



FYI ...



Newsletter of the New York Association of Conservation Districts ••• May 2005

EPF DUST SETTLES

Just in time for the April 1 deadline, the New York State Legislature passed the State Budget. This was the first time this feat had been accomplished in two decades. Since the Legislature was under great pressure to meet the deadline, they chose to eliminate numerous items from the Budget which might slow down the process. Unfortunately, the Environmental Protection Fund was among those items.

For the first two weeks of April, we had a Budget, but no EPF. Fortunately, the Legislature did pass the EPF separately in mid-April.

The overall dollar amount of the final EPF is \$150 million. This is an increase of \$25 million from last year. While not the \$250 million which the conservation needs of our state demand, it is the first increase in several years. Within the total, the line for Soil and Water Conservation Districts is the same as last year, \$1.86 million.

Also within the EPF total is a line for non-point-source water pollution control. During our Lobby Day on March 1, Districts requested that this amount be budgeted at \$15 million. In the final EPF Budget, there is good news and bad news on this. The bad news is that we did not get what we requested. The good news is that non-point will receive more than the \$10,850,000 it got last year. The number in the new EPF Budget is \$11,700,000. This means that you will not be able to address all of the needs which you

have documented, but it does mean that you will be able to solve a few more problems than you did last year.

Thanks to the efforts of all of you, the Districts did well in this year's Budget. Keep up the good work!

OUR BILL IN STATE LEGISLATURE

On February 23, Assemblyman Bill Magee introduced a bill which NYACD had requested. It would provide the legal basis for Soil and Water Conservation Districts to receive new kinds of funding. On May 3, the Assembly Environmental Conservation considered the measure, had no objections, and referred it to the Ways and Means Committee.

Unfortunately, after the bill had been introduced, it came to our attention that there was a small problem with its wording. Again, we worked with Assemblyman Magee who introduced an amendment on our behalf. This minor word change is needed to provide consistency within the Soil and Water Conservation Law. The bill is now numbered A5449A.

On the State Senate side, the bill was introduced by the Chair of the Agriculture Committee, Patricia McGee. There, it was numbered S3231. Unfortunately, Senator McGee passed on. For the bill, that means that the bill currently does not have a sponsor. We plan to seek sponsorship from Catharine

Young who has just won the special election to replace Senator McGee.

FEDERAL LOBBY DAYS

by Linda Coffin

As part of the National Association of Conservation Districts, your NYACD sent four people to Washington from April 3 to 5. While there, they met with a long list of Members of Congress, Senator Hillary Clinton, and Congressional staff members. They pressed issues of concern to Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The main message delivered was, "We understand that there will be cuts in the Federal budget, but we request that these cuts be made on an equitable basis. Agricultural and conservation funding seem to be getting more of a hit than other areas of the budget." During our visit, a House resolution called for \$5.3 billion cut in Ag; and in the Senate, \$2.9 billion. Additional requests included: the restoration of discretionary conservation and forestry programs, the restoration of funding for watershed protection and rehabilitation programs, the maintenance of a viable nationwide RC&D program, and the maintenance of \$319 funding. They also sought restoration of cuts proposed to State and Private Forestry accounts and requested full funding of EQIP, WHIP, FRPP, CSP CREP, and CRP.

In addition to the legislative meetings, our group also met with NRCS Chief Bruce Knight and Dick Koon of our region of NRCS. We discussed staffing, the need for additional EQIP dollars, the need for fine tuning of the CSP program and the soil indexing criteria, as well as the outlook for the federal 2006 budget and the 2007 Farm Bill. USDA Secretary Mike Johanns delivered an address to the NACD representatives. A copy of the speeches can

be found on the NACD website at www.nacdnet.org.

We have been discussing how to get more members of NYACD to Washington for this lobbying effort in 2006.

RALEIGH WATERSHED WORKING LANDS SUMMIT

by Maggie Atkins

I had the opportunity to attend the third and final Watershed Working Lands Summit. Held in Raleigh, NC, April 18-19, it was sponsored by EPA, the Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators (ASIWPCA) and the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA), among other organizations.

The stated Vision was: As stewards of natural resources, State, Local, and Federal agencies, non-governmental organizations and communities will:

- Share water quality goals and related natural resource protection priorities in the States,
- Work collectively to more effectively use existing tools and resources to address water problems and achieve measurable environmental results.

The stakeholders, working to preserve natural resources on working lands in the Eastern States in US EPA Regions 3 and 4, in addition to New York State, included participants from 19 states. Presentations were made outlining successful collaborative efforts. Discussions among small working interest groups (CAFA/AFO, Row Crop, Urban, and Forestry) identified existing gaps and barriers to making progress on collaborative efforts and how to overcome them. State action plans were developed to

better connect programs and resources to watershed priorities

There are many areas where programs intersect. It is these areas which need our attention and partnership efforts. Meeting presentations can be found at: www.asiwpca.org.

TRAILS CONFERENCE JUNE 17-18

Parks & Trails New York, a statewide non-profit organization, will hold a trails and greenways conference, June 17 and 18 at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Entitled *Healthy Trails, Healthy Communities*, it recognizes the contribution that trails can make to individual health and quality of life and to the environmental and economic health of communities. The Hudson River Valley Greenway and the Healthy Heart Program of the NYS Department of Health are supporting partners.

Through workshops, field trips, and two nationally-known speakers, the conference will provide tools to advocate for, build, and maintain trails. Its goal is to strengthen and broaden the trails constituency and establish new working relationships among the trails, planning, business, tourism, and health care communities. For information: www.ptny.org or (518) 434-1583.

LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE IN AUGUST

On an island in the Adirondacks from August 22 to 24, NYACD will present its second Leadership Institute. Based on the success of our first Institute in 2003, the 2005 Institute will bring together partner agencies and organizations to develop skills and create working relationships. It will be held at the

Outdoor Education Center on Raquette Lake owned by SUNY Cortland. Plans and funding are being arranged now. More details will be forthcoming as they develop, but consider being a part of this unique and enjoyable effort to advance the work of conservation in New York State.

OUTREACH FOR SUCCESS

For two years, NACD, the National Association of Conservation Districts, has been presenting seminars called, "Outreach for Success." The program trains Boards of Directors on how to expand their influence and vigor through targeted recruiting of new members. As part of a regular meeting, the NYACD Board went through the seminar on March 21. It was presented by Christa Jones of the NACD staff, who was surprised that the law in New York defines who sits on Conservation District Boards more tightly than in other states, thus, limiting the ability of Boards to implement some of the recommendations.

FARMLAND PROTECTION EASEMENTS

One of the most effective methods to protect farmland from development is the purchase of development easements. However, once an easement has been purchased, the process is not over. The easement needs to be held and administered for years by some organization. NYACD has been approached by the American Farmland Trust to see if it, or a new statewide entity, would be interested in becoming the body to play this much-needed role.

