New York State
Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Protecting, Managing & Improving Natural Resources for all New Yorkers

Investing in Our Future

For decades, New York's 58 County Soil & Water Conservation Districts have helped farmers, home owners, communities, organizations and businesses to protect the natural resources that all New Yorkers depend on. Established under state law, Soil and Water Districts have the unique ability to work on both public and private lands.

Over the years, District programs and technical services have diversified to meet an expanding range of local needs, from helping farmers implement new conservation techniques and technology, to assisting local governments with stormwater mitigation and emergency response.

Today, with tighter budgets and stricter regulations, the work of Districts is vital to New York's environmental and economic future.

American Aerial Scenes

Pollution laden sediment entering Oneida Lake prior to conservation practices being installed. The practices helped restore the lake's water quality and aim to prevent similar problems in the future.

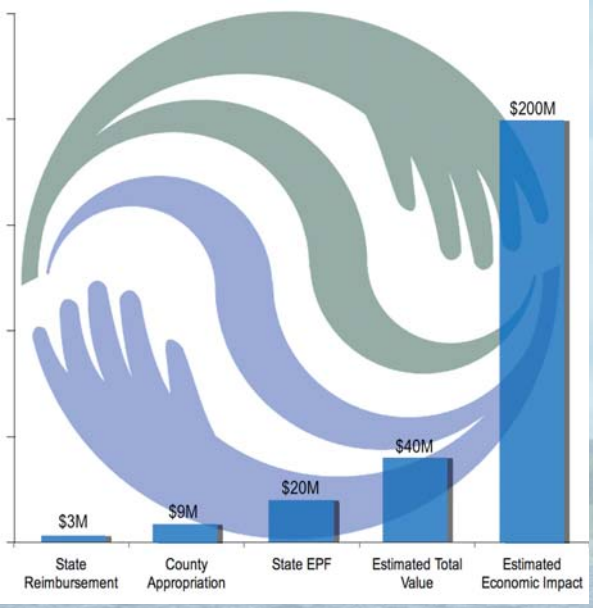
Soil erosion and stormwater runoff from urban, suburban and agricultural lands can pollute our drinking water, impact the productive farmland that provides our local food supply, impair fisheries, and contribute to flooding that can destroy property and threaten public safety. These problems can also damage the agricultural and tourism industries that are critical to local economies.

The quality of water resources directly impacts the economic health of our communities. The technical expertise and 'know-how' of Districts is essential to addressing environmental concerns in ways that save time and money.

District efforts have resulted in watershed-wide success stories. For example, improving and protecting water quality in Oneida, Skaneateles and Conesus Lakes, Steele Creek, the Susquehanna River and the New York City drinking water supply has saved New Yorkers billions of dollars. The work of Districts is also essential to achieving federal pollution reduction goals for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Conservation: A Key Economic Tool

In 2010, county appropriations to Districts statewide totaled $9 million. These county funds enabled Districts to access an additional $3 million in reimbursements through the state's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), as well as $20 million in EPF cost-share grants for priority conservation projects.



In total, over $40 million in conservation projects and programs were delivered by Districts across New York in 2010.

Over 90% of these dollars multiply in local economies, supporting businesses and keeping local contractors working.

"Our construction division that employs 10 people would not exist if it were not for state funded conservation projects. Most of their work comes from these projects, and we spend 95% of the funds right here in the area."

- Don Ford, RMS Gravel
Tompkins County

When you factor in the value of clean water to tourism, boating and fishing, with avoided water treatment costs and stormwater expenses, collectively these conservation projects provided an economic value to New York State exceeding an estimated $200 million.

Because Districts play such a key role in New York's rural economies, it is important that resource levels remain adequate to ensure the continued delivery of programs and technical services that meet local needs and priorities.

Cover Photos: Conservation Plantings, Albany County; Agricultural Environmental Management, Barber's Farm, Schoharie County, Streambank Stabilization, Dutchess County; Stormwater Management, Warren County; View of Skaneateles Lake, Drinking Water Supply Protection, Onondaga County.

Agricultural Environmental Management

Over 12,000 farms of all types and sizes statewide are involved in Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM), a program that responds to vital environmental needs with tangible, cost effective improvements that benefit farms and communities. The AEM partnership of farmers, Soil and Water Districts, local, state and federal agencies, and the private sector share the goal of farming cleaner and greener into the future.

New York's AEM program is delivered locally by County Soil and Water Districts in cooperation with the State Department of Agriculture and Markets. AEM continues to be recognized as a national model for addressing agriculture's environmental challenges, while meeting farm businesses goals. Nearly eight million acres of New York land is in the care of farm families whose farms are the backbone of local economies, generating jobs and revenue, while helping to keep local taxes from rising. Well managed farms protect natural resources, open space, cultural heritage and recreational opportunities enjoyed by residents and tourists alike.

District assistance is vital to ensure that farming remains a part of New York's future. AEM is the vehicle by which environmental regulations have been effectively implemented on larger livestock farms. With the assistance of AEM Certified Planners, these farms have developed science-based Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans to control runoff, conserve soil and recycle nutrients.

In recent years, Districts have also expanded to help connect farmers with new opportunities including the production of renewable energy and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

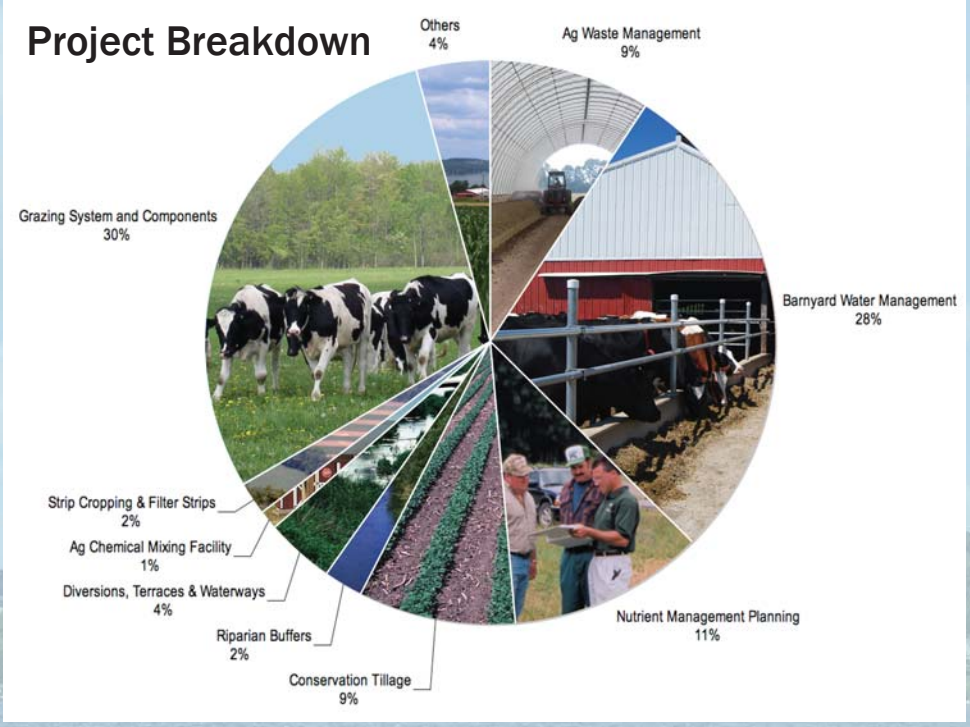
Washington County Soil & Water District

Neal Rea of Reafield Dairy Farm in Washington County proudly displays his AEM sign. Districts have awarded 125 signs to exemplary AEM farms across 25 counties.

High Return on Investment

State Environmental Protection Funds (EPF) – 17 years getting conservation on the ground:

- Since 1994, $100 million in State EPF grants have been allocated through Districts, cost sharing over 6,000 conservation projects on over 2,300 farms in 53 counties. For their share, farmers contributed over $47 million toward state sponsored projects and millions more through federal and local programs.
- In 2010, over $10 million in projects were funded, with an unprecedented direct farmer contribution of over $7 million. State AEM funding also assisted with leveraging over $65 million in USDA conservation program funds.
- More than 1,000 conservation projects totaling $23 million were implemented to protect water quality on farms in 2010. See project breakdown below.
- Over half of the projects involved grazing systems, barnyard water management and nutrient management planning.
- Many of the practices also help farmers reduce costs, improve efficiencies and increase farm profitability.



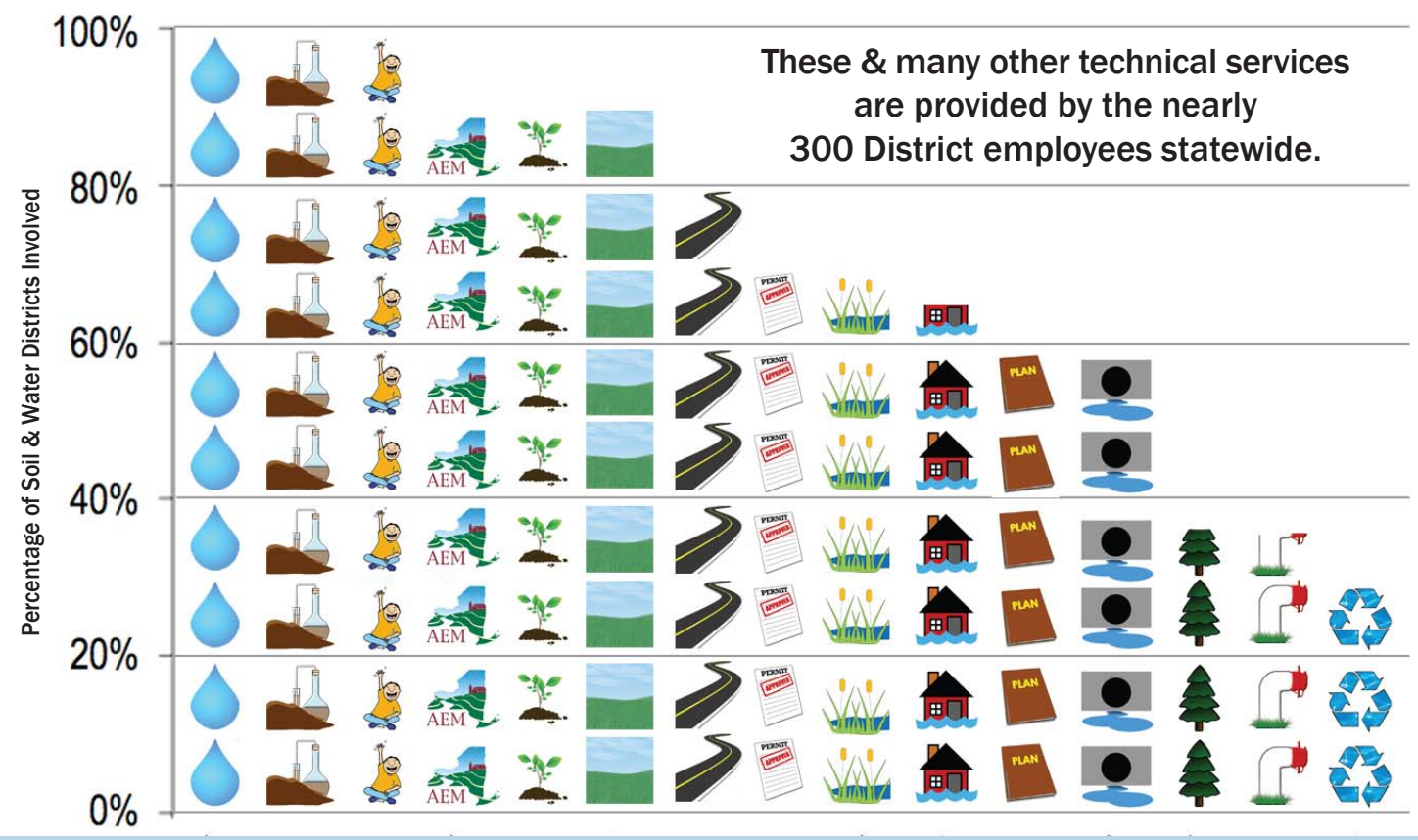
Strategic Focus

To maximize the on-the-ground impact, Soil and Water Districts utilize a watershed approach to develop county-wide AEM Strategic Plans. These plans prioritize environmental concerns and target available local, state and federal resources.

Since 2005, approximately $2 million in State EPF dollars annually have helped Soil and Water Districts strengthen local partnerships, carry out County AEM Strategic Plans and provide technical assistance to farmers in priority watersheds resulting in:

- 6,400 new farms participating.
- 2,000 farm conservation plans developed.
- 3,000 farms with conservation practices designed or installed.
- 2,000 conservation evaluations conducted to help farmers maintain, adjust or enhance conservation activity.
- Substantial changes in farm operations that do not require public funds, yet still provide public benefit.
- Expanded partnerships with USDA and Cornell increasing educational opportunities for farmers and conservation partners.
- Over $20 million in high-impact, shovel ready projects proposed with planning data indicating the potential for applying several times that amount.

2010 District Accomplishments



Streams, Wetlands & Wildlife Habitat – In 2010, Districts provided technical assistance to more than 25,000 landowners, communities and organizations, including 1,300 municipalities. Over 1,000 conservation practices were installed to stabilize streams, shorelines, road ditches and disturbed areas, as well as to restore wetlands, establish rain gardens and plant vegetative buffers that filter runoff. These projects have a value of over $7 million.

Soil Analysis – Districts are the local experts on soil, responding to over 3,600 requests for technical analysis of soil type, quality, capability and limitations. They completed more than 4,000 soil worksheets covering over a quarter-million acres. In addition, 18 Districts provided technical assistance to public and private entities including surveys, maps and designs for 43 mined land reclamation projects.

Conservation Education – Over a half-million New Yorkers of all ages participated in District conservation education programs including conservation field days, local and state Envirothon competitions, pasture walks, farm safety days and conservation project tours. Informing the public and educating the next generation is fundamental to long-term conservation success.

Agricultural Environmental Management – AEM – See page 4

Conservation Plantings – Districts provided over a million tree and shrub seedlings for conservation plantings, which are an essential component of streambank stabilization, erosion control, water quality protection and habitat improvement. Districts also helped prevent the spread of invasive species, which can cause significant environmental and economic damage. Early detection and rapid response by Districts help to minimize the adverse impacts. Education programs help identify and prevent the spread of invasives like purple loosestrife, milfoil, emerald ash borers and zebra mussels.

Farmland Protection & Open Space Planning – 90% of Districts helped county governments and state agencies to develop and implement Farmland Protection Plans, and over two-thirds provided technical support for open space planning. Protecting farmland safeguards our local food supply and natural resources, while preserving New York's scenic beauty. Open space also provides valuable ecosystem services including water quality protection, stormwater management and well water recharge. These efforts help communities ensure that valuable farmland resources remain available for productive use by today's farmers, and generations to come.

Roads & Highways – 80% of Districts provided technical assistance to over 1,600 municipalities for road projects. This assistance saves taxpayer dollars and protects public safety. Projects include bridge embankment stabilization, culvert sizing and placement, erosion and sediment control, ditch design, highway drainage, and wetland determinations.

Stormwater Management –75% of Districts provided more than $2.4 million dollars in stormwater assistance to regulated municipalities, involving 550 site visits, 400 Stormwater Management Plans and 150 stormwater projects. 50 District employees have become Certified Professionals in Erosion and Sediment Control and 100 municipalities across the state have contracted with their District for stormwater services. District-led stormwater workshops helped educate nearly 14,000 individuals statewide, including over 8,000 contractors trained in erosion and sediment control. Over 60% of Districts also provide stormwater services to their community beyond regulatory requirements.

"The assistance of our Soil and Water District in solving our stormwater and flooding problems has been remarkable. Our taxpayers and the lake are truly grateful."

- Lake George Village Mayor Bob Blais
Warren County

Permit Assistance – 80% of Districts helped farmers, landowners, local highway departments and others to complete 680 state and federal permits necessary for projects involving streams, wetlands, stormwater, historic preservation and livestock farms. Districts provide the experienced assistance necessary to successfully streamline the process, saving time and taxpayer dollars, while ensuring resources are protected.

Water Resources Management – 70% of Districts provided technical assistance to landowners, communities and organizations involving more than 800 waterbodies. This assistance is critical to flood mitigation, protection of drinking water supplies, wildlife habitat and rural fire response. In an effort to help maintain healthy fish populations, control aquatic weeds and provide recreational opportunities, 31 Districts provided over 100,000 juvenile fish for local fish stocking. Understanding water quality problems is critical to developing a solution, and to that end, 26 Districts conducted water quality sampling & monitoring programs to quantify changes and ensure an accurate understanding of trends.

Flood Protection & Emergency Management – 62% of Districts provided over $3.7 million in programs and services, implementing more than 250 flood mitigation and emergency management projects that protect public safety and save taxpayer dollars. Districts have been in the forefront of disaster recovery efforts dating back to the Dust Bowl Era. With technical staff at the ready, Districts help farmers and communities shorten response and recovery time after floods and other natural disasters. Their expertise also helps communities address the damage in ways that help prevent it from reoccurring.

Watershed Management Plans - Nearly 60% of Districts conducted watershed management planning to identify and prioritize environmental needs in New York's watersheds. This included updating and completing 112 plans utilized by Districts and partner agencies to maximize limited resources to address top priority needs.

Forest Management – 21 Districts provided technical assistance to 625 public and private entities to link water quality protection goals with objectives for forestry, timber management, wildlife habitat and recreation. Carefully managed forests can provide a sustainable income stream, allowing landowners to keep land as open space, while protecting water quality, recharging well water and helping mitigate floodwater.

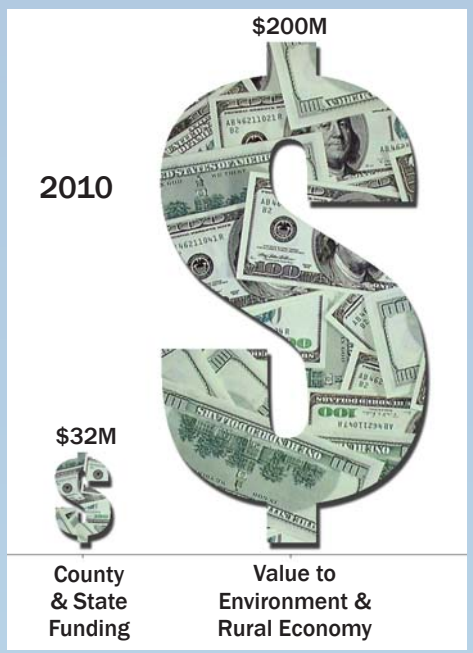
Rural Fire Protection – 20 Districts worked with their local fire departments to design and install 55 dry hydrants. Dry hydrants are water withdrawal pipes installed in ponds and streams along roadsides that are used by local fire departments for fire response. Dry hydrants save local taxpayer dollars by reducing the number of water tank trucks needed to fight fires in rural areas, and are a critical part of fire response vital to saving lives and property across rural New York State.

Septic System Management – 17 Districts provided training and technical assistance to assist homeowners in making repairs and upgrades to failing septic systems. Some Districts also managed programs that provide reimbursements to residents to protect priority water bodies and public health.

Albany County Soil & Water District

Soil and Water Districts work with local fire departments and highway crews to install cost-effective dry hydrants that are vital to saving lives and property in rural areas.

Conservation Dollars & Sense



Modest Investment Big Results

The work of County Soil and Water Conservation Districts helps save New Yorkers billions of dollars in water treatment costs, protects public health, supports New York's agriculture and tourism industries, and safeguards our farmland and irreplaceable natural resources for future generations.

Soil and Water Districts make dollars go further, resources go further and conservation go further. Details on Page 1.

"The value of our Soil and Water District can't be fully measured in dollars and cents when you consider how much money they save our taxpayers."

- James Miccio
Dutchess County Legislator,
Environmental Committee Chairman

Award Winners

New York agriculture's highest environmental honor, the 2010 Statewide Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Award, went to the VanSlyke Dairy Farm recognizing the family's commitment to incorporating AEM principles into their farm business. This seventh generation farm family has implemented a complete conservation systems approach to help protect water quality across two watersheds.

The Wyoming County Soil and Water District was also recognized for their outstanding work with the VanSlykes and other county farmers. AEM details on Page 4.

"Our father taught us the value of never putting dollars and cents before common sense when it comes to the environment. We appreciate all the help from our Soil and Water District as we continue our farm's conservation legacy for generations to come"

- Ken VanSlyke
Wyoming County

American Agriculturalist

The VanSlyke family is dedicated to AEM on their farm, which has also benefited their dairy business.

70 Years of Success

Back in 1940, when New York's first Soil and Water District was created in Schoharie County by the Board of Supervisors, they were at the forefront of the conservation movement leading to the establishment of Districts in all counties across the state.

Also celebrating their 70th anniversary in 2010 were the Chenango, Madison, Oneida, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Wyoming and Yates County Soil and Water Districts. Their success is a tribute to the strong partnerships forged with farmers, homeowners and communities, along with local, state and federal agencies, whose efforts have helped New York lead the nation in conservation.

Partnering Progress

County Committees

Forty County Water Quality Coordinating Committees are active across the state, led mainly by their District. The Committees are made up of agencies, organizations and individuals that hold a common interest in protecting and improving the water quality in their county. Working together to identify, prioritize and address local water quality needs, these partnerships help to unite and maximize conservation efforts.

Watershed Coalitions

The newly formed Mohawk River Watershed Coalition and St. Lawrence River Watershed Partnership were added to District watershed coalitions in the Lake Champlain, Upper Susquehanna, Upper Hudson and Lower Hudson watersheds.

Ecosystem Health

The value of services and cost saving benefits that healthy ecosystems provide is immeasurable. Working with the state's Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) partnership of state agencies, Districts are at the forefront of helping achieve goals for a holistic approach to the health of watersheds. District-led EBM projects are helping farmers to protect drinking water supplies in Jefferson County and meet Chesapeake Bay pollution reduction goals in the Upper Susquehanna Watershed. Utilizing a $90,000 State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) grant, EBM principles are being integrated into the AEM process, expanding AEM's watershed approach to include social and economic considerations.

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