



**Conservation districts are the backbone of private lands conservation in America. NACD requests support for conservation districts to deliver assistance in communities, ensuring natural resource conservation while protecting critical infrastructure and our food system during the current crisis.**

## **Expand FFCRA and CARES Act Relief to State and Local Governments**

The second relief package passed by Congress, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), included relief for small employers that provides a dollar-for-dollar reimbursement through a refundable tax credit for paid sick and family leave costs required under the law. Additionally, the Paycheck Protection Program included within the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) was created to allow small employers to pay their workers rather than let them go.

Despite Congress' intent to help smaller employers who may be struggling through the current economic crisis, small public-sector entities, such as most conservation districts, are not eligible for this relief and are facing the possibility of laying off employees at a time when local economies can least afford it. **NACD requests future packages include relief for state and local entities such as conservation districts through extension of relief provided in the FFCRA and CARES Act to state and local government entities or through similar policy.**

## **Streamlined USDA Hiring**

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was authorized at the beginning of FY 2020 to fill an estimated 1,700-person staffing shortfall and was given limited direct hiring authority to accelerate hiring of employees to serve customers across the country. Although some progress has been made, **NACD requests that the USDA be authorized to substantially increase the amount of direct hiring authority available to NRCS**, so that the agency can help fill vacancies in local USDA Service Centers, both aiding local economies and providing needed customer service to our nation's farmers and landowners.

## **Conservation Technical Assistance Flexibility**

NRCS receives part of its annual funding from discretionary dollars appropriated each year from the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program. This program provides for activities including conservation planning, farm bill program implementation and partnership agreements and is flexible enough to allow NRCS to target assistance and work toward the greatest conservation needs on the ground. This program promotes the soil health and water quality practices that ensure our nation's food system is safe, abundant and available during today's challenging times, while also providing flexibility to educate the public about conservation activities that individuals can safely engage in at home.

CTA is also an economic engine on the ground that provides jobs and improves our nation's natural resources while mitigating future natural disasters such as flooding and wildfire prevention. The CTA program is flexible enough in statute to meet a wide array of needs associated with the current crisis within rural and urban communities and supports a diverse partnership of conservation delivery at the federal, state and local level. **NACD requests an additional \$75 million for the CTA program in any stimulus package to meet these needs.**



## Watershed Operations and Watershed Rehabilitation

Watershed Operations and Flood Prevention and Watershed Rehabilitation programs authorize NRCS to work with local sponsors to plan and install watershed protection and improvement projects. These infrastructure projects aid in flood prevention, water quality and water quantity protection, agricultural water management, fish and wildlife habitat protection, and public recreation development. Every year, this system protects over 47 million Americans and saves an estimated \$2 billion through flood damage prevention.

Additional funding for these projects in a COVID-19 stimulus package would not only provide much-needed funds to construct new and repair existing structures but would also provide a needed economic boost in rural communities during this time. **NACD requests that a future infrastructure package include substantial investments in these programs and a temporary waiver of the local cost sharing requirement to ensure these additional funds can be quickly delivered on the ground.**

## Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 319 Nonpoint Source Grants

EPA grants fund critically important infrastructure projects to address water quality at the local level. In some areas, the program is significantly oversubscribed and additional funding could be put to work immediately. In other areas, matching funding requirements are too stringent for otherwise impactful projects. Additional funding for this program in a COVID-19 stimulus package would improve water quality while generating economic activity and creating jobs. **NACD requests substantial investment in 319 Nonpoint Source Grants and a temporary waiver of match requirements to ensure additional funds can be used quickly and effectively.**