

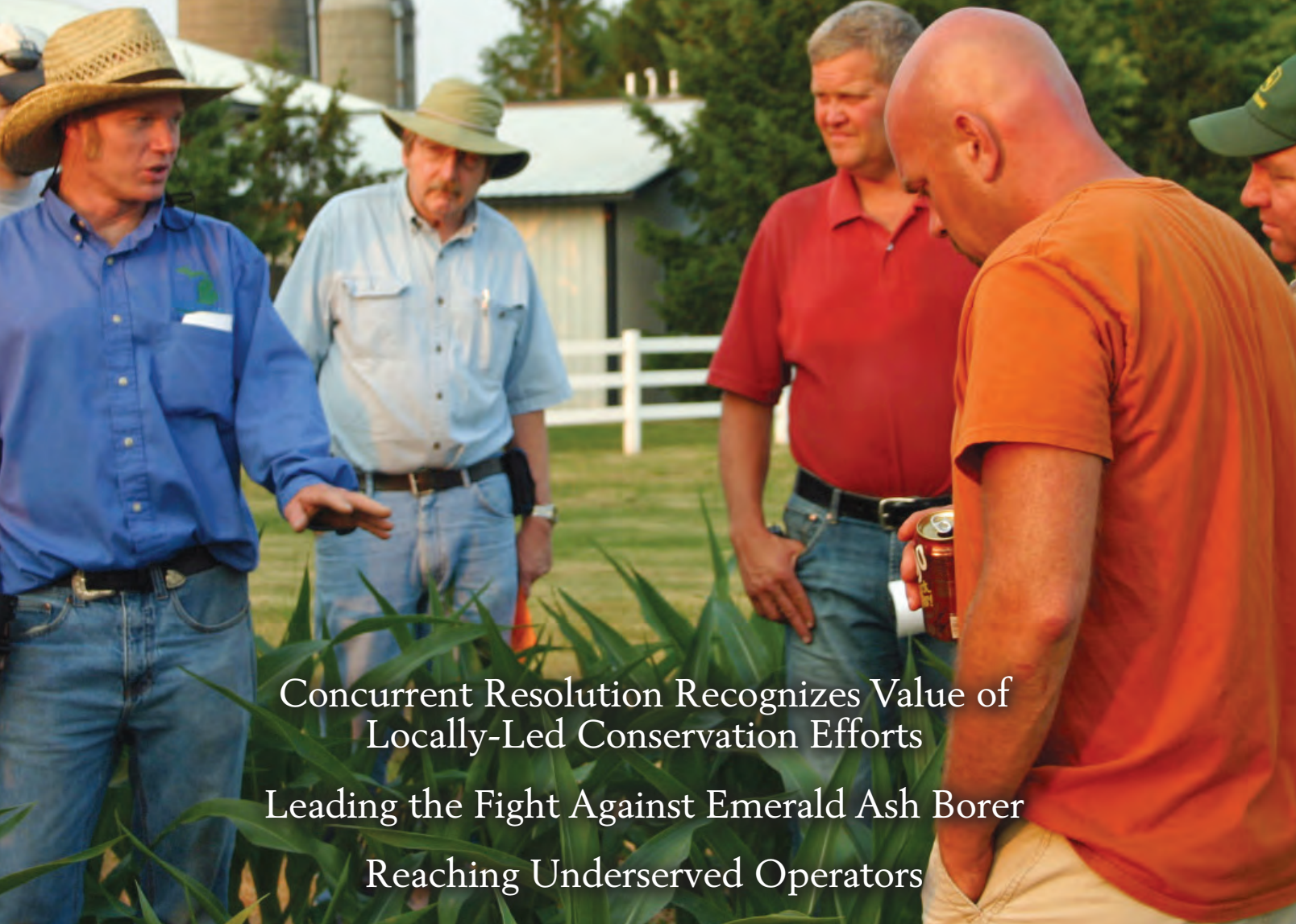


Spring 2015

RESOURCE

America's Voice for Conservation

Soil Health Mentoring *Across the Country*



Concurrent Resolution Recognizes Value of
Locally-Led Conservation Efforts

Leading the Fight Against Emerald Ash Borer

Reaching Underserved Operators



a letter from the president

Looking Ahead

As the new President of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), I would like to introduce myself to the general membership. I am a crop farmer from Darlington, Maryland, in a county of 250,000 people located near the beginning of the Chesapeake Bay and 10 miles from Interstate 95. I have been involved with conservation in one form or another since the 1980's.

My vision for NACD for the next two years is aggressive and multifaceted. I will be building upon the efforts of Past-President Garber who created a District Outlook Task Force to identify ways in which NACD can help every district in America be more successful. The Noble Foundation will be facilitating this process for NACD. By the summer of 2016, we will begin updating our long range plan, using the work of the task force as a baseline.

Another priority is the North American Envirothon. NACD, through the National Conservation Foundation (NCF), has taken on the responsibility of funding this program into the future. We have been working for several years at NACD to expand opportunities for foundations, corporations and individuals to support our efforts. What has become apparent is that we are soliciting for funds with our volunteer team, whereas other non-profits have professional fundraisers working for them. My goal is to work with NCF to create and fund a Development Director position to work for both groups.

Every district in America should have a way to directly bring in funds to support itself. I will be directing our consultants, the 9b group, to work with Congress to create a plan that would accomplish this, but at the same time not cost our cooperators any out-of-pocket expense.

Finally, we must continue to communicate and demonstrate to the public the message that our nation has the best conservation delivery system in the world. By farming and living in close proximity to Washington D.C., I am aware of the many embassies that request tours of farms in the Maryland and Virginia areas to see our farming methods and conservation practices firsthand. It's important that we are also communicating to our own citizens the first class job that we do in this country. Conservation is at a crossroads in this nation, and I ask that you help the national leadership team move us all forward together.

I look forward to working with you to achieve these and other goals while serving as your NACD President.

Sincerely,



Lee D. McDaniel

Lee McDaniel
NACD President

The RESOURCE

SPRING 2015

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Brent Van Dyke

First Vice President

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John McDonald

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Executive Board

Kimberly Lafleur Northeast Region

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about our cover

Mark Ludwig leads a farmer-to-farmer discussion on soil health. These farmer-to-farmer meetings are sponsored by the Allegan Conservation District in Michigan.

ceo's corner



Jeremy Peters
CEO, National Association
of Conservation Districts

Changes in the Air

Everywhere I look, I see reminders that spring time is upon us. The evenings are getting longer, the weather is warming, and with those changes all around Mother Nature is reawakening from her winter slumber. Here in Washington, D.C. that means cherry blossoms once again painting the national mall and witnessing the inspiration of youth—many of whom visit our nation's capital for the first time on spring field trips.

And across the country, in every community things are springing back to life. Fields are being prepared and planted with seeds of hope for another year's crop; bees, butterflies and other pollinators dutifully get to work performing their ancient symbiosis of pollination; and forests begin another season of steady, quiet growth. Everywhere the natural world is stirring and beckoning us outdoors.

And yet, with all its wonders and beauty, spring is always a fleeting season. It quickly passes those that miss its call. As conservation professionals, we cannot let our opportunities pass us by but instead we must get out and take advantage of every occasion to get good conservation on the land.

The season's change is a reminder that with every change comes opportunity for growth, rejuvenation and a bright future ahead. Your national association is no different and change has been underway as NACD transitions to a new CEO. Conservation districts have a rich heritage and history that has brought us to where we are, and our future awaits, full of life and opportunity.

Budgets remain tight and there are always challenges, but everywhere I look I see potential for NACD and for conservation districts. From our roots in promoting soil health, to our strong national, state and regional conservation partnerships, to new and emerging opportunities that we are just beginning to engage—conservation districts remain the trusted local resource for voluntary, incentive-based conservation.

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to serve as your next CEO and manage the national association during this time of transition and opportunity. I am proud to be working for conservation districts and everything you have accomplished, and I look forward to the many great things we will do together. The land again beckons us with opportunity this spring, will we miss it or will we answer the call?

Jeremy Peters

Jeremy Peters
CEO

Soil Health Mentoring Across the Country



Rocky Bateman from North Dakota leads soil health demonstration

Conservation districts have been asked to help lead the rapidly emerging soil health movement, and many have responded with gusto.

Shop Talks and Demonstration Sites in North Dakota

If you want to have a chat about soil health with fifth-generation producer Rocky Bateman in Morton County, North Dakota, one cup of coffee won't do. "You'll need a whole pot," he said. Bateman's 2,650-acre diversified cow-calf and grain operation has been a testing ground for soil health practices since 1998. He has detailed records that show production and economic gains over those years.

As a supervisor for the Morton County Soil Conservation District, Bateman wants to share what he has learned with producers across the county and beyond. He isn't alone. The district's Soil Health Mentor Program benefits from input and direction from district advisory supervisor Dr. Don Takaka, a retired researcher from the USDA

Agricultural Research Service's Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory in Mandan, North Dakota.

An Environmental Protection Agency 319 Grant is also boosting the effort, said Joseph Stegmiller, 319 watershed coordinator for the district.

The grant is aimed at increasing cover-crop adoption by producers to enhance water quality. Cover crops reduce runoff by improving infiltration. Other gains can come from nutrients the cover crops generate, which can reduce crop inputs.

Using a model developed by NRCS District Conservationist Michele Doyle, the Soil Health Mentoring Program seeks to raise awareness through producer-to-producer interaction. It includes "shop talks," which are just that. "We get together in somebody's shop and talk farming," Bateman said. The mentors are producers "who have a handle on soil health tools to

Feature Story

enhance the bottom line and improve productivity,” Bateman said. “They’re going over real well, especially as we see the economics of agriculture tightening up.”

Another key component of the program involves three-year cover crop demonstrations on 10 farming operations in the county. Each producer has volunteered to dedicate a field where cover crops are applied. Each field has a “check strip” with no cover crops. Soil samples are taken from the check strips and the cover crop fields.

The producers have varying degrees of soil health experience. Some have been at it for years, others are newcomers. Some have cropping operations, some integrate cattle and grazing.

The fields are tour sites, where producers see local application of soil health practices first-hand. At the end of the three-year program, another group of producers will rotate in.

The grant also provides cover crop cost-sharing for new adopters. But the mentoring piece is what most excites Bateman. “In my life, I’ve been able to learn with mentors. I found the sharpest people who could help me. Now, if I can mentor or help mentor someone, it’s all for progress,” he said.

In an area with low annual rainfall, about 14 inches, some questioned whether soil health practices would work. Bateman says his meticulous records prove it does. The key, he said, is to mimic nature. “We look at the native prairie sod as the ideal soil profile. When we look at its attributes, nature has built that soil from the top down. There is no tillage in native sod. It feeds itself. It takes care of itself and those who use it.”

Field Days and YouTube in Michigan

The Allegan Conservation District in Michigan has held a series of farmer-to-farmer discussions about soil health. The Soil Health Working Group programs have drawn good crowds. But, thanks to YouTube, the audience has grown by multiples.

The district posts videos of the gatherings on its YouTube channel, West Michigan Conservation. Mark Ludwig, District Chair, swears by the results. “Last time I pulled the metrics on it, we had over 70,000 minutes downloaded and watched by somebody,” he said. “It’s a heck of a tool and is under-utilized by districts. It literally costs us almost nothing to have that video up there.”

The farmer-to-farmer discussions were supported by a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant, administered by the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council, to address serious water quality concerns in the Macatawa watershed in western Lower Michigan.

“The process was to get farmers together on a farm. We’d have a meet-and-greet. Then I’d start a 20-questions dialogue with producers and encourage others to ask questions. We would do a walk and talk, maybe look at specialized equipment on the farm, learn how farmers were approaching lowering tillage and managing nutrients and discuss what their experience has been.”

It’s sometimes difficult to convince producers to take land out of production for conservation practices, Ludwig said. Soil health systems, however, keep land in production while achieving water quality goals. Ideally, they also increase productivity and profitability.

But Ludwig is quick to point out that the district doesn’t sugar coat the shift from conventional tillage to no-till, cover crops and related systems. “It takes between three to five years to get that soil tuned back up.” He tells producers that, especially early in that period, it may be hard to identify gains. Producers may need to practice a higher level of management in the transition, perhaps even “throw a little more nitrogen at those crops” in the first year as soil microorganisms gobble up what’s available. Once in place, soil health systems produce multiple benefits, he added.

“It’s not about accepting lower yields and making sacrifices for conservation. It’s more about building soil health for better productivity, and, more importantly, resiliency, especially during brutally dry times,” he said. When drought hit the Midwest a couple of years ago, Ludwig

saw this first-hand. “The no-till guys were hanging in there, much better than the conventional guys.”

The need for soil health systems will only grow, he added. “With what we’re up against with climate change and these big weather events, we have to start thinking about resiliency.”

He sees evidence of greater resiliency as soil health has marched into the mainstream. “What has been great is it’s no longer us talking about it. Corn and Soybean Digest and other mainstream publication have grabbed onto this message and are saying what those in the conservation community have been saying for a long time.”

The farmer-to-farmer sessions were popular, but the YouTube videos opened doors of opportunities to producers who shy away from gatherings or are too busy to attend. The videos let them learn on their own time. “These are not really slick, wonderful videos. But it’s interesting to see how much they are watched,” he said.

Conservation district employees and supervisors need to brush up on soil ecology to be conversant with their cooperators, he said. Publications like No-Till Magazine are a must for district offices promoting soil health, he added. The annual national No-Till Conference sponsored by No-Till Magazine is “probably the best crash course district employees can get. It is really a great way to quickly dive into the world of progressive farming techniques that are approachable for the average American farmer.”

Simple Works, Too

Many conservation districts are on tight budgets. As Wade Troutman, Washington State producer and NACD Executive Board member, said during a panel discussion at the 2015 annual meeting, districts don’t have to get too fancy.

Troutman is a supervisor for the Foster Creek Conservation District in Washington State. “We have 15 to 20 test plots, where we offer free coffee for producers and research scientists” to come together and share information. “It doesn’t have to be fancy,” Troutman says.

Troutman joined fellow producers and NACD Executive Board members Ron Brown of Kansas and Tim Palmer of Iowa on the panel, held during a Soil Health Workshop.



Mark Ludwig leads a farmer-to-farmer demonstration

Education a Key to Soil Health

This issue of *The Resource* features examples of conservation districts working to raise awareness about the importance of soil health practices. Districts across the country are using education to spread the word.

Education was one of the key common themes identified in the Soil Renaissance initiative. NACD joined an array of partners last year in identifying these themes and related strategies. The effort was sponsored by the Farm Foundation, NFP, and the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation.

Other key themes are research, economics and measurement. Future stories in *The Resource* will focus on these themes.

The Soil Renaissance initiative is intended to advance soil health and make it the cornerstone of land use management decisions. Soil Renaissance focuses on the role of soil health in vibrant, profitable and sustainable natural resource systems, as well as the critical importance of soil and soil health in meeting the challenge of feeding 9 billion people by 2050.

Interior Department Issues Strategy to Protect, Restore Sagebrush Lands for 2015 Fire Season

Secretarial Order 3336, signed by Secretary Jewell on January 5, 2015, calls for the development of a comprehensive, science-based strategy to reduce the size, severity and cost of rangeland fires; address the spread of cheatgrass and other invasive species; and position wildland fire management resources for more effective rangeland fire response. The Order calls for the Department's creation of an implementation plan, initial report, and final report with the opportunity for stakeholders and partners to provide public comment on each step of the process.

The Order's Implementation plan, completed January 31, 2015, establishes a roadmap to accomplish the objectives within the order. The Initial Report, released March 10, 2015, outlines actions and activities that the Department, in collaboration with partners and interested stakeholders,

can take prior to the onset of the 2015 Western wildfire season. The recommended actions in the Initial Report involve targeted, strategic investments of Departmental resources to immediately enhance the management of rangeland fire in specific portions of the Great Basin—this report identified Soil and Water Conservation Districts as a crucial partner to assist state and federal efforts to protect, restore and conserve vital sagebrush landscapes and productive rangelands. The particular focus of this Order is in the Great Basin region of Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Oregon and California.

For more information about Secretarial Order 3336 and how your local district can get involved, please contact NACD Western Issues Specialist, Ted Ramsey or visit www.forestsandrangelands.gov

Concurrent Resolution Recognizes the Value of Locally-Led Conservation Efforts

NACD is excited to announce that the concurrent resolution we supported in 2014 (S. Con. Res. 39 and H. Con. Res. 95) has been reintroduced with some changes in the 114th Congress. Senator Donnelly (D-IN) and Senator Boozman (R-AR) sponsored the legislation in the Senate which has been designated S. Con. Res. 10 and they're pushing for its passage through the Senate Agriculture Committee. The House version H. Con. Res. 30 has been introduced by Congressman Thompson (R-PA) and Congresswoman Lujan Grisham (D-NM) who currently serve as the Chair and Ranking Member respectively for the Conservation and Forestry Subcommittee of the House Committee on Agriculture.

The legislation supports healthy soil and voluntary agricultural conservation practices. Specifically, the legislation supports the designation of an International Year of Soils and encourages locally led soil conservation. Additionally, it encourages public participation in activities celebrating the importance of soils to the United States; and supports soil conservation through partnerships with local soil and water conservation districts and landowner participation in federal conservation programs.

Please ask your Members of Congress to sign-on as cosponsors in support of this positive legislation!

FY16 Budget and Appropriations

Every year around March and April, Congress begins the process of formulating a budget and setting spending levels for the coming fiscal year known as appropriations. NACD works to influence this process by advocating grassroots positions in support of key conservation funding.

This year's budget process for fiscal year 2016 (FY16) has been dominated by discussion of what is known as "reconciliation." Reconciliation is an option budget committees can use to set specific funding targets and then require other committees like the Agriculture committees to make cuts to achieve those targets.

Just last year, both Senate and House Agriculture committees cut \$23 billion in funding—\$6 billion of which came directly from conservation funding—by reauthorizing Farm Bill programs in the Agricultural Act of 2014. Because of that fact, NACD and a large coalition of agriculture, conservation, forestry and nutrition groups have worked hard to oppose reconciliation for farm bill programs including conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Watershed Rehabilitation and the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

As NACD President Lee McDaniel puts it, "Conservation has already gone through cuts in a Farm Bill where the ink is barely dry. Conservation should not be subject to additional, disproportionate cuts. With upcoming budget decisions looming it is more important than ever to let Congress know the value of conservation in their local communities."

In addition to protecting conservation programs from additional cuts, NACD is also working to ensure strong FY16 funding for discretionary appropriations. This work

includes advocacy for conservation technical assistance, state and private forestry and section 319 nonpoint source grants. Each of these priorities result in stronger delivery of conservation at the local level and ensure tools are available for conservation districts to work with landowners on a variety of landscapes.

Hundreds of conservation district officials from across the country joined together in Washington, D.C. on March 18 to participate in the NACD Spring Fly-In and educate their Members of Congress about these important programs. This effort was an excellent start and a strong showing, but the conservation message must continue to be delivered throughout the year. Lawmakers need constant feedback on how their decisions impact local communities.

Looking ahead, the annual budget and appropriations process culminates by September 30 when the federal fiscal year ends. Congress has to take action by that date to ensure federal agencies remain operational. This requirement means either the appropriations bills must be completed and signed by the President by then, or a short term funding bill known as a Continuing Resolution (CR) must be passed.

We need your help to ensure strong funding for conservation! NACD has resources available online including issue papers and letters that your district can use as templates to educate your Members of Congress about the value of conservation for local natural resources. Now is an excellent opportunity to visit NACD's Policy pages at www.nacdnet.org/policy to learn more about what you can do today!

NACD Appreciation Banquet Honorees

The NACD closed out the 2015 Annual Meeting with its Appreciation Banquet. The banquet is an opportunity for NACD to recognize the many outstanding individual efforts of conservation leaders from across the country.

The awards kicked off with the presentation of the NCDEA Awards John Finch of Nash Soil and Water Conservation District in North Carolina and retiring Southeast Region Executive Board Member, received the award for outstanding district board member. Peter Vigil of the Taos Soil and Water Conservation District of New Mexico was the award winner for outstanding district employee.

One of the most prestigious awards of the evening is the NACD/NRCS Olin Sims Conservation Leadership Award. This year's award recipient was Mike Thralls. Thralls was recognized for his superior service to the conservation community in promoting and leading conservation on private lands.

Rounding out the awards ceremony was the presentation of NACD's top National Awards. The NACD Friend of Conservation award was presented to Charlie Shafer, president of Agri Drain Corporation



The family of Mike Thralls accepts the Olin Sims Conservation Leadership Award from Earl Garber and NRCS Chief Jason Weller

and longtime supporter of soil and water conservation in Iowa and across the nation. Shafer has supported NACD as an exhibitor at the Conservation Expo, a sponsor of the NACD Annual Meeting, and by serving as the CTIC representative on the NACD Executive Board.

NACD's Distinguished Service Award went to Don and Mary Jane Spickler. Don sadly passed away in the spring of last year, but his legacy to conservation will long be remembered. Mary Jane accepted the award for her and Don's lifelong contributions. The Spicklers have been actively involved with conservation districts at the local, state and national level for over 42 years. While Don advanced from serving on his local district board to state and national positions, Mary Jane advanced in her position of involvement alongside Don through the NACD Auxiliary, supporting the soil and water stewardship program and the NACD poster contest. The Spicklers also developed a vision for the National Envirothon which they supported financially and through the dedication of their time and talent.

The final award of the night was the President's Award which was presented to Tim Palmer. Palmer is an NACD Executive Board Member and farmer from Iowa. Palmer is also Vice Chair of Madison County SWCD, NACD CTIC board representative, and serves on a number of committees within NACD.



Mary Jane Spickler and her son accept the Distinguished Service Award from Earl Garber

NACD Hosts Successful Spring Fly-In!

The NACD Spring Fly-In was a great success! More than 100 soil and water conservation district supervisors, employees and state association representatives gathered in Washington, D.C. on March 18 to meet face-to-face with their local representatives and to promote the shared values of conservation districts across the nation.

The event kicked off with breakfast at the Capitol featuring remarks from NACD President Lee McDaniel, NACD Interim CEO Jeremy Peters, consultants from the 9b group, and other NACD leaders and staff, who provided insight into effectively communicating with representatives in Congress. NACD staff and leadership also briefed members on our advocacy materials and provided updates on policy issues affecting agriculture.

“Now is an important time for conservation districts to make their voices heard,” said NACD President Lee McDaniel. “Conservation has already gone through sequestration and cuts in a Farm Bill where the ink is barely dry. With upcoming budget decisions looming it is more important than ever to let Congress know the value of conservation in their local communities.”

Members spent the remainder of the day visiting hundreds of legislators to share their priorities on behalf of NACD on a number of issues including: FY 2016 appropriations and budget, Farm Bill implementation, a concurrent resolution recognizing locally-led conservation and soil health as well as state-specific issues.



Newly elected NACD President Lee McDaniel at the 2015 Spring Fly-In on Capitol Hill

The fly-in wrapped up with a Congressional reception on Capitol Hill where members go 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 of which are members of the House Agriculture Committee, attended the evening's event and spoke about the important work of conservation districts and locally-led conservation.

NACD would like to thank the reception sponsors for a successful event: CHS, U.S. Sugar Corporation, the International Certified Crop Adviser program, the Society for Range Management, U.S. Cattlemen's Association and the National Conservation District Employees Association.



Photo by Shawn Farrell

NACD Participates in the 20th Annual Commodity Classic in Phoenix

NACD President Lee McDaniel represented NACD at the 20th Annual Commodity Classic in Phoenix, Arizona February 26-28. The convention is open to all friends of corn, soybeans, wheat and sorghum—from growers and member associations to agribusiness and farm media. This year's Classic set record attendance with more than 7,900 participants and a huge assortment of exhibitors throughout the trade show. NACD was able to interact with thousands of producers interested in improving their operations and conserving the natural resource base.

Conservation was a common theme throughout the convention with sessions like "Using Cover Crops to Boost Performance and Resilience of Commodity Cropping Systems," "Nitrogen Management: A Common Sense Approach" and "Farmers of the Soil Health Partnership—A Panel to Discuss Soil Health Contributions to Productivity, Profitability, and Sustainability."

During keynote remarks, USDA Secretary Vilsack announced that a one-time extension will be provided to producers for the new safety-net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill, known as Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC). The final day to update yield history or reallocate base acres has

been extended one additional month to March 31, 2015. The final day for farm owners and producers to choose ARC or PLC coverage also remains March 31, 2015.



NACD Announces New CEO



Last week NACD announced that former Chief Operations Officer (COO) Jeremy Peters will be taking on the role of Chief Executive Officer. Peters has been serving as interim CEO since January and will continue to manage the association and lead advocacy efforts on behalf of the nation's 3,000 conservation districts in the official capacity of CEO.

"NACD is extremely fortunate to have an 'in-house' candidate that understands the needs of our association," said NACD President Lee McDaniel. "Jeremy is a humble and sincere young man who knows our staff, our partners and many of our members, and understands the issues facing conservation districts today. His strong work ethic, passion for our mission, and ability to follow through on our various projects will serve NACD well in our future endeavors. We are pleased to welcome Jeremy as our new CEO."

Peters rejoined NACD as COO in October 2014. Prior to that

time, he worked for American Farmland Trust (AFT) where he led AFT's efforts on Capitol Hill as the Director of Federal Policy. Earlier in his career, Peters served as NACD's Legislative Affairs Manager, and directed climate, conservation and energy programs for National Farmers Union. He has also previously worked on Capitol Hill for former Congressman Earl Pomeroy, D – N.D., who sat on the House Agriculture Committee and the Ways and Means Committee.

"I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to serve NACD and the nation's conservation districts as CEO," said Peters. "With a rapidly growing world population, this is an important time for natural resource conservation. I look forward to working with NACD's officers, elected leaders and staff, and our national partners, to promote and advance voluntary, incentive-based conservation solutions."

Peters grew up on his family's farm raising beef cattle in rural southwest Virginia. He holds B.A. degrees in Political Science and History from Emory and Henry College, as well as a Masters in Public Administration from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Reaching Underserved Operators

To make sure every acre counts, conservation districts need to reach out to underserved customers. These underserved customers make up a broad and diverse base of potential customers that need to be properly engaged when assessing local resource needs. The following are two examples of how some conservation districts are successfully engaging this underserved customer base.

Outreach to Non-English Speaking Poultry Growers in Maryland

The Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts has reached out to more than 100 Korean and Vietnamese poultry growers in the Chesapeake Bay region with critical information about conservation practices, water quality and cost-share programs.

Print materials are translated into Korean and Vietnamese with the help of growers who are respected in their communities. "We were really surprised to discover just how many non-English poultry growers were on Maryland's eastern shore," said project consultant Gerald Talbert. To make the project work, it was necessary to gain acceptance and respect with the community, he said. A key part of this establishing a strong dialogue with respected community leaders.

The translated materials will be shared with Extension and NRCS, state and national Civil Rights Committees for use elsewhere in the country and territories.

Contact Gerald Talbert at gft@gtalbert.com for more information.

Focus on Women Ag Operators in North Dakota

Women comprise an increasing share of farm operators and owners in the U.S. Conservation districts in North Dakota are reaching out to this growing group with programs and tours.

About 20 districts, in partnership with NRCS, are involved in these efforts, said Rhonda Vetsch, District Secretary at the Emmons County Conservation District in Linton, North Dakota. One example is a "Women in Agriculture Night" -- a program that blends education and entertainment. Motivational speakers are sometimes featured in addition to agency representatives who provide information about conservation programs. The local Farm Service Agency offices help in these efforts by providing names of women farm operators as potential invitees.

USDA says the number of farms run by women in the past three decades has tripled. "Our Women in Agriculture Program encompasses all female producers and wives, whether they're renting the land or operating it themselves," Vetsch said. Some end up at the district office seeking more information and signing up for programs.

Contact Rhonda Vetsch at Rhonda.Vetsch@ND.nacdnet.net for more information.



Every Acre Counts

Leading the Fight Against Emerald Ash Borer

Minnesota's Cottonwood Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has taken a lead role in the fight against emerald ash borer, which infests—and ultimately destroys—ash trees.

The district's work began more than a decade ago in Mountain Lake, where it helped conduct a tree inventory on city controlled or owned land (boulevards, city parks, etc.) and contributed funding for replacement trees. Through these efforts, and an ongoing partnership with the Minnesota Conservation Corps, the district has helped the community reduce the local ash population. Not long ago, ash accounted for 26 percent of the trees within the Mountain Lake urban forest; today it accounts for 16 percent.

Cottonwood SWCD also has helped reduce the ash count in the neighboring community of Windom. The district worked with the City Council to establish a tree commission and conduct a survey to examine tree species, hazardous trees and open planting spots. Over the past five years the district has helped plant more than 350 trees. Landowners can pay 25 dollars to have a six- to eight-foot potted tree planted on their property.

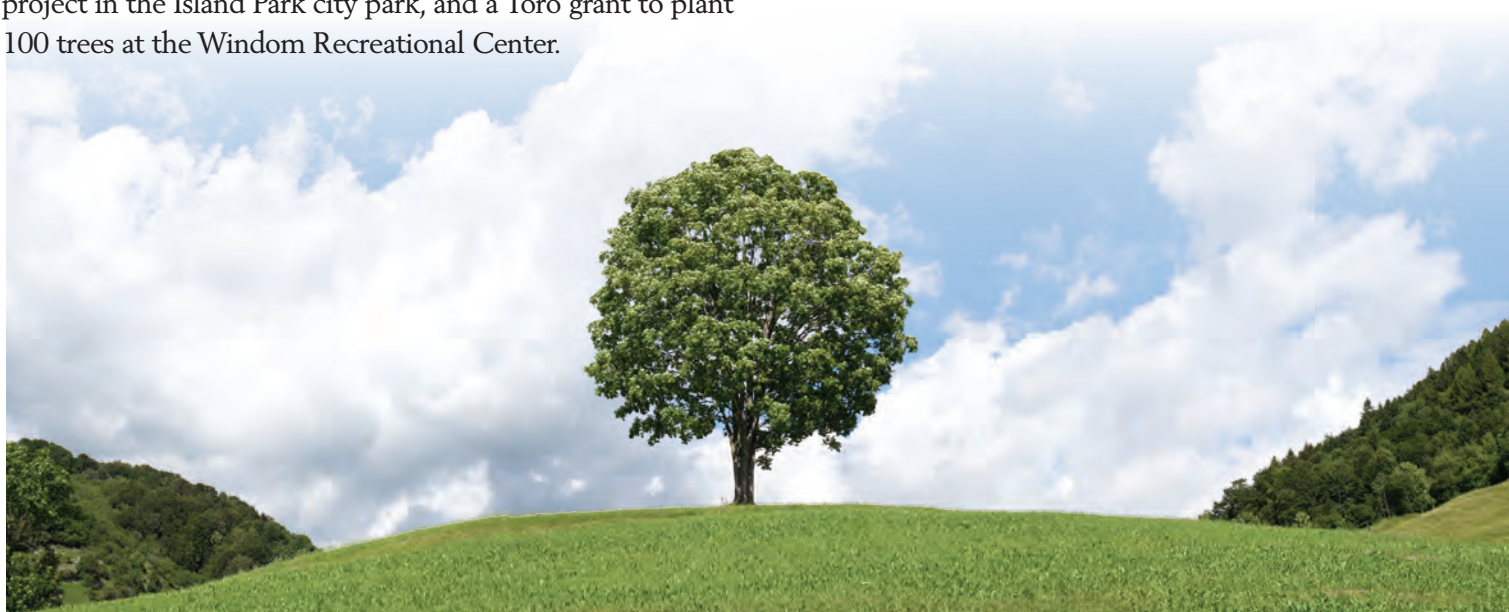
Project work includes separate grant funding to plant trees in the Windom Plunge Pool Project, a riparian improvement project in the Island Park city park, and a Toro grant to plant 100 trees at the Windom Recreational Center.



Windom stormwater pond in Island Park

Diversity is critical to successful urban forest replanting efforts. In both cities, Cottonwood SWCD abides by the 10-20-30 rule—no more than 10 percent of a tree type, 20 percent of a genus, or 30 percent of a tree family.

To learn more about Cottonwood SWCD's urban forestry programs, contact District Technician David Bucklin at david.bucklin@windomnet.com.



Spokane Conservation District at Work

Did you know NACD is heading to Spokane, Washington for its summer meeting, July 11 – 13? Spokane Conservation District (SCD) is a shining example of the power of locally-led conservation across a diverse landscape and customer base.

Located on the Spokane River in eastern Washington, Spokane is part of the Inland Northwest region, consisting of eastern Washington, northern Idaho, northwestern Montana, and northeastern Oregon. Spokane lies in the Columbia Plateau ecoregion on the eastern edge of the basaltic Channeled Scablands steppe—a transition area between the barren landscape of the Columbia Basin and the coniferous forests to the east; and to the south, the lush prairies and rolling hills of the Palouse.

There is a lot to see around this beautiful, resource-rich area. Here are just a few highlights of SCD's diverse work servicing urban, agriculture and forested regions within its boundaries.

Septic System Loan Program

Among SCD's newest programs is one to help landowners protect water quality through on-site septic system repairs and replacements. This program's funding comes from a state revolving loan, so the taxpayers of Washington benefit from the financial return on their conservation investment. Altogether the SCD disbursed \$93,000 in loans and \$32,000 in grants on 36 projects in Spokane County addressing septic related water quality issues.

Direct Seed/No Till Loan Program

Over the last 20 years, SCD has offered funding to purchase no-till and direct seed equipment, resulting in more than \$25 million in low-interest loans. Most recently, SCD

developed a program using a Cross Slot no-till drill and tractor to provide custom seeding services, especially to those farmers putting Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres

back into production. More than 7,000 acres were planted with the drill in 2014, virtually eliminating soil erosion from those acres.



Photo by Chuck Schmidt

Livestock and Land Program

Through its new Livestock and Land program—a combination of grant and loan funds made available to producers in Spokane County—SCD provided technical assistance to 27 farmers and installed 19 Best Management Practices on seven different properties. All of the projects emphasize protecting water quality by keeping animal waste out. They also benefit landowners by streamlining chores, reducing mud and improving animal health.

Vets on the Farm

Another SCD-led program, "Operation New Mission: Vets on the Farm," gives returning Veterans a way to transition back into civilian life by providing them with opportunities for education, partnership, and employment in conservation based agricultural industries. Spokane has received an outpouring of support from partners including the Upper Columbia RC&D, Northwest Farm Credit Services, WSU Extension–Spokane, Spokane Community College, Spokane County Farm Bureau, Wounded Warrior Project, and private donations of land.



Photo by Lynn Suckow

Partnering for Success

2015 NACD Annual Meeting Recap

NACD would like to extend a special thanks to the Louisiana delegation for hosting the 2015 NACD Annual Meeting in New Orleans, bringing a local flavor, creating a festive atmosphere, and showcasing the Louisiana area. This year's meeting presented a unique opportunity for almost 1,000 conservationists from across the country to gather together to share ideas, learn and network with partnering organizations, companies and government agencies

This was a record-breaking year for the Conservation Expo with a total of 34 exhibitors seeking to connect conservation districts and local leaders with new ideas and technologies, potential for projects and partnerships, and supporting resources.

This dynamic program included presentations from a diverse group of speakers from across the nation, providing attendees with a chance to dig deeper into the issues, projects and programs facing conservation districts today. If you were unable to attend this year's meeting or if you missed a session, presentations and videos can be found on the NACD website.



2015 NACD Annual Meeting Conservation Expo

NACD thanks the following sponsors for their support of the 2015 NACD Annual Meeting: Case IH, USDA NRCS, Verdesian, John Deere, US Forest Service, LG Seeds, Monsanto, Bayer CropScience, Syngenta, Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts, Plum Creek, Bob Warner, Agri Drain, Apache Corporation, National Farmers Union, and Scotts Miracle-Gro. Their investments helped to make this year's NACD Annual Meeting a great success.

For more information on the exhibitors, presentations, sponsors, and more, please visit the NACD website at www.nacdnet.org/events/annualmeeting. To become a sponsor or exhibitor at the 2016 NACD Annual Meeting in Reno, Nevada, please contact Beth Mason, beth-mason@nacdn.net.

Pack-a-Book

NACD held its 8th annual Pack-a-Book project at the New Orleans Annual meeting.

Andy Lewis from the KIPP Central City Primary received the over 160 books donated by conference participants.

This NACD community service project has provided over 1250 books on natural resources to local schools in our annual meeting location.



Andy Lewis, Business Operations Manager, KIPP Central Primary, LA and Ron Brown, NACD Executive Board and Stewardship and Education Committee, Vice Chairman

NACD, Partners Plan for Future

NACD and its partners are cooperating in efforts to prepare for conservation challenges and opportunities on several fronts.

During NACD's 2015 Annual Meeting, 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, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies and the National Conservation District Employees Association signed the MOA. It encourages strong national, regional, state, and local partnerships to cooperate and coordinate in the delivery of conservation assistance to private landowners.

The national partners are now encouraging state-level

partners to plan for the future by adopting similar MOAs, if they don't already have such agreements. State partners are being encouraged to have dialogues about how to strengthen their partnerships and delivery systems.

"We see a bright future for those districts and state associations that are planning for the future along with their partners and adapting to the challenges facing natural resources conservation across America," said NACD President Lee McDaniel.

NACD and its partners also have other future oriented initiatives under way. One of NACD's is a District Outlook Task Force. Two other examples are working together with NRCS and partners to assure implementation of NRCS' Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI) and a new Conservation Planning Initiative.



Outgoing NACD President Earl Garber signs MOA agreement along with other members of the National Conservation Partnership

Another Perspective

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Working with Partners to Save the Monarch Butterfly

Monarch butterflies were once a staple sight in American backyards, farm fields, and public lands. However over the last 20 years, their numbers have declined precipitously by over 90 percent. Many threats loom for the butterfly, especially the loss of native milkweed. The wide-scale adoption of herbicide-resistant corn and soy crops has drastically changed the agricultural landscape, once a vibrant source of breeding and migrating habitat for monarchs.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with a diverse variety of partners to restore and enhance habitat, increase native seed availability, and engage communities to help save the monarch. This year alone, the Service will work with partners to restore and enhance more than 200,000 acres of habitat for monarchs and other pollinators on public and private lands, especially through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program working side-by-side with the Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service. The agency has also partnered with the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation to create a Monarch Conservation Fund to provide millions of dollars to key conservation projects.

The agency's monarch conservation strategy focuses on three key geographic areas:

- Spring breeding areas in Texas and Oklahoma
- Midwest summer breeding areas in America's "Corn Belt"
- Areas west of the Rockies for the western monarch population





Photo by USDA-NRCS

The collective efforts of federal, state, tribal and local governments—along with private industry, non-profits, universities and anyone with a backyard—will be needed to tackle this enormous challenge. Local conservation districts play a critical role in leveraging natural resource management programs to benefit monarchs and a host of other pollinators who also depend on native flowering plants for food and habitat.

In February, the agency launched a public awareness campaign and a website at www.fws.gov/savethemonarch. From pollinator gardens on Service lands to schoolyard

habitats, the agency will work with such organizations as the National Wildlife Federation to get communities excited about the Monarch butterfly. Local actions matter, from planting milkweed to participating in citizen science monitoring projects. At the end of a decade, the collective actions of local efforts will be what will have saved the Monarch butterfly.

Michael Gale is a Special Assistant with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service working on monarch conservation and other natural resource issues.



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