



FRIENDS OF THE **FOREST**

A comprehensive survey of
America's conservation districts



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to the many partners who helped shape the list of questions; to NACD's national leadership team, state association leaders and National Conservation District Employees Association (NCDEA) representatives who encouraged participation; most of all, many thanks to the conservation district staff who made time to provide data for this survey.

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National Association of Conservation Districts



Think of conservation districts as able, willing forestry partners

America's conservation districts have a long history as stewards of the landscape. We've helped farmers and ranchers and a good many forest landowners implement conservation-minded practices on their land for close to a century.

NACD recently conducted a comprehensive conservation district forestry survey with the goal of studying district efforts and identifying areas for growth; it revealed encouraging results. Conservation districts are active participants in a multitude of forestry activities across the country and, perhaps more importantly, are capable of taking on more.

In a time when our country's forests need our assistance more than ever, conservation districts are poised to answer the call. As this publication illustrates, district staff are educating landowners about resource needs and management options, delivering financial and technical assistance with agency partners, and preparing community leaders for how to react to catastrophic wildfire and/or forest pest outbreaks.

Regardless of the need - no matter how big or small - conservation districts stand ready.

Jeremy Peters, CEO

National Association of Conservation Districts





AMERICA'S CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

“Conservation districts are a critical partner in USDA’s efforts to manage forest resources across ownership boundaries at a pace and scale that produces results at the landscape level.”



Steve Koehn
Director of
Cooperative Forestry,
U.S. Forest Service

Conservation district board member forestry connections



10.09%
Consulting
or professional
forester



7.21%
American Tree
Farm System
member



9.98%
Active member in a state
forestry association



6.43%
Employed in forest
industry (e.g. logger)

America’s nearly 3,000 conservation districts help local people to conserve land, water, forests, wildlife and related natural resources.

Because conservation districts are established under state laws, they vary in what they are called – soil and water conservation districts, resource conservation districts, natural resource districts, etc. – and how they are funded, but they share a single mission: to coordinate assistance from all available sources—public and private, local, state and federal—in an effort to develop locally-driven solutions to natural resource concerns.

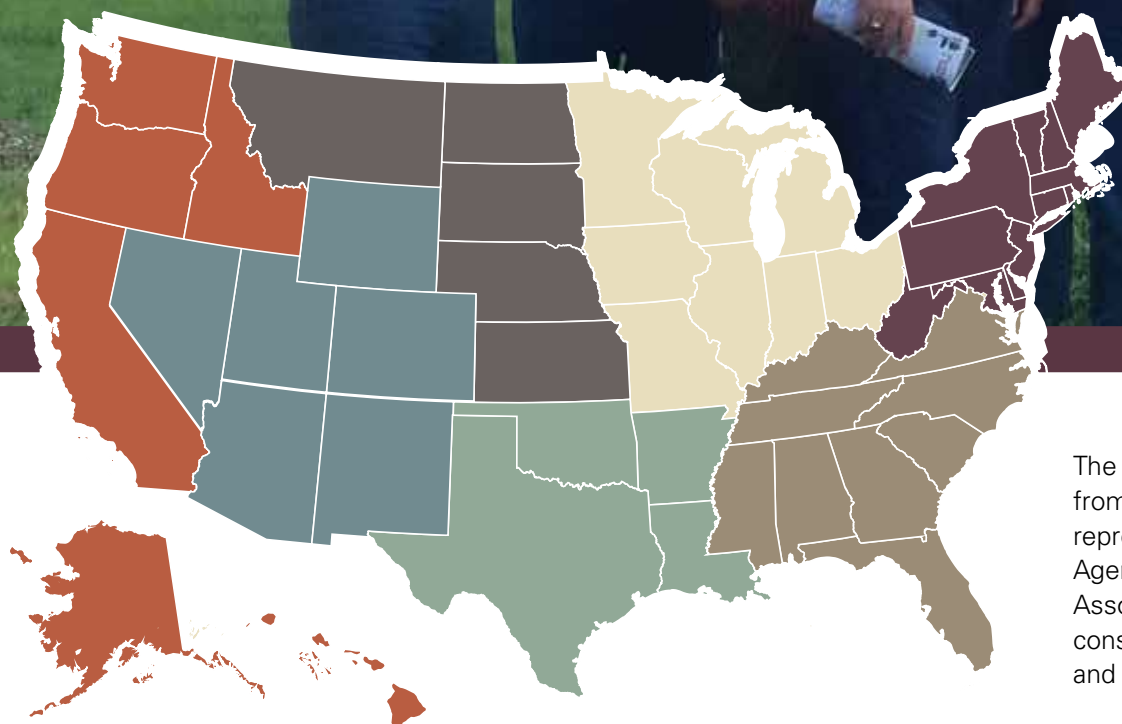
More than 17,000 citizens serve in elected or appointed positions on conservation district governing boards. The districts work directly with millions of cooperating landowners to manage and protect our nation’s natural resources.

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), headquartered in Washington D.C., represents the interests of its member districts through its policy, communication and partnership efforts.

What forestry products does your conservation district make available for sale to the public?

Trees/shrubs for sale in bulk (seedlings, packets, etc.)	46.11%
Tree shelters	17.84%
Balled and burlap trees	3.71%
Wildlife repellent	13.17%
Tree planting bars	8.74%
Conservation products	16.05%
Fertilizer, root dip, etc.	10.66%
Books on tree management/identification	15.21%

The Forestry RPG: Tom Crowe (Indiana), Chairman Steve Hedstrom (Montana), Doug Rushton (Washington), Gary Blair (Mississippi), Orval Gigstad (Nebraska), John McAlpine (Arkansas), Charles Holmes (Alabama) and Joe Smith (Massachusetts). Not pictured: Jennifer Hinkhouse (Wyoming), Cindy Lair (Colorado) and Rick Reimer (Minnesota).



NACD Regional Map

PACIFIC	SOUTHWEST	NORTHERN PLAINS
NORTH CENTRAL	NORTHEAST	SOUTHEAST
SOUTH CENTRAL		

NACD FORESTRY RPG

The NACD Forestry Resource Policy Group (RPG) consists of representatives from each of NACD's seven geographic regions, as well as one appointed representative from both the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) and the National Conservation District Employees Association (NCDEA). The group meets regularly to discuss how conservation districts can improve forest health conditions through policy and partnership opportunities.

Each summer, the Forestry RPG visits a different part of the country to get a first-hand look at how conservation districts are working with landowners and partners to make a difference in the forest. Forestry RPG members are tasked with conveying forest resource concerns from their respective regions to the national level, and sharing federal policy and program updates with the local conservation districts they represent. To learn more about how to engage with your Forestry RPG representative, visit the NACD website.



Does your office have a listing of professional foresters to provide to landowners?

| 57%

WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS

“Conservation districts have made a significant impact on our nation’s woodlands and water by providing landowners with the ‘hands on’ guidance they need to manage the landscape.”



Keith Argow
President,
National Woodland
Owners Association



Breakdown of America’s forest land ownership (2014)

59%
Private

30%
Federal

9%
State

3%
Local

Landowners are most comfortable working with a familiar face—someone they see at the grocery store, high school basketball games or the annual Fourth of July parade. That’s what landowners see in conservation district staff. They see men and women from the same community, who understand local interests and values, and who are just as invested in the community’s well-being as the landowners they represent. And with a smile, handshake and an honest assessment, conservation district staff let the landowner guide the process in making a difference on the landscape.

Conservation districts help landowners become good stewards by:

- Educating them about local resource concerns (drought, wildfire, pests, etc.) through print and online publications, news articles and local workshops or tours. These efforts not only help landowners to become more aware of what’s in their woods, but often lead to sharing of information among neighbors.
- Connecting them with local resource professionals. Not every conservation district office has a forester on staff, but most have relationships with local consulting and state agency foresters.
- Exposing them to available programs and funding to complete work on their property. There is too much for any one landowner to know, and conservation districts serve as a good starting point to gain knowledge and access to resources.
- Providing resources to get work done. Conservation districts in many states organize annual seedling sales to encourage tree planting, and one of the most common ways in which districts assist landowners is through equipment rentals.

Helping landowners rebuild after the storm



SUCCESS STORY: WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS

Residents in north central Kentucky were left devastated by a series of tornadoes that tore through the area in March 2012. Beyond the loss of property, many landowners were robbed of the trees that provided shade for livestock and contributed to water quality, and some were anticipating revenue from a planned timber sale.

Thanks to a two-year grant through the Kentucky Division of Forestry and the Arbor Day Foundation, leaders in northern Kentucky were able to give seedlings to qualified landowners who lost

trees in the storms. The Kentucky Tree Recovery Campaign committed 25,000 seedlings in all, and helped reforest much of the 800 acres affected in Campbell County alone. In April 2014, conservation district staff members Mary Kathryn and Linda Grizzell gave out 1,000 tree seedlings to Campbell County landowners affected by the tornadoes. The seedlings consisted of pecan, white oak, swamp white oak, persimmon and northern red oak.

In addition to the seedling give-away program, the Campbell County Conservation District used funds

from The Kentucky Soil Erosion and Water Quality Cost Share Program to assist farmers with debris cleanup following the tornadoes.

Kentucky's conservation districts have a long-standing relationship with the Kentucky Division of Forestry. They make office resources available and provide meeting spaces for foresters to sit with landowners, when needed. The organizations work together to assist landowners on the ground, and they provide information on topics such as forestry opportunities in the Farm Bill.



WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS

In states all across the country, conservation districts organize tree and shrub sales that serve as both a source of revenue and a method for reaching out to landowners. Tree sales provide conservation district staff an opportunity to educate landowners about clean water, shade, wildlife habitat and other tree planting benefits. And because tree and shrub sales are open to all landowners – big and small, rural and urban – they serve as a great networking opportunity for districts and current and potential cooperators.

Results from NACD's forestry survey suggest tree sales are one of the most valuable tools districts have at their disposal. Nearly 50 percent of respondents listed bulk tree sales as an offering provided to landowners, and more than 25 percent indicated they sell trees designed for urban use.

Districts partner with both state and private nurseries to meet the needs of the landscape and the interest of landowners. Tree sales have also been effective vehicles to help reforest species

such as longleaf pine and American chestnut.

The Middle Park Conservation District and Prowers County Soil Conservation District work with the Colorado State Forest Service Nursery in Fort Collins to distribute seedling packages to landowners. The districts work with local media to promote the sale and the benefits of tree planting.

The Dawson County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) sponsored a windbreak tree project in cooperation with the Texas Forest Service. Tree and shrub species were selected to create and restore windbreaks, reduce erosion, re-establish wildlife habitat, provide reforestation, rehabilitate wildfire areas, and enhance wetlands and riparian areas.

Muskingum SWCD's annual tree sale gives Ohio homeowners three packet options to choose from: a homeowner packet, timber production packet and wildlife packet.

Michigan

Michigan's Grand Traverse Conservation District hosts an annual timber tax workshop to provide tax guidance for area forest landowners.

Top 5 reasons for owning woods or forest

1. Beauty and scenery
2. Part of home
3. Wildlife habitat
4. Pass on to children/heirs
5. Privacy

Top 5 issues or concerns

1. High property taxes
2. Trespassing
3. Keeping land intact for future generations
4. Vandalism or illegal dumping
5. Insects or disease

Credit: U.S. Forest Service 2011-13 National Woodland Owner Survey (forest landowners with 10 or more acres)



WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS

Nearly 100 participants attended a woodland management workshop organized by the Pike County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Missouri Department of Conservation and NRCS, in cooperation with the American Tree Farm System. Pike County SWCD staff compiled a database of landowners with a minimum of 40 contiguous forested acres. Workshop sessions included traditional topics such as forest stand improvement and tree planting, as well as some non-conventional sessions on taxes, walnut management, fruit tree pruning and chainsaw maintenance.



PARTNERS

“No single agency or conservation organization can meet the nation’s forestry needs. As partners, state forestry agencies and conservation districts achieve more work on the ground. Forest Action Plans help target these efforts where they are needed most.”



Jay Farrell
Executive Director,
National Association
of State Foresters



NACD is one of four members of the national **Joint Forestry Team**, along with the U.S. Forest Service, National Association of State Foresters and Natural Resources Conservation Service. The JFT’s recommendations result in coordinated interagency delivery of forestry and conservation assistance for working forests, farms, and ranches.

To learn more visit
jointforestryteam.org.

Conservation districts are a loyal partner to local and state conservation organizations and agencies. They provide access to private landowners and a local infrastructure most other partners cannot; perhaps most importantly, conservation districts provide versatility to fit whatever the project requires. Conservation districts can provide financial and administrative assistance to keep efforts organized, and they can add bodies on the ground, including qualified district staff and local volunteers.

But being a good partner is more than being present; a good partner is dependable and gets the job done right. A recent survey of a dozen state-level forestry partners indicated a favorable view of conservation districts in their state. Sometimes the lead, sometimes only a supporting player, conservation districts fill the available need, and often recruit new partners to the table to help tackle all-lands forestry projects.

Does your state association or member districts participate in the NRCS State Technical Committee (or a forestry subcommittee)?



YES | 67.22%

Does your state association or member districts participate in the State Forest Stewardship planning committee?



YES | 58.33%

Pulling partners together to restore the landscape



SUCCESS STORY: PARTNERS

A few years ago, Norman Vigil was ready for retirement. He had dedicated 37 years of his life to conservation, much of it running programs for NRCS in New Mexico. But Vigil was approached by the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD) with a job offer – one he and more than two dozen former state NRCS, Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff have been unable to turn down. For a decade, NMACD has turned to retired agency staff to assist in their role in Restore New Mexico, an initiative designed to control invasive brush species, improve riparian habitat, reduce woodland encroachment, and reclaim abandoned oil and gas well pads.

In December 2013, the Forest Service and NMACD entered into a technical service agreement – the first of its kind in the state – to conduct work using Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding. The interest level was high; NMACD

Executive Director Debbie Hughes and other state association leaders visited with Southwestern Regional Forester Cal Joyner to discuss how the program could work in the state. But the Forest Service presented a unique challenge; each budget is managed by the forest supervisor, meaning the partnership would need to be “sold” on a one-by-one basis.

Enter: Vigil and fellow retired NRCS Technical Specialist George Chavez.

Fresh off retirement, both men were tasked with visiting with District Forest Rangers and explaining how NMACD could help address resource needs. There was no shortage of work needed to be done: brush management had long been a problem in the state, the lack of thinning had resulted in diminishing forage for livestock, and invasives like pinyon-juniper and Russian olive continued to choke out other vegetation and drain water resources.

“The bureaucracy is such that often work doesn’t get done because of the paperwork and because it is too complicated for landowners and cooperators to understand,” Vigil said. “That’s what we do – we help facilitate the process. NMACD walks those people through the process and helps manage the details for the partnering agencies.”

Hughes doesn’t have a word to describe it, only that NMACD’s track record of getting work done the past decade speaks for itself. When BLM issued a request for proposals (RFP) years ago for a \$10 million, five-year Restore New Mexico project, NMACD had the most competitive bid and was quick to get to work.

“Partners began to take notice that we could put out an RFP and within a matter of months work was being done on the ground,” Hughes said. Those efforts have resulted in the treatment of more than three million acres in New Mexico. “Every bit of it benefitting our watersheds,” added Hughes, proudly.



WILDFIRE

What forest health issues and productivity concerns directly affect your conservation district?

21.1%
WILDFIRE



A number of conservation districts in fire-prone areas use **Firewise** to help homeowners prepare for the threat of catastrophic wildfire. The program provides education and solutions for individual property owners and encourages community preparedness.

To learn more about Firewise visit www.firewise.org.



Mercer County Soil Conservation District, with help from U.S. Forest Service grant funding, implemented several Community Wildfire Protection Plans in New Jersey.

Catastrophic wildfires know no boundaries and drain our land management resources. Each year they consume millions of acres and threaten the lives of residents and our brave firefighters. The best defense is active management of our private and public forests, and cooperation and communication when fires do strike.

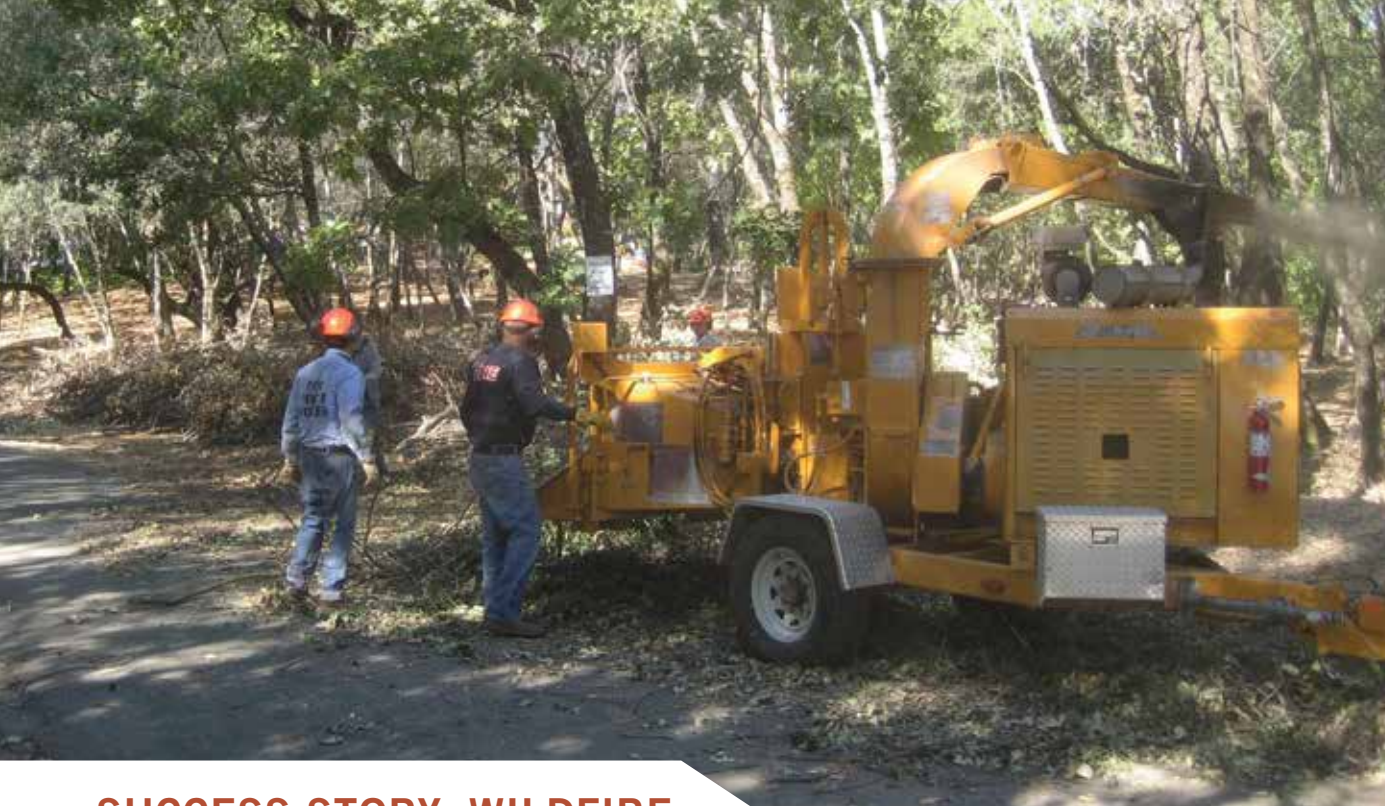
Conservation districts have played a key role in assisting both before and after blazes. They help design fuel breaks to slow the spread of fire and educate landowners living in wildfire-prone areas on how to protect their homes. Conservation districts are able to help pull civic leaders and residents together at a time of crisis, and often are looked upon to assist with reseeding and replanting efforts post-fire.

Recently, NACD organized a series of listening sessions in western states where conservation district leaders were able to share success stories and identify common obstacles in assisting wildfire prevention and recovery efforts.



WILDFIRE

The 2015 fire season was one of the worst on record. According to numbers released by the U.S. Forest Service, fire consumed more than 9.8 million acres at a cost of more than \$1.7 billion. Less than two decades ago wildfire accounted for roughly 15% of the Forest Service budget but now accounts for more than half.



SUCCESS STORY: WILDFIRE

California's Placer County Resource Conservation District (Placer RCD) serves as the managing partner of one of the state's most successful community chipper programs. Dating back to 1999, the program has provided more than 40,000 services and chips approximately 4,000 tons a year. Having the chipper service available helps landowners meet state defensible space requirements and provides an alternative to burning brush piles, which reduces air quality emissions.

Program partners include Placer RCD, Placer County Office of Emergency Services, Placer County Sheriff's Department and Placer County Fire Department. The partners each contribute various services and supplies to make the program successful.

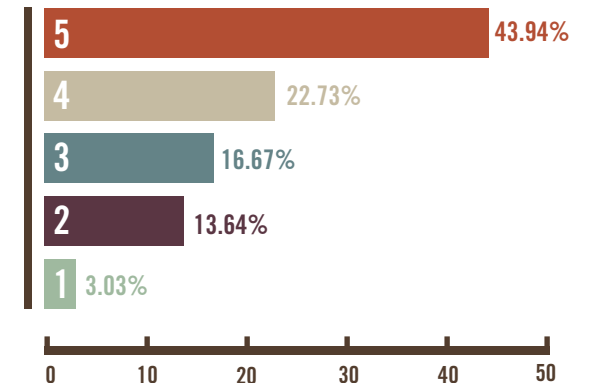
Landowners call a message line to request service once they've accumulated a pile of woody biomass. The partners work together to identify grant funding from various sources to cover half of the program expenses. Landowners are asked to contribute half the hourly at-cost service rate (the program waives the fee for low-income or disabled landowners).

According to Steve Garcia, Placer RCD Chairman and Unit Forester for the CA Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the program encourages landowners to maintain their defensible space, and limits the number of potentially dangerous fires that can occur when landowners choose to burn their slash piles. "Every year there are incidents where property owners do burning and have escaped burn piles. The chipper program is a very valuable tool because it offers an alternative to burning," Garcia said.

Please rate the forest resource threats/concerns in your state

***survey of State Foresters, State Conservationists and Conservation District State Association Executives*

Wildfire



LARGE FIRES CAN GENERATE WINDS UP TO 100 MPH. HOT TEMPERATURES PREHEAT FUELS IN THE FIRE'S PATH, PREPARING THEM TO BURN MORE RAPIDLY.

It's estimated that over 80 percent of wildfires are man-made. Unattended campfires and discarded cigarettes are a few of the common causes.

Responding to those in need during the fire



SUCCESS STORY: WILDFIRE

The Carlton Complex Fire ravaged much of north central Washington in 2014, consuming an estimated 300 homes and 250,000 acres. Lightning caused four separate fires within Okanogan County. Eventually, the fire merged and by the time fire crews contained the blaze it had become the largest fire on record in Washington State.

Not long after flames intensified, the Okanogan Conservation District began to prepare local residents for life after the fire. The conservation district organized a series of workshops and assembled a variety of resources.

"Our district worked with many of the landowners that were impacted," said Kirsten Cook, Okanogan Conservation District's Education and Outreach Coordinator. "Immediately, we felt the need to step

up and provide resources to those landowners."

The district used a Restoration Needs Form – created by the Kittitas County Conservation District in response to the Taylor Bridge Fire in 2012 – to collect data from landowners in need, and it enlisted the help of agency partners such as the U.S. Forest Service, NRCS and Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

"People are happy to have someone to turn to, and if we don't have the answer we can steer them in the right direction," Cook said.

Okanogan Conservation District also organized a Carlton Complex Recovery Resource Fair, where more than a dozen natural resource agencies and organizations visited with landowners to

address concerns regarding post-fire recovery of the landscape. Cook said this interaction helped ease the burden landowners often feel during a catastrophic event like a wildfire.

"Immediately, people want to fix it. They want to make it better," she said. "We tried to help them understand that land recovery is a process, and fire is a part of the natural ecosystem."

If there has been a positive to the Carlton Complex Fire, Cook said it's an increased awareness for the need to make the landscape more resilient to fire. For the past few years Cook has conducted five or six summer Firewise workshops, each welcoming a handful of attendees on average. The most recent workshop the district offered welcomed more than 50 attendees.

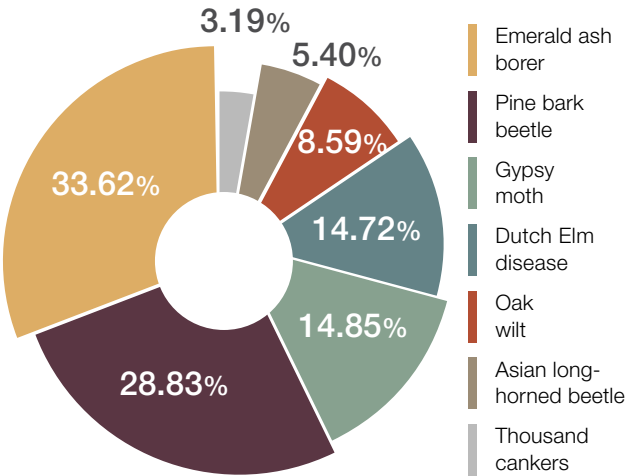


What kind of service does your state association or member districts provide?

62.5%
Invasive Species Control

PESTS AND INVASIVES

What insects and/or diseases are threatening forest health in your conservation district in which the district is actively involved in controlling/preventing? (check all that apply)



The number of forest pests is alarming. Emerald ash borer has spread throughout eastern states and made its way across the Mississippi River, quickly consuming ash trees wherever it goes. Some variety of beetle is attacking pine throughout the west, leaving thousands of acres of standing dead that increases the threat of catastrophic wildfire. And there is gypsy moth, Thousand Cankers Disease, oak wilt and others. Name a tree and there's most likely a pest or disease to go with it. Forest pests are expensive to fight, no matter if the solution is to treat or to remove and replace affected trees.

Invasive plants pose just as great of a threat to America's public and private forests. Non-native plants and brush use up water resources and choke out the space trees need to grow and survive, and can be near-impossible to control

Colorado

The White River Conservation District worked with researchers at Colorado State University on a wood utilization study to determine the recovery rate of mill stock from lodgepole pine timber killed by mountain pine beetle.

once they begin to spread. The fight to control invasive plants is equally expensive and time-intensive for land managers.

Fortunately, conservation districts aid in the fight against pests and invasives. Conservation district staff work closely with civic leaders and other local conservation organizations to develop plans in advance of pest outbreaks, and can manage projects to treat or remove invasives. Most importantly, conservation districts educate the public about these concerns, increasing the number of people able to combat invasives on private lands.

The right partner to battle beetles in South Dakota



SUCCESS STORY: PESTS AND INVASIVES

When the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, Resource Conservation and Forestry Division was tasked by the Governor's office with marking and removing thousands of beetle-infested trees affecting state and private forestlands in the Black Hills region, staffing became an immediate concern. Then State Forester Ray Sowers did not have the ability to hire new division staff nor did he have the ability to oversee marking teams on the ground, but he knew the right partner for the job. Sowers had developed a close bond with conservation districts in his state and enlisted the help of the Custer, Lawrence and Pennington Conservation Districts through a joint powers agreement.

The South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts (SDACD) accepted the task of managing the seasonal crews. SDACD Executive Director Angela Ehlers hired and coordinated a staff ranging from 13 to 80 Association employees, many of them fresh from summer fire crews or logging jobs. SDACD provided administrative services and vehicles. "The only thing not provided to the markers is a saw. The worker's compensation insurance for that would kill me," Ehlers laughed.

The joint powers agreement with SDACD also included a project to mark infested trees within Custer State Park. Contract crews cut and treated

more than 80,000 trees in the park, more than half of which were utilized by logging companies. The joint powers agreement was expanded in the fall of 2014 to include the marking of trees within the Black Hills National Forest.

When the private landowner program began, the State used direct mail and an aggressive radio, television and newspaper campaign to spread the word to landowners in high-risk areas. Workshops provided information about cost-share and treatment options. Those landowners who shared interest in participating were added to a list that was prioritized by area of impact and elevation level.



WATER

“Conservation districts serve a critical role in protecting drinking water sources.”



Kira Jacobs
Drinking Water Program,
Environmental
Protection Agency

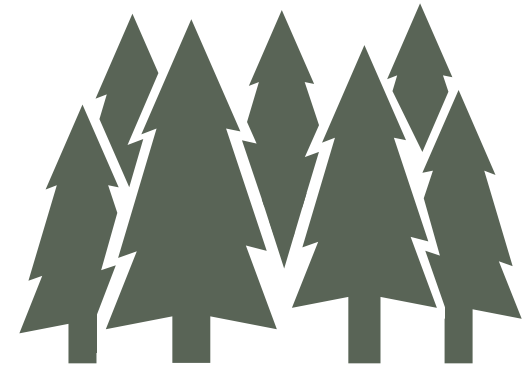


The U.S. Forest Service series *Forests on the Edge* covers a wide array of topics. In 2014 the series published **Private forests, housing growth, and America's water supply**, which studied the relationship between America's private forests and clean surface drinking water.

To view this publication, visit www.fs.fed.us/openspace/fote.

Of all the benefits a healthy forest provides, perhaps nothing is more valuable than clean water. It is our most precious resource, and our forests help intercept pesticides from nearby lands and stabilize the banks along streams to limit sedimentation in the water.

Many conservation districts have the staff and expertise to manage riparian forest buffer plantings and streambank stabilization projects. And conservation districts are an advocate for the need to preserve our drinking water and invest in the resources to support that effort.



100 MATURE TREES

**INTERCEPT AND FILTER
ABOUT 100,000 GALLONS
OF RAINFALL PER YEAR IN THEIR
CROWNS, REDUCING THE NEED
FOR EXPENSIVE STORMWATER
CONTROLS AND PROVIDING
CLEANER WATER.**

Credit: American Forests

Making a difference downstream



SUCCESS STORY: WATER

The Delaware River is a unique resource providing clean drinking water to more than 16 million people. The Upper Delaware River Watershed, which crosses three states – New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania – is heavily forested and provides a key resource for protection of this clean water.

Making the connection between clean water resources and management of the forested tracts in the watershed's headwaters, conservation districts across the region joined with other cooperating partners and the Pinchot Institute for Conservation Studies to form a cross-boundary collaborative partnership called Common Waters.

The mission of Common Waters is to conserve clean water, natural places and working lands through cooperation, research, education, and assistance by and for the region's stakeholders.

Overcoming the challenges of working across both local and state boundaries, partners have joined together to focus opportunities for both technical and financial assistance on forest and land management for the region's landowners.

Since formation in 2007, Common Waters partners have had tremendous success. With conservation districts in each state acting as the point of contact for landowners, the Common Waters Fund initiative distributed close to \$1 million directly to landowners in the Upper Delaware Watershed to develop forest stewardship plans and implement forest management practices on their lands.

Sussex County (NJ) Soil Conservation District Manager Cliff Lundin said, "The district was viewed as a trusted local source of assistance. We were simply doing what districts do best: helping people manage their natural resources and connecting landowners to

sources of technical and financial assistance." Partners continue to seek funding for implementation of forest conservation initiatives in the watershed's headwaters. Common Waters partners also focus programs, stakeholder meetings and trainings on conservation and land management for local officials and landowners. Conservation districts in Common Waters are now helping to focus technical assistance for the region's landowners through the NRCS Resource Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and other NRCS programs.

Pike County (PA) Conservation District Manager Sally Corrigan said, "Common Waters has been a great opportunity for conservation districts across the Upper Delaware Watershed to work together, bringing watershed and forest management and conservation efforts to fruition with the end result being clean water."



The Polk-San Jacinto Soil and Water Conservation District in Texas works with the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe to plant longleaf pine. Tribal members use the needles for the customary baskets and wreaths they sell.

The solution to a healthier, more vibrant forest is simple: a healthy forest industry. And landowners and policymakers are often reminded: 'no markets, no management.'

Conservation districts help support the wood industry in a variety of ways, whether it's conducting site visits with forest landowners first exploring a timber harvest, offering chainsaw safety courses, or helping to educate landowners about the American Tree Farm program and the process and potential benefits of wood certification. In Louisiana, for example, soil and water conservation districts have helped the state forestry association and logging council to organize best management practice workshops and logger training courses.

MARKETS



Wood pellet production in the United States grew by 285% from 2010 to 2014. Of the nearly 6 million metric tons produced annually, the vast majority is exported to European countries.

Credit: University of Florida study

Conservation districts participate and/or assist forest landowners with:

17.25% | Timber harvest

37.37% | Forest/timber stand improvement

9.34% | Forest utilization projects

(ex. biomass, utilizing material from fuels reduction projects)

Providing landowners with a one-of-a-kind opportunity



SUCCESS STORY: MARKETS

Thanks to the Aitkin County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), north central Minnesota landowners have an advantage when marketing timber harvested from their lands.

By the late 1990s, all of the public forestland within the county had become Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified, allowing any timber harvested from those lands to be marketed as such. Not long after, landowners began to explore having their timber certified, only to find the process was time intensive and not economically feasible.

When Dennis Thompson was hired by the district in 1998 he was given one primary mission: to work with landowners to develop more forest

stewardship plans. Thompson soon recognized the interest landowners had in certification, and began to explore what the district could do to assist.

Aitkin County SWCD created a group certification model and became FSC certified in early 2005. The potential benefits of participating in the program are increased assurance that forest management is compatible with widely recognized measures of responsible forestry, the potential for unique marketing opportunities, and access to more information and expertise about forest stewardship. To qualify, landowners must have at least 10 acres of forestland and a stewardship plan.

Most of the group's members sell harvested

hardwoods (maple, birch and aspen) to Sappi, a nearby paper mill that consumes a lot of certified product. Many of Sappi's customers demand that its manufactured paper come from a certified source.

Roger Howard (pictured above) makes a variety of custom woodworking products that he markets as certified, while another landowner sells certified Christmas trees.

Howard believes customers care about the difference. "Put two products side by side, one certified and one not. If everything else is equal, I think 99 percent of people will buy the certified," said Howard, who added: "If nothing else, it gives me a little extra pride in my products."

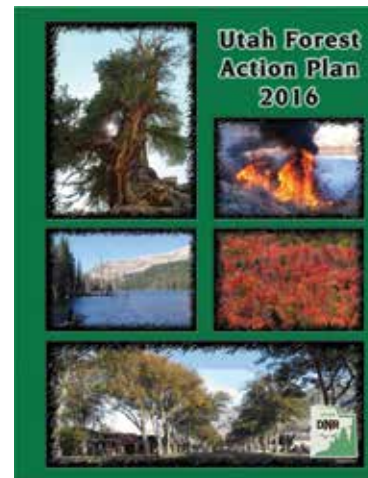
Over 83% of Americans now live in urban areas

URBAN

“Conservation districts are a key component to thriving urban forests in communities everywhere.”



Sasha Tennebaum
Director,
Sustainable Urban
Forests Coalition



Each state has a **Forest Action Plan**, prepared by its state forestry office, to help identify and prioritize forest resource needs. These 10-year strategic documents also address urban forestry concerns and goals within the state.

To learn about your state's Forest Action Plan, visit www.stateforesters.org/regional-state

Trees can make a city street brighter, more lively. They dress up a park and make business districts seem more inviting. But beyond the aesthetic, urban forestry has economic benefits that civic leaders are only now beginning to understand: reduced fuel costs, increased home values and stormwater reduction, to name a few.

Conservation districts have helped carry this message to local decision makers for decades, and in many states, districts have been a key (if not lead) partner in designing the green space that attracts new residents to communities.

Districts organize community tree planting efforts to provide students and local groups an opportunity to make a difference. These events also serve as educational opportunities where the district can teach its residents about such things as local resource issues and proper tree care. Conservation districts help build outdoor classrooms and manage school forests.

The presence of larger trees in yards and as street trees can add from 3% to 15% to home values throughout neighborhoods

Credit: University of Washington study



Replacing vacant lots with valuable green space



SUCCESS STORY: URBAN

Several years ago, leaders from Lawrence County in western Pennsylvania were faced with a dilemma – what to do with 150 lots that had fallen into repository due to delinquent taxes. When the lots did not sell at auction, and were not claimed by an adjacent landowner, the county was left to maintain them.

Then county commissioners had an idea: revitalize the lots to bring more green space to the City of New Castle and the surrounding area. The county could liven up the unmowed lots with trees, shrubs and native grasses, all with the help of the Lawrence County Conservation District.

Said County Commissioner Steve Craig, “Long term, it saves us money from having to maintain these lots, and it provides habitat. These lots are now assets, no longer eyesores. Our conservation district took on the project and developed it in a way I could never have imagined.”

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Bureau of Forestry funding allowed the district to plant 200 trees – maple, oak and dogwood – over four planting seasons. The average size of each lot is 40 by 120 feet, allowing for roughly 10 trees per project.

To help get work done on the ground, the district has relied on vehicles made available by the County Maintenance Department, as well as a pair of volunteer worker programs. New Castle High School has a service learning program in which students are encouraged to get hands-on experience. The district contacts the program’s advisor a week or two ahead of a scheduled planting, and the school sends up to 15 students to assist with the project. The district has also established a relationship with the local probation office. Those people in need of community service hours can apply to participate in the program and help to improve their community’s natural resources.



SUCCESS STORY: URBAN

It's difficult to put a number on the value of a good partnership, but at the very least Michigan's Muskegon Conservation District's relationship with airplane part manufacturer Alcoa Howmet is worth 100,000 trees.

For years, the district has worked with the company's Human Resources Department on conservation-led activities, but a few years ago the two found the perfect project to partner on. Alcoa Howmet has an active outreach program whereby employees are given a day off, with pay, to perform service work within the community. The company supports American Forests' Global Relief Program and identified an opportunity through its 10 Million Trees campaign. It suggested Muskegon Conservation District apply for a grant, and Alcoa Howmet would provide 100 willing volunteers for a day.

The district owns and manages 1,000 acres in

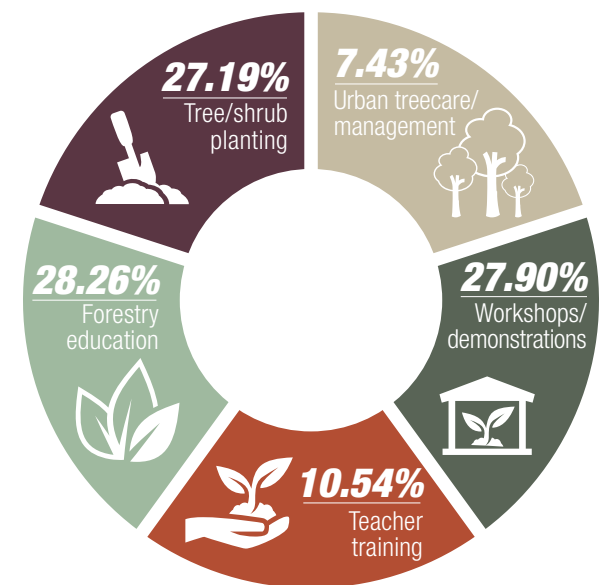
Muskegon County, including more than 20 parcels ranging in size from 20 to 120 acres. The majority of the parcels are red pine plantations that had come under attack by pine bark beetles and diplodia fungus.

With the grant's help, Muskegon Conservation District has restored much of the forested landscape to native Michigan tree species. The funding covered approximately 75 percent of the total project cost, with the district covering the remaining amount as project match.

The project has not only helped solve the forest pest issue and replenish the forest with native trees, but it has provided a better habitat for wildlife. "We planted snowberry for songbirds in the winter. We planted spruce and Canadian hemlock for cover in the harsh winter months," said Dallas Goldberg, a program manager with Muskegon Conservation District.



The King Conservation District in Washington State initiated an Urban Forest Health Management Program to help communities in the county enhance their green infrastructure by stewarding street trees, backyards and forested open space.



What urban forestry service(s) does your conservation district provide? (check all that apply)



URBAN

Conservation districts in a number of states help organize annual Big Tree contests. Landowners are recognized for owning the largest of a given species in the county, and take pride in the competition. Often, the winners are identified on well-attended public tours. The contest also gives conservation districts an opportunity to educate community members about forest resource concerns and management opportunities.



AGROFORESTRY

“NACD provides the National Agroforestry Center valuable information on what America’s producers most need to implement agroforestry practices.”



Susan Stein
Director,
National Agroforestry Center



Conservation districts order more publications from the National Agroforestry Center each year than any other group. In 2015, districts in more than 20 states ordered print materials.

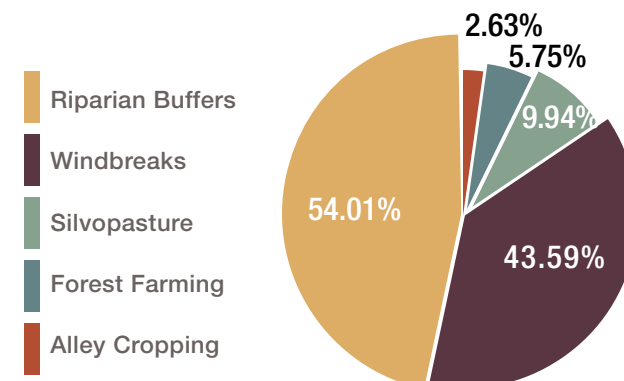
To find agroforestry publications visit the NAC website at nac.unl.edu

Agroforestry has existed for centuries. It consists of five practices – silvopasture, windbreaks, riparian buffers, forest farming and alley cropping – and provides landowners with an opportunity to combine agriculture and forestry to create integrated and sustainable land-use systems.

Conservation districts help educate landowners about agroforestry’s many applications and benefits. In Kansas, conservation districts work with the Kansas Forest Service to assess the condition of existing windbreaks, which benefit soil and water conservation and can increase crop yield. In Washington, conservation districts promote forested pasture for livestock. In Michigan and Illinois, conservation districts organize annual shiitake mushroom workshops for landowners interested in value-added products.

On a national level, NACD continues to assist the U.S. Forest Service and NRCS in developing a nationwide agroforestry strategy. NACD staff and Forestry RPG members have toured agroforestry operations, and national agroforestry leaders regularly contribute to NACD meetings.

Percentage of conservation districts helping landowners with agroforestry practices ...



Showcasing the magic of maple syrup production



SUCCESS STORY: AGROFORESTRY

Paul Reining was sitting in front of the Wayne Conservation District Board of Directors interviewing for the district's forest specialist position. His experience was impressive – Reining had spent most of his adult life working for his family's timber business – but the Board wanted to know what new ideas he had to offer the district. Among them, Reining suggested the district consider hosting a tour of maple syrup producers in the area. It would offer a boost in sales and an understanding for the process; it might also convince a few landowners to try their hand at making maple products.

"You can tell people about making maple syrup,"

Reining told them, "but it's not the same unless you're standing near an evaporator smelling the maple and experiencing it."

His first steps in organizing the tour were to build partnerships with the Northeastern Pennsylvania Maple Producers Association (NPMPA) and the Penn State Cooperative Extension office in Wayne County. Soon, Wayne Conservation District began organizing an annual self-guided maple tour, showcasing 12 area producers. At many of the sites, visitors experienced the process of collecting maple to make everything from syrup to maple-flavored cotton candy. Some sites welcomed as many as 60 guests during the two-day tour.

Local Agway stores agreed to distribute brochures containing maple syrup production facts and terminology, as well as a map for the tour. NPMPA provided money to make 'We've Got Maple' signs to mark each destination on the tour. Reining sent press releases to local media and invited Honesdale High School's environmental club to visit his family's operation. Students were given a step-by-step overview of the process and were able to see Reining's wood-fired evaporator at work.

Reining said the tour has two selling points: "It helps to promote the idea that there are multiple ways landowners can enjoy their property, and it's a way they can realize some income."



EDUCATION

Percentage of conservation districts working with 100+ area youth each year

55%



NACD has a wide variety of educational resources available on its website, including publications, bookmarks and activity placemats.

To learn more, visit
www.nacdnet.org/education



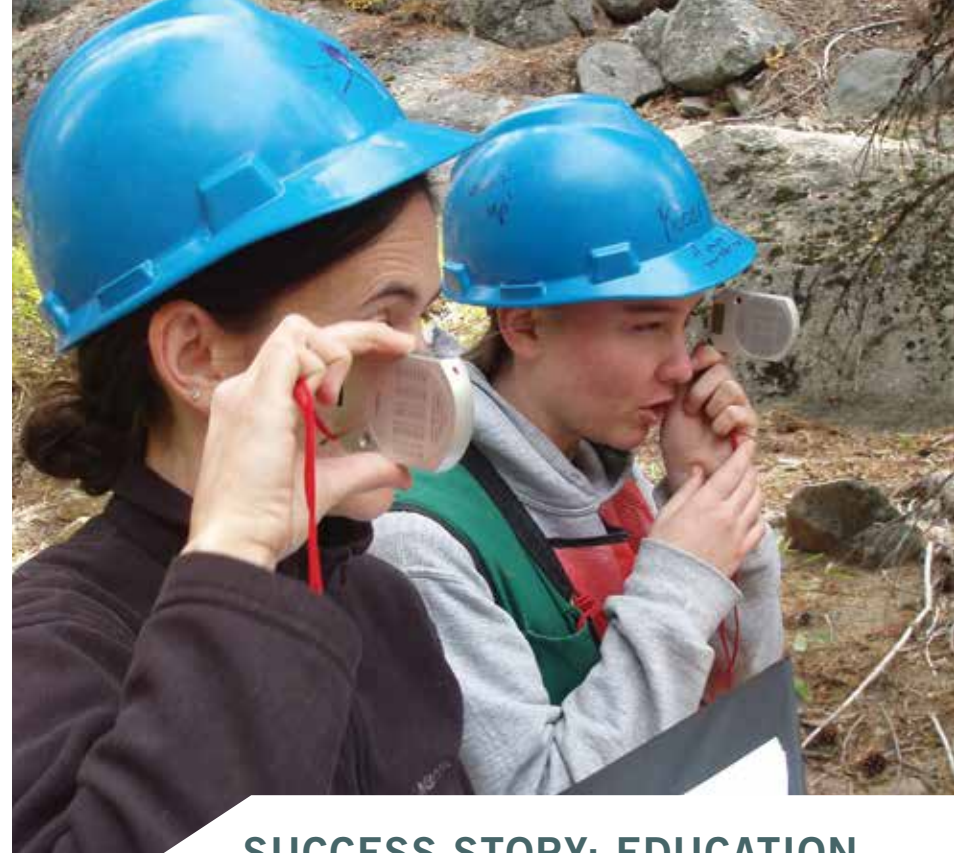
Fourth and fifth grade students in Florida worked with the Gadsden Soil and Water Conservation District and other partners to plant more than 400 longleaf pine in the Bear Creek Educational Forest.

The most important thing a conservationist can do is educate the next generation about the importance of preserving our natural resources. The forest is an easy sell – it cleans our air and water, provides us with a peaceful place to walk, and houses our treasured wildlife. But the story must be shared, and America's conservation districts do their part in communicating those benefits to civic leaders, community residents and area students.

For many years, NACD has supported Envirothon, where students gather for a day of learning and sharing outdoors. Winning teams from participating states and Canadian provinces compete nationally for recognition and scholarships. The competition is centered on four universal testing categories (soils/land use, aquatic ecology, forestry and wildlife) and a current environmental issue.

NACD also sponsors an annual contest which encourages K-12 students to design posters related to that year's stewardship week theme. The 2016 theme – We All Need Trees – attracted more than 1,000 entries. Winning entries receive cash prizes and their posters are displayed at NACD's Annual Meeting.

Teaching tomorrow's conservation leaders about the forest



SUCCESS STORY: EDUCATION

For nearly two decades, area high schools have sent their finest students to California's El Dorado National Forest where they spend four days in the wilderness each September converting classroom discussion into on-the-ground training. You couldn't draw up a better model for applied learning.

Mark Egbert is proud to be a part of it. As the district manager for both the El Dorado County and Georgetown Divide Resource Conservation Districts (the two districts have separate boards but share staff) Egbert plays a key role in making the Watershed Education Summit a reality. Like he points out – the concept came from the schools and the program couldn't exist without them, but the district and local Forest Service and NRCS staff pull everything together.

What began as a partnership with one school has evolved into an event involving all six high schools in the county. Eighty students are chosen from close to 400 applicants each year. The students test water quality in Union Valley Reservoir relying on a suite of parameters, such as habitat channel typing, slow hydrology discharge and electro-fishing. In the riparian area, students conduct a vegetation survey and tree inventory, and study shade and canopy. For each area of study, the Watershed Education Summit has enlisted the help of a partner to provide a specialist. For example, CalFire and Sierra Pacific Industries provide foresters, USGS provides hydrologists, and NRCS provides soil scientists.

Says Egbert, "Because of this help, the data we collect is high quality, but it too is challenged, so

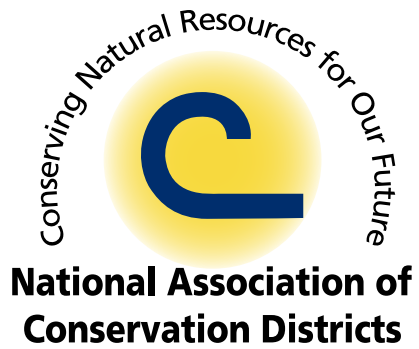
we've developed a quality assurance project plan to assure quality controls are in place." The plan is updated and reviewed by state officials each year.

In the forest, students learn about how trees impact water quality and the overall landscape. Students are shown how a thinned forest can reduce the risk of wildfire and are educated on forest health topics, such as noxious weeds and bark beetles.

Many of the students return for several summits; one former Watershed Education Summit participant listed the experience on her application to Yale, and was asked about it during the interview process. "It's a very competitive process," says Egbert. "Once they've been here kids want to come back."



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