



**FY 2026 Annual Operations Plan
July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026**

Approved -

Council on Soil and Water Conservation Members & Staff

Council Members

Denise Savageau, Chairman	CT River Coastal Conservation District
Cheryl Cappiali, Secretary Treasurer	Southwest Conservation District
Dan Mullins	Eastern CT Conservation District
Larry Rousseau	Northwest Conservation District
Joanna Shapiro	North Central Conservation District
Eileen Underwood	Department of Agriculture
Melissa Mostowy	Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
Amy Harder	UConn Extension System
Latha Swamy	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)
Jocelyn Lahey	CT Resource Conservation and Development

Staff

Lilian Ruiz	Executive Director
-------------	--------------------

Table of Contents

Introduction, Council Role and Mission	4
2026 Primary Initiatives/Goals	5
<u>Council on Soil and Water Conservation Goals</u>	
Goal I Protect and Restore Connecticut’s Watershed Health	7
Goal II Protect and Restore Connecticut’s Soil Health	9
Goal III Facilitate Integration of Sustainability Across Disciplines	11
Goal IV Strengthen Partnerships and Leverage Resources for Soil and Water Conservation	12
Goal V Provide Outreach and Education on Conservation Programs	13
Goal VI Provide Efficient and Effective Council Administration	14
Other Organizations and Affiliates	15
Meeting Dates	16

Introduction

The Council on Soil and Water Conservation's (Council) 2026 Annual Operations Plan (Plan) provides benchmarks for the Council's proposed activities for the 2026 fiscal year. The Plan details the Council's goals, objectives and actions. The Council executes this work 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 2026 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 resources programs.

The Council consists of nine members, including a representative of each of the five 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 from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, CT Agricultural Experiment Station, Storrs Agricultural Experiment Station and the CT Resource Conservation and Development Area. 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 the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA). In Connecticut, the core **Conservation Partnership** refers to the Council, the CT Association of Conservation Districts representing the five conservation districts, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the CT Resource Conservation and Development Area. 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 natural 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.

2026 Primary Initiatives/Goals

The Council and its members have established the following six overarching goals for the 2026 fiscal year. Action items for each goal have been established and will be accomplished in collaboration with local, state and federal partners.

 The Council will continue to identify new opportunities to support climate change actions, education and outreach, and support projects and messaging that provide for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, especially in those areas in Connecticut identified as being in an Environmental Justice area.

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 Partnership (formerly 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 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. The Council facilitated the developed of the Long Island Sound Coastal Zone Soil Survey, which is an important tool for planning and implementation of projects in Long Island Sound. The Connecticut portion of the survey was completed in 2024 and applications for use are now available. The Council will continue to work with NRCS on outreach and education about this important tool and with partners in NY to ensure that the soil survey is completed for the entire 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. This includes working on the new Long Island Sound Partnership Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan-Healthy Watershed Objective.

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 federal, state and local resources including funding needed to implement soil and water conservation programs in an equitable and just manner and facilitate the leveraging of these resources.

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 Partnership (formerly 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 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 five New England States and New York.

- 1) **Action:** Advise and facilitate implementation of the Long Island Sound Partnership within the entire watershed.
 - a) Participate in the implementation of the updated Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP)- ongoing.
 - b) In collaboration with CT River Watershed Partnership, seek funding to coordinate a Long Island Sound Watershed multi-state tour of successful projects in FY2026.
- 2) **Action:** Continue to identify new opportunities to build on the networking established by the LISW-RCPP.

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

- 1) **Action:** Support the outreach and education efforts for the newly updated CT Stormwater Quality Manual and CT’s Guidelines for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control.
 - a) Host a Workshop on the Guidelines for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control.
 - b) Host a statewide conference on construction stormwater management and sediment and erosion control for local land use boards and staff and consulting engineers, using the newly updated CT Stormwater Quality Manual and Soil and Erosion Control Manual.
- 2) **Action:** Establish a workgroup in coordination with DEEP to 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 USDA NWQI programs.
- 4) **Action:** Work with local dairy farmers, conservation districts, DEEP and NRCS to secure funding needed to implement the new Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) rules.

Objective C: Support 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:** Support the execution and implementation of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Landscape Scale Forestry grant, including securing funds for the required match.
- 2) **Action:** Continue to promote the new GIS Model- [Source Water Protection Project](#)- produced by UConn in collaboration with the Council and the Department of Public Health that identifies parcels with the most value for source water protection.
- 3) **Action:** Participate and support the DPH CT Source Water Collaborative and attend regular meetings (2-3 per year).

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

- 1) **Action:** Coordinate implementation of the Long Island Sound Study Enhancement Grant, with DEEP and Audubon CT for development of a Long Island Sound NRCS Watershed Operations Plan (PL 566). The plan will be aimed at protecting shellfish beds from stormwater runoff and restoring important habitat to bring implementation funding to Long Island Sound.
- 2) **Action:** Assist NRCS with Watershed Operations Plan assessments statewide.

Objective E: Work with DEEP Forestry Division and the NRCS to expand access to NRCS forestry programs.

- 1) **Action:** Increase forestry technical assistance capacity through training and certification of foresters as Technical Service Providers (TSPs).
- 2) **Action:** Administer a program to provide cost-share funding (match for federal financial assistance) to support non-industrial private & municipal forest landowner in implementing climate adaptation & sustainable forestry practices.

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. The Council facilitated the development of the Long Island Sound Coastal Zone Soil Survey, which is an important tool for planning and implementation of projects in Long Island Sound. The Connecticut portion of the survey was completed in 2024 and applications for use are now available. The Council will continue to work with NRCS on outreach and education about this important tool and with partners in NY to ensure that the soil survey is completed for the entire 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 December 2025.
- 2) **Action:** Maintain and expand a list for soil health stakeholders and identify ways to engage annually.

Objective B: Support Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry in CT.

- 1) **Action:** Assist the Department of Agriculture to implement the climate smart agriculture and forestry program as it relates to soil health and conservation planning.
- 2) **Action:** Work with partner organizations to complement efforts to implement climate smart agriculture programs.
- 3) **Action:** Communicate and coordinate with stakeholders on legislation concerning soil health, climate smart agriculture and forestry and environmental conservation efforts and programs.

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

- 1) **Action:** Support climate change education in schools.
- 2) **Action:** Create or promote existing materials for distribution at events, highlighting the importance of soil health and its ecosystem services.
- 3) **Action:** Design a Soil Health presentation that is specific to Connecticut’s assets and challenges, to be used by Council representatives at local, regional, statewide and national events of interest.

- 4) **Action:** Support a 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, Department of Agriculture 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 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- as stated in the report Smart Solar in Connecticut: Farmer Survey Findings and Initial Recommendations.

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

- 1) **Action:** Provide outreach and education on the newly completed Coastal Zone Soil Survey in Connecticut in conjunction with the NRCS and support the completion of CZSS for the entire Long Island Sound with our partners in New York.
- 2) **Action:** Promote and support outreach and education efforts for the soil survey online tools to maximize the use of this resource.

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. This includes working on the new Long Island Sound Partnership Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan-Healthy Watershed Objective.

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

- 1) **Action:** Develop and promote materials showing the links between these resources and the need for a coordinated approach to management, to be used at outreach events on this topic where the Council participates.
- 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:** Support efforts in CT to develop a Food System Plan for the state that:
 - a. reduces the distance between supply and demand areas, reducing the carbon footprint and cost of transportation for the food produced and consumed in CT.
 - b. reduces food insecurity in urban areas as experienced during the 2020 pandemic.
 - c. promotes soil health and nutrient cycling by supporting the use of compost from animal operations and other sources, such as food waste, as fertilizers in urban agriculture.
 - d. supports the farming community and preserves land under farming.
 - e. recognizes the important connection between the local rural/urban interface for food supply.
 - f. provides for actions that ensure greater use of locally grown products in state schools and other institutions.
 - g. helps support distribution and sale of locally grown products in the state.
- 2) **Action:** Assist and support the CT Dept of Agriculture on urban agriculture initiatives that accomplish the same goals.

Objective C: Support implementation of the Long Island Sound Partnership Healthy Watershed Objective

- 1) **Action:** Participate in the LIS Partnership's Nature Based Solutions Workgroup.
- 2) **Action:** Promote education and implementation of best management practices that provide multiple ecosystem services on working and natural lands.

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 federal, state and local resources including funding needed to implement soil and water conservation programs in an equitable and just manner and facilitate the leveraging of these resources.

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) LIS Partnership 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 a minimum the CLCC conference (Spring).
 - g) Engage with GC3 Initiatives and continue to serve on relevant workgroups.

Objective B: Participate in National Association of State Conservation Agencies (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)
- 2) **Action:** Executive Director will serve on NASCA Finance Committee.

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 explore include but are not limited to:
 - a) USDA NRCS - all funding sources
 - b) EPA Clean Water Act Section 319
 - c) EPA Long Island Sound Partnership
 - d) Long Island Sound Futures Fund
 - e) State – all funding sources
 - f) Private organizations

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:** Facilitate Local Work Groups to be hosted by the conservation districts, to assess natural resource concerns that will help deliver assistance to farmers and landowners through Farm Bill programs (Annually in December).

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 and work with the steering committee to support the creation of a training and placement pipeline for jobs in environmental conservation.
- 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.
- 3) **Action:** The Council will collaborate with the Envirothon committee on the organization of the 2028 National Envirothon to be hosted by Connecticut.

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

- 1) **Action:** Continue to work in collaboration with UConn Cooperative Extension and the CT Invasive Species Working Group to promote biodiversity and healthy landscapes.
- 2) **Action:** Support the work of the Conservation Districts in promoting National Pollinator Week.
- 3) **Action:** Advertise the work of the Conservation Districts in promoting healthy natural systems in the state including nature-based solutions for healthy watersheds, plant sales of native species, and educational materials such as invasives species control guide, and others.

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.

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

- 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 a 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 2026
 - e) Election of officers – 1st meeting of each fiscal year.
- 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 the 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 it 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 Financial 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 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 Planning Association

CT Association of Zoning Enforcement Officials

CT Association of Conservation and Inland Wetland Commissions

Council of Small Towns

CT Councils of Governments

CT Horse Council

Working Lands Alliance

Save the Sound

Rivers Alliance

CT Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA)

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
FY2026 Meeting Dates**

Meet quarterly on 3rd Thursday of September, December, March, June unless otherwise noted*.

Meetings dates for FY25-26

September 18, 2025

December 18, 2025

March 19, 2026

June 18, 2026

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

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