



## Spotlight on Conservation: Keeping Working Lands Working with Conservation Easements

Land conversion and the loss of working lands to residential subdivisions, solar arrays, data centers, and other development are concerns NACD hears from conservation districts across the country. One tactic to keep working lands working is to permanently protect them through conservation easements.

Conservation easements help landowners voluntarily protect their land from development. A conservation easement retains the land's current use (e.g., farming, ranching, recreation) and the natural resources, habitat, and other benefits it provides. An easement protects the land against changes to local zoning laws and future development pressures.

"I love the farm and the cattle," said **Bob Warner**, farmer, rancher, and NACD Board Member. "It's meant to be farmed, and I don't want it to become an industrial site."

Focused on this goal, Warner works with local and national partners and programs, like Colorado Open Lands and NRCS's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, to keep his working lands working, protecting their agricultural value through conservation easements and receiving financial compensation for doing so.

"Conservation districts can be helpful to landowners interested in conservation easements by assisting or being in a position to sponsor an easement," said Warner. In Kansas and Virginia, two conservation districts are embracing these roles.

The **Kearny County Conservation District** recently became the first district in Kansas to hold a conservation easement. The easement process was set into motion about five years ago when a landowner in the county approached Ducks Unlimited about placing land in a conservation easement. The landowner's love for wildlife and desire to permanently

protect habitat provided the motivation to pursue an easement. Ducks Unlimited secured a grant provided by the North American Wetlands Conservation Act for the bargain sale acquisition of the conservation easement. The easement perpetually protects the property's conservation values and was deeded to the Kearny County Conservation District at closing.



Photo provided by Ducks Unlimited

In Virginia, the **Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)** has been a conservation easement partner to their local land trust, the Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust, for years. In 2004, the land trust approached the Eastern Shore SWCD, and together they now co-hold 28 conservation easements.

"The number of easements we hold together is a big success," said **Carmie Ross**, District Manager for the Eastern Shore SWCD.

Conservation districts have a long history of helping producers and land stewards reach their conservation goals. As the threat of land conversion and the loss of working lands in communities grows, one way districts can help is by fostering awareness, understanding, and partnerships for voluntary conservation easements on private lands.

Learn more about conservation easements, including common misconceptions, in the extended blog post at [www.nacdnet.org/blog/](http://www.nacdnet.org/blog/).

## Join Us in San Antonio, Texas, for NACD's 80th Annual Meeting



NACD invites you to saddle up and join us in San Antonio, Texas, for the 2026 Annual Meeting! Hosted with the **Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts**, our 80th meeting will take place on **February 15-19**.

Hear from great speakers like Chet Garner, the creator, host, and executive producer of *The Daytripper*, an 18-time Emmy-award-winning Texas travel show, and Aaron Alejandro, Executive Director of the Texas FFA Foundation. Learn from fellow conservationists and earn continuing education credits by attending some of the meeting's nearly 60 breakout sessions. Experience more of San Antonio by joining a tour of the San Antonio Food Bank's farms on February 19.



Online registration is open through **January 26**, so act now to secure your spot! Details and exclusive hotel discounts can be found by scanning the QR code with your smartphone. If you have questions, contact [events@nacdn.net](mailto:events@nacdn.net).

## Save the Date: Spring Fly In



NACD invites members to join us for the annual Spring Fly-In scheduled for **March 25**. This is your opportunity to speak directly to members of Congress and share the voluntary, locally led conservation work being done in your area. Monitor our Spring Fly-In webpage for more information.

## What's Up in Washington? Government Affairs Updates

Lately, the NACD Government Affairs (GA) team has been focused on:

- Federal budget allocations and policy certainty for conservation programs,
- Preserving key federal funding streams,
- Highlighting the impacts of administrative actions on local conservation delivery, and
- Providing updates and action items to NACD members.

This work combines direct engagement with lawmakers, documentation of local impacts, and mobilization of conservation districts.



### Advocacy

Much of the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2026 was overshadowed by the federal government shutdown which closed some conservation district offices and delayed necessary reviews and approvals for technical assistance. NACD's GA team

## Membership Corner: NACD Membership Updates

### Leadership Tips and Tricks with NACD Presidents Association

Join us for our next Conservation Coffee on **January 15 at 3:00 p.m. ET** with Karl Jensen and Dr. Carol Knight. These former state association presidents will share how they've built partnerships, sought out mentorship from other leaders, and provide tips for applying these skills in your own leadership journey.

Our guest speakers will also discuss opportunities for you to step into national leadership and help you understand how to manage your time as a volunteer board member effectively.

Sign up at [nacdnet.org/webinars/](http://nacdnet.org/webinars/) or view the recorded session and

supplied templates for contacting congressional representatives, collected responses to a shutdown impacts survey to highlight and convey effects to both Congress and federal agencies, and engaged USDA leadership to request limited NRCS office access so districts could continue essential conservation work during a critical time.

NACD continues active engagement with Congress on passage of a Farm Bill with a fully funded conservation title, and supports continued efforts to simplify application, permitting, and funding processes.

The GA team also responded to numerous proposed and enacted changes to environmental and management regulations, emphasizing the effectiveness of conservation districts and the value of locally led partnerships.

### Looking Ahead

With USDA fully funded through September 30, 2026, but a looming January 31 deadline for other agencies, NACD will closely monitor Department of the Interior appropriations impacting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (with an emphasis on Section 319), the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management.

many of our previous Conservation Coffees on our YouTube channel: @ [nacdconserve](https://www.youtube.com/nacdconserve).

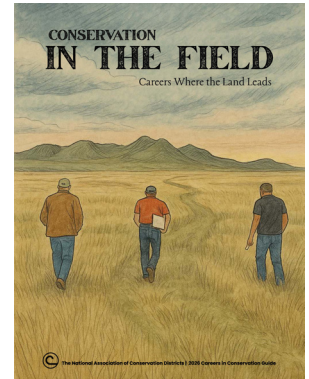
### Your Membership Contribution

NACD advocates for natural resource conservation policies and programs that advance the work of conservation districts across the country and in overseas territories.

Your membership dues support this work and ensure the ongoing success of conservation districts. Thank you for contributing dues to NACD in Fiscal Year 2026. If you are still considering and need help understanding our membership benefits please reach out to us at [membership@nacdnet.org](mailto:membership@nacdnet.org).

## New Resource Spotlight: Conservation Careers Guide

NACD is excited to introduce Conservation in the Field: Careers Where the Land Leads, a new high school level guide connecting students to real world conservation careers. This resource highlights careers supported by conservation districts and NRCS, including field, technical, scientific, and administrative roles. The guide includes career profiles, hands on projects, and classroom ready activities designed for formal and informal education settings. It is a valuable tool for districts engaging youth in workforce development and conservation leadership.



Access this and other district resources at [nacdnet.org/general-resources/district-guides](http://nacdnet.org/general-resources/district-guides).

## Get Ready for Stewardship Week 2026 - Soil. Where it All Begins

The 2026 Stewardship Week, to be held on **April 26 – May 3**, will focus on the foundation of all natural resources with the theme "Soil. Where It All Begins."



New K-8 education materials explore soil science, land stewardship, and conservation practices through hands on, adaptable activities. Designed for use by conservation districts, these resources support locally led education with a focus on the essential role soil plays in food systems, water quality, and healthy communities throughout the US and its territories. Materials are available now on the NACD Marketplace at [nacdnet.org/store](http://nacdnet.org/store).



Want more frequent updates from NACD? Subscribe to our weekly email newsletter eResource at [bit.ly/NACD-eResource](https://bit.ly/NACD-eResource).