



2014
NASCA

ANNUAL REPORT

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
STATE CONSERVATION AGENCIES**

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CONSERVATION AGENCIES**

Founded 1967

OUR VISION

TO ENHANCE THE ABILITY OF ALL MEMBER CONSERVATION AGENCIES TO FULFILL THEIR
AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCE MISSIONS

OUR MISSION

TO STRENGTHEN MEMBERS' CAPACITY AND INFLUENCE NATIONAL PROGRAMS AND POLICIES BY
PROVIDING LEADERSHIP, FOCUS, AND DIRECTION

OBJECTIVE I

PROVIDE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMS AS MEMBERS IDENTIFY NEEDS

There is an undeniable value to NASCA membership in the form of networking opportunities with our peers from other states. NASCA provides a unique forum for many of our state conservation agencies to share ideas and experiences. Members benefit as more states become active NASCA members due to the increased size of our network. Additionally, NASCA becomes more marketable to inactive member states as the number of active state members increases. With each additional active member we have more to offer one another, and thus we become more effective in our member capacity-building efforts. We therefore strive to solicit more participation from all of our member states and enlist greater participation from staff-level personnel of those states that are currently active.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

NASCA continues to provide opportunities for its members and partners to interact and learn about the conservation delivery topics that are of the utmost importance. In keeping with tradition, we hosted four webinars in 2014. The first was on January 23 and featured our friend Ray Ledgerwood, who presented on effective facilitation skills. The next presentation took place on May 7 and focused on Waters of the United States, and featured speakers from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The third was a series of presentations from around the country on the effectiveness of local work groups. This webinar took place on May 28 and set a NASCA record for webinar participation. Our final webinar for 2014 aired on June 24 and featured NRCS subject matter experts discussing the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Our 2014 webinars reached over 200 participants from 42 states and the District of Columbia. These presentations are also archived at <http://www.nascanet.org/index.php/category/webinars/>



NASCA President Shana Joy speaks with membership at 2014 Annual Meeting in Whitefish Montana.

REGULATORY CERTAINTY

Many of NASCA's member states have expressed an interest in providing agricultural producers with the "certainty to operate" in the face of escalating pressures from environmental regulators, now commonly referred to as "regulatory certainty." NASCA defines this as a voluntary approach to provide "assurances" to the agricultural community so they may conduct business in a predictable regulatory setting in exchange for their implementation of additional BMPs to achieve enhanced environmental benefits.

To help accelerate program development, NASCA developed a regulatory certainty business planning template with partnership from NRCS which provided funding from a CIG grant. This tool was designed for State Conservation Agencies to use as part of their regulatory certainty program development process allowing agencies to select options and considerations that are most relevant to their operations, partners, and agricultural community. The template is available at

<http://www.nascanet.org/index.php/nasca-develops-plan-for-certainty-programs/>

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STATES REPORTED
PROGRAMS
THAT OFFER
REGULATORY
CERTAINTY TO
PRODUCERS

CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD TRAINING

NASCA members from every region in the country have shared their concerns with us about conservation district boards and District Conservationists that fail to work together as effectively as they might. This seems to be a result of limited understanding on the part of each of these two parties as to the responsibilities of the other. With the support of NRCS, NASCA developed complimentary curriculum to our district official training programs targeted at building effective working relationships between district conservationists and the conservation district board(s) in their area of responsibility. The PowerPoint presentation can be found at <http://www.nascanet.org/index.php/resource-library/district-training/>

NATIONAL SURVEY

One of the most valuable services NASCA members can provide is the sharing of information between State Conservation Agencies. This sharing not only keeps fellow NASCA members up to date on conservation delivery innovation, but also provides them with exposure to a variety of administration options. In December 2013 NASCA issued a national survey to its members based on questions asked by our officers, Board of Directors, and members. We are pleased to report that we received an 82% response rate to the survey. Based on the responses, NASCA developed its membership survey report this summer, available at http://www.nascanet.org/nasca/wp-content/uploads/survey/NASCA_2013_survey_to_membership.pdf

DISTRICT OFFICIAL TRAINING



NASCA is continuing to provide one-on-one assistance to those states that request it in order to improve their district official training. Additionally we modified the district official training matrix at the request of the NACD District Operations Committee so that the self-assessments would be more comparable between states. NACD requested this modification to aide with their recognition program.

NASCA Executive Director Mike Brown provided district official training on March 20, 2014 at the 2014 Delaware Association of Conservation Districts (DACD) annual meeting in Dover, DE. His preparation for this training session included revamping Delaware's District Official Training Program. As a result of this program improvement, Delaware's program will be recognized for the first time at the 2015 NACD Annual Meeting. Mike provided a comprehensive district official training program on July 7-8 for the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts (WVACD). Additionally, he spent a week in June in West Virginia preparing the West Virginia Conservation Agency staff to assist with the training delivery. As a result, West Virginia's training will be recognized in 2015 by NACD for the first time. For the second consecutive year Mike was asked to provide multi-state district official training to board supervisors from a number of states at the 2014 NACD NE Regional meeting in Newport, RI on August 25. He provided curriculum on fiduciary responsibilities and how district boards and district conservationists should ideally work together.

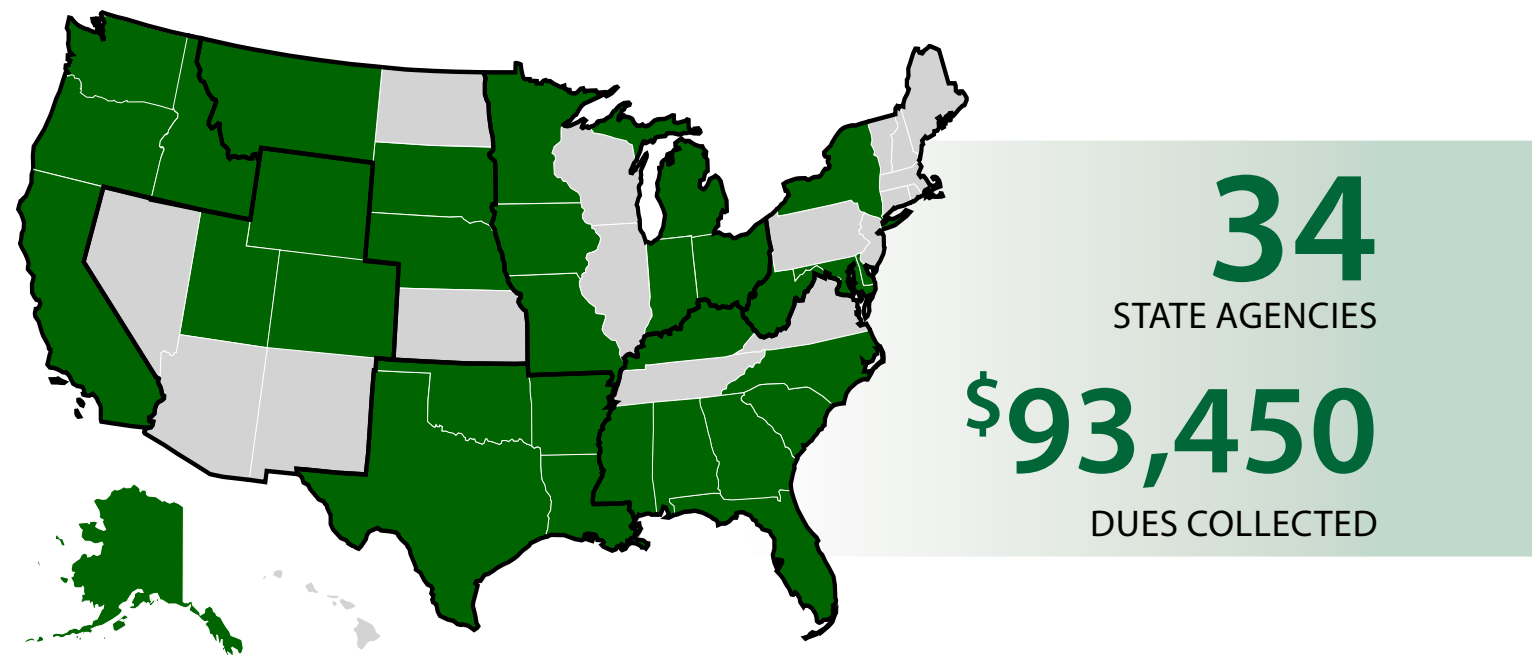
NASCA North-Central Director Bill Wilson of Missouri and NASCA Executive Director Mike Brown continue to work with the NACD District Operations Committee to continually improve our district official training efforts across the country. NASCA believes that district official training ultimately leads to better decision-making at the local level, resulting in more efficient and effective conservation delivery.

OBJECTIVE II TO REMAIN A FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION

NASCA currently depends on member dues, grants, contractual agreements, and earnings from its investment accounts to support the organization's annual budget. Additionally, the organization has worked tirelessly in recent years to streamline its operations in the name of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. In doing so, we have trimmed our budget from \$268,250 in 2008 to \$141,000 in 2015 while at the same time improving service to our member states!

MEMBERSHIP DUES

In 2013 NASCA received dues in the amount of \$93,450 from 34 member states.



AGREEMENTS

NASCA entered into a contribution agreement with NRCS again in 2014 to provide technical training to our members and partners, develop and deliver District Official training programs, develop curriculum for conservation district boards and District Conservationists to work together more effectively, and provide multiple venues for information exchange and technology transfer. Additionally, NRCS was an integral part of the development of our business planning template for regulatory certainty. NASCA is grateful to NRCS for providing a portion of the funding for these projects that provide so much value to our members and partners.

BUDGET

The NASCA board of directors continues to reevaluate it's annual budget reducing costs wherever applicable. NASCA performed well in 2014 exceeding budget expectations

| | 2014 ACTUAL | 2014 BUDGET | 2015 BUDGET |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| TOTAL INCOME | \$135,931 | \$121,000 | \$141,000 |
| OPERATIONS | \$25,990 | \$31,200 | \$33,750 |
| CONTRACTORS | \$94,632 | \$100,000 | \$103,750 |

A SPECIAL THANKS



NASCA would like to thank its 2014 President Mike Thralls of Oklahoma for his leadership. Mike has been a long-time NASCA member who has always shared his keen insights willingly amongst our membership. As our President, Mike proved an unparalleled statesman for conservation, and regularly demonstrated the value of State Conservation Agencies to the National Conservation Partnership. Health issues forced Mike's retirement from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission in September, thus cutting short by a few months the term of his NASCA presidency. Nonetheless, Mike served as one of the most effective leaders we have known, and our organization remains eternally grateful for his dedication, leadership, and friendship.



OBJECTIVE III NATIONALLY REPRESENT ITS MEMBERS

NASCA serves as the voice for its member states in developing conservation policy at the national level. Our staff and leadership keep in constant contact and work effectively in Washington DC with NRCS, EPA, our conservation partners, and a number of NGOs.

NATIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

NASCA is one of five core partners that constitute the National Conservation Partnership. The others are:

- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)
- National Conservation District Employees Association (NCDEA)
- National Association of RC&D Councils (NARC&DC)

NASCA's leadership meets quarterly with these partners to help shape national conservation policy. In fact, NASCA hosted this meeting on September 8 in Whitefish, Montana. Additionally, NASCA's Executive Director meets at least monthly with the NACD CEO, the NCDEA Executive Director, and the NRCS Associate Chief for Conservation. We are diligent about raising awareness to the issues of greatest concern to our membership at the national level.

NASCA Executive Director Mike Brown also travelled to Charlotte, NC in June to attend the National Conservation District Employees Association (NCDEA) Board meeting. NCDEA has become a vital member of the National Conservation Partnership and NASCA is appreciative of their professional development efforts for district employees across the country



ANNUAL MEETING

Each year NASCA members gather to share strategies and experiences in delivering soil and water conservation in their home states. President Shana Joy welcomed members to this year's event in Whitefish, Montana. This year's opening general session featured updates from several of our key partners, including National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) President Earl Garber, National Conservation District Employees Association (NCDEA) President Irene Moore, and National Watershed Coalition (NWC) Executive Director Dr. Dan Sebert. Other keynote speakers during the meeting were Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Jason Weller, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Acting Agricultural Counselor to the Administrator, Allison Wiedeman, and NRCS State Conservationist from Louisiana, Kevin Norton.

Following our opening general session, the meeting broke out into two sessions. State agency directors and administrators met in one session to share issues of concern, discuss national policy, and conduct the business of the organization. Field staff personnel gathered in the other session to share numerous presentations on innovative ideas and programs in their states.



NATIONAL WATERSHED COALITION (NWC)

NASCA continued to work closely with the National Watershed Coalition in 2014 to ensure the sustained viability of the Small Watershed Program. In May, NASCA President Mike Thralls (OK), Brian Farkas (WV), Brent Dykes (GA), Mark Gilbert (MS), and NASCA Executive Director Mike Brown joined NWC Executive Director Dr. Dan Sebert in Washington, D.C. for agency, Hill, and White House visits. The goal was to build political support for watershed planning and operations.

The 2014 Farm Bill included \$250M for Watershed rehabilitation. These funds were targeted for rehabilitation work in 26 states. We learned in mid-summer that several states were having issues in crafting language for working agreements with NRCS that was acceptable to both NRCS and the State Agency. NASCA intervened in August by organizing a national conference call between NRCS and the states that were targeted for this funding to discuss the language discrepancies and offer solutions. Through this effort NASCA members were able to identify the major hurdles and develop language that worked, thus allowing NRCS to encumber these critical funds before the end of the fiscal year.



NASCA AT YOUR SERVICE

In addition to representing its membership at the national level, NASCA also took the opportunity this year to provide a national perspective at some local venues. At the request of the Association of Florida Conservation Districts, NASCA Executive Director Mike Brown and NACD CEO John Larson traveled to Ocala, Florida in early August to give a two hour presentation at AFCD's annual meeting. Many districts in Florida have dealt with a variety of frustrations in recent years, resulting in the dissolution of two conservation districts. Mike and John talked about conservation district history, basic fiduciary responsibilities of district officials, conservation district powers and responsibilities, and the next steps to revitalize Florida's districts.

Mike Brown was also asked to speak on district official responsibilities at a couple of other events. In late October he addressed the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) Board of Directors about fiduciary responsibilities, strategic planning, and the value of creating a statewide conservation district employees' association. In late November, he travelled to Bismarck, North Dakota to present at the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts (NDASCD) Annual Meeting. This presentation focused on district responsibilities and the varied duties of conservation district officials and employees.

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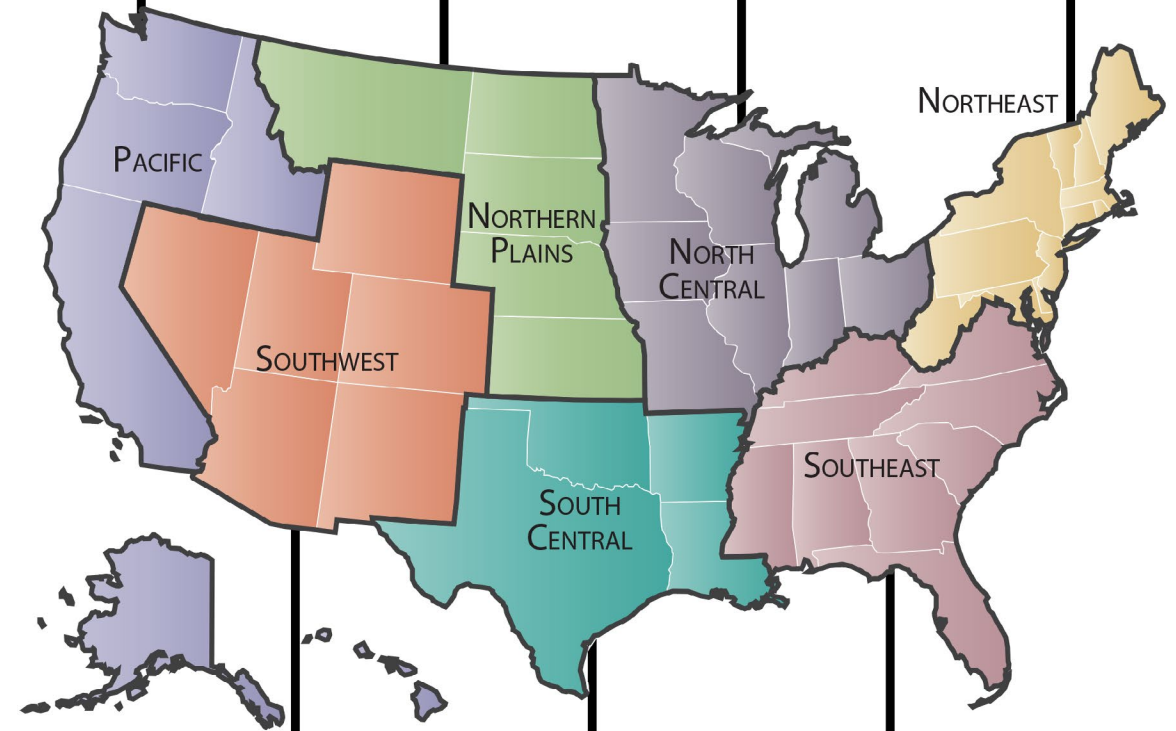
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