

Northern Rhode Island Conservation District 2021 Annual Report

Current Initiatives

- Urban Agriculture
- Manure Management
- Drinking Water Protection
- Flood Mitigation
- Farm Conservation Plans
- Land Easements
- Wildlife Protection
- Snake Den Farm

Urban Agriculture

Providence County Urban Growers

Leadership Program



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Urban Agriculture Programming: June 30, 2021 marked the successful completion of the second year of the Providence County Urban Growers Leadership Program, which was funded by a grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts with in-kind match provided by partners including Southside Community Land Trust, Groundwork Rhode Island, Community Health Innovations of Rhode Island, and African Alliance of Rhode Island. Year 2 of the program was fully bilingual, with the program offered in both English and Kinyarwanda, a language native to Rwanda and spoken by a growing community in the Providence area. NRICD worked with translators and interpreters from The Center For Southeast Asians and Pinpoint Translation to provide all program elements in both languages and provide opportunities for all participants to network and socialize. Eleven students successfully completed the program which consisted of hands-on workshops, optional skill-share partnerships, and networking opportunities. A pending federal grant from the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program, expected to be received in September, 2021, will allow the Urban Growers Leadership Program to continue and increase in size in 2021-2022.



The Northern Rhode Island Conservation District serves the cities and towns of Providence County. If your community is not represented on our Board of Directors, please consider joining our team. We meet the fourth Tuesday of every month at 4:30 usually at the District Office, 2283 Hartford Ave, Johnston or virtually. To receive a copy of our agenda and minutes, please call 934-0840 ext. 5 or email gdemarco.nricd@gmail.org.

Northern Rhode Island Conservation District

2020-2021 Board of Directors

Dick Went, Chair, Glocester

Matt Tracy, Vice Chair, Providence

Jean Lynch, Secretary Treasurer, Johnston

Marc Tremblay, Pascoag

George Gettinger, Cumberland

Associate Directors

Paul Dolan, Scituate

Staff

Gina DeMarco, District Manager

Kate Sayles, Agriculture & Forestry Program Manager

Molly Allard, Water Resources Outreach & Education Program Manager

Annie Ragan, Agriculture & Forestry Technician

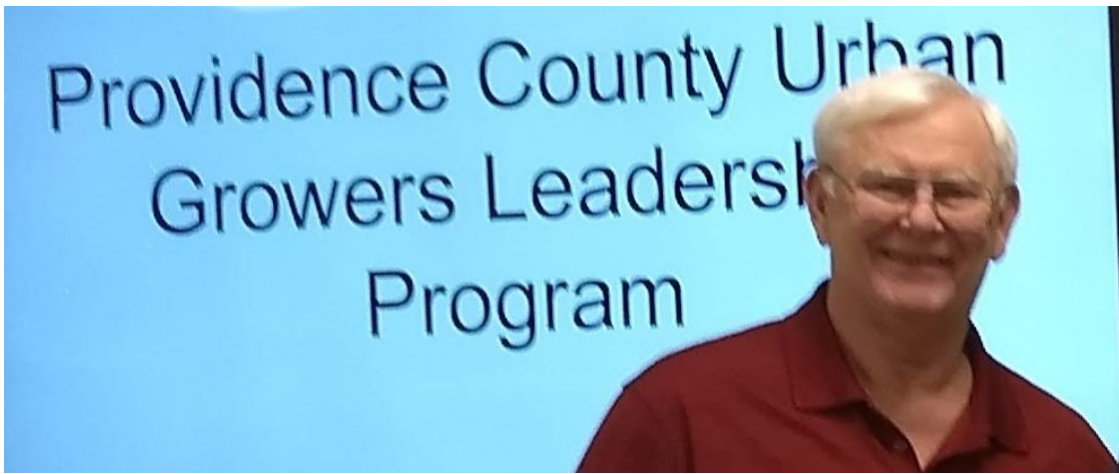
Gennifer Keller, Urban Agriculture Program Coordinator

NRICD.ORG

The Northern Rhode Island Conservation District fosters a community-based approach to the stewardship of northern Rhode Island's natural resources through education and outreach into the communities, technical assistance and partnerships with other agencies.



NRICD Board of Directors, Left to Right: George Gettinger, Paul Dolan, Dick Went, Jean Lynch, Matt Tracy, Marc Tremblay



Greetings

The past year has certainly been difficult in many ways. But, The Northern RI Conservation District met it head on and con-

tinued our conservation work with hardly a bump in the road. Our staff immediately found ways to continue from home and meet virtually with our clients. Our board was able to meet virtually without missing any scheduled meetings.

Over the course of the year, NRICD worked on no less than 18 programs and agreements. Perhaps one of the most satisfying was completing the Belfield Drive flooding problem. We also completed 75 conservation plans, are working with hobby farmers to compost animal manure, worked with farmers on soil health, trained leaders in urban agriculture, helped establish small community gardens and along with everything else, continue our outreach for Providence Water in relation to the reservoir. Snake Den Farm continues to be a success.

This year we said goodbye and congratulations to Kate Sayles, as she moved on to become the Executive Director of the RI Land Trust. We also warmly welcome back Marina Capraro who has been serving as the Snake Den Farm Manager and will now also serve as the Agriculture and Forestry Project Manager.

So, we continue to do our job. Our staff has continued to work full time under a difficult situation and we are serving Providence County as our enabling legislation suggests.

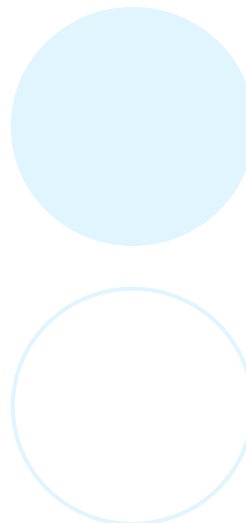
Sincerely,

Dick Went

Chair, NRICD



Kate Sayles—Served 10 Years at NRICD is now Executive Director of The RI Land Trust



Marina Capraro now serves as both the Snake Den Farm Manager and Agriculture and Forestry Project Manager.

Belfield Drive in Johnston—Flood Mitigation

NRICD worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS), the Town of Johnston, and the Rhode Island Association of Conservation Districts (RIACD) to complete a floodplain restoration project to prevent recurring flooding of the Pocasset River, which had previously affected properties on Belfield Drive in Johnston.

Federal funding was provided through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program. EWP authorizes NRCS to purchase permanent easements on eligible lands and restore the floodplain functions in the easement area to their natural conditions. Participation is voluntary.

Only land in the affected section of Belfield Drive in Johnston was eligible for floodplain easement enrollment with this funding and had to meet certain criteria, including being damaged by flooding at least once within the previous calendar year or having been subject to flood damage at least twice within the previous 10 years.

NRCS entered into an agreement with RIACD, which accepted applications from eligible landowners, secured appraisals and acquired land with the assistance of NRICD. Restoration work, which was designed and constructed by the engineering firm Fuss and O'Neill, included both structural and non-structural measures to bring back floodplain functions. A structure was removed to create a flood water storage area, then a box culvert was installed to allow storm water to flow under the road and back into the Pocasset River. Native vegetation was planted to control soil erosion.

"Floodplains can provide significant protection from flood damages to downstream landowners," said Phou Vongkhamdy, Rhode Island State Conservationist for NRCS. "The purpose of this project was to limit future uses of land in this floodplain area to make it available to store flood water."

NRCS is a federal agency that works hand-in-hand with conservation districts and the people of Rhode Island to improve and protect soil, water and other natural resources.

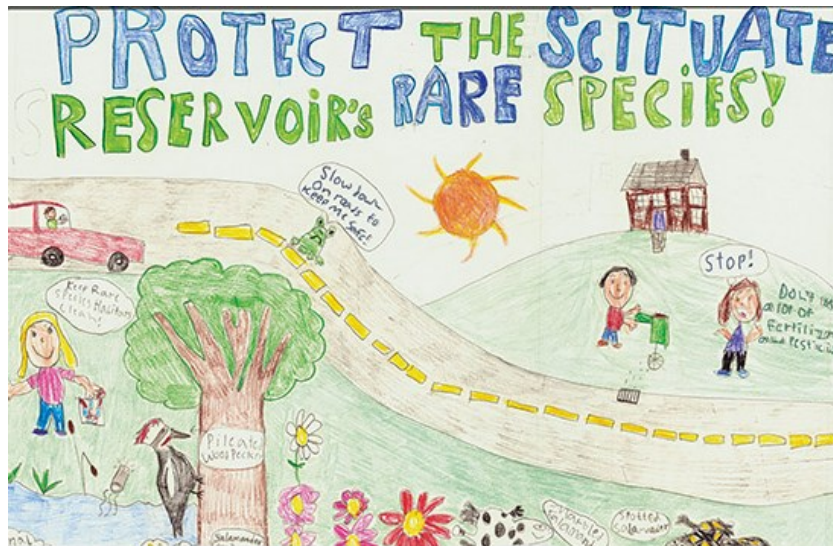


Above: Prior to project completion, a row boat stands ready to transport people across the flood to their residences. Center: Demolition of a home to convert area to a flood plain. To the right: Same area after Hurricane Ida dropped over 5 inches of rain on the area in 2021.

Drinking Water Protection

Scituate Reservoir Watershed Education Program (SRWEP)

SRWEP had to make many changes to continue providing programming during the COVID-19 pandemic, but was able to celebrate a successful year of educating the residents of Scituate, Foster, Glocester, and Johnston about the value of the beautiful Scituate Reservoir. The



2021 Poster Contest
Winner:

NOELLE SUTTER

North Scituate
Elementary School

"Scituate Reservoir
Watershed Education
Program"

LandWaterConnection.org

Reservoir supplies over 60% of Rhode Island residents with their drinking water, and the goal of SRWEP is to engage area residents in ways that help them to appreciate the reservoir and learn how to better care for it. The SRWEP poster contest's theme for 2021 was "Wonderful Watershed Wildlife," and the program received over 150 posters the celebrated both the importance of conserving the Reservoir and the diverse wildlife that call the watershed home. One poster was used as a billboard, pictured above, at the entrance to Scituate near the Johnston line on Route 6. The Neighbor to Neighbor new resident mailing program was very active during the current real estate boom, and sent 117 packets to residents of Scituate, Foster, Glocester, and western Johnston this year. SRWEP also took time during 2020-2021 to partner with local paper *The Foster Home Journal* to bring a series of educational inserts to its readership of over 11,000 in Scituate, Foster, Glocester, and Johnston, as well as to hold a series of four educational webinars. One webinar, on the topic of backyard composting, attracted 83 attendees. Most were from the Scituate Reservoir watershed, but some joined from across the country! SRWEP plans to continue hosting webinars even once in-person events are once again possible so that learning about the watershed is not limited to those able to attend an event in person.

Program	Reach
2021 Calendars	1250
Educational Inserts	11600
Neighbor to Neighbor	117
Webinars	200
Poster Contest	179
Elementary Visits	180
Remote Classroom Programming	123
Video Views	36

The chart at left illustrates the direct impacts of SRWEP programming—residents who received a mailing or calendar, attended a workshop, or saw a classroom presentation. They do not, however, encompass the many secondary impacts of our programming, such as parents who received take home materials from their school-age children, residents who drove by our annual billboard, or homeowners who passed on their new knowledge to a friend or neighbor. 30 years of partnership between Providence Water and NRICD has enabled SRWEP to become a trusted force in the watershed community whose message is well received and shared from "Neighbor to Neighbor."

Drinking Water Protection

HEALTHY FARM, HEALTHY WATERSHED PROGRAM

Small Farmers Addressing Animal Waste in Scituate Reservoir Watershed



NRICD's *Healthy Farm, Healthy Watershed* Program involves small farmers in the Scituate Reservoir serving as Ambassadors hosting workshops for other small farmers. The goal of the project is to address manure management of farm animals by using compost systems. Technical and financial assistance is available to small farmers in the Scituate Reservoir Watershed for this purpose. Contact Marina Capraro at mcapraro.nricd@gmail.com for more information. Also go to: www.nricd.org/manure for fact sheets and more. Working together to reduce manure impact will have a very positive impact on the Scituate Reservoir Watershed! We are extremely thankful to our farming partners for participating in this effort.

The *Healthy Farm, Healthy Watershed* Program is supported by Southeast New England Program (SNEP) Watershed Grants. SNEP Watershed Grants are funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through a collaboration with Restore America's Estuaries (RAE). For more on SNEP Watershed Grants, see www.snepgrants.org.



More Urban Agriculture

People's Garden: NRICD participated in the second year of the People's Garden Initiative, a statewide program that puts federal money from the USDA NRCS into the hands of local organizations for community gardens. NRICD was able to fund nine projects in Providence and Pawtucket in 2020-2021: Amos & Earley Community Garden, MLK Community Garden, Camden Ave. Rainbow Community Garden, Davis Park Community Garden, Roger Williams Park Botanical Center, Planting Hope School Garden, Providence Housing Authority Community Garden Projects, and the Billy Taylor Park Sharing Community Garden & Esek Hopkins Homestead Community Garden Project. NRICD also continued to coordinate the three projects being conducted by 2020 award-ees.



Urban Farmers gathering for their first Urban Growers Leadership Workshop to ask questions about irrigation methods, how to conserve water, and how to maintain or implement irrigation systems they have in their urban farms/ gardens.

At the UGLP's Soil Health workshop participants gather at Southside Community Land Trust's City Farm around a raised bed to discuss methods of maintaining a raised bed, prepping for the seasons, maintaining soil health, and the importance of testing the soil.



NRCS Conservation District Partnership

Outreach



The Fortune family showed off some plantings meant to encourage wildlife on a video tour of their family woodlot in Foster.

RI Conservation Districts provide outreach to agricultural producers and forest land owners, bringing awareness to the programs that are available to them through technical and financial assistance from NRCS.

The NRCS Outreach program was able to continue providing online webinar programming as well as one-on-one assistance to landowners throughout the 2020-2021 year despite obstacles caused by COVID. Our largest event, the Woodland Owners 101 webinar held on March 9, 2021 had **58 registrants** and led to **8 site visits** with landowners who wanted assistance applying for USDA NRCS help. In total NRICD technical staff assisted **42 landowners** with applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or another USDA NRCS program during the fiscal year. Creation of video media was also a big part of the year's outreach efforts. NRICD staff produced two tours of forested properties utilizing great conservation practices and posted them to social media—where the “Intro To Woodland Management” video has had 21 views and the “Virtual Tour of Fortune Tree Farm” has had 52—and to the “Video Library” section of the HealthyLandsRI.org website, a statewide resource for conservation planners and potential clients.

Farm Conservation Plans Regional Conservation Plan Partnership Program

This statewide RI Conservation District program provides technical assistance by writing whole farm conservation plans for applicants to the Farm portion of the Farm Forest and Open Space Program. NRCS funds district technical staff to write the plans. Farmers enrolled in the Farm Forest and Open Space program receive property tax reductions from their respective municipalities. It is in the interest of the public to conserve the remaining farm, forest and open space in Rhode Island. Taxing this land at its value for development makes it difficult for landowners to retain it in its natural state. Rhode Island created the Farm, Forest and Open Space program to assess these properties at their current use so that owners can afford to keep their land in its natural state. Over the past three years, over 70 plans have been written.

Farm Conservation Plan Implementation Regional Conservation Plan Partnership Program

Following the development of the Farm Conservation Plans, the implementation of those plans is also provided for through NRCS funding by RI Conservation District staff. Our technical staff work with farmers to prioritize recommendations in the plan that will best protect natural resources for the good of the community. One example would be installing a manure management system for livestock—protecting water resources for the community.

Snake Den Farm



Marina Capraro and Mark Ducharme, Farm Managers

Photo Credit: Amanda Harding

In November 2013, the Northern RI Conservation District signed a lease with the RI Department of Environmental Management to oversee the management of historic Snake Den Farm, a 150-acre farm located on Brown Avenue in Johnston. The farm is located within the boundary of Snake Den Park, a 744-acre State Park that stretches from Hartford Avenue to Greenville Avenue, along the Brown Avenue Historic District. The farm was founded in 1789, and was maintained as a working farm for over 200 years.

Currently the Snake Den Farm is home to seven sub- leasing farms including:

Bami Farm - African Alliance of Rhode Island

AARI farmers represent a multi-national population comprised of refugees and immigrants who derived their livelihoods from agriculture in their native countries but have struggled to find access to farmland after settling in Rhode Island. The farmers come from all over the African continent, but also include many who are Southeast Asians, Afro-Caribbeans, Central Americans and others who want to have access to fresh vegetables and greens that are part of native cuisines. The farmers are growing many varieties new to Rhode Island but which are scarce and prized in Ethnic communities. After years of growing on small urban plots and community gardens, AARI farmers signed a lease at Snake Den Farm in April 2018.

Basil Farm

Basil Farm is operated by Lia Lee who has over 30 years of farming experience in many different environments- from Laos to America, from city to countryside. Lia is scaling up her current operation to a four acre diversified vegetable farm located at Snake Den. She sells at farmers markets in RI and MA.

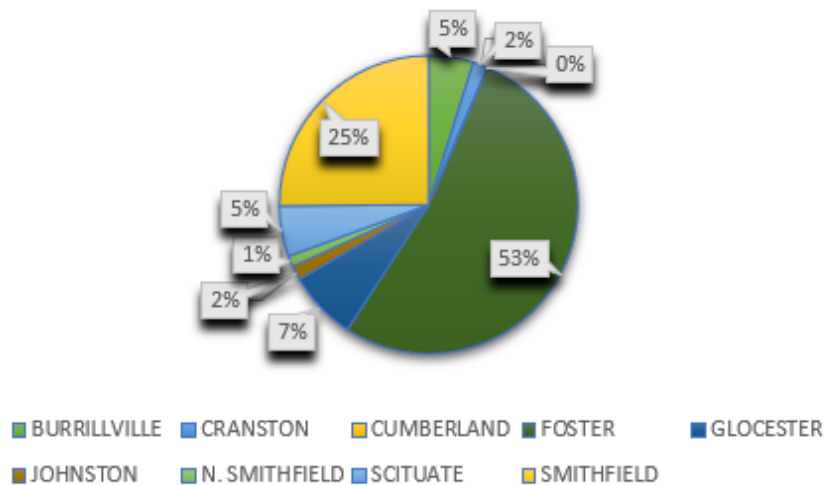
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Federal Dollars For Providence County

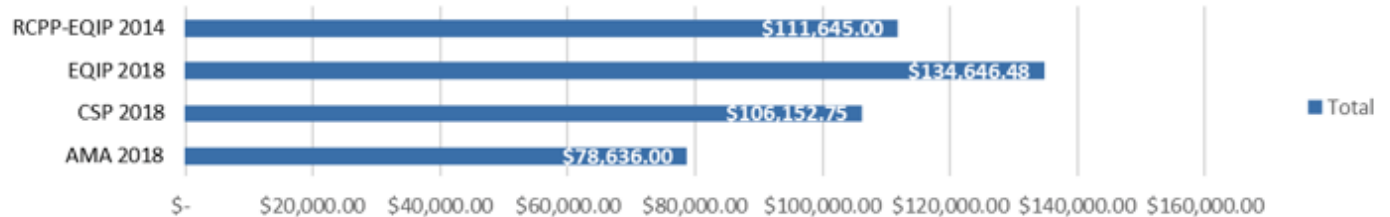
The NRICD's partnership with the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service allows our staff to participate in providing technical and financial assistance to agriculture and forest landowners in Providence County. The table and graphs below indicate the value of the services for individual municipalities in Providence County. Funds and technical assistance go directly to the landowners.

TOWN	NRCS FUNDING AMOUNT
BURRILLVILLE	\$89,616.00
CRANSTON	\$29,091.32
CUMBERLAND	\$1,373.00
FOSTER	\$971,425.00
GLOCESTER	\$138,456.00
JOHNSTON	\$28,089.00
N. SMITHFIELD	\$21,582.71
SCITUATE	\$100,886.00
SMITHFIELD	\$463,511.00

NORTHERN DISTRICT FY21 TOWN OBLIGATION



NORTHERN DISTRICT FY20 PROGRAM OBLIGATION



RCPP-Regional Conservation Partnership Program
 EQIP-Environmental Quality Incentives Program
 CSP-Conservation Stewardship Program
 AMA-Agricultural Management Assistance



Northern RI Conservation District

2020-2021 Financial Statement

Income:	
Contribution/ State/Muni Income	19,636.11
Grants	410,149.74
Other Income	28,830.46
Total Income:	458,616.31
Expenses:	
Depreciation	2918.40
Project Reimbursables	58,284.74
Employee Expenses	376,765.22
Facilities and Equipment	11,485.10
Other Expenses	61,021.96
Total Expenses	510,475.42
Net Income	-51,859.11

The RI Department of Transportation, the RI State Conservation Committee and NRICD worked closely with the Town of Cumberland and the engineering team from Fuss & O'Neill throughout the year to identify a potential site for a RIDOT-funded stormwater project at the Cumberland Monastery, a unique Town-owned property that is home to several public buildings and commonly used for recreation. RIDOT is interested in funding the project once the Town of Cumberland is able to receive approval to install the six-best management practice structure. As of June 30, 2021, the Town was still working on receiving all required approvals to move forward. Once approval is given, NRICD will work with Fuss & O'Neill to write a charter for RIDOT to fund the project which will protect Cumberland and Pawtucket drinking water sources.

Snake Den Farm Continued

Cucumber Hill Farm

Cucumber Hill Farm is a historic farm located on Cucumber Hill Road in Foster, RI. Owners Marc and Christine Paulhus lease and maintain hay land at Snake Den to feed to their cattle. They feature Pick Your Own pumpkins and a corn maze at their farm on weekends during the fall. They are a local Foster family with the goal of maintaining Cucumber Hill Farm for the community to enjoy.

Endless Farm

Endless Farm grows fresh greens and herbs for professional kitchens. They offer excellent flavor and dependable shelf life, all while building nutrient-rich soil and conserving pollinator habitat. Sign up for the weekly fresh sheet at endless-farmri.com.

Foggy Notion Farm

Adam Graffunder, Jenna Yu and Nathaniel Wood are growing soil and food on historic farmland surrounded by the beautiful forests of Snake Den State Park without chemical inputs. They use innovative growing techniques learned by transforming vacant city lots into productive farms. Foggy Notion Farm offers vegetables through CSA shares, restaurant orders, donations and farmers markets.

Professor Chef Honey Company

Professor Chef Honey Company was created out of our desire to cook with only the best, freshest and local ingredients. They grow most of their own produce at our North Providence home, but noticed some of our plants just did not flourish. Doing a bit of research they determined that it was the lack of honeybees impeding their harvest!! They started with one hive in their backyard, then grew to two. That year they had a bounty of onions, strawberries, beets, peppers, squash, cucumbers, peaches and plums, just to name a few. Then they approached Snake Den State Park and Farm to see if they could place a few hives there to help pollinate the crops grown in the area. They currently have 6 hives at that location. Honeybees will fly up to 3 miles to collect pollen and nectar. Professor Chef hopes that the farmers at the Snake Den property have noticed the difference their bees are making!

Wicked Tulips Flower Farm

EcoTulips began in 2009 when Keriann, a self described "green girl" met Jeroen Koeman, who hailed from a Dutch family of tulip growers. They fell in love, got married, and started the first certified organic flower bulb company in the US, EcoTulips.com. In September 2015 they moved from Central Virginia to Rhode Island and started their new endeavor [Wicked Tulips Flower Farm](http://WickedTulipsFlowerFarm). The duo has been importing bulbs from Holland and are now growing their own! Keriann is a native New Englander so Rhode Island's proximity to family combined with the colder climate made it perfect for starting a tulip farm here in the States - a long time dream of Jeroen's. They are incredibly proud and excited to be the only tulip bulb growers on the East Coast! Visit their u-pick website www.wickedtulips.com for details.