

# NEW YORK ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS, INC.



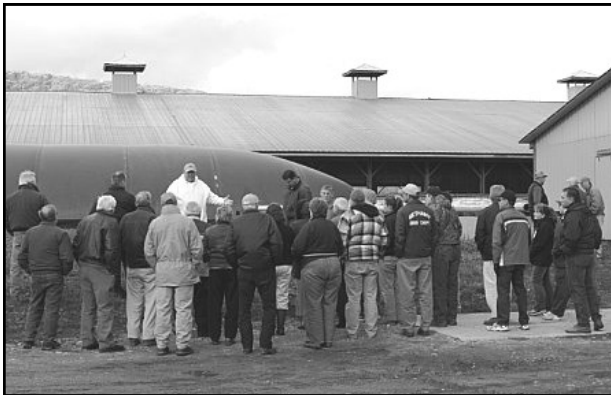
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## FYI...

NYACD NEWSLETTER • OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2007

### ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The NYACD Annual Meeting 2007 was a success. By any measure, the meeting in Owego, New York provided loads of relevant information, interesting connections, and a stimulating field trip. It also provided the policy direction for NYACD for 2008.



Bob Aman gives a talk about his manure digester.

Assemblyman Gary Finch showed a solid appreciation of the value of the Envirothon and expressed strong support for our efforts to get \$3 million for stormwater work. Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo discussed her concern about flooding and supported our work to help prevent it through better stormwater control. At the Sunday dinner, the ever-winning Candor High School Envirothon team and their coaches were there to receive awards, applause, and encouragement from NYACD. Their retiring coach, Spence Hunt, even explained the secret to how they have kept motivating the students and winning. At the Monday dinner, Ag and Markets Commissioner Patrick Hooker congratulated Districts on their work and pledged to continue the strong relationship with his Department.



Assemblyman Gary Finch with the Candor High School Envirothon team and coaches.

Attorneys John Rusnica and Megan Levine described the legal connections between Districts and County Attorneys and how to indemnify District Boards. In a third legal presentation, Fred Kelly of the NYS Department of Labor described the requirements for project wage standards.

Right at the beginning of the schedule, the bus trip to Bob Aman's farm gave a close-up view of his huge, flexible-topped cow manure digester. A stop at Jackson's Iron Kettle Farm was fun and gave insight into how a family has created a successful agri-tourism enterprise. Following the field trip, Brian Kittler of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation presented projects they have funded and explained what they are looking for in grant applications from Districts.

Both evenings of the conference featured speeches by members of the New York State Assembly.

#### NYACD MISSION:

*The NYACD provides leadership in the wise use of soil, water and related natural resources. This direction is provided through programs that support member Soil and Water Conservation District's scientific, marketing/outreach and financial work and that encourage networking and building alliances with outside groups that have related interests.*

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

NACD 3

GREAT LAKES  
COMMITTEE

NYACD 5  
IN REVIEW:  
2007

CONSERVA- 6  
TION BUFFERS

UPCOMING 8  
EVENTS

# ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS, CONTINUED

Tom De Rue led a high quality session on meeting the engineering needs to get District projects funded. He included experts from the State, Federal, and private sectors.

Monday afternoon was devoted to the Annual NYACD Business meeting, the session during which District Directors exercise direct governance over their association, NYACD. During this session, elections were held and resolutions were debated. Elected as officers for NYACD were: Brad Rogers, President; George Proios, First Vice President; Tom Nichols, Second Vice President; Mary Beth Goodwin, Secretary; and Chuck Colby, Treasurer. Next, nine resolutions were considered, discussed, debated, amended, and passed. These will set NYACD's legislative priorities for the next year. The two main new topics passed were resolutions in support of the Bigger Better Bottle Bill and funding to assist the inspection and rehabilitation of small dams.



*Outgoing NYACD President Linda Coffin installs 2008 NYACD Officers:  
(L to R: Tom Nichols, Second Vice President; Mary Beth Goodwin, Secretary; George Proios, First Vice President; Brad Rogers, President; Linda Coffin, Outgoing President)*

On the final day of the meeting were related sessions on disasters and climate change. Shino Tanikawa, District Manager of the New York City SWCD led a fascinating, but scary, session on how global climate change is already impacting New York State. Included were Cornell University data showing that many parts of upstate are having twenty to thirty fewer days each winter with snow cover, while the lake-effect zones are getting lake-effect snows lasting much further into winter due to the loss of ice on the Great Lakes. In the last session of the conference, four District Managers of conservation districts which have experienced flooding, shared their experiences and presented the disaster committee's draft report.

Altogether, there were 35 speakers during the Meeting. Each brought expertise, insight, and inspiration. We also had ten sponsors (double the five of last year). In future issues of FYI, we will expand on some of the issues which developed during this most productive Annual Meeting.

By Gregg Bell, Executive Director, NYACD

## 2007 NYACD Annual Meeting...

Our theme for the 2007 NYACD Annual Meeting was "Districts at the Crossroad". Based on what I saw at the meeting, we are ready to take on the challenges that lie ahead. I'm grateful to all of those who contributed to the success of this conference: the speakers who shared their expertise and sent us home with much to work on; the sponsors and volunteers who defrayed our costs and kept everything moving smoothly.

Over 120 members of our Association, partners and friends were on hand in Owego to learn, share their experiences and establish and strengthen their working relationships. We debated and voted on resolutions that will help determine our course in the coming year. We listened to individuals who have hands-on experience in issues we face in our Districts.

Thank you to all who participated. If you were there, you saw the wealth of human resources we have to draw on as we work to protect and enhance the natural resources of New York State.

Mary Beth Goodwin, Secretary, NYACD

# THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NACD GREAT LAKES COMMITTEE

by Brad Rogers

## *Does NACD view the restoration of the Great Lakes a regional problem?*

The NACD Great Lakes Committee is a special committee of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) established under NACD bylaws Article 11.30 at the request of the NACD North Central Region in 1988. The committee's mission is to represent Great Lakes conservation districts as an advocate for Great Lakes natural resources by facilitating activities and strengthening the abilities of conservation districts to conserve, enhance, and restore these resources and use them in a sustainable manner. The committee's primary areas of concentration for 2007 were erosion and sediment control, non point water quality issues and policy positions, and lobbying strategies relating to Basin resource issues. The latter was most successful when Senators Clinton and Schumer worked to get \$600,000 through the Senate Appropriations Committee to maintain the Great Lakes Commission Sediment and Erosion Control program for FY 2008. Hopefully, working through NACD and our congressional people we will be successful in obtaining the program as a "line item" in the president's FY 2009 budget.



The key function of the Great Lakes Committee is its role as liaison between Great Lakes Basin conservation districts and the numerous agencies, organizations and associations working on Great Lakes issues. Part of our responsibility to the districts is to show people that the Basin is a vital part of the United States economy. Many of the innovations enjoyed by all Americans were created in the Basin --- from mass transportation to the internet. The Basin could and should be the center of agricultural innovation. Not only are the Great Lakes the world's largest area of fresh water, but they are also the home of the greatest variety of crop production seen anywhere in the world. Stewardship of these water-bodies and the lands that surround them is the responsibility of the more than three hundred basin conservation districts. The districts make sure that state and federal programs are implemented and that there is growth in technological research and developmental activity. Their work spurs agricultural technology that is vital to the region and beyond.

It has been reported that over the past half century the Great Lakes Basin has struggled to find its niche in a changing agricultural economy. The Great Lakes Committee is a conduit for districts and their partners to show that the Great Lakes themselves are key assets in maintaining sustainable agricultural growth and providing for fresh water protection and technology development. The Committee, working with and through their partners, encourages federal, state and local leaders to work together to commit the resources needed to ensure that the health and beauty of the lakes are restored and maintained.

However, the continuation of the NACD Great Lakes Committee is in question. At NACD's Summer/Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. a resolution was proposed by the NACD Northeast Region's Board of Directors that would change the Urban, Forestry and Great Lakes Committees into Resource Policy Groups (RPG) within NACD. It was reported that NACD's 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Steve Robinson (Ohio) assured Cliff Lundin (New Jersey), newly elected NACD Executive Board Member from the NACD Northeast Region, that the resolution would be looked upon favorably by the Executive Board if the NACD Great Lakes Committee was removed from the resolution. Mr. Lundin then proceeded to remove the name of NACD Great Lakes Committee from this resolution before forwarding it to the Executive Board. The Executive Board sent the amended resolution to the NACD Board of Directors and the resolution was approved, making the former Urban and Forestry Committees NACD's first RPG. It wasn't until later that evening that several members of the NACD Great Lakes Committee, including myself, were informed of the aforementioned discussions and actions. We were given two reasons for not including the NACD Great Lakes Committee as a RPG. First, the Great Lakes restoration is a regional problem. Secondly, because of NACD's financial situation, it can not, at this time, support the committee. The end result of all of this is that the future of the Great Lakes is in serious jeopardy since as of February 2008 all committees will be terminated and their work transferred to RPGs.

## NACD GREAT LAKES COMMITTEE, CONTINUED

At the NACD Great Lakes Committee meeting of October 10 -12, 2007 in Ann Arbor, MI committee members had an opportunity to discuss the aforementioned issue with NACD CEO Krista Harden via tele-conferencing. Ms. Harden defended NACD's position and continued to refer to the Great Lakes as a "regional problem". This position, especially when money is involved, was also taken by some congressional members at a senate hearing on the Great Lakes Restoration that I attended last year. However, at the end of our tele-conference discussion Ms Harden said that if we actively pursue the issue she believed the NACD Great Lakes Committee could become a RPG under the NACD Natural Resources Standing Committee. The NACD Northeast Region, NACD North Central Region and several other states have been actively politicking for the Great Lakes Committee to become a RPG. A positive action by NACD will assure a strong continuous relationship with NACD regions and states supporting this effort.

The Great Lakes Basin is an area that encompasses twelve states. Home of more than 97 million people, the region is defined by its shared geography and natural resources, and dynamic economic and agricultural history that together have shaped its growth and development. Within the basin you can find one of the largest industrial production and agricultural marketplaces in the world. This highly urbanized region is a vital global hub of economic and agri-business growth. Yet, the Great Lakes Basin is in a precarious position, facing numerous threats to its health and position in the nation's and world's economy. For example, some international ships empty their ballasts into the Great Lakes rather than into international waters. Because of the shallowness of the lakes, there is a movement to eliminate international shipping on the Great Lakes. Companies are still dumping untreated waste into the lakes. Erosion run-off from agricultural lands continues to enter into the Great Lakes along with storm water run-off.

As 2008 approaches, the time is right for the NACD Great Lakes Committee, with the aid of the twelve state associations and the more than 300 soil and water conservation districts, along with their local, state and federal partners, to show our elected officials that the Great Lakes Basin is not merely a regional concern. It is a region endowed with major assets that impact national and international life. For starters we can begin educating our detractors. According to the 2006 report from the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C.:

1. For two centuries the Great Lakes Region has occupied the highest ranking in America's economic development.
2. The Great Lakes Region has a growing population of 97 million people, and is one of the largest industrial production centers and agricultural and consumer marketplaces in the world.
3. With over 32.5% of the United States gross state product, the Great Lakes are one of the largest wealth generators and marketplaces in the world.
4. Over 300 of the country's Fortune 1000 firms are headquartered in the Basin.
5. The Great Lakes region is leading the nation's fast growing global trade, generating more that a third of all U.S. exports.
6. The region's exports dwarf that of the West and Northeast, and are exceeded only by the South (which includes Texas's oil and gas exports).
7. The Great Lakes Region performs 29 percent of the total U.S. public and private research and development.
8. The Great Lakes Region is home to one of the largest concentrations of research universities in the world.<sup>1</sup>

NYACD and its partners, through its relationship with the NACD Great Lakes Committee, must help the Great Lakes states and the federal government capitalize on the assets of the region. The key to continued growth within the Great Lakes Basin is to restore the Great Lakes themselves. Our nation can and must support total restoration of the Great Lakes because of their vital role in a vibrant, creative world economy.

<sup>1</sup> The Brookings Institution, [Metropolitan Policy Program](http://www.brookings.edu/metro), 1775 Massachusetts, Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-2188, [www.brookings.edu/metro](http://www.brookings.edu/metro)

## 2007 --- A GREAT YEAR FOR NYACD

For the past year NYACD has focused on advancing the environmental efforts of conservation districts across New York State. We continue to help districts obtain financial tools to demonstrate how strong conservation programs can contribute to a strong economy. Through continued legislative activity districts are able to protect and conserve acres of productive farmland, manage working forests and improve water quality, and provide jobs, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and tourism.

By working with our state and federal partners NYACD is leveraging state, federal and local investments to protect land, water and air, thus improving the quality of life for New York State citizens. The unprecedented financial support of Governor Spitzer and the members of the State Assembly and Senate through the Environmental Protection Fund, has provided \$225 million for a variety of state and local environmental programs, including \$3 million re-imbusement to districts, and \$12.8 million for Ag. non point source pollution programs. The 2008 Federal Farm Bill looks favorable regarding conservation, thereby bringing additional dollars to New York State.

In order to continue the great inroads NYACD has gained in Albany and Washington we need to expand our grassroots advocacy. We need greater support from districts in NYACD for FY09 appropriation requests. Working diligently to protect the EPF will enable us to continue to increase conservation monies, allowing districts to get state and federal programs to the land, thus strengthening our theme that "all lands are connected to districts."

The activities of NYACD have not gone unnoticed. As stakeholders, we have been invited to several state and federal meetings that directly affect districts. One such meeting was an Upstate Roundtable --- Linking Community Revitalization and Environmental Restoration in the Great Lakes Region. Organized by the Great Lakes Commission, the Upstate Roundtable focused on policy options that would advance state and local linkages to economic revitalization and natural resource protection.

Another invitation to participate in a review of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the United States and Canada, involved several face to face meetings and dozens of teleconference calls. The importance of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, written in 1972 and signed by President Nixon and Premier Trudeau, is widely recognized. It commits the two countries to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the waters of the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem and has been held up as a successful model of Canada-United States partnership.

Since our origin in the late 1930s, districts have played a significant role in soil and water conservation. Over the past few years some activities have gradually decreased in importance in regard to the general district mission as other issues have increased in significance. Programs related to agriculture remain the most significant component of district activity. However, water quality, urban and forestry programs, technical support and information/education activities have added to this heavy workload.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts in New York have always been at the fore-front of the significant growth in resource management regarding watersheds leading the way for an increased interest on the part of local, state and federal governments for this type of management. Implementing formal watershed-based management practices is challenging because districts remain most closely allied with traditional partners which have never regularly operated on the watershed level in New York State. We have not yet taken full advantage of non-traditional partners, such as certain federal agencies and watershed organizations nor the watershed-based opportunities these partners represent.

The state and federal emphasis on water-shed based resource management means that districts should also begin to partner more actively with watershed groups and conservation and environmental organizations whose mission and/or goals coincide. This will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of local environment and resource management education programs and ensure that landowners and local residents receive a common message from multiple sources.

The New York Association of Conservation Districts will continue to be a conduit that represents the interests of the districts on local, state and federal issues.

Brad Rogers, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, New York Association of Conservation Districts

## SWCD INVOLVEMENT IN INSTALLING CONSERVATION BUFFERS ON FARMS

### ***What is NYS Conservation Buffer Program?***

In October 2003, the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and the NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee entered into an agreement with USDA to work cooperatively to help farmers address erosion and nutrient runoff within New York's high priority watersheds by installing conservation buffers on 40,000 acres of environmentally sensitive farmland. Eligible farmland includes fields planted to crops on steep slopes or cropland or pastures that border streams, creeks, lakes and wetlands.

The program officially known as the NYS Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program or CREP has more than \$100 million available to farmers to cost share the installation and maintenance of conservation buffers; making CREP one of the largest funded conservation programs in the state. The program has additional advantages such as funding is not competitive and there is no extensive waiting period between sign up and implementation.

### ***What are conservation buffers and why are they important to farmers?***

Conservation buffers make good use of areas that often should not be cropped or pastured. Farmers participating in CREP are encouraged to take unprofitable land out of production and get paid for it. Buffers include practices such as riparian forest buffers (planting of trees and shrubs along streams) and installing grass filter strips on cropland and the excluding of livestock from riparian areas along streams and wetlands by fencing and providing alternative sources of water.

Buffers provide many benefits to the farm.

Located in environmentally sensitive areas, buffers provide another line of defense to filter both surface and shallow groundwater before it enters streams and lakes. They also reduce crop losses from flooding, and improve integrated pest management by providing cover for predatory insects and insect-eating birds. Buffers can also reduce the setback requirements for manure and agricultural chemical application along watercourses.

Streambanks without buffers tend to have higher rates of erosion, particularly when grazing livestock are present. Fencing livestock out of the stream can improve herd health (reduce the risk of gastrointestinal diseases and improve udder and hoof health). Restricting livestock access to streams can improve bio-security. Efforts to control diseases on one farm may be undone if livestock have unlimited contact with a stream used by herds upstream. Providing an alternative water supply, particularly if a stream's water quality is poor, will provide better drinking water for livestock and as a result increase milk production as milk cows are particularly sensitive to drinking water quality. Buffers in pastures can also lead to improved pasture management as once electrified stream bank fences are in place, creating additional paddocks is cheap and easy.

Buffers are a proven, time-tested way of working with the land and protecting the environment. Installing and maintaining conservation buffers is a highly visible way for a farmer to demonstrate their environmental stewardship.

### ***How do farm conservation buffers benefit communities?***

Buffers improve water quality. Conservation buffers reduce the amount of nutrients, sediments, farm chemicals and bacteria from entering streams. This protects water uses of many types, from fisheries, to contact recreation like swimming, to public water supplies. Studies have shown that riparian forest buffers if properly designed and maintained can reduce nutrient runoff by up to 90% and remove as much as 80% of the sediment in runoff and are the primary mechanism of pesticide removal.

Buffers improve watershed functions. When a substantial portion of a watershed has conservation buffers installed, flood frequency and severity decrease and groundwater recharge increases. Streambank erosion and sedimentation is reduced, which can be of major economic importance in terms of damage prevention and avoided maintenance costs to communities downstream.

Buffers enhance fish and wildlife habitat. Fencing livestock out of the stream and installing buffers can have a profound effect on fish habitat. Forested buffers reduce stream temperatures, add leaf litter to feed invertebrates which provide food for fish and provide large woody debris for fish cover. Stream corridors are wildlife magnets used by a wide range of animals from small game species, to waterfowl to songbirds.

***What is the current status of district involvement?***

The original expectation was county SWCD staff would help FSA and NRCS plan and install these buffers based on a survey conducted in 1998 by the NYSSWCC on the need for and District interest in implementing a statewide conservation buffer program.

A follow up survey of district involvement in CREP in 2007 found that around 60% of the districts are involved with CREP; primarily promoting buffers while conducting agricultural environmental assessments (AEM) on farms. Approximately 40% of the districts are involved in planning, designing and implementing buffers on farms. Only about a 1/3 of the districts attended CREP classroom and field training conducted by USDA and the NYSSWCC in 2006 and more than half of those attending felt the training didn't meet their needs as it focused on program requirements and not enough on planning and designing buffers. Less than 5% of the districts feel the program is working well in their county. A host of reasons identified by districts for why the program was struggling included too many programs competing for limited staff resources (the most frequent response), lack of trained staff, lack of technical assistance funding, and the lack of partnership support. Additional state incentives identified by Districts to encourage more farmer participation in CREP included enhanced cropland rental payments, additional cost share incentives, and more outreach to the farm community on the benefits of buffers. In addition the lack of adequate staff resources was frequently mentioned.

***What is the future of CREP?***

The USDA/State CREP partnership is working to improve CREP. The NYSSWCC has encouraged the use of AEM Base Funding to identify which farms are most in need of buffers and to fund District staff to plan, design, install and evaluate buffer practices on farms. The State Soil & Water Conservation Committee has also added bonus points for projects submitted for funding under the state AGNPS Grant Program that include buffers. FSA has encouraged each of their county executive directors to sit down with their NRCS and District counterparts to prepare County CREP Implementation Plans that will help sort out agency roles and outline an aggressive buffer marketing campaign in each county.

NYS has requested amending our current agreement to add a biomass component so when farmers remove highly erodible fields from agricultural production the farmer has another option to obtain an economic return on the farm. The NYSSWCC has also identified additional changes needed in the program to improve the potential for success.

NYS has also funded a conservation buffer pilot in the Sandy Creek Watershed with the Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District to help demonstrate the benefits of installing buffers on a group of farms within a watershed and to better identify what's needed to encourage more farmers to install conservation buffers. The pilot is scheduled to be completed in 2008.

The current CREP Agreement with USDA expires at the end of this year. The state needs to decide whether to renew the agreement for another 5 years. A key consideration will be whether there is the commitment from each of the partners to make the program a success. The CREP Steering Committee has defined success as getting the fields most in need of buffers enrolled in the program. The goal being quality buffers not quantity. The key to ensuring that will happen is by having a well thought out AEM strategy that helps identify how CREP and other conservation programs can best be used to benefit your farms and your communities.

***What might you do as a SWCD Director?***

Discuss at a board meeting if there is an area of your county that might benefit from installing conservation buffers on farms. Ask your staff if while conducting AEM assessments on farms have they identified farms in need of buffers? Are those farms willing to install buffers and if not what are the barriers? Ask your FSA County Executive Director to attend one of your board meetings to review the CREP Implementation Plan they have prepared for your county. Decide whether conservation buffers should be a priority conservation practice you might want your staff to promote in your county. If you decide buffers should be promoted determine whether your staff has the technical expertise to help plan and install buffers and if not how they will receive the necessary training. If you own and operate a farm, consider whether your farm would benefit from installing buffers. If a number of buffers have been installed on farms in your county, has anyone gone back and evaluated how well they are functioning? Also, did you know that AEM Base Funding can be used to plan, design, install and evaluate conservation buffer practices?

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## UPCOMING EVENTS



- **Tri-State Conservation Tillage Conference**, West Middlesex, PA, January 22, 2008
- **Northeast Grasstravaganza 2008**, Binghamton, NY March 28-29, 2008
- **New York State Envirothon**, SUNY Cobleskill, May 21-22, 2008

Save the Date & Make Your Plans  
**NYACD Legislative Days in Albany**  
Monday & Tuesday, February 4 & 5, 2008  
Best Western Albany Airport Inn, Wolf Road, Albany

**December FYI**—Deadline for Articles —November 30, 2007.

Please send articles to Maggie Atkins at [matkins@frontiernet.net](mailto:matkins@frontiernet.net); Phone: 585-396-9973; Fax: 585-554-4077. **Thanks.**