

# New Hampshire's Conservation District Supervisor Handbook



New Hampshire  
State Conservation Committee

2022



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Third known edition, printed 2022. Content in this handbook should be considered to supersede previous handbooks. Questions and requests for additional copies can be directed to the SCC Executive Director, at 603-848-4648 or at [scc@agr.nh.gov](mailto:scc@agr.nh.gov).

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The Committee would like to acknowledge the work of numerous supervisors, district employees, and partners around the State who have helped with the writing and review process.

# Welcome and Introduction

Congratulations on your appointment as a District Supervisor! Your willingness to get involved is greatly appreciated. As a Supervisor, you'll provide valuable leadership and insight in your community. On behalf of the State Conservation Committee, in partnership with the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts, I thank you for your commitment and willingness to be involved.

As a team of 5 Supervisors, your District's board will provide leadership through coordination of technical, educational, and financial assistance to private land-users and communities. These efforts are vital in protecting agriculture and engaging the community in responsible conservation practices. The conservation district system was originally created to protect productive soils. In the 75 years since its inception, conservation districts have developed to address other environmental concerns such as improving water quality, restoring wildlife habitat, reducing the spread of invasive species, and mitigating effects of climate change. Threats to natural resources continue to evolve and shift the challenges communities face to maintain a healthy environment.

The intent of this guide is to provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities of Supervisors and District Boards, as well as overview resources and partnerships involved in the conservation district system in New Hampshire. A full reference manual, the New Hampshire Conservation District Handbook, can be found at your District office and is available through the New Hampshire State Conservation Committee.

Ian Hanley

Executive Director

New Hampshire State Conservation Committee



# Introduction to Conservation Districts

Conservation districts play an important role in the delivery and education of conservation practices that conserve soil, maintain water quality, and protect natural resources. They are legislatively-created bodies whose form and function are defined by state law (RSA 432:8). Districts are part of a nationwide structure that is closely tied to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and are a unique form of non-regulatory government. Districts match local resource needs with technical and financial resources to help landowners implement “on-the-ground” conservation projects. Their effectiveness is derived from their structure as local boards of knowledgeable and concerned volunteers.

Today, all across our country, nearly 3,000 conservation districts, are helping local communities and landowners to conserve land, water, forests, wildlife, and related natural resources. Districts across the country share a single mission: to coordinate assistance from all available sources---public and private, local, state and federal---in an effort to develop locally-driven solutions to natural resource concerns. More than 17,000 citizens serve in elected or appointed positions on conservation districts’ governing boards. These supervisors guide how their district uses resources and develops partnerships to meet local resource concerns.

Among other things, conservation districts:

- Implement farm and forest land conservation practices to protect soil productivity, water quality and quantity, air quality and wildlife habitat.
- Conserve and restore wetlands, which purify water and provide habitat for birds, fish and numerous other animals.
- Reach out to communities and schools to teach the value of natural resources and encourage conservation efforts.
- Help communities and homeowners to plant trees and other land cover to hold soil in place, clean the air, provide cover for wildlife and beautify neighborhoods.
- Provide opportunity for land users to learn about best practices, access resources and local experts, and connect with other local land users.

Conservation districts can do many things under the state code to encourage, educate, coordinate, and take action to assist the land users within its boundaries, but what actually occurs is often largely a reflection of the dedication, vision, and commitment of conservation district supervisors and staff.



Cheshire CCD- Soil steamer demonstration & “Source to Sea” river clean-up with local high school

# A Brief History of Conservation Districts

Conservation districts arose in response to the great Dust Bowl of the 1930's. The Dust Bowl was a period of terrible dust storms caused by severe drought coupled with poor agricultural practices. Wind-blown topsoil from Texas to Oklahoma could be seen as far as 300 miles out in the Atlantic Ocean. This resulted in major ecological and agricultural damage to the American Midwest.

Hundreds of thousands of people were uprooted. Dust pneumonia and other illnesses plagued those who stayed. By 1934, 100 million acres no longer had enough topsoil for crops. The dust storms helped awaken the nation to the threat of soil erosion while leading people to despair of ever being able to use the land again.

Hugh Hammond Bennett, considered today to be the father of soil conservation, urged the nation to address the "national menace" of soil erosion. Due to the work of Bennett and others, the Legislature voted to approve the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 and the creation of the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Bennett served as the chief of SCS until he retired in 1951.

The SCS developed many of our modern techniques for surveying soils and provided methods for determining what kinds of crops the land was capable of sustaining. It also devised numerous techniques, like contour farming, terracing, strip-cropping, and grassed waterways, to prevent soil erosion.

Despite its efforts, the SCS was not successful in getting farmers to implement the new practices. As a result, President Franklin D. Roosevelt determined that an organization was needed at the local level to carry out and promote soil and water conservation programs. This local organization would determine local conservation needs, find ways to solve local problems and encourage their solution by individual landowners within the community.

On February 27, 1937, Roosevelt sent a letter to all state governors urging the passage of state legislation to create a soil conservation district program. He enclosed a copy of *A Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law* prepared by the USDA at the suggestion of several state representatives. The act provided that land occupiers could organize soil conservation districts as governmental subdivisions of the state. It also set up procedures for establishing districts and defined their duties and powers.

In addition, the act recommended that districts direct and manage erosion control programs by engaging citizen volunteers in the planning and installation of conservation practices, empowering the district to determine local needs and develop local solutions the community. Today, all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, islands in the Pacific Basin, and the District of Columbia have enabling legislation creating approximately 3,000 local districts.



# New Hampshire's Conservation Districts

At first, New Hampshire created the entire state as a district. To administer the law within such a structure, a policy was adopted organizing ten county 'sub-districts.' It was ultimately decided to organize each county as its own district, and make them governmental subdivisions of the State. These State's county conservation districts formed in 1946 and 1947.

Each district is governed by a board of five volunteer supervisors, who are county land occupiers. Districts may also appoint associate supervisors to help carry out responsibilities. Supervisors are land users of the county from diversified backgrounds who are concerned with the wise management of the county's natural resources. They set the district's priorities; deliver information and education efforts; provide administrative, technical and financial assistance to cooperators, land users, and municipalities; and lead projects. Districts rely on voluntary cooperation to achieve thoughtful use or needed treatment of the land.

Your district's staff are an integral part of accomplishing goals. Each New Hampshire district has at least one district employee. The exact number depends on your district's funding and relation to other county resources. As a supervisor, you should be in regular communication with your district's staff. It is important that you coordinate your activities with your staff to ensure efforts aren't duplicated and that all responsibilities are taken care of.

## Meetings

The district boards hold open meetings to discuss and vote on district business. This also provides opportunity for residents of the county to bring forth conservation concerns or request assistance from the district on matters related to soil, water, wildlife, and other natural resources. District supervisors can discuss, debate, and resolve to take action, or not. These meetings occur regularly, usually on a monthly basis, in a public building or other place which is open to the general public. Anyone wishing to attend will be welcomed, and will be heard if they desire to speak and are recognized by the Chair. Participation by the public is vital to district activities and success.

Each district holds an Annual Meeting, at which residents, other agency personnel, and the general public are invited. This meeting may be used to elect supervisors and to inform attendees of the activities of the district during the past year.

A district's regular/monthly meetings or Annual Meeting require a quorum to conduct district business and vote on district action. A quorum requires 3 supervisors to physically be in the same location. Districts without a quorum of supervisors present may deputize associate supervisors present to vote (Sect. 432:13).



Time and place of district meetings should be publicized in advance (at least 24 hours in advance, excluding Sundays and holidays) in two different locations. The district's website or local public newspaper count as acceptable locations (Sect. 91-A:2). It is recommended that meetings be posted at the district's office and/or the physical location of the meeting (if not at the district's office).

Districts may choose to use online video-conferencing (e.g. Zoom, Skype, etc.) or conference calling to make scheduling easier and to allow for greater public access to meetings (Sect. 91-A:2). Access links to public meetings should be publicized with other meeting details. Under NH State law, any supervisor who is virtually present does not count towards the required quorum in a physical location (Sect. 91-A:2)

Board representatives are expected to respond to invitations to attend town committee or agency meetings when aspects of district responsibilities are under discussion. When possible, board members should attend state, regional, and national meetings of conservation district associations.

Supervisors absent from three or more consecutive meetings, without legitimate reason, may be asked by the State Conservation Committee to resign, if so requested first by a vote of the district board.

### **Governance**

The supervisors of a conservation district shall be the governing body. They may delegate to one or more of their members such powers and duties as they determine appropriate. They will be responsible for keeping records of all procedures, policies, and orders issued or adopted at its meetings. These records are public information and shall become a permanent file of the district.

The board of supervisors of each district shall, annually elect a chair, vice-chair, secretary, and treasurer for the coming year. The chair and vice-chair shall be members of the board of supervisors, and not associate supervisors.

Supervisors are appointed to a 3 year term, which begin August 1<sup>st</sup>. Within the three year term cycle, the 5 supervisors' terms are spaced out to have no more than 2 supervisor positions needing appointment/reappointment each year.

District boards should ensure that required materials are sent to the State Conservation Committee. These include:

- Regular and Annual Meeting Minutes (both draft and approved minutes, within 5 business days of meeting)
- Annual Financial Report (SCC Form #4, Conservation District Operating Expenses)
- Proof of Bonding



# Your Role as a Conservation District Supervisor

District supervisors set the priorities and operational direction of the district. As part of the district's five person board, you'll be responsible for providing guidance on district activities and voting on district decisions. You're encouraged to be involved and knowledgeable about all district activity, even those that you aren't directly responsible for. The district's support of local communities and neighbors is at the heart of the conservation district program's mission. Examples of specific responsibilities of district supervisors include:

## Technical

- Assess the needs and interests of county residents to build soil health, improve water quality, restore wildlife habitat, and increase farm viability.
- Improve efforts to connect residents with needed resources at the local, state, and federal level.

## Educational

- Be part of your district's efforts to provide opportunity for educational growth of county residents. This can include conducting demonstration plots, organizing technical workshops, or community education programming.

## District Oversight and Financial Management

- Provide leadership and guidance for conservation district activities including, but not limited to, voting on district activities and spending.
- Regular oversight of district income and expenditures, and ensuring that annual financial records and proof of bonding are sent to the State Conservation Committee.

A complete and specific list of responsibilities can be found in NH RSA 432:16. How you turn these responsibilities into action and community benefit will depend on your collaboration with fellow district supervisors and your district's need and activities. You should feel encouraged to learn about what programs and services your district is offering and how you can contribute to developing these efforts.





A supervisor is knowledgeable about natural resource issues. They are familiar with the challenges facing their state and they know many of the people, businesses, organizations in their community who are affected by these issues, particularly those involved in farming and forestry. They also know which issues have the potential to affect the health and well-being of human and natural communities within their district.

In an earlier time, when the sole emphasis of districts was to assist farmers primarily with soil conservation, district supervisors were also usually farmers. Conservation districts now focus on many different natural resource issues, including soil conservation. Reflecting this change, districts now need supervisors from many disciplines, including farming. Today, a supervisor can come from just about any walk of life. One thing all supervisors must have in common is a deep interest in the field of conservation, a belief in their obligation to help in this effort and the dedication to conscientiously perform their duties.

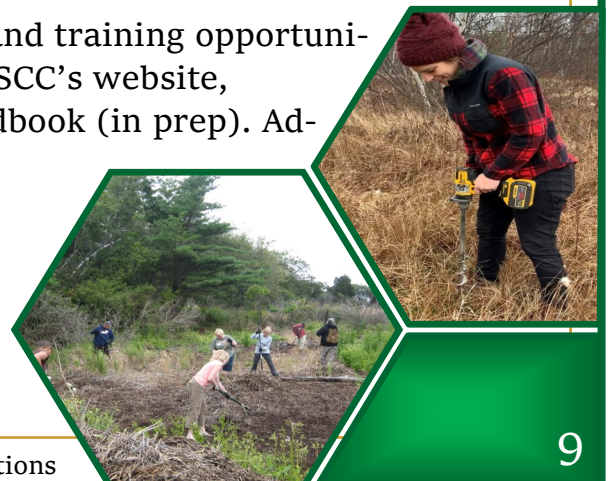
### ***Election of Supervisors***

Supervisors may be nominated by the district board or by residents in the district. Once a district has agreed on a nominee a supervisor nomination form, signed by the chair of the district, is sent to the State Conservation Committee (SCC). The SCC representative from that district speaks to the appointment at the SCC meeting.

If approved, the SCC sends a letter of confirmation to the new or reappointed supervisor and copy to district. Supervisors shall serve for three year terms beginning on August 1st. A supervisor may succeed himself/herself in office and shall serve until a replacement is appointed by the SCC. Supervisors appointed to fill vacant positions will serve the remainder of the 3 year term, and will need reappointment if they wish to start a full term. (Sect. 432:14)

### ***Training Opportunities***

Supervisors have access to additional resources and training opportunities. Additional information can be found at the SCC's website, [www.nh.gov/scc](http://www.nh.gov/scc), and through the District's Handbook (in prep). Additional resources can be found at the New Hampshire Association of Conservation District's website, [www.nhacd.net](http://www.nhacd.net) or the National Association of Conservation District's website, [www.nacdnet.org](http://www.nacdnet.org).



# Partners in Conservation

Conservation Districts work with other organizations in order to promote their conservation goals and activities:

## **State Conservation Committee (SCC)**

The SCC is an agency of the State of New Hampshire established under RSA 432:10, it provides support and guidance to the districts. The Committee consists of 12 members, 5 representatives from the conservation districts, and a representative from the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food, NH Fish and Game, NH Department of Environmental Services, NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, NH Agriculture Experiment Station, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, and the NH Association of Conservation Commissions. The SCC is chaired by one of the conservation district representatives, and employs an Executive Director to manage day-to-day function. The SCC provides basic oversight and support of the districts, facilitates projects involving multiple districts, and provides opportunity to collaborate with member agencies.

## **New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts (NHACD)**

NHACD is a private, non-profit statewide organization formed by the ten conservation districts. Since 1946, the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts, has provided statewide coordination, representation, and leadership for Conservation Districts to conserve, protect, and promote responsible use of New Hampshire's natural resources.

More than 50 citizens serve on 10 conservation district governing boards. Districts set priorities; deliver information and education efforts; provide administrative, technical and financial assistance to cooperators, land users, and towns; and sponsor projects. Districts rely on voluntary cooperation to achieve thoughtful use or needed treatment of the land.

NHACD works collaboratively with county districts, federal, state, and local agencies, nonprofits, and other conservationists as a volunteer, tax-exempt, nonprofit organization. These citizen supervisors are environmentally aware citizens of their county from diversified backgrounds who are concerned with the wise management of our natural resources.



## **Conservation District Employees Association of New Hampshire (CDEA-NH)**

The mission of the Conservation District Employees Association of New Hampshire is to strengthen County Conservation Districts in New Hampshire by providing a system of resources and communication that develops and supports District professionals. CDEA-NH is a membership organization that meets regularly to provide trainings, offer peer to peer learning platforms, and identify future opportunities for conservation programming and services for Conservation Districts in New Hampshire.

## **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

NRCS is the technical arm of the U. S. Department of Agriculture for soil and water conservation. NRCS provides the skills of trained soil conservationists, technicians, soil scientists, engineers, agronomists, biologists, foresters, and other experts to deliver technical assistance to groups, individuals, and units of government. Responsibilities of the NRCS include technical assistance to district cooperators in reducing soil erosion, improving soil quality, watershed planning, upstream flood protection, rural development, enhancing and protecting wetlands, resource inventories and improving farm and forest land. NRCS has the leadership for the implementation of conservation provisions of the Farm Bill.

Thanks to the long standing relationship between NRCS and conservation districts, NRCS relies on the local work groups, led by the districts, to help set local priorities and practices to address natural resource issues at the county level. This was written into the language of the 1996 Farm Bill and has carried forth since. Conservation districts, in collaboration with NRCS, leads the effort to gather public input from a broad range of agencies, organizations, businesses and individuals in the local area who have an interest in natural resources. Conservation districts also develop, implement and evaluate a conservation action plan/strategic plan to identifies priorities, sets goals and determines the stakeholder to carry out the actions on the strategic plan.

More NRCS information on following page.



## ***Section 1619 of the 2008 Farm Bill***

Being a conservation district supervisor provides you with the opportunity to have knowledge regarding the financial assistance workload being conducted in your county by NRCS and by serving as a conservation district supervisor, you are also held to the requirements of Section 1619 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. Section 1619 prohibits USDA, its contractors and cooperators from disclosing information provided by an agricultural producer or timber land owner concerning the operation, farming or conservation practices or the land itself in order to participate in USDA programs, this include farm bill programs and any USDA program that provides loans, subsidies or other benefits. 1619 does not inhibit disclosure of covered information between NRCS and partners who have signed a 1619 statement when that information is used for partners to provide technical or financial assistance. In this instance, NRCS may disclose information related to their customers to assist in the locally led conservation process or to allow partners to provide technical or financial assistance opportunities.

## **Local District Contact Information**

(as of June 2022)

<b>District</b>	<b>Staff Contact</b>	<b>Contact Email</b>	<b>Contact Phone</b>
Belknap	Lisa Morin	<a href="mailto:lisa.morin@nh.nacdnet.net">lisa.morin@nh.nacdnet.net</a>	(603)527-5880
Carroll	Catherine Dufault	<a href="mailto:contact@carrollccd.org">contact@carrollccd.org</a>	(603)447-2771 Ext.100
Cheshire	Amanda Littleton	<a href="mailto:amanda@cheshireconservation.com">amanda@cheshireconservation.com</a>	(603)756-2988 Ext.4
Coös	Whitney Lewis	<a href="mailto:da.cccd@gmail.com">da.cccd@gmail.com</a>	(603)788-4651 Ext.5
Grafton	Pam Gilbert	<a href="mailto:pamela.gilbert@nh.nacdnet.net">pamela.gilbert@nh.nacdnet.net</a>	(603)353-4652 Ext.103
Hillsborough	Kerry Rickrode	<a href="mailto:kerry.rickrode@nh.nacdnet.net">kerry.rickrode@nh.nacdnet.net</a>	(603)673-2409 Ext.100
Merrimack	Stacy Luke	<a href="mailto:info@merrimackccd.org">info@merrimackccd.org</a>	(603)223-6023
Rockingham	Vicky Nelson	<a href="mailto:vicky@rockinghamccd.org">vicky@rockinghamccd.org</a>	(603)679-2790
Strafford	Alena Warren	<a href="mailto:alena@straffordccd.org">alena@straffordccd.org</a>	(603)749-3037
Sullivan	Lionel Chute	<a href="mailto:conservationdistrict@sullivancountynh.gov">conservationdistrict@sullivancountynh.gov</a>	(603)542-4891

