

Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District

802-582-3133

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Dear friends,

In 2024, the Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District has continued to expand our staff, capacities, and program areas. Excitingly, we have grown into a team of eight full-time staff. Beyond our own team, local community members have contributed over 550 volunteer hours to our projects, and over 900 participants have engaged with our workshops and outreach events, including over 300 students. We've deeply enjoyed getting to know more people and communities, and engaging in projects with folks across Franklin County and beyond.



Left to right: Orenna Brand, Maria Burnett, Kerry Brosnan, Dorothy Kinney-Landis, Kate Wettergreen, Mel Affredou, Morgan Pratt, Lauren Weston

We have continued expanding our offerings related to forestry and maple, including a series of fall workshops and site visits, as well as continuing to host a skidder bridge rental program for folks working in the woods who needs to cross streams and protect water quality. Once again, we hosted our largest Tree Sale ever! Thanks to all 450+ of our customers and collaborators for planting over 17,000 stems this spring. Coming out of 2024, we have a lot of momentum for several clean water and natural resources projects across Franklin County that are in the early stages of design. These projects include tree plantings, lake shoreland restorations, and stream and floodplain restorations. If you have a project idea, please reach out.

None of this work would have been possible without our incredible land stewards, landowners, farmers, producers, and partner organizations. It is such an honor to work in this community with people who truly care about the natural resources around us and want to do their part.

Sincerely,
Lauren Weston, District Manager

Message from the Board:

Speaking on behalf of the Board of Supervisors, we are all so proud of the work of Lauren Weston and her team of conservationists have completed in 2024, providing outstanding assistance to farmers, forest landowners, partner organizations, municipalities, and others across Franklin County. This past year was marked by growth—growth in the number of projects the District was able to complete, growth in the number of staff we have on board to serve our community, and growth in our ability to make a positive impact across our landscape. We assisted 111 farms this year, providing technical support to improve nutrient management and water quality, as well as mitigate the effects of climate change through tree plantings and buffer improvement.

Additionally, I am proud to announce that the Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District has literally grown out of its current shared location with USDA-NRCS, and has moved to 431 Franklin Park West, Ste. 100a, in St Albans (although our mailing address remains 50 South Main Street, Ste. B-20). Please swing by to say hello.

Richard J. Noël, Chair

2024 By the Numbers:

17164 Tree stems sold to **455** customers,
7031 Plants planted along waterbodies and streams with help from
213 volunteers at **9** sites,
111 Farms assisted,
231 Soil samples collected,
\$1.5 million secured for local led conservation projects,
25 Posts about events, grants, opportunities, and surveys on our “Stay Up to Date” webpage,
28 grant proposals written with **96%** success rate,
 Staff spent **45%** of their time working on Agriculture Programs, **24%** on Natural Resources Conservation and Restoration Projects, and **31%** on Education Programs, the Tree Sale, Administration, Stormwater Remediation, and Water Quality Monitoring.

Meet New Members of the FCNRCD Team



Morgan Pratt, Agricultural Programs Specialist

Morgan Pratt is originally from New Haven, Vermont, and is excited to be spreading her roots in Franklin County as an Agricultural Programs Specialist with the District. After working on a sheep dairy in Southern VT for two years and receiving her MPS in Natural Resources and the Environment from Cornell, she is grateful to have the chance to return to Vermont and work within the landscapes she has always called home. She is looking forward to building relationships with farmers across Franklin County and assisting them in their on-farm goals.



Maria Burnett, Agricultural Programs Specialist

Born in the Pacific Northwest and raised in Abu Dhabi, Maria got her first real taste of Vermont as an AmeriCorps member at Camp DREAM in Fletcher during the summer of 2021. After completing her bachelor's degree at Fitchburg State University, she moved to Vermont full time in 2023 where she spent a year as an ECO AmeriCorps member in the Water Quality Division at the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets. She is excited to join the District as an Agricultural Programs Specialist and assist producers with farm viability and environmental sustainability.



Orenna Brand, Community Engagement Coordinator & Field Technician

Orenna grew up in Massachusetts and now lives in Burlington's Old North End. After graduating from Columbia University with a degree in Classics and Computer Science, she pursued a love of literature and print media by working as an editor at a magazine in Brooklyn for two years. Somewhere along the way she tried her hand at vegetable farming and was hooked by life in the field. She has since worked on several farms throughout Central Vermont. Outside of work she loves to read, bicycle, and cook for her friends.

Returning Staff: Lauren Weston, Kate Wettergreen, Mel Auffredou, Dorothy Kinney-Landis, Kerry Brosnan

2025 District Events

We are hard at work planning events and workshops for 2025! Look out for these events (and more):

- Locally Led Conservation Meetings
- Tree Planting Days
- Buffer Planting Trainings
- Soil Health Workshops

Event details will be shared when available online at FranklinCountyNRCD.org/StayUpToDate.

Have an idea for an event that you'd like us to host? Let us know by emailing us at info@FranklinCountyNRCD.org or calling us at 802-582-3133.

Soil Health Webinars

Interested in learning about soil health? This year we developed a training course to educate Vermont's agricultural technical assistance providers about building soil health on farms. In our 12-part webinar series, we explored

- the science behind healthy soils,
- how to measure and assess soil health,
- how to select and implement agricultural management strategies that build healthy soils,
- and much more.

Visit FranklinCountyNRCD.org/SoilHealth to access the webinars and more.

Water Quality Updates

Lake Carmi Update

In 2024, the Franklin County NRCDC has continued to partner with various stakeholders in the Lake Carmi community to work toward water quality solutions. This year, we completed a comprehensive assessment of completed, in progress, and potential best management practices (BMPs) in the Lake Carmi watershed. This project gave us the opportunity to take stock of work that has already been completed to contribute to phosphorus reduction goals, and water quality work that can potentially be pursued in the future as we continue to develop relationships with landowners in the area. We are thankful to our many regional partners that helped to complete this assessment, including the Franklin Watershed Committee, Fitzgerald Environmental Associates, and the many generous landowners in Franklin that have made this progress possible.

As a result of this identification and assessment work, we are currently in the process of creating preliminary designs for five projects in the Lake Carmi watershed. These water quality projects look different based on the context of each parcel and the landowner's goals, but each will help to reduce phosphorus inputs and improve overall lake health. Project types include floodplain restoration, wetland restoration, two-tier channels, and shoreline bioengineering.

Skidder Bridge Rental Program

Are you a logging professional or forest landowner in need of a temporary skidder bridge? We own two that we rent out for \$100/month. Email, call 802-582-3133, or visit franklincountynrcd.org/skidderbridge to find out more.



Volunteers planting trees in Enosburg Falls in April.

2024 Tree Plantings

This year our staff, interns, and volunteers planted over 7,000 trees and shrubs at 8 sites in Franklin County! We also performed maintenance and survivorship counts on approximately 45 acres at 24 sites.

Over the past couple years, we have observed the many challenges that trees face in getting established. Common reasons include deer browse pressure, voles or other rodents chewing on trees, transplant shock, site flooding, and grass and vegetation pressure. Based on our observations, we began an exciting new project this year to replant over 1,000 trees at sites with low survivorship. By observing and maintaining the sites year to year, we are able to make more informed decisions about what species to plant, as well as how many trees to plant.

Why are trees important for water quality? Trees help to slow water down! Branches and leaves capture and slow rain drops, and the roots act like sponges, absorbing and holding onto water. This prevents erosion and holds soil in place. Trees also help to filter water, trapping nutrients and pollutants before they enter waterways. In addition to water quality, they provide countless benefits for wildlife, improve air quality, create shade, sequester carbon, and more.

Want to get involved? If you own land along a waterway, the Franklin County NRCDC offers free tree planting consultations. We may be able to provide free trees, planting labor, and financial incentives at eligible sites. If you have native shrub willow, speckled alder, or dogwood on your property, and you would be willing to have FCNRCDC staff come evaluate and potentially take cuttings, please let us know! If you want to volunteer to plant trees with us, send us an email.

Education Highlights

Montgomery Tracking Day

This past spring, FCNRCD partnered with Montgomery Elementary School to bring students on a day-long field trip to a restoration site at the confluence of Black Falls Brook and the Trout River in Montgomery, VT. The event focused on wildlife tracking in the context of the local landscape and watershed. We were lucky to have beautiful weather in early March, knowledgeable local experts to lead us through the landscape, and enthusiastic students with plenty of excitement to spend the day outdoors. The restoration site contains a variety of diverse ecosystems, including woodland, wetland, and agricultural fields. As a result, students had the opportunity to observe wildlife tracks and signs in a variety of habitats. Students rotated through six stations across the parcel to learn about different aspects of wildlife tracking and habitat.

Activities included birding with FCNRCD staff member Kerry Brosnan and tracking mammals with local tracking expert Ana Maria Arroyo. MES students were particularly excited to see the abundant evidence of wildlife in the parcel's wetland area, including signs from

Watershed 101

This past spring and fall, FCNRCD has worked with students, teachers, and community members throughout the county to learn about watersheds through classroom presentations, hands-on learning, and workshops. Through the Franklin County Watershed 101 Initiative, the District has been able to connect with over 250 students from schools in St. Albans, Swanton, Montgomery, Richford, and Fairfax.

For many of the students, teachers, and District staff, the highlight of these partnerships were the field trips, where students were able to apply classroom learning to hands-on experiences in a variety of settings. Field trips included water quality sampling at Mill River Falls in Georgia; planting trees along the Rock River in Franklin and the Lamoille River in Fairfax; learning about stormwater management in St. Albans; visiting farms to learn about how farmers engage with conservation practices supporting soil health, wildlife habitat, water quality, and flood resiliency; and visiting water treatment plants to learn about how our communities' source drinking water.

visiting beaver and black bear. Students also had a chance to learn about the ways local communities interact with their landscape and waterways from Abenaki culture bearer Dan Coutu and hunting educator Keith Sampietro. Finally, students were introduced to broader environmental topics—including watershed health and landscape in the context of wildlife ecology—by former supervisor Carissa Stein. This event was made possible with funding from the Upper Missisquoi and Trout Rivers Wild & Scenic Committee.



MES students birdwatching.

Many of the students we worked with are avid fishers, come from farming families, have years of experience sugaring, or have other experiences leading to intimate knowledge of their local landscape. Through our partnership with schools, it has been especially rewarding to see students draw connections between what they have learned in Watershed 101 Initiative presentations and field trips, and what they have observed through their own experiences. Many students we work with are already stewarding landscapes in Franklin County. Identifying the relationships between topics including land management, climate change and climate justice, water quality, food security, and flood resiliency will support the students we work with to care for our natural resources and ecosystems so they can continue to support our communities.

Stream Wise

Are you a streamside landowner interested in protecting your stream? Schedule a Stream Wise visit with a District staff member, who can provide recommendations for improved stewardship. Reach out via email or call 802-582-3133.



Community Engagement

Locally Led Conservation

Locally Led Conservation is a collaborative approach where communities, organizations, and individuals at the local level take an active role in planning, implementing, and managing conservation efforts. This year, through community events and dinners, surveys, and one-on-one conversations, Conservation Districts in Franklin, Grand Isle, and Lamoille Counties and NRCS gathered input on priorities in our community. This input helps inform grants and projects that the Franklin County NRCD pursues. Additionally, through this work, NRCS has created a \$1.5 million Local Funding Pool to assist landowners with practices to address soil, water, air, plants, animals, human, and energy considerations. Applications from landowners for this funding pool are only going to be ranked against other applicants in these three counties, instead of statewide as usual.

One of the ways in which we gathered feedback from the local community was via participation in the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets (VAAF) 2024 Listening Session Series. The series included 11 events which encompassed all 14 counties. Although there were common themes throughout, each county had a unique focus of conversation. The Franklin and Grand Isle Counties Listening Session took place on March 25th, 2024, in St. Albans, and major themes of discussion included Act 250, Act 143 (Accessory On-Farm Business), Act 59 (Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection), Farm Service Agency and emergency preparedness, federal and state grants, and how various regulatory bodies interact with farmers. Unique to Franklin County was a discussion on how the state delineates wetlands.

Abenaki Water Quality Workshops

Franklin County NRCD is excited to share that we have received funding from the Lake Champlain Basin Program to partner with the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi on a series of participatory outreach workshops over the next three years. Due to centuries of oppression and land loss, Abenaki peoples have limited access to water, land, and natural spaces in Vermont. FCNRCD will collaborate directly with registered members of the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi to elevate their voices in Vermont's water quality processes and create tangible benefits around water quality, habitat, recreation, and access. The District will lead facilitated discussions that emphasize community empowerment and participation throughout this process. The outcome of these events will be a comprehensive Community Priorities Plan that identifies future environmental and water quality goals for the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi. The project also includes funding for the District to provide water quality grant writing assistance and create and install Abenaki language signs in locations identified by Abenaki community members. Reach out to mel@franklincountynrcd.org with any questions and check our website for updates.

We are building this local-led process into the future with more events, listening sessions, and surveys and with the goals of increasing the amount of funds in the Local Funding Pool and guaranteeing that on-the-ground needs in our region are being met. Please help us shape the program for next year by filling out our survey at franklincountynrcd.org/local or keeping an eye on our calendar for Local Led Conservation Meetings in 2025.

Take a minute to make a difference!

LOCALLY LED CONSERVATION SURVEY

Complete this short survey to share your vision for natural resources in Franklin, Grand Isle & Lamoille Counties.

Your input will help shape funding and efforts to address local conservation needs in your community.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

THE FRANKLIN, GRAND ISLE & LAMOILLE COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

VERMONT NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (USDA-NRCS)

Scan or visit FranklinCountyNRCD.org/Local

Save the Date! We're hosting a Local Working Group dinner in Grand Isle County on Tuesday, January 21st, 2025, from 5-7pm. Location TBD.

Find the survey and more information at FranklinCountyNRCD.org/Local.

Agriculture Highlights

Agricultural Services

Franklin County NRCDC provides a multitude of agricultural services and resources at no cost to farmers and producers.

- **Kitchen Table Talks:** We sit down with you to better understand your needs, concerns, and goals. These opportunities allow us to identify what services are the best fit.
- **Grant Application Assistance:** We assist with writing and submitting program and grant applications. We are also able to write a letter of support, coordinate with a grant program administrator, and assist with reporting requirements.
- **New Nutrient Management Plans (NMPs) with UVM Extension:** We assist farms in preparation for and during the UVM Extension Nutrient Management Planning Class that takes place every year starting in January. This class is free for farms and includes soil and manure tests, a Land Treatment Plan, and a Nutrient Management Plan.
- **Updating Existing NMPs:** We work with you on all stages of updating your NMP from sampling, to entering records, to making nutrient recommendations, to completing an update.
- **Soil Sampling:** Whether the samples are required or not, we are available to soil sample your fields. We can deliver standard soil samples to the UVM Extension lab. The farm is responsible for UVM lab fees (usually \$17/sample).
- **Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs):** We can interpret how the RAPs apply to your farm. If you receive a Corrective Action Letter from the state, we can help interpret the letter and write a response to the letter. We can also connect you with technical and financial assistance to correct the problem.
- **Support With Annual Manure Sampling:** While we can't sample your manure sources, we can drop off the bottles for you and deliver them to the lab.
- **Agricultural Guide for Producers:** Every year, we update the Guide to Agricultural Assistance, a comprehensive compilation of resources for new and existing landowners, farmers, and producers. We bring copies with us whenever we're at an event or visiting a farmer, and are always happy to walk you through it!
- **Farm Teams:** We understand that there are a multitude of agencies and organizations working to complete projects on a farm, and it can get overwhelming at times. FCNRCDC is happy to communicate with all relevant partners about various projects, and make sure that everyone working with the farm is on the same page.

**View Our Updated
Guide to Assistance for
Agricultural Producers**

[www.franklincountynrcd.org/
agproducersguide](http://www.franklincountynrcd.org/agproducersguide)



Featured Farmer



Dorothy Kinney-Landis
and Gene Branon.

Gene Branon, of Branon's West View Maples in Fairfield, has been working with the District since 2023 and in that time has been involved in several projects that we are proud to highlight. Gene is a certified custom applicator, and with the help of the District, he applied to the Capital Equipment Assistance Program (CEAP) in 2023 and successfully secured funding to purchase a manure injector in 2024. He collaborated with Scott Magnan to find the equipment to best suit his operation, and is excited about the possibility of being able to service more of Franklin County. While Gene was a participant in the 2024 Nutrient Management Planning (NMP) class, the District collected soil samples from his farm to better understand his field conditions and prioritize future nutrient management goals.

When asked what he loved most about working with the District, Gene highlighted the teamwork atmosphere of collaborating with staff including his primary contact, Dorothy Kinney-Landis. Having Dorothy on his team is an amazing benefit to his farming operation, and he expressed his gratitude for her hard work in helping him apply for grants, secure funding, and communicate on his behalf across state-run organizations throughout the process. During a site visit in October 2024, Gene remarked that he wishes he had started his collaboration with the District sooner, and overall feels his farm has benefited a great deal from the District's services. We are proud to celebrate Gene and can't wait to see what the future holds for him and his farm team.

Montgomery Flood Mitigation Study

Throughout 2024, the Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District, in close partnership with the Montgomery Conservation Commission, Selectboard, and other groups such as the Vermont River Conservancy, Upper Missisquoi and Trout River Wild and Scenic Committee, and VT Dept. of Environmental Conservation Rivers Program, worked with the engineering firm SLR International to better understand the flooding patterns that impact the Trout River, Black Falls Brook, and West Hill Brook in Montgomery, VT. Using this information, the team identified possible flood risk reduction alternatives and locations where floodplain restoration, stream restoration, infrastructure upgrades, and more may be beneficial for hazard mitigation and watershed health. Community input throughout this process has been critical to understand where flooding and erosion have previously occurred, and where there might be interest in pursuing future projects. Analyzing models of the streams and valleys built from topographic information collected using drones, the engineering team was able to understand existing flooding patterns under different storm scenarios. These models were also used to test the impact of flood risk reduction alternatives under future storms to help prioritize which projects to move forward in the design process.

This approach of collecting landscape data, engaging community members, modeling flood levels, and analyzing potential projects can be used across Vermont communities to better understand flood risks. With changing rainfall patterns, development and land use changes, and aging infrastructure, preparing for increased flooding and its associated hazards are necessary for everyone's safety and resilience.



Drone and ground surveying at the Trout River in July.

2024 Weather & Land-Based Economy

Winter

Winter was unpredictable and warm. Franklin County experienced flooding along the Lamoille River in mid-December 2023, damaging many farm fields and roads along the river. A January winter storm brought heavy wet snow, freezing rain, and powerful winds, bringing down trees and impacting infrastructure. February brought multiple days over 50 degrees. This record-breaking warm winter posed challenges to the logging industry, and many cherished ice fishing events were cancelled due to the resulting dangerous ice conditions.

Spring

March and April brought two wet blizzards with over two feet of heavy snow, leaving many without power. This year's mud season was notably long and challenging with muddy road conditions starting in December and sticking around until April. Late February and early March brought near perfect weather conditions for maple sugarers, although the cold spell and snow in mid-March stopped production during peak season. The solar eclipse's path of totality graced the region with a once-in-a-lifetime astronomical event on a rare sunny and clear April day.

Summer

A three-day June heat wave started the summer with uncomfortably high humidity. Exactly one year after the 2023 July Floods, Vermont communities were hit with intense rainfall and flash flooding yet again, with only more devastating flooding to hit the Northeast Kingdom later in the month. Compared to last year there were more sunny, dry days between storms, allowing for a successful season for most Franklin County. Remnants of Hurricane Debby were felt with 62-mph winds in mid-August, leaving many without power.

Fall

After a year of unpredictable, intense, and damaging weather, September brought sunshine and classic crisp fall temperatures. Farmers in Franklin County baled hay and harvested corn without a hitch, spreading cover crop on the bare corn fields to keep nutrients in the soil and on the land. The sprouting cover crop now growing on fields will help reduce erosion and nutrient runoff during future, likely intense rain events and snow melt. Vermont's apple growers had a bountiful harvest this year, which was welcomed after last year's frost damage.



FRANKLIN COUNTY
NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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The Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District empowers and partners with land stewards and communities on the ground by supporting connections that benefit natural resources, water quality, soil health, and the working landscape in Franklin County and across Northwest Vermont.

Interested in sponsoring our newsletter and reaching our 3,000 readers? You can reach us at info@FranklinCountyNRCD.org or 802-582-3133.

**Tree and Trout Sale
Information Inside!**



FRANKLIN COUNTY
NATURAL RESOURCES
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Annual Newsletter 2024-2025

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