



NCDEA Connections

National Conservation District Employees Association

CONSERVATION • COLLABORATION • CAPACITY

Dear NCDEA Enthusiasts,

Welcome to the first edition of our new NCDEA Connection quarterly newsletter. Our hope is that it serves as your connection to your national voice - the NCDEA Board.

As Executive Director, I'm honored to lead an association dedicated to representing such a passionate and dedicated group of professional conservation district employees across the nation. This newsletter is a new way to keep you connected and informed, but it's also a direct reflection of our work. It highlights how the NCDEA Board and I engage and advocate on your behalf at the national level.

The power of our association comes from its ability to unite local conservation efforts into a strong, national voice. The Board and I have been busy strengthening partnerships through our NCDEA programming, attending regional meetings, participating in national meetings and forums, and meeting with policymakers - all to ensure that the unique challenges and valuable contributions of district employees are recognized at the highest levels.

We are your bridge to the National Conservation Partnership, and we're here to help elevate the important work you do every day. This newsletter will give you an inside look at these efforts, providing updates and summaries of our activities, and connecting you to the resources you need to succeed.

To that end, this newsletter is being designed to be a two-way street. While we will be providing important information, we also want to hear from you! Please share your success stories, challenges, and ideas. Your contributions are what will make this newsletter a true reflection of our national community.

Thank you for your tireless commitment to conservation. We look forward to building this resource with you and for you.

Sincerely,
NATIONAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT EMPLOYEES
ASSOCIATION

Tim Riley

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ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

- Welcome to our First Edition
- Annual Mid-Year Meeting & Training
- NACD Pacific, Southwest & Northeast Region Meetings
- NCDEA Webinars
- National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCP)

Highlights from NCDEA's Annual Mid-Year Meeting & Training



The NCDEA Board recently held its annual mid-year meeting and training in the Pacific Region in partnership with the Spokane Conservation District. The five-day event, held in late August in Spokane, WA, was a success, focusing on internal capacity-building for the NCDEA Board of Directors and providing a two-day training and tour for employees. The training offered valuable insights into sustainable agriculture, urban forestry, and community education in the Pacific Northwest. In total, 54 employees and partners attended the event. All resources, including presenter training materials, videos, and follow-up presentations, are now available on the NCDEA website at www.ncdea.us/training.

Internal Board Development

The NCDEA Board dedicated the first part of the week to strategic planning and improving team collaboration. Meg McNeese from Rose Group International facilitated a session that began with a 12-question pre-assessment to understand individual working styles and preferences. Using these results, Ms. McNeese guided the board through exercises designed to enhance their collective impact. Her follow-up resources ensure the insights gained will continue to benefit NCDEA's internal operations. Rose Group, International's services are available to all conservation districts and groups, offering tools to elevate team collaboration.

A Comprehensive Training for Conservation District Employees

The employee training portion of the event, which was attended by just over 50 employees, provided a wealth of knowledge and networking opportunities.

Day One: Education & Collaboration

The training kicked off with an overview of financial and organizational resources available

to districts of all sizes. Attendees then learned about effective strategic engagement through elevated social media and non-traditional partnerships. A networking break was followed by a presentation from Kyle Venell, the new Pacific Region Representative for the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), who provided an update on NACD's support for districts, including upcoming grant funding and free webinars.

The day concluded with a panel of representatives from the National Conservation Partnership, including speakers from NACD, the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (NARCDC), the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA), NCDEA, and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This discussion highlighted the importance of a unified approach to conservation.

Day Two: Tours & Practical Application

The second day focused on hands-on learning through tours of Spokane Conservation District programs. Vicki Carter, Spokane Conservation Director, provided a comprehensive look at the process of building new programs and partnerships, using the district's new year-round Scalehouse Market as a case study. Attendees learned about the entire development process, from concept and fundraising to construction and ongoing maintenance. A second presentation by Ms. Carter and Rachel Petitt from the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County, California detailed the origins of Spokane's successful "Vets on the Farm" program, which supports veterans while addressing regional food scarcity.

The afternoon featured tours of Spokane Conservation District's headquarters, where groups learned about their education and outreach efforts and urban forestry programs. Attendees enjoyed lunch from local vendors at the on-site commercial kitchen before touring the Scalehouse Market.

The day culminated with a tour of the off-site "Vets on the Farm" property, a successful site with crops, cold storage, and a stand run by a husband-and-wife team. The program has been a success not just for food production, but for its positive impact on veterans transitioning into conservation and agricultural roles.



"This event was a fantastic opportunity for learning, networking, and celebrating the crucial work done by conservation employees across the country."

Highlights from the NACD Pacific, Southwest, & Northeast Region Meetings

On the heels of the annual mid-year meeting and training, NCDEA has played significant roles in the NACD Region Meetings held throughout the country. Recently, NCDEA attended the Pacific and Southwest Region Meeting in Golden, Colorado, and the Northeast Region Meeting in Syracuse, New York. Like all of the region meetings, these two particular events highlighted the pivotal role of the NCDEA in representing conservation district employees and fostering professional development and partnerships within the national conservation community.

NCDEA's National Representation

At both the Golden and Syracuse meetings, NCDEA leaders played a prominent role in ensuring the voices of conservation district employees were integrated into regional and national strategic discussions. The agendas included welcome sessions with introductions from key partners, including NACD, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA). These platforms allowed NCDEA representatives to engage directly with conservation leaders, reinforcing the association's commitment to advocating for its members at a national level.



Inspirational Leadership in Golden

A highlight of the Pacific and Southwest Region Meeting in Golden was an inspiring presentation titled "Courageous Leadership and Teamwork to Elevate" by retired Air Force Colonel Kim "KC" Campbell. Colonel Campbell shared her gripping story of resilience and leadership, recounting how she successfully landed her war-damaged fighter jet during a real-life combat mission. She connected the principles of teamwork and leadership she employed to the work of conservation professionals, leaving attendees motivated and inspired to apply these lessons in their own roles.

Professional Development Opportunities

Both regional meetings provided robust opportunities for professional growth. The agendas featured breakout sessions on leadership development, diverse conservation topics, and strategic planning discussions. These sessions equipped attendees with additional knowledge and real-life examples they could utilize to advance conservation efforts in their respective Districts. NCDEA held sessions at each to provide an overview of our current

activities, and more importantly listen to the needs of conservation district employees. We will utilize the notes and topics from these discussions as NCDEA begins to work on its strategic priorities in the coming months and years.

Strengthening Conservation Partnerships

The meetings in Golden and Syracuse served as critical platforms for NCDEA to strengthen partnerships within the national conservation partnership. These collaborations are essential for advocating for the resources and support conservation district employees need to succeed. By engaging in these regional meetings, NCDEA commits to its role as a vital link between individual conservation districts and the broader national conservation community, fostering stronger networks to support ongoing and future initiatives.

NCDEA Webinars: 17 Months of Growth Aligned with Strategic Goals

NCDEA recently completed its 15th highly successful monthly webinar in September, demonstrating impressive growth and a strong commitment to our strategic goals. From May 2024 to September 2025, our webinars saw a total of 2,072 registrations from 877 unique individuals, with an average of 138 registrants per session from an average of 30 states. This wide reach underscores the national impact of our virtual training programs.

The content of these webinars was meticulously crafted to align with the NCDEA's mission of fostering collaboration, innovation, and excellence among conservation district employees, and our aspiration to strengthen local, state, regional, and national networks by facilitating opportunities for professional growth and development. Our topics were organized around our four key strategic goals:

1 Professional Development, Training, and Education:
Webinars like "Grants - Applying and Implementing," "Grant Management 101," and "Successful Education Programming" provided essential skills for our members.

2 Workforce Development Systems:
Sessions such as "Mid-Year Training Session 1: District Operations," "Human Resources - Just the Basics," and "Annual Planning" were designed to enhance operational and administrative efficiency.

3 Communication and Outreach Efforts:
We provided strategies for strengthening community engagement through webinars like "Innovative District Services," "Telling Your District Story," and "Selling Urban Conservation in a Rural Setting."

4 Sustainable Framework for Organizational Advancement:
Forward-thinking sessions, including "District Partnerships - Thinking Outside The Box" and "District Income Sources," offered innovative ideas for long-term sustainability.

The high level of participation, especially in our top-attended webinars like "Grants - Applying and Implementing" (230 registrants) and "Innovative District Services" (223 registrants), confirms the value of this targeted professional development.

If you missed any of these valuable sessions, we encourage you to visit www.ncdea.us/training to access recordings and resources.

National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCP)

Throughout everything else your NCDEA Board does, NCDEA is proud to continue its active collaboration with the NCP. The NCP is a comprehensive effort of the five partners of the National Conservation Partnership.

The NCP was established to strengthen the effectiveness of conservation planning and the partnership workforce.



Its key goals are to:

- Reinvigorate conservation planning as the foundation for all conservation efforts.
- Improve the capacity of the partnership to deliver one-on-one conservation planning assistance.
- Ensure the delivery of voluntary, science-based assistance.
- Build and sustain a strong workforce of conservation planners across the partnership.

As a core partner, NCDEA is at the table to ensure the voice and on-the-ground experience of district employees are central to these discussions.



NCDEA's involvement in the NCP directly benefits you, the District Employees, in several ways:

- Elevating the Workforce: We advocate for the professional development needs of district employees, ensuring that training programs, new tools, and resources are relevant and accessible.
- Shaping Policy: Our participation helps to streamline program policy and improve internal processes, ultimately increasing efficiency for district staff and ensuring that your work is directly reflected in national-level decisions.
- Recognizing Excellence: NCDEA promotes and supports the annual Hugh Hammond Bennett Award for Conservation Excellence, which recognizes outstanding service by both producers and conservation planners within the partnership. This program highlights the value of your work on a national stage.



By continuing to be an active voice within the NCP, NCDEA helps to ensure that your dedication and hard work are recognized and that you have the tools and support you need to deliver high-quality, voluntary conservation on private lands.

If you are interested in more information regarding NCP please visit their website at www.ncpp.info.

Visit www.NCDEA.us to Explore Resources

- Take the 2025 District Employee Survey: *Tell us about your district, what you need, and how we can help.*
- Local Work Group Resources: *Presented by the National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCPPI).*
- Don Aron Scholarship: *Presented annually.*
- Outstanding Professional & District Board Member Awards: *Presented annually.*
- Federal Government Shutdown Checklist
- Links to Conservation-Related Organizations
- Professional Development Webinars: *Registration for live webinars and recordings.*
- Convene, LLC "Soft Skills" Webinar Training Service: *A free service provided for you by NCDEA.*

Learn more about:

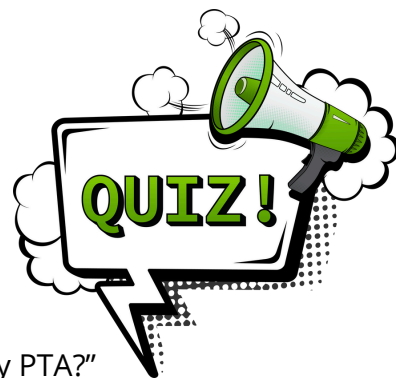
NCDEA's mission to advance the standing of district employees as professionals and serve as a vehicle for them to address regional and national concerns.

NCDEA's role in the national conservation community, including our participation in meetings with our key partners of NACD, NARCDC, NASCA, and USDA-NRCS.

NCDEA Board Quiz

How well do you know your National Board?

1. Which NCDEA Board Member is co-owner of a business that makes wooden pens, among other things?
2. Which NCDEA Board Member is known to make their own clothing?
3. Which NCDEA Board Member sings a mean version of "Harper Valley PTA?"
4. Who is the gentleman in the black shirt in the picture from the NACD Pacific and Southwest Region Meeting in this newsletter?



If you think you know all 4 answers, please submit them to timothy.riley@ncdea.org. The first to submit all 4 correctly may receive some NCDEA swag, and be recognized in the Winter 2025 edition of the NCDEA DE National Connection Newsletter.

(Current NCDEA Board members are ineligible to win, but feel free to submit your answers if you think you know!)



**CONNECT
WITH US**

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