

BENNINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT

OVERVIEW

Bennington County Conservation District underwent significant changes this fiscal year in terms of staffing. After bidding a fond farewell to Katy Crumley BCCD hired Michael Fernandez as our new District Manager. Mr. Fernandez is a farmer and graduate of Oregon State University's College of Forestry where he concentrated his studies on Natural Resource Policy and Management. He brings a wide array of skills and knowledge to the table and transitioned well into his new role with BCCD.

TREES FOR STREAMS & RIPARIAN PLANTINGS

Riparian plantings are utilized to stabilize eroding stream banks, provide habitat for both aquatic and terrestrial organisms, and to sequester carbon. Due to their long-term effectiveness these plantings have long been a core part of BCCD's work. Over the course of this year BCCD worked in partnership with The Battenkill Watershed Alliance, the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resource Conservation District, Orvis, and private landowners to plant approximately 4 acres of riparian buffer systems in Manchester, North Bennington, and Rupert amounting to approximately 1,200 trees planted throughout Bennington County utilizing state grants, federal grants, and private funds.

LAKES AND PONDS

Lakes and ponds in Bennington County provide valuable recreational access to the citizens of Bennington County. Using Tactical Basin Planning Funds BCCD engaged extensively with Paran Recreations and the Woodford Lake Association to initiate the development of long-term management plans designed to mitigate and reverse chronic reductions in water quality and recreational value.

BCCD engaged directly with landowners at Woodford Lake to provide Lake Wise Assessments that helped identify projects to reduce nutrient and sediment loading in Woodford Lake. We further worked with the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation to obtain funds to conduct a Lake Watershed Action Plan for Woodford Lake, though as of this report those funds have not been finalized.

BCCD worked with Paran Recreations, VTDEC, and other relevant stakeholders to begin developing a nuisance plant and nutrient loading reduction plan for Lake Paran. The proposed management paradigm includes an all fronts approach to arrest the long term decline in water quality and recreational use value of the lake.

AGRICULTURE

BCCD provides outreach and technical assistance to farmers in Bennington County with a special emphasis on supporting distressed and emergent businesses in need of public assistance to adapt to changing economic conditions facing Vermonters in the wake of the Covid crisis. BCCD expanded its services to include Cannabinoid Hemp testing to allow hemp farmers in Bennington County access to this vital and legally required service in order to take their crops to market. BCCD also provided technical assistance and educational materials on Agroforestry as well as other new and innovative land management techniques such as cover cropping, no till, and enhanced nutrient management planning. These services help farmers diversify their operations and BCCD strives to work with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to allow those farmers to access state funds to implement these new practices without having to take as substantial of a financial risk.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

BCCD worked with the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, Shires Housing, the Bennington Housing Authority, and the Center for Whole Communities to conduct Environmental Justice workshops at the Wollowbrook and Orchard Village housing complexes in Bennington. The intent of these workshops was tailored to ascertain how state agencies can better provide access to resources in financially disadvantaged communities. We gathered a substantial quantity of qualitative data on program delivery through these stakeholder interactions and BCCD continues to work with community members to enhance the livability of these communities by providing technical assistance on grants and project development led by community members who want to see their neighborhoods thrive.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION BLOCK GRANTS

Design and Implementation Block Grants make up a core part of BCCD's work. We utilize these grants to ameliorate specific environmental hazards and to pursue specific projects identified through community outreach or through state plans such as the Tactical Basin Plan and Stormwater Master Plans. Over the last year BCCD initiated projects largely designed to reduce phosphorus loading stemming from stormwater flows into the Battenkill and Walloomsac rivers. We are in the process of conducting six projects in Arlington, Bennington, Winhall, and Woodford.