

ANNUAL REPORT

2021





District Board - Supervisors

Ann Mefferd, Board Chair

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Term ends: 12/31/2021

Years of Service: 5 years

Alan Haberstock

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Term ends: 12/31/2021

Years of Service: 20 years

Gwen Hilton, Vice Chair

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Term ends: 12/31/2022

Years of Service: 3 year

Jon Doty, Treasurer

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Term ends: 12/31/2022

Years of Service: 1 year

District Board – Associate Supervisors

Elizabeth Hoffman

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District Employees

Executive Director

Joe Dembeck
1184 East River Road
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Date of employment 5/11/2015

Technical Director

Laura Suomi-Lecker
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Date of employment 1/2/2007

Outreach Coordinator

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Date of employment 5/8/2018



Note from the Executive Director

One of the most useful aids in writing the annual report is reviewing the list of planned activities highlighted in the previous year's report. Needless to say, that process did not work well in creating the District's 2021 Annual Report! In early March 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic completely altered our well-planned approach to workshops, staff trainings, meetings, and other public events. Obviously disappointing but nothing could be done to alter the situation. Many in-person workshops were cancelled or postponed until 2021. Staff pivoted and focused on the activities and interactions that we could perform safely but still provide meaningful results. The planned field efforts for invasive plant surveys on properties in Somerset County were doubled so we could assist more landowners and get to more areas across the county. Activities associated with the 5th year of the Ag Allies-Grassland Bird Project were not impacted and the assistance to landowners, farmers, and land trusts was well received. Staff increased their focus on the Yankee Woodlot Demonstration Forest projects that would allow users to independently explore the property and learn more about recent management activities that have been conducted there.

We quickly learned the benefits and nuances of virtual meetings, trainings, workshops, and webinars ranging from Board Meetings to the Maine Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting.

And some time was spent reviewing, consolidating, and reacquainting ourselves with the paper and electronic files of the District.

Here is to a successful 2021!

Sincerely,

Joe Dembeck
Executive Director



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.
- Continue annual trout sale fundraiser. Investigate additional options for fundraisers that would promote conservation practices.
- 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.
- Continue to provide education and technical assistance on issues including buffer planting, camp road maintenance, erosion control, nutrient management, conservation enhancements, water quality, and forestry management issues.
- 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.
- Expand mailing/contact list to include more participants and update current list. Develop electronic newsletter to replace paper newsletter.
- Contribute press releases and articles to local newspaper highlighting 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 to provide technical assistance in areas of nutrient management, erosion control, aquatic organism passage, 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) to implement workshops at the forest, improve the recreational trail system, and implement other forestry-related activities.
- 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.





Highlights of Proposed 2021 Activities:

- Workshops:*
 - Apple Tree Pruning Workshop #1 – Skowhegan (February 21st)
 - Apple Tree Pruning Workshop #2– Skowhegan (February 27th)
 - Spring Wildflower Identification and Walk (May)- *planning*
 - Forestry for the Birds @ Old Canada Road Property (Robbins Hill) – (June)
 - Wild Edibles – Foraging Walk and Talk @ Yankee Woodlot (June)
 - Invasive Plant Assessment and Management Workshop @ Yankee Woodlot (July)
 - Enhancing Biodiversity in Your Woodland @ Yankee Woodlot (August)
- Yankee Woodlot Management and Activities
 - Picture Post Project – Post-harvest monitoring of succession
 - Trail Maintenance and Improvements
 - Forestry for Maine Birds Signs along Trail System
 - Update Trail Map and Brochure
 - Update Trail Signage
 - Invasive Terrestrial Plant survey
- Assist with 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 6
 - Signs for participants and Forage Information Sheets to livestock owners
 - 2021 Field Surveys
 - 2021 Delayed Mowing Payments
 - 2021 Field Renovation Workshop & Technical Assistance (John Sage Foundation)
 - Public Outreach and Education efforts through presentations, social media, and news releases
- Invasive Plant Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) Project in partnership with the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) – Year 3. Conduct surveys and develop management reports for two Somerset County property owners. Project will be completed in June 2021.



- Participate in MACD Meetings (Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter)
- Maine Farm Days*
- Maine Highway Congress – Assist with MACD Training Booth*
- District Annual Dinner and Awards (Farmer and Woodland Owners of the Year)*
- 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)

***NOTE:** *In person workshops and meetings are dependent upon Covid-19 guidelines.*



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**Conservation Priorities of Somerset County
 Recommended to the NRCS Somerset County Field Office
 By the Local Working Group for FY 2021 and FY 2022**

The Somerset County Local Working Group met on January 9, 2020 and determined the EQIP funding allocations for FY 2021, Table 1. Recently the Local Working Group at their December 17, 2020 meeting has recommended allocating the available EQIP funds as follows for FY 2022, Table 2. For FY 2022 it was again decided to keep categories and associated funding levels unchanged.

Table 1. FY 2021 EQIP Funding Allocations

Resource Category	% of Local Allocated Funding
Animal Waste	74%
Forestry	15%
Cropland & Pasture	11%

Table 2. FY 2022 EQIP Funding Allocations

Resource Category	% of Local Allocated Funding
Animal Waste	74%
Forestry	15%
Cropland & Pasture	11%



SOMERSET COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL PLAN OF OPERATION (APO) 2021

This plan identifies the major objectives, actions, and goals that will be emphasized in calendar year 2021 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. Partner with NRCS to provide technical assistance for nonpoint source pollution surveys.
3. Expand working relationships with municipalities or municipal road crews.
4. Create a working relationship with landowners of forestland within the Kennebec River Basin to identify forestland erosion and implement practices to control it.
5. Provide technical assistance on Nutrient Management planning.
6. 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 assistance/ permit reviews (LUPC and DEP).
2. Provide technical assistance for construction site (erosion control certification) inspections.
3. Provide outreach and educational materials to municipalities and towns.

Who: NRCS/ ED

When: As needed



C. Encourage proper management of wastes

1. Agriculture

- a. Provide technical assistance – nutrient management plans to area producers at the current technical assistance rate
- 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. Gravel Road training sessions
3. General Outreach
4. 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. Award for outstanding Woodland Owner of the Year (reinstated at 2019 Annual Meeting)
4. Pursue or expand forestry funding
5. Provide outreach and educational materials to the public and forestry community



6. Conduct invasive terrestrial plant surveys and develop management reports for woodland owners as part of the Maine Natural Areas Program's CIG Project during 2019-2021.
7. 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. WILDLIFE HABITAT

- A. Hold wildlife workshops (pond building and maintenance, pollinator plantings, etc.)
- B. Proceed with Year 6 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

IV. 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 (reinstated at 2019 Annual Meeting)
 6. Award Outstanding Woodland Owner of the Year (reinstated at 2019 Annual Meeting)
 7. Provide outreach and educational materials to the public

Who: ED/TD/MFS

When: As needed



V. COORDINATE AND IMPLEMENT DISTRICT OPERATIONS

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

1. Budget- Supervisors
2. Annual Report- Supervisors and Executive Director
3. Forestry- Maine Forest Service, Supervisors
4. Education- Supervisors, Executive Director, Technical Director
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, Woodlot 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

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



VI. CURRENT GRANT PROJECTS

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

1. Continue Year 6 of Project in 2021 with John Sage Foundation Grant
2. Conduct farmer and landowner outreach efforts
3. Develop demonstration areas for practices
4. Determine the need for securing additional funding for project

Who: ED/ TD/OC/Supervisors

When: Throughout 2021

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. AOP – Focus on Eastern brook trout, sea-run Atlantic salmon, and diadromous fish species
 - c. SARE
 - d. Small Foundation and Capacity Grants
 - e. Other applicable opportunities

Who: ED/ TD/Supervisors/ NRCS

When: Throughout the year



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. Also work with private road owners to establish a road review and individualized plans for erosion control and road maintenance
- 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 woodlots
- 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



Somerset County Soil & Water Conservation District FY 2020 Budget (July 2019 – June 2020)

Expenses	PROPOSED	ACTUAL
Payroll [including taxes]	\$71,132.00	\$64,048.00
Workers Comp	\$400.00	\$374.00
Office Supplies	\$250.00	\$960.00
Postage/Printing	\$500.00	\$83.00
IT	\$300.00	\$30.00
IT – Web Hosting	\$225.00	\$308.00
Sales – Item Costs	\$3,000.00	\$3,632.00
Dues	\$2,000.00	\$2,220.00
Payroll Service	\$1,350.00	\$1,152.00
Travel/Mileage	\$2,550.00	\$1,483.00
Meetings/Events/Workshops	\$1,000.00	\$1,057.00
Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$2,000.00	\$800.00
Election Expense	\$300.00	\$240.00
Training	\$1,000.00	\$522.00
Licenses/Permits	\$300.00	\$90.00
Grant Payments to Participants	\$16,000.00	\$11,000.00
Envirothon	\$200.00	\$0
District Promotional Items	\$1,200.00	\$1,133.00
Total:	\$103,707.00	\$89,132.00
Income		
Somerset County Funding	\$28,500.00	\$28,500.00
State of ME - Dept. of Ag.	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00
USDA- NRCS Contribution Agreements	\$6,000.00	\$3,097.00
USDA-NRCS CNMP Cooperative Agreement	\$10,000.00	\$6,114.00
USDA-NRCS CIG Invasive Plant Project	\$3,000.00	\$2,837.00
Maine DACF – Forest Pest Project	\$0.00	\$560.00
Sales (Trout)	\$4,000.00	\$4,689.00
Workshops/Education	\$1,000.00	\$28.00
Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$750.00	\$0.00
Interest Income	\$100.00	\$137.00
MEMIC Dividend	\$45.00	\$60.00
Tech. Assistance/Evaluations - Billable	\$500.00	\$196.00
Envirothon	\$0.00	\$0.00
Grants and/or Additional Fundraising	\$19,000.00	\$23,500.00
Total:	\$97,995.00	\$94,718.00*

**Note - \$4,500 of FY2020 grants received were not used and moved to FY2021 in agreement with grantor.*



Somerset County Soil & Water Conservation District
FY 2021 Budget (July 2020 – June 2021) (as of Jan. 8, 2021)

Expenses	PROPOSED	YEAR TO DATE
Payroll [including taxes]	\$70,132.00	\$35,634
Workers Comp	\$350.00	\$352
Office Supplies	\$300.00	\$30
IT	\$300.00	\$256
IT – Web Hosting	\$250.00	\$216
Postage/Printing	\$200.00	\$137
Dues	\$2,400.00	\$2075
Payroll Service	\$1,300.00	\$565
Trout Sales- Item Costs	\$3,000.00	\$0
Travel/Mileage	\$2,300.00	\$1053
Annual District Meeting/Dinner	\$2,000.00	\$0
Meetings/Events/Workshops	\$1,000.00	\$200
Election Expense	\$300.00	\$0
Training	\$1,000.00	\$95
Licenses/Permits	\$300.00	\$90
Payments to Landowners – Ag Allies Project	\$8,000.00	\$9,000
Envirothon	\$350.00	\$0
District Promotional Items	\$600.00	\$164
Total:	\$94,082.00	\$49,837

Income		
Somerset County Funding	\$28,500.00	\$14,250
State of ME - Dept. of Ag.	\$25,000.00	\$25,000
USDA- NRCS Contribution Agreements	\$6,000.00	\$0
USDA-NRCS CNMP Cooperative Agreement	\$12,000.00	\$3,439
USDA-NRCS CIG Invasive Plant Project	\$6,000.00	\$4,775
Trout Sales	\$4,000.00	\$0
Workshops/Education	\$1,000.00	\$0
District Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$1,000.00	\$0
Interest Income	\$100.00	\$0
MEMIC Dividend	\$45.00	\$46
Tech. Assistance/Evaluations - Billable	\$500.00	\$0
Grants and/or Additional Fundraising	\$12,000.00	\$12,000
Total:	\$96,145.00	\$59,510



Somerset County Soil & Water Conservation District

DRAFT FY 2022 Budget (July 2021 – June 2022) *

Expenses	PROPOSED
Payroll [including benefits and taxes]	\$71,000.00
Workers Comp	\$350.00
Office Supplies	\$300.00
IT	\$300.00
IT – Website Hosting	\$250.00
Sales - Item Costs	\$3,000.00
Postage/Printing	\$200.00
Dues	\$2,400.00
Payroll Service	\$1,300.00
Travel/Mileage	\$1,200.00
Meetings/Events/Workshops	\$500.00
Election Expense	\$300.00
Training	\$500.00
Licenses/Permits	\$200.00
Ag Allies Project	\$4,000.00
District Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$1,500.00
Envirothon	\$0.00
Total:	\$87,300.00
Income	
Somerset County Funding	\$28,500.00
State of ME - Dept. of Ag.	\$25,000.00
USDA- NRCS Contribution Agreements	\$4,000.00
USDA-NRCS CNMP Cooperative Agreement	\$15,000.00
USDA-NRCS CIG Invasive Plant Project	\$2,000.00
Trout Sale	\$4,000.00
Workshops/Education	\$250.00
Interest Income	\$100.00
MEMIC Dividend	\$45.00
District Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$1,000.00
Tech. Assistance/Evaluations - Billable	\$250.00
Grants and/or Additional Fundraising	\$4,500.00
Total:	\$84,645.00

**The FY 2022 District Budget is currently under development by the Board Supervisors and Executive Director.*



Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation District

2020 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, SCSWCD 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 - V): The Outreach Coordinator monitors use and updates with new information and event postings on the District's Web site, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. Social media platforms have enjoyed steady growth in audience since launching in 2018 (Facebook) and 2019 (Instagram). The Web site, too, has 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). Use of social media, Instagram in particular, to promote the District's mission and activities has created new relationships with NGOs and conservation districts across the state and country. This has led to more electronic and in-person public interactions and has led to greater involvement in District programs and events.

District Annual Retreat (APO Priority V): District Supervisors and staff once again held a one-day retreat on September 19, 2020 that was focused on a review of the District's Strategic Plan and current operations. This meeting allowed for a comprehensive review of recent activities and the goals stated in each section of the Strategic Plan. All involved felt that this review and planning session is extremely valuable in the operation of the District.

Yankee Woodlot Demonstration Forest (APO Priorities II-B, III, IV): The District has continued implementing its approved 10-year management plan for the Demonstration Forest. Working in collaboration with the Maine Forest Service, Maine Woodland Owners, and the UMaine Extension Somerset Office, the District implemented 2 workshops at the Yankee Woodlot in



2020: 1) Pruning and Managing Apple Trees in February and 2) Forestry Tax Workshop in collaboration with Maine Woodland Owners in March.

Throughout 2020 District staff performed periodic trail maintenance, refurbished the entrance sign on the trail system, utilized trail cameras throughout the property to assist with entries for District social media sites and “The Yankee Woodlot Blog”, and continued forest monitoring at the 4 Picture Post sites on a quarterly basis.

The Yankee Woodlot Demonstration Forest was featured in several national publications in 2020: National Woodland Owners Spring magazine and National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Summer Forestry Newsletter and several NACD electronic publications.

The District teamed with Maine Audubon to create signs that highlight forest management activities and how they benefit birds. These five signs will be installed in the Spring 2021.





2020 Workshops/Education/Outreach (APO Priority IV):

Pruning and Managing Apple Trees Workshop (Collaboration with MFS, UMaine Extension Somerset Office, MWO) – Held in February at the Yankee Woodlot in Skowhegan.

Forestry Tax Workshop (Collaboration with MFS, UMaine Extension Somerset Office, MWO) – Held in March at the UMaine Extension Office in Skowhegan.

Beech Management Workshop (Collaboration with MFS and MWO) – Held in August at the Peter Pfeiffer’s Property in Solon.

Carbon and Woodlands (Collaboration with Piscataquis County SWCD, MFS, and Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association) – Held in October at the Law Farm in Dover-Foxcroft.

Grassland Bird Habitat Education/Outreach - Eight scheduled in-person workshops and talks for 2020 were cancelled due to COVID, but two webinars featuring Ag Allies methods and results were held this season. The first, sponsored by the Northeast Bird Habitat Conservation Initiative (NBHCI), was a webinar to showcase [Ag Allies](#) and the [Bobolink Project](#). A discussion following the presentations started exploring the viability of a grassland/working farm/bobolink pilot project in the Northeast. The second webinar, on October 22, *The Power of Birds to Amplify Conservation, Stewardship and Community Outreach*, was provided for the Land Trust Alliance and showcased Ag Allies as one of the success stories.

(<https://www.landtrustalliance.org/webinar/power-birds-amplify-conservation-stewardship-and-community-outreach>)

Facebook, Instagram and Web site postings of the Ag Allies program ran throughout the summer, both on the SWCD sites and that of Avian Haven Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center. Handouts discussed above were available at all presentations and for download at the District Web site. District Facebook page posts were shared and linked by project partners and supporters.

Technical Development of Staff (APO Priority V):

Due to Covid-19 there was a significant reduction in staff development activities. Planned in person trainings were cancelled or postponed until 2021. Staff did take advantage of online based opportunities when appropriate. Specific technical development activities included:

- Forest Management Webinars – primarily focused on invasive species (plant and pest) assessment and treatment
- Certified Crop Advisor In-Service Training
- NRCS Technical Trainings



Expanding Partnerships and Collaborations (*AP0 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 2020 projects/activities with partners include:

- Invasive Forest Pest Project – Partners: DACF, MACD, MWO, MNAP
- Agricultural Allies – Grassland Bird Project – Partners: William P. Wharton Trust, Blake-Nuttall Trust, Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund, Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative, MDIFW, Avian Haven, MACD, Knox-Lincoln SWCD, Waldo County SWCD, Kennebec County SWCD, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, University of New England, Maine Cooperative Extension, Maine Land Trusts (8), Landowners (22).
- Invasive Terrestrial Plant Project – Partners: MNAP, DACF, Kennebec, Waldo, and Knox-Lincoln SWCDs, Landowners (11).
- Yankee Woodlot Demonstration Forest Workshops – Partners: MFS, BPL, Somerset County Office of UMaine Cooperative Extension, MWO, Forest Stewards Guild, Maine Audubon

Technical Assistance to Landowners & Community (*AP0 Priorities I-IV, VI*):

Throughout the year the District receives, calls, emails, Facebook inquiries, or office visits from county residents, towns, and resource professionals. Many could be directly handled 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
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- 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.

Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) – Invasive Terrestrial Plant Management (APO – Priority II-B):

The District has teamed with the Maine Natural Areas Program and the Kennebec, Knox-Lincoln, and Waldo Districts for a three-year project (2019-2021) that provides invasive plant surveys and reports, with focused management recommendations to landowners in an effort to provide assistance with control of invasive terrestrial plant species in woodlands.

Invasive terrestrial plant species in woodlands have a negative impact on the regeneration of native plant and tree species as well as wildlife habitat. Examples of invasive plant species found in Somerset County are shrubby honeysuckles (*Lonicera* spp.), Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), and Asiatic bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*). The District surveyed five woodland properties in 2019 and another 12 properties in 2020. The program has been well received by landowners in all counties that are participating in the project.



Ag Allies – Grassland Bird Project (APO Priorities III, VI):

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)), 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 land trusts to make sustainable bird-friendly management changes on their land; and improve the opportunity for nesting success of grassland birds in Maine. Accomplishments this year include:



- Worked with 18 land trusts in the last year and a half of the program, providing grassland habitat workshops, signage, and both financial and technical assistance. This has resulted in 8 land trusts making management changes to benefit grassland birds (which included adding delayed mowing to lease agreements, changing location of walking paths, and changing free-running dog policy during nesting season) as well as providing continuing support for those already on a delayed mowing schedule to help them with maintenance and enhancement of the quality of grassland habitat.
- With both land trust and landowner participation, Ag Allies 2020 program resulted in enrolled over 600 acres and 29 participants, including land trusts, dairy, beef, horse, and sheep farmers, as well as non-agricultural landowners across central Maine. Protection of these acres has resulted in the fledging of an estimated 1600 Bobolinks, 475 Savannah Sparrows, and the confirmed fledging of 10 meadowlarks.



Looking Ahead:

The most exciting development for upcoming seasons is the Ag Allies new formal collaboration with Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative. Since receiving one of their first small grant awards in 2018, we have communicated with Cornell LTBCI about our program successes, goals and needs for the future. This year, in addition to formalizing a collaboration with Ag Allies, Cornell has written a grant proposal for 2021 that will include the use of Ag Allies as a pilot program model for grassland bird conservation in the northeast. This is the first step in a multi-year plan to create a northeast region conservation partnership for grassland bird habitat. Ag Allies has also been invited as a participant in an upcoming North/east grassland coalition meeting, hosted by the Grassland Bird Trust of New York, again to work on creating a coalition to help grassland birds across the northeast.

The Ag Allies program has also attracted the interest of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) state office biologist, who is working with the District on plans to have an NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program 'Grassland Bird Initiative' in 2021. This Initiative will bring federal funding to grassland bird habitat statewide.

Another new piece of the program is to aid land trusts wishing to refurbish grasslands that are currently under-managed. Many grassland acres held by Maine's land trusts have not been



actively managed for forage production in recent years. With later, more sporadic mowing and lack of fertility management, these grasslands have declined in productivity as well as become less attractive for nesting grassland birds.

Therefore, Ag Allies plans to implement field refurbishment/improvement practices for demonstration sites with interested land trusts. This will include assessment of fields and implementation of best-fit practices to restore quality nesting habitat, which has been successfully done in NY (Dr. Tom Gavin, Professor Emeritus, Cornell University). Practices will likely include soils testing and analysis, lime and fertilizer application and may also include some re-seeding, land smoothing (for particularly rutted fields to allow management), and invasive species management. Demonstration sites will be in areas with known nesting bird populations. Public workshops will showcase techniques and results. In addition, there will be a separate workshop during active nesting season to train bird behavior skills necessary for determining safe mowing dates.

In addition to targeting land trust properties, the Ag Allies program will continue working with individual farmers and landowners of priority grasslands across Maine. We will also continue providing signage to help showcase bird-friendly grasslands and help spread the grassland bird conservation message. SCSWCD has already secured some funding for the field refurbishment demonstration projects and is waiting to hear on two other funding sources for the program in 2021.

Nutrient Management Plans (*APO Priority I-C*):

The District continued writing State Nutrient Management Plans (NMPs) for local producers in Somerset County this year.

NMPs written by the District satisfy the requirements for the State of Maine Nutrient Management Law and protect producers under [Maine's Right to Farm Law](#). Plans help farmers with the proper storage, management and utilization of both on and off farm nutrients. The District's Technical Director, a certified Crop Advisor (International) and state licensed Nutrient Management Planner, is currently working with farmers in Somerset and surrounding counties to either update their existing NMPs or to develop an initial NMP.

Envirothon (*APO Priority IV*):

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. Unfortunately in 2020 the Maine Envirothon was cancelled due to Covid-19 safety guidelines.

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 2020, 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). Thirty-seven Somerset County producers (approximately \$1,100,000 in funds) in the three programs were assisted through this cooperative agreement in 2020.



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

In 2017 SCSWCD entered into a 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 2020 the District's Technical Director worked on six different CNMPs in multiple counties including Waldo, Hancock, Somerset and Kennebec.