



Hillsborough County Conservation District

2018 Annual Report

As presented at the Annual Meeting on 5/29/19

CONSERVATION TOWARD
SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE and FORESTRY



United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

As in past years, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has continued to work collaboratively with our partners, farmers, and private landowners in Hillsborough County to “get conservation on the ground”. We accomplish this through our Farm Bill Programs, using technical advice and financial assistance as our tools for the successful implementation of conservation practices that improve the environment as well as the agricultural and forestry operations.

We had another successful year planning and implementing quality conservation projects across the county on farmsteads, diverse cropland, pastures for a variety of livestock, and forest land. Through the Local Work Group process, we were able to improve support for forestry-related conservation projects in the county by involving more forestry-focused partners like UNH Extension, NH Fish & Game, and NH professional foresters. This renewed focus will help us build on the good, large-scale forestry and wildlife practices we have been promoting to improve forest health and habitat availability for at-risk species on a wider range of properties. We also continued our strong and comprehensive efforts on agricultural conservation projects, focusing on the now-familiar aerial cover crop seeding and soil health initiatives. Across all land uses, we have placed a high importance on forest management plans, forest stand improvement, and the control of both woody and herbaceous invasive species, on approximately 1,444 acres in 2018.

This year we would like to highlight a wildlife project that was funded and partially implemented in fiscal year 2018. Hillsborough County was funded for the only Working Lands for Wildlife contract in NH to improve habitat for the New England Cottontail, a state endangered species. NRCS continues to work with many partners including NH Fish & Game, UNH Extension, and private foresters to gain input on how to best improve the mountain laurel habitat on a 400-acre parcel in Milford and Amherst to provide enough cover for the New England Cottontail to thrive. Due to the partnership cooperation on this project, another follow-up project has been funded for fiscal year 2018 and on this same parcel of land, to include the first wood additions in stream project in Hillsborough County to improve native brook trout habitat and water quality. We are excited to work with our partners this fall to see another ground-breaking wildlife project through to implementation.



Gleaned produce from 2018 season



Kerry Rickrode, volunteer and Hazel Chatfield at apple glean (Wilton)



HCCD's No-till seed drill at Warm Season Grass Workshop (Sept. 2018)

NRCS has continued to work very closely with the Hillsborough County Conservation District during fiscal year 2018. HCCD continues to provide trees and shrubs through their spring plant sale for NRCS contract producers to help with stream bank erosion, nutrient management filtration and wildlife habitat. The USDA-NRCS look forward to continuing this partnership in future projects.

In the coming year, we look forward to building and expanding on our past success, strengthening partnerships, and finding new ways to assist landowners and conserve our natural resources.

2018 Conservation Highlights

NRCS planners wrote new Conservation Plans on over **5,825 acres** for producers on varied land bases, including Farmsteads, Cropland, Hayland, Pastures and Forests. Resource concerns addressed include Soil, Water, Air, Plants, Animals and Energy. We implemented **134** conservation practices at a cost of **\$775,501.67**.

In 2018, NRCS funded **47** Financial Assistance Contracts on **5,825 acres** in Hillsborough County. The contracts were awarded under the 2018 Farm Bill in programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program. **10** applications were funded to address water quality degradation on **195 acres**. **14** applications were funded to address fish and wildlife habitat concerns on over **1,400 acres**. **6** applications were funded to address livestock concerns on **130 acres**. **5** applications were funded to address soil erosion on over **175 acres**. **29** applications were funded to address degraded plant condition concerns on just under **2,900 acres**. These numbers are to serve as a representation of some of the main resource concerns that are addressed through NRCS programs however many other resource concerns were also addressed through those programs.

NRCS partnered with Technical Service Providers (TSPs) to plan and develop **8** Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs) in 2018. Since NRCS began offering CAPs, **85** Forest Management Plans, Grazing Management Plans, Energy Audits, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, and wildlife-centric Management Plans have been developed or are in the process of being developed by private sector TSPs for Hillsborough County landowners.

NRCS would like to thank our partners in conservation, including the Hillsborough County Conservation District, the USDA Farm Service Agency, the UNH Cooperative Extension, NH Fish & Game, and all other state, local, and private non-profit organizations with whom we have worked. Without our partners, we would not be successful.

Michael Birchler, District Conservationist

- HCCD hosted the NH Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting in November at Doubletree by Hilton hotel in Manchester. The theme was “The Future of Forestry & Agriculture”. The conference consisted of various workshop sessions geared towards forestry and agriculture. It was a well-attended, successful event. At the evening banquet, NH Commissioner of Agriculture Shawn Jasper and Brad Simpkins (NH Division of Forests & Lands) gave the keynote presentation.
- Worked closely with NRCS to review and sign-off on landowners NH DES Wetland permit applications.
- HCCD is playing an active role on the newly formed NH Soil Health Working Group.
- Soil penetrometer was available for loan to interested farmers to conduct their own soil tests on their property.

Hillsborough County Conservation District Board of Supervisors

Eric Radlof, Chair.....Milford

Melissa Blindow, Vice Chair.....Goffstown

Christopher Connolly, Treasurer.....Temple

Charles Hardy.....Hollis

The Hillsborough County Conservation District Board of Supervisors is comprised of volunteers who receive no compensation for their services. The Board meets the last Wednesday of the month to review work plans, assess programs, etc. These meetings are open to the public and cooperating agencies.

All programs are offered on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status, disability or political beliefs.

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- Held a Spring Plant Sale Fundraiser.
- Provided seedlings through our plant sale fundraiser to a local farmer in Greenfield to assist him in putting in a riparian buffer on his property to meet his NRCS contract requirements.
- The District rented out its No-Till Drill Equipment to interested farmers within the County. The equipment was featured at a workshop in September where farmers in attendance were able to get a first-hand look and get questions answered.
- Participated in a Conservation Field Day for Alvirne High School students at Beaver Brook Association.
- Held our 2017 annual meeting in May at Alpine Grove in Hollis. The theme was “Farmland for Wildlife” and Matt Tarr, Wildlife Specialist with UNH Cooperative Extension, gave the keynote presentation on how fields, field edges and surrounding woodlots can provide habitat for various types of wildlife. We also honored Brookdale Fruit Farm (Hollis) as Cooperator of the Year and Kathy Parker, Riddle Brook School (Bedford) as Educator of the Year.
- Secured funding to continue to work with Grow Nashua in creating a seconding garden at Dr. Crisp Elementary School (Nashua) which will serve Grow Nashua’s immigrant farmers, neighborhood community and students.
- Secured funding to work with the Cornucopia Project (Peterborough) to assist in the sustainability of their Farm to Fork program that employs students from ConVal High School and provides them with hands-on farming and business experience.
- HCCD is a member of the newly formed Nashua Food Council.
- HCCD began work on a multi-year conservation easement monitoring project partnering with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Hillsborough County Gleaners, a program of HCCD & NH Farm to School, completed its sixth season. This continues to be one of the most successful District programs. Through the program, we were able to collect over 66,000 pounds of food and redistribute to those in need. New recipient organizations have been added this year and a new partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Nashua.
- Partnered with the Rockingham County Conservation District to offer an Erosion Control Field day for environmental professionals this fall.
- Held a Warm Season Grass workshop at Connolly Brothers Dairy Farm (Temple) for interested farmers.
- HCCD had a display at the Hillsborough County Agricultural Fair.



Ciardelli property (NE Cottontail habitat site)

2018 Awards

Cooperator of the Year

The Ciardelli Family
Amherst & Milford, NH

Conservation Educator of the Year

Erin White, Hollis Brookline Middle School
Hollis, NH

Special Thanks to:

Benedikt Dairy Farm, Goffstown
Brookdale Fruit Farm, Hollis
Connolly Brothers Dairy Farm, Temple
Orde Farm Grain Store, Hollis
Bill Wilson (handmade bat & duck boxes)

2018 County Forester Annual Report

UNH Cooperative Extension works hand-in-hand with the Hillsboro Co. Conservation District (HCCD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to encourage positive steps in conservation and forest management practices across the county. One significant update to this relationship in 2018 was the signing of a Cooperative Agreement between UNHCE and NRCS. This agreement streamlines the process of referring clients from UNHCE to NRCS for cost-sharing, or from NRCS to UNHCE for technical assistance. Making this process easier has facilitated much more frequent interactions between our organizations in Hillsboro County.

Landowners across Hillsboro County continue to steward their forests and support local industry through scientifically-informed timber harvesting. Over the course of the last year, I have visited with dozens of foresters and landowners working to improve wildlife habitat, generate income, salvage dead or dying trees, create recreational opportunities, and improve the visual appeal of their forests. Some of these harvests have involved large, 5+ acre openings, others have used a light touch. Some have focused on managing high-value red oak, others on removing relatively unhealthy red pines. The common factor that I see in many of the landowners in Hillsboro County is that they are concerned with trying to do not only what is right for them, their use of the land and their wallet, they are concerned with doing what is right for the forest. And that is heartening. Any landowner interested in learning more about the possibilities for managing their forest are encouraged to call the County Forester for a no-cost consultation and/or site visit.

Over the past year I have worked with several hundred landowners to provide recommendations for the efficient removal of invasive plants from their lands. Through in-person site visits, workshops, phone calls and emails, I have heard from a variety of people struggling with these plants.

During that past year I have initiated or collaborated on **12** different invasive species workshops for professionals and the public. While invasive plants aren't going away any time soon, my hope is that these workshops give people the tools they need to learn to manage these plants effectively and mitigate their impacts.

Invasive plants are often a major issue on municipal lands as well. Many Conservation Commissions have expressed an interest in using herbicides as a part of their overall management strategy. Many are already working with Licensed Pesticide Applicators to control invasive plants on town-owned land. One relatively new option is for Conservation Commissioners themselves to acquire the necessary license and apply herbicides on municipal lands. Commissioners interested in pursuing this option need to acquire a Commercial Applicator, Not-For-Hire license. This license requires an individual to pass a written exam covering numerous aspects of pest control, maintain detailed records of applications made, and attend continuing education classes to ensure they are up-to-date on safe and effective use of chemicals. Though not required, Forest Pest Control trainings offered by the UNH Pesticide Safety Education Program are an excellent introduction to the safe and effective use of pesticides and may be of particular interest to Conservation Commissioners interested in learning more about controlling invasive plants. For more information about trainings, please contact pesticide.safety@unh.edu. For questions about the management of invasive plants or how this training and license might be useful, please contact Ethan Belair.

Forest health issues continue to evolve across the state. Over the past year, new infestations of Emerald ash borer (EAB) have been found in Brookline, Hillsboro, Hollis, Mason, Merrimack, and Milford. Despite the fact that EAB is now wide spread in our area, there is still a lot that we can do to slow its impacts. The fact that this insect is primarily spread by the movement of firewood and other bark-on wood products provides both a risk and an opportunity. Individual's decisions to not move firewood more than 5 miles unless it has been seasoned for 12+ months has a significant impact on slowing the spread of EAB. On a positive note, there have been fewer new reports of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and Elongate Hemlock Scale in Hillsboro County compared to past years. This is likely due to high mortality noted in these invasive insects during the extreme cold weather of January 2019. While this is NOT a long-term solution to the issues posed by invasive insects, it is a very positive temporary improvement for hemlock in southern NH.

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