



SOMERSET COUNTY



SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



# ANNUAL REPORT

2023



## 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: 7 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: 5 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: 3 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: 12/31/2023*  
*Years of Service: 1 year*

**VACANT – Supervisor #5**

## District Board – Associate Supervisors

*None*



## District Employees

### ***Executive Director (Outgoing)***

Joe Dembeck  
1184 East River Road  
Skowhegan, ME 04976  
(207) 474-9789  
[joseph.dembeck@me.nacdnet.net](mailto:joseph.dembeck@me.nacdnet.net)

*Date of employment 5/11/2015  
Will be resigning, effective 2/24/2023*

### ***Executive Director (Incoming)***

Jennifer Hebert  
31 Mt Hunger Road  
Starks, ME 04911  
(207) 578-0341  
[jhebert@maineconservationdistricts.com](mailto:jhebert@maineconservationdistricts.com)

*Date of employment 1/9/2023*

### ***Technical Director***

Laura Suomi-Lecker  
PO Box 45  
Liberty, ME 04949  
(207) 589-3018  
[laura.lecker@me.nacdnet.net](mailto:laura.lecker@me.nacdnet.net)

*Date of employment 1/2/2007*

### ***Outreach Coordinator***

Jennifer Brockway  
PO Box 2475  
Waterville, ME 04903  
(207) 679-7306  
[somersetswcd.outreach@gmail.com](mailto:somersetswcd.outreach@gmail.com)

*Date of employment 5/8/2018  
\*moved to Contractor status effective 7/1/2022*



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

While 2022 continued with caution around in-person workshops, many of our outreach efforts stayed in place. This year also brought the well-earned retirement of Joe Dembeck from his role as our stalwart Executive Director.

Joe's years of service launched the District into our current successful programs, secure fiscal position, solid partnerships, and expanded our network of professionals, organizations and landowners. He also helped build and foster our high-functioning board of supervisors and made the District a fantastic place to serve. With fewer workshops in 2022, the District was afforded the time to vision and plan. Coinciding with the conclusion of our recent five-year plan and Joe's transition, we examined where the District is, our strengths, how we can best serve landowners into the future, and the kind of leadership skills that will realize our mission.

We are thrilled to announce our new Executive Director, Jennifer Hebert. In addition to tending to her family's large woodlot, Jennifer has developed a deep knowledge of the district and its role. She has 13 years' experience with the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and in the periphery of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Her years as the town clerk of Starks and working within the UMaine system, has given her valuable experience interfacing with the public, towns and the state as well as top-notch data processing and administrative skills. These robust administration skills, familiarity with state and federal procedures, her personable nature, and Joe's generously continued guidance is making Jennifer's transitioning into her role at the district smooth.

While Joe will be missed, we are looking forward to the new year!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ann Mefferd', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

*Ann Mefferd  
Chair  
Board of Supervisors*



**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.
- 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.
- Continue *Somerset Field Notes*, the District's biweekly 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, 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 2023 Activities\*:

- Workshops:
  - Apple Tree Pruning Workshop – Skowhegan (March 4th)
- Yankee Woodlot Management and Activities
  - Picture Post Project – Post-harvest monitoring of succession
  - Trail Maintenance and Improvements
- 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 8
  - 2023 Field Surveys
  - 2023 Delayed Mowing Payments
  - 2023 Field Renovation Workshops & Technical Assistance
  - 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)

*\*Due to the change in Executive Directors workshop planning for 2023 has been delayed.*



**Conservation Priorities of Somerset County  
 Recommended to the NRCS Somerset County Field Office  
 By the Local Working Group for FY 2023 and FY 2024**

The Somerset County Local Working Group met on December 21, 2021, and determined the EQIP funding allocations for FY 2023, Table 1. Recently the Local Working Group at their January 18, 2023, meeting has recommended allocating the available EQIP funds as follows for FY 2024, Table 2. For FY 2024 it was decided by the meeting participants to increase the Forestry funding pool to 23%, while retaining Animal Waste at 70%, decreasing Cropland to 6%, and retaining Pasture at 1%. The intent of these changes was to increase funds for forestry-related activities due to the high demand of applications by landowners for such practices.

**Table 1. FY 2023 EQIP Funding Allocations**

<b>Resource Category</b>	<b>% of Local Allocated Funding</b>
Animal Waste	<b>70%</b>
Forestry	<b>19%</b>
Cropland	<b>10%</b>
Pasture	<b>1%</b>

**Table 2. 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>





## SOMERSET COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL PLAN OF OPERATION (APO) 2023

This plan identifies the major objectives, actions, and goals that will be emphasized in calendar year 2023 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.
  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 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. 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
4. Pursue or expand forestry funding
5. Provide outreach and educational materials to the public and forestry community
6. 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.)
- G. Provide outreach and educational materials to the public

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 8 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
  - 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

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 8 of Project in 2023
  - 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 2023

- 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
  - d. Small Foundation and Capacity Grants
  - e. Other applicable opportunities

Who: ED/ TD/Supervisors/ NRCS

When: Throughout the year



Invasive plant survey area at a public site in Madison



## 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



## Somerset County Soil & Water Conservation District FY 2022 Budget (July 2021 – June 2022)

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>PROPOSED</b>	<b>ACTUAL</b>
Payroll [including taxes]	\$82,000.00	\$85,185.00
Workers Comp	\$350.00	\$505.00
Office Supplies	\$250.00	\$406.00
Postage/Printing	\$250.00	\$106.00
IT	\$300.00	\$402.00
IT – Web Hosting	\$250.00	\$358.00
Sales – Item Costs	\$5,000.00	\$3,947.00
Dues	\$2,400.00	\$2,175.00
Payroll Service	\$1,500.00	\$1,149.00
Travel/Mileage	\$1,300.00	\$1,212.00
Meetings/Events/Workshops	\$1,000.00	\$235.00
Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
Election Expense	\$300.00	\$240.00
Training	\$1,000.00	\$0.00
Licenses/Permits	\$300.00	\$0.00
Grant Payments to Participants	\$11,000.00	\$12,200.00
Envirothon	\$350.00	\$0.00
District Promotional Items	\$400.00	\$71.00
Ag Allies Project - Supplies	\$0.00	\$701.00
Ag Allies Field Refurbishment Projects	\$10,500.00	\$9,023.00
Ag Allies Contractor Services	\$4,000.00	\$4,071.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$124,090.00</b>	<b>\$121,986.00</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
USDA- NRCS Contribution Agreements	\$6,000.00	\$5,676.00
USDA-NRCS CNMP Cooperative Agreement	\$12,000.00	\$6,169.00
USDA-NRCS CIG Invasive Plant Project	\$4,000.00	\$3,044.00
Maine DACF – Forest Pest Project	\$0.00	\$333.00
NACD-TA Outreach Grant	\$2,520.00	\$5,502.00
Sales (Trout)	\$6,000.00	\$4,750.00
Workshops/Education	\$500.00	\$110.00
Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$1,000.00	\$0.00
Interest Income	\$150.00	\$144.00
MEMIC Dividend	\$45.00	\$45.00
Tech. Assistance/Evaluations - Billable	\$750.00	\$1,000.00
Envirothon	\$0.00	\$0.00
Grants and/or Additional Fundraising	\$43,198.00	\$37,269.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$129,663.00</b>	<b>\$117,542.00*</b>

\***Note** - \$5,929 of FY2022 grants received were not used and moved to FY2023 in agreement with grantor.



	PROPOSED	YEAR TO DATE
<b>Expenses</b>		
Payroll [including taxes]	\$74,427.00	\$30,220
Workers Comp	\$500.00	\$481
Contractor Services	\$9,350.0	\$6,087
Office Supplies	\$250.00	\$31
IT	\$1,250.00	\$1,361
IT – Web Hosting	\$350.00	\$344
Postage/Printing	\$250.00	\$0
Dues	\$2,250.00	\$75
Payroll Service	\$1,500.00	\$729
Trout Sales- Item Costs	\$5,000.00	\$0
Travel/Mileage	\$1,850.00	\$695
Annual District Meeting/Dinner	\$2,000.00	\$0
Meetings/Events/Workshops	\$1,000.00	\$601
Election Expense	\$300.00	\$59
Training	\$1,000.00	\$280
Licenses/Permits	\$300.00	\$110
Payments to Landowners – Ag Allies Project	\$25,500.00	\$25,500
Field Rehab Demo Projects – Ag Allies Project	\$5,000.00	\$3,626
Contractor Services – Ag Allies Project	\$1,500.00	\$2,169
Envirothon	\$350.00	\$0
District Promotional Items	\$400.00	\$0
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$134,327.00</b>	<b>\$72,368</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Somerset County Funding	\$28,500.00	\$21,372
State of ME - Dept. of Ag.	\$25,000.00	\$25,000
USDA- NRCS Contribution Agreements	\$9,430.00	\$241
USDA-NRCS CNMP Cooperative Agreement	\$11,000.00	\$140
Ag Allies Technical Assistance (KELT)	\$2,000.00	\$0
NACD-TA Outreach Project	\$0.00	\$4,325
Trout Sales	\$6,000.00	\$0
Workshops/Education	\$500.00	\$0
District Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$1,000.00	\$0
Interest Income	\$150.00	\$0
MEMIC Dividend	\$45.00	\$41
Tech. Assistance/Evaluations - Billable	\$1,750.00	\$1,229
Cornell Ag Allies Grant (FY22 carryover)	\$6,000.00	\$5,928
Grants and/or Additional Fundraising	\$40,000.00	\$26,704
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$131,375.00</b>	<b>\$84,980</b>





## Somerset County Soil & Water Conservation District **DRAFT** FY 2024 Budget (July 2023 – June 2024) \*

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>PROPOSED</b>
Payroll [including benefits and taxes]	\$82,000.00
Workers Comp	\$500.00
Contractor Services (Rise & Shine)	\$10,000
Office Supplies	\$650.00
IT	\$200.00
IT – Website Hosting	\$400.00
Trout Sales - Item Costs	\$5,000.00
Postage/Printing	\$150.00
Dues	\$2,250.00
Payroll Service	\$1,500.00
Travel/Mileage	\$2,000.00
Meetings/Events/Workshops	\$1,000.00
Election Expense	\$100.00
Training	\$1,000.00
Licenses/Permits	\$300.00
Ag Allies Project	\$25,000.00
District Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$2,000.00
Envirothon	\$350.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$132,900.00</b>
<b>Income</b>	
Somerset County Funding	\$28,500.00
State of ME - Dept. of Ag.	\$25,000.00
USDA- NRCS Contribution Agreements	\$9,430.00
USDA-NRCS CNMP Cooperative Agreement	\$12,000.00
Trout Sale	\$6,000.00
Workshops/Education	\$500.00
Interest Income	\$150.00
MEMIC Dividend	\$45.00
District Annual Meeting/Dinner	\$1,000.00
Tech. Assistance/Evaluations - Billable	\$1,500.00
Grants and/or Additional Fundraising	\$45,000.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$129,125.00</b>

*\*The FY 2024 District Budget is currently under development by the Board Supervisors and Executive Director. The results of several grant submissions are still pending. Final FY 2024 Budget anticipated in May 2023.*



## Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation District

### 2022 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 2022 the *Somerset Field Notes*, the District's newsletter, was launched as a biweekly 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 2022. 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 2022 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", and continued forest monitoring at the 4 Picture Post sites on a quarterly basis.



The ecologically focused quotes on the “Trail of Thoughts” were updated to provide a much more inclusive viewpoint of how different individuals view humankind’s relationship with the natural world. The original “Trail of Thoughts” was developed in the early 2000s by Warren Balgooyen.

### **2022 Workshops/Education/Outreach (APO Priority V):**

**Pruning and Managing Apple Trees Workshops** (Collaboration with MFS, UMaine Extension Somerset Office, MWO) – Held March 6th at the Yankee Woodlot in Skowhegan.

**Wildlife Habitat Projects for Small Woodland Owners** (Collaboration with MWO, IFW, USFWS) – Held August 13th at C. Hulsey Property in Temple.

**Grassland Bird Habitat Education/Outreach** - Provided educational presentations and distributed educational handouts at 10 grassland bird presentations provided for farm and land trust events and 4 general bird conservation presentations. UMaine provided great publicity for the joint Walk and Talk event in June: [WFX features grassland bird walk -UMaine News - University of Maine](#).

**Invasive Plant ID & Management Walk** – Provided information and management tips for common non-native invasive plants at Weston Woods & Waters in Madison in partnership with Somerset Woods Trustees.



**Aquatic Invasive Plant Paddle** – Partnered with Skowhegan Outdoors to provide an aquatic invasive plant ID and prevention workshop on the Kennebec River in Skowhegan

**Yankee Woodlot Guided Trail Walks** – Hosted Skowhegan Outdoors, a program of Main Street Skowhegan, for a half-dozen public walks and/or snowshoe events.

**Maine Woodlands** – The District’s Outreach Coordinator provided several woodland stewardship articles for Maine Woodlands, the newsletter of Maine Woodland Owners.

Facebook, Instagram and Web site postings of the Ag Allies program on Somerset SWCD, Avian Haven, Maine Land Trust Network; articles in local newsletters, Maine Audubon Habitat



Summer magazine, National Association of Conservation District's (NACD) Annual Report 2021 (released spring 22), press releases, and most recently, on [Maine Public Radio](#). This piece was shared in NACD Conservation Clips the week of 8/23.

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

Staff did take advantage of various online-based opportunities throughout 2022. Specific technical development activities included:

- Forest Management Webinars –focused on: 1) invasive species (plant and pest) assessment and treatment; 2) Carbon sequestration in forests and management options; 3) woodland management activities for wildlife, water quality protection and silviculture.
- 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 2022 projects/activities with partners include:

- Invasive Forest Pest Project – Partners: DACF, MACD, MWO, MNAP
- Agricultural Allies – Grassland Bird Project – Partners: Maine Audubon, Davis Foundation, 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 (14), Landowners (52), Municipalities (2).
- 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



Forestry for Maine Birds interpretive panel at Yankee Woodlot  
 Demonstration Forest

### 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.

### **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 land trusts to make sustainable bird-friendly management changes on their land; and improve the opportunity for nesting success of grassland birds in Maine.

For 2022 field season, outreach, on-site habitat protection, and field refurbishment demonstration areas were implemented with metrics increasing on nearly every front over last year. Financial incentives were particularly critical to most farmers this season, due to the volatility of the economy and increased pressure of a rapidly changing climate. In fact, some farmers who participated without funding last year requested financial assistance for participation this year. As we see warmer and drier springs and early summers, the difficulty balancing quality forage production and nesting habitat will likely continue to increase. Thus, the incentive payments for delayed mowing practices will be a critical piece for continued success of the program.

There was also increased interest in outreach activities this field season. Ag Allies staff provided educational opportunities, formally and informally, to inform audiences on bird-friendly land management and use. Each of these educational offerings were tailored to a local focus, highlighting the local breeding population and the long-term impact of bird-friendly management practices. Land Trusts and RCP partners, in particular, were very interested in and supportive of on-site educational programs this year. This provided an excellent source of outreach to land trust and RCP constituents.



Jason Littlefield, Winterport, new 2022 Ag Allies participant

Specific tasks for 2022 field season included:

- On-site grassland bird nesting habitat conservation/creation and tracking:



- Partnered with 14 land trusts and 2 municipalities; Adopted practices included adding delayed mowing to lease agreements, changing location of walking paths, and implementation of leashed dog policy during nesting season.
  - Worked with 52 individual landowners/farmers and other entities to provide nesting habitat for grassland birds; up from 38 in 2021
  - Since conclusion of field season, have 48 new site visit requests for 23.
  - Enrolled over 1000 acres in habitat protection; up from 780 in 2021
  - Protected habitat resulted in the fledging of an estimated 2,300 birds, including bobolinks, Savannah sparrows, meadowlarks, and harriers
  - Bird species and numbers were entered into the Ebird database
- Field Refurbishment for three land trust demonstration areas
    - 28-acre Bangor Land Trust/Maine Audubon Penjajawoc fields: limed this fall; fertilizer to be spread in 2023.
    - 40-acre 'Riverview fields' at Georges River Land Trust (GRLT): fertilizer spread in spring, completing refurbishment activities begun last field season.
    - 20-acre Kennebec Land Trust field refurbishment, Phase II, continued this year with funding from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Phase II includes forest mulching and rock removal to increase the amount of re-seedable acres. Work to continue into 2023.
  - Community and landowner outreach:
    - Installed habitat signs: Installed grassland habitat signs on participating fields.
    - Produced and disseminated new Ag Allies Pamphlets: Developed participant field guide for walk and talk presentations.
    - Worked with Land Trusts to provide outreach to conservation easement owners: Partnered with GRLT for 10 site visits on grassland conservation easement properties.
    - Provided educational presentations and distributed educational handouts: 10 grassland bird presentations provided for farm and land trust events, 4 general bird conservation presentations. UMaine provided great publicity for the joint Walk and Talk event in June: [WFX features grassland bird walk -UMaine News - University of Maine.](#)







- Provided outreach articles and posts: Facebook, Instagram and Web site postings of the Ag Allies program on SWCD, Avian Haven, Maine Land Trust Network; articles in local newsletters, Maine Audubon Habitat Summer magazine, National Association of Conservation District's (NACD) Annual Report

2021 (released spring 22), press releases, and most recently, on [Maine Public Radio](#). This piece was shared in NACD Conservation Clips the week of 8/23.

### **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 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 2022 the Maine Envirothon was once again held as an in-person event at Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) in Unity.

### **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-two Somerset County producers (approximately \$1,300,000 in funds) in the three programs were assisted through this cooperative agreement in 2022.

**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 2022 the District's Technical Director worked on four different CNMPs in multiple counties including Waldo, Franklin, and Somerset.