

CDEA News

Autumn 2025



NEW YORK STATE
CONSERVATION DISTRICT
EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION, INC.



Cover Photo

The morning sunrise on December 9, 2025, from Lewis County SWCD Treasurer Carla Yaw's office window.



The CDEA Corner

Caitlin Stewart, President, NYS CDEA, Inc.

February greetings! Please take a few minutes to refill your mug or water bottle and enjoy the Autumn 2025 CDEA News.

After Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District's Jim Lieberum sent his final CDEA News in 2009, Hamilton County SWCD Manager Elizabeth Mangle encouraged me to apply to the Request for Proposals. For the last 15 years, I have thoroughly enjoyed spotlighting New York State's Soil and Water Conservation District employees, our work, accomplishments, and partnership efforts with the Soil and Water Conservation Committee, New York Association of Conservation Districts, and Natural Resources Conservation Service. The evolution of the newsletter has been profound. Jessica Verrigni shared newsletters from the 1980s with me, the Ask Miss Dirt days. Jim added his own flair with a trivia competition and chance to win the coveted Warren County SWCD travel mug. My contributions included seasoned and new employee surveys. Now, it is time for the next generation to take over. Please welcome **Victoria Bray**, Montgomery County SWCD's Agricultural Economic Development Specialist, and the new editor of CDEA News!

FY26-27 executive proposed **Environmental Protection Fund budget (\$425 million) highlights:**

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts – \$18.65 million, a \$650,000 increase.
- Agricultural Non-point Source Pollution Control - \$18.7 million, a \$200,000 increase. Level funding for Cornell Pesticide Management Education Program at \$250,000.
- Climate Resilient Farms - \$19.1 million, a \$400,000 decrease. Level funding for Cornell Soil Health Program at \$500,000, and no funding for Forest Preservation on Ag land for carbon sequestration.
- To the SWCDs who mailed letters to the Governor, thank you.
- To Commissioner Ball and NYACD, thank you for submitting written testimony. Your advocacy, recommendation to approve the budget at its proposed amount to support conservation work, and encouragement to increase funding to Districts is invaluable.

CDEA Vice President Jessica Armstrong has done an incredible job coordinating the **2026 Water Quality Symposium**. Track chairs, committee members, and instructors will deliver courses that will advance staff expertise. Networking opportunities like the Farmers Market Resource Fair, entertainment, and hospitality suite will bolster camaraderie. This intense, 4-day training session is perhaps the most effective professional development experience available to participants.

Paul Grier emailed a statewide request for volunteers to work the **New York Farm Show**. Pens, notepads, and agricultural materials will be available to visitors at the SWCD booth. The event is slated for February 26—28, 2026 at 581 State Fair Boulevard, Syracuse NY 13209.

CDEA representatives attended or facilitated the following **meetings** and provided updates to ensure CDEA's support of and contribution to SWCD employees, the 4-Way Partnership, and beyond: January 20 New York

Continued on page 3.

The CDEA Corner (from page 2)

State Invasive Species Advisory Committee meeting, December 16 SWCC meeting, January 5 CDEA Bylaws meeting, January 21-22 CDEA meeting, February 10 NYACD Legislative Day.

Upcoming events

- **SWCD Booth at the New York Farm Show**
February 26—28, 2026 • 581 State Fair Boulevard, Syracuse NY 13209
- **CDEA Managers' Meeting**
February 27, 2026 • 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Join in person: 50 West High St. • Ballston Spa NY 12020 • Lunch will be served
Join virtually: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86995541273?pwd=b1NyelVBTnUyekJ3RXcyWXdzUXFBUT09>
Meeting ID: 869 9554 1273 • Passcode: 696701 Dial by your location: +1 929 205 6099 US
- **Water Quality Symposium**
March 10 – 13, 2026 • Hyatt Regency Rochester • 125 E Main St, Rochester, NY 14604
- **CDEA Annual Meeting**
March 11, 2026 • 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. • Hayatt Regency Rochester • 125 E Main St, Rochester, NY 14604
- **New York State Envirothon**
May 27 – 28, 2026 • SUNY Cortland
- **SWCD booth at the Great New York State Fair**
August 26 – September 7, 2026 • NYS Fairgrounds

Please contact your Division Representative or me with questions or concerns. I wish you the absolute best with your upcoming programs and projects.

Kindest regards,



Caitlin Stewart, MS
President, NYS CDEA



I do not own the land.
The land owns me.
I am merely the
caretaker for my
generation.

Mary Alice Monroe

The Passing of Lester Travis

Lester Travis passed away on November 3, 2025. He served as Yates County Soil and Water Conservation District Manager and New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee Regional Coordinator. SWCC's Executive Director Behtany Bzduch remembers him as a great friend and colleague to many who will be remembered fondly.

2025 Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum Wrapup

Lydia Brinkley, USC Buffer Coordinator

Binghamton University, NY - On Thursday, October 2, more than 140 conservation professionals, researchers, students and community leaders gathered for the 2025 Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum, a day of knowledge-sharing and collaboration focused on building resilience across New York's watersheds. The day-long forum showcased a wide range of sessions exploring the intersection of science, policy, and practice in watershed management.

The event opened with a keynote address by Dr. Benjamin Hayes, Director of Bucknell University's Watershed Sciences & Engineering Program, who highlighted how centuries of land-use change continue to shape today's watershed dynamics. Dr. Hayes emphasized that adaptive restoration offers the most effective path to restoring ecosystem health and resilience.

With a wide range of presentation topics divided into two groups of concurrent sessions, and 17 table displays and poster presenters available for discussion, forum attendees had the opportunity to learn, interact and network on a variety of topics.

Through science, innovation and shared commitment, this year's forum underscored how collective action continues to drive progress

toward a more resilient and connected Upper Susquehanna watershed.

We are appreciative of our 11 - 2025 Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum sponsors, of the 22 forum speakers, 29 display and poster presenters, 6 moderators and 16 members of the forum planning team without which this forum could not have happened.

This training was supported by the Conservation District Employees' Association's 4-Hour Fund.

To access the 2025 (and past) watershed forum presentations and resources visit:

<https://www.u-s-c.org/watershedforum>

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Silent Auction & Bucket Raffle Donations Needed

Beginning on March 10th the annual NYSCDEA Bucket Raffle and Silent Auction will be held at the 2026 Water Quality Symposium in Rochester.

Your continued support of the Frank Bratt Scholarship is appreciated!

- Each District: please bring in one raffle item and if possible, a silent auction item as well.
- Each Division: please bring one silent auction item



Please note: There is no freezer available to store food, if you bring an item that needs refrigeration it will need to be kept in the refrigerator in your room.

For questions please contact:

Carla Yaw, Division III Representative (315) 263-5613

Lydia Brinkley, Division IV Representative (315) 525-5872

Nassau County SWCD attends National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association

Olivia Cunningham, Conservation Technician, Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District

The Nassau County Soil & Water Conservation District attended The National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA) Mega Conference in Sandusky, OH. We attended multiple classes throughout the day which covered important wastewater topics such as new technologies, leaching field studies, updated Operation & Maintenance, etc. We were also able to tour different technologies which reflect all which are used throughout the USA. This mega-conference is a great way to stay up to date as the industry expands and changes, while building connections with others in the field.



MAY 27-28

NYS

2026

ENVIROTHON

WHERE: SUNY CORTLAND

**NON-POINT SOURCE
POLLUTION:
IT BEGINS AT HOME!**

**CURRENT
ISSUE:**

**REGISTRATION
FEE:**

\$650
per team

WE NEED YOU!

We are dedicated to continuing the State Envirothon and are welcoming new members to the committee!



MORE INFO:

[NYSENVIROTHON.ORG](https://nysenvirothon.org)

DUSTINLEWISSARATOGASWCD@GMAIL.COM



Warren County Horicon Canoe Access Stabilization

Nick Rowell, Natural Resource Specialist Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District

The Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District worked in partnership with Warren County Parks and Recreation and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to stabilize the Schroon River Canoe Access area near the Horicon Ave. bridge in the Town of Horicon. The stormwater runoff from the unpaved road flowing to the canoe access site, plus the heavy foot traffic has led to a large area of continuous erosion directly to the Schroon River. The before photo shows the area of erosion.

The stabilization project consisted of installing 24 coir logs (made of coconut fiber) on contour as grade breaks along the eroding riverbank. The coir logs get trenched in and held in place with wooden

stakes to be able to handle the river flows during flood events. The coir logs will provide stabilization for up to five years while they slowly biodegrade. On the upslope side of each coir log, we planted 22 mature native shrubs to stabilize the bank with roots and protect the soil with a canopy long term. The shrubs planted include Dogwood, Ninebark, Elderberry and Chokeberry. The team then installed stairs and a canoe slide made of split cedar logs to protect the highly erodible riverbank soil while allowing safe public access for recreation. The final step was a conservation grass seed mix and straw mulch to stabilize the area short term while the shrubs get rooted for long term protection. In April 2026, the team will be planting an additional 50 bareroot shrubs for further stabilization and more diversity for wildlife habitat.



Before.



After.



Coir logs.

Iron-Oxidizing Bacteria or Oil Spill? Do you know the difference? **Theresa Hajos, District Technician, Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District**

Have you seen something that looks like an oil sheen in a water body and thought it was the result of a spill? Iron-oxidizing bacteria can appear as an oil sheen in waterbodies, and the two are often confused. Iron-oxidizing bacteria are naturally occurring microorganisms that feed on iron and can typically be observed as a fuzzy, bright orange substance, as shown in the picture below. This bacteria takes on iron dissolved in groundwater and oxidizes it, a chemical reaction similar to the formation of rust. Oxidation prevents iron from dissolving in the water and produces either an orange colored slime or an oily sheen. This is often an indicator that a stream is partially fed by groundwater. To distinguish between the two, break up the oily sheen on the water with a stick or rock. If the sheen stays broken up in pieces (as seen in the video), then it is most likely iron-oxidizing bacteria; the same orange slime as we mentioned earlier, just in a different form! If the sheen goes back together, then it may be a petroleum spill, and you can contact the NYS Spill Hotline at 1-800-457-7362. Iron-oxidizing bacteria are not harmful to humans or aquatic life and may accumulate for several months until they are dislodged by high waterflows.



Chemung County Cover Crops Program

Hailey Feusner, Agricultural Specialist, Chemung County Soil and Water Conservation District



In 2025, the program saw its largest participation yet and purchased 121 tons of rye seed and 9 tons of triticale on over 3,550 acres of planted cover crops. These cover crops are essential to protecting our productive farmland from erosion through the winter months and keeping that sediment out of streams for better water quality. Cover crops also provide soil health benefits such as better water infiltration, adding organic matter and keeping soil microbes alive through the winter on living roots. Take a peek at the fields as you drive throughout the county

and applaud the farmers who prioritize this practice that benefits us all.

In Chemung County a great deal of farmers apply the seed with a broadcast spreader but there was a new initiative that happened here in Chemung County this year. Hi-Rise Farm in Pine Valley NY had taken interest in flying a drone over a standing field of soybeans to seed their rye into these fields before harvest. Harvest Works from Bloomsburg, Pa had made the trip to help in operating the drone for us to all get a glimpse of how this application works.

The program is open to any farmers in the county with no prerequisites, only to follow the guidelines of the program to qualify.



Monarch Monitoring in Rockland County

Adam Bradford, Conservation District Technician, Rockland County Soil and Water Conservation District

Monarch Larva Monitoring Project

This summer, the Rockland County SWCD was able to participate in the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project (MLMP). The Monarch Larva Monitoring Project was developed in 1997 by researchers at The University of Minnesota to collect long term data on larval monarch populations and milkweed habitat. From June until September, District Staff were able to monitor **4748** milkweed plants, and found **186** monarch eggs & **47** larvae across **3** different sites in Rockland County.

Field data were recorded by inspecting the leaves and stalks of milkweed plants found at Kakiat County Park, Kennedy Dells County Park, and Riverhook in Upper Nyack. The data included environmental data in addition to the number of monarch larva and eggs that were found. The data were entered into the MLMP's online database to help better understand trends in monarch populations and migration patterns. This was the districts first time participating in the project.



(Above) Common milkweed in bloom at Kennedy Dells Park

More About Monarchs

Monarchs start their journey hatching from tiny eggs laid on the underside of milkweed leaves. Once hatched, the tiny caterpillars feed exclusively on the milkweed plant and go through several different life stages called *instars*. Each instar phase is characterized by changes in body size, color, and physical features such as antenna length.

As the larvae grow, they increase in size and develop black and white stripes resulting from sun exposure and yellow and green stripes derived from their diet of milkweed leaves. The bright colors may serve as camouflage as well as a warning to predators that the toxic *cardenolides* from the milkweed plant have accumulated inside their bodies. In this way, the milkweed gives the larvae a defense mechanism that stays with them even after they form a pupa and emerge as fully grown adults.

Adult monarch butterflies typically live 4-5 weeks, which they will spend mating, laying eggs, and feeding from a variety of different wildflowers throughout the summer. As Fall approaches, shorter days and cooler temperatures trigger a process called diapause, in which their reproductive hormones are suppressed enabling them to live for up to 9 months. It is this "super generation" of monarchs that will embark on the nearly 3,000-mile flight to their overwintering habitat in the mountains of central Mexico.

Despite their longer lifespans, only 20% of the super generation will complete their journey to Mexico. In addition, monarch populations in Mexico have declined by 70% in the past 30 years. Habitat loss is believed to be the cause of this trend, as more milkweed and wildflower habitat is lost to urban development, agricultural expansion, and pesticide use. You can help monarchs in their migration by planting pollinator gardens with milkweed and other flowering plants.

Want to get involved? Visit MLMP.org to learn more!



(Above) a monarch egg on the underside of a milkweed leaf



(Above) a monarch larva eating a milkweed leaf at Kakiat Park

Aquatic Weed Harvester

Jake Lynch, Natural Resource Conservation Assistant , Cortland County Soil and Water Conservation District

In June of 2025 Cortland County Soil and Water Conservation District purchased an ILH-250 aquatic weed harvester with assistance from a Central New York Community Foundation grant. The harvester has a 7 foot cutter head and has 250 cubic feet of storage. In 2025 the harvester was used on Little York Lake and Tully Lake, where we executed dockside harvesting for over 60 land owners as well as a significant amount of general harvesting in areas of concern. We removed over 25,000 cubic feet of vegetation in more than 100 full harvester loads. Invasive species

including Eurasian Watermilfoil, Starry Stonewort, Purple Loosestrife and Curly-leaf Pondweed were targeted during

harvesting. Removing invasive species helps promote areas where native species can re-establish themselves, and helps manage the nutrient loading of the lakes. Excessive nutrient loads contribute to the emergence of harmful algal blooms, which both lakes experience. These targeted aquatic invasive species can deplete dissolved oxygen levels if left unmanaged, stressing native life in the watershed. On top of that, aquatic invasive species affect bank stability, which promotes erosion, and reduce habitat for native invertebrates. These impacts harm fisheries as a whole, decrease property values, and can colonize and disrupt the functions of wetlands if harvesting is not occurring. The harvester also improves the recreational experience on the water. Removing invasive aquatic vegetation improves swimming, boating, and fishing by clearing navigational pathways and improving native fish habitat. The removed aquatic vegetation is being repurposed as compost by landowners. Link to news video:

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/news/2025/08/28/how-a-weed-whacker-like-machine-helps-to-keep-upstate-waterways-clean->



Where in New York is **Ronny Raindrop®**?

Please note: black pants and a black long sleeved shirt must be worn with the costume.

Ronny Raindrop® accompanied Oswego County SWCD's Erica Schreiner on an adventure to Italy with my high school travel friend.





New York Association of Conservation Districts
c/o Steuben County SWCD
415 W. Morris Street
Bath, NY 14810
www.nyacd.org

What NYACD has been working on the last couple of months.

We have been informed that bill #A5254, the "New York Open Water Data Act," successfully passed both legislative chambers and was subsequently sent to the Governor's office for consideration. It has since been vetoed by the Governor.

Beginning in January, NYACD Board members will contact districts in Divisions III, V, VI, VII, and VIII to encourage those without a Division Representative to appoint one. Districts should also inform the NYACD Board of potential candidates for this role. Comprehensive representation ensures that all district concerns and programs are addressed at monthly NYACD meetings.

The NYACD will hold a by-law meeting in January to review and propose amendments, which will be communicated once finalized. In addition, we are in the process of updating our strategic plans.

In February, NYACD Board members and soil and water districts will attend the 2026 NACD meeting in Texas. This event offers a chance to network, exchange ideas, and gather useful projects and information for improving our state's soil and water quality.

On December 4th, I participated in a 4-Way Partner meeting to discuss programs, projects, concerns, and other pertinent matters related to SWCDs. Another session is scheduled for the coming months. These meetings provide valuable opportunities for partners to share information and collaborate effectively for the benefit of all involved parties.

NYACD informed the Governor about SWCDs' use of EPF funds. Sam Casella also spoke to the Governor's staff, who noted that while many groups contact the Governor about the EPF, she strongly supports SWCDs.

The NYACD Board and I have been handling correspondence and phone inquiries about concerns and support for its work.

Legislative Days are set for Monday, February 9, 2025, and Tuesday, February 10, 2025. The "Taste of New York" event will be held Monday evening for informal networking with Legislators. Districts and directors have been asked by email to attend, along with registration details.

If you plan to stay overnight, rooms have been reserved for Districts at the Hampton Inn, 10 Ulenski Drive, Albany, for \$117.00 per night at your District's expense. Each District

is responsible for making its own reservation. When booking, mention that you are with NYACD and use block code: NYACD to receive the discounted rate. The phone number for the Hampton Inn is (518) 438-2822. Be sure to use block code: NYACD. The cutoff date for the discount rate is 1/9/26. **Don't forget to bring your tax-exempt forms.** Here is the booking link: **Booking Link:**

<https://www.hilton.com/en/book/reservation/deeplink/?ctyhocn=ALBULHX&groupCode=CHHNYA&arrivaldate=2026-02-09&departuredate=2026-02-10&cid=OM,WW,HILTONLINK,EN,DirectLink&fromId=HILTONLINKDIRECT>

The request for Legislative Booklet projects has been issued, and several districts have already submitted their entries. The deadline is December 12, 2025.

The upcoming NYACD Board meeting will take place on Wednesday, December 17, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. and will be held virtually via Zoom.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87238841984?pwd=nDINvN9RYeJOUjnz2Xxv8lscr83Mmm.1>

Respectfully Submitted,

Blanche

Blanche L. Hurlbutt,
NYACD Executive Director



Executive Committee Members

President: Caitlin Stewart
Hamilton County SWCD

Vice President: Jessica Armstrong
Oneida County SWCD

Secretary: Joann Burke
Madison County SWCD

Interim Treasurer: Kristin White
Monroe County SWCD

Member At Large: Alice Halloran
Essex County SWCD

Partners

Natural Resources Conservation Service
Blake Glover

New York Association of Conservation Districts
Blanche L. Hurlbutt

Soil and Water Conservation Committee
Bethany Bzduch

Division Representatives

Division I: Rebecca Campbell
Wyoming County SWCD

Division II: Jason Cuddeback
Cayuga County SWCD

Division III: Carla Yaw
Lewis County SWCD

Division IV: Lydia Brinkley
Tioga County SWCD

Division V: Maren Stoddard
Warren County SWCD

Division VI: Nicholas Klemczak
Schenectady County SWCD

Division VII: Vacant

Division VIII: Olivia Cunningham
Nassau County SWCD