

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Delaware Association of  
Conservation Districts

# DELAWARE ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS 2023 HIGHLIGHTS



## DACD ELECTS GWEN PIERCE AS PRESIDENT

A farmer in New Castle County, here she addresses the audience at the inaugural Black Farmers Conference held in Dover in November 2023.



## GRAY RECOGNIZED AS LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR

Rep. Gray's advocacy for conservation district programs was instrumental to launch Sussex Conservation District's Tax Ditch Pilot Program.



## THREE STUDENTS PLACE 1ST IN NATIONAL POSTER CONTEST

Anakin Knox (left, New Castle), Annabelle Hochstedler (Sussex) and Genevieve Frisch (New Castle) all placed 1st for their respective grade levels in the NACD contest.



## 2023 DELAWARE ENVIROTHON

Charter School of Wilmington Team A placed first among 16 teams competing at DNREC's Aquatic Resources Education Center. The team went on to place 38th at the NCF North American Competition.



## SUSSEX SCD PILOTS OYSTER AQUACULTURE PROGRAM

SCD developed a cost-share program for oyster aquaculture farmers to help support the industry and improve water quality.



## FARMERS PLANT RECORD COVER CROP ACRES IN 2023

133,431 cover crop acres were planted in the Fall of 2023, the highest year among an increasing trend in cover crop adoption.

## SUPPORTING CONSERVATION, SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES

Delaware's Conservation Districts have been trusted advisors to farmers for generations, to conserve and protect Delaware's natural resources.

What started as an experiment during the Dust Bowl became a permanent fixture across the country. What began as a resource for technical assistance to solve critical erosion challenges has evolved over time to meet the changing needs of our communities. Today, our conservation districts provide technical and financial assistance to farmers, communities, developers and individuals. We still work with our cooperators to control erosion, but we also focus on improving water quality, mitigating flooding issues, improving wildlife habitat and ensuring sustainable development to increase the quality of life for all Delawareans.

Delaware's Conservation Partnership represents an active and effective collaboration between the Kent Conservation District (KCD), New Castle Conservation District (NCCD), the Sussex Conservation District (SCD), the Delaware Association of Conservation Districts (DACD), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA), University of Delaware (UD) and Delaware State University (DSU).

We are uniquely positioned to work with our communities to address soil health, climate change and other natural resource needs. As our natural resource concerns change over time, the Partnership will continue to grow and evolve to meet new challenges as they arise.





# Urban Drainage Management

## RESOURCE CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT (RC&D)

Delaware's Conservation Districts serve as catalysts to work with landowners, government agencies, and other entities to resolve drainage, flooding, and stream bank erosion issues. The districts work cooperatively with county governments, DelDOT and legislators to investigate and resolve complaints or concerns in a timely manner. Types of water management projects include:

- Resolving backyard drainage problems using swales, subsurface drains, and pipes and catch basins
- Streambank erosion repair using riprap or other advanced stream restoration technology using a combination of techniques called green engineering
- Assisting with stormwater basin/pond maintenance and community open space tree plantings

### Districts worked on 128 RC&D projects in 2023,

ranging from \$7,300 to \$705,000. In addition to RC&D funds used for the projects, the districts secured over \$2 million in funding from other sources.

## SEDIMENT & STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

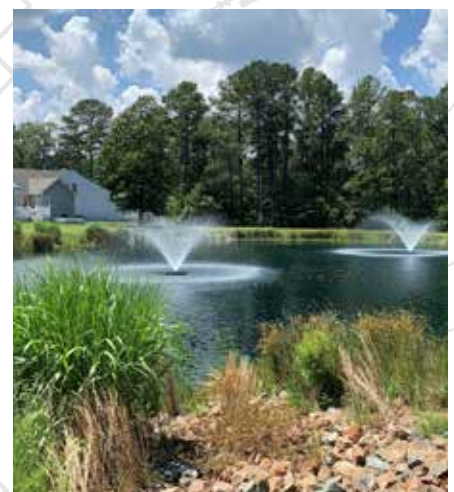
As delegated agencies, the districts work closely with DNREC to employ a comprehensive approach to sediment control (both during and after construction) and stormwater management. Projects vary from small commercial construction and agricultural structures to large subdivisions.

Conservation districts have dedicated staff to conduct plan reviews on projects that disturb 5,000 square feet or more, as well as provide construction inspections, maintenance inspections and technical assistance.

### Delaware's Conservation Districts conducted over 4,000 plan reviews in 2023,

including 3,892 standard plan reviews and 181 detailed plan reviews. These reviews encompassed 3,607 acres of land vulnerable to sediment and erosion loss.

They also completed 6,726 construction inspections and 1063 maintenance inspections.



# Tax Ditch Maintenance & Repair



## WHAT IS A TAX DITCH?

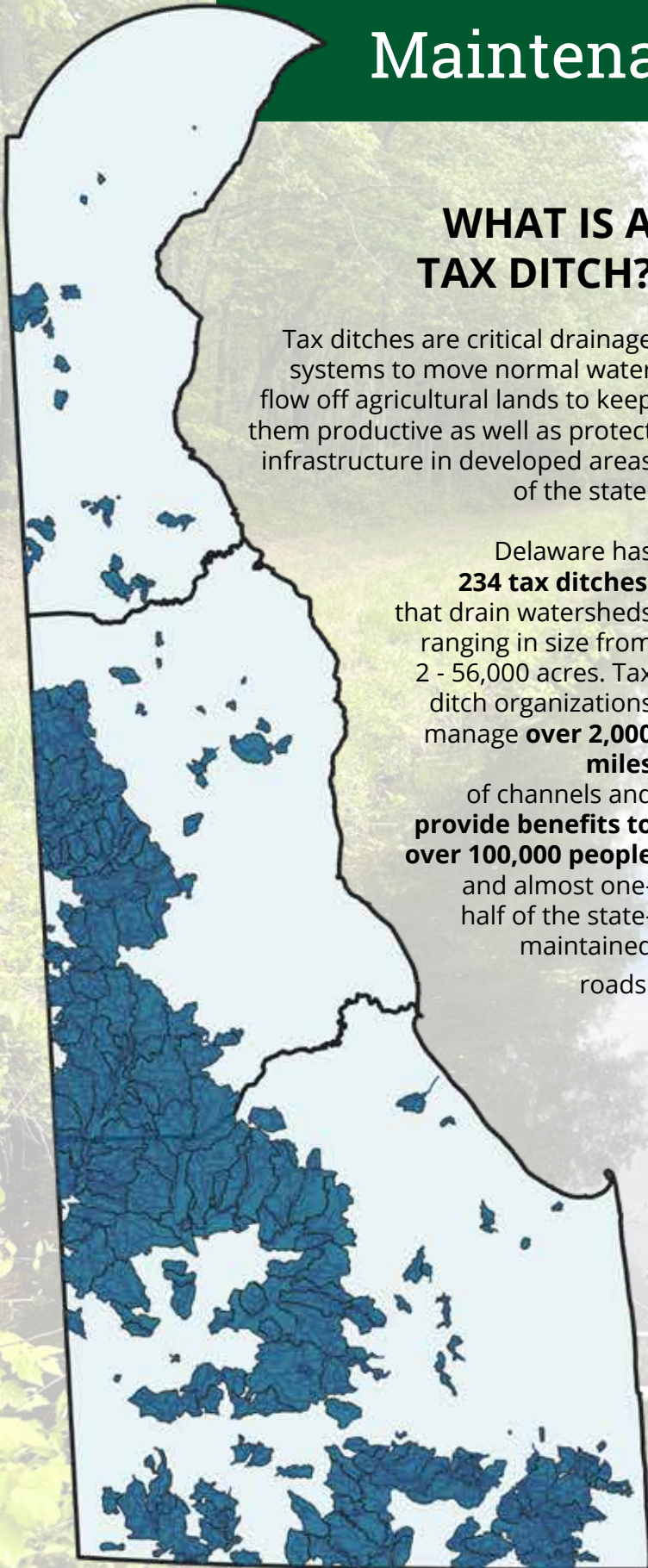
Tax ditches are critical drainage systems to move normal water flow off agricultural lands to keep them productive as well as protect infrastructure in developed areas of the state.

Delaware has **234 tax ditches**, that drain watersheds ranging in size from 2 - 56,000 acres. Tax ditch organizations manage **over 2,000 miles** of channels and **provide benefits to over 100,000 people** and almost one-half of the state-maintained roads.

Delaware's Conservation Districts provide tax ditch organizations with funding and technical assistance to help with maintenance and repairs to maintain the function of the ditches, including:

- Cleanout of ditch channels (dip outs) and spreading of spoil
- Grading for dip outs and pipes
- New pipes or pipe repair and replacement
- Tree removal
- Erosion repair
- Beaver dam removal
- Mowing of tax ditch rights-of-ways
- Weed Wiper Bar and Hand Spraying
- Bonding
- Project inspections

**In 2023, maintenance & repair projects were completed on 151 ditches, combining \$225,000 in 3921 funds with \$797,937 from tax ditch organizations and \$186,948 in other state and county funds.**





# Agricultural Conservation

Delaware's Conservation Districts work with farmers and landowners to protect and enhance the natural resources on their working lands. Conservation districts are unique within the larger conservation partnership. Each district is guided by a local board of supervisors to ensure that the priorities and programs of each district are aligned with the needs of their local communities. Working at the local level also allows the districts to be responsive to changing resource concerns.

The locally-led, voluntary model of conservation delivery has served as the guidepost of the districts' mission since the days of the Dust Bowl. Delaware's Conservation Partnership and our cooperators truly lead the country in outstanding stewardship.

Within the agricultural community, conservation districts work with farmers and landowners to identify the resource needs on their individual farms, develop

conservation plans and projects that address those needs and align with their farm goals, create engineering designs for structural conservation projects and match the project to financial assistance.

In short, conservation districts are a one-stop shop to get conservation practices on the ground.

## **Technical Services that Conservation Districts provided in 2023 include:**

- Whole Farm Conservation Planning
- Nutrient Management Planning
- Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning (Animal Waste Plans)
- Cover Crop and Soil Health Management Advice
- Soil Health Evaluations
- Compliance and Verification Inspections
- Pre-sidedress Nitrate Tests (PSNTs)
- Soil and Manure Sampling

**While US farmers as a whole plant 4.7% of their cropland in cover crops each year, Delaware farmers planted 31.3% of their acres in 2023.**

**Funding investments from the State have increased cover crop acreage more than 225% since 2019.**





## GOVERNOR'S CONSERVATION AWARDS

Each year, DACD hosts the Governor's Conservation Awards during Stewardship Week to recognize the exceptional efforts of an urban and agricultural recipient in each county. This year's honorees include:

- Jacob Urian
- Guy Philips
- Carousel Farm Park and Equestrian Center
- Sarvil Patel and Jigar Patel, Kent Del Properties, LLC
- Rich Rishel, Carl M. Freeman Group
- The Terraces in Rockland Mills

"One Water" was the theme for the National Association of Conservation Districts' 68th Stewardship Week, celebrated from April 30 - May 2, 2023.

## DELAWARE ENVIROTHON

The Delaware Envirothon is an annual competition for high-school students, offering training and education in aquatic ecology, wildlife, forestry, soils and land use, air quality, and public speaking. 2023 saw 16 teams competing from across the state. Charter School of Wilmington, Team A placed 1st, marking the school's 21st win in the 28-year history of the competition.

## URBAN AGRICULTURE

NCCD's Urban Ag Cost Share Program awarded 9 participants this year, a total of \$18,990.57 to repair existing raised beds, install new beds at multiple sites, put in a greenhouse, install a perimeter garden fence, set up two hydroponic towers, and build a new composting system.

NCCD also piloted an urban farmer training program, call the New Ground Growers Series which worked with 17 local partners to deliver 23 different webinars, workshops, and hands-on learning opportunities from April - September. The program had a total of 36 participants and three individuals who completed the entire program.

In collaboration with the Delaware Urban Farm and Food Coalition, NCCD developed a set of recommendations for the City of Wilmington for updates to the city zoning code that would protect and promote urban agriculture based on case studies from around the country.

# Education & Outreach



## OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Delaware's Conservation Districts host numerous events for local cooperators. For example, Locally-Led Workgroup Meetings were held in each county to identify natural resource concerns and priorities. Stormwater workshops were hosted by SCD to educate residents and industry professionals on regulations, types of facilities and their function, and successful maintenance. The districts also develop print materials and social media content, and participate in outreach events for schools, youth events and communities.

Soil Health Outreach remains a key focus. Soil health workshops, farmer breakfast meetings, television commercials and social media have promoted the benefits of cover crops and soil health practices.

**Delaware's Conservation Districts hosted and participated in 80 events in 2023.**

## CONTACT US

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