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• Newsletter of the New York Association of Conservation Districts • July / August 2005 •

2005 NYACD ANNUAL MEETING

by Anne Tibbetts, Chairperson of Annual Meeting Committee

The NYACD Annual Meeting Committee has been hard at work planning a topnotch agenda for you. This year's Annual Meeting will be held at the Riveredge Resort, Alexandria Bay, NY in the heart of the spectacular Thousand Islands. It will run from October 30 to November 1, 2005. This year's theme is "**1000 Islands, 1000 Opportunities**"

Sunday afternoon, October 30th, will begin with an array of sessions focusing on land use planning, preserving agricultural lands and on alternative renewable energy potentials. To top off the day, Commissioner Nathan Rudgers will address everyone on the fast-changing needs of agriculture, water quality, and natural resources and will help us achieve our goal of having Districts look at new paradigms.

On Monday afternoon, Uncle Sam's Boat Tours will guide us through the 1000 Islands, around million-dollar homes and castles of mystery. (The boat will be enclosed with the warmth of home). The 1000 Islands are part of the 775 mile-long St. Lawrence River. There are actually 1,860 Islands. Some are as small as a large rock, but at least one tree must be growing on it to be counted in the Islands. The Thousand Islands region begins at **Tibbetts Point Lighthouse/Hostel** on Lake Ontario and ends at Morristown, NY. The French call these Islands "Mille Isles", Native Americans call them "Garden of the Great Spirit", I like best "**Thousand Islands.**" The man-made St. Lawrence Seaway shipping channel is the doorway between the Great Lakes and the North Atlantic, where everything from oil, grains and farm implements are shipped to and from the world.

Join NYACD and listen to speakers from the region speak about river conservation efforts and conservation easements in Northern New York. You will not want to miss the presentation by South Nation Conservation from Canada tell their success stories and how their districts are different from ours.

We need you to be part of the 2005 NYACD Annual Meeting. **Please mark your calendars.** Registration materials will be mailed to you later.

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

We all know that New York's farmland is threatened every day with pressure to sell for the construction of strip malls, big boxes, housing developments, fry pits and other suburban sprawl. Beside New York State's Farmland Protection Program, there are only a few other measures targeted at trying to conserve our agricultural land resources. Fortunately, there could be one or two new arrows in the quiver soon. Both share the same goal. Both would employ agricultural conservation easements.

One of these approaches grows out of the Northeast Regional Office of the American Farmland Trust (AFT). They have been meeting all around New York with farmland owners, NYACD, individual Conservation Districts, local and state government agencies, and other interested parties. Combining information from those meetings with legal models from other states, they have developed a proposal for the creation of a new statewide agricultural land trust. Primarily, this new land trust would purchase, hold, and administer conservation easements. Unlike most of the 85 existing land trusts in New York, this new one would focus on agricultural land across the state.

EASEMENTS continued...

The first formal meeting to begin the new non-profit organization was held at the Cooperative Extension office in Syracuse on July 13. Soil and Water Districts were well represented by Linda Coffin, President of NYACD; Gregory Bell, Executive Director of NYACD; Sandy Huey of the Cayuga County SWCD, and Rick Neuman of the Onondaga County SWCD. A mission statement, composition of the Board of Directors, possible names of the land trust, geographic scope and other details were discussed. Overall, this meeting and the work behind it was an encouraging step. When this new legal entity is created, it is expected that Districts will be able to play an important role in it, although that role is yet to be worked out.

This new organization is intended to provide a mechanism for creating the legal expertise and funding needed to implement a program which will be successful enough and widespread enough to solve much of the problem. NYACD and some Districts will continue working with AFT on this. AFT plans to develop more details and then hold a larger meeting on September 26. For more information, please contact David Haight at AFT at (518) 581-0078.

On a parallel track, Districts have increasingly been trying to find solutions to the same problem which AFT has been working on. Several are planning to submit resolutions on the topic at NYACD's Annual Meeting in October. Details on those resolutions will be reported when they emerge.

THANK YOU GREENE

For the past few years, bookkeeping services for NYACD have been done by the Greene County SWCD. Due to the availability of more Board volunteer hours and a desire to streamline procedures, during the Spring, the NYACD Board voted to return the financial work back to the organization. Since then, the Board and staff of the organization have set up new accounts and moved these functions mostly to Chuck Colby, the Treasurer of NYACD. These transitions are now complete.

For their long term help, patience, and a job well done, NYACD would like to formally thank the Greene County Soil & Water Conservation District. We especially thank Heidi Carl, who did most of the work for the Association.

LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE POSTPONED

As you have heard participants say often, the 2003 Leadership Institute was fun, and a great experience. It allowed people to learn about themselves and learn how to work with others on all levels. The NYACD Leadership Institute committee has been busy in recent months. The hardworking members want to provide you the best learning experience possible. Last month's edition of this newsletter announced the dates for a 2005 Leadership Institute, but they would have been only days after our Annual Meeting. We know that many of you will be at the Annual Meeting in Alexandria Bay and that a second event that close afterwards would have been difficult for you to attend. During the July 25 meeting of the Board of NYACD in Canandaigua, it was recommended that we postpone this year's institute until a time in 2006 which will allow the best participation. The Board agreed.

With this breather, committee members are currently hard at work preparing a survey which we hope you will take the time to complete. Other members continue to work with site selection, funding, program content and promotion. In fact, if you attend the Annual Meeting, there might even be an appetizer of some of the team-building exercises. The committee wants to produce a quality program that you will find useful and fun.

EPF COALITION

In the Albany world of wall-to-wall lobbyists and bus loads of citizens coming to the Capitol to influence their legislators, it is hard to get funding for what is needed. In today's society, networking is very important to make things happen. The NYACD itself is a network of directors, district staff members, and partner agencies. As we work in the State legislative arena, every effort, every

EPF continued...

step is important to help bring awareness to the issues that SWCDs support. In addition to legislative work which the soil and water family has advanced by itself, other causes have been advanced by building coalitions with other organizations which share these concerns.

For the past several years, your State Association of Conservation Districts has been an active part of one such coalition focused on one issue: the Environmental Protection Fund. The EPF is an issue which is very dear to SWCDs. Recently the coalition was renamed "Friends of New York's Environment." More organizations have joined, as well, so that the coalition now includes over 100 conservation and environmental organizations, ranging from zoos to the New York Conservation Council, the Farm Bureau, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, and the American Farmland Trust.

On June 27, your Executive Director, Gregory Bell, represented NYACD at a meeting of the coalition at the state office of the Farm Bureau in Albany. There, the organizations celebrated the fact that the State Legislature budgeted the Environmental Protection Fund at \$150 million, an increase of \$25 million from last year. Charts detailing the history of this funding were also presented.

Conservation Districts receive their primary state administrative support as well as funds for non-point-source water pollution control from the EPF. While the 100 organizations each have their own special concerns, and while there are a few issues which might present disagreements between them, they all agree on two simple goals: 1) to achieve funding of \$250 million for the EPF within five years, and 2) to reach overall environmental and conservation funding equal to 2% of the State Budget within five years.

Organizational membership in the Friends is both loose and voluntary. To keep from speaking on behalf of any organization which might not agree with something, the coalition is careful to obtain a specific sign-on from each organization for each letter it sends or position it takes. Each organization is given the opportunity to sign on or not sign on. At no time does an organization's name get added to a position without approval from the organization.

Having NYACD involved in the Friends of New York's Environment coalition has strengthened funding for Districts; has given us access to excellent, timely information; and has put Districts at the table.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

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| • NACD, NE Regional Conference | August 7-10 | Teaneck, NJ |
| • NYSCDEA Executive Board | August 31-Sept. 1 | Ellenville, NY |
| • Four-Way Partnership | September 29 | Troy, NY |
| • NYACD Board Meeting | September 30 | Troy, NY |
| • AFT Ag Land Trust organizing meeting | September 26 | Syracuse, NY |
| • NACD State Assoc. Executive Directors | October 17-19 | Salt Lake City, UT |
| • NYSCDEA Conservation Skills Workshop | October 17-21 | Cortland, NY |
| • NYSCDEA Executive Committee Meeting | October 30 | Alexandria Bay, NY |
| • NYACD Annual Meeting | October 30 - Nov. 1 | Alexandria Bay, NY |

