

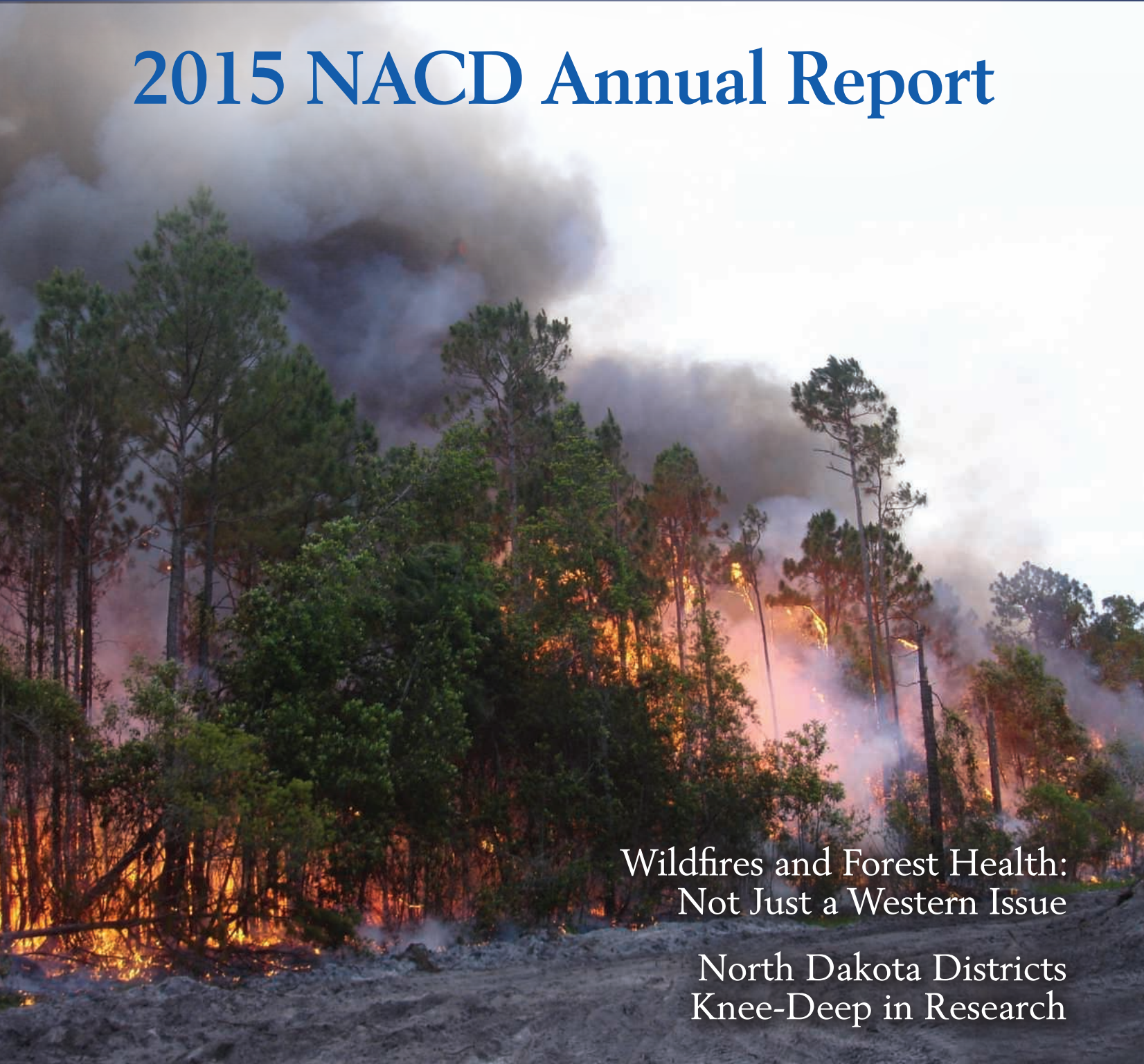


Winter 2016

RESOURCE

America's Voice for Conservation

2015 NACD Annual Report



Wildfires and Forest Health:
Not Just a Western Issue

North Dakota Districts
Knee-Deep in Research

a letter from the president



Lee McDaniel

President,
National Association of
Conservation Districts

The Year Ahead

As the nation moves into a new calendar year, it is a good time to take stock of where our conservation movement is, and where it is going as we move forward. Since the passage of the last Farm Bill, more and more of the conservation funding is moving away from the traditional funding streams (that would go directly to districts) to competitive funding sources where districts must compete with many non-traditional entities. NACD will continue to advocate for conservation funding, but all of our districts need to step up their game to compete in this new environment. What is NACD doing to address this game changer? We currently have a district outlook task force that is looking into the many challenges that are now facing our districts as well as reviewing the traits of those successful districts throughout the nation. The report should be available to share with our members later in the year. NACD will also begin its update of the long range plan. There will be a review of the plan adopted by the NACD Board of Directors five years ago with a goal to have it updated for the Board's approval at the 2017 annual meeting in Denver. We must create a vision that is both forward thinking and bold.

One point that needs to be made is that conservation districts and NACD need to look beyond the Farm Bill. There are many opportunities to help fund conservation that include state funding, corporate funding, funding from other federal agencies (many opportunities here), foundation funding and local government funding. In most cases, districts must compete for many of these funds and be accountable in reporting how those funds are used to meet the goals of the funder. Our strength is still in our locally led districts and we need to use that to our advantage. We have the trust of our cooperators and our landowners. Trust is something that much of the competition does not have. Funding in the traditional manner will continue to dry up and competitive funding appears to be our future.

Both NACD and each and every conservation district in America need to raise the bar and set goals above and beyond where we have been in the past. Our district officials cannot only be care-takers of their respective districts. All of us need to develop a vision of where we want to be as individual districts and as a national organization. A person can only tread water for so long before he or she drowns. It is time for all of us to start swimming. Don't be left behind!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lee D. McDaniel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lee McDaniel
NACD President



The RESOURCE

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Lee McDaniel
President

Brent Van Dyke
President-Elect

Dick Went
Second Vice President

John McDonald
Secretary/Treasurer

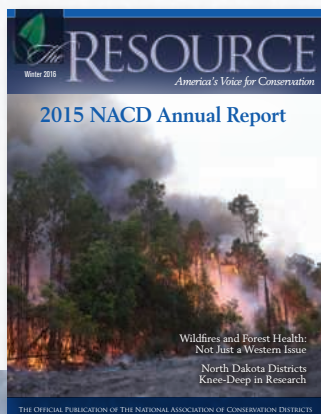
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Rick Jeans South Central Region
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Editors: **Mary Price,**
Mary-Price@nacdnet.org

Alexandra Kuhlman,
Alexandra-Kuhlman@nacdnet.org

www.nacdnet.org



about our cover

NACD is diligently working to get increased funding for wildfire prevention, management and restoration. Photo of Georgia wildfires in 2007 by the National Interagency Fire Center.

2015 Brings Changes, Unwavering Commitment to Conservation

Looking back at 2015, NACD has made tremendous accomplishments in our mission to serve conservation districts by providing national leadership and a unified voice for natural resource conservation. The year was transformational in many ways—with newly elected officers and a newly appointed CEO beginning service within weeks of one another—but at the same time it was steady, with a solid focus on core areas of NACD's mission and strategic plan.

NACD was highly effective in our legislative advocacy in 2015. Together with our grassroots leaders, we influenced legislators on Capitol Hill to maintain high funding levels for Conservation Technical Assistance, State and Private Forestry, and EPA 319 Grants; successfully secured emergency funding to heal the land scarred from another catastrophic wildfire season; and prevented deeper cuts to financial assistance through Farm Bill conservation programs. NACD also secured recognition by the United States Senate for 2015 International Year of Soils and locally-led delivery of conservation programs through soil and water conservation districts.

Working with our partners, we increased our focus on conservation delivery through initiatives like the National Conservation Planning Partnership and a recommitment to the core partnership by signing a National Memorandum of Agreement at the 2015 Annual Meeting. These and other initiatives will continue full steam ahead into 2016. As conservation delivery continues to evolve, these efforts will help ensure that conservation districts and our partners deliver the best and most effective assistance possible to landowners.

NACD's communications are also evolving. This Annual Report edition of *The Resource* will also be the last regular edition in print form. While future Annual Reports will continue to be printed every winter, NACD is moving forward with increasing emphasis on electronic distribution of materials, including our Stewardship and Education program. This move will help your national association connect with an even broader audience on a more cost-effective basis while continuing to deliver the same high-quality information you expect in our publications. Several articles in this edition explain the changes, and we look forward to sharing additional information as we make this transition.

As you read this Annual Report edition of *The Resource*, please join me in celebrating our accomplishments as well as everything we will achieve in the year ahead!


Jeremy Peters, CEO

ceo's corner



Jeremy Peters
CEO, National Association
of Conservation Districts

National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2015

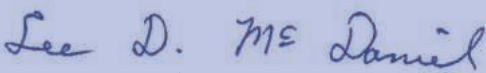
Dear NACD Membership:

On behalf of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), I am pleased to present to you our Annual Report for fiscal year 2015.

The report highlights just a snapshot of NACD's many activities on your behalf throughout the year. From the historic decision not to list the Greater Sage Grouse or Lesser Prairie Chicken under the Endangered Species Act; to the successful Soil Health Forum and Conservation Tour of the Palouse region in Spokane; a new Conservation Innovation Grant; and representation at numerous member, partner and coalition meetings across the nation; it's certainly been a busy and productive year.

It has been a great joy to serve my first year as your president, and I am optimistic about the path ahead for the association. Thank you for your continued engagement with your national association. You are the reason we do what we do, and we could not be successful without your ongoing support.

Sincerely,



Lee McDaniel
NACD President



Swearing in of new officer team at the 2015 NACD Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Representing and Supporting our Members

- **2015 NACD Annual Meeting:** NACD hosted a successful Annual Meeting, Feb. 1 – 4 in New Orleans, Louisiana. The meeting focused on the theme “Conservation: Key to a Healthy Nation,” and featured a full program of national-level speakers, breakout sessions, tours, a Conservation Expo, training opportunities, and more. Videos, photos and presentations from the meeting are posted on the NACD website.
- **Soil Health on the Palouse:** NACD continued the recent trend of holding its summer conference outside of D.C. and held this year's event with the help of the Spokane County Conservation District in Spokane, Washington. The theme of this year's Board Meeting

Annual Report 2015

and Conservation Forum featured “Soil Health on the Palouse” and gave participants an opportunity to learn about the unique soil health challenges and practices of the Northwest. The forum featured a welcome address by Congresswoman Cathy McMorris-Rogers [WA-5]; a national issues panel with representatives from NRCS, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Society for Range Management, and the Agricultural Retailers Association; and a regional issues panel that included NRCS, soil scientists, and representatives from the Washington Conservation Commission, the Washington Association of Conservation Districts and the Palouse Conservation District. The meeting was capped off with a tour of the picturesque Palouse region of Washington that included stops at Sievers Farm, the McCoy Grain Terminal, Red Barn Farms and Steptoe Butte State Park.

- **Partner Meetings:** NACD expanded its outreach efforts by showcasing conservation districts and their locally-led work at a variety of expositions and conferences. Major outreach opportunities attended by NACD included: International Soil and Water Conservation Society Meeting, Greensboro, North Carolina; National Association of State Conservation Agencies, Corpus Christi, Texas; Commodity Classic, Phoenix, Arizona; Western Forestry Leadership Coalition Meeting, San Francisco, California; National Association of State Foresters Meeting, Olympic Valley, California; National Forest Stewardship Program Conference, Vancouver, Washington; Society of American Foresters Annual Conference, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; National Association of Farm Broadcasters Trade Talk, Kansas City, Missouri; National Conservation Planning Partnership meetings in Indianapolis, Atlanta, Spokane, and Corpus Christi; National Watershed Coalition, Fort Worth, Texas; National Range and Pasture Judging Contest, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Agriculture Retailer Association, New Orleans, Louisiana; Field to Market Sustainable Ag Summit, Minneapolis, Minnesota and Irrigation Association Show, Long Beach, California.

- **Region Meetings:** NACD’s regions held all-member

and leadership meetings to provide networking and information sharing opportunities for districts and their partners.

- **Executive Directors Meeting:** The NACD State Association Executive Directors Conference was hosted by the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Cleveland, Ohio, and provided executive directors with valuable professional development, networking and field tour opportunities.
- **Funding Opportunities:** NACD promoted a variety of national and regional grant funding opportunities available to membership.



Pictured: Attendees at the NACD State Association Executive Directors Conference in Cleveland, Ohio.

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- **Strengthening State Conservation Partnerships including MOAs:** During NACD's 2015 Annual Meeting in New Orleans, the core National Conservation Partnership signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), pledging to help strengthen the collective effort to deliver conservation within states and territories. Representatives of NACD, NRCS, the National Association of Resource Conservation & Development Councils (NARC&DC's), the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) and the National Conservation District Employees Association signed the MOA. It encourages strong national, regional, state and local partnerships to work collaboratively in the delivery of conservation assistance to private landowners. The national partners are now encouraging state-level partners to plan for the future with state-level discussions and considering similar MOAs at the state level, and reviewing or updating such agreements if they are already in place. So far, most states have begun discussions and several states have followed suit, including: the Southeast Region, Rhode Island, Delaware, North Carolina and New Hampshire.
- **National Conservation Planning Partnership:** NACD participated throughout the year on this initiative to

reinvigorate the conservation planning process. The project is designed to improve the services to customers and the delivery of conservation. Five action teams worked to provide recommendations for training, technical processes, partnerships, communications, and performance or accountability. Executive Board members Tim Palmer and Kim LaFleur serve on the leadership team for this initiative along with representatives from NASCA, NCDEA, NRCS, and NARC&DC's.

- **District Outlook Task Force:** NACD launched a special task force charged with conducting an analysis of the changing environment for districts and locally led conservation. With the changing and increased resource needs on the landscape due to a variety of issues, conservation districts must be able to adapt to the needs of their landowners, managers and communities. The task force is researching trends on how districts are finding ways to better serve their communities and landowners. The 21-member group is composed of district officials from across the nation and representatives from NACD's partners. The final report will be submitted to the NACD Board in 2016.



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Sharing our Conservation Message

- **Water Quality Trading Conservation Innovation Grant:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the award of 45 projects under the Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program to develop and advance the conservation of natural resources. These projects include efforts to increase habitat for pollinators, develop new ways to attract private investment in natural resource conservation, give agricultural producers greater access to greenhouse gas markets, and help farmers and ranchers make their operations more resilient to climate change. NACD, along with American Farmland Trust, received a Water Quality Trading CIG, which will be utilized to develop guidance materials and engage in outreach and training to increase participation of soil and water conservation districts in nutrient trading programs. The grant will leverage the relationships and reputations districts and their employees already have as conservation experts interacting with agricultural producers in water-quality trading programs.
 - **NACD Soil Health Champions Network:** In the spring, NACD established a Soil Health Champions Network working in cooperation with state/territory associations and local districts. Its goal is to raise awareness of and increase the adoption of soil health systems by farmers and other landowners. The Network's goal is to recruit 150 farmers, ranchers, woodland managers, and other landowners—from every region of the country—who are willing to use, demonstrate, and share their enthusiasm for soil health practices. There are currently 80 Champions, many of whom are featured on NACD's website (www.nacdnet.org/policy/healthy-soil/soil-health-home) along with many other soil health resources.
 - **NACD Blog:** This past year, NACD launched the NACD Blog *conservation4thefuture.wordpress.com*. The blog is another communications tool for NACD to interact with and create a dialogue with our members. It will also allow members and partners to write guest blogs that focus on issues or personal experiences in the field. The blog is a more conversational vehicle for communications and aims to engage our members as well as the broader public in new diverse ways while communicating and focusing on NACD issues and initiatives. In less than a year, we have already been able to reach more than 1,200 visitors.
 - **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):** Conservation districts were one of the most highly represented entities among RCPP projects announced in January 2015. More than 200 districts were directly involved in more than 100 projects (with hundreds more indirectly involved through additional projects) selected for federal, state, or Critical Conservation Area RCPP funding. In many cases, districts play a key role in helping administer the project. NACD First Vice President Brent Van Dyke testified about the importance of conservation districts' role in helping deliver this critical Farm Bill conservation program before the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry in June 2015. In advance of the fiscal year 2016 roll-out of RCPP funding, NACD put together a RCPP task force which made recommendations to NRCS for ways to improve the process for soil and water conservation districts.
- NACD also teamed up with NRCS to present a conservation district specific webinar explaining the proposal process and addressing any specific concerns attendees had. NACD also continues to gather member testimonials to be highlighted on the USDA RCPP webpage and continues outreach and education efforts on RCPP for our members and conservation districts across the country.
- **Social Media and Publications:** NACD continued to promote the work of local conservation districts and highlight policy issues impacting locally-led conservation through a variety of communications tools, including both print and social media. These include NACD's website, blog, Facebook and Twitter pages, "Did You Know?" monthly emails by the District Operations Committee, the *eResource* weekly e-newsletter, monthly "Forestry Notes," photos highlighting local and national events on Flickr, and the quarterly magazine, *the Resource*.
 - **District Official Training Program:** NACD recognized three new states—Delaware, Nevada, and West Virginia—for a total of 25 states having an approved District Official Training Program.

- **NACD Urban and Community Conservation Webinars:** Through the sole sponsorship of the Scotts Miracle-Gro Company, the NACD Urban and Community Resource Policy Group was able to continue the monthly webinars for a third year. Topics varied from funding to outreach to partnering and more, all focused on showcasing districts' work and partner resources. Recordings and presentation PDFs are available at www.nacdnet.org/policy/urban/webinars along with information about how to access the FY2016 webinars.

Educating the Next Generation

- **Soil and Water Stewardship Week:** The 60th year of NACD's Soil and Water Stewardship Week was held April 26 – May 3, 2015. Conservation districts across the country provided education and outreach during this week and throughout the year. As part of these outreach efforts, conservation districts distributed press releases to local media outlets, and provided NACD's "Local Heroes-Your Hardworking Pollinators" materials to schools, community groups, radio and TV stations, and other outlets. A number of governmental agencies issued proclamations declaring Soil and Water Stewardship Week in local communities.
- **Stewardship & Education:** NACD staff promoted Stewardship and Education materials and Marketplace products across the country at various conferences; Virginia, Florida, and Indiana state meetings; the Soil Science Society's National Association of Ag Educators and National Ag in the Classroom conferences; and Project Learning Tree.
- **Poster/Photo Contests:** The NACD/NACD Auxiliary poster and photo contest saw an increase in participation this year. A donation from the Albert I. Pierce Foundation along with funding from the NACD Auxiliary increased the national prize money for both contests. Visit nacdn.net.org/education/contests for more information.
- **Educator Conferences:** NACD staff participated on the Soil Science Society of America's K-12 education committee, the Education Operation Committee of the American Forest Foundation/Project Learning Tree, the Smithsonian Waterway



Project, and volunteered at the Envirothon in Missouri. These various engagements have provided NACD with additional education resources and connections.

- **"NACD Pack A Book":** The "NACD Pack A Book" project had a successful 8th annual event at the NACD Annual Meeting in Louisiana. Participants donated more than 160 books to KIPP Central City Primary school in New Orleans, Louisiana. More than 1,250 books have been donated over the past 8 years at the various NACD Annual Meeting sites.



Pictured: Students at the 2015 NCF Envirothon competition in Missouri.

- **Envirothon:** Through the National Conservation Foundation (NCF), NACD supported the annual International Envirothon competition. This year's competition was graciously hosted by the Missouri Envirothon at Missouri State University, in Springfield. A total of 260 students making up 52 teams from across North America participated in this penultimate contest to determine the 2015 Envirothon winners. The competition also brought together more than 200 adult advisers and volunteers. This event and the individual state-level events leading up to it, were a collaborative effort of NCF, Smithfield Foods, local conservation districts, educators, and cooperating natural resource agencies. Fifty-seven provinces and state programs conducted programs during the year, with more than 42,000 students and advisors participating throughout the U.S. and Canada. State and provincial programs had local funding, volunteers, and in-kind donations of equipment, food, etc. to help them in carrying out their respective programs.

Next year's annual contest will take place in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada July 24-29 at Trent University and will be hosted by Forests Ontario.

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Advocating for Conservation

- **Farm Bill Conservation:** NACD First Vice President Brent Van Dyke testified before the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry on the implementation of conservation programs in the 2014 Farm Bill in June 2015. NACD was a prominent leader on Capitol Hill, advocating for conservation in the 2014 Farm Bill and working closely with the House and Senate Agriculture committees to ensure strong Farm Bill conservation programs.

Van Dyke stressed the importance Farm Bill conservation programs play in supporting clean air, clean water and productive soils, while helping producers avoid unnecessary regulation and promote our nation's food security and sustainability. He specifically focused on the implementation of the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which is a priority for NACD because of the heavy involvement of conservation districts in the program.

- **Farm Bill Task Force:** This year, NACD established a steering committee for the Farm Bill Task Force with Brent Van Dyke as the chair. The steering committee is working to establish guidelines and a timeline for NACD's top priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill.
- **Appropriations:** NACD advocated for the highest possible funding levels for critical discretionary programs in fiscal year 2016, including funding for Conservation Technical Assistance, the Environmental Protection Agency's 319 Nonpoint Source Grants, and the Forest Service State and Private Forestry Program.
- **Concurrent Resolution on Conservation:** NACD worked closely with Congress on a concurrent resolution recognizing locally-led conservation, the work of conservation districts and 2015 as the International Year of Soils. The resolution passed in the Senate on May 14, 2015 by unanimous consent. A companion bill, H.Con.Res. 30, was introduced by the Chair of the House Agriculture Committee's Conservation and Forestry Subcommittee Representative Glenn Thompson (R-PA-5). The original cosponsors include Representatives Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM-1), Gregg Harper (R-MS-3) and Walter Jones (R-NC-3).

NACD Live Auction: The NACD Live Auction celebrated its 13th anniversary with more than \$75,000 raised at the annual meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana. NACD's advocacy efforts would not be possible without funds raised from the auction. Auction proceeds are used on education and relationship-building with policymakers; sending NACD leadership and other on-the-ground conservation experts to Washington, D.C. to participate in hearings, briefings and other key meetings; developing policy position papers and other educational resources; building partnerships with other like-minded groups and coalitions; and sponsoring receptions, briefings or other educational outreach events.



Pictured: NACD President Lee McDaniel at the 2015 Spring Fly-in

- **Spring Fly-in:** In March, NACD hosted a two-day "Spring Fly-In" with more than 100 soil and water conservation district employees and state association representatives gathering in Washington, D.C. The fly-in kicked off with addresses by NACD President Lee McDaniel, NACD CEO Jeremy Peters, consultants from the 9b Group, and other NACD leaders and staff. They shared insights on how to effectively communicate with representatives in Congress and briefed members on NACD's advocacy materials and provided updates on policy issues affecting agriculture. The fly-in wrapped up with a Congressional reception on Capitol Hill where members got the opportunity to network with legislators, Congressional staff, members of the media, and partner organizations and agencies. Congressmen Glenn Thompson (R-PA) and Ralph Abraham (R-LA), both members of the

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House Agriculture Committee, attended the evening's reception and spoke about the important work of conservation districts and locally-led conservation.

- **Action Alerts:** Through grassroots "action alerts" and coalition efforts, NACD advocated for key legislative issues impacting conservation, including calling on members to reach out to their representatives to support the concurrent resolution recognizing locally-led conservation and 2015 as the International Year of Soils.
- **Horses and Burros:** NACD has continued to remain engaged with the National Horse and Burro Rangeland Management Coalition. NACD and the National Horse and Burro Rangeland Management Coalition have been working on redeveloping the *wildhorserange.org* website and have created five public information commercials on the wild horse and burro program which will air out of a Denver news station beginning in 2016. They will also be made available on the *wildhorserange.org* website. NACD will continue working with the coalition to deal with the over population of wild horses and burros as well as grow outreach efforts with the Bureau of Land Management and Capitol Hill leadership.
- **Forestry RPG:** The Forestry RPG held its annual summer meeting in Boston, Massachusetts where conservation district representatives from across the country learned about forest resource concerns affecting the northeast. A field tour organized by the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District showcased a small forest landowner cooperative and a state-owned farm operation the district is now managing. Presenters included Massachusetts State Forester Peter Church, Massachusetts State Conservationist Christine Clark and Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director Jeff LaFleur, as well as representatives from the National Association of State Foresters, American Forests, APHIS and other state and regional forestry professionals.
- **Forestry Partnership Panels at Region Meetings:** NACD also showcased a forestry partnership success story at each of this year's regional meetings. These presentations demonstrated the dependability and versatility that conservation districts offer state partners.
- **Joint Forestry Team (JFT):** NACD assisted with a number of JFT projects this past year, including helping the group organize and

distribute a survey of state-level forestry partnerships across the country. The four-member JFT also includes the Forest Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the National Association of State Foresters.

- **EPA Brownfields Forum:** NACD Urban and Community RPG members Ron Rohall (PA) and John Peterson (VA) represented districts at the U.S. EPA Brownfields Stakeholder Listening Session on "The Brownfields Program at 20: Looking Back, Moving Forward." They shared comments in person and later in writing, which were developed through feedback from districts.

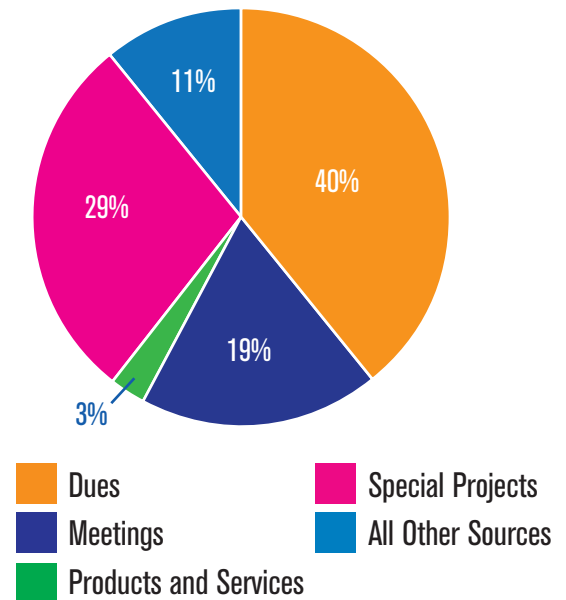
- **Federal Comments:** NACD submitted comments to a number of federal agencies on proposed regulations with potential impacts on conservation. A primary focus was on providing important technical input on conservation program rules, many of which were published in 2015. Specific program comments submitted by NACD include:
 - **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)**
 - **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):** NACD submitted comments on the Interim Rule
 - **Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP):** NACD submitted comments on the Interim Rule
 - **Regional Conservation Partnership Program** NACD sent a memo to NRCS with Recommendations for the FY 2016 RCPP Announcement for Program Funding (APF)
 - **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP):** NACD submitted comments on the Interim Rule
 - **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**
 - **Pesticide Regulations:** NACD submitted comments on the proposed rule for Mitigation of Exposure to Bees from Acutely Toxic Pesticide Products.

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FINANCIALS: Statement of Activity

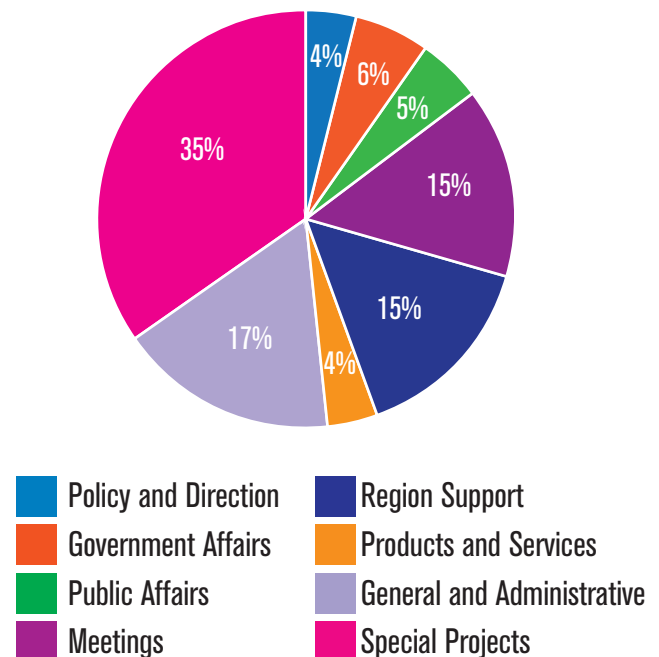
Revenue	2015	2014	2013	2012	
Dues	\$ 1,120,985	1,137,996	1,132,852	1,194,245	40%
Meetings	\$ 527,008	397,215	523,429	486,496	19%
Products/Services	\$ 79,916	144,730	263,135	254,382	3%
Special Projects	\$ 808,203	677,544	696,665	793,647	29%
All Other Sources	\$ 298,750	163,493	187,522	136,881	11%
Total	\$ 2,834,862	2,520,978	2,803,603	2,865,651	100%

2015 Revenue



Expenses	2015	2014	2013	2012	
Policy/Direction	\$105,802	233,654	339,717	381,704	4%
Government Affairs	\$162,072	211,409	193,192	246,456	6%
Public Affairs	\$139,828	191,710	244,269	253,676	5%
Meetings	\$432,701	578,912	503,414	399,330	15%
Region Support	\$431,877	519,474	573,193	522,777	15%
Products/Services	\$120,252	236,900	308,860	306,854	4%
General and Administrative	\$492,981	481,882	523,744	424,238	17%
Special Projects	\$1,012,086	342,161	227,040	339,874	35%
Total	\$2,897,599	2,796,102	2,913,429	2,874,909	100%

2015 Expenses



Recognition of Supporters

Thank you to all of our Fiscal Year 2015 Sponsors. We appreciate your support and partnership!

Gold Level: Case IH

Silver Level: CHS, Syngenta

Bronze Level: USDA-NRCS, Verdesian, John Deere, Scotts Miracle-Gro, Bayer CropScience, USDA Forest Service, LG Seeds

Supporting Level: Monsanto, Maryland Association of Conservation Districts, U.S. Sugar Corporation, Plum Creek, AgriDrain, National Farmers Union, Apache Corporation, Bob Warner

Other Contributors: Certified Crop Advisers, National Conservation District Employees Association, Society for Range Management/U.S. Cattleman's Association, Ag Enterprise Supply, Inc., American Association of Crop Insurers, AGPRO, The McGregor Company, Pacific Northwest Farmers Cooperative Inc.

FRIENDS OF NACD

NACD would like to thank all of our supporters who have helped facilitate our work this year and every year by donating through our Friends of NACD program. To see all the Friends of NACD, visit: www.nacdnet.org/membership/friends2014

Guillermo Benavides, TX	Earl Garber, LA	Jack Majeres, SD	Kenneth Roehrich, NJ	Brent VanDyke, NM
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Arthur Ganta, DC	Doug Loudenslager, DC		Donavon Taves, LA	

DISTRICTS

NACD also thanks districts and state associations that have supported NACD through FY15 dues. We are proud to be your national representative and we appreciate your continued support!

GRANTORS

This fiscal year, NACD had substantial support from a number of federal and private grantors. Thanks to our FY15 partners: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; U.S. Forest Service; U.S. Bureau of Land Management; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; and the Walton Family Foundation. Funding from these partners assisted NACD in carrying out projects to promote soil health, water quality, outreach to underserved clients, forestry education, leadership and advocacy training, and other efforts directed at locally-led natural resource conservation.

NACD also thanks its conservation delivery system partners: NASCA, NRCS, NCDEA, and NARC&DCs.

Conservation Policy

2016 Budget Passed

In December, Congress passed and the President signed a fiscal year 2016 omnibus funding bill. The bill funds the government through September 30, 2016.

The agriculture section included an increase in funding for Conservation Operations to over \$850 million, which includes technical assistance. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program, a critical mandatory program, was cut by \$321 million. The Conservation Stewardship Program, another vital program, saw no cut. Also included was \$271 million for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program, the Emergency Conservation Program, and the Emergency Forestry Restoration Program.

Key highlights from interior appropriations include increased funding for EPA 319 grants with over \$164 million and State and Private Forestry with \$237 million. In response to the record fire season in 2015, Congress increased wildfire funding by \$600 million. Missing from the bill was a provision modifying wildfire funding to that of other disasters. Also included was a three year extension of the Land Water Conservation Fund for \$450 million.

CRP 30th Anniversary

In 1985, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill that created the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Since then, the program has helped landowners across the country conserve land, wildlife habitat, and natural resources.

CRP is administered by the Farm Service Agency with technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. It is a voluntary, incentive-based program and is the largest private-lands conservation

program in the United States. In return for a rental payment, producers take environmentally sensitive land out of production under a ten to fifteen year contract.

Over the last thirty years, CRP has helped producers reduce soil erosion, improve wildlife habitat, and improve water quality. The program continues to be a strong tool for use in resource conservation.

Wildfires and Forest Health: Not Just a Western Issue

As 2015 comes to a close and 2016 begins, trees continue to grow, biomass accumulates, and another wildfire season is around the corner. Fire seasons are on average 78 days longer now than in 1970. This past wildfire season, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) spent for the first time more than 50 percent of its budget solely on wildfire expenditures, and the USFS projects that number to exceed 67 percent by 2025. While the wildfires in Alaska, California, and Washington were front and center in the news this year, wildfires are not just a regional issue — they are a national concern.

Since 2004, 13 states have had record-setting or near record-setting wildfires. Four of the states were east of the Rocky

Mountains: Georgia, Florida, North Carolina and Texas. In November, six large fires were reported in Kentucky, Oklahoma and Virginia. According to the National Interagency Fire Center, as of late December there have been 68,151 fires across the country resulting in 10,125,149 acres burned. Since 1960 there have only been four seasons in which the 9 million acre mark has been reached — all coming within the past decade (2006, 2007, 2012 and 2015).

From 1960 through the early 1980s, 100,000 wildfires were reported each year, but never burned more than five and half million acres. Fast forward to 2000-2014 where the number of annual fires only exceeded 90,000 twice in that time span, but

nine out of those fourteen years burned more than five and a half million acres. The ongoing drought has helped to increase the intensity of the fires, combining with current management practices to create the perfect storm.

The large and intense fires more frequently require a national wildfire preparedness level 5 — a category assigned when the potential for emerging significant wildland fires is high and expected to remain high in multiple geographic areas. Level 5 results in a full commitment of national and state resources. At level 5, the USFS spends on average \$100 million per week fighting fires.

Due to previous forest management policies, an excessive buildup of fuels has occurred, particularly in woody plant communities. Proper land management and post-fire emergency recovery efforts are essential to conserve America's forests as well as surrounding natural and cultural resources. In the past legislative session, Congress has increased its effort to change the status quo.

Funding and the USFS budget have increasingly become prominent issues in Washington D.C. In September, Congress appropriated \$700 million in emergency funding to the USFS for wildfire suppression activities. NACD fully supports increased

funding for wildfire prevention, management and restoration of our public forests and rangelands and continues to work to ensure that federal policies support the uninhibited flow of vital information between agencies and partners that will allow natural resource concerns to be addressed, private and public property protected, and all life, especially human, fully cared for.

The House and Senate both have a bill under consideration, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, which aims to limit the impact wildfire spending can have on the funding of agency programs designed to improve forest health conditions. In July, the House passed the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015, which expedites the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process in order to improve forest management activities, to return resilience to overgrown and fire-prone forests. The Senate is currently reviewing the legislation and NACD strongly encourages the Senate to vote in favor of it.

In order for these bills and similar future legislation to become law, a strong showing of public support is required. That support will grow when the country stops looking at wildfires as a region-specific problem. A fire anywhere in any state affects the entire country. The wildfire problem is a national issue.



Happy Camp Complex Fire in California. USFS photo by Kari Greer.

Rhode Island Signs MOA

Conservation Rhode Island signed a state-level Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The agreement was signed by the Rhode Island State Conservation Committee, Eastern RI Conservation District, Northern RI Conservation District, Southern RI Conservation District, RI Association of Conservation Districts, RI Resource Conservation and Development Area Council and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The purpose of the MOA is “to encourage strong partnerships,” which will lead to “coordinated interagency delivery of conservation assistance” and thereby provide landowners and operators an increased ability to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of Rhode Island’s natural resources. The agencies’ mutual goal is to establish locally-led conservation efforts that address local, state, national and tribal natural resource priorities at the highest

levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

The signing of this state-level MOA was spurred by a national MOA signed at the 2015 NACD Annual Meeting in New Orleans by the National Conservation Partnership: National Association of Conservation Districts, the National Association of Resource Conservation & Development Councils, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies, the National Conservation District Employees Association, and the USDA-NRCS. The national MOA is an agreement by the core National Conservation Partnership members to encourage strong national, regional, state, and local partnerships as well as to strengthen the cooperation between the core partners in the delivery of conservation assistance to private landowners.

NACD Exhibits at NAFB’s Trade Talk

Last week, NACD President Lee McDaniel and NACD Director of Communications Mary Price, attended the National Association of Farm Broadcasting (NAFB) Trade Talk event as part of their 72nd annual convention in Kansas City, Missouri, November 11-13.

NACD staffed a booth at the trade show and conducted several interviews with agriculture broadcasters from across the country throughout the day. President Lee McDaniel shared updates on NACD’s priorities and federal actions and spoke about NACD’s emphasis on soil health and the development of our Soil Health Champions Network. The event was a great opportunity for NACD to network with agriculture broadcasters as well as agriculture industry professionals from all over the country and share the critical work of conservation districts and the importance of locally-led, voluntary conservation efforts.



Pictured: NACD President Lee McDaniel being interviewed by Lane Nordlund of Northern Ag Network at NAFB's Trade Talk in Kansas City, Missouri.

NACD Attends Irrigation Show in California

“Waves of Innovation” was the theme for this year’s Irrigation Association Show held in Long Beach, California, November 11-12. The event hosted nearly 4,000 professionals in an expansive trade show featuring agriculture, landscape and golf irrigation. The Irrigation Association is the leading membership organization for the irrigation industry. Its mission is to promote efficient irrigation through advocacy and professional development opportunities.

The Irrigation Show was held in conjunction with their Education Conference held from November 9-13. It featured more than 60 technical sessions, poster presentations on the show floor, and a new product contest showcasing the hottest innovations and new technologies in irrigation systems for agriculture, landscape architecture, and golf courses.

The November 12 general session included the presentation of the Irrigation Association Awards, selection of the new product contest winners, and a keynote address by the world renowned sea life artist Wyland.

NACD Southeast Region Representative, Phylis Vandevere represented NACD at the Irrigation Show where she staffed the NACD booth. She shared NACD’s engagement and activities with local conservation districts and the association’s work on issues such as soil health, water quality, forestry and conservation education and outreach. She also directed attendees to the NACD website to learn more about NACD’s priorities and how to become involved with local conservation.

Next year’s Irrigation Show will be held in Reno, Nevada, December 5-9, 2016. For more information about the Irrigation Association and to find certified irrigation specialists in your area visit www.irrigation.org.



Pictured: NACD Southeast Region Representative Phylis Vandevere at the Irrigation Association Show in Long Beach, California.

Want some conservation with your cereal?

What do Cheerios and conservation have in common? Quite a bit, as it turns out. General Mills, maker of the venerable breakfast food and a host of other consumer products and brands, is among a growing number of companies that have embraced sustainability goals. They seek to address environmental, economic and social sustainability all along their supply chains, from a farmer’s field to a consumer’s table.

Their efforts were front and center as 350 people representing industry, agriculture and conservation gathered November 19-20 for the Sustainable Agriculture Summit in Minneapolis. The summit, subtitled “Global Challenges, Local Solutions” was co-sponsored by Field to Market, a consortium of groups interested in supply-chain sustainability, and the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy. Participants explored private-sector

sustainability efforts and the important role conservation plays in them.

NACD is a member of Field to Market and participated in the Sustainable Ag Summit. Many see the marketplace as a powerful new partner in efforts to address issues and opportunities like soil health, water quality and quantity, air quality and climate change. Conservation districts may find new roles, responsibilities and resources in this emerging area. NACD has been tracking these issues and providing information to members and partners for several years. NACD leaders see growing roles for America’s conservation districts, starting with good conservation planning and possibly leading to verification and certification of farm stewardship.

Every Acre Counts

Durham Soil & Water Conservation District Celebrates 50 years of Conservation

JENNIFER BROOKS

Natural Resources and District Education Coordinator
and Certified NC Environmental Educator
Durham County

The Durham Soil and Water Conservation District (Durham SWCD), located in Durham County, North Carolina, celebrated 50 years of conservation work in 2015. Located in the heart of North Carolina, where tobacco was king but urban sprawl has since taken over, Durham SWCD has adapted to its changing environment and become a leader in the new era of conservation.

From 1965 until the mid-80's it was like most other districts at that time, focused on providing technical assistance to the agriculture community. However, the arrival of the Research Triangle Park (RTP) and the resulting population boom, brought increased sedimentation in streams and stormwater runoff contributing to increasingly negative effects downstream. The district perceived the need to address more than just agriculture.

"Agriculture was and still is an extremely vital part of the district's work in Durham County," said Durham SWCD Board Chairman Talmage Layton, "but the board at that time, as it does now, felt that it couldn't turn a blind eye to any natural resource issue no matter the source."

Today, the district has a diversity of programs to meet natural resource challenges from agricultural to urban landscapes. This diversification has gained the district and its staff local, state and national recognition as leaders and innovators.

A major area of emphasis for the district is stream restorations and stormwater projects. Since 2004, the



district has received more than \$5.5 million in grant funds for projects for multiple stream restorations and stormwater projects around Durham County.

"The district's success in receiving grants is its ability to recognize a grant-worthy project and then matching it with the right grant. Additionally, we have a strong history of building partnerships which have contributed to our overall success," said district Director Eddie Culberson.

Another highly successful and extremely popular program is the North Carolina Community Conservation Assistance Program (CCAP) which offers cost-share assistance on the installation of conservation best management practices (BMPs) in urban/suburban settings. Popular BMPs in Durham for CCAP include rain gardens, cisterns, streambank stabilizations and impervious surface conversions. Since 2007, Durham has gotten more than \$476,000 of urban BMPs on the ground.

In addition to these priority areas, the district also works extensively on: cost share programs for agriculture water quality and quantity issues on the farm, farmland preservation, agricultural economic development, an active environmental education program and more.

With change being inevitable, conservation districts across the nation must be willing to adapt to meet all of their county's natural resource needs. One thing is certain, the Durham SWCD is committed to continue to conserve, enhance and promote the natural resources of Durham County for the next 50 years and beyond.

Soil Health Champions Spotlight

Oklahoma's Emmons Says Yes, Soil Health Works

When asked about the biggest challenge to adopting soil health practices, Jimmy Emmons is clear: "Our biggest challenge sometimes is in our minds! The perception of 'This won't work here' drives me crazy and is my biggest driver and motivation," said the third-generation family farmer from Leedey, Oklahoma.

Emmons and his wife, Ginger, have been farming since 1980. They were nominated for NACD's Soil Health Champions list by the Dewey County Conservation District. He has served on the district board since 2007, including terms as chair and vice chair. He is also vice president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts.

The Emmons' farm is a diverse operation that includes wheat, soybeans, cover crops, irrigated dairy alfalfa, a wheat/canola rotation and a cow-calf operation. The farm began using no-till about 15 years ago. Cover crops are used to fill the gap between cash crops and to build soil health.

Working with the Dewey County Conservation District, Emmons has worked to educate others about the importance of soil health. An on-farm demonstration project "is what we like to call on-the-farm research of cover crops," Emmons said.

The Emmonses have hosted three field days with excellent response. "The smallest crowd, the first year, was forty-five. Last year we had ninety-five, and we had about that number this year. Topics were cover crops, soil health and economics of how to incorporate cover crops and cattle in a systematic approach that enhances soil health," he said. "We track temperature and soil moisture in and out of the covers to allow people to



Pictured: Jimmy and Ginger Emmons of Leedey, Oklahoma.

actually see the difference themselves. We have been tracking organic matter since the start of this partnership. All of our mixes are multiple species to feed the microbiology in the ground. We always push the limits of possibilities of mixes so we learn what will or will not work in our area."

Emmons was also featured on RFD TV's "Out on the Land" with Larry Butler. You can view the episodes featuring the Emmons at <http://outontheland.com/category/episodes/> (Season 6 episodes 76 and 77).

NACD's growing roster of Soil Health Champions can be viewed at <http://www.nacdnet.org/policy/healthy-soil/soil-health-champions-network>. Soil Health Champions are helping to raise awareness about and increase the adoption of soil health systems by farmers and other landowners. Want to nominate someone as a Soil Health Champion? Contact NACD's regional staff to learn how.



Don Knezick Honored with National Pollinator Award

On October 20, Don Knezick of Pinelands Nursery & Supply in Columbia, New Jersey, was honored with the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC)-National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Farmer-Rancher Pollinator Award. Don was presented with the award by NACD President Lee McDaniel at an evening reception during the NAPPC Annual Conference.

The annual NAPPC-NACD award recognizes individuals who have contributed significantly to pollinator protection, conservation, and issue outreach resulting in increased awareness of the importance of pollinators and pollination within the agricultural community.

Don Knezick and his wife Suzanne established Pinelands Nursery & Supply in 1983. After finding success in selling container grown blueberries, raspberries and grapes, the Knezicks shifted their focus to their true passion of growing native plants.

Pinelands Nursery & Supply is now one of the largest suppliers of indigenous trees, shrubs, and herbs in the United States. These native plants help reestablish critical pollinator habitat especially in areas overtaken by invasive species.

Pinelands Nursery supplies millions of plants for environmental restoration projects throughout the Mid-Atlantic, and provides erosion control blankets, hydro-mulches, geotextiles, silt fencing, and custom seed mixtures for stormwater management. Through their more than 20 years of experience, they have become an industry leader in environmental restoration.

Don is actively engaged with local area conservation districts through his business as well as through his role as Chairman of the Burlington County Soil and Water Conservation District. His nursery supplies native plants, seeds and erosion control materials for many of the area's conservation district projects and private land managers.



South Carolina Conservation Partnership Responds to Historic Flooding

MARC CRIBB

Conservation Districts Program Manager

South Carolina DNR

The first weekend of October was met with a severe flooding event that hit South Carolina prompting a Presidential Disaster Declaration in 24 of the state's 46 counties. At the height of the flooding, following days of torrential rains that dropped more than 2 feet overnight in some parts of the state, 541 roads and bridges were shut down and thousands of homes and businesses were destroyed or damaged.

The historic rainfall and subsequent flooding claimed 19 lives across the state and caused over a half-billion dollar loss to the agriculture industry. The worst flooding extended from Columbia east and south to the coast. The state has requested the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to expedite the handling process for aid to farmers and has asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to speed up its process for handling repairs to beaches. Since the disaster was declared, more than 90,000 applications for aid have been submitted to FEMA.

In response to the disaster, the South Carolina Conservation Partnership leapt into action as conservation district officials, district employees and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources staff assisted local NRCS personnel to assess damages to infrastructure, streams, dams, ponds and agricultural lands. The assessment revealed that flood waters destroyed many roads and bridges throughout the region. The widespread devastation caused erosion to cropland that removed valuable top soil and damaged farm access roads and other agricultural infrastructure.

The damage to waterways, including ponds and lakes, was remarkable as many dams breached or were significantly damaged. Millions of gallons of additional water flowed into already swollen streams and rivers. Furthermore, saturated soils and the continued flooding increased runoff, resulting in the devastation of many homes and infrastructures.

Based on the field damage assessments, NRCS announced the availability of the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) which will invest \$3 million initially to help



Picture by U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jorge Intriago.

communities protect eligible, high-priority infrastructure such as roads, bridges, houses, and businesses. NRCS contacted local county and municipal governments to offer EWP assistance upon their request. As part of their eligibility for EWP assistance, the units of government also had to agree to serve as project sponsors. As of December 1, sponsors from eight counties have requested EWP Program assistance. NRCS will pay 75 percent of the restoration costs and the sponsor is responsible for the remaining 25 percent.

NRCS is exploring additional ways to help communities, farmers and forest landowners recover from the catastrophic flooding through its existing programs. For instance, NRCS is seeking additional funding through the EWP Program from its national office in Washington, D.C.

At the district level, several Conservation District officials have met with local emergency management teams, dam safety officials, watershed associations and others to determine the extent of the damage and to develop comprehensive watershed management plans to protect the resources in the event of future flood events. As follow up to the disaster, *Carolina Strong-After the Storm* will be the theme for the 2016 South Carolina Conservation Partnership Conference focusing on flood assistance and how the conservation family can help the state recover and prosper.

Partnering for Success

North Dakota Districts Knee-Deep in Research

America's conservation districts are expert at addressing local conservation needs. Sometimes those needs go beyond district boundaries.

Research on good conservation farming is one example, and 12 North Dakota soil conservation districts have combined to make field-level research possible for more than three decades.

It has an unassuming name – Area IV SCD Research Farm. But in partnership with the USDA Northern Great Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory, the farm in Mandan has been the site of research for 31 years. Conservation tillage, residue management, soil erosion and water conservation are among the issues and practices to benefit. Transferring what's learned to farmers and ranchers is a major goal, says David Archer, ARS research agriculturalist. Scientists ask how good conservation fits in dryland cropping systems of the region.

The districts lease the farm and make it available for research under a memorandum of agreement with the ARS.

A representative from each district serves on the Area IV Research Advisory Committee, which meets with ARS staff twice yearly to exchange information and provide guidance on farm activities. Six scientists lead research at the farm, which is overseen by a farm manager. The research lab has a fulltime staff of 25. "We're always trying to look ahead, and a lot of it comes from the SCD advisors," Archer said.

"The way I understand it is the SCDs were working with the research station to do some work on dryland cropping systems on the Roy Nelson Farm," Archer said. "At that point, Roy offered to lease the entire farm to the AREA IV SCDs."

These days, the farm is looking closely at the role of organic matter in soil health systems. "We're trying to find out the key to productive soils," Archer said.

Soil conservation districts participating in the farm are: Burleigh, Emmons, Kidder, Logan, McIntosh, McLean (two districts), Morton, Oliver, Sheridan, Sioux and Stutsman.

District Development

Green Infrastructure Wizard

Green infrastructure uses natural landscapes to manage water, including reducing and treating stormwater at its source, and provide environmental and community benefits. Many conservation/natural resource districts are using aspects of green infrastructure to assist landowners and communities.

As green infrastructure has been embraced over the years, numerous resources have been developed. Now the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Green Infrastructure Wizard (GIWiz) provides access to their many tools and resources that can support and promote water management and community planning decisions.

GIWiz is an interactive, online information portal to thousands of EPA green infrastructure tools and resources. Accessible at www.epa.gov/giwiz, users can produce customized reports with links to the resources to help them analyze problems, understand management options, calculate design parameters, analyze costs and benefits, evaluate tradeoffs, engage stakeholders, and/or develop education and outreach campaigns.

GIWiz is made possible through a cross-agency collaboration involving EPA's Office of Research and Development, Office of Policy, Office of Water, and regional staff.

2016: A great year to be a conservationist

I'm going to go out on a limb and make a bold prediction: 2016 will be a great year to be a conservationist.

Why?

Because for the first time since Hugh Hammond Bennett made his impassioned plea to Congress to save our nation's precious soil more than 80 years ago, Americans are increasingly aware of our intractable connection to our living and life-giving soil.

Not since the dark days of the Dust Bowl have so many farmers, stakeholders, businesses and consumer groups turned their attention to the soil.

And for good reasons.

Faced with the prospect of feeding a growing planet on fewer arable acres within the context of global climate change and increasing resource scarcity, our very future is rooted in improving the health and function of our soil.

How do we sequester more carbon? Reduce the off-site impact of nutrients and fertilizers? Improve farm resiliency? Reduce flooding and hold more water in the soil profile? Increase wildlife and pollinator habitat? Increase farm productivity and profitability? Reduce agricultural energy use?

The answer is soil health.

I fervently believe that improving soil health is the single greatest conservation opportunity of our lifetime – one that is both foundational and potentially transformational.

Not surprisingly, more and more stakeholder groups, NGOs and businesses are coming to the same conclusion.

At a time when many of our global challenges seem insurmountable, improving soil health is an opportunity that is steeped in genuine hope and possibility.

But, with this hope comes great expectations.

To meet those expectations, each of us must lend our individual skills, talents and passions to help our nation's farmers do what we all know must be done – improve the health and function of our soil.

No individual group or organization invented the soil health movement. But it's fair to say that the conservation partnership is in a unique market position to greatly enable it.

With your help, history will record that 2016 was the year we renewed our commitment to improving the health of our living and life-giving soil. By doing so, history will also record that 2016 was the year we brightened the future for our children and grandchildren.

Happy 2016 and long live the soil!

Ron Nichols, NRCS

Soil Health Communications Coordinator





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Soil and Water Stewardship Week 61st Year

April 24 to May 1, 2016

Stewardship Week Information

Visit <http://www.nacdnet.org/stewardship>
 to find your copies of the proclamation,
 PSA's, news release and more!

New for 2016 – Program insert, program blank
 and litany available for FREE electronic download.

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