

# Maine Association of Conservation Districts



***Steps of the Maine 2016 Conservation Partnership's Natural Resource Assessment, Results, and How the Data was Used by Maine's Soil And Water Conservation Districts.***

# Public Input Process

## Natural Resource Assessment for the State of Maine

In 2016, Maine Association of Conservation Districts – through a cooperative agreement with USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – conducted a Natural Resource Assessment (NRA) across the state to determine natural resource priorities so that Districts and NRCS can assist landowners, professionals, and municipalities with best management practices to protect and improve land and water resources. This assessment built on the data collected in the first assessment, completed in 2011.



# Gathering Public Input – Process

Maine's 16 Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD's) gathered information for the Natural Resource Assessment through public meetings, open to all, as well as through an online survey available through Survey Monkey™, using their online web based software. Paper surveys were made available upon request, with District staff inputting the data gathered.



Districts encouraged farmers, woodland owners, resource professionals, and members of the general public to take advantage of the opportunity to make their voices heard.

# Gathering Public Input – Outreach

Outreach to make the public aware of the request for their input was accomplished through a variety of media:

- Press Releases
- Website Announcements/Articles
- Electronic Newsletters
- Radio Announcements
- Direct Emails/Communication

Outreach in ‘getting the word out’ about the Natural Resource Assessment included the following partners – MACD, Maine SWCDs, NRCS, ME Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, Small Woodland Owners Assoc., Univ. of Maine Cooperative Extension.

# Gathering Public Input - Outreach

- Local Press Releases – proved beneficial at the county level, if published
- NRCS State Office Press Release – issued by the ME NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, Tom Kielbasa – was picked up by the Associated Press with wide distribution

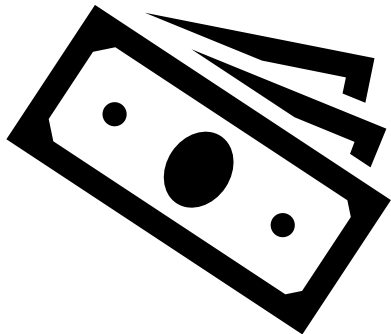


# Gathering Public Input – Outreach

## Why participate?

- The priorities articulated in the survey and meetings informed federal, state, and local natural resource programs and funding opportunities in the coming five year cycle.

To encourage participation, some conservation districts entered everyone who completed a survey - or attended a meeting - into a drawing for a cash prize.



# Gathering Public Input – Survey Process

The survey, developed by Joe Dembeck, Somerset County SWCD Executive Director, was organized to allow participants to identify priorities in several identified areas or ‘landscapes’: cropland, forestry, pasture, farmstead, livestock, water resources, wildlife habitat, and urban. This broad focus for priorities allowed for expanded participation from the public.

The public survey developed to assist in gathering public input was an ‘open invitation’ that didn’t limit respondents to a defined group as the target audience was meant to include all. The time estimated to complete the online survey was 15 minutes.

Organized to gather information on priorities state-wide in the first 11 questions of the survey, the next question – which county the respondent was in – allowed for SWCDs to input questions specific to that area, if desired.

888 total surveys were completed – 885 online and 3 hard copy. 771 answered the county/location question, 117 declined to answer.



# Online Survey – Behind the Scenes

- Developed over a 6 month period.
- Statewide questions were developed by group consensus.
- Format – Statewide questions to start then move to county specific questions based upon respondent's answer to county of property/residence.
- Counties were limited to 6 questions each.
- **BEFORE** release survey tested for functionality by a group of individuals with varying computer skills in order to identify any problem areas.

# Gathering Public Input – Survey Participation

County	Number of Respondents
Androscoggin	30
Aroostook	59
Cumberland	93
Franklin	32
Hancock	59
Kennebec	108
Knox	40
Lincoln	32
Oxford	46

County	Number of Respondents
Penobscot	63
Piscataquis	25
Sagadahoc	21
Somerset	38
Waldo	49
Washington	43
York	33
Total	771

Source - <http://somensetwcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Somerset-County-2016-Resource-Assessment-FINAL.pdf>

# Gathering Public Input – Public Meetings

Maine's 16 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) gathered information for the Natural Resource Assessment through public meetings, open to all. Districts contacted and encouraged agriculture producers, foresters and woodland owners, resource professionals, and members of the general public to take advantage of the opportunity to make their voices heard.

The public meetings were scheduled and held from late February to early April. Participation from the public varied with some being well attended and others with minimal attendance.



# Gathering Public Input – Public Meetings

- Priorities and comments at public meetings were recorded and included in the final report.
- In some cases, attendees followed up with District staff after the public meeting to add to or clarify their natural resource priorities and/or concerns.
- Capture ‘private conversation’ resource concerns while maintaining anonymity.

# Gathering Public Input – Urban Specific

## **Identified Urban specific resource concerns :**

Storm water management in urban areas ranked high in concern and importance.

Clean water issues ranked high across all groups.

Shoreline / Coastal erosion management

Seasonal non-point source issues



# Gathering Public Input – Urban Specific

Data identified from high population areas included spread of urban resource style concerns to seasonal areas where second homes/camps saw repetitive cyclical problems, such as gravel/camp road non-point source issues near lakes and streams. Many towns where seasonal residents significantly increase and create impact lack the resources for full time employees to monitor or assist with these issues and turn to SWCDs for technical assistance.



# Gathering Public Input – Results & Response

All Districts reported that public priorities / concerns included invasive species – plant and insect

- *Districts entered into an agreement with Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry for educational outreach for invasive species. Some Districts provide technical assistance for invasive plant surveys / plans to landowners.*

Work with municipalities and communities where seasonal residents impact resource concerns in a condensed time frame

- *Soil and Water Conservation Districts offer information, workshops, and technical assistance to municipalities, lake associations, private road associations, and landowners to address this impact.*

In the southern part of the state (most populated), education in urban agriculture was identified as a need.

- *NACD Urban grant awarded to Cumberland County SWCD, offering opportunities for education and materials to underserved urban participants.*
- *York County SWCD provides educational, afterschool gardening programs for students*

# Gathering Public Info – Issues & Difficulties

## Challenges –

Online survey for information gathering:

- Open ended questions on the survey
- Structure questions to focus on intended data
- Provide training to Districts to make best use of 'county specific' questions
- Determine ways to engage public input in under-represented areas

For anticipated future surveys, need for:

- broad platform for public relations / outreach
- Ability for software to operate on all device types
- Identify current technology platforms