservationist, Walker’s goals also include helping streamline program delivery processes to “best serve customers,” and to continue outreach to non-traditional or “historically underserved” groups.

“In Fiscal Year 2020 NRCS-Maine obligated nearly \$10 million to farmers and landowners through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for practices that included cover crops, high tunnels and aquatic organism passages.” Walker explained. “And we did a great job overall of providing those funds for groups like beginning farmers, limited resource farmers, and veteran farmers. In fact, more than 30 percent of those EQIP funds were obligated to beginning farmers with less than 10 years of farming experience. I want to ensure that high level of service is maintained.”

Walker and his family live in Bangor, Maine.

The USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides leadership and technical assistance to address natural resource conservation issues on private land. NRCS employees work to improve and protect natural resources in partnership with Maine's 16 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, federal, state and local agencies, farmers, landowners and communities. The partnership's commitment to conservation provides a solid foundation to a locally led program delivery system. The partnership is also committed to a voluntary, incentive-based approach to private land stewardship and conservation treatment.

NRCS-Maine obligated more than \$13 million in financial assistance through several perennial programs in Fiscal Year 2020 to help landowners address natural resource concerns.

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