



THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS



Annual Report
2021

NORTHEAST



In the Northeast Region, we host a robust network of hardworking districts with a variety of programs and their own unique challenges and opportunities. Our state leadership works closely and shares information across the region, which supports and enhances our collective work. Despite our seeming differences in such a varied landscape, our community of conservation practitioners share the same spirit of local conservation delivery and represent our communities and producers in all that we do.

I came to NACD just prior to our Northeast Region meeting last October in Portsmouth, NH. I couldn't think of a better way to hit the ground running with such an impressive group of conservation professionals. We spent a fulfilling week learning, networking, and generally celebrating one another's work. We went home full of new ideas and deepened connections. I am excited to see what this year brings for our shared work and I look forward to the ways we continue to share and learn with one another as we work towards our collective goals around how we communicate the important work happening at the local level and throughout the northeast. I am especially looking forward to the opportunity to gather again at the 2022 Northeast Region Meeting in Cambridge, Maryland August 28-31, 2022.

ANNICA MCGUIRK
NORTHEAST REGION REPRESENTATIVE



Collaborating to Protect Grassland Birds in Maine



In the last 50 years, 700 million grassland birds have been lost in North America. These species eat large quantities of insects and rodents that damage crops, and their populations continue to sharply decline. In Maine, the Ag Allies program focuses on the protection and enhancement of habitat for these species of special concern by empowering landowners and farmers to make sustainable management changes on their land to improve the opportunity for nesting success of grassland birds. This collaborative program is managed by the **Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation District** working with land trust partners and the Regional Conservation Partnership Network through the Northeast Bird Habitat Conservation Initiative in Maine.

Ag Allies works with farmers and other landowners across the state to fine-tune management strategies through technical assistance and incentive payments to better manage open lands for grassland bird nesting success. By focusing on fields where grassland birds are present in greatest density, the areas can then be targeted for a delayed mowing schedule. Technical assistance staff then monitor closely to allow participating farmers to harvest as soon as fledglings are capable of sustained flight. A variety of methods are employed to create the balance necessary to support farmers and their operations with the needs of the birds. This integration and technical assistance help

incorporate delayed mowing into holistic farm management practices that can become permanent parts of the needs and goals of the farming operation and their management plans.



"The program is about coming to meet the farmers where they are, helping them find a way to make room for the birds but be able to get done what they need to get done," **said Laura Sumoi-Lecker**, Technical Director and Manager of Ag Allies. "This is a tough ask for them. By monitoring the fields, farmers can get back to work as soon as the birds leave. The program is successful because of these farmlands. We wouldn't have any grassland space or these birds if it weren't because of the farmers. It's all



about balance. Helping these producers make modifications to get what they need while creating the habitat for the nesting birds. It doesn't have to be a sacrifice on the part of the farmer if the program is doing their job right."

When the program first began in 2018, **Tim Hewett**, manager of Hewett Diversified Farm in Skowhegan, Maine was one of the first to join. Hewett recognized the value of these grassland nesting species and after his first season in the program, his 30-acre field fledged large

groups of Eastern Bobolinks and Savannah Sparrows. Since his initial enrollment, Hewett has managed that same 30-acre field for delayed harvest, haying after field surveys show birds have fledged. Not only has the nesting activity increased for these species of concern, but this field has become a refuge area for grassland birds from other farms. When his conservation efforts for the birds were praised, Hewett simply shrugged saying, "the incentive payment helps, but this is important. It's just the right thing to do."



SOUTHEAST



In 2021, Southeast Region conservation districts, associations, and partners continued to get conservation on the ground in the face of ongoing pandemic challenges.

Shifting to virtual meetings, the NACD Forestry Resource Policy Group, in partnership with the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts (AACD), hosted an online "Winds, Water, and Wildfires Summit" for NACD's Southeast and South Central Regions in May. The summit explored how conservation districts are helping to support the three goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

Through a continued agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), NACD awarded more than \$2.6 million in fiscal year (FY) 2021 Technical Assistance (TA) Grants funding to the Southeast Region. In FY21 alone, that funding helped employ the equivalent of nearly 53 full-time employees in conservation districts across the region. In the same fiscal year, the Southeast Region led the nation in a variety of TA grant metrics collected by NACD: the number of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts assisted and obligated; number of Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) plans and contracts completed; and the number of contracts with historically underserved populations.

After being canceled in 2020, the Southeast Region was able to convene in person in Gulf Shores, Alabama for the 2021 Southeast Region Meeting where nine new leaders were inducted into the Southeast Region Conservation Hall of Fame.



Following NACD's 2022 Annual Meeting in Orlando, FL the region looks forward to welcoming the attendees of the 2022 NACD Summer Conservation Forum and Tour and Southeast Region Meeting back to the southeast for a joint meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico. These meetings in Puerto Rico, known as "La Isla del Encanto," or Isle of Enchantment, will showcase the accomplishments of Puerto Rico's conservation districts.

¡Bienvenidos! Plan to spend some extra time enjoying Puerto Rico's warmth, beaches, rainforest, bioluminescent bays, and traditional Puerto Rican food!

CANDICE ABINANTI
SOUTHEAST REGION REPRESENTATIVE