

SOMERSET COUNTY



SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2024

# Annual Report





Somerset County Soil & Water Conservation District  
70 East Madison Rd  
Skowhegan ME 04976  
207-474-8323  
Email: [info@somersetswcd.org](mailto:info@somersetswcd.org)  
Website: [www.somersetswcd.org](http://www.somersetswcd.org)

## District Board - Supervisors

**Ann Mefferd**, Board Chair  
300 Beckwith Road  
Cornville, ME 04976  
(207) 858-3033  
[farmers@onedropfarm.com](mailto:farmers@onedropfarm.com)  
*Term ends: 12/31/2024*  
*Years of Service: 8 years*

**Gwen Hilton**, Vice Chair  
8 Olde Ferry Road  
Starks, ME 04911  
(207) 399-9866  
[gwenhilton88@gmail.com](mailto:gwenhilton88@gmail.com)  
*Term ends: 12/31/2025*  
*Years of Service: 6 years*

**Jon Doty**, Treasurer  
75 Bagley Road  
Madison, ME 04950  
(207) 612-6823  
[jdodzilla@gmail.com](mailto:jdodzilla@gmail.com)  
*Term ends: 12/31/2025*  
*Years of Service: 4 years*

**Colin Hoffman**  
571 East Madison Road  
Madison, ME 04950  
(570) 428-3072  
[c.t.hoffman45@gmail.com](mailto:c.t.hoffman45@gmail.com)  
*Term ends: 12/31/2026*  
*Years of Service: 2 years*

**Joe Dembeck**  
1184 East River Road  
Skowhegan, ME 04976  
(207) 474-9789  
[jdembeckmaine@gmail.com](mailto:jdembeckmaine@gmail.com)  
*Term ends: 12/31/2026*  
*Years of Service: 1 year*

## District Board – Associate Supervisors

None



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## District Employees

### ***Executive Director***

Jennifer Hebert  
31 Mt Hunger Road  
Starks, ME 04911  
(207) 578-0341

*Date of employment 1/9/2023*

[jhebert@maineconservationdistricts.com](mailto:jhebert@maineconservationdistricts.com)

### ***Technical Director***

Laura Suomi-Lecker  
PO Box 45  
Liberty, ME 04949  
(207) 589-3018

*Date of employment 1/2/2007*

[laura.lecker@me.nacdnet.net](mailto:laura.lecker@me.nacdnet.net)

### ***Outreach Coordinator (Outgoing)***

Jennifer Brockway  
PO Box 2475  
Waterville, ME 04903  
(207) 679-7306

*Date of employment 5/8/2018  
resigned effective 12/31/2023*

[somersetswcd.outreach@gmail.com](mailto:somersetswcd.outreach@gmail.com)

### ***Outreach Coordinator (Incoming)***

TBD





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### ***Note from the Chair – Board of Supervisors***

2023 brought the well-earned retirement of Joe Dembeck from his role as our dedicated Executive Director.

New Executive Director, Jennifer Hebert started with the District in February and has been settling into the position. She hopes to explore workshop ideas that prove to be interesting and timely topics for the residents of our county. Jenn will also spearhead the organization and hosting of the popular high school environmental competition the 2024 MidCoast Envirothon. The event will be held April 25<sup>th</sup> in Skowhegan.

We have entered a year of growth as the new “Umbrella” Technical Assistance grant was finally underway, partnering with the Maine Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). We will also reap the benefits of an additional funding increase of \$12,500 from the Department of Conservation and Forestry (DACF) to further our ability to make conservation connections within the county.

Our Technical Director’s legacy program Ag Allies also grew exponentially in 2023. Laura Suomi-Lecker’s expertise and hard work helped us win a grant with NRCS to implement Best Management Practices for Imperiled Grassland Birds. Laura continues to work with Maine Audubon and Cornell University and their generous grant funding has also allowed the program to expand. The growth of Ag Allies prompted an internal reorganization separating Ag Allies into a new division of the district with Laura providing leadership of staff, budget, and outreach, ultimately overseen by the board.

Our stalwart Outreach Coordinator, Jennifer Brockway, has resigned from the district. Her contributions helped move us forward as an organization accessible to our stakeholders. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with Jennifer in her role as Executive Director of Somerset Woods Land Trust as well her continued role as staff of Ag Allies’ Grassland Bird Project. We have decided to enter a contract with MXH Marketing for the district’s promotional needs. We look forward to establishing a strong relationship with Mary Haley and her team. Our conservation and education focus seems to be right in her wheelhouse.

We look forward to announcing our events planned for this coming year from our annual trout sale to developing ideas such as purple martin house installation, a defensible space workshop, pond workshop, and more. Ideas abound and we are eager to connect with the community.

We are fortunate, amidst the changes in Executive Director, a new Ag Allies branch of the district and new marketing/outreach coordinator, to maintain a highly functioning, enthusiastic, and cooperative board and staff.

Sincerely,

Ann Mefferd

Chair, Board of Supervisors



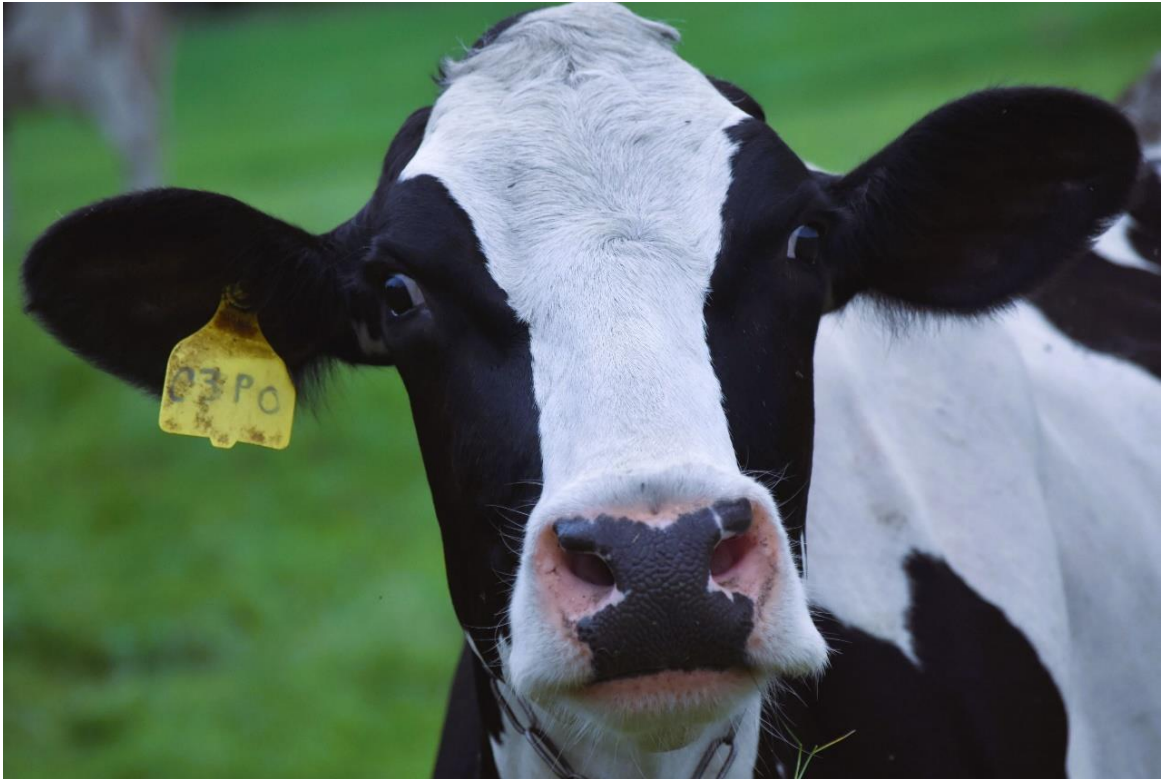
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**A summary of the programs currently in place, program changes and/or new programs SCSWCD plans to implement.**

### **Future And Ongoing Projects & Plans**

- Continue participation in Envirothon, a natural resource science-based competition for high school-aged students, at county and state levels. Coordinate with area high schools, groups, and homeschoolers plus assist as requested. In 2024 Somerset will host the MidCoast Envirothon in Skowhegan.
- Continue annual trout sale fundraiser.
- Spotlight and recommend products and Best Management Practices to encourage conservation enhancements, water quality protection, and erosion control.
- Participate in continuing education plus applicable certifications and staff development.
- Support and expand outreach and education programs to help farmers in such areas as cover crops, marketing, organic transition, and soil health, to name a few.
- Continue partnership with USDA-NRCS, USDA-FSA, Somerset County Cooperative Extension, plus private, state, and federal agencies, and organizations.
- Produce and/or obtain, plus distribute informational materials (i.e.: brochures, booklets, worksheets) focusing on conservation.
- Identify and obtain funding, grants, donations or partnerships for conservation projects and outreach.
- Continue *Somerset Field Notes*, the District's monthly electronic newsletter.
- Contribute press releases and articles to local and regional publications highlighting Somerset SWCD issues and events, conservation topics, and completed projects.
- Continued attendance and outreach at area fairs, events, and meetings.
- Continue Web and social media presence, assess user metrics, and modify presented information as necessary.
- Continue the Ag Allies – Grassland Bird Program by further spreading the program's reach through in-state collaborators and with Cornell University to out-of-state entities.

- Continue to provide technical assistance in areas of nutrient management, erosion control, invasive terrestrial plants management, and water resource management to farmers, landowners, lake associations, road associations, and towns.
- Yankee Woodlot Demonstration Forest– Continue collaboration with the Maine Forest Service (MFS) and Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IF & W) to implement workshops at the forest, improve the recreational trail system, and implement other forestry-related activities. Finalize the development of a Forest Management Plan to refine the management of the woodlot as well as serve as a demonstration document for local woodlot owners to see what plans contain for information. Explore successional species plantings as climate fluctuations evolve and change.
- Forestry/Wildlife Education/Workshops – Continue collaborations with MFS, Maine Woodland Owners, other Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and NRCS to host outreach events on topics pertinent to private woodland owners.





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### Highlights of Proposed 2024 Activities:

- Workshops:
  - Apple Tree Pruning Workshop – Skowhegan (March 3rd)
  - Pond Management – Location TBD (October 6<sup>th</sup>)
- Yankee Woodlot Management and Activities
  - Purple Martin installment of nesting structures (Collaboration with IF & W)
  - Trail Maintenance and Improvements
  - Release of Apple Trees for wildlife habitat (Collaboration with IF & W)
  - Development of Forest Management Plan (Collaboration with Maine School of Forest Resources)
  - Collaboration with the Maine Bureau of Public Land Management (BPL) to ensure safe and legal hunting on the woodlot.
- Host the Mid-Coast Regional Envirothon (Collaboration with regional School Districts and other regional Soil and Water Conservation Districts)
- Spring Trout Sale – Provide Brook Trout (May) and Rainbow Trout (June) sales for private pond owners to purchase for stocking.
- Agricultural Allies - Grassland Bird Protection and Management Project – Year 9
  - 2024 Field Surveys
  - 2024 Delayed Mowing Payments
  - 2024 Field Renovation Workshops & Technical Assistance
  - Administer NRCS Technical Assistance Grant
  - Public Outreach and Education efforts through presentations, social media, and news releases
- Participate in MACD Meetings (Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter)
- Nutrient Management Plans for Farmers
- Assistance to NRCS through Contribution Agreement Grants
- Assistance to NRCS on development of Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans through Cooperative Agreement
- Collaboration with other Districts (staff development, technical services, outreach, project collaborations)



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**Conservation Priorities of Somerset County  
 Recommended to the NRCS Somerset County Field Office  
 By the Local Working Group for FY 2024 and FY 2025**

The Somerset County Local Working Group met on January 18, 2023, and determined the EQIP funding allocations for FY 2024, Table 1. Recently the Local Working Group at their January 18, 2024, meeting has recommended allocating the available EQIP funds as follows for FY 2025 Table 2. *For FY 2025 it was decided by the meeting participants to keep the Forestry funding pool to 23%, the Animal Waste at 70%, Cropland at 6%, and Pasture at 1%. The intent is to continue increased funds for forestry-related activities due to the high demand of applications by landowners for such practices.*

**Table 1. FY 2024 EQIP Funding Allocations**

<b>Resource Category</b>	<b>% of Local Allocated Funding</b>
Animal Waste	<b>70%</b>
Forestry	<b>23%</b>
Cropland	<b>6%</b>
Pasture	<b>1%</b>

**Table 2. FY 2025 EQIP Funding Allocations**

<b>Resource Category</b>	<b>% of Local Allocated Funding</b>
Animal Waste	<b>70%</b>
Forestry	<b>23%</b>
Cropland	<b>6%</b>
Pasture	<b>1%</b>





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## SOMERSET COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL PLAN OF OPERATION (APO) 2024

This plan identifies the major objectives, actions, and goals that will be emphasized in calendar year 2024 to help Somerset County address soil and water conservation needs as well as focus the public education and outreach efforts of the District.

### District work plan for addressing priorities.

#### I. WATER QUALITY

To reduce erosion and non-point source pollution on cropland, woodland, construction sites, roadsides, and other areas.

##### A. Work with units of government and community organizations to:

1. Provide technical assistance to lake associations, watershed associations, conservation groups, etc.
2. Expand working relationships with municipalities or municipal road crews.
3. Create a working relationship with landowners of forestland within the Kennebec River Basin to identify forestland erosion and implement practices to control it.
4. Provide technical assistance on Nutrient Management planning.
5. Provide outreach and educational materials to the public.

Who: Executive Director (ED) / Technical Director (TD), Supervisors    When: As needed

##### B. Work with municipalities to:

1. Provide outreach and educational materials to municipalities and towns.
2. Provide needed conservation assistance.

Who: NRCS/ ED

When: As needed

##### C. Encourage proper management of waste materials.

1. Agriculture
  - a. Provide technical assistance – nutrient management plans to area producers at the current technical assistance rate.



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- b. Encourage proper management of agricultural waste through manure storage, manure testing (with use of manure management program, nutrient management program, etc.) and land spreading to meet crop nutrient needs.
- c. Promote integrated crop management through workshops and Nutrient Management.
- d. Pursue funding for surveys, assessments, and implementation projects.
- e. Provide outreach and educational materials to the agricultural community.
- f. Work with Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry to share information, needs, and record updates.

Who: ED/TD

When: Ongoing

## II. SOIL EROSION CONTROL / BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

### A. Gravel Road Maintenance

- 1. Provide public educational workshops on BMP implementation to road and lake associations
- 2. General Outreach
- 3. Partner with Department of Environmental Protection to maintain updated information and training

### B. Proper Forest / Woodlot Management

- 1. Continue Forestry Program, and educate the public regarding good forest management practices
- 2. Promote and present developing forestry demonstration areas at the Yankee Woodlot.
- 3. Pursue or expand forestry funding
- 4. Provide outreach and educational materials to the public and forestry community
- 5. Partner with Maine Forest Service/MWO to assist with education programs

### C. Crop and Grazing Land

- 1. Provide public educational workshops on BMP implementation
- 2. Pasture Walks Workshop
- 3. General Outreach on Cover Crop and No Till Practices

Who: ED /TD, Supervisors

When: As needed



**III. CLIMATE RESILIENCY AND CARBON SEQUESTRATION**

- A. Continue staff training and development on subject matters.
- B. Coordinate with appropriate agencies (NRCS, MFS, DACF) and organizations (MWO)
- C. Promote participation in appropriate current NRCS programs (CSP, EQIP, etc.)
- D. Provide outreach and educational materials to the public.
- E. Develop a workshop/seminar that highlights Climate Resiliency education and private landowner opportunities/options available to address climate issues.

Who: ED/TD/NRCS/DACF/MFS/MWO

When: As needed

**IV. WILDLIFE HABITAT**

- A. Hold wildlife workshops (pond building and maintenance, pollinator plantings, etc.)
- B. Proceed with Year 9 of Agricultural Allies (grassland bird) Project
- C. Assess wildlife habitat needs.
- D. Provide technical assistance to cooperators
- E. Seek wildlife habitat funding
- F. Promote participation in appropriate current NRCS programs (CSP, EQIP, etc.)
- G. Provide outreach and educational materials to the public

Who: ED/TD/NRCS/IF&W/UMCE/USFWS

When: As needed

**V. CONSERVATION EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

- A. Ongoing Educational Projects
  - 1. Involvement with Regional Envirothon
  - 2. Assist with State Envirothon
  - 3. Pond Workshops
  - 4. Nutrient Management Plan (technical assistance)
  - 5. Award Outstanding Conservation Farmer of the Year
  - 6. Award Outstanding Woodland Owner of the Year
  - 7. Provide outreach and educational materials to the public

Who: ED/TD/MFS

When: As needed

**VI. COORDINATE AND IMPLEMENT DISTRICT OPERATIONS**

- A. Assign committees to plan Annual Report, budget, education, and forestry program



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1. Budget- Supervisors and Executive Director
2. Annual Report- Supervisors and Executive Director
3. Forestry- Maine Forest Service, Supervisors
4. Education- Supervisors, Executive Director, Technical Director, Outreach Coordinator
5. Personnel Policy- Supervisors and Executive Director

Who: ED/ TD/Supervisors/ NRCS

When: Throughout the year

- B. Advise public of District meetings, elections, newsletters, conservation/education, booths or programs, workshops, and contests (Envirothon, Woodand Owner of the Year, etc.) through public newspapers, Web pages, quarterly newsletters, and annual report

Who: ED/TD/OC

When: As scheduled, or needed

- C. District Fundraising
1. Trout Sale (*brook trout and rainbow trout for private pond stocking*)

Who: ED/Supervisors

When: Annually in Spring

- D. Interact with state, county, and township officials to integrate their programs with the services the District offers to their communities.
1. Contact towns and legislators by letter, explaining district programs, services available and make personal follow-up.
  2. Provide outreach and educational materials to state, county, and township officials.

Who: ED/OC/Supervisors

When: Once/twice a year



## VII. CURRENT GRANT PROJECTS

### A. Grants – Agricultural Allies – Grassland Bird Protection & Management

1. Continue Year 9 of Project in 2024
2. Conduct farmer and landowner outreach efforts
3. Develop demonstration areas for practices
4. Administer NRCS/Ag Allies Technical Assistance Grant
5. Invasive Forest Pests Grant
6. Determine the need for securing additional funding for project
7. Continue to provide Outreach support and activities

Who: ED/ TD/OC/Supervisors

When: Throughout 2024

### B. Future Grant Projects

1. Stay “up-to-date” with upcoming grant projects available through Internet, mailings, and other sources for future grant projects (which will promote beneficial conservation practice) such as:
  - a. EQIP
  - b. SARE
  - c. Small Foundation and Capacity Grants
  - d. Other applicable opportunities

Who: ED/ TD/Supervisors/ NRCS

When: Throughout the year





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## Benefits of District Programs

- Solve statewide problems by providing local solutions to many local natural resource problems (one size does not fit all).
- Assistance to agricultural producers in maintaining farming as a viable career and business option.
- District provides local leadership as part of a cooperative team to find solutions to problems for residents, businesses, and landowners
- Opportunities which provide education and hands-on training for natural resource issues and concerns
- Technical assistance to landowners that will enhance and improve soil and water quality, plus maintain appropriate certifications, and comply with State regulations (i.e.: Nutrient Management Plans)
- Technical assistance and education to reduce non-point source pollution to a target audience of gravel and camp road users.
- Address the need for agricultural and forestry professionals in Somerset County to maintain necessary certifications, continuing education credits, and training to comply with industry requirements.
- Work with schools, groups, and committees to promote soil and water conservation through the awareness and use of Best Management Practices
- Identify agricultural and forest-related priorities and concerns to address issues that could benefit both the landscape and industry needs.
- Technical assistance and education to help landowners to better understand and manage their individual woodlands.
- Manage and promote the Yankee Woodlot Demonstration Forest in cooperation with MFS, MWO, UMCE, and IF&W
- Promote programs that generate local cash flow for Somerset County residents and landowners through federally funded contracts. Continue to assist federal and state agencies in working to ensure programs are efficiently managed.



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**Somerset County Soil & Water Conservation District - FY 2023 Budget (July 2022 – June 2023)**

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>PROPOSED</b>	<b>ACTUAL</b>
Payroll [pay, benefits, and taxes]	\$74,427.50	\$69,959.80
Workers Comp	\$500.00	\$481.00
Payroll Service	\$1,500.00	\$1,260.00
Contractor Services (Rise & Shine)	\$9,350.00	\$10,336.00
Postage, Printing (incl. newsletter)	\$250.00	\$22.20
Office supplies	\$250.00	\$106.28
IT (including web hosting)	\$1,600.00	\$1,944.75
MACD Dues	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00
Dues - Other	\$250.00	\$75.00
Meetings/Events/Workshops - staff attendance	\$500.00	\$182.06
Meetings/Events/Workshops - hosting	\$500.00	\$138.89
Annual District Dinner/Meeting	\$2,000.00	\$371.50
Trout Sale	\$5,000.00	\$4,321.43
Travel/Mileage	\$1,850.00	\$1,181.89
Election Expense	\$300.00	\$59.09
Training	\$1,000.00	\$280.00
Licenses/Permits/Certifications	\$300.00	\$110.00
Ag Allies Field Assistance (Contractor)	\$1,500.00	\$4,548.05
Payments to Landowners - Ag Allies Project	\$25,500.00	\$25,500.00
Field rehab demo projects - Ag Allies Project	\$5,000.00	\$3,625.50
Envirothon	\$350.00	\$0.00
District Promotional Items (hats, t-shirts, etc.)	\$400.00	\$0.00
ED Job Search Expenses		\$99.00
<b>Total Expenses:</b>	<b>\$134,327.50</b>	<b>\$126,602.44</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Somerset County Funding	\$28,500.00	\$28,500.00
State of ME - Dept of Ag.	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00
NRCS projects - CA Farm Bill Admin	\$9,430.00	\$11,310.71
CNMP Cooperative Agreement	\$11,000.00	\$4,770.57
NACD TA Grant - NRCS Outreach	\$0.00	\$6,485.10
Workshops/Education	\$500.00	\$0.00
Annual Meeting	\$1,000.00	\$0.00
Trout Sale	\$6,000.00	\$5,135.00
Tech. Assistance/Evaluations - Billable	\$1,750.00	\$1,229.41
Interest Income	\$150.00	\$293.20
MEMIC Dividend	\$45.00	\$41.35
Grants and/or Additional Funding	\$48,000.00	\$58,144.30
<b>Total Income:</b>	<b>\$131,375.00</b>	<b>\$140,909.64</b>



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<b>Expenses</b>	<b>PROPOSED</b>	<b>YEAR TO DATE</b>
Payroll [pay, benefits, and taxes]	\$90,000.00	\$41,391.78
Workers Comp	\$550.00	\$605.00
Payroll Service	\$1,850.00	\$912.00
Contractor Services (Rise & Shine)	\$10,000.00	\$3,152.00
Postage, Printing (incl. newsletter)	\$150.00	\$0.00
Office supplies	\$300.00	\$0.00
IT - (including web hosting)	\$1,000.00	\$507.23
MACD Dues	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
Dues - Other	\$250.00	\$75.00
Meetings/Events/Workshops - staff attendance	\$1,750.00	\$1,158.16
Meetings/Events/Workshops - hosting	\$1,500.00	\$910.00
Annual District Dinner/Meeting	\$0.00	\$0.00
Trout Sale	\$4,500.00	\$0.00
Travel/Mileage	\$4,650.00	\$3,124.23
Election Expense	\$150.00	\$130.00
Training	\$1,000.00	\$69.00
Licenses/Permits/Certifications	\$300.00	\$0.00
Ag Allies District Transitional Contribution	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
Ag Allies Field Assistance (Contractor)	\$30,000.00	\$14,614.74
Payments to Landowners - Ag Allies Project	\$33,000.00	\$33,000.00
Field rehab demo projects - Ag Allies Project	\$5,000.00	\$2,942.40
Materials/Management Fees - Ag Allies Project	\$3,850.00	\$131.88
Envirothon	\$400.00	\$52.07
District Promotional Items (hats, t-shirts, etc.)	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
Yankee Woodlot Expenses	\$300.00	\$0.00
<b>Total Expenses:</b>	<b>\$196,500.00</b>	<b>\$102,775.49</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Somerset County Funding	\$28,500.00	\$28,500.00
State of ME - Dept of Ag.	\$37,500.00	\$37,500.00
NRCS CA Farm Bill Admin	\$12,430.00	\$6,803.32
NRCS CNMP Cooperative Agreement*	\$12,000.00	\$2,192.27
NRCS Ag Allies Agreement	\$8,500.00	\$0.00
NACD TA Grant - NRCS Outreach		\$2,220.00
Workshops/Education	\$1,200.00	\$910.00
Annual Meeting	\$0.00	\$0.00
Trout Sale	\$5,500.00	\$0.00
Kennebec SWCD Agreement	\$9,600.00	\$5,019.55
Interest Income	\$1,950.00	\$720.05
MEMIC Dividend	\$45.00	\$55.90
Invasive Forest Species Outreach Grant	\$500.00	\$515.83
Grants and/or Additional Fundraising	\$86,461.00	\$80,679.66
<b>Total Income:</b>	<b>\$204,186.00</b>	<b>\$166,116.58</b>





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**Somerset County Soil & Water Conservation District - FY 2025 Budget (July 2024 – June 2025) \***

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>PROPOSED</b>
Payroll [including benefits and taxes]	\$95,000.00
Workers Comp	\$625.00
Contractor Services (Outreach and Promotion)	\$18,000
Office Supplies	\$650.00
IT	\$550.00
IT – Website Hosting	\$500.00
Trout Sales - Item Costs	\$4,500.00
Postage/Printing	\$150.00
Dues	\$2,250.00
Payroll Service	\$1,850.00
Travel/Mileage	\$4,750.00
Meetings/Events/Workshops	\$3,250.00
Election Expense	\$150.00
Training	\$1,000.00
Licenses/Permits	\$300.00
Ag Allies Project	\$104,800.00
District Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$2,000.00
Envirothon	\$400.00
Promotional Items	\$2,000.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$242,375.00</b>
<b>Income</b>	
Somerset County Funding	\$28,500.00
State of ME - Dept. of Ag.	\$37,500.00
USDA- NRCS Contribution Agreements	\$10,000.00
USDA-NRCS CNMP Cooperative Agreement	\$6,000.00
Trout Sale	\$5,500.00
Workshops/Education	\$1,200.00
Interest Income	\$2,500.00
MEMIC Dividend	\$50.00
District Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$1,000.00
Grants and/or Additional Fundraising	\$155,205.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$247,455.00</b>

*\*The FY 2025 District Budget is currently under development by the Board Supervisors and Executive Director. The results of several grant submissions are still pending. Final FY 2025 Budget anticipated in May 2024.*

## Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation District - 2023 Accomplishments

For decades, Somerset County SWCD has been a leading local resource for agricultural producers, the forestry industry, and water resource concerns. With the ability to respond quickly to issues as priorities evolve, Somerset SWCD helps Somerset County participants stay current and updated with state and federal regulations, emerging technology, and options for project/program funding.

Whether providing the agricultural community with state required nutrient management plans, or partnering with local, state, and federal agencies to expand conservation opportunities for area land and business owners, we are proud to provide valuable assistance to the citizens in this unique and diverse county.

**District Website and Social Media (APO Priorities I - VI):** The Outreach Coordinator monitors use and updates with new information and event postings on the District's Web site, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. During 2023 the *Somerset Field Notes*, the District's newsletter, was launched as a monthly electronic newsletter that carries short informational articles as well as links to relevant items for landowners, farmers, and county residents. Feedback on this new format has been good. The decreased traffic on Facebook first noted in 2021, continued throughout 2023. The Web site continues to have pulses of activity driven by event announcements on social media and traditional program offerings (e.g. trout sales). Since the start of the District Outreach Coordinator position in May 2018, the District has greatly increased interaction with the Somerset County community (residents, municipalities, community groups and NGOs). Instagram continues to be a productive tool for building relationships with NGOs and conservation districts across the state and country.

**Yankee Woodlot Demonstration Forest (APO Priorities II-B, III - V):** The District has continued



implementing its approved 10-year management plan for the Demonstration Forest. Throughout 2023 District staff performed periodic trail maintenance, utilized trail cameras throughout the property to assist with entries for District social media sites and "The Yankee Woodlot Blog". The development of a Forest Management Plan for the woodlot has begun with a Masters of Forestry student completing the work in collaboration with the MFS and the Maine School of Forest Resources. The District has also collaborated

with IF & W and hopes to place Purple Martin nesting habitat in a field on the lot. In September a Chainsaw Safety Workshop that was an excellent day of learning for participants.

**2023 Workshops/Education/Outreach (APO Priority V):**



**Pruning and Managing Apple Trees Workshops** (Collaboration with MFS, UMaine Extension Somerset Office, MWO) – Scheduled for March 4th at the Yankee Woodlot in Skowhegan the workshop had to be cancelled due to a winter storm.

**2023 Sustainability and Water Conference** – Held March 30<sup>th</sup> in Augusta. Sponsored by the Mitchell Center. The Executive Director attended and had a day of learning and networking.

**Bat Conservation – Support Bats in your Own Back Yard Owners** (Collaboration with NRCS, USFWS, UMaine Extension Somerset Office) – This well attended workshop was held April 6th at Somerset Extension Office.

**Grassland Bird Habitat Education/Outreach** – Provided educational presentations to the general public and land trusts in multiple locations across central and southern Maine.

**Somerset Extension Open House** – Held May 13<sup>th</sup>, the Executive Director attended and created a SWCD promotional and outreach booth with information regarding our programs and initiatives.

**Wildlife Habitat Education Program Invasive Plants Workshop** – Held May 16<sup>th</sup> at the Yankee Woodlot Somerset Career and Technical Center Outdoor Recreation High School Students attended a seminar led by Chuck Halsey to learn invasive plant identification.

**MidCoast Regional Envirothon** - Held May 24<sup>th</sup> in Camden the ED and an Associate Supervisor volunteered at this regional high school competition focusing on environmental and conservation issues.

**Yankee Woodlot Chainsaw Safety Workshop** – Held September 30<sup>th</sup> at the Yankee Woodlot, a day long hands-on chainsaw safety.



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**2023 Watershed Managers Roundtable** – Held November 17<sup>th</sup> in Augusta. The Executive Director attended and had a day of learning and networking.

**Technical Development of Staff (APO Priority VI):**

Staff did take advantage of various online and in person opportunities throughout 2023. Specific technical development activities included:

- ‘Productive Disagreement’ at the Lake: The Role of Deliberation in Lake Associations
- Transforming Food Systems through Agroecology
- Basic Accounting Principles and QuickBooks Online
- National Association of Conservation Districts Northeast Conference
- Maine Association of Conservation Districts Winter Meeting
- Certified Crop Advisor In-Service Training
- NRCS Technical Trainings

**Expanding Partnerships and Collaborations (APO Priorities – ALL):**

By working with other agencies and groups the District can diversify and expand education and outreach opportunities for Somerset County residents. Examples of 2023 projects/activities with partners include:

- Invasive Forest Pest Project – Partners: DACF, MACD, MWO, MNAP
- Agricultural Allies – Grassland Bird Project – Partners: Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative, Maine Department Inland Fish and Wildlife, Maine Audubon, MACD, Maine Land Trusts, Landowners, other entities including University of Maine’s Witter Farm, Wolfe’s Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment, and College of the Atlantic’s Peggy Rockefeller Farm.
- Yankee Woodlot Demonstration Forest – Partners: MFS, BPL, Somerset County Office of UMaine Cooperative Extension, MWO, Forest Stewards Guild, Maine Audubon, Skowhegan Outdoors, Maine IF&W

**Technical Assistance to Landowners & Community (APO Priorities I-V, VII):**

Throughout the year the District receives calls, emails, Facebook inquiries, or office visits from county residents, towns, and resource professionals. Many could be directly managed by District staff, while others were forwarded on to other agencies that could provide further assistance.



Examples of technical assistance provided:



- Landowner requests for soil health/vegetation management assistance
- Landowner requests for forestry information or site visits.
- Landowner/public requests for invasive terrestrial plant information and site visits.
- Landowner/public requests for invasive forest pest information and site visits.
- Landowner/public requests for wildlife habitat information, ex. grassland birds, early successional habitat
- Landowner requests for pond management assistance, ex. algal blooms, fish health, site visits
- Landowner requests for erosion control assistance via site visits
- Public requests about PFAS testing in soil and well water. All inquiries were directed to

Maine DACF or environmental NGO assisting communities.

- Public requests for information on well water quality testing, septic system site design, and activities within shoreland zones. All such inquiries are directed to the appropriate state/federal agencies.
- Farmland registration program – DACF program that District performs initial review of application materials. There were no applications submitted in 2023.

**Ag Allies – Grassland Bird Project (APO Priorities IV, VII):**

The Ag Allies program focuses on the protection and enhancement of habitat for grassland bird species, most of which are species of special concern in Maine, as well as, throughout their North American range. Grassland habitat is disappearing fast (*State of the Birds Report, 2016* ([www.stateofthebirds.org](http://www.stateofthebirds.org)), and the birds of our grasslands are disappearing just as fast, with an overall decline of 53% in the last 50 years, the most dramatic loss experienced by any of the major bird families (Rosenberg et al., 2019, *Science*). One third of all grassland species in North America, including the Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), were on the 2016 State of the Birds



*Watchlist.* This list includes species most at risk of extinction without significant conservation action. More specifically, in Maine, Bobolinks have declined at a rate of -2.97% annually between 1966 and 2005. This annual decline increases to -3.28% when considering just the most recent decade of data, 2005-2015 (Dr. Noah Perlut, pers. comm. 2016).

Ag Allies works with local landowners and land trusts to increase the nesting success of grassland birds through on-farm incentive payments, technical assistance, outreach, and education. The program empowers landowners and land trusts to make sustainable bird-friendly management changes on their land; and improve the opportunity for nesting success of grassland birds in Maine.

The 2023 season proved the busiest, and in many ways most successful, for Ag Allies thus far. We reached more landowners than ever before, adding more than 50 to our network of participants. This expansion corresponds to an increased footprint of ~2,093 acres of grassland habitat under improved management, which is an increase of more than 100%.

Fortunately, Ag Allies was able to enhance staff support this season through a new formal partnership with MDIFW. While Bobolinks and Eastern meadowlarks are identified as species of greatest conservation need in Maine's state wildlife action plan, MDIFW lacks the internal capacity to have a team dedicated to this specific conservation priority. In spring of 2023, in addition to Ag Allies staff, three designated program managers, MDIFW committed to providing the in-kind time of three wildlife biologists to advance Ag Allies' fieldwork. These wildlife biologists – Chuck Hulse, Joe Roy, and Adrienne Lepold – brought tremendous expertise and a vigorous willingness to learn. Their support was critical to the success of the program this season.



Joanne Alex, one of Ag Allie's star volunteers (left), and Linden Schneider for University of Maine's Witter Farm (right) by UMaine's new Ag Allies 'bobo block' for 2023. Witter Farm delayed mowing on over 30 acres of bobolink nesting habitat for 2023.

#### **Notable Conservation impacts from the 2023 field season include:**

- More than 2,000 acres protected for grassland birds during the breeding season.
- Approximately 130 landowners participating in our program.
- \$33,000 distributed in incentive payments provided to 24 participating farms to encourage delayed harvest.
- More than 700 breeding pairs of birds protected, including ~550 of Bobolink, ~162 of Savannah sparrows, and ~6 of Eastern meadowlarks.
- Partnership with Kennebec Land Trust and Somerset Woods and subsequent restoration on approximately 22 acres of grassland nesting habitat.
- 12 different educational programs - including field walk and talks and formal presentations throughout the state
- At least 200 individuals reached through educational programs.

#### **Envirothon (APO Priority V):**

The Maine Envirothon is an international science competition with a focus on natural resources. SWCDs statewide have held the events since the program came to Maine, and the event has grown annually. Somerset County SWCD, as part of the Mid-Maine region, provides assistance and support to the event. In 2023 the Maine Envirothon was once held as an in-person event at Merryspring Nature Center in Camden.



**CSP/EQIP Activities with NRCS (APO Priorities – ALL):**



Somerset County SWCD maintains a close partnership with **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** at the Skowhegan Service Center. Through

operational agreements, as well as contribution agreements, we often work in tandem to better serve the natural resource needs of Somerset County. In 2022, we worked on a multi-purpose contribution agreement with NRCS to provide both administrative and technical program assistance. These agreements provide additional conservation assistance to Somerset County participants and provide SCSWCD with supplemental operational funding.

District Contribution Agreement Assistance to NRCS programs this year was with the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Forty-six Somerset County producers (approximately \$1,323,000 in funds) in the three programs were assisted through this cooperative agreement in 2023.

**Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) Activities with NRCS (APO Priorities – I-A, I-C):**



In 2022 SCSWCD entered into a new five-year Cooperative Agreement with the NRCS to provide technical services focused on the development of

Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs) for producers in counties throughout Central Maine. As the District’s Technical Director is certified in nutrient management planning this agreement is a direct result of the professional staff employed at the District and the Supervisors’ focus on continuing technical development for staff. This agreement fully reimburses the District for all staff time and mileage associated with the development of CNMPs, which includes: farm site visits, soil tests, plan development, and project administration. In 2023 the District’s Technical Director worked on six different CNMPs in multiple counties including, Franklin, Piscataquis, and Somerset.

SOMERSET COUNTY



SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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