

The Voice of Local Conservation 2020-21

2020 NWCD Annual Meeting Celebrates Conservation *"In a year unlike any other"*



In 2019, our NWCD annual meeting kicked off at precisely 5PM in West Cornwall on the banks of the soon-to-be Wild and Scenic Housatonic River. Guests walked together, sharing, and shaking hands while touring a newly constructed recreational access areas.

Guests then traveled up to the Trinity Retreat Center to enjoy food and libations together to celebrate with like-minded conservation friends. That was pre-Covid 19. In midsummer 2020, amid a continuing public health crisis, the NWCD Board and staff chose to move to a Zoom annual meeting respectful of the safety of our valued conservation partners. With new technology and a lot of work on the part of staff, we were able to record the meeting. You can now attend an edited and enhanced version in the comfort of your home by following the link: <https://nwcd.org/2020-annual-meeting/>

"Zooming forward", our October 19, 2020 ZOOM Virtual NWCD Annual Meeting opened at precisely 5:30PM, under dark skies, guests signing on from the safety of their homes to celebrate conservation in a "year unlike any other". Executive Director Cynthia Rabinowitz and Chairman Larry Rousseau welcomed guests from our 34 towns in attendance to participate in a brief virtual business meeting to nominate members to the NWCD Board and approve our Annual Report. The business meeting was followed by three conservation awards presented to six individuals by sharing screens miles apart.

A Lifetime Conservation Award was presented to NWCD Board member Curtis Read by Chairman Rousseau. Curtis was recognized for his leadership role as an NWCD Director and Chairman for over 30 years as well as being instrumental in the acquisition and restoration of Native Meadows and its transfer, as permanent open space, to the Town of New Milford. The Conservation Agriculture Award was presented to Mark Mankin by Cynthia Rabinowitz. Mark was honored for his leadership with the New Milford Youth Services Agency where he revitalized the town's Sullivan Farm, while introducing students to farming and creating a self-sustaining business model for the Farm. Conservation Education Awards were awarded to CT Envirothon Team Leaders Jennifer Perga and Kelsey Leach from Northwestern Regional 7 High School and David Moran and Audra Leach from Housatonic Valley Regional High School. Awards presented by NWCD staff Kelsey Sudol and Karen Nelson cited the four educators for their leadership in a critical time requiring adaptability, mentorship and personal dedication for their students and public education. (See page 5 - Envirothon and 2020 Award winners.)

Following the awards, guests were treated to a virtual tour of Native Meadows. Drone footage by District friend, Peter Tavino, under brilliant blue skies, showcased this restored nature preserve in downtown New Milford on the shores of the lower Housatonic River. Kelsey Sudol, staff member, presented a walk through Native Meadows using a GoPro camera with voice-over details from former Executive Director Sean Hayden. This was followed by historic commentary from Curtis Read.

The conclusion of the meeting highlighted several key community gardens in Northwest Connecticut which have become increasingly important during this pandemic year.

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Preservation through Partnership

Ten-plus years of collaborative work between NWCD and many conservation partners, culminated in February 2020 with the transfer, to the Town of

As providence would have it, in 2009, fellow Board member, Bob Rush, also Chairman of the New Milford Affordable Housing Trust, secured funding for acquisition of the property, persuading the Housing Trust Board to buy it and secure a drainage easement. The property was then sold to NWCD about a year later with a minor restriction. Later, Bob advocated for his fellow NWCD Board Directors and staff to seek more grants to make improvements to the preserve. Those grants from many environmental organizations allowed NWCD to eradicate invasive vegetation, including phragmites and Tree of Heaven. The property was replanted with native vegetation and acres of pollinator friendly habitat. Walking trails were created that initiated a connection for future public access from downtown New Milford. Bob was instrumental in finding partners to install a parking lot and an information kiosk for visitors.



Bob has recently retired from the NWCD Board of Directors and in tribute, the Board and staff wish to thank Bob for his help and invaluable assistance to ensure that this project would become a reality

As the Town of New Milford has assumed the role of conservator of Native Meadows, NWCD remains committed to its long-term conservation and is a committed partner to work with New Milford staff and volunteers to maintain the natural beauty and ecological integrity of this invaluable preserve.

New Milford, of a restored nature preserve in downtown New Milford now identified as Native Meadows Preserve. This 25-acre river front parcel was put up for sale in 2009 by owners proposing that the parcel was suitable for a 9-hole golf course. The parcel, then known as Indian Fields, was the last piece of land owned by indigenous people, the Wawayachtonog, living in the area of modern New Milford both before and during the colonial era. They had a farming and fishing culture, cultivating corn, squash, beans and tobacco, and fishing in freshwater areas.

In 2009, the site was pristin as a wildlife corridor for an array of migratory birds and other wildlife. The land provides huge flood capacity and serves as a recharge area for the New Milford public water supply.

In October 2020, former NWCD Executive Director, Sean Hayden, gave a virtual tour of Native Meadows, and described how, then NWCD Chairman, Curtis Read, was adamant in 2009 about preserving this parcel. He brought the news of its imminent sale to the attention of the NWCD Board which was motivated to attempt to purchase the property a year before funds were available. Later, grants were awarded by the Natural Resource Damage fund, administered by CT-DEEP, NOAA, and US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Watch for these Birds and other Wildlife

These twenty-five acres were purchased in 2010 and preserved by the Northwest Conservation District as part of the Houlihan's River PCB pollution remediation and watershed restoration effort. NWCD worked for eight years to improve this environmentally significant parcel of land in many ways.

We treated and removed significant overgrowth of invasive plants. Then we planted native and wildlife enhancing species. For instance, invasive plant populations were reduced to make room for native species, such as Milkweed and Cattails. Milkweed is important to butterflies, particularly monarch butterflies who feed on the flower clusters and lay eggs only on milkweed plants.

Cattails are also important to resident wildlife. They provide cover in the winter months and are used in nests of waterfowl and marsh birds.

NWCD partners studied bird habitat and documented wildlife populations. Trails were planned and installed. The preserve is now permanently protected by a Conservation Easement. In 2019 the preserve was donated to the Town of New Milford for ongoing stewardship and maintenance.

With careful management, Native Meadows can remain a sanctuary for migrating and resident wildlife in the area. Continuous management of this property is vital to ensure a stable habitat for the local ecosystem and the enjoyment of respectful visitors.

Northwest Conservation District
Learn more online at NWCD.org
Email us: info@nwcd.org

Look for these Plants and Trees

Flood Control & Water Quality

Native Meadows plays a central role in flood protection for both town and farm. The riparian buffer zone is not only open space, but also a critical floodplain.

Since so much of the surrounding area is developed and covered by impervious and impervious surfaces, runoff will flow off roads and parking lots, and into the river. This runoff can cause erosion and siltation, which can reduce the river's ability to absorb floodwaters. Native Meadows helps absorb floodwaters and filter out sediment before it reaches the river.

In storm events, this forested flood plain acts as a natural sponge, absorbing and storing water. This water is then slowly released through layers of soil and grass, reducing the risk of flooding. This natural flood storage is critical to the town's water supply and the river's health.

In the same way, this open space acts as a natural sponge for water. This water is then slowly released through layers of soil and grass, reducing the risk of flooding. This natural flood storage is critical to the town's water supply and the river's health.

Wildlife Habitat

An amazing variety of wildlife visit to live here. If you take the time to watch and listen carefully and quietly, you will be rewarded. Come back on dawn or dusk at all seasons.

The abundance of diverse habitats across this property is an especially valuable "multi-habitat" for wildlife. The riparian buffer zone, the forested flood plain, the open meadow, and the wooded areas all provide different habitats for various species of birds and mammals.

Invasive Plants

Control of non-native invasive plants and other species will always be needed in the Preserve. Invasive plants can crowd out native species, reduce biodiversity, and alter the ecosystem. NWCD works to identify and remove these plants, and to plant native species in their place.

Riparian Buffer, Flood Channel

The riparian buffer area along the river provides a natural flood control. This buffer zone is critical to the town's water supply and the river's health. NWCD works to maintain and improve this buffer zone, and to plant native species in their place.

The Northwest Conservation District has had a long history of stewardship and protection of this property. We are committed to ensuring that this property remains a valuable and protected natural resource for future generations.

Native Meadows Preserve

- Access the preserve from this parking area and the hidden trail
- Watch for poison throughout the preserve
- Please stay on the trails and be respectful of this property

- Bring binoculars for bird watching
- Check for ticks when you leave
- NO DOGS

NRCS Assistance & Funding Opportunities

Who is the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and who do they work with?

The U.S Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) offers conservation planning, technical assistance and financial assistance to farmers and landowners interested in conservation practices that address natural resource concerns. Conservation planning and technical assistance are free of charge to the individual and all programs and services are voluntary.

Typical resource concerns that farmers and landowners are interested in addressing include soil erosion, poor soil health, compaction or inadequate organic matter; excess water runoff, and plant productivity and health. Conservation practices that address these concerns may include planting cover-crops, installing contour field strips, reduced tillage and no-till, grassed waterways, livestock grazing management, and a myriad of other possible practices, some of which include engineering design, which is also provided at no cost to the individual. Financial assistance comes in the form of contracts which are cost-shared with the participant and not paid in full by NRCS.

While some may think that NRCS can only assist commercial farmers and forest landowners with

practices to address natural resource concerns, NRCS also offers assistance to community garden managers and individual landowners. Suggestions for community gardens include practices such as soil testing, practices that will extend the growing season such as high tunnels, or ways to increase organic matter in the soil such as composting. There are many methods for producing compost including the use of animal manure, food scraps, leaf and lawn clippings and other organic materials.

Composting systems range from simple to complex and a recommendation for a system that will best fit the needs of your garden can be considered with the help of NRCS. Individuals with livestock such as horses can also benefit from NRCS's assistance. Manure management, pasture management, water runoff from buildings, can all be addressed by skilled professionals.

These resources and more are available at nrcs.usda.gov. For more information, or if you are interested in developing a conservation plan, contact the USDA Service Center at (860) 626-8852.



Community Gardens in NW Connecticut

Community gardens increase access to fresh food produced locally and help our region to become more resilient to economic and environmental changes. Many of the community gardens in northwest Connecticut towns have individual plots available for a nominal rental fee as well as community plots cared for by volunteers. The community plots provide regular donations to needy people in our communities through soup kitchens, food banks, senior centers or other ways of delivery. At our recent annual meeting, we illustrated this movement by focusing on

five local gardens: Bethlehem Community Garden at Swendsen Farm Preserve in Bethlehem; Goshen Green Garden, sponsored by the Goshen Church of Christ Congregational; Brooker Child Care and Learning Center Garden in Torrington; the Judea Garden located on the Steep Rock Mastrocostis Preserve in Washington, and Litchfield Community Garden on the Litchfield Land Trust's Graham Thompson Preserve.

Gardeners at these community gardens report that the benefits go well beyond the produce they grow. The social connections formed among the participants are a very important part of the experience. During 2020 – the Covid year – these relationships were often the only contact some people had with others outside their own homes. This was especially important for those living alone. Sometimes, participating in a community garden is the only connection a person may have with outdoor activity and nature.

The Management of Connecticut's Woodlands in an Era of Climate Change

Connecticut's woodlands are essential to us for what is provided to all; air and water quality, diverse and critical wildlife habitat, carbon uptake and storage, recreation and human health benefits, important products, productive employment and contributions to local economies, and peaceful retreats and a sense of place. The sustainability of Connecticut's society depends upon the products and benefits that come from its woodlands.

Connecticut is the third smallest state in area and the fourth most densely populated, but is 58 percent wooded (1.8 million acres). This wasn't always the case. In 1860, Connecticut's tree cover dropped to a low of 30 percent. The return of woods is largely the results of beneficial woodland policies, large public support for woodlands, and the emergence of professional woodland management. The woodlands of Connecticut are not remnants of primal nature, but a reflection of millennia of human interaction. Private individuals own 73 percent (1.3 million acres) of our woodlands. The average size of a woodlot is 30 acres.

Our woods are comprised of trees that are middle to late age (60+ years), big (11+ inches in diameter) and of predominately oak species. These woodlands have little diversity in tree size, age, and species composition.

The changing climate in the Northeast is altering weather and other natural disturbance patterns which will change the makeup of our woodlands. The increase of heat trapping carbon dioxide gas (CO₂) is one of the driving forces of climate change.

Connecticut's woodlands provide a valuable ecosystem service by taking up and storing carbon and reducing atmospheric CO₂ through the process of photosynthesis. Our woodlands are widely acknowledged as a carbon sink. Active and sustainable management is essential to maintain and promote woodland's resilience and adaptability to climate change. Woodlands are carbon. Managing woodlands is managing carbon.

Professional foresters, licensed by the State of Connecticut, use their unique knowledge of the 100+ tree and shrub species, and the environmental factors which influence their growth, to help guide landowners in making informed decisions on the stewardship of their woods. Woodland management can include timber harvesting when it fits with the landowner's objectives and the capabilities of the woods. Such management can provide long-term carbon uptake and storage.

Sustainable woodland management, planned and conducted by Connecticut's forestry professionals, will ensure that our woodlands will continue to meet the challenge of a changing climate.

Sources of information:

Forest Carbon: https://masswoods.org/sites/masswoods.org/files/Forest-Carbon-web_1.pdf, <https://www.uvm.edu/rsenr/news/older-forests-resist-change-climate-change>

Forest Management: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/CAES/DOCUMENTS/Special_Features/ForestRegenerationpdf.pdf

<https://extension.unh.edu/tags/woodlot-management>
Woodland Owner Assistance: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Forestry/Landowner-Assistance/Service-Forestry-Program-for-Connecticut-Landowners>



Larry Rousseau is the Chairman of the Northwest Conservation District. He has been a resident of Torrington for 38 years. He recently retired from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's Division of Forestry after 42 years as a forester. He is the Vice-Chairman of the Yankee Division of the New England Society of American Foresters.

CT Envirothon - Pushing Forward Into the Virtual World

This past June, CT Envirothon successfully held a virtual competition with 12 participating teams from 10 Connecticut schools. Held through google classroom, one exam from each main station – aquatics, wildlife, soils and forestry – was posted per day across one week. In addition, each team created a 10-slide PowerPoint based on a current issue scenario about Watershed Management. In their PowerPoint, students addressed questions about the Natchaug Watershed, where the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District is helping create a management plan.



First Place Team: From left to right; Kaleigh Spencer, Maia Scaramuzza, Ellie Crone and Dylan Phillips

NWCD is proud to announce that the top three competing teams came from two schools in our district. Congratulations to Northwestern Regional High School Team 2, pictured to the right, who won first place. Team 1 of Northwestern Regional High School (NWR7) claimed second place, and the team from Housatonic Valley High School (HVRHS) won third place. Congratulations to all teams for participating as well!

Victoria Duffy, a NWR7 student, commented on Envirothon, "...what I appreciated most about Envirothon was the diversity of topics. It taught students to broaden their horizons and look at all aspects of the environment as a cohesive unit--how each interacts and how they differ. Going into college, this is incredibly helpful because, as an environmental science major, it is vital to see the connection between topics and classes. There are chain reactions within every part of an ecosystem--helping one area can benefit or harm another."

This year for the 2020-2021 season, instead of in-person workshops, the current plan is for the CT Envirothon Steering Committee to hold 'Envirothon' week at the beginning of each month from December - April. Each station will have its own day to release material with the option to hold a live virtual event, if desired. The Steering Committee plans to hold another virtual competition in May 2021, building off the virtual event held last year, but with tighter restrictions and more formality. Kelsey Sudol, NWCD's Environmental Associate, is the Aquatics Chair, and will be leading the coordination of the Aquatics Curriculum, presentations and released material. She is also developing a video series focusing on her aquatic field work using a new GoPro for first person perspective.

The Envirothon Steering Committee is currently in the process of planning and adapting for the 2020-2021 competition year, and look forward to bringing Envirothon to as many students as possible. We cannot emphasize enough our gratitude for all schools that participated last year, and for the teams that are signed up for this year. The students and advisors pushing forward to participate are greatly appreciated, and we are excited to bring you great content this year.

2020 Educator Awards - Our Envirothon Partners

JENNIFER PERGA has taught science for 26 years, starting in California and the last 20 years at NWR7. She has been an advisor of the Envirothon Team for many years. Jen is a board member and current president of the Winchester Land Trust and involved in many community projects.

KELSEY LEACH (and Audra's sister) is a secondary science teacher at NWR7. She has been busy coaching field hockey, advising Envirothon, and tutoring students for the last 10 years at NWR7.

AUDRA LEACH is currently an Agricultural Education teacher at HVRHS in her 12th year teaching either science or agriculture in the State and involved with the Envirothon program all those twelve years.

DAVID MORAN is an Agriscience and Technology Teacher at HVRHS. He is in his 25th year of teaching and has also taught at NWR7 and Glastonbury H.S. David has helped his Envirothon students compete at the state and national level for many years and has been a "mentor" to many Envirothon teachers and teams.

Building Resilient Communities with Low Impact Development



NWCD has just completed our second year in our project, Building Resilient Local Communities with Low Impact Development (LID), funded by the Connecticut Community Foundation. This initiative focuses on two different towns each year, and aims to improve current stormwater management infrastructure, and increase local resiliency by installing a LID demonstration project in each town. The goal is to partner with town land use agencies and citizens to promote the use of resilient development projects, and to raise local awareness and understanding of future climate conditions.

While this year's demonstration projects in Roxbury and Woodbury were stalled due to the pandemic, NWCD was able to begin planning for the projects, and to begin educational outreach in both towns. These demonstration projects, when completed, will count towards the Silver SustainableCT certification in both Woodbury and Roxbury, which are currently Bronze certified towns. SustainableCT (<https://sustainablect.org>) is a statewide initiative run through Eastern Connecticut State University to address resiliency and climate adaption in Connecticut Towns. NWCD is glad to aid Woodbury and Roxbury in reaching their higher level certifications.

Rain Gardens and LID demonstration projects aim to increase local resilience, better stormwater infrastructure, and are excellent locations for native

plants to create habitat for birds, butterflies and other wildlife year-round. As part of our goals to raise location awareness and outreach, NWCD created our first StoryMap pertaining to the importance of native plants, and their various benefits such as their use in rain gardens. With the interactive map at the end, you can see one of NWCD's previous rain gardens and interact with the different native plants. NWCD looks forward to updating this interactive feature with more rain gardens from this project and our other LID structures. To view this StoryMap, visit our website at NWCD.org and look under the education tab for the StoryMaps page. To learn more about rain gardens and LID, check out our website or another great resource is nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens/.



Energy Updates - Current Solar Initiatives and Funding

We are pleased to report that since our last newsletter, the conditions for solar installation in Connecticut have taken a turn for the better. The federal tax credit on solar (called ITC, for "Investment Tax Credit"), which as we reported was scheduled to ratchet downward, has instead been extended for two years at the present 26% level. As well,

programs proposed to replace our state's consumer-friendly net metering policy (which ends after 2021) are far more generous than had been discussed in the past and offer future solar customers sensible choices. For more details, we recommend the CT Mirror article "A Shocker in the Plan to Finally Update Residential Solar Rates: No Complaints,"

published 1/29/21. <https://ctmirror.org/2021/01/29/a-shocker-in-the-plan-to-finally-update-residential-solar-rates-no-complaints/>

Ray Furse of Warren is vice chairman of the NWCD. He is a partner at Litchfield Hills Solar, an integrator of solar electric (PV) systems for homes and farms in northwestern Connecticut

NWCD Welcomes New Agricultural Technician Sarah Ammirato



I am a recent graduate of the University of Connecticut. I have a diverse background in the field of agriculture including livestock, forestry, and sustainable agriculture. Since 2019, I have worked closely with UConn Extension and Litchfield County 4-H as a summer educator. I am also an active member of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, Young Farmers Committee, and the UConn College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources Alumni Board. I look forward to using my connections to the agricultural community in Litchfield County to connect producers with opportunities offered by NRCS and the Conservation District.

If you are interested in agricultural assistance or would like information on developing a conservation plan, please contact me at saraha@nwcd.org.

This position was funded partially by a National Association of Conservation Districts Technical Services grant.



NWCD serves the following 34 northwestern CT towns, those in bold are current SustainableCT towns with * indicating bronze certification:

Barkhamsted, Bethel, Bethlehem, Bridgewater, Brookfield*, Canaan (Falls Village), Colebrook, Cornwall*, Danbury, Goshen, Hartland, Harwinton, Kent, Litchfield, Morris, New Fairfield, New Hartford, New Milford*, Newtown, Norfolk, North Canaan, Plymouth, Roxbury*, Salisbury, Sharon, Sherman, Southbury, Thomaston, Torrington, Warren, Washington, Watertown, Winchester and Woodbury*.



**NWCD IS PLANNING A PRE-ORDER ONLY/
DRIVE THRU – CONTACTLESS
EARTH DAY PLANT SALE
AT THE GOSHEN FAIRGROUNDS
THE WEEK OF APRIL 19-24, 2021
SPRING NEWSLETTER ORDER FORMS
TO BE AVAILABLE AND
WEBSTORE TO BE OPEN IN MID MARCH**

To support NWCD

Please make a charitable donation by check to NWCD or donate by Paypal <https://nwcd.org/donate/>
Under the CARES Act, you may be able to deduct charitable donations up to \$600.00 in 2021 without itemizing your deductions.



Northwest Conservation District
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Conservation Corner

nwcd.org 860 626 7222

Virtual Programs and Materials from NWCD and our Partners

- **Benefits of Native Plants Storymap:** <https://nwcd.org/storymaps/>
- **CT Compost Virtual Web Series:** NWCD was a planning partner for this series. To view, search RC&D compost conference on youtube
- **Follow the Forest StoryMap:** Created by HVA, learn about Core Forest at <https://hvatoday.org/connecting-forest-corridors/>
- **Pollinator Pathway:** Preserving pollinators is imperative to protect all of our natural resources. To learn more and follow, visit <https://www.pollinator-pathway.org/connecticut>
- **Livestreams from White Memorial Conservation Center:** search White Memorial Conservation Center on Facebook
- **CT Envirothon Monthly Webinar Series:** Mentioned on page 5. To watch the recordings, search CT Envirothon on youtube



Drone shot from Native Meadows Trail

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