



# The VOICE of LOCAL CONSERVATION

## Northwest Conservation District

## Winter Edition 2023

On Tuesday September 26th, 2023, we welcomed guests from the 34 towns in our district to our annual meeting held at Housatonic River Brewing in New Milford, located next to the 25 acre Native Meadows Preserve along the Housatonic River.

Executive Director Cynthia Rabinowitz began the evening with a welcome and introduction to guest speaker Chris Combs from The Institute for American Indian Studies. Mr. Combs gave an informative talk about the history and customs of indigenous people in Connecticut. After a brief business meeting electing board members and approving the annual report and minutes, we proudly presented this years' conservation awards.

The *2023 Conservation Farmers Award* was given to Hungry Reaper Farm in Morris. Sarah Ammirato from the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service presented the award, honoring their efforts to produce food for their community while being mindful of soil, water and air quality. They follow organic standards and climate smart farming goals including cover cropping, crop rotation, use of beneficial insects and limiting tillage. As beginning farmers, they are active advocates for new farmers in Connecticut.

The *2023 Conservation Educator Award* was given to Sarah Bailey. Her award was presented by Karen Griswold Nelson, recently retired Program Administrator for NWCD. Karen honored Sarah's many years of leadership in the UConn Ext. Master Gardener Program and dedication to environmental education. Sarah supports conservation and ecological stewardship by promoting best practices in horticulture. Sarah and her volunteers have been an essential part in helping our annual plant sale be a success.

Fellow volunteer Michelle Winkler received the *2023 Conservation Partner Award* presented by NWCD Chairman Larry Rousseau. Michelle was recognized for her many years of leadership in the UConn Ext. Master Gardener Program as Litchfield County Coordinator. She encouraged Master Gardeners to be environmental stewards in their local communities and also played a vital role volunteering for our annual plant sale.

Sue Ford from the New Milford Public Library was also presented with a *2023 Conservation Partner Award* for her dedication to conservation-focused library programs, teaching the next generation environmental stewardship.

Lastly, Karen Griswold Nelson was surprised with an Environmental Award honoring her 10 years of dedicated service to the Northwest Conservation District. The evening concluded by acknowledging the recipients of the Jacolyn "Jackie" Mott, Rev. Ledlie Laughlin Jr. and Dick Leavenworth scholarships.

We thank Housatonic River Brewing for their warm hospitality, Chris Combs for his informative presentation, and all of our District partners, supporters and fellow environmentalists who love and protect our natural world.



Sue Ford, Conservation Partner



Michelle Winkler, Conservation Partner



Sarah Bailey, Conservation Educator



Hungry Reaper, Conservation Farmers

## Farm to Table at NWCD's Annual Meeting

Although our treasurer Doreen Lynch-Sudol's planned farm-to-table meal could not be provided this year, Agriculture and Natural Resources Technician Annette Lott did bring her home-made pumpkin cupcakes, highlighting Goshen-grown New England Pie Pumpkins and duck eggs from Crosswicks Farm.

# Pumpkin Cupcakes

### Ingredients

#### Cupcake:

2 cups all-purpose flour (240g)  
 ½ cup granulated sugar (100g)  
 2 tsp baking powder  
 1 tsp baking soda  
 ¼ tsp salt  
 2 tsp pumpkin pie spice  
 2 tsp ground ginger  
 1 tsp ground cinnamon  
 425g pureed pumpkin (or one 15-ounce can)  
 1 cup vegetable oil (240mL)  
 1 cup packed light brown sugar (220g)  
 4 large eggs  
 1 tbsp vanilla extract

#### Icing filling:

8-oz packet of cream cheese  
 ½ cup powdered sugar  
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

#### Optional:

Pumpkin seeds

Prep Time: 30 min

Cook Time: 20 min

Servings: 24 cupcakes

Recipe adapted from Preppy Kitchen



### Farm Highlight: Ford Farm

Ford Farm is located in East Canaan, CT and is run by Ty Ford. The farm has been operating since the 1930's. They raise beef, pork and seasonal produce. Ford Farm's stand is a staple in the East Canaan community to pick up pork and sweet corn in the summer. The stand is located on Route 44 (368 Norfolk Road) and is open 9-6 from July to October.

### Pureeing Pumpkins:

Preparing pumpkins is quite easy! Cut your pumpkin in half, and scoop out the seeds. Cut the pumpkin into wedges. Place the wedges into a pot, filling the bottom with 1-2 inches of water and cover with a lid. Bring the pot to a boil and let it simmer until the flesh is fork-tender. Remove the pot from the heat, and let the wedges cool. Use a spoon to scoop the flesh from the skin, collecting it in a bowl. The pumpkin can now be fork-mashed, blended, or sieved to make the puree. Any extra can be frozen for later use.

### Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350F. Line 2 muffin pans with paper cupcake liners.
2. In a large bowl, sift together the flour, granulated sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, pumpkin pie spice, ginger, and cinnamon.
3. In another bowl, whisk together the pumpkin, oil, brown sugar, eggs, and vanilla. Add the pumpkin mixture to the flour mixture, and stir just until no streaks of flour remain.
4. In another bowl, mix together the cream cheese, powdered sugar, and vanilla extract.
5. Fill the paper liners ¾ full with cupcake batter (about ¼ cup). Then, use a spoon to scoop ~1 tablespoon of icing onto the center of the cupcakes. Optional, sprinkle pumpkin seeds around the edges of the cupcake.
6. Bake for 20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the cupcake comes out clean. (Rotate the pans and swap oven racks after 12 minutes.) Let cool in the pan for 10 minutes, then remove, and finish cooling.

## Soil Health and Cover Crops

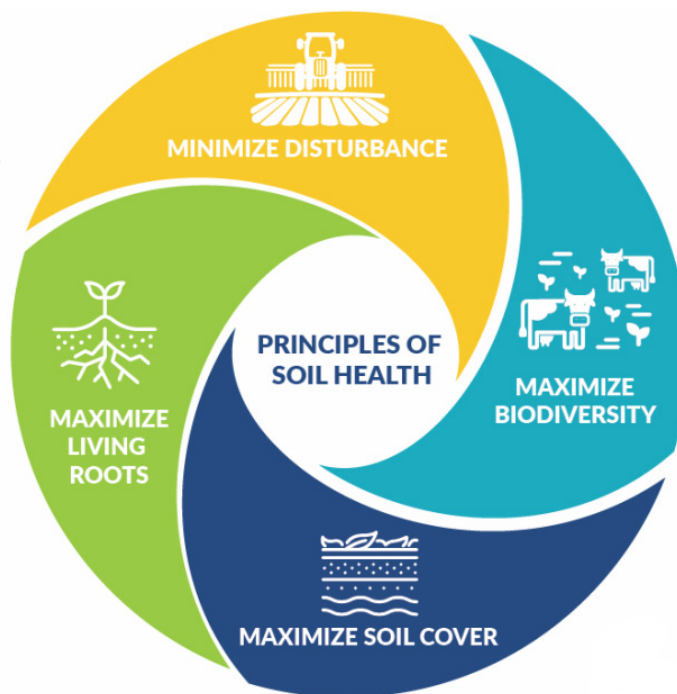
For the third year, NWCD offered free cover crop seed and technical assistance to farms through our Cover Crop Challenge! Twenty-two farms are participating this year, including many returning participants from past year's challenges. Besides protecting soil health and increasing farm resiliency, cover crops also protect our watersheds by reducing nutrient runoff and soil erosion, benefiting not only farmers but their surrounding communities as well.

USDA-NRCS conveniently divides soil health into four distinct principles:

- Minimize disturbance
- Maximize biodiversity
- Maximize soil cover
- Maximize living roots

These principles support the soil ecosystem, which in turn makes the farmer's job easier and minimizes risks to the surrounding environment. Fortunately, cover crops fit into each principle!

Instead of leaving a field bare after a cash crop has been harvested, cover crops provide living roots and aboveground biomass over winter and into the spring to directly compete with weeds. After termination, cover crop residue can block sunlight from weed seeds, providing increased suppression into the cash crop growing season. Because of these weed-suppressing properties, farmers can reduce the use of tillage and herbicides, thus helping to minimize disturbance and maximize biodiversity.



By their nature, cover crops maximize living roots, which helps to stabilize soil from erosion, leaves underground biomass to feed the soil, and creates pathways for air and water to penetrate the earth. Likewise, cover crops maximize soil cover, even when terminated. This mulching prevents evaporation and moderates soil temperatures, reducing the need for irrigation, and also provides a protective barrier to the soil from erosive factors like rain and wind.

We thank our participating farms for committing to this cause and hope to see the program expand even more in the future. If you are interested in trying out cover crops on your farm or garden, questions can be directed to Annette Lott at (860) 626-7222.

## NRCS Funding Opportunities for Climate Smart Practices

Are you a farmer in Litchfield County interested in climate-smart conservation practices on your farm? Do you want to (or do you already) use cover crops, mulching, reduced or no-till, pollinator plantings, field borders, or prescribed grazing? Did you know that there is funding from the Inflation Reduction Act for these practices, and more! Reach out to the NRCS Torrington field office if you'd like to learn more.

1185 New Litchfield St, Torrington, CT 06790  
(860) 626-8852 or paula.rosado@usda.gov

(Full list of Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Practices <https://bit.ly/ClimateSmartNRCS>)

# Low Impact Development Project

Since January 2021, NWCD has been working to create green infrastructure at Meckauer and Bennett Parks in Bethel along Limekiln Brook, a designated impaired watercourse. NWCD's partners in this project are the Town of Bethel, Housatonic Valley Association (HVA), Earth Tones Native Plant Nursery, CT DEEP, and EPA.

Funding came from a US EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source grant, administered by CT DEEP, and is designed to underwrite implementation projects to mitigate nonpoint source pollution (NPS). NPS is pollution that originates from the built landscape, including home grounds, agricultural fields, and all impervious surfaces such as roads, driveways, roofs, patios, decks, etc.

A low impact development project (LID) is designed to divert the stormwater runoff from those impervious surfaces into bio-infiltration areas (rain gardens, swales) that allow the water to infiltrate the ground where the soil microbiome and plant roots help to clean the water before it reaches open ponds, lakes, rivers, and streams from where the water ultimately is carried out to Long Island Sound.

LID is a piecemeal approach to an amorphous "everywhere" problem. Stormwater drains off the land carrying pollutants and is "nonpoint source"

because we can't know exactly where the pollution originated. The pollution itself is "piecemeal" and so is the solution.

Four rain gardens were designed and constructed by Earth Tones Native Plant Nursery to capture stormwater runoff from building roofs and parking lots. At Bennett Park, the garden captures roof runoff from the Pavilion. After infiltrating the garden, water then seeps through "weep walls" into an adjacent pond – much cleaner than it would otherwise have been. Limekiln Brook, a tributary of the Still River, flows through the man-made pond and into Meckauer Park where three additional rain gardens help to protect water quality in the watershed.

The final piece of this project will be a riparian buffer of native plants along the southwest side of the pond and brook at Bennett Park. This planting is scheduled for this month and will help to protect the water from Canada Geese which like to hang out there and create a lot of waste that contaminates the water.

If every building or parking lot had a rain garden, we could more easily keep our water resources cleaner. For information on creating a rain garden at your home, check out these resources:

[www.nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens/](http://www.nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens/)



## NWCD Outreach & Education: Children's Gardening Programs

For the third summer, NWCD expanded our Community Garden Program at the Beardsley and Memorial Library in Winsted. The garden includes four raised beds set up on the edge of the parking lot. Each week, NWCD held an hour long program for kids and an hour long program for teens, where they harvested their hand-grown produce, while learning about a variety of environmental and agricultural topics. The goals of this ongoing project are to increase access to locally grown produce while expanding agricultural education at the local level.

Thanks to funding from the Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation, we were again able to provide 50 at-home container garden kits, one for each participating family. Each kit included a trowel, watering can, bottle of fertilizer, gardening gloves, 12-inch pot, and 4 plants - either a tomato or pepper, and 3 smaller plants, either lettuce or herbs. Participants were able to practice what at home what they learned at the library.

We were also able to expand the program to include programming for the adults who visit the library. We held a container garden program, where take home kits were given out, and our NWCD treasurer, Doreen Lynch-Sudol, held three cooking classes that highlighted skills that paired with the vegetables grown in their kits.

Lastly, we were grateful to be able to bring our children's gardening program to the New Milford Public Library! The weekly, hour long program was offered to children, and included the same take-home kits, books, educational activities and presentations given at the Beardsley Library children's program.

The Beardsley program was made possible thanks to funding from the Northwest CT Community Foundation Keroden Endowed Fund. We would also like to thank Carol Parent, Children's Services Director, Emily Young, Teen Services Librarian, and Karley Padin, Adult Program and Outreach Librarian, for their partnership. The New Milford program was made possible thanks to funding from the Women's Club of Greater New Milford. We would also like to thank Sue Ford, Children's Services Librarian. And thank you to all of our participants this year - your dedication and enthusiasm were contagious!



## NWCD Welcomes New Staff



**Lola Szydlo**  
*Program Administrator*

I am happy to return to the environmental field as Program Administrator for NWCD. I began my career as a summer camp counselor with Indian Rock Nature Preserve in Bristol, eventually working my way up to becoming Director of Education. I taught a variety of hands-on programs for primarily pre-k to 5th graders including; farm tours, pond life, nature walks and wildlife programs, Native American culture, outdoor skills, and more. Teaching and connecting young people to nature was very rewarding and I look forward to developing elementary school programs for the District.

In addition to assisting with education, my other roles with the District are financial and office management, public relations, and event planning. I have extensive experience in these areas as well and enjoy having diverse responsibilities. I look forward to helping the District become a prominent presence in the communities we serve. You can email me at [lolas@nwcd.org](mailto:lolas@nwcd.org).



**Coleman Pushlar**  
*Outreach and  
Education Intern*

I graduated from Roger Williams University in 2023 with a marine biology and communication degree. I joined NWCD to get experience in many diverse fields and get involved with conservation work. I assisted the Lake Waramaug Task Force with the collection of lake monitoring data and the removal of invasive species. I shadowed Cynthia on wetland determinations and solar installation site inspections. I helped run the NWCD's summer library programs in Winsted and New Milford. Some weekends, I represented the district at farmers' markets, handing out literature, answering questions, and even doing hands-on demonstrations with our watershed simulator. When I wasn't out in the field, I joined meetings, helped to plan events, and learned from experts of many disciplines. I worked on educational literature as well, creating a pamphlet on mycorrhizal fungi and a booklet on invasive plant identification and removal.

This internship made me fall in love with teaching conservation and protecting our communities. I'm thankful I was able to experiment with a new career path, and now plan on getting my masters in conservation.

**EARTH DAY**  
*Plant Sale*  
**April 19<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024**  
**@ the Goshen Fairgrounds**  
*Pre-ordering available in March*

**NORTHWEST  
CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT**  
[www.nwcd.org](http://www.nwcd.org)

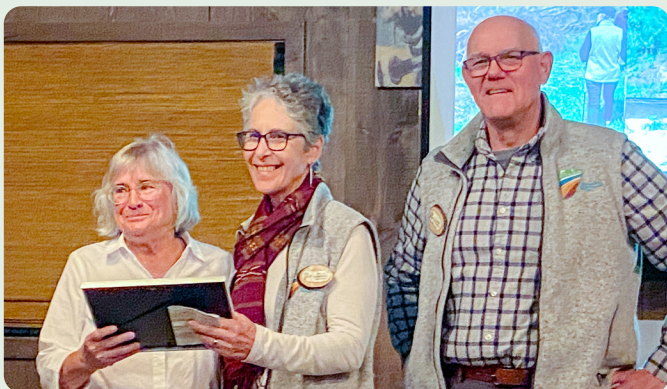
## Celebrating Karen's Retirement

Many of you will know Karen Griswold Nelson from our annual plant sale, educational outreach programs, your work on town commissions, or even just calling our office for assistance. Karen recently retired after 10 years in her position as Program Administrator at NWCD.

During her dedicated service at NWCD, Karen was a passionate advocate for the environment and a committed advocate for education. She served on the Steering Committee of the Connecticut Envirothon and became chair of the committee during her last year. She was an avid supporter of the Envirothon experience. Karen was also instrumental in helping to organize the establishment of NWCD's scholarship program that champions future environmentalists from the region's high schools.

Karen shared her extensive knowledge of native plants during the District's annual plant sale and worked hard to stay abreast of research into the need for native plants to support insects, birds, and other animals. She also advocated for "No Mow May" by creating yard signs for the District to distribute to people wanting to show their advocacy for wildlife habitat by pledging to not mow their lawns during the month of May. This supports emerging creatures, especially insects, that need cover and food sources after winter dormancy.

As a land use administrator in the Town of Cornwall, Karen kept up-to-date on the latest land use regulations and administration of inland wetlands and zoning commissions and was a great resource at NWCD for other land use agents throughout our District who could call on for assistance and advice. We thank Karen for her 10 years of hard work with NWCD, and wish her well in partial retirement. She will be missed!



## Future Environmental Stewards CT Envirothon

This year marked the 32nd year of CT Envirothon, which provides high school students an opportunity to explore the environment in an applied science approach, while promoting skills in communication and teamwork. There are five main stations - Soils, Forestry, Aquatics, Wildlife, and a rotating Current Issue. This year, CT Envirothon held three in-person workshops, while continuing to hold webinars and post content on our YouTube channel.

In May, we held our competition at Kellogg Environmental Center in Derby, CT with twenty four participating teams from sixteen schools. Each station gave a 50 minute, hands-on test. This year's current issue was 'Adapting to a Changing Climate', where students gave a presentation simulating a grant proposal for a climate adaptation project in their local municipalities.

First place was awarded to Nonnewaug Regional High School, second place to Lyman Hall High School, and third place to Housatonic Valley Regional High School, Team 1. Tracy Babbidge, CT DEEP's Acting Deputy Commissioner, presented the awards and spoke about the importance of preparing the students to be future environmental leaders. Congratulations to all teams - this also includes from our district: Marvelwood School and Northwest Regional High School!

In July, Nonnewaug High School competed in the 35th International Event, hosted in New Brunswick, Canada (pictured below), and were aided by NWCD in their aquatics preparation. They competed with teams from 49 states, 6 Canadian provinces, China and Singapore. Congratulations to Nonnewaug and their advisor Audra Leach! We appreciate the dedication and hard-work of all our teams and advisors, and look forward to next year!



## Invasive Plant Education and Management: Native Meadows Preserve



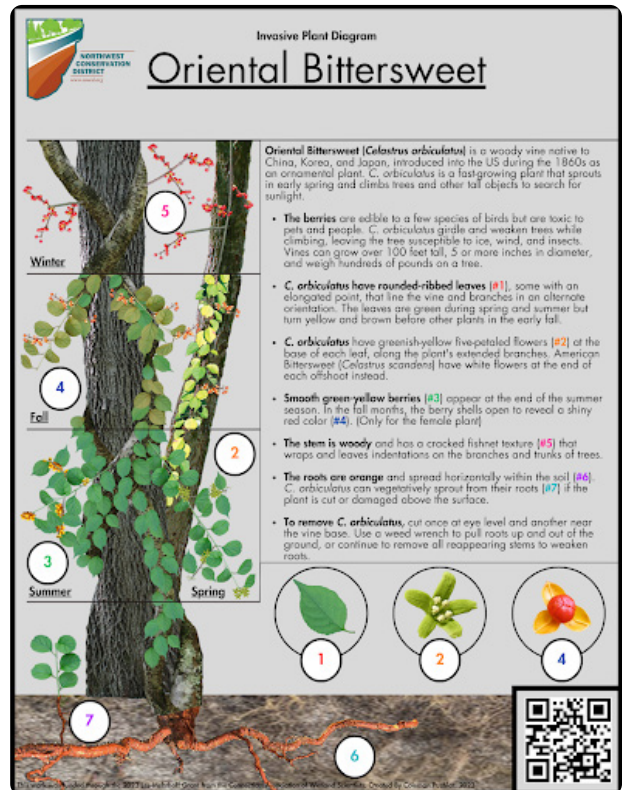
Native Meadows Preserve (NMP) is a 25 acre parcel in the floodplain of the Housatonic River, near downtown New Milford. After it was threatened by development, NMP was preserved by NWCD in 2009 with funds from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Extensive studies identified NMP as an area of high importance for its diverse habitats (including vernal pools, mixed grasses, riparian forest buffers, etc.). NMP supports wildlife such as pollinators and amphibians, is a crucial flyover location for migratory birds and waterfowl, and has many ecosystem services. The Preserve also regulates flooding, protects nearby infrastructure, and serves as a recharge area for the New Milford public water supply. Previously known as Indian Fields, NMP is historically significant as the last piece of land owned by the indigenous Wawaytonoc.

As part of a major floodplain, NMP is vulnerable to non-native invasive species. To protect its various habitats, it will need future invasive maintenance. In 2020, the ownership of NMP was transferred to the Town of New Milford; but NWCD remains a committed partner for its long-term conservation. With funding from the 2023 Les Mehrhoff Grant from the Connecticut Association of Wetland Scientists (CAWS), NWCD has begun work on an Invasive Plant Education and Management Program for NMP to contain and remove invasive plants, while increasing community awareness.

In December 2022, NWCD surveyed the public walking trails for invasive species and their density. While there are numerous invasives, our program plans to target Oriental Bittersweet, Autumn Olive, Japanese Barberry, Multiflora Rose, Garlic Mustard, Japanese Honeysuckle and Phragmites. NWCD staff repeated this survey in June 2023, hoping to document invasives in multiple phases. We also created literature specific to our targeted species.

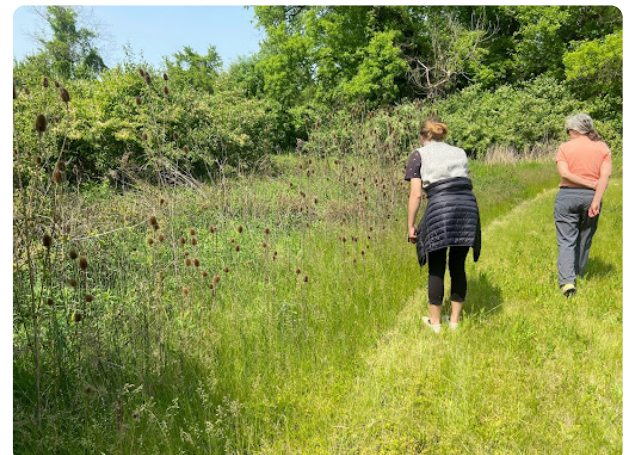
We are focusing on invasives that can be removed mechanically, as New Milford is a Bee City - so chemical treatments will not be used. We hope to train volunteers on a public Survey123 form we created and to become part of our survey team. NWCD is planning an educational program about invasive identification; how invasives negatively affect biodiversity; mechanical removal; and how to use our Survey123 form. We also plan to host an invasive plant removal party this winter using hand tools provided by the Les Mehrhoff Grant, and will continue follow up surveys to monitor the effectiveness of the project.

If you are interested in helping remove invasives on NMP or partnering, please email [info@nwcd.org](mailto:info@nwcd.org).



Invasive Plant Informational Booklet created by NWCD intern Coleman Pushlar.

To download, please visit: [nwcd.org/native-meadows](http://nwcd.org/native-meadows)





2023 NWCD

# Scholarship Awardees

2024 Applications Due:

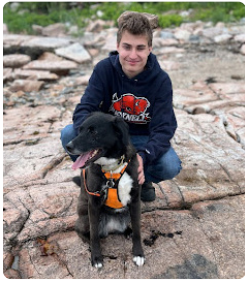
March 15, 2024

[nwcd.org/scholarships](http://nwcd.org/scholarships)

## Noah Green

I am a 2023 graduate of Northwestern Regional H.S. and I am currently attending The University of Connecticut, Storrs, majoring in Natural Resources. I was driven to this field of study by a long-time passion for the outdoors. I plan to use the education I receive now to help me pursue a career where I can work in the outdoors and have a positive impact on the environment and my community.

*Jacolyn "Jackie" Mott Scholarship*



## Aiden Cherniske

I am attending Bucknell University, majoring in Computer and Electrical Engineering. I am currently taking an introductory engineering course with a focus on designing sustainable technology. I've also been able to participate in the Renewable Energy Scholars organization which actively seeks for ways to increase sustainability on campus. Our current projects include a complete overhaul of a Growing Spaces Greenhouse with solar and water recycling. I look forward to continuing to get more involved in this project and other clubs and organizations as I settle into college life.

*Rev. Ledlie Laughlin Scholarship*



## Joseph Velky, III

During my high school years I have had the privilege of learning all about CT's natural resources and wildlife ecology through my natural resources class. I've also been able to work as a Forest Technician for the Southbury Audubon for the past three years, monitoring and caring for bird species and habitat. Now, through my college and major choice, I have been able to study and learn more about environmental stability, the ecosystem, and wildlife ecology which I plan to help me in my future goals of becoming a Fish and Game Warden.

*Dick Leavenworth Scholarship*

## Casey Labrie (not pictured)

Attending University of New England for Marine Sciences, graduate of Northwestern Regional #7 High School.

*Jacolyn "Jackie" Mott Scholarship*

## NRCS-EWP Program

# Emergency Funding

*If interested, please contact:*

1185 New Litchfield St, Torrington, CT 06790

(860) 626-8852 or [paula.rosado@usda.gov](mailto:paula.rosado@usda.gov)

The USDA-NRCS administers the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP), which responds to emergencies created by natural disasters, and it is NOT necessary for a national emergency to be declared for an area to be eligible for assistance!

The program is a recovery effort aimed at relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural disasters. NRCS may bear up to 75% of the eligible construction cost of emergency measures.

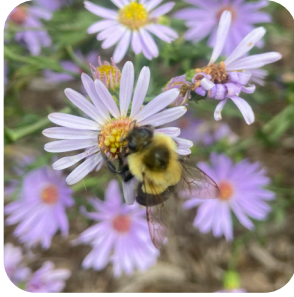
Public and private landowners are eligible for assistance but must be represented by a project sponsor. (Sponsors include legal subdivisions of the State, such as a city, county, general improvement

district, conservation district, or any Native American tribe or tribal organization.)

### **Various activities can be funded, including:**

- Remove debris from stream channels, road culverts and bridges;
- reshape and protect eroded streambanks;
- correct damaged or destroyed drainage facilities;
- establish vegetative cover on critically eroding lands;
- repair levees and structures;
- repair certain conservation practices, and
- purchase of EWP Buyouts.

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/ewp-emergency-watershed-protection](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/ewp-emergency-watershed-protection)



**Northwest Conservation District**  
1185 New Litchfield Street  
Torrington, CT 06790

**Non-Profit Org**  
**US Postage Paid**  
**Winsted, CT**  
**Permit No. 11**

## Conservation Connections

**Rain Gardens** are a way you can reduce the amount of pollutants that leave your yard and enter nearby lakes, streams and ponds. To see if a rain garden is right for your home visit [www.nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens/](http://www.nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens/)

**Looking to have your soil tested?** Contact UConn's Soil Nutrient Analysis Laboratory at (860) 486-4274 or [www.soiltesting.cahn.uconn.edu](http://www.soiltesting.cahn.uconn.edu)

**Pollinator Pathways** are pesticide-free corridors of native plants that provide nutrition and habitat for pollinating insects and birds. For a wealth of information on native plants and pathways in your area visit [www.pollinator-pathway.org](http://www.pollinator-pathway.org)

**Follow the Forest's** mission is to protect and connect forests and promote the safe passage of wildlife from the Hudson Valley to Canada! Check out their amazing map at [www.followtheforest.org](http://www.followtheforest.org)

**Environmental Concern or Problem?** Go to <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/About/Reporting-Environmental-Problems> for what to do and who to contact.

### To Support NWCD...

Make a charitable donation by either mailing a check made out to NWCD to: 1185 New Litchfield St, Torrington, CT 06790 or donate via Paypal on [nwcd.org/donate](http://nwcd.org/donate).

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