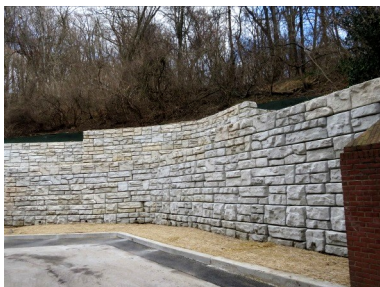


NEW CASTLE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

BACKYARDS TO BARNYARDS CURBSIDE TO STREAMSIDE GETTING CONSERVATION ON THE GROUND



New retaining wall at The Terraces at Rockland Mills



Manure structure at Carousel Park



Robert Emerson presents award to Michael and Rachel Kitts.



New manure storage structure recently built on the farm

CONSERVATION PROJECTS BENEFIT EVERYONE

2023 was a banner year for the District’s drainage program with more than 80 projects completed. Projects literally do take place in backyards, along streams, along roadsides, and on the farm. We cover urban, suburban, and agricultural locations all over New Castle County. Projects could not happen without funds approved by the Delaware legislature, funds provided through the Resource Conservation and Development (or 21st Century) fund, through Conservation Cost-Share funding, and through District resources.

We commend our 2022 and 2023 Cooperators of the Year for their exemplary conservation work ethic as they managed their farm operations. Our 2022 Cooperator of the Year is Bruce and Beth Patrick (featured in the 2022 annual report) and our 2023 Cooperator of the Year is Michael Kitts. Both were recognized during a dinner held at one of the monthly District Board of Supervisors meetings. The 2023 Governor’s Conservation Awards were held in May. The Agricultural award went to New Castle County Department of Community Services and Public Works for the new manure structure installed at Carousel Park. The Urban Conservation Award was presented to Steinele Construction Engineers and Castle Construction for their work on the pre-cast concrete retaining wall in the community of The Terraces in Rockland Mills. Two students were named national winners in the 2023 Conservation Poster Contest. Congratulations to Anakin Knox from North Star Elementary School. and Genevieve Fritsch from Appoquinimink High School (digital poster category).

L to R: Genevieve Fritsch and Anakin Knox. More poster winners on the back page.



Michael Kitts, Jr. Named 2023 Cooperator of the Year

Mike began farming in 2006 with his uncle and branched out on his own in 2008. He grew hay and started a trucking business then quickly transitioned to row crops. He took advantage of the Farm Service Agency’s Beginning Farmer Loan Program in 2018 to purchase his home farm at Alley Mill with his wife Rachel and children Gracie and little Mike. Since then, Mike has incorporated on-farm storage and participated in District and USDA NRCS programs for a beef cattle operation and expanded to over 1800 acres of cropland. Conservation highlights include:

- Over 3000 acres of cover crop planted since 2018.
- Use of precision ag techniques like GPS for grid sampling, yield mapping, and soil testing.
- Soil health practices through reduced tillage.
- Worked with NRCS for manure storage, fencing, waterers for his beef operation, and a grazing management plan.
- Pollinator plantings with new wildlife practices done with NRCS and Ducks Unlimited.
- Utilized advanced Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques for noxious weed prevention and control to enhance crop productivity.



Food Bank of DE raised beds



Greenhouse at Odyssey Charter School

Urban Agriculture Takes on New Challenges

The District continued and expanded the offerings available through the urban agriculture program with these initiatives:

- ◆ Awarded mini-grant funding in the amount of \$18,990.57 to nine urban agriculture projects.
- ◆ Piloted the New Ground Grower Series working with 17 partner organizations holding 27 workshops and events
- ◆ Signed a 3-year urban agriculture agreement with USDA NRCS totaling \$502,000.
- ◆ Led the Delaware Urban Farm and Food Coalition through a re-organization process.
- ◆ Held the 3rd annual “Ready, Set, Grow!” resource and networking fair.
- ◆ Organized and held the annual “Golden Gourd” gardening awards.
- ◆ Assisted in planning the 10th annual Urban Ag Session as part of Delaware Ag Week.
- ◆ Participated in outreach at Wilmington Earth Day, UD Ag Day, Bellevue Farms Seed Swap, DETV Good Morning Wilmington program, the Delaware Farm and Food Policy Council, the Tanger Arboretum in Lancaster, PA and the Black Farmer’s Conference.



Insect I.D. workshop

Conservation Cost Share Highlights

Cost Share by the number of projects:

- 55 for cover crop
- 05 for water quality
- 11 animal mortality
- 04 water management
- 11 urban agriculture

Total of 86 funded cost share projects.



Cover crop in field



Residential drainage systems



Pasture seeding

The Conservation Cost Share Program provides funding for both agricultural practices and urban/suburban water management and erosion control. The largest agricultural practice is planting cover crop. **For FY 2023, farmers planted 10,573 acres of cover crop to protect the soil from erosion.**

Technical Assistance Provided

Technical assistance is provided to the drainage program through on-site investigations, survey, and administrative services. The following is a snapshot of services provided:

- ◆ **146** on-site drainage investigations.
- ◆ **57** projects surveyed by the survey team.
- ◆ **8** tax ditch groups assisted with annual meetings and maintenance work.
- ◆ Provided sediment and stormwater inspection services.
- ◆ Locally Led Conservation Workshop held with landowners and partners.
- ◆ Soil Health Workshop held on Townsend area farm and a joint session held with the Kent Conservation District in Clayton.



Soil Health Workshop



Wet area in backyard



Pipe installation on Massey’s Tax Ditch

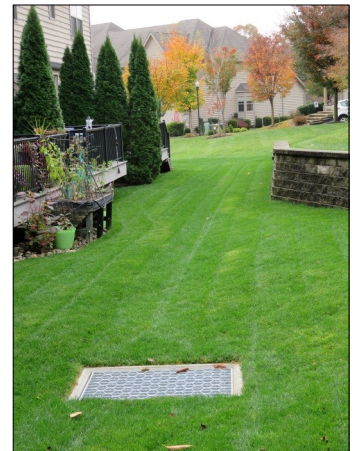
Water Management Projects: Backyard, Streamside, Curbside



Eroding suburban drainage channel in Chatham stabilized with riprap



Concrete retaining wall replaced old timber wall in Drummond Ridge



Drainage system installed behind homes in the Centerville Terrace community



Eroding channel and wet area stabilized in Pierson's Ridge



New curb and gutter installed on Old Harmony Road in Robins Green

Water Management by the numbers between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023:

147 projects either in planning, under construction or completed through the final inspection process.



Maintenance mowing along Little Mill Creek in Elsmere



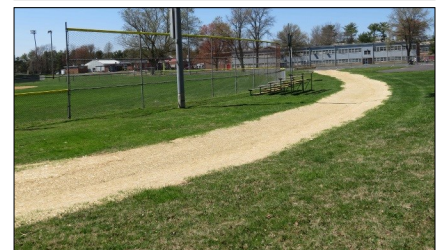
Drainage system installed in soggy area behind homes in The Oaks



Backyard drainage system installed in Timber Farms



Pedestrian trail and footbridge in the community of Richards Lane



Drainage swale installed around Pike Creek Little League Field

New Castle Conservation District

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The New Castle Conservation District is an equal opportunity employer and provider.



NCCD Board of Supervisors from L to R:

- Nick Adams - Secretary (NCC Ag Extension Agent)
- Richard Morris - Vice Chair
- Gwen Pierce - Treasurer
- Robert Emerson - Chair
- Mike Harris - for County Executive Matt Meyer
- Brandon Yerkes - Member
- S. R. Smith - Member

Charter School of Wilmington Team A were the winners of the 2023 Delaware Envirothon.

2023 Poster Contest First Place Winners



Clockwise from top:
 Caspian David-Linden Hill E.S., Rafael Ostrea-Crystal Run E. S., Maya Zhou-Redding M.S., Josephine Petrak-Brandywine H.S., and Rayzel Joseph-Everett

Education and Outreach



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During 2023, the District maintained an active education and outreach schedule by participating in the following events and activities:

- ◆ Delaware Association for Environmental Education Conference
- ◆ The Make A Splash water education program
- ◆ The NCC 4-H STEM Camp and Summer Camp
- ◆ Wilmington Earth Day
- ◆ White Clay Creek Fest
- ◆ Youth Environmental Summit
- ◆ NCC Farmers Markets
- ◆ Blackbird Creek Fall Festival
- ◆ Delaware Envirothon
- ◆ William Penn High School Farm Day



From L to R: White Clay Creek Fest, Wilmington Earth Day Event, William Penn Farm Day, pollinator display at Glasgow Park Farmers Market