



Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation

**FY 2020 Annual Operations Plan
July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020**

Approved ()

Council on Soil and Water Conservation Members & Staff

Council Members

| | |
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| Denise Savageau, Chairman | Southwest Conservation District |
| Jeff Folger, Secretary Treasurer | North Central Conservation District |
| Walter Smith | CT River Coastal Conservation District |
| Dan Mullins | Eastern CT Conservation District |
| Cynthia Rabinowitz | Northwest Conservation District |
| Stephen Anderson | Department of Agriculture |
| Phil Throwbridge | Department of Energy and Environmental Protection |
| Michael O'Neill | UConn Extension System |
| Jennifer Kaufman | Governor's NGO Appointment |

Ex-Officio

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Tom Morgart | USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Abigail Maynard | CT Agricultural Experiment Station |
| Bonnie Burr | USDA Farm Service Agency State Committee |
| Vacant | Storrs Agricultural Experiment Station |
| Vacant | Municipal E&S Staff Representative(s) |
| Jeanne Davies | Resource Conservation and Development |

Staff

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Lilian Ruiz | Executive Director |
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Introduction

The Council on Soil and Water Conservation's (Council) 2020 Annual Operations Plan (Plan) provides benchmarks for the Council's proposed activities for the 2020 fiscal year. The Plan details the Council's goals, objectives and actions. The Council executes this working plan with its members and partners. The Council's Executive Director will work directly with the Council Chairman and Council members in implementing the directives and actions set forth in the Plan. The 2020 Plan may be amended as needed.

Council Role

The Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation is a state agency set up to provide guidance to the Commissioner of the Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection on all matters relating to soil and water conservation and to provide oversight to Connecticut's five conservation districts. It also serves to coordinate activities and partnering opportunities for the conservation districts and other Council members with other federal, state and local agencies regarding environmental and natural resource programs.

The Council consists of 9 members including 5 members from the conservation districts, CT Dept. of Environmental Protection, CT Dept. of Agriculture, UConn Cooperation Extension, and an appointee of the Governor. Ex-officio non-voting members of the Council are USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, USDA Food Security Administration, CT Agricultural Experiment Station, Storrs Agricultural Experiment Station, and the CT Resource Conservation and Development Council. The Council is located within the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection for administrative purposes only.

The CT Council and Districts are part of a nationwide network of local, state and federal entities established as a result of the dust bowl era. The Council is Connecticut's state soil and water agency (board, council, etc.) and as such is part of NASCA (the National Association of State Conservation Agencies). In Connecticut, the core Conservation Partnership refers to the Council, the CT Association of Conservation representing the five conservation districts, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the CT Resource Conservation and Development Council.

Council Mission

The Mission of the Council on Soil and Water Conservation is to advise and assist the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Commissioner of Agriculture and other partnering agencies in conserving and protecting the land, water and other resources of the State in order to preserve and enhance quality of life for present and future generations.

State Declaration Strengthening Erosion and Sedimentation Control Activities

Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 22a-326 and the legislature finds "that soil erosion on land being developed is a serious problem in Connecticut" it is "therefore, declared to be the policy of the state to strengthen and extend its erosion and sediment control activities and programs and to establish and implement, through the Council on Soil and Water Conservation", and Conservation Districts and the Department of Environmental and Energy Protection, "a state-wide coordinated erosion and sediment control program which shall reduce the danger from storm water runoff, minimize nonpoint sediment pollution from land being developed and conserve and protect the land, water, air and other environmental resources of the State."

2020 Primary Initiatives/Goals

The Council and its members have established the following five overarching goals for the 2020 fiscal year. Action items for each goal have been established and will be accomplished in collaboration with local, state and federal partners.

Goal I – Protect and Restore Connecticut’s Watershed Health

The Council will coordinate the technical assistance provided by the Conservation Partnership and Council members on watershed planning and management efforts designed to protect and restore our coastal and inland water resources, including public drinking water supplies. The Council will work with all relevant institutions, in both urban and rural areas to reduce the impacts of nonpoint source pollution from urban and agricultural storm water run-off and facilitate the implementation of best management practices.

Goal II – Protect and Restore Connecticut’s Soil Health

The Council will coordinate a state-wide discussion of soil health initiatives in Connecticut. Specifically, the Council will appoint and facilitate a stakeholder workgroup to review and recommend changes to existing state statutes that would further advance the adoption of soil health best management practices on agricultural and urban land.

Goal III – Strengthen Partnerships and Leverage Resources for Soil and Water Conservation

Council will coordinate the programs of Conservation Partnership with stakeholders region-wide and expand the reach and capacity of all partners. The Council will identify and facilitate the leveraging of federal, state and local resources, including funding, needed to implement soil and water conservation programs.

Goal IV – Provide Outreach and Education on Conservation Programs

The Council will provide and support outreach and education programs to facilitate the technical transfer and adoption of best management practices related to soil and water conservation. It will also provide education to the CT General Assembly members, school children, and members of the public to increase environmental and agricultural literacy in the state.

Goal V – Provide Efficient and Effective Council Administration

The Council will review the governing requirements set forth in state statute and regulation for the Council and the conservation districts and will adopt administrative procedures to ensure that all requirements are followed.

Goal I – Protect and Restore Connecticut’s Watershed Health

The Council will coordinate the technical assistance provided by the Conservation Partnership and Council members on watershed planning and management efforts designed to protect and restore our coastal and inland water resources, including public drinking water supplies. The Council will work with all relevant institutions, in both urban and rural areas to reduce the impacts of nonpoint source pollution from urban and agricultural storm water run-off and facilitate the implementation of best management practices.

Objective A: Provide coordination for the protection of the Long Island Sound with the Conservation Partnership network by facilitating landscape scale watershed programs extending into 5 New England States and New York.

- 1) **Action:** Continue to serve as the lead agency for the Long Island Sound Watershed - Regional Conservation Partnership Program (LISW-RCPP). (ongoing to 2021)
 - a) Coordination of the LISW-RCPP steering committee and oversight of the program and all deliverables.
 - b) Administration of the grant by the Executive Director including all reporting of deliverables and distribution of funds to sub-contractors.
- 2) **Action:** Advice and facilitate implementation of the Long Island Sound Study (LISS) within the entire watershed. (ongoing)
 - a) Executive Director to report annually to the LISS Management Team on the LISW-RCPP.
 - b) Coordinate a Long Island Watershed multi-state tour of successful projects in fall 2020

Objective B: Assist DEEP and the conservation districts with technical assistance and outreach programs on urban storm water management and nonpoint source pollution control.

- 1) **Action:** Support the work of the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District to provide the education and outreach requirements in municipal MS4 permits by facilitating statewide adoption of the program.
- 2) **Action:** Coordinate with DEEP on the establishment of a workgroup to reconcile differences/ technical inconsistencies between the CT’s Storm Water Manual and CT’s Soil and Erosion Control Manual.

Objective C: Support the implementation of the State Water Plan and protection of our public drinking water supplies by bringing together partners working on watershed management, source water protection, and land protection efforts.

- 1) **Action:** Seek funding to increase the technical capacity of stakeholders working on source water protection.
 - a) Apply for USDA NRCS cooperative agreement grant funding.
- 2) **Action:** Join the CT Source Water Collaborative and attend regular meetings (2-3 per year).

Goal II – Protect and Restore Connecticut’s Soil Health

The Council will coordinate a state-wide discussion of soil health initiatives in Connecticut. Specifically, the Council will appoint and facilitate a stakeholder workgroup to review and recommend changes to existing state statutes that would further advance the adoption of soil health best management practices on agricultural and urban land.

Objective A: Provide coordination and leadership for the protection, conservation and regeneration of the soils in agricultural and urban lands in Connecticut.

- 1) **Action:** Form a Subcommittee on Soil Health (CSWC-SSH) to lead the coordination of soil health initiatives in the state, including the work on Healthy Soils legislation reporting to the Council.
 - a) Establish and direct a stakeholder group to broaden the reach and fit of the legislation at the state level, to include the Districts, CT RC&D, the NRCS and other relevant non-profit organizations dedicated to Soil Health in the state.
 - b) Provide substitute language and goals for Healthy Soils Legislation by Fall 2019, in time for January Legislative Session.
- 2) **Action:** The Subcommittee on Soil Health (CSWC-SSH) will coordinate soil health initiatives in the state, facilitating the dialogue among stakeholders (institutions and the relevant public) and identifying gaps and needs.
 - a) Create a stakeholder map including the different categories: governmental agencies, non-governmental institutions, industry (upstream and downstream), rural and urban landowners.
 - b) Map existing soil health initiatives within to better coordinate efforts and to identify program needs.

Objective B: Champion the creation of a state funded Soil Health Program.

- 1) **Action:** The Council, through the Subcommittee on Soil Health, will seek to establish state level funding to educate, support and promote healthy soils best management practices for:
 - Farmers and landowners who do not qualify for federal programs (EQIP and others).
 - Providing match for federal programs.
 - a) Determine potential sources for funding that satisfy stakeholders’ diverse interests.
 - b) Communicate and coordinate with stakeholders on Healthy Soils legislation.

Objective C: Educate stakeholders and the public on the role of soils in climate change, water quality and carbon sequestration.

- 1) **Action:** Create or promote existing materials for distribution at events, highlighting the importance of soil health and its connection to water quality and retention, climate change and carbon sequestration.
- 2) **Action:** Design a Soil Health presentation that is specific to our state assets and challenges, to be used by Council representatives in the various events of interest (districts, state, and national level)
- 3) **Action:** Declaration of Soil Health Week in the State of Connecticut where the Conservation Partnership will hold a Soil Health Day event(s).

Goal III – Strengthen Partnerships and Leverage Resources for Soil and Water Conservation

Council will coordinate the programs of Conservation Partnership with stakeholders region-wide and expand the reach and capacity of all partners. The Council will identify and facilitate the leveraging of federal, state and local resources, including funding, needed to implement soil and water conservation programs.

Objective A: Represent the Council and conservation district partners at statewide environmental advocacy meetings.

- 1) **Action:** Executive Director and/or Council chair will increase participation in statewide environmental advocacy meetings, including but not limited to the following:
 - a) NRCS State Technical Committee Meetings
 - b) Working Lands Alliance Meeting – minimum 1 per year
 - c) CT Source Water Collaborative – minimum 2 per year
 - d) LISS-Management Committee – minimum 1 per year
 - e) CT League of Conservation Education Fund – Environmental Summit - annually

Objective B: Participate in NASCA and represent Connecticut at national and regional Conservation Partnership Meetings.

- 1) **Action:** Executive Director and/or Council chair will attend the following national/regional meetings as funds allow:
 - a) NACD Annual meeting and participate in the NASCA meeting (Jan/Feb)
 - b) NACD Northeast Regional meeting – annually (summer)
 - c) New England Leadership Meeting – annually (March/April)
 - d) NASCA Annual meeting – annually (Sept/Oct)

Objective C: Explore and identify funding sources for the Council, conservation districts, and other Council members for implementation of soil and water conservation programs.

- 1) **Action:** Establish workgroup to review existing funding sources for soil and water conservation programs and make recommendations on how best to leverage resources to address multiple concerns. Sources to be explored include but are not limited to:
 - a) USDA NRCS - all funding sources
 - b) EPA 319
 - c) EPA LISS
 - d) Long Island Sound Futures Fund
 - e) State – all funding sources
- 2) **Action:** Explore creation of state-wide soil and water conservation fund, similar to programs in other states, that will complement and enhance NRCS EQIP programs.

Goal IV – Provide Outreach and Education on Conservation Programs

The Council will provide and support outreach and education programs to facilitate the technical transfer and adoption of best management practices related to soil and water conservation. It will also provide education to the CT General Assembly members, school children, and members of the public to increase environmental and agricultural literacy in the state.

Objective A: Facilitate the adoption of best management practices on soil and water conservation on both urban and working lands.

- 1) **Action:** Develop an outreach program for NRCS Farm Bill programs to be implemented regionally by conservation districts and other partners. (Jan 2020) |
- 2) **Action:** Host a state-wide conference on storm water management/sediment and erosion control during construction for local land use boards and staff and consulting engineers.

Objective B: Provide base funding and support for the Connecticut Envirothon to better leverage in-kind services of participating federal and state agencies and sponsor funding.

- 1) **Action:** The Council, as part of its annual budget process, will allocate \$20,000 annually as base funding for the CT Envirothon.
- 2) **Action:** The Council, through the Conservation Partnership, will coordinate with Envirothon State Steering Committee to assist in planning for the annual program and on planning and implementation tasks throughout the year.
 - a) The Executive Director and/or Chairman will provide assistance to the Envirothon State steering Committee as needed and/or requested.

Objective C: Assist with state-wide outreach programs designed to promote native plantings and reduce impact of invasive species on natural habits.

- 1) **Action:** Coordinate National Pollinator Week proclamation with the Governor's office
 - a) Executive Director will develop proclamation for adoption by Governor
 - b) Host a state-wide ceremony with core partners including but not limited to:
 - i) Council members involved in pollinator programs
 - ii) Pollinator Pathways Program
 - iii) CT Land Conservation Council
 - iv) CT Audubon Society
 - v) National Audubon - CT

Goal V – Provide Efficient and Effective Council Administration

The Council will review the governing requirements set forth in state statute and regulation for the Council and the conservation districts and will adopt administrative procedures to ensure that all requirements are followed.

Objective A: Conduct business of Council in accordance with state regulations and bylaw.

- 1) **Action:** Council Chair and Executive Director will review current statutes, regulations, and bylaws to ensure compliance including:
 - a) Reviewing Council membership and ensuring quorum at all meetings
 - b) Establishing meeting schedule annually
 - c) Setting of agendas and recording of minutes
 - d) Adopting annual plan of work and budget
 - e) Election of officers
- 2) **Action:** Conduct annual training for Council members on the purpose of the Council and legal requirements.

Objective B: Provide guidance and administrative oversight for activities of Connecticut's Conservation Districts as per state statute.

- 1) **Action:** Coordinate annual reporting requirements of Conservation Districts to the Council and CT DEEP
 - a) Annual Operation Plans - review and comment; accept and place final plan on file
 - b) Annual Report – accept and place final report on file
 - c) Annual Audit – accept and place final report on file

Objective C: Provide support for Conservation Districts and the Conservation Partnership to advance soil and water conservation programs in Connecticut

- 1) **Action:** Review training needs of conservation district boards and staff and develop strategic plan for training.
- 2) **Action:** Assist with coordination of state-wide communication program including use of social media for the Conservation Partnership.

Other Organizations and Affiliates

The Council recognizes the important role of NGOs and municipal partners of the Council and Districts in carrying out relative programs included in this Annual Operations Plan. The partners include, but are not limited to:

NON-GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

CT Conference of Municipalities

CT Chapter of the American Planners Association

CT Zoning Building Officials

CT Association of Conservation and Inland Wetland Commissions

Council of Small Towns

CT Horse Council

Working Lands Alliance

CT Fund for the Environment

Rivers' Alliance

CT League of Conservation Voters

CT Land Conservation Council

GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

CT Department of Public Health

US Environmental Protection Agency

U.S. Fish and Wildlife

U.S. Forest Service

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

U. S. Geological Survey