
Connecticut's Five Reorganized Soil and Water Conservation Districts: What They can Do for Your Community

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The services of Connecticut's five reorganized soil and water conservation districts (Conservation Districts) are available to help municipal leaders, boards and staff, and residential, commercial and agricultural land users to contend with the growing complexities of development pressures, regulations and natural resource issues.

In April 2003, the number of Conservation Districts was reorganized from eight county-based into five watershed-based Conservation Districts. The realignment was completed through the joint efforts of the Connecticut Association of Conservation Districts (CACD), the Council on Soil and Water Conservation (Council) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). This was done to streamline more effective delivery of technical and educational services in areas including, but not limited to, erosion and sedimentation control, management of nonpoint source (NPS) pollution, including the management of storm water runoff, and promotion of watershed management.

Although boundary lines have been altered, *the five* watershed based Conservation Districts' mission to provide comprehensive and professional assistance to its service area remains the same.

What is a Soil and Water Conservation District?

Connecticut's five Conservation Districts are part of a nationwide network of nearly 3,000 Conservation Districts; every state has soil and water conservation districts. The boards of these locally governed Conservation Districts comprise more than 15,000 men and women (primarily volunteers). They serve as a link between local, state and federal agencies to coordinate and facilitate financial and technical assistance, to address locally driven priorities.

Connecticut's Conservation Districts are established by state regulations developed jointly by the CACD, the Council, and the DEP. In Connecticut all districts are non profit 501 (c) (3) organizations. District operations are under direction of a locally elected Board of Directors. District' staff implement locally driven assistance programs.

Conservation Districts receive fiscal support for their programs from three primary sources: (1) a portion of the land use fee collected on municipal land use applications; (2) municipal contributions and private donations; and (3) grants—primarily US Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water Act grants administered by the DEP.

History of the Conservation District Network

In 1935, Public Law 46, also known as the Soil Conservation Act, was enacted to provide suggestions for remedies for soil and water degradation that became apparent with the natural resource degradation problems of that era. Congress passed enabling legislation allowing each state

to create soil and water conservation districts, to implement local practices to address soil and water quality issues. In doing so, Congress also declared soil and water conservation and sound land use a national policy.

- In 1937, President Roosevelt wrote to the governors of each state urging the creation of soil and water conservation districts by state law.
- 1945 marked the year Connecticut passed enabling legislation to create soil and water conservation districts in the state. Connecticut, ever the land of steady habits, was the last state in the nation to do so. By 1953 eight Soil and Water Conservation Districts were formed along county lines.
- Until the 1970s district boards were primarily made up of agricultural producers who had first hand knowledge on how to protect natural resources. They worked in conjunction with the District's primary technical services partner, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, (NRCS, formally the US Soil Conservation Service).
- In the 1980s, to meet the challenges of population growth and the complexities of land management, district boards became more diversified and technical staff were added. In addition to agriculture producers, natural resource specialists and other professionals were elected to boards.

Today Districts are well positioned to carry out their mission to provide comprehensive and professional assistance at the local level for protecting Connecticut's natural resources.

Services of Conservation Districts to Local Government and its Community

Connecticut's nonpartisan Conservation Districts provide objective, accurate and timely assistance to municipal leaders, commissions and staff and, residential, commercial and agricultural land users by, among other things:

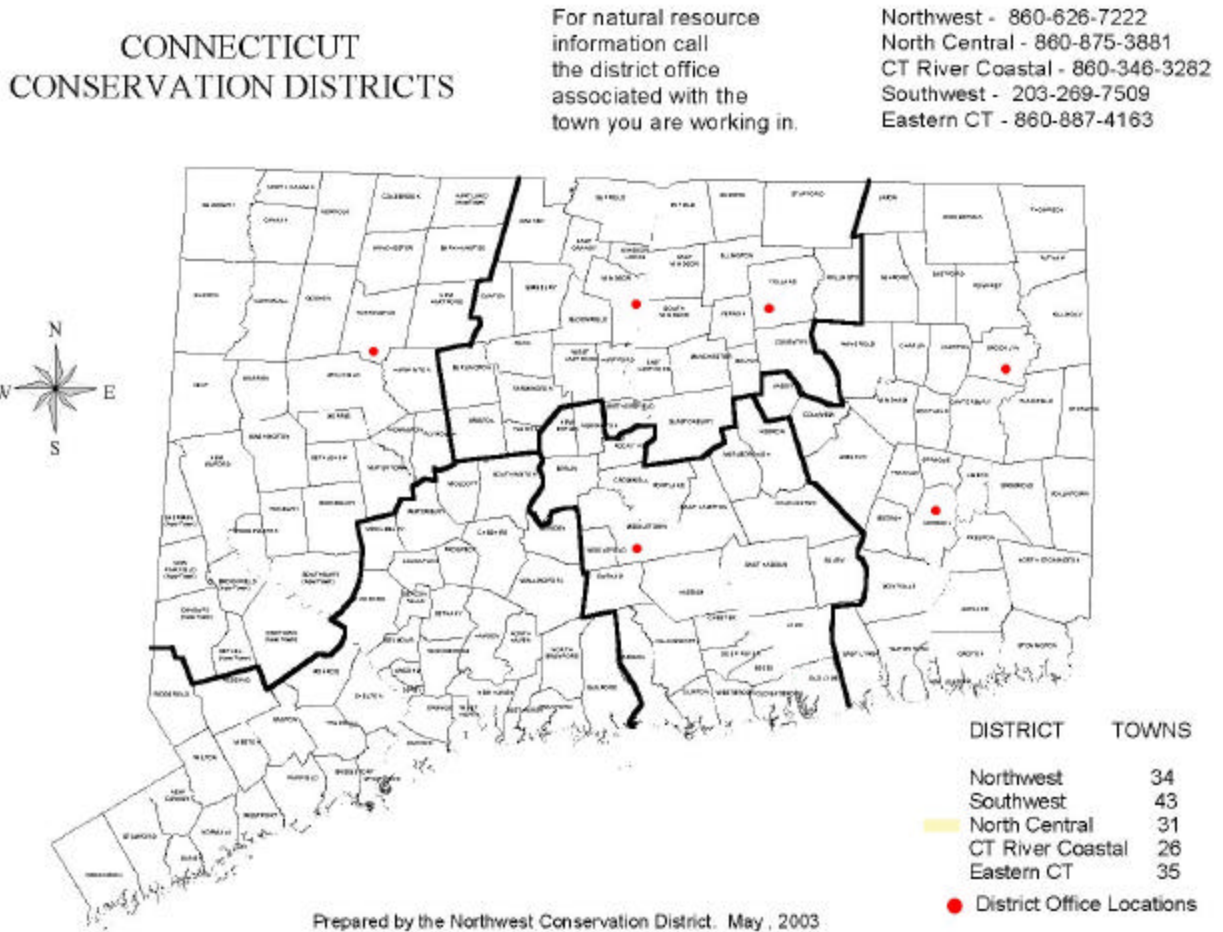
- providing technical information and assistance on natural resource problems including; site plan review and on-site inspection, management of NPS pollution, erosion and sedimentation control, storm water management, and habitat restoration.
- providing natural resource education and training on various land use issues. Topics offered by Conservation Districts this year include: "Training on Connecticut's 2002 Erosion and Sediment Guidelines for Municipal Staff", "Green Gardening Techniques for Homeowners", "Reading the Land – A Workshop for Realtors about Natural Resource Issues facing New Homeowners", "Pond Maintenance, and Landscaping for Improved Water Quality". Districts also annually coordinate and sponsor the nationally recognized Envirothon, a high school education and competition program in natural resource topics.
- providing public on-call or walk-in information, recommendations, and referrals to assist land owners, developers and home owners with problems relating to soil and water conservation and other natural resource issues;

- partnering with public and private stakeholders to formulate and implement watershed management plans and other local initiatives to preserve the health of watersheds and;
- partnering with the agricultural community, private environmental organizations, and municipal, state and federal agencies to protect and preserve sustainable farm lands, open space and woodlands.

Conservation Districts Positioned for Future Challenges

The face of Connecticut is changing drastically due to tremendous development pressures on all types of land areas. In addition there are new state and federal regulations to implement. Municipal land use commissions depend on community volunteers--some 5000 strong in Connecticut—to make appropriate decisions that balance environmental protection, public health and economic viability. Conservation Districts are now organized to more effectively assist municipalities in making these decisions as well as assisting private, commercial and agricultural land users to ultimately promote informed land use decisions.

Provided below is a map of Connecticut showing the reorganized boundaries and contact information for Connecticut’s five Conservation Districts.



To learn more, or for further information please contact any of the Conservation District service areas listed below, or Suellen Kozey McCuin, Executive Director of the Council on Soil and Water Conservation at (860)767-9594. **A map of the new district boundaries and contact information can be found on the Connecticut Conservation Districts' Website, CONSERVECT.ORG.**

The Council on Soil and Water Conservation is established by regulation pursuant to Section 22a-315 of the Connecticut General Statutes, to coordinate the activities of the State's Soil and Water Conservation Districts with the activities of the Department of Environmental Protection and other local, state, and federal agencies, and propose regulations to said Department of Environmental Protection in matters of soil and water preservation and conservation