

NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee

2024 - 2028 Strategic Plan



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Front Cover Photo Credits: Vineyard Cover Crop, SharePoint Photo Library (top left), Photo by Laura Weyeneth, Greene County SWCD – Hunter Branch Rail Trail truss bridge and riparian buffer planting (top right), Photo by Wyoming County SWCD – Pike Mills Dam Removal informational sign to educate the public about the dam and the positive impacts of project (middle left), Conservation Project Tour in Ulster County – Stony Clove Stream Restoration Project (middle right), Ontario County SWCD – Flare used to destroy methane generated from a covered manure storage implemented through the Climate Resilient Farming Program (bottom left), Rockland County SWCD – District Manager Brianna Rosamilia and volunteers assisting with a project to count, weigh, and relocate American eels.

Acronyms

ACOE	Army Corp of Engineers
AEA	Associate Environmental Analyst
AEM	Agricultural Environmental Management
AGM	New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
AgNPS	Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control
BMP	Best Management Practice
CAA	Conservation Approval Authority
CCA	Certified Crop Adviser
CLCPA	Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act
CNMP	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
CPESC	Certified Professional in Erosion and Sediment Control Certification Program
CPMSM	Certified Professional in Municipal Stormwater Management
CRF	Climate Resilient Farming
CWA	Clean Water Act
EBM	Ecosystem Based Management
EPF	Environmental Protection Fund
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
HABs	Harmful Algal Blooms
JAA	NRCS Job Approval Authority
NAACC	North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative
NYACD	New York Association of Conservation Districts
NYSCDEA	New York State Conservation District Employees' Association, Inc.
NYSDEC	New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
NYSESCCP	New York State Erosion and Sediment Control Certification Program
NYSSWCC	New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee
RRAMP	Rural Roads Active Management Program
SDWA	Safe Drinking Water Act
SPAC	State Program Advisory Committee
SWCD	Soil and Water Conservation District
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load
USDA FSA	United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency
USDA NRCS	United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

Introduction

New York State Soil and Water Conservation Districts are recognized as local leaders in comprehensive natural resources conservation. This often includes identifying and addressing water quality, soil health, community resiliency, green infrastructure, and other local natural resources concerns and opportunities. As local leaders, the roles and services provided by Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) continue to expand in an effort to support new priorities and to address emerging concerns such as climate change and land use change pressures that threaten New York State's natural, community, and agricultural resources. Districts provide assistance to private landowners within the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors and carry out programs that are designed to support the unique local needs of their communities. The NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee (SWCC) provides support to SWCDs by adopting policies that guide district programs or initiatives, providing technical and administrative support for local programs and operations, and approving and coordinating designated funding sources including State Aid to Districts, Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM), Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution Abatement and Control (AgNPS) Program, Climate Resilient Farming (CRF) Program, Ecosystems Based Management (EBM) Program, and other funding opportunities supported by the state budget.

The AEM framework, developed by the NYS SWCC in collaboration with SWCDs and under the leadership of the Department of Agriculture and Markets, supports work within the agricultural sector, including afforestation efforts on farms, urban agriculture and community gardens. The AEM framework utilizes a 5-tiered approach that helps farmers make cost-effective and science-based decisions to help meet business objectives while protecting and conserving the State's natural resources. Farmers work with SWCDs and other AEM resource professionals to develop, implement, operate, and evaluate comprehensive farm plans. Participation in the AEM program is voluntary, but those that choose to become involved are eligible to receive financial assistance through the grant programs such as, AEM, AgNPS, CRF, EBM, and NYS Grown and Certified, to develop conservation plans and implement conservation practice systems.

SWCDs also work to address natural resource concerns outside of the agricultural sector. They have broadened their expertise in stormwater management, stream corridor management, invasive species management, green infrastructure, and other fields to meet local needs and priorities. The increased frequency of high intensity storm events has only perpetuated the need for SWCDs to respond to flooding events, provide technical assistance and implementation funding to municipalities to repair flood damage and/or plan, design, and implement alterations or new approaches to watercourses and infrastructure to prevent future flooding events or lessen flood impacts.

New environmental initiatives within New York State will greatly impact the work of SWCDs. In 2020, the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) took effect. The CLCPA establishes ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets of 40% reduction statewide by 2030 and 85% reduction statewide by 2050. In accordance with the CLCPA, a Scoping Plan was developed and made public in December 2022 to provide a broad strategic road map to achieve the goals established in the CLCPA. The Scoping Plan includes strategies for several sectors including Agriculture and Forestry. SWCDs and existing District programs were identified as central to addressing many of the agricultural and forestry related strategies outlined in the Scoping Plan. Following the signing of the CLCPA, the Clean Water, Clean Air, Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act was passed making \$4.2 billion available for environmental and community projects. This funding will be used to protect water quality, help communities adapt to climate change, improve resiliency and create green jobs. NYS SWCC programs and technical services provided by SWCDs will also be key to achieving many of the Bond Act funding targets.

To be successful in supporting the advancement of comprehensive natural resources management and to ensure that the environmental goals established for NYS are met, the NYS SWCC will work collaboratively with SWCDs to effectively meet the conservation challenges over the next five years. The NYS SWCC will also continue to focus on fostering cooperative relationships among member agencies and expanding partners serving as an information and idea network to further support the growth and capacity of SWCDs.

History

Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) were established throughout the United States in response to the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. The New York State Soil Conservation District Law, creating the State Soil Conservation Committee and authorizing counties to create local Soil Conservation Districts, was passed in 1940—and New York's first Conservation District, in Schoharie County, was established just a few months thereafter. The role of the Conservation Districts expanded in the 1950s and 60s, as awareness of the importance of water quality grew. After the Clean Water Act was passed in 1972, increased demand for services from the Districts led them to increase their capacity and add technical staff, as well as to change their names to SWCDs. District successes soon led counties to fully recognize their value and designate them as the lead local water quality agency. The State Committee responded as well, by hiring regional staff to better support local Districts and ensuring that Districts have the authority and the funding to work on non-point source (NPS) water quality management. The financial security of funding through the Environmental Trust Fund (now the Environmental Protection Fund or EPF), created in 1993, has allowed the State Committee and Districts to continue their operations successfully and to develop award-winning programs such as the AEM framework and the post-flood Emergency Stream Intervention program. Continued support of District operations through the EPF have allowed SWCDs to implement unique natural resource conservation programs that support the local needs within their counties.

NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee

The New York State Soil & Water Conservation Committee (SWCC) operates as an agency of the State located within the Department of Agriculture & Markets. The Committee functions under its own statutory charge with fulltime staff members being employees of the Department's Division of Land & Water Resources. The Department provides necessary administrative support that enables the NYS SWCC to be successful in meeting the goals and objectives of this strategic plan.

The NYS SWCC is led by five voting members who are appointed by the Governor to serve five-year terms. Soil and Water Conservation District law defines that one member of the committee shall represent the state grange, one shall represent state farm bureau federation, one shall represent the New York Association of Conservation Districts, one shall be an at large member who represents the farm interest, and one shall be an at large member who represents the urban, suburban, and rural non-farm interest.

Soil and Water Conservation District Law further states that representatives from nine agencies shall serve as advisory or consulting members of the NYS SWCC. These advisory members are:

- Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension or designated representative
- Dean of the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences at Cornell University (CALS) or designated representative

- President of the State University of New York College of Environmental Science & Forestry (SUNY ESF) or designated representative
- Commissioner of NYS Department of Environmental Conservation or designated representative
- Commissioner of NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets or designated representative
- Commissioner of NYS Department of Health or designated representative
- Secretary of State, NYS Department of State or designated representative
- Representative of New York State Conservation District Employees' Association, Inc.
- State Conservationist of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or designated representative

About This Plan

The 2024 – 2028 Strategic Plan includes five goals that reflect an overarching long-term vision for how the Committee and Districts can grow in each area. The five goals are: (1) District Operations, (2) Public Outreach, (3) Data Management, Quantification, Modeling and Reporting, (4) Comprehensive Natural Resources Management, Technical Service and Program Delivery, and (5) Cooperative Conservation. Each strategic goal includes achievable and measurable objectives that provide a pathway to advance this plan and meet each goal.

This plan will be reviewed and revisited on an annual basis to evaluate the State Committee's progress toward achieving each strategic goal. During this evaluation, the State Committee will review accomplishments within each strategic area and identify priority focus areas for the upcoming year.

Mission Statement

The mission of the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee is to advance comprehensive natural resources management in partnership with and through the support of local Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Statement of Values

- Comprehensive and science-based natural resource management on lands both public and private
- Cooperative partnerships that work to achieve natural resource conservation goals and promote natural resource management on a watershed scale
- Local leadership and decision making to manage natural resources
- A strong voluntary, incentive based local delivery system provided through Conservation Districts that provides access to conservation programs and SWCD assistance and focuses on the long-term adoption of conservation practices and
- Trust between landowners, farmers, local officials, Soil and Water Conservation District personnel, NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee, and other conservation partners
- A system that enables Districts to adapt to an evolving landscape: environmental, technical, and political
- The environmental stewardship role of NY farmers and the benefits of well managed farms to local communities
- Strong communication between Soil and Water Conservation District staff, District Boards, and the NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee

Vision for the Future

- Strong and collaborative partnership with Soil and Water Conservation Districts that are actively engaged in program and policy development
- Expanded District workforce with enhanced technical capacity to address local natural resource issues and meet statewide environmental conservation goals
- Locally led conservation that is science based, and natural resource driven
- Conservation District legislative authority and funding fully addresses emerging natural resource management and environmental conservation issues
- District operations are well managed and financially secure to effectively grow and address local natural resource issues
- Heightened public awareness and acknowledgment of SWCDs

Strategic Goal: Conservation District Operations

Statement

To support Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) continuing efforts to build and maintain highly qualified managerial, technical, and administrative staff with the necessary experience, knowledge, and demonstrated skills to fulfill comprehensive conservation services and other requirements for conservation work.

To encourage SWCD Boards of Directors to be leaders in their field and engage in strategic and annual planning activities to help direct effective conservation services.

State Aid to Districts

- Advocate for increased funding of the State Aid to Districts Program
- Convene annual State Aid to Districts meetings to review current performance measures and make recommendations to modify, strengthen and determine importance to all statutory categories
- Actively assist Districts to consistently meet and exceed State Aid to Districts requirements for Parts A, B and C through regular communication with Districts and District Boards
- Provide annual Performance Measure training to SWCDs/District Boards to increase understanding of processes, procedures, and requirements
- Develop tools for SWCDs to help track performance measure accomplishments
- Review District Annual Plans of Work and provide feedback to help SWCDs manage risk and limit liability
- Encourage SWCDs to review Annual Plans of Work throughout the year to track accomplishments and achievements

District Staff Capacity

- Increase access to funding for SWCDs to support District operations and staff capacity to carry out priority natural resource programs that address local and state goals
- Work with District Managers and Boards, upon request, to develop an employee compensation structure commensurate with District resources, programs, commitments, responsibilities and long-term goals to encourage staff retention
- Provide career counselor offices and Department heads at SUNY and other institutions of higher learning information about SWCD career paths
- Work with District Managers and Boards upon request to develop a District Internship Program
- Work with the NYSCDEA to support and implement a management/leadership certification training program
- Coordinate with NYSCDEA to offer regional opportunities for District mentoring and connection with other Districts that have skilled staff and successful programs
- Work with NYSCDEA to update and keep current the applicable Civil Service SWCD career series including job descriptions, qualifications and testing criteria.
- Identify areas where SWCC can provide administrative support to District staff and develop action items to address those needs
- Identify ways the SWCC can assist District Managers and Boards with succession planning and develop action items accordingly

Training

- Provide and facilitate in-person and/or virtual training to District staff on managerial, technical and administrative topics based on identified needs (e.g., District Director training modules, engaging with the Office of the State Comptroller or other state agencies)
- Participate in regular/annual training events such as Water Quality Symposium, NYACD Annual Meeting, Administrative Conference, etc.
- Conduct an annual evaluation of District Director training modules and update or develop new modules as needed.
- Develop a District Operations Training Module based on prominent Operations Manual topics to provide enhanced District administration guidance
- Facilitate adaptive and effective strategic planning through the delivery of training modules and one-on-one interaction at board meetings

NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee Staff Capacity

- Recruit a State Aid to Districts Program Manager/District Operations Specialist to manage the State Aid to Districts program and provide additional support to Districts regarding operational issues
- Recruit Regional Program Assistants to support Regional State Committee Staff
- Evaluate NYS SWCC staffing plan and revise accordingly to accommodate need and priorities

Strategic Goal: Public Relations and Outreach

Statement

To expand public awareness and understanding of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and support SWCDs in their individual public outreach activities.

Public Awareness and Recognition

- Disseminate information throughout the State regarding the activities and programs of the SWCDs to promote the wide array of District services and highlight District technical capacity (i.e., expertise to design, implement, evaluate, and maintain conservation projects)
- Host an annual conservation project tour for SWCC Voting Member and Principal Advisory Members to showcase Conservation District projects and partnerships
- Include District led presentations at NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee (SWCC) meetings to continue building awareness of District programs and services
- Annually evaluate and update a statewide web-based GIS Storyboard to highlight and promote Conservation District accomplishments across the state
- Build public recognition of the services District offer to municipalities, stormwater coalitions, watershed groups and farms in their local communities.
- Enhance recognition of the environmental stewardship role of NY farmers, the benefits of well managed farms, importance of climate change preparedness and the benefits of floodplain management
- Improve public access to non-sensitive conservation and agency information, primarily through web-based document libraries, GIS Storyboards, etc.
- Be responsive in assisting the public and other local units of government by providing conservation program information and local points of contact

Reporting and Outreach

- Distribute an annual report of NYS SWCC and SWCD accomplishments to NYS SWCC members, SWCDs, and NYS legislators, Governor's Office
- Provide annual report highlights to Districts that can be published in local District newsletters
- Publish articles and project highlights through the Department of Agriculture and Markets newsletter and social media outlets
- Make county SWCD program data more accessible to Districts for local promotion of District programs and activities
- Update and expand the outreach materials/tools available to Districts and coordinate their distribution through Regional SWCC staff (e.g., program displays, educational demonstrations, conservation project/practice signage)
- Work with Department of Agriculture and Markets to provide outreach, through existing outreach programs, to New York's historically underrepresented and underserved communities about SWCD services and programs

NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee Staff Capacity

- Recruit a position to focus on outreach and public awareness and recognition
- Evaluate NYS SWCC staffing plan and revise accordingly to accommodate need and priorities

Strategic Goal: Data Management, Quantification, Measurement, Modeling, Reporting and Verification of Benefits of Conservation BMPs

Statement

Expand and enhance data management, quantification, measuring, modeling, verifying and reporting capabilities to effectively and efficiently analyze and report on program data and accomplishments.

Data Collection, Quantification and Management

- Develop a cloud-based data management system to allow for greater data security, quality controls, timely upgrades, direct data entry, and improved data quantification, modeling, and reporting. The system will also support inter-agency and intra-agency reporting including map sharing capability, data forms, and database information
- Work with State and USDA NRCS/FSA partners to expand data sharing and reporting
- Track conservation and ecological services data to assist in meeting statewide/local goals and initiatives such as the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, Clean Water, Clean Air, Green Jobs Bond Act, TMDLs, 9E Watershed plans, etc.
- Track conservation systems for water quality, climate change mitigation, adaptation, and other environmental benefits
- Track Conservation District collaborations with partners

Data Modeling and Analysis

- Explore and identify various data analytics models to most effectively translate program data into decision-making information
- Collaborate with partners to research/develop data analytics modeling tools that can be used to model the anticipated benefits of conservation practices
- Regularly analyze conservation system data with models to estimate conservation benefits
- Continue to grow State Committee and District capacity in geospatial data management and graphics generation

Data Reporting

- Provide timely and accurate conservation program data to state, federal, and local governments for decision making purposes and to track accomplishments toward statewide goals and initiatives
- Implement streamlined data communication with Conservation Districts
- Upon request, provide coalitions of Districts with data to enhance and implement their joint projects
- Report conservation and ecological services data to assist in meeting statewide/local goals and initiatives such as the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, TMDLs, 9E Watershed plans, etc.
- Provide information and updates to Districts on the progress made towards meeting the goals written into the Climate Action Council Scoping Plan.
- Report on Conservation District collaborations with partners
- Provide Districts with the tools and training to track, report and evaluate program accomplishments by County, watershed or other scales and encourage Coalitions of Conservation Districts to coordinate efforts

NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee Staff Capacity

- Recruit additional staff to increase support for climate specific programs and initiatives
- Evaluate NYS SWCC staffing plan and revise accordingly to accommodate need and priorities

Strategic Goal: Comprehensive Natural Resources Management, Technical Services, and Program Delivery

Statement

Provide opportunities to achieve a high level of environmental stewardship across all land uses and types through science-based comprehensive natural resources management and support District technical capacity to provide a wide range of services and encourage successful program delivery.

Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM)

Priorities

- Expand the planning priority areas covered by AEM, (e.g., Climate Resiliency, Forestry/Agroforestry, near-shore aquaculture) to increase the Soil and Water Conservation Districts abilities to assist a diverse agricultural community
- Increase investment in core and emerging, cost-effective BMP Systems to enhance natural resources, promote climate preparedness/adaptation work and improve farm viability (e.g., soil health management and soil health BMPs, riparian buffer systems, Forestry/Agroforestry system)
- Ensure that AEM framework remains current with existing and emerging academic and applied research to advance water quality, soil health, agricultural GHG mitigation/sequestration and climate change adaptation strategies
- Build on the AEM framework to advance and encourage implementation and adoption of Agricultural BMP Systems that reduce and mitigate greenhouse gases (GHGs) and improve farm resiliency and climate change preparedness
- Encourage the development of AEM Strategic Plans to include comprehensive natural resource management and environmental conservation goals, targets and priorities associated with water quality, climate change mitigation, climate adaptation/resiliency, and other emerging priorities

Technical Tools, Guidelines, Training

- Develop technical tools, planning and implementation guidelines, and trainings for Forestry/Agroforestry Systems, climate preparedness/adaption, and near-shore aquaculture
- Develop technical tools that can be used to increase AEM participation within the historically underserved, underrepresented farming community
- Update Agricultural BMP Systems Catalogue to ensure BMP system listings are current and encompass broad environmental benefits
- Develop new Agricultural BMP Systems to meet emerging needs to be included in the NYS Agricultural BMP Systems Catalogue as appropriate
- Provide direct training opportunities to SWCD staff through local or statewide events to increase/advance District capacity to identify and address critical agricultural conservation issues and to develop sound and implementable AEM plans
- Support SWCD implementation of the AEM Base Tier 4 cost-share program (i.e., through direct staff mentoring, technical assistance, written guidance)
- Assist Conservation Districts in strengthening and implementing their local AEM Strategies through local, regional, and statewide meetings, training events and workshops
- Enable Conservation Districts to receive full AEM reimbursement by identifying overlooked AEM opportunities, and informing them of new AEM eligible activities

- Promote incorporation of AEM principles into the development of USDA NRCS NY Conservation Practices Standards.
- Promote the incorporation of AEM principles into the development of third-party certifications programs that enhance and build technical assistance capacity of District staff, including Certified Crop Adviser Certification, Society of American Foresters Certification, NYS Professional Engineer License, and others as appropriate

Planner Certification Program

- Increase participation in the AEM Planner Certification Program (public and private section organizations)
- Perform quality assurance reviews through the AEM Certified Planner - CNMP Quality Assurance Program to encourage development of effective AEM Tier 3A Plans and CNMPs
- Annually update the AEM Certified Planner Directory and make available to SWCDs and the public

Stormwater Management, Emergency Management and Community Resiliency

Priorities

- Identify opportunities for District involvement in existing state and federal programs that support installation of green infrastructure and stormwater projects (e.g. State Aid to Districts, Water Quality Improvement Projects, Green Innovations Grant Program, CRF, AgNPS, and AEM Base for upland water management on agricultural lands)
- Encourage SWCD involvement emergency management planning, including resiliency planning, immediate response, and long-term recovery efforts
- Support District cooperation and shared services during emergency management phases, including joint planning, response, and recovery efforts
- Educate state and federal emergency management agencies on the capacities and roles of the State Committee and Districts in supporting disaster assistance response
- Support and streamline Districts' ability to work with Army Corp of Engineers (ACOE) and DEC to obtain emergency permit authorization. Support cooperation/collaboration between all parties for emergency permit authorization
- Work with partner agencies to better enable conservation implementation through streamlined permitting and/or expedited project review process

Technical Tools and Training

- Promote Districts' capacity to assist municipalities in meeting Stormwater Phase 2 permit requirements
- Increase District capacity statewide to assist municipalities in post-flood emergency stream intervention protocols
- Provide training coordination and support to Districts on protection, recovery, and restoration of natural resources proactively and following extreme weather events (e.g. Post Flood Emergency Stream Intervention, soil health, NAACC Protocol, RRAMP, emergency conservation funding)

Certification

- Support the NYS Erosion & Sediment Control Certification Program (NYSESCCP) and

support Districts involvement and coordination in the 4-hour Erosion and Sediment training for contractors, 2-hour Code Enforcement Officer training, and other training modules as they are developed in conjunction with renewed/updated Stormwater permit requirements.

- Support the NYSCDEA offering the on-line version of the NYS DEC 4-hour course

Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM)

Priorities

- Expand District understanding of the value of incorporating an EBM approach to successfully implement watershed management plans
- Implement the EBM project model and share information with State Committee, Department of Agriculture and Markets and conservation partners
- Diversify funding opportunities to support comprehensive natural resource management across all land types
- Seek input and feedback from SWCDs regarding program ideas to meet emerging and existing comprehensive natural resource management needs

Watershed Management

Priorities

- Support District involvement with, and leadership in watershed management
- Work with partners and Districts to promote District development of watershed management plans and programs to assist municipalities and county governments with local priorities
- Encourage the implementation best management practices that will support the goals and objectives of completed watershed management plans
- Promote District involvement in invasive species management and control to promote watershed health, restore and maintain biodiversity and terrestrial/aquatic ecosystems on a watershed scale
- Enable implementation, establishment and maintenance of conservation buffers within a watershed
- Promote the protection/construction of wetlands in the landscape for flood attenuation, maintaining surface water flow, aquifer and groundwater recharge, water quality improvement, carbon sequestration, and biological productivity
- Encourage District involvement in source water protection planning and implementation projects such as the Drinking Water Source Protection Program

Watershed Coalitions of Conservation Districts

- Continue promotion and support for watershed-based coalitions of Conservation Districts to target resources through a coordinated and comprehensive approach
- Increase access to funding for Coalitions to increase staff capacity and provide technical support to improve watershed management on a basin level

Forest Management and Afforestation/Reforestation

Priorities

- Support District involvement with and leadership in forest management, afforestation, reforestation
- Develop technical tools, planning and implementation guidelines, and trainings to support forest management, afforestation, reforestation work on non-ag land
- Expand on current program concepts and/or develop new program concepts to support District implementation of forest management, afforestation, and reforestation projects
- Help to grow District capacity to be able to provide these services within their local communities
- Promote forest management, afforestation, and reforestation activities to support NYS carbon sequestration goals

Conservation Program Delivery and Development

Funding

- Assess AEM Base technical assistance funding needs and increase AEM Base Funding levels to keep up with SWCD staff capacity, increasing agricultural conservation opportunities and challenges
- Increase funding for programs that fall under the AEM Framework (AEM Tier 4 Cost-Share Track, Agricultural Non-Point Source Pollution Abatement and Control Program, Climate Resilient Farming Program, Eco-system Based Management Program)
- Continue to advocate for and secure additional State Aid to Districts to provide direct funding assistance to raise District capacity to address community resiliency and community emergency management
- Advocate for increased funding for all EPF line items where Districts are eligible applicants
- Advocate for and support the development of new funding opportunities and initiatives to promote a high level of environmental stewardship across all land uses including stormwater management, emergency management and community resiliency (Municipal Assistance Programming)

Program Development

- Provide for the expansion of practices eligible to be funded to support innovative, cost-effective BMPs
- Identify and support partnership research efforts/opportunities that address BMP System effectiveness, advance new and innovative technologies, and ultimately support and advance District services and programming
- Support the goals and actions written into the Climate Action Council Scoping Plan through new and existing programs to address agricultural and forestry related climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies
- Expand and update existing program offerings through utilization of Clean Water, Clean Air, Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act funding
- Actively work with Districts to seek opportunities to implement conservation measures as identified in Harmful Algal Bloom plans, 9E Watershed plans, TMDL, or other local watershed plans
- Seek new or strengthen existing partnerships to integrate the AEM framework into State agriculture programs

- Effectively address critical issues related to the programs within the AEM framework through collaborative and efficient policy deliberation and execution

Program Administration

- Continue to improve upon the current contract management and claim for payment procedures by increasing efficiency in reviewing and processing payments, contracts, and amendments
- Work to standardize cost share program requirements where possible to promote ease of administration
- Provide regular training and updated guidance to Districts regarding grant administration (e.g., project procurement, payment processes, and close out procedures)

Technical Capacity

- Increase Districts' ability to design and certify commonly used conservation practices while limiting exposure to liability and improving quality assurance throughout state funded programs
- Increase number of Districts with technical staff certified in applicable areas (e.g., CCA, AEM Certified Planner, CPESC, CAA, NYSESCCP, and CPMSM, Professional Engineering, Professional Forester certification)
- Promote Conservation Approval Authority (CAA) for Districts and expand the course offerings when applicable to achieve and maintain authorization to design and certify Conservation ("C") related BMPs for state grant purposes
- Provide training and resources to support District staff to assist municipalities with conservation delivery and community/natural resource resiliency on a watershed scale
- Work with NYSCDEA to offer regional opportunities for District mentoring, connection, and collaboration with other Districts that have skilled staff, certifications and successful programs
- Develop training module to highlight available technical certifications, such as CAA and the procedure required to obtain certifications

NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee Staff Capacity

- Recruit a Forestry and Related Programming Specialist to better support SWCDs in these areas
- Recruit additional Program Assistants to support the SWCC/SWCD program needs
- Maintain NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee staff professional certifications to continue providing assistance to Districts with training, project review, technical assistance, and District staff technical development
- Evaluate NYS SWCC staffing plan and revise accordingly to accommodate need and priorities

Strategic Goal: Cooperative Conservation

Statement

Promote cooperative partnerships among federal, state, local agencies and educational institutions to advance common natural resources conservation goals in support of Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) program delivery.

Build Partnerships

- Conduct regional SWCD Managers' Meetings on an annual basis
- Conduct a statewide SWCD Managers' meeting every other year or as funding is available
- Maintain an up-to-date list of NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee (SWCC) Advisory Member representatives
- Identify opportunities for new and expanding State Committee partnerships with farmer organizations, land trusts and other agricultural/conservation NGOs as well as other state and federal agencies such as NYS Parks, NYSEDA and USDA Forest Service
- Participate in regular 4-Way Partnership meetings to engage with NY Association of Conservation Districts, NYS Conservation Districts Employee Association, and Natural Resource Conservation Service to provide better support to Conservation Districts and communicate SWCD priorities, program needs and success stories to state and federal policymakers.
- Seek new or strengthen existing partnerships and cooperation for AEM framework development

Advance Common Conservation Goals

- Support the goals and objectives of the New York State implementation of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) through interagency coordination and local initiatives led by Conservation Districts to protect public drinking water supplies
- Support the goals and objectives of the New York State Nonpoint Source Management Program through interagency coordination and local initiatives led by Conservation Districts to enhance consistency with the Clean Water Act Section 319 requirements and related Section 319 guidelines
- Support the goals and objectives of the NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through interagency coordination, local initiatives led by Conservation Districts, and implementation of conservation programs such as the Climate Resilient Farming grant program
- Support the goals and objectives of the Clean Water, Clean Air, Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act to protect water quality, help communities adapt to climate change, improve resiliency, and create green jobs.
- Invite representatives from Advisory Member agencies to report on emerging issues, technologies, and opportunities during regular NYS SWCC Meetings
- Provide opportunities for Advisory Members to engage in a broad spectrum of natural resource issues and policies at monthly NYS SWCC meetings and through engagement in sub-committee meetings
- Proactively identify opportunities for District involvement in existing or proposed state and federal programs
- Work with state and federal agencies to identify Districts as eligible applicants through new, existing and expanding programs
- Work with State and Federal Partners to explore ways to track and reduce energy demands on farms through conservation efforts

- Renew the DEC/SWCC/AGM MOU that provides funding support for watershed-based projects that align with SWCD priorities and programs
- Continue to work with DEC and Districts to showcase the DEC/SWCC/AGM MOU and cooperative agreements to State & Local municipalities, watershed organizations and the public
- Develop new MOUs with applicable state and federal partners to provide targets funding support to SWCDs

NYS SWCC Sub-Committees

- District Operations Sub-Committee
 - Hold regular District Operations subcommittee meetings to engage with SWCD partners to address operational related inquiries and matters, develop a list of required policies and policy templates for Districts, review and update the District Operations manual
 - At annual organizational meeting, nominate NYS SWCC Voting Member to participate on the District Operations Sub-Committee
- Municipal Assistance Sub-Committee
 - Hold regular Municipal Assistance Sub-Committee meetings to engage with SWCD partners and other Advisory Members, as appropriate, to promote exchange of information on municipal programs, assist Districts in working with municipalities, and establish framework for relationship building
 - At annual organizational meeting, nominate NYS SWCC Voting Member to participate on the Municipal Assistance Sub-Committee
- State Programs Advisory Committee
 - Hold regular State Programs Advisory Committee (SPAC) meetings to engage with SWCD partners to discuss NYS SWCC program ideas and development and obtain feedback from SWCDs
 - At annual organizational meeting, nominate NYS SWCC Voting Member to participate on the State Programs Advisory Committee
- Technical Advisory Committee
 - Hold regular Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings to enhance the exchange of information and advice to Voting Members for policy and program development
 - Broaden the membership of the Technical Advisory Committee to engage industry experts and promote information sharing
 - At annual organizational meeting, nominate NYS SWCC Voting Member to participate on the Technical Advisory Committee