

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
REPORT TO THE
LOWER PLATTE SOUTH NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT
August 26, 2020**

PERSONNEL:

- Peyton Harsin has been hired as a Contract Soil Conservation Technician in the Weeping Water Field Office. He graduated in May from Doane University with a B.S. in Environmental Science with Agriculture and Natural Resources emphasis and a minor in Computer Studies.
- USDA Service Center Operations – Service Centers continue to be closed to the public to avoid face-to-face interactions with customers. Producers may contact their local office to make arrangements to conduct business by alternate means, such as over the phone, electronically, or by mail. Staff will continue to complete field work while following social distancing guidelines.

LAND TREATMENT:

- The Conservation/Resources Technicians are currently finishing certification and payment on Summer 2020 applications and beginning design on fall projects. John Albert and Evan Sisel have also been training and working on AutoCAD to complete a pond dam design.
- We have fewer applications this year due decreased foot traffic in NRCS Service Centers. Staff have been following up with producers to promote the Land Treatment and Cover Crop Programs to encourage more applications.

PROGRAMS:

- EQIP – Staff are finishing up with EQIP obligation for the FY2020 sign-up. The following contracts have been obligated so far:
 - Lancaster – 4 contracts - \$41,125
 - Cass – 4 contracts - \$93,917
- CRP - Staff is currently finishing up writing contracts for accepted CRP offers. The deadline to get contract signed and to FSA in September 11th.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Labor Day Holiday – September 7th

Cory Schmidt - District Conservationist

Summer
2020

The RESOURCE



National Association of
Conservation Districts

SUMMER 2020

2020 OFFICERS

Tim PalmerPresident
Michael CrowderPresident-Elect
Kim LaFleur Second Vice President
Ian Cunningham Secretary-Treasurer
Brent Van Dyke Past President
Jeremy Peters Chief Executive Officer

2020 EXECUTIVE BOARD REPRESENTATIVES

Linda Brownson Northeast Region
Alex Schmidt North Central Region
Bevin Law Northern Plains Region
Bill Thomas South Central Region
Gary Blair Southeast Region
Jim Berlier Southwest Region
Tom Wehri Pacific Region
Mike Komp CTIC Representative

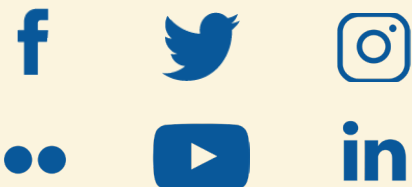
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About the cover:

This edition's cover photo was submitted to the 2019 NACD Photo Contest by **Maria Christensen** of Houston, Minn., representing **Root River Soil and Water Conservation District**. Submissions for the 2020 Poster Contest and the 2020 Photo Contest are due **Dec. 1, 2020**. Winners will be announced at the [2021 Annual Meeting](#).

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President's Perspective

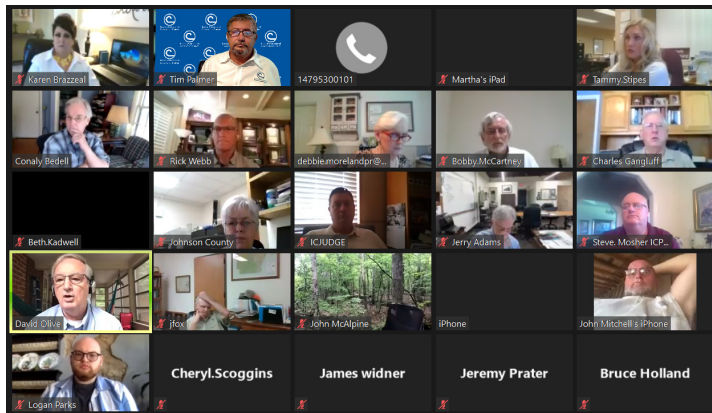
Six Months In

By the time you read this, we will have been “social distancing” for about six months. No local SWCD meetings in person—virtually everything is virtual.

We all enjoy each other's company. I have looked forward to every state and national meeting since first coming to NACD because of that. Hopefully, we will soon have a vaccine that will protect us from COVID-19 (coronavirus), and things will return to normal.

But a side effect of the pandemic is that we are communicating differently. Every time we log on to a video conference, we learn. As part of the “at risk” population (I don't know when that happened), I'll bet many of you are like me—calling on my eight-year-old grandson to help me navigate the maze of connectivity. And here we are, utilizing any means necessary to communicate.

Video conferencing platforms are giving us opportunities, ways to stay better engaged with partners without the limits of travel and time away from home and our operations. They also provide us the means to expand our reach by following and being involved in projects that are important to our districts and their customers and partners.



The work at NACD to support locally-led conservation continues. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Farm, Ranch and Rural Communities Committee has returned from hiatus, and President-Elect Michael Crowder is representing NACD. Because of NACD's national voice supporting local conservation and its effects, I wouldn't be surprised that we are going to be a core member of that committee with Michael's guidance.

The Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC) is moving forward from the organizing stage to formation of the Producers Circle. The Producers Circle will provide input and guidance as we fit current and planned “discovery” pilots into protocols that will prove the soil's ability to store carbon and water. That proof will provide an avenue for cash flow into producers' pockets.

Of course, planning for kicking off the celebration of NACD's 75th year continues. We are monitoring the restrictions and other items pursuant to COVID-19 and our meeting in New Orleans to ensure the safest possible meeting conditions for our members. We have much to celebrate in 2021, and we will continue to work to make sure we can celebrate together, in whatever form that may take.

In the meantime, let's make the most of the technology available to stay connected.

Stay Tuned!

Handwritten signature of Tim Palmer in black ink.

Tim Palmer, NACD President

CEO's Column

For the first time in recent memory, perhaps ever, NACD's Board of Directors cancelled their mid-year meeting this summer and held a virtual board meeting on July 20. The two and a half-hour virtual meeting took place when NACD and our partners would have been in Bismarck, N.D. While the board took several important actions during the meeting, one of special significance is a statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) that was adopted. I am proud to be part of an organization that is taking DEI seriously, and I look forward to the work we have ahead of us as an organization.

NACD's statement wasn't very different from many others that have been issued by organizations, institutions and companies over the course of the summer. What is significant about NACD's statement is the potential it holds to have influence across the nation's 3,000 conservation districts. No doubt, as units of local government, conservation districts strive to maintain DEI in their programs and operations. What NACD's statement challenges our own organization and our members to do is to examine programs, policies and procedures related to diversity, equity and inclusion in order to make conservation delivery and service on conservation district boards even more accessible and available for all Americans.

NACD is taking a first step to meet that challenge in the near future, as President Tim Palmer works to appoint a DEI Task Force. We will provide updates as the task force takes up its work.

I also wanted to give special recognition to a colleague and friend that will be retiring from NACD at the end of September. A year ago in Santa Fe, N.M., at NACD's summer meeting, I was pulled aside during breakfast one morning by NACD Senior Advisor Deb Bogar. I could tell by her expression she had something important to talk about, so we had coffee and talked. Deb shared with me that she had been giving a lot of thought about her career at NACD, and she wanted to start transitioning to retirement in 2020.

Naturally, my reaction was a mix of celebration for Deb and her decision, but also the realization of the incredible accomplishments and contributions to conservation that she has made. After all, Deb has been working with NACD since 1992 and has held positions ranging from Northern Plains Region Representative, Director of Field Services, Senior Advisor and Interim-Executive Director. Before that, she worked for conservation districts in Michigan. She has worked to strengthen conservation districts through efforts like the District Outlook Task Force, on which she served in 2015-16. And she has championed urban conservation districts throughout her career, which has resulted in an even stronger network of urban conservationists through NACD's urban webinar series and NACD's urban agriculture conservation grants. Deb has devoted her career to NACD and to conservation districts, and it is only fitting that we celebrate this moment with her.



Please join me in congratulating Deb by sending her a message at deb-bogar@nacdnet.org expressing your thoughts and wishing her well in retirement!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeremy Peters".

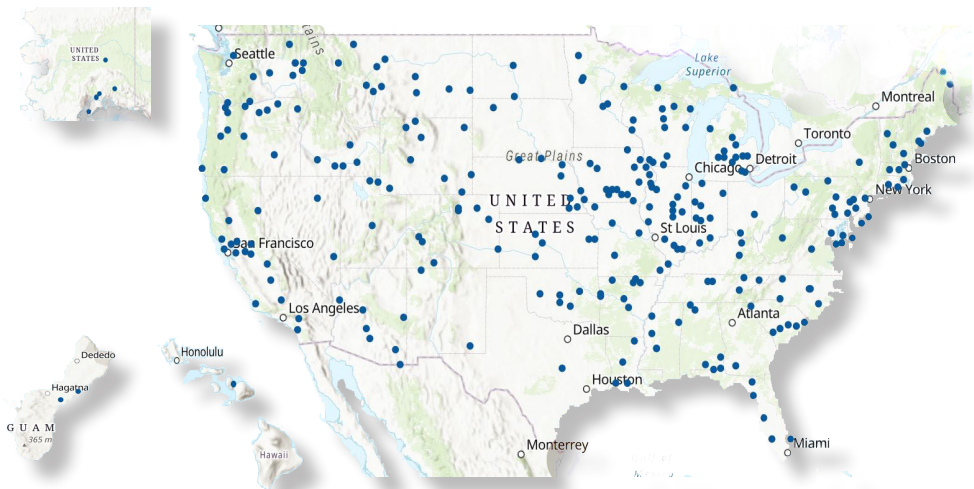
Jeremy Peters, NACD CEO

Technical Assistance Grants Keep Adding BOOTS TO THE GROUND

During the virtual summer board meeting on July 20, **NACD President Tim Palmer** [announced the awarding of \\$6.5 million](#) of additional Technical Assistance (TA) grants to 93 awardees. The announcement capped off the largest annual funding yet through NACD and NRCS's partnership in TA grants when added to the \$8.5 million awarded in March. The slightly over \$15 million awarded this year is 50 percent more than the funds awarded last year.

As with previous years, this year's TA grants are made possible through a partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Furthermore, the placement of the funds relied on the state and territory conservation partners to ensure that the funds are directed where they will make the largest impact. NACD appreciates all the support that goes into making these projects a reality.

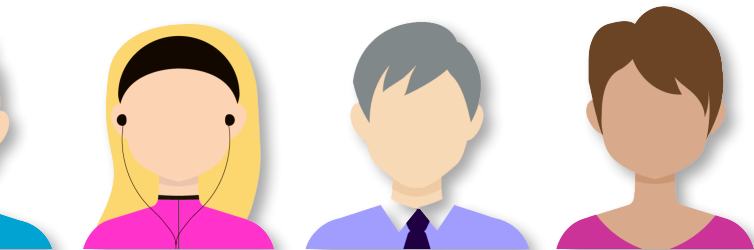
Beyond the amount of funds available this year for the TA grants, this year's awardees bring a significant milestone to the TA program. With the awards Palmer announced, NACD now will have issued a TA grant in all 50 states, as well as



three territories. Every state and territory conservation delivery system works differently, and one of NACD's goals with these grants is geographic diversity. Hitting this milestone reinforces the goal for the grants to be flexible enough for each local recipient, as well as their state/territory leadership, to find the most productive way to use these funds in areas with the highest priorities.

That flexibility is obvious when grant proposals are reviewed: Proposals ranged from focused technical assistance to individual producers to landscape-scale planning projects. The newly announced awardees may have very different ideas of how they will use the funds, but no matter what the scale, they share a vision of clearing any barriers to getting conservation on the ground.

NACD in Action



On Monday, July 20, the NACD Board of Directors conducted a virtual board meeting for the first time, in place of the 2020 Summer Conservation Forum and Tour, which was to be held that week in Bismarck, N.D., but was moved to a virtual format given the ongoing COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. The

organization's governing body voted to amend the national association's bylaws to permit virtual board meetings in times of state or federal emergencies and conducted the business meeting over Zoom. July 20 also marked the first meeting since the 2020 NACD Annual Meeting in February. During the meeting, the NACD Board of Directors took up, voted on, and approved a formal statement on diversity, equity and inclusion:

"The NACD Board of Directors formally denounces racism and discrimination in any form. We are committing to gain greater awareness and understanding of issues important to diverse communities, and we support actions to advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in conservation. We are taking additional steps to encourage greater diversity in our national board, calling for the formation of a task force to examine DEI in our internal governance; and we call on conservation districts and state associations to examine their own programs, policies and procedures related to diversity, equity and inclusion as well, in order to make conservation delivery accessible and available for all Americans.

We also call on conservation districts to actively engage all members of their local communities to understand conservation issues important to diverse populations, to encourage greater diversity in local elections and to encourage even greater transparency

and open dialogue in conservation district programs. NACD recognizes that if we do not fully embrace diversity, equity and inclusion in each and every local conservation district, then we cannot possibly be a diverse organization at the national level.

At our core, we are a grassroots organization representing every community in the United States – and we understand that expanding our commitment to DEI takes this same fundamental approach – a voice that starts in the thousands of local communities that we serve and grows emphatically, energetically and compassionately into a cohesive national transformation that takes root across the country. NACD is fully committed in its efforts of diversity, equity, and inclusivity to work with clients, conservation districts, partners, and others to achieve our fundamental goal of transforming how we reach and work with communities across the country."

The statement can be viewed on [NACD's website](#). The Board of Directors is next scheduled to meet in February 2021.

*NACD Board of Directors
Hold Virtual Summer
Board Meeting*



NACD in Action

On behalf of the nearly 700 current and past presidents of state and territory conservation district associations, the Presidents Association provided a donation to the Pennsylvania Envirothon in memory of **Pat Sueck**, past president of the association and past leader in NACD regional and national roles, as well as her leadership in her home state of Pennsylvania.

NACD PRESIDENTS ASSOCIATION UPDATE

The association's ongoing work is conducted at monthly board meetings, as well as in committee meetings. Several committees have been successful this year in accomplishing tasks to support conservation efforts in this country. The association is represented on the National Conservation Foundation Board of Trustees by current president **Barbara Perlman-Whyman**. Other current work includes planning for meeting activities at NACD's 75th Annual Meeting, scheduled for Feb. 6-10, 2021 in New Orleans.

For information about the NACD Presidents Association, please [visit NACD's website](#), where you can find information on the current national board members, who are actively engaged in providing leadership for the association.

NATIONAL CONSERVATION PLANNING PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Progress continues toward the goal to reinvigorate conservation planning across the country. The National Conservation Partners renewed their support in Las Vegas during NACD's Annual Meeting for this effort by continuing the national partnership agreement for another five years. From tasks like updating policy to improved planning and implementation of training, as well as improved and more timely communications and many other efforts, the partnership continues its work under the guidance of a National Leadership Team, which includes several members from each of the five partners and is co-chaired by **Astor Boozer** with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and **Mike Brown** with the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA). To learn more about NCPP activities, [visit NCPP's website](#).

NCPP's Hugh Hammond Bennett Award for Conservation Excellence nominations are open again to honor a producer and a conservation planner. This award, now in its fourth year, has identified so much excellent

work around the country in addition to naming two winners each year. Previous winners are highlighted [on NCPP's website](#).

Four NCPP Action Teams and several project teams are underway with actions and decisions every week. The Leadership Team has identified high priority projects which are underway and for which monthly reports are obtained to track progress.

One of the unique approaches about the partnership's emphasis on planning is that conservation planning includes the implementation of the plan, along with follow up and review or revisions as necessary, becoming an ongoing, constantly improving, process. Conservation planning as practiced by the partnership, can also use many different programs and sources of funding to address the identified natural resource concerns on an individual property and/or a landscape- or watershed-scale. Planning progresses at the pace that each individual or group decides, as they can either afford or schedule their conservation work.

NACD in Action



The NACD Forestry Resource Policy Group (RPG) organized a series of seven webinars on August 11 to help replace the group's summer meeting due to COVID-19 (coronavirus).

More than 200 attendees registered for hour-long topics, ranging from how conservation districts can support female forest landowners to ways conservation districts can more effectively communicate with landowners, educators and community leaders.

"We reached a lot of new folks," **Forestry RPG Chairman Steve Hedstrom** said. "It was our first time doing this, but the response was positive. We are considering doing more of these in the future."

The Forestry RPG held its annual business meeting the following day, with guests from the U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), National Association of State Foresters, National Agroforestry Center, National Institute of Food and Agriculture and National Wild Turkey Federation.

To learn more about the Forestry RPG's work, visit the [forestry section](#) of the NACD website and [subscribe to Forestry Notes](#).

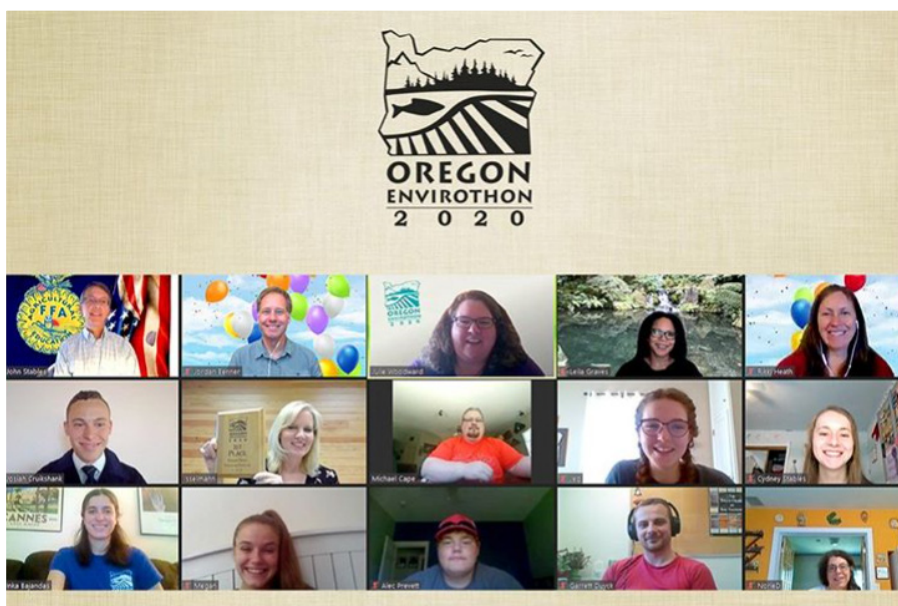
***Forestry RPG Holds
Successful Virtual Meeting***

ENVIROTHON DURING COVID-19

In a typical year, spring is the busy season for the National Conservation Foundation (NCF)-Envirothon program. Between late March and mid-June, thousands of students prepare for and compete in local state and provincial competitions across the United States, Canada and China. They strive to be the top placing team and go on to represent their state/province at the NCF-Envirothon annual international competition. However, by early March of this year, it became apparent that this spring would be far from normal.

As the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic spread across the nation, and stay-at-home orders became the new normal, many state and provincial Envirothon competitions were canceled. Only three states/provinces—Arkansas, Prince Edward Island and Louisiana—were able to hold their competitions before the pandemic struck, leaving 52 others with no way to test students in an in-person setting.

As the cancellations began growing in numbers, the NCF-Envirothon staff, Operating Committee and NCF Board realized that the 2020 NCF-Envirothon event was in jeopardy. The 2020 international competition was to be hosted by the **Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD)** in Lincoln, Neb., from July 26 to Aug. 1, 2020; however, in early April, [NCF and NARD jointly announced the cancellation](#) of this event to protect



NACD in Action



the health and safety of students, advisors, volunteers, sponsors and education partners.

Despite in-person event cancellations and stay-at-home orders, several state/provincial Envirothon programs decided to try something

different: a virtual Envirothon! These online events ranged from an official team-based competition like those conducted by Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island and Utah; to an informal challenge, social media engagement or another type of activity like those hosted by Kansas, Ontario, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin.

As expected, participation numbers were lower compared to an in-person competition in a typical year; however, each state and province reported overwhelmingly positive feedback from participating students and advisors. These states and provinces also gained valuable experience in conducting distance education and engagement through online platforms, which could act as a model for other Envirothon programs. No one knows how long the pandemic will last, nor what long-term impacts it has in store, but the Envirothon program is looking ahead to a strong competition season in 2021. Lessons learned in 2020 will provide useful guides as the program moves forward.

As for the 2021 NCF-Envirothon annual international competition, Nebraska will host the event from July 25-31, 2021 at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus and will feature the same resource topic and learning objectives as were planned for the 2020 event. The top priority of the NCF-Envirothon will continue to be the health and safety of all. NCF and NARD will be working closely with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln over the next several months to ensure that any recommended guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are met when the NCF-Envirothon reconvenes in July 2021.



NACD in Action

NACD Supports Coastal Conservation with #DistrictsConserveCoasts Campaign

This summer, NACD launched a social media campaign to gain a better understanding of conservation districts' (CD) coastal conservation issues, activities and partnerships. During National Ocean Month in June, NACD encouraged conservation districts to share their coastal conservation work on social media using the hashtag **#DistrictsConserveCoasts**. Conservation districts from across the country – both coastal and inland – responded with ways they help conserve our nation's coasts and the partnerships they've built along the way.



NACD in Action

In the continental United States, coastal counties account for 10 percent of the nation's land mass. Of the nation's 3,000 conservation districts, 10 percent have Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf Coast or Great Lakes coastline. Yet, the coastal counties these districts serve are home to nearly 40 percent of the nation's population! It's no surprise, then, that coastal districts face unique conservation challenges. CDs that participated in the #DistrictsConserveCoasts campaign pointed out two in particular: the loss of coastal habitat and the ecosystem services they provide, and nonpoint source pollution.

Conservation districts are responding to these conservation challenges in resourceful ways. For example, in Washington state, **Pierce CD** conducts education and assistance and created their own video series to encourage marine shoreline landowners to keep their shorelines natural and help restore coastal habitat in Puget Sound. In Connecticut, conservation districts are addressing nonpoint source pollution by engaging with partners in water quality monitoring and watershed management planning.

To help restore coastal habitats and ecosystem services, reduce nonpoint source pollution and more, conservation districts partner at all levels: local, state and territorial, and federal. At the federal level, coastal districts highlighted partnerships with the local programs of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s National

Estuary Program to protect the nation's 28 estuaries of national significance. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has also partnered with state and territory agencies to fund coastal conservation projects that districts have been involved in planning, implementing and monitoring.

The information districts shared during the #DistrictsConserveCoasts campaign is helping inform the priorities and work of NACD's Coastal Resource Policy Group (RPG), one of six RPGs tackling special interest issues under the association's Natural Resource Policy Committee (NRPC). In the months ahead, NACD's Coastal RPG will talk with state and territory associations and their partners to learn more about the breadth of their Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf Coast and Great Lakes conservation work and identify more districts leading the way.

"The Coastal RPG looks forward to developing resources and partnerships to support the work of coastal conservation districts and promote districts as partners in addressing coastal conservation challenges," **said Joe Lomax**, chair of the Coastal RPG.



Districts At Work



Larry Wright was raised on a farm in west-central Oklahoma and now manages his own operation of 195 acres of rangeland, as well as a market garden, where he grows organic produce to sell at the local farmers market.

Wright began working with the local conservation district while attending high school. While at Oklahoma State University (OSU), he began working as a student trainee with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). After receiving a bachelors of science in agronomy, Wright has had a long career in conservation working for NRCS.

Over the past 15 years, Wright has incorporated a variety of conservation practices into his operation and has been able to share his experiences throughout the community at farmers markets and workshops. Through prescribed burns and primarily native vegetation, Wright keeps a healthy rangeland that provides a great habitat for pollinators and wildlife. He also utilizes rotational grazing for his cattle, giving his land the rest that it needs to stay healthy and recover.

Currently, Wright serves on the board of directors for the [Deer Creek Conservation District](#) and is president of the [Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts](#).

Districts At Work

WRIGHT'S INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Part of keeping a healthy rangeland requires controlling invasive species. To control the eastern red cedar, a lot of hand labor and the use of chainsaws is required due to the rough terrain and steep slope leading into the canyon. Such efforts minimize soil disturbance and allow access to areas that machines cannot reach. Because the cedars are dioecious (having a male tree and a female tree), Wright targets the seed-producing trees to slow the reproduction rates of new seedlings. Follow-up control efforts need to occur every four to five years.

Feral swine are also an invasive species with a high reproduction rate and create tremendous damage to the land and wildlife. They are extremely difficult to control and almost impossible to eradicate. Wright's efforts include hunting and shooting feral swine. While trapping is the most effective method, Wright notes that it is difficult since the nearby canyon and creek provide a travel corridor for the feral swine. After being hunted, the feral swine may stay away for about six months. Wright says the efforts could be more effective if adjoining landowners teamed up; however, his neighbors are unavailable as they are absentee and recreational landowners.

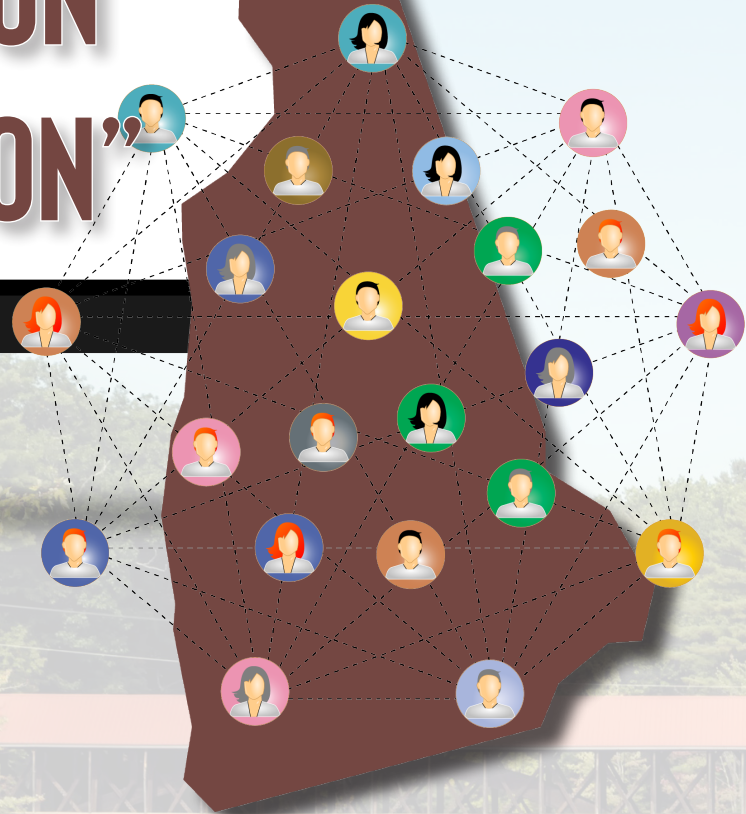


To read more about Wright, his operation and his soil health journey, visit [his profile on NACD's website](#).

If you or someone you know would like to become an NACD Soil Health Champion, please contact NACD North Central Region Representative **Beth Mason** at 317-946-4463 or beth-mason@nacdnet.org.

Districts At Work

NEW HAMPSHIRE “ZOOMS IN ON CONSERVATION”



Many conservation districts and state associations have had to pivot their normal operations in the face of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Staff are working from home, outreach activities have been severely curtailed, and meetings have been replaced with conference calls and video conferencing. While this has impeded the work of many, it has also opened new opportunities.

The **New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts** (NHACD) has launched “Zoom in on Conservation,” a monthly series of virtual meetings featuring news, partner presentations and district spotlights. Significantly, this effort has strengthened the conservation

partnership in New Hampshire and increased district supervisor engagement at the state level.

Dick Lutz, a **Rockingham County Conservation District** supervisor, sits on the NHACD board and the New Hampshire State Conservation Committee. He decided to launch “Zoom in on Conservation” to better connect NHACD with the conservation committee. According to Lutz, “New Hampshire has limited resources for conservation. ‘Zoom in on Conservation’ has taken on a ‘Stone

Districts At Work



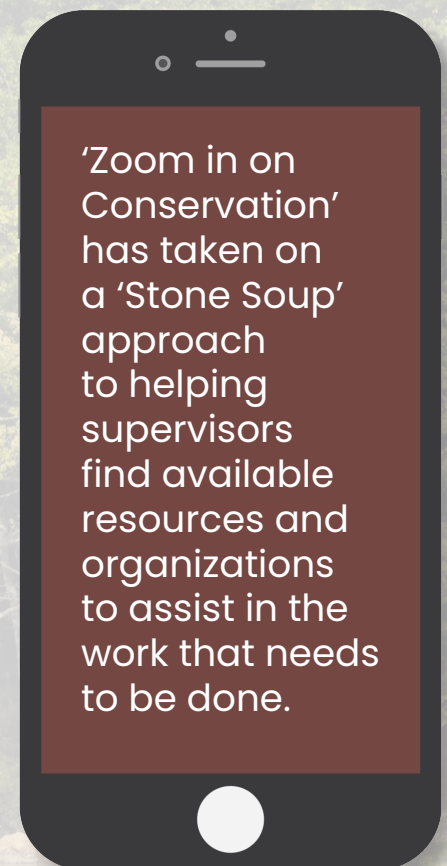
Soup’ approach to helping supervisors find available resources and organizations to assist in the work that needs to be done.”

By featuring conservation district spotlights monthly, state conservation committee members and district supervisors can learn about what is happening across the state. Since the committee only meets quarterly, these monthly virtual meetings have covered much more ground than would be possible within the committee alone.

Each month’s program features several elements. It begins with news from around the state, including funding opportunities and new staff and supervisors. One district presents an overview of their programs and work. The bulk of the program is training sessions and presentations from partners. Training sessions have included information on social media and legislative outreach. Partners have presented on land trusts and municipal conservation commissions. NHACD hopes these sessions will build partnerships between supervisors and other organizations.

One of the most exciting aspects of the program is increased district supervisor engagement. Prior to the pandemic, NHACD meetings were held in person and required several hours of travel from distant areas of the state. Attending a virtual meeting is much easier, and NHACD has seen increased engagement, both in the number of districts and the number of supervisors.

Additionally, this increased engagement has come at zero cost to the state association. NHACD is using an existing Zoom account to conduct the meetings, and volunteer supervisors have led the planning and organization. Not only has this program been successful, but it’s easily replicable across the country as well.





INDIANA GETS CREATIVE WITH CONSERVATION OUT

At the beginning of 2020, the country was trying to figure out how to deal with COVID-19 (coronavirus) and, like most states, Indiana shut down non-essential businesses for a short time in an effort to slow the virus's spread. Indiana conservation districts managed their workload differently from county to county, trying to juggle the safety of employees, conservation partners and landowners while still trying to conduct the business of conservation.

While it was manageable to push a "virtual pause button" on operations for a few weeks, Indiana conservation districts needed to develop a plan on how to continue their education and outreach with landowners during a time when face-to-face meetings are discouraged and considered a health risk for contracting COVID-19.

The conservation districts in Indiana have a unique opportunity and partner in the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI), a program administered through the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD) and supported by the Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP). Conservation districts throughout the state are now able to use technology provided through CCSI to bring field days to participants, wherever they are located. This technology comes in the form of

Districts At Work

REACH



Virtual Field Day Kits.

Following guidance from [Practical Farmers of Iowa](#), each kit

consists of a standard tripod, an articulated tripod, smartphone and tablet adapters to the tripods, a Bluetooth lapel microphone and a Bluetooth headset. The lapel microphone helps record the speaker with clarity for “traditional presentations,” and the headset reduces wind noise, and allows the speaker to more easily hear their production staff and questions from the audience. Soon, the kits will also include gimbals, which will help keep the video stable as the speaker moves throughout the field. CCSI has put together four of these kits for conservation districts to use upon request, but, as the demand increases, more of these kits will probably be made available.

CCSI Director **Lisa Holscher** and her team tested the system this past July with a field day at the farm of **Phil Needham**, a producer and ag consultant from [Needham Ag Technologies, LLC](#) in Kentucky. Needham utilized his tablet in the field as a monitor for the webinar, while his son utilized his iPhone

to film Needham in the field. At appropriate times, Needham would cue the staff at remote locations to cut to videos or slides that he

had prepared for the webinar, making the presentation multi-faceted—combining live demonstrations with prepared illustrations and videos. The next day, Needham held a virtual roundtable session with a few farmers over Zoom. Both productions were recorded and subsequently [posted online](#) with additional outreach tools and resources.

These kits were funded through an agreement CCSI already had with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to conduct outreach. However, Holscher sees this embrace of technology as a way to augment their current efforts and not just a solution during COVID-19. Conservation districts and partners will have the expanded opportunity to remotely hold meetings, conduct necessary training and continue outreach. Thanks to this program, work in Indiana won't need to stall during this difficult time. Rather, conservation districts will be able to continue to advance conservation across the state.

Districts At Work

After the mountain pine beetle epidemic began to slow down, areas throughout the western United States had to deal with the reality of how to prepare for the next one. This was especially true for three conservation districts in Wyoming located on the edge of the Black Hills National Forest.

The **Campbell County Conservation District (CD)**, **Crook County Natural Resource District (NRD)** and

Weston County NRD encouraged landowners to seek funding through various programs, but there was not enough funding to create the landscape-scale treatment that was needed. In 2017, the conservation districts and a group of other partners came together and applied for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)'s Regional Conservation

Partnership Program (RCPP).

The goal of this project was to create a more resilient forest ecosystem by reducing the threat of invasive species, increasing wildlife habitat, and enhancing the public benefit of the forest. This was no small feat, so the eleven partners, including the Campbell County CD; Crook County NRD; Weston County NRD; Weston

County Weed & Pest; Wyoming State Forestry Division; USDA Forest Service; DOI- Bureau of Land Management; Wyoming Game and Fish Department; National Wild Turkey Federation and USDA-NRCS Gillette, Newcastle and Sundance field offices pooled their resources and were able to secure almost \$1.3 million in assistance through RCPP. This funding, coupled with the partners matching funds,

Wyoming CDS Tackle Forest He

Districts At Work

created a project budgeted at \$1.6 million. The idea was to assist landowners in improving the forest health of their properties, as well as provide an opportunity for landowners to continue those efforts through the creation of forest stewardship plans.

Through active outreach and education by the partners, the project has been an enormous success. To date, there have been 45 landowners that have been funded through the RCPP and \$1,075,569 in

financial assistance contracted. With this financial assistance, producers were able to treat 2,900 estimated acres of overstocked forest stands and increase the area's overall resiliency. These projects consisted of forest thinning coupled with various techniques to handle the remaining woody residue or slash.

Work continues to be implemented on the project, with 16 of the 45 contracts completed. These projects are located in the northeast corner of Wyoming and, to date, 1,052

acres have been treated. Partners have also been implementing projects on adjacent private lands and have contributed match dollars totaling \$311,637 in financial assistance, administration and technical assistance and outreach toward reaching the overall project goals.

Partners are now focusing on promoting the Forest Stewardship Plan to keep the momentum of the RCPP going after the project has concluded. These plans will assist landowners in assessing their properties and managing for their

long-term forestry goals. The plans provide a guide for landowners to determine when to implement further treatment either on their own or through future incentive-based programs.

Campbell County CD manager **Jennifer Hart** says, "The locally-led approach of the three districts has led to the project exceeding our acreage goal and shown the need for continued investment in forestry conservation in northeast Wyoming."

Health with RCPP

HUERTA DEL VALLE BRINGS COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE TO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

In southern California, a nonprofit organization called [Huerta Del Valle](#) (HdV) is crucial in bringing healthy, fresh and reasonably priced produce to the community. At their four locations in Ontario, Jurupa Valley, Crestmore and San Bernardino, HdV hosts community garden space for locals to rent, farm space for beginning farmers to practice and learn upon, and markets to sell the produce.

“The mission of Huerta Del Valle is to bring people together to grow their own organic food and, through so doing, create sustainable community health and empowerment,” **said Arthur Levine**, HdV project director and board member.

One of HdV’s most popular programs is its community supported agriculture (CSA) program. Thanks to a 2017 NACD Urban Agriculture Grant (UAC), the **Inland Empire Resource Conservation District** (IERCD) was able to hire a staffer to help run the program and grow it to become sustainable.

“The technical support provided by the grant helped bring us closer to IERCD and define a strong partnership with them,” **Levine said**. “That partnership has borne a lot of fruit in terms of mutual benefits for our missions related to agriculture.”

HdV’s sites are located in areas that are



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called 'food swamps', where healthy food options are severely outnumbered by fast food and junk food outlets. The CSA boxes help tackle this issue by providing everything from peaches and plums to eggplants, herbs and greens.

"Traditional CSAs, I think, tend to be a bit exclusive, because they're expensive," **said Susie Kirschner**, IERCD program manager. "The goal of the CSA program that was developed through the 2017 NACD UAC grant was not just to have a CSA program, but to have one that addresses the need for all community members to be able to participate."

With that in mind, HdV and IERCD developed a program that serves different populations by offering tiered pricing for their boxes. Knowing that the full-price option, priced at \$30/box, would be out of reach for some community members, they offer a subsidized rate of \$15/box for those who need it. Individuals are also able to use food stamps to purchase boxes and produce at the market.

"When the program started, they had maybe less than 10 people enrolled, and it was a little disorganized due to being volunteer-led," **Kirschner said**. "The

fully staffed program now serves about 70 families per week, with more requests to join the program coming in frequently."

These requests are coming even more frequently now due COVID-19 (coronavirus).

"There's been a huge uptick in CSAs, but also just general market interactions, as people were looking for alternatives for where to get food safely. Many families stuck at home have also told staff that coming to HdV for produce is the highlight of their day, as it gets them outside to spend time at a community garden," **said Autumn Yanez-Jacobo**, CSA coordinator.

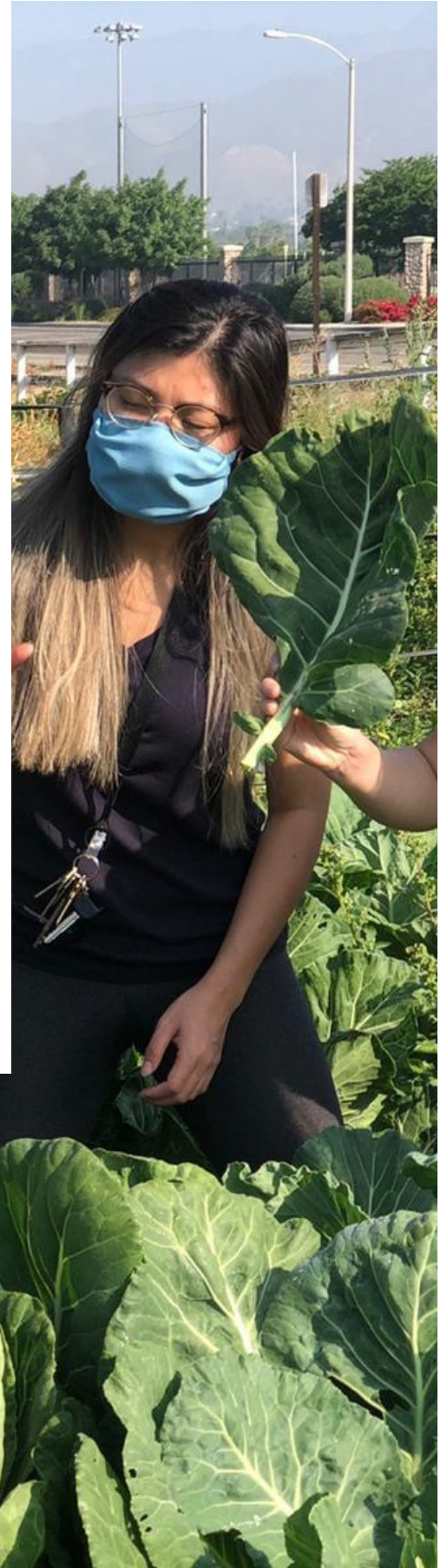
During this time, HdV has also been leading a local initiative that gives their CSA boxes to people in need for free. "There's been a lot of great rallying and partnerships in this area as community members have been losing their jobs and food security," **Kirschner said**.

HdV continues to run on four core values of respect, justice, support and responsibility – values that are even more important now than they've ever been. Visit their website, <https://www.huertadelvalle.org/>, to learn more about their programs and how to support their endeavors.



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“The mission of Huerta Del Valle is to bring people together to grow their own organic food and, through so doing, create sustainable community health and empowerment.”



HOW LANDOWNERS ARE COLLABORATING TO FIGHT

WILDFIRES

In 2015 and 2016, NACD, in partnership with the United States Forest Service (USFS), conducted five forest health listening sessions across the western United States. Session attendees, which included conservation district employees, partners and agency representatives, discussed a wide variety of topics that included the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy and the growing concern over expansive wildfires occurring on unprotected lands.

A common theme heard among attendees was the lack of cohesive, organized fire



Pictured from left to right: Tim Murphy (BLM); Senator Bert Brackett; Chris Anthony (BLM); Michael Guerry; Mike Henslee; Darcy Helmick; Tony Black; Penny Black; Andy Delmas (BLM); Chris Simonson (BLM) Steve Acarregui (BLM); Meagan Conry (BLM); Todd Floyd (BLM) and Neil Kornze (BLM).

responses in unprotected areas. In these areas, it is uncertain which agency, if any, will show up to put out a fire, and if individuals involved will have adequate training, equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE) knowledge to do so effectively. To provide

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for the safety of the public and firefighters, some states have begun creating Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs) that help address this issue.

RFPAs are volunteer groups of landowners that become trained and authorized to respond to wildfires. These landowners often live closer to where the wildfires start than agency-organized wildfire suppression response teams. Multiple states—including Idaho, [Oregon](#) and [Nevada](#)—have adopted programs to allow these associations to exist and to fill the gap for providing quick response to protect natural resource-rich lands, such as valuable sage grouse habitat. [A federal study](#) conducted indicates support for developing these protection programs.

In Idaho, [nine RFPAs](#) have been created through a program started by **Idaho Governor Butch Otter**. Through a collaborative effort between local ranchers, the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Idaho Department of Lands, these RFPAs provide a quick, effective initial attack to suppress wildland fires.

“The number one benefit of these associations is smaller fires,” **Darcy Helmick said**. “These associations benefit

the resource the most, because we’re able to work together and put out these fires when they’re small.”

Helmick, who currently serves as the secretary for Idaho’s Saylor Creek RFPA and on the board for both Three Creek RFPA and Black Canyon RFPA, played a role in creating the Saylor Creek and Three Creek RFPAs. Initially, Helmick was skeptical about the success of the associations because of the polarized views of local ranchers and BLM employees. However, she was pleasantly surprised by the effectiveness and camaraderie that was created through these associations.

“It’s so hard to get the simplest thing done sometimes,” **Helmick said**. “But then you take this example of RFPAs, and we were able to take two polarized groups that have the same end goal in mind, and we’re able to get them to work together.”

There is no doubt that these associations have played a crucial role in limiting the devastation of rangeland fires.

“From 2003 until 2012, at least every other year there was at least one fire that was over 200,000 acres,” **Helmick said**. “Since RFPAs have been in the place, the largest fire we’ve had has been 79,000 acres.”

The formation and success of RFPAs are becoming more crucial.

“Over the past couple of decades, we’ve been seeing these gigantic, catastrophic wildfires that have devastated areas,” **said Gretchen Hyde**, executive director for the [Idaho Rangeland Resources Commission](#). The success of Idaho’s RFPAs are a great example for how other states could conduct similar programs and associations to mitigate and prevent devastating wildfires on their states’ precious lands.

“IT’S SO HARD TO GET THE SIMPLEST THING DONE SOMETIMES. BUT THEN YOU TAKE THIS EXAMPLE OF RFPAS, AND WE WERE ABLE TO TAKE TWO POLARIZED GROUPS THAT HAVE THE SAME END GOAL IN MIND, AND WE’RE ABLE TO GET THEM TO WORK TOGETHER.”

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For many conservation districts, providing valuable outreach events to their community while adhering to local public health guidelines has been an ongoing challenge in 2020. Many annual events have been canceled or moved to an online format, yet conservation districts have also found creative ways to continue these events. The **Inland Empire Resource Conservation District** (IERCD) in California recently celebrated their second annual Latino Conservation Week (LCW), with the help of dedicated partners and an innovative approach to sharing information.

Started by the Hispanic Access Foundation (HAF) in 2014, LCW provides an opportunity to celebrate the dedication and support of Latino communities to conservation nationwide while further engaging individuals in educational opportunities.

As one of IERCD's ongoing partners, HAF co-organized IERCD's event, along with the Mary Vagle Nature Center in the City of Fontana and the San Bernardino County Master Gardeners.

"Latino Conservation Week is an opportunity to highlight our unique public lands and local parks in the Inland Empire, and it also demonstrates that the Latino community truly engages with nature's beauty, cares for wildlife, enjoys the outdoors, and values our natural resources," said **Christine Tamara** of HAF.

"Planning events this year during COVID-19 made us pivot to offering a variety of wonderful virtual events," **Tamara said**. "Teaming up with IERCD and partners to organize the first ever Latino Conservation Week interactive drive-up event was phenomenal! We were truly pleased with the community's response to such a unique, interactive socially distanced event."

Jasmine Orozco Clark, IERCD's education coordinator, worked with these organizations to plan distribution of native seed kits during a one-day drive-up event, held in the parking lot of the Mary Vagle Nature Center on July 25. With support of a gracious grant from HAF and the ability to repurpose materials from other canceled events, IERCD was able to package

50 seed kits with three native species—California poppy, Arroyo lupine and Narrowleaf milkweed—as well as planting instructions, gloves, soil and a coconut husk pot to start the seeds, and a seed paper butterfly.

Although originally planned as an LCW event, a diversity of individuals registered and all spots filled quickly, in part thanks to publicity from the San Bernardino Sun and IERCD's promotion on social media. Registration slots were staggered to limit the number of people on-site at any given time, and registrants did not need to leave their cars to receive their kits. Additionally, all staff and volunteers wore personal protective equipment (PPE), which was covered by the HAF grant.

During the event, registrants could drive through various educational "walk and talk" stations on pollinators, composting, sustainable agriculture and birds, as presented by the partners through the comfort and safety of their car window. With the "walk and talk" stations on the driver's side of the vehicle, the individuals could drive up and roll down their window. Even visitors of the nature center were able to benefit from these socially distanced educational opportunities by walking through the stations and signing up for mailer kits.

Orozco Clark considers the event a pleasant success given this year's unique challenges, and she even sees it as a model for ongoing outreach efforts. Engaging underserved populations through LCW and other events remains a priority for IERCD, and the success of this event has led to preliminary plans for a National Public Lands Day celebration co-sponsored by California Assemblymember **Eloise Reyes**. Such partnerships with organizations like HAF are "vital for ensuring that conservation districts represent everyone in their local communities," **said Orozco Clark**. "IERCD looks forward to pursuing new partnerships to continue to do so in the future."

For more information regarding Hispanic Access Foundation and Latino Conservation Week, please visit hispanicaccess.org and latinoconservationweek.com.

INLAND EMPIRE RCD CELEBRATES



LATINO CONSERVATION WEEK

IERCD IS OFFERING TO SHARE THEIR MEDIA OUTREACH TEMPLATES AND OTHER RESOURCES TO ASSIST OTHERS PURSUING SOCIALLY-DISTANCED EVENTS.

PLEASE CONTACT JASMINE OROZCO CLARK AT [JCLARK@IERCD.ORG](mailto:jclark@iercd.org) TO CONNECT AND GET ACCESS TO THESE MATERIALS.



Government Affairs Report



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ummer in Washington, D.C. usually means a few, standard things: hoards of tourists, sweltering heat and humidity, and Congress struggling to work through the annual appropriations process. While the tourists haven't been around in this unique year, the other two hallmarks of a DC summer have remained.

Alongside Congress attempting to address the problems associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been clear attention paid to the issues associated with climate change and the extreme weather events that our nation's agricultural producers have had to deal with as a result.

Last fall, the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, a new committee created for the purpose of providing legislative solutions to address climate change, requested stakeholders provide their thoughts on what Congress can and should be doing. [NACD provided our comments](#) in November, and on June 30, 2020, the Select Committee [released its full set of recommendations](#). NACD focused on the successes and needs of locally-led conservation, including the need to ensure proper technical assistance and workforce capacity, which are critical to the success of any conservation program on the ground. We understand that as the local partners of NRCS, it is our responsibility to advocate for the policies that make conservation programs work, which requires us to

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educate Congress that it doesn't matter how big of a program is funded, without the essential technical assistance to back up the financial assistance,

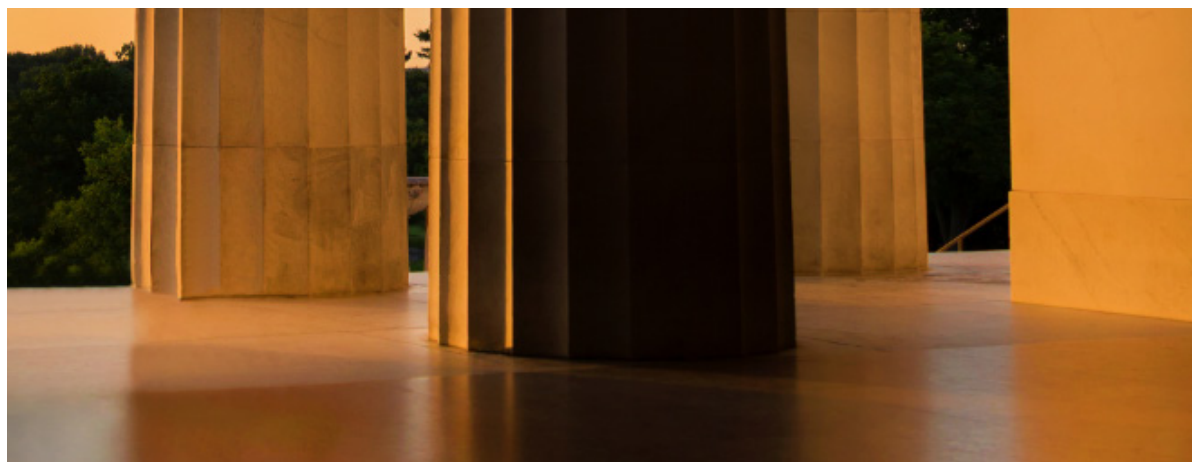
it won't be as successful as it could be. NACD was pleased to see that the Select Committee took this message to heart and included these recommendations in its final report. Senate Democrats created a separate Special Committee on the Climate Crisis, which also requested stakeholder feedback, and [NACD submitted similar comments](#) to that committee in June.

Alongside these reports, there have been legislative proposals introduced this Summer with a focus on carbon credit markets. On June 24, 2020, the Senate Agriculture Committee [held a hearing](#) focused on this legislation and carbon trading markets and how Congress can help create the building blocks that would ultimately lead to a successful climate market where landowners are compensated for the carbon sequestering practices they are implementing

on the ground. NACD is pleased to see a bipartisan and bicameral focus take place on this subject, because agriculture has a great story to tell, and also to sell, on the positive environmental outcomes taking place across the country. Conservation districts have the longevity and relationship with landowners across the nation to serve landowners as they enter these markets and are a natural fit, as they already provide technical assistance and are a trusted entity to conduct verifications.

Although there are significant barriers that still exist before we have a fully operational carbon market running, economic incentives provided by a private market offer an incredible opportunity to dramatically expand on the successes of existing conservation programs while helping farmers', ranchers' and forestland owners' bottom line.

NACD will continue advocating for the work conservation districts are already doing and looks forward to continue being a part of the conversation about how to help the private sector succeed in setting up these markets, as well as what role USDA should and should not play in these environmental markets.



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2021 STEWARDSHIP AND EDUCATION MATERIALS AVAILABLE

NACD's 2021 Stewardship and Education materials, celebrating the theme "Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities," are now available for free download through [NACD's Conservation Education Hub](#).

It is important that we educate our youth about trees and forests conservation and their value in our daily lives. Trees provide numerous benefits, and without them, the world would be a very different place. One large tree can supply daily oxygen for four people. Just think what we can do by planting one tree.

Our free, downloadable materials provide educators with the needed resources to teach and promote trees and forests conservation in the classroom. The materials can also be printed and purchased on-demand through [Goetz Printing](#).

To learn more, [visit NACD's Stewardship Program webpage](#) or contact stewardship@nacdnet.org.



NACD MARKETPLACE EXCLUSIVE M

NACD's Marketplace is offering product discounts to platinum, diamond and gold members. The following discounts:



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20 percent off a single purchase of \$100 or more

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[Visit our store](#) and benefit from the lengthy list of products that NACD is offering. The higher your tier, the more you save!

COMING SOON!

FRIENDS OF NACD DISTRICT GRANT RFP

The Friends of NACD District Grants Program will award another round of district grants during NACD's 2021 Annual Meeting.

Funding for these grants comes from individual donations made through the Friends of NACD program. Thank you to all who have supported Friends through the years.

If you or your organization are interested in supporting the program or learning more about the four projects funded in 2020, [visit NACD's website](#). NACD will announce a request for proposals later this fall, so stay tuned!

ENVIROSCAPE OFFERS EXCLUSIVE NACD DISCOUNT

Conservation districts, associations or state agencies interested in purchasing [EnviroScape® hands-on models](#) can receive discounts with the following promotional codes good now through Dec. 31, 2020.

10 PERCENT OFF one or more models with the code NACD10

15 PERCENT OFF five or more models with the code NACD15

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or more (excluding sale/clearance items)

\$775 – \$1,775

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