



## **State Conservation Committee**

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### **SCC Strategic Planning Framework**

The following is an initial outline of a strategic plan for the New Hampshire State Conservation Commission (SCC) for Spring 2020 - Spring 2025. The information was gathered through surveys sent out to SCC members, conservation district supervisors and staff, and other conservation organizations as well as during a strategic planning meeting held on March 18, 2020. There were 17 people who contributed to the surveys and 21 SCC and conservation district members who attended the meeting.

In the strategic planning meeting, it was identified that the SCC members needed to focus on gaining clarity on RSA 432:11, which defines the SCC's duties, in terms of how it should be interpreted and whether there should be any revisions made to it in order to broaden the scope of what the SCC is able to achieve. There is also internal work to be done around clearly defining the SCC's identity and how the SCC members will interact with the conservation districts. There is much hope about what the role of a new SCC Executive Director will be able to achieve and recognition that there is so much to do that ideally this would be a full-time staffed position.

The outline lays out the framework for a strategic plan. There are many elements that will need to be defined in future meetings; this may be achieved partly through assigning sub-committees. The areas that were discussed cover three categories, which have been defined as short-term (1-6 months), medium-term (6 months–1 year), and long-term (in years 2-5). The information outlined does provide some initial steps for the SCC to take, and begins to articulate a long-term vision for the SCC. It was expressed that ideally the SCC will not only develop a strategic plan, but also a strategic roadmap – a high level plan that provides the key outcomes that must be delivered over a particular time horizon in order to achieve the SCC's strategic vision.

The major parts of a strategic plan include the following: (1) mission, vision, core values, (2) identification of a group's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (the SWOT analysis), (3) objectives, strategies and actions, (4) measurements and funding streams. This outline only begins to address some of the identified objectives and strategies that the SCC would like to address. To continue working on the remaining elements of the strategic plan and roadmap, the SCC recognizes the importance of continuing to work with outside facilitators to assist them with completing this process.

In October of 2021 the SCC brought Cara Cargill and Steve Whitman back to assist with a review and update of this strategic planning document. The changes and updates have been included as "tracked changes".

## **Guiding Organizational Vision, Mission, and Values**

*December 2021*

### **Vision**

Our Vision for New Hampshire's Future:

NH farms, forest lands, and open space are both productive and profitable in growing food, wood, and fiber and enhance local economic stability, while respecting and protecting our natural resources. Our forest management and agricultural businesses remain major contributors to the local economy and play a significant role in the social capital of their communities, while retaining the State's quality of life and ensuring NH citizens have access to affordable local food and forest products and open space.

The State Conservation Committee's Future:

The SCC is the one group in New Hampshire that coordinates across State, Federal, and local agencies and organizations to ensure sustainable management practices are used in NH farms, forests and watersheds. In this role, the SCC advises, promotes and supports NH Conservation Districts. Locally-led Conservation Districts use this guidance to sustain and improve agriculture and forest management activities which provide clean water and air, open space and wildlife habitat; conserve soil, rivers, lakes, wetlands and special places; and reduce effects of floods and climate change.

### **Mission**

To support and strengthen agriculture and natural resource conservation statewide. We do this by providing:

- Leadership and fostering collaboration at the statewide-level
- Guidance, coordination, and assistance to County Conservation Districts
- Facilitating coordination among government agencies and conservation organizations
- Assistance to County Conservation Districts in sustaining New Hampshire's natural resources and communities and helping citizens act voluntarily to manage for natural resource productivity and enjoyment
- Information to the public and decision-makers

## **Values**

- Stewardship - Sustainability of natural resources through Best Management Practices
- Ecological Health - Healthy and viable farm and forest land
- Resource Productivity - Farms, forests, and land
- Business Sustainability - Viable agriculture, forestry, and local markets
- Collaboration - Working together with organizations in mutual respect to create opportunity and assisting Conservation Districts when needed
- Open Communication and Transparency - Information sharing with the public and decision-makers
- Inclusiveness and Diversity- Enabling equitable access and opportunity in our actions and partnerships

## **The SCC's Relationship with Conservation Districts**

*February 2022*

New Hampshire's conservation community plays a central role in the State's natural resource management, addressing food security challenges, and mitigating the effects of climate change on our natural resources. Within this conservation partnership, agencies and organizations play a major role in the State's ability to successfully maintain healthy ecosystems. The relationship between the New Hampshire State Conservation Committee (SCC) and the State's ten county-based conservation districts are central to this success.

The State Conservation Committee provides the opportunity to strengthen partnerships between conservation districts and state agencies. It also provides an avenue for the coordination of efforts between multiple districts, as well as training and development for districts. Through this collaboration, the SCC is able to identify funding sources for districts and provide additional resources to districts.

New Hampshire's conservation districts provide numerous values to the people and lands of the State. The districts are a direct connection with farmers, land managers, schools, and communities. Their actions create and maintain strong relationships and allow the districts to be responsive to the needs of county residents and communities, some of which may be statewide issues while others are locally specific. Districts provide valuable technical assistance, educational growth, and connections to financial opportunities for community members to address these needs.

The SCC is charged with the following duties relating to the conservation districts under RSA 432.11. The state conservation committee shall:

I. Offer assistance to the supervisors of districts in formulating and carrying out any of their programs.

II. Keep the supervisors of each district informed of the activities of all other districts and facilitate an interchange of advice, experience and cooperation among such districts.

III. Coordinate the programs of the several districts so far as this may be done by advice and consultation.

IV. Seek the cooperation and assistance of the United States, of this state, and of town and county governments, in the work of such districts, and receive funds from such agencies or from any other source, and use such funds to carry out the purposes of the state conservation committee and the conservation districts.

V. Keep the public informed throughout the state, concerning the activities and programs of the conservation districts.

VI. Establish satisfactory cooperative arrangements and avoid duplication between the districts and other federal, state or county agencies which have similar responsibilities.

In order to facilitate these duties, the SCC works with the conservation districts by doing the following;

- The SCC develops and produces training and shares knowledge relating to: natural resource best- and developing-practices; technical, educational, and financial resource availability; and administrative and operational support. The SCC explores opportunities for district supervisors and staff to attend relevant agency trainings.
- The SCC maintains communication among the districts and partners keeping each informed about district activities, as well as relevant local, state, and federal agencies.
- The SCC facilitates projects that involve multiple districts and/or state agencies bringing added resources and expertise to project development.
- The SCC communicates the work of the districts with the public to increase awareness and interest in local conservation districts. By developing public awareness and interest, more land users may become involved in district activities and engaged with local resource conservation efforts.
- The SCC represents the conservation districts to the State Legislature to help develop district operational and financial abilities.

The work of the conservation districts in New Hampshire is integral to natural resource stewardship. As the State Conservation Committee continues to work in support of the conservation district community, it is important that the Committee recognizes its responsibilities, and how it can best support the work of the districts. These efforts are aimed at increasing opportunities and access to resources, while increasing efficiency. Through these efforts, the Committee can continue to develop strong partnerships to address New Hampshire's natural resource management, food security concerns, and impacts from climate change.

### **Glossary of Terms Used**

**Conservation Districts (may be shortened to Districts)**- Refers to New Hampshire's ten county conservation districts.

**SCC Members**- Organizations and state agencies represented on the State Conservation Committee and the five county conservation district representatives;

- NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food
- NH Department of Environmental Services
- NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
- NH Fish and Game
- UNH Cooperative Extension
- NH Agricultural Experiment Station
- NH Association of Conservation Commissions

**Partner Organizations**- Conservation organizations that the SCC and conservation districts work with during their activities. (e.g. NHACD, NRCS)



**Short-term Strategic Goals and Actions (November 2021-January 2022)**

***Goal: Develop clear messaging for internal and external purposes on who the SCC is and the roles they serve – establish SCC identity.***

**Action One** – designate a subcommittee of SCC members to discuss the role and oversight of the new SCC Executive Director:

1. Develop performance criteria, and determine how to evaluate the ED’s effectiveness and performance.
2. Collect data to document the need for the Executive Director to be a full-time staffed position.
3. Identify the top critical functions of the Executive Director to assist this new position in understanding what to prioritize as highest work needs.

\*All proposed ideas will then be finalized and approved by the entire SCC Board.

**Action Two** – To raise awareness address the different definitions of the SCC provided on the website and within RSA 432:11; these should be the same to ensure consistency in messaging and action and be displayed on the website, agenda, and elsewhere to highlight the RSA

**Accomplished Short-term Actions**

- Designated a subcommittee of SCC members to work on initial vision, mission, and values statements which will then be finalized and approved by the entire SCC Board.
  - These should be in alignment with RSA 432:11
- Identified who will be supervising the work of the SCC Executive Director
- Transitioned the new ED into their position.
- Finalized the Executive Director’s job description.
- Designate a subcommittee of SCC members to discuss the identity of conservation districts individually and collectively across the State and their connection to the SCC. Develop proposed guidelines around SCC recommendations to support conservation districts scope of work.

- What should SCC coordination of the conservation districts look like?
- How is this defined?
- Recognize there are different issues in each district as well as some issues in common across the state.
- Provide support, request feedback, and help increase the efficiency of the Conservation Districts.

**Medium-term Strategic Goals & Actions (2022)**

***Goal #1: To ensure leadership, clarity, and transparency as an organization promoting conservation in New Hampshire.***

The SCC members and the Executive Director will carry out the following critical functions:

**Action One** – The SCC will obtain diversified funding to support Committee and conservation districts’ operations and programs.

1. Obtain support for full-time Executive Director.
2. Executive Director will seek grant funds for program opportunities. Prioritize funding that includes direct outreach and education along with any conservation and/or research goals.
3. Establish cooperative arrangements between districts and other federal, state, or county agencies with similar responsibilities.

**Action Two** –The SCC will provide leadership for statewide conservation efforts.

1. Provide leadership, guidance, and support to conservation districts to develop statewide conservation priorities.
  - a. Actively engage and coordinate conservation districts.
    - i. Help coordinate State-wide and regional initiatives, priorities, and outreach.
    - ii. Act as a link between the districts and other state conservation and natural resource groups.
  - b. The SCC offers technical, administrative, and financial assistance to supervisors and staff in formulating and carrying out any of their programs.
    - i. The Executive Director conducts training to supervisors and district managers. This training will increase awareness of supervisors’ responsibilities and develop new conservation leaders.
  - c. Appoint supervisors

2. The SCC will coordinate the activities of member organizations, and work with conservation partners, to better conserve NH natural resources.
3. To ensure SCC member organizations are using best practices, policies, and procedures needed to conserve natural resources.
4. The Executive Director manages the SCC Board and implements goals and objectives developed by the Board.
5. The Executive Director represents the SCC around the State and attends meetings and legislative committees to support SCC goals.

**Action Three** –The SCC will facilitate communication between member organizations, conservation districts, conservation partners, and the public.

1. Maintain communication between the SCC and the districts about statewide and regional programs and initiatives led by SCC member and partner organizations.
2. Keep districts aware of relevant federal and state legislation.
3. Assist legislators in conservation-related decisions.
  - a. Increase visibility of who the SCC is, and the work being carried out by the conservation districts with State Representatives and the Executive Council.
  - b. Help guide legislation to better represent SCC conservation efforts.
4. Support communication between districts and their county delegation as needed by the district to inform them of the value of their investment.

**Action Four** – The SCC will promote statewide conservation efforts of member organization and conservation districts by highlighting conservation services to communities and land owners.

1. Share with conservation districts, other conservation organizations, and the public what the strategic objectives are of the SCC.
  - a. Host education and outreach programs about current environmental issues.
  - b. Present at, and help organize, conferences, meetings, and conservation demonstration projects.
2. Engage in community outreach to promote basic understanding of what the conservation districts can do and how they benefit the community.

- a. Increase public awareness of conservation district activities and resources through local and statewide media.
- b. Promote demonstration projects to conservation partners and public.
3. Enhance public visibility of Moose Plate program; underscore its importance in addressing the State's conservation objectives.
  - a. Increase annual sales and renewals of Moose Plate license registrations.
  - b. Increase applications for Moose Plate grants.
  - c. Increase public knowledge of Moose Plate projects.

***Goal #2: Work with Conservation Districts to identify what their individual goals will be to achieve statewide conservation priorities.***

**Action One** – SCC supports districts developing long-term and annual plans.

1. Executive Director works with districts to ensure they are aware of statewide priorities.
2. SCC members priorities and key programs are communicated to districts.
3. Executive Director work with districts to assist, develop, and implement long-term plan.
4. SCC assists with publication of district plans to SCC members and conservation partners.

**Action Two** – SCC has improved web presence.

1. SCC's website provides information on operational, training, and funding resources available.
2. SCC's website highlights SCC and conservation district activities and success stories.
3. SCC's website promotes available New Hampshire conservation jobs and internships.

**Medium-term Outcomes**

1. Increase public awareness and engagement with conservation districts within and across the State.
2. The SCC and districts receive additional funding – county, state, and regional/statewide grants – and share grant opportunities between organizations.

3. The Executive Director acts as a bridge between the SCC and Districts who have shared priorities; the districts are able to bring forward environmental programs and actionable projects and initiatives.
4. The SCC quarterly meetings are more productive and additional methods of carrying out communication and tasks are implemented between meetings.
5. SCC is promoting State-wide priorities as identified with the Conservation Districts.
6. Communicate the outcomes of the collective work of the SCC and Conservation Districts to other conservation organizations, legislators, and the public.

**Long-term Goals & Actions: (March 2022-March 2025)**

***Goal #1: SCC members and Executive Director work with conservation districts and other conservation partners to identify critical needs and lead initiatives across the State.***

Possible topics include: climate change and loss of ecosystem integrity, cover cropping, expanded solar and other alternative energies, natural resource protection, education of conservation issues, loss of intact wildlife populations due to human intervention and management, wildlife habitat work, loss of water quality due to land use practices and abusive recreational practices, conservation of farm, wetlands, and forest land, sustainability and viability of NH Farms, landscape connectivity, drinking water protection, and culvert replacements and stream crossings.

**Action 1** - SCC plays a leading role in facilitating statewide dialogue about conservation issues.

1. The SCC recognizes the existing and ongoing work of member organizations, conservation districts, and partners in organizing statewide conservation efforts.<sup>1</sup> The SCC will work to promote connections with these organizations and their programs and goals.
2. SCC agencies provide current information on how strategic conservation plans address key statewide issues, such as climate change, loss of open space, etc. at quarterly meetings in 2023 and beyond. These efforts help identify agency priorities and identify gaps that need to be addressed.
3. The SCC will work with partners to develop a large conference/summit of conservation stakeholders in 2025 to address statewide strategic priorities.
4. The SCC will work with partners in the planning and outreach of a statewide annual conservation meeting.
5. SCC Executive Director and each conservation district do an analysis of the current programs offered and what each district would need to do to take on new projects.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. NHACC's Annual Conference, Saving Special Places Conference, Water & Watershed Conference.

**Action 2** - SCC develops a public outreach program that highlights conservation priorities and challenges.

1. Engage partner organizations in order to keep the public informed.
2. Utilize multiple media formats and platforms (ex. videos on Moose plate projects, radio, online, educational programs, etc.).
3. Programs that engage children and youth in conservation strategies.
4. Leverage continuing education programs.
5. Support and promote field-to-table/school initiatives.

**Action 3** - Invite partner conservation organizations and other key leaders to work with the SCC and conservation districts to identify top conservation priorities. Find ways in which these different groups can collaborate on implementation of these conservation efforts.

1. Review and understand the visions of all the SCC partners and other state conservation priorities.
2. Use relationship with partners to identify gaps and duplication in conservation efforts that the SCC can help address.

**Goal 2: *Continue to identify and secure funding for SCC initiatives.***

**Action 1** - Acquire funding for continued staff development.

1. Funding will support staff focused on strategically identified priorities.
2. Engage partners that are better positioned to meet specific needs, such as specialists.

**Action 2** - Acquire funding to expand SCC's programs and outreach.

1. Funding to provide for long-term implementation programs.
2. Funding will support statewide conservation conference and annual workshops.

**Action 3** - Research and identify incentive programs for land owners or individuals.



**Long-term Progress Indicators**

1. Need buy in from other organizations for SCC to play a leadership role.
  - a. Become a credible authority or resource with other organizations/agencies statewide; to have a seat at the table.
2. Begin to establish a State-wide vision for conservation and natural resource management.
3. Districts are seen as the county-level leaders and agents of environmental conservation.
4. SCC is a leader of integrated land conservation.

**Long-Term Possible Outcomes**

**Conservation Priorities**

1. SCC is key coordinator/convener of conservation in the State.
2. New Hampshire's conservation community has a collective sense of purpose.
3. New ways to engage citizens in learning about and responding to conservation issues.
4. Transferring conservation easements administered by a conservation district to another conservation organization.
5. More school and youth programs addressing conservation issues.

**Conservation Operations**

1. SCC is recognized as a conservation leader in NH.
2. Roles and responsibilities understood and importance of districts in delivering conservation at the local level.
3. Educate supervisors about what the SCC is, their roles and responsibilities.
4. Support legislative info sessions with NHACD and other partners.
5. Tools for conservation districts to use with their delegations.
6. Executive Director highlights positive work of districts and communicates role and impact.
7. Convene meetings of Conservation Districts with other partner organizations.
8. The Executive Director attends a meeting of each of the Conservation Districts.

9. Identify the top five statewide conservation issues and have a subcommittee to focus on addressing identified issues.
10. Increased capacity building and strengthening of the unique assets of each conservation district.