



**FY 2023 Annual Operations Plan
July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023**

Draft for Approval

Council on Soil and Water Conservation Members & Staff

Council Members

Denise Savageau, Chairman	CT River Coastal Conservation District
Secretary Treasurer	TBD
Cheryl Cappiali	Southwest Conservation District
Dan Mullins	Eastern CT Conservation District
Larry Rousseau	Northwest Conservation District
Joanna Shapiro	North Central Conservation District
Simon Levesque	Department of Agriculture
Christopher Bellucci	Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
Michael O'Neill	UConn Extension System
Vacant	Governor's NGO Appointment

Ex-Officio

Tom Morgart	USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Leigh Whittinghill	CT Agricultural Experiment Station
Vacant	USDA Farm Service Agency State Committee
Vacant	Storrs Agricultural Experiment Station
Vacant	Municipal E&S Staff Representative(s)
Jeanne Davies	CT Resource Conservation and Development

Staff

Lilian Ruiz	Executive Director
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Introduction

The Council on Soil and Water Conservation's (Council) 2023 Annual Operations Plan (Plan) provides benchmarks for the Council's proposed activities for the 2023 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 2023 Plan may be amended as needed.

Council Role

The Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation is a state agency established by Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 22a-314 to provide guidance and assistance to the Commissioner of the Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection on all matters relating to soil and water conservation, including oversight of 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 Cooperative Extension, and an appointee of the Governor. Ex-officio non-voting members of the Council are USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, 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 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 Districts representing the five conservation districts, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the CT Resource Conservation and Development Council. There is a similar Conservation Partnership in every state.

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 and to support the work of the local soil and water conservation districts.

2023 Primary Initiatives/Goals

The Council and its members have established the following five overarching goals for the 2023 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 support through coordination and/or collaboration, the technical assistance and education/outreach 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. This includes working with the Long Island Sound Study, increasing the capacity of partners and accelerating the implementation of measures for source water (drinking water) protection in Connecticut. 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 stormwater run-off, to facilitate the implementation of best management practices, and to support the protection of forested and other natural landscapes through land acquisition and/or easement programs.

Goal II – Protect and Restore Connecticut’s Soil Resources

The Council will continue to coordinate the development of a state-wide action plan for soil health in Connecticut and will continue the work of its soil health committee to further advance the adoption of soil health best management practices across all landscapes, including agricultural, forest, wetlands, and urban lands. This committee will build on the work accomplished by the Governor’s Council on Climate Change Working and Natural Lands Work Group regarding soil health and the ecosystem services provided for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Council will also work collaboratively with various partners to accelerate and increase the protection of prime and important farmland soils throughout the central valley in Connecticut and the region. It will also support completion of the Coastal Zone Soil Survey as an important tool for planning and implementation of projects in Long Island Sound.

Goal III – Facilitate Integration of Sustainability Across Disciplines

The Council recognizes that there is a nexus between food supply/security, water resources and energy; and that healthy soil, and the ecosystem services it provides, is a common thread. The management of working and natural lands is critical to a sustainable and resilient Connecticut and recognizes the connection between urban and rural landscapes. The Council will identify program areas and facilitate integration of soil and watershed health in planning for climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency.

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

The Council will coordinate the programs of the Conservation Partnership with diverse stakeholders and expand the reach and capacity of all partners. It will identify and facilitate the leveraging of federal, state, and local resources, including funding, needed to implement soil and water conservation programs in an equitable and just manner.

Goal V – 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 VI – Provide Efficient and Effective Council Administration

The Council will annually 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 support through coordination and/or collaboration, the technical assistance and education/outreach 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. This includes working with the Long Island Sound Study, increasing the capacity of partners, and accelerating the implementation of measures for source water (drinking water) protection in Connecticut. 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, facilitate the implementation of best management practices, and to support the protection of forested and other natural landscapes through land acquisition and/or easement programs.

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 the 5 New England States and New York.

- 1) **Action:** Advise and facilitate implementation of the Long Island Sound Study (LISS) within the entire watershed. (ongoing)
 - a) Seek funding to coordinate a Long Island Sound Watershed multi-state tour of successful projects in fall 2023.
- 2) **Action:** Identify new opportunities to build on the networking established by the LISW-RCPP.
- 3) **Action:** Develop projects on the “One Water” concept together with the NACD Coastal RPG.

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

- 1) **Action:** Continued participation in the workgroup and support the DEEP in reviewing and updating CT’s Storm Water Quality Manual and CT’s Soil and Erosion Control Manual.
- 2) **Action:** Establish a workgroup in coordination with DEEP that will develop recommendations to provide enhanced training for local inland wetland commissioners and staff.
- 3) **Action:** Support implementation of watershed plans developed under EPA 319 and/or USDA NWQI programs.

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: Implement USDA Cooperative Agreement on Source Water Protection.** (Ongoing through September 2022)
 - a) GIS Survey of Land Use in Source Water Watersheds – working with UConn CLEAR.
 - b) Update Watershed Plan for the Little River- working with the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District.
- 2) **Action:** Join the CT Source Water Collaborative and attend regular meetings (2-3 per year).

- 3) **Action:** Join the efforts from the American Farmland Trust, the CT Land Conservation Council and Land Trusts to support land conservation easements for the purpose of forest land protection in drinking water supply watersheds.

Objective D: Identify potential NRCS Watershed Operations Plan (PL 566) and facilitate development as needed

- 1) **Action:** With NRCS, develop Watershed Operations Plan for Long Island Sound that both protects shellfish beds from stormwater runoff and restores important habitat to bring implementation funding to Long Island Sound.
- 2) **Action:** Coordinate the implementation of the Long Island Sound Study Enhancement Grant, with DEEP and Audubon CT, for the development of an NRCS Watershed Operations Plan (PL 566) for Long Island Sound.
- 3) **Action:** Assist NRCS with Watershed Operations Plan assessments statewide.

Goal II – Protect and Restore Connecticut’s Soil Resources

The Council will continue to coordinate the development of a state-wide action plan for soil health in Connecticut and will continue the work of its soil health committee to further advance the adoption of soil health best management practices across all landscapes including agricultural, forest, wetlands, and urban lands. This committee will build on the work accomplished by the Governor’s Council on Climate Change Working and Natural Lands Work Group regarding soil health and the ecosystem services provided for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Council will also work collaboratively with various partners to accelerate and increase the protection of prime and important farmland soils throughout the central valley in Connecticut and the region. It will also support completion of the Coastal Zone Soil Survey as an important tool for planning and implementation of projects in Long Island Sound.

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

- 1) **Action:** Continue the development of a state-wide action plan for soil health in Connecticut through the Council’s Soil Health Committee and building on the soils report completed as part of the Governor’s Council on Climate Change Working and Natural Lands report. Completion by Fall of 2022.
- 2) **Action:** Maintain and expand a list for soil health stakeholders and identify ways to engage annually.

Objective B: Support the CT Farmland Restoration and Climate Resiliency Grant Program.

- 1) **Action:** The Council will assist the Department of Agriculture on the planning and deployment of the program as it relates to soil health and conservation planning.
- 2) **Action:** The Council will support the implementation of all climate smart agriculture programs.
- 3) **Action:** Communicate and coordinate with stakeholders on Healthy Soils legislation.

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

- 1) **Action:** Create or promote existing materials for distribution at events, highlighting the importance of soil health and its ecosystem services.
- 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 districts and other stakeholders will hold a Soil Health Day event.

Objective D: Promote the preservation of farmland and prime and important soils in CT

- 1) **Action:** Support CT's Farmland Preservation Program and assist with coordination of USDA, DOA, and local efforts.
- 2) **Action:** Explore establishment of a regional workgroup to address loss of prime and important farmlands in the Connecticut central valley.
- 3) **Action:** Work with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Department of Agriculture, and the American Farmland Trust to establish a regulatory process for the proper siting of utility scale solar arrays in CT that preserves prime and important soils, including the implementation of dual use solar where appropriate.

Objective E: Promote the preservation of hydric and subaqueous soils in CT

- 1) **Action:** Support the completion of the Coastal Zone Soil Survey in conjunction with the NRCS.
- 2) **Action:** Serve on the NACD Coastal Resource Policy Group.

Goal III – Facilitate Integration of Sustainability Across Disciplines

The Council recognizes that there is a nexus between food supply/security, water resources, and energy; and that healthy soil, and the ecosystem services it provides, is a common thread. The management of working and natural lands is critical to a sustainable and resilient Connecticut and recognizes the connection between urban and rural landscapes. The Council will identify and facilitate integration of soil and watershed health in planning for climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency.

Objective A: Educate key stakeholders about the nexus between soil health, water, energy, and food supply in Connecticut

- 1) **Action:** Develop and promote a PowerPoint presentation showing the links between these resources and the need for a coordinated approach to management.
- 2) **Action:** Provide information on integrated management of these resources to the Governor's Council on Climate Change.

Objective B: Promote Local Food Supply/Food Security Initiatives as a Sustainable Goal for Connecticut

- 1) **Action:** Assist CT Dept of Agriculture to enhance programs that:
 - a. reduce the distance between supply and demand areas, reducing the carbon footprint and cost of transportation for the food produced and consumed in CT
 - b. reduce food insecurity in urban areas as experienced during the 2020 pandemic
 - c. support the farming community and preserve land under farming
 - d. recognize that important connection between the local rural/urban interface for food supply.
- 2) **Action:** Assist and support the CT Dept of Agriculture on urban agriculture initiatives that accomplish the same goals.

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

The Council will coordinate the programs of Conservation Partnership with diverse stakeholders and expand the reach and capacity of all partners. It will identify and facilitate the leveraging of federal, state, and local resources, including funding, needed to implement soil and water conservation programs in an equitable and just manner.

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

- 1) **Action:** Executive Director and/or Council chair will participate in statewide meetings, including but not limited to the following:
 - a) NRCS State Technical Committee Meetings
 - b) Working Lands Alliance Meetings
 - c) CT Source Water Collaborative – minimum 2 per year
 - d) LISS-Management Committee – minimum 1 per year
 - e) CT League of Conservation Voters Education Fund – Environmental Summit – annually
 - f) Connecticut Land Conservation Council meeting(s) or at minimum participation in annual CLCC conference (Spring).

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:** 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:** Engage with GC3 initiatives.

Goal V – 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 across all landscapes.

- 1) **Action:** Develop a standard presentation to be used as information materials for a series of meetings on NRCS Farm Bill programs to be implemented regionally by conservation districts and other partners. (Jan 2023)
- 2) **Action:** Host a state-wide conference on stormwater 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 the CT Envirothon 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 CT Envirothon 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 habitats.

- 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
 - vi) CT NOFA
 - vii) CT Invasive Plant Working Group

Goal VI – Provide Efficient and Effective Council Administration

The Council annually reviews 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 meet annually to 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 – June 2023
 - e) Election of officers – September 2023
- 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 – Districts will develop Annual Operation Plans and submit for comments to the Council in accordance with State regulations. Council to accept and place final plan on file by July 31st. Council to send Districts a reminder in March.
 - b) Annual Report – Districts will prepare an Annual Report and submit to Council in accordance with State regulations. Council to accept and place final plan on file prior to the District's Annual Meeting. Council to send Districts a reminder in July.
 - c) Annual Meeting - Districts will host an annual meeting within 5 months of the end of the fiscal year in accordance with State regulations. Council to send reminder in July.
 - d) Annual Audit – Submitted by December 31st, accept and place final report on file. Council to send Districts a reminder in October.

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 a strategic plan for training.
- 2) **Action:** Assist with coordination of state-wide communication programs 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

Save the Sound 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

**CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation
FY2023 Meeting Dates**

Meet quarterly on 3rd Thursday of September, December, March, June
Meetings dates for FY22-23

September 15, 2022

December 15, 2022

March 16, 2023

June 15, 2023

Meeting notices will be published on the Council's website at:

<http://www.ctcouncilonsoilandwater.org/home/quarterly-meetings/>