WESTCHESTER COUNTY
SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2020 WORK PLAN

American Kestrel at Croton Point Park (Photo by Jeff Seneca/Saw Mill River Audubon)
Westchester County
Soil and Water Conservation District

2020 WORK PLAN

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www.westchestergov.com/soilwater
or
www.planning.westchestergov.com/soil-and-water-conservation
The Westchester County Soil and Water Conservation District is a County entity created in 1967 by an act of the then Westchester County Board of Supervisors (modern-day Board of Legislators) under the New York State Soil and Water Conservation District Law.

The District provides opportunity for the County to obtain state, federal and other non-County funds for projects and activities that help the County meet its stormwater and natural resources management obligations. The District also assists the public with matters specific to the conservation and management of soil, water and other natural resources.

The District is guided by a seven-member Board of Directors. A professional from the County Department of Planning carries out the duties of the District manager in addition to his other responsibilities with the County. He is largely responsible for carrying out the District’s work plan and other District-related administrative and technical responsibilities. The County acts as the District’s treasurer and other County professionals assist the District from time to time.

The Westchester County Executive appoints county residents to the District’s Board of Directors for three-year terms as specified by state law. The volunteers serve as “at-large” members. They each represent the entire county. The Board of Directors generally meets monthly. At its meeting in January, the Board conducts an Annual Organizational Meeting to elect officers.

The County’s five-year cooperative agreement with the District began February 1, 2019. It will expire January 31, 2024. Under the agreement, the County made a commitment to assign two environmental professionals and a secretary from the Department of Planning to carry out the District’s work program as their time allows given their other departmental responsibilities. In exchange, the District agreed to transfer to the County’s operating budget a portion of its annual state financial assistance, which it receives through the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets – Soil and Water Conservation Committee (SWCC). Additional annual state financial assistance and other revenue is used to carry out District activities, projects and programs, usually on County-owned properties.

The District operates, in part, under the authority of Westchester County. It is administered by staff of the County’s Department of Planning. As a result, personnel policies, employee evaluations, and training are managed through the Department of Planning. Procurement and financial policies are also generally developed and implemented through the County. In addition, the District falls under the County governmental structure for purposes of risk assessment and management functions.

The District’s Board of Directors on January 16, 2015, approved a cooperative working agreement with the SWCC and the United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Under this agreement, the SWCC, NRCS and District pledged to assist each other in promoting and implementing mutually acceptable, sound soil and water conservation practices in Westchester County.

The District has a distinct suburban- and urban-oriented work program focused on soil and water resources and ecological conservation and management. This program helps the County address its obligations under State and federal guidelines, policies and regulations.
The District’s priorities include:

- restoring, protecting, managing natural resources;
- installing and retrofitting stormwater management facilities to improve water quality and mitigate flooding;
- controlling erosion and sedimentation and polluted stormwater by advocating best management practices through professional training and watershed-based analyses and recommendations; and
- promoting sound soil and water resources conservation techniques and natural resources stewardship through public outreach and education.

I. Stormwater Management and Natural Resources Restoration

On behalf of the District, the Planning Department will continue to advance the Stormwater Management and Natural Resources Restoration Program, a.k.a., Aquatic Restoration Program, which helps the County address its water quality and stormwater management obligations under state and federal requirements. Because of the District and its relationships with state, federal and non-governmental entities, the County has additional opportunities to seek and receive non-County funding for its priority projects and activities related to stormwater management and natural resources restoration.

Since 1998, nearly 50 individual projects have been completed or are being planned, designed or constructed to more efficiently manage stormwater runoff to improve water quality and, where possible, lessen the risks associated with flooding. Secondary objectives include improved fish and wildlife habitats, passive recreation, and public outreach and education.

The Aquatic Restoration Program’s webpage link, with summaries and photographs of completed projects, is: [www.westchestergov.com/restoration](http://www.westchestergov.com/restoration). In 2020, this webpage will be updated to include projects completed within the past five years.

The projects focus on: (1) natural resources restoration, especially to streams and rivers, freshwater and tidal wetlands, ponds, lakes and meadows; and (2) retrofitting existing and installing new stormwater management facilities. The latter includes innovative technologies to improve water quality by using processes that mimic natural systems and use natural materials.

The following are the most significant projects scheduled for planning, design and/or construction in 2019:

1. **Croton Point Park Grassland Restoration Project**: The two-year restoration of approximately 85 acres of grassland covering the former Croton Landfill at Croton Point Park in Croton-on-Hudson began in March 2019. The restored area plus about another 20 acres not requiring restoration will be maintained under a new management plan that will improve the grassland’s biodiversity. The plan will be implemented following completion of the restoration in late 2020.
The grassland had largely been a patchwork of plant populations and communities, with most dominated by ecologically undesirable vegetation, such as non-native cool season grasses and invasive and non-native mugwort and other species. The goal is to transform the grassland into a more ecologically rich community of plants...largely native, drought-tolerant grasses...which will promote biological diversity and species richness, especially for beneficial insects and birds.

The restoration of each large patch of vegetation is being handled differently in order to achieve the best overall results. The grassland will be frequently mowed on a temporary basis and/or treated with herbicide to eradicate dominant plants. It also will be re-seeded with mixes of desirable grasses and forbs.

The grassland is viewed by naturalists as critically important to many species of birds using the Atlantic Flyway, the migratory route for birds traveling up and down the East Coast. Many other birds, including the bald eagle, also use Croton Point Park, the largest peninsula in the Hudson River.

The project is funded by a $500,000 state grant to the District, which is being used for construction. The District is using additional state funding and its other revenue to finance project design and construction management. The district manager will oversee the project on behalf of the District and Westchester County. A consultant, Larry Weaner Landscape Associates, will handle day-to-day project management. Weeds Inc. is the construction contractor.

2. **Fulton Brook Streambank Stabilization and Restoration Project**: Fulton Brook, a small tributary to the Bronx River, flows in a west-to-east direction and emerges from a large pipe immediately north of the Westchester County Center in White Plains. The pipe carries the stream under a commercial and light industrial area. The stream is above-ground or “day-lighted” from County Center Road to its discharge point in the Bronx River. This section is adjacent to the County Center within the Bronx River Parkway Reservation. Project components will include the removal of sediment from the stream channel and establishment of a vegetated buffer alongside the stream. Hard (e.g., rock revetment) and soft (e.g., live plant stakes) stabilization practices will be included. The project was awarded a state grant by the NYS DEC. It will be matched with county funding. Design is expected to be completed by early 2020 with construction completed in 2021.

3. **Muscoot Farm Drainage and Water Quality Improvement Project**: On behalf of the District, the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) applied for a state grant to construct a drainage and water quality improvement project, to include a stormwater wetland, at Muscoot Farm in Somers. The grant was awarded by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYS DAM) under its Climate Resilient Farming Program. The project’s design has been completed and construction is anticipated to begin in October 2020. Contracts among the involved entities (County, WAC, SWCD and NYS DAM) as well as a construction contractor or multiple contractors must first be executed.
The total project cost is $223,374, of which $89,851 will be reimbursed by the state under the grant. The balance will be paid for by WAC. The project is considered a “track two” project, for which $790,000 in state funding was available. The state received applications seeking a total of $1,778,452.

The project consists of 11 structural and four non-structural best management practices specified by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service to address flooding in critical and heavy farm use areas and grazed pastures and increase farm carbon sequestration. A series of structures for water control (NRCS 587), roof runoff structures (NRCS 558), and a grassed waterway (NRCS 412) will collect surface runoff and direct it to a constructed wetland [water and sediment control basin (NRCS 638)] and critical area planting (NRCS 343)). Fencing (NRCS 382) will exclude animals from the grassed waterway and control basin. A nutrient management plan (NRCS 590) and prescribed grazing plan (NRCS 528) will be developed to accommodate changes in fields and a forage and biomass planting (NRCS 512) will be implemented to restore grazing in affected areas. New silvo-pasture will be created to replace the heavy use areas used to create the constructed wetland. This system of best management practices will prevent flooding of heavy use areas and critical infrastructure during rain events by capturing storm water and redirecting it to the constructed wetland. The proposed implementation will allow significant carbon capture and sequestration on the farm, improve soil health and decrease the farm’s greenhouse gas emissions (GHG).

4. **Conservation Project**: The District has consistently used the modest amount of state funding it receives annually for conservation-related projects to achieve successful products, leveraging the funds with other District revenue and in-kind services and through partnerships with other entities. All of the projects have benefitted County-owned assets. The $6,000 in state funding has been used over the years to create vegetated filter strips, stabilize stream banks, restore meadows, eradicate non-native, invasive plants, and provide other services to the County. By leveraging the funds, the District has often been able to expand the projects’ original scope.

Some past projects will still be part of the District’s work plan in 2020. For example, leveraged conservation project funding in 2018 was used to eradicate hundreds of highly invasive European alder saplings and mature trees from a wetland restoration site in the Bronx River Parkway Reservation in Greenburgh. A relatively modest amount of additional saplings and invasive common reeds were detected in 2019, prompting further eradication in late 2019. The District manager will continue to monitor the site in 2020.

The District will use its 2020 conservation project funding from the state to purchase twelve (12) native trees, 10 feet to 12 feet in height; 2,000 2-inch plugs of blue flag iris (Iris versicolor); and 250 pounds of a native grass seed mix to create a vegetated buffer and aquatic shelf in and around a freshwater pond close to the Mamaroneck River at Westchester County-owned Maple Moor Golf Course in White Plains. The golf course is located in the Long Island Sound watershed. The buffer will be planted with trees and grasses and the aquatic shelf will be planted with the blue flag iris. The buffer and aquatic
filtration practices will help filter pollutants, including the nutrients nitrogen and phosphorus, from the golf course before they reach the Mamaroneck River and downstream Long Island Sound. Tree species will include pin oak (Quercus palustris), river birch (Betula nigra), black tupelo (Nyssa sylvatica), and swamp white oak (Quercus bicolor). These will be planted on the County-owned golf course by Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation staff. Specific grass species have not yet been determined but the District will require that selected species be native, of substantive benefit to wildlife, and will maximize the water quality improvement capabilities of the buffer. The trees, plugs and seed mix will be purchased and planted/sown in early spring 2020.

II. Planning and Analyses

1. **Bronx River Corridor Management Plan:** The District hired fluvial geomorphologists with expertise in stream assessments, restoration and stabilization to develop a Bronx River Corridor Management Plan for the County’s 807-acre Bronx River Parkway Reservation, a linear park stretching from Kensico Reservoir Dam in Mount Pleasant and North Castle south to the county’s border with New York City (Bronx Borough). The plan and its recommendations will be formulated based on the consultants’ fieldwork, hydrologic and hydraulic analyses, and other characterizations of the river channel and corridor. It will feature recommendations for making improvements within the reservation to improve the river’s water quality, curb flooding and enhance the corridor’s ecological value. The consultants also will develop conceptual plans for specific site along the river using information they gleaned during the study.

   The consultants will present the plan as two volumes. The first volume was completed in the spring 2019. It is now available online at www.westchestergov.com/soilwater and at www.westchestergov.com/bronxriver. It consists of the consultants’ findings based on their fieldwork and analyses. A draft of the second volume will be completed for review by the end of 2019 and is expected to be fully complete and available online in the spring 2020. It will consist of the consultants’ recommendations and conceptual plans.

2. **Watershed Management Plan for the Watersheds of Stephenson Brook, Burling Brook, Pine Brook and Larchmont Harbor:** A grant application seeking funding from the federal Long Island Sound Futures Fund was submitted in 2019 and would, if it is approved, result in a new watershed management plan for Pine, Stephenson and Burling brooks and Larchmont Harbor. A previous plan for the same watersheds was completed in 1997 and that plan will be updated to address relatively new criteria recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. If the grant is awarded, work on the watershed management plan would likely begin in late 2020.

   The District and Westchester County’s Planning Department partnered with the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC) to develop the grant
application and the three agencies will work together, and with a consultant, to develop the updated plan if the grant is awarded. The District would provide the cash match and the Planning Department and NEIWPCC would provide the in-kind services match for the grant. The new plan would be crafted so as to align with the EPA’s recommended nine-element (9E) watershed plan framework. The 9E plan will coordinate and guide planning and watershed protection activities in municipalities within the subject watersheds (Larchmont, Mamaroneck Town and Village, New Rochelle, Pelham, and Pelham Manor) in such a way that the quality of waters entering the Sound is protected and improved.

The WAC 9E watershed management plan include these elements (summarized):

- Identify and quantify pollution sources;
- Identify water quality target and pollutant reductions needed;
- Identify best management practices to help achieve reductions;
- Describe the financial and technical assistance needed to implement best management practices (BMPs);
- Describe stakeholder outreach, how their input was incorporated, and their role to implement plan;
- Estimated schedule to implement BMPs;
- Describe milestones and estimated time frames for implementation of BMPs;
- Identify criteria to assess water quality improvement as the plan is implemented;
- Describe the monitoring plan that will collect water quality data to measure water quality improvement.

3. **Artificial Reefs Using Reef Balls; Long Island Sound Coast at County-Owned Facilities:** A grant application seeking funding from the federal Long Island Sound Futures Fund was submitted in 2019. The grant would, if it is approved, result in a study with accompanying conceptual plans that may lead to the placement of artificial reefs using “reef balls” at six County-owned properties fronting Long Island Sound.

A “reef ball” is a concrete structure resembling a wiffle ball that has been cut in half. When a “reef ball” is placed at or just below the intertidal zone, shellfish, seaweed and other organisms attach themselves to it. An artificial reef is then created. Artificial reefs have many of the same benefits as natural reefs. Due to their strong structural core, artificial reefs created by “reef balls” help break up waves before they reach the shore, thereby lessening the risk of damage to natural and man-made features. And the marine life living on artificial reefs improves water quality through chemical and biological processes.

The properties to be analysed would be:

- Edith G. Read Natural Park and Wildlife Sanctuary, City of Rye (County of Westchester)
- Playland Park, City of Rye (County of Westchester)
- Marshlands Conservancy, City of Rye (County of Westchester)
- Harbor Island Park and Mamaroneck Wastewater Treatment Plant, Village of Mamaroneck (Village of Mamaroneck and County of Westchester)
- Five Islands Park and New Rochelle Wastewater Treatment Plant, City of New Rochelle (City of New Rochelle and County of Westchester)
- Glen Island Park, City of New Rochelle (County of Westchester)

If the grant is awarded, the study is expected to begin in late 2020.

III. **Education**

**Professional Development and Public Educational Workshops**

The District will continue its annual sponsorship of educational workshops for professionals and general public in 2020. The District will sponsor at least two related but differently styled workshops, one in the spring and one in December 2020. Due to the time-consuming nature of workshop planning, programming and administration coupled with limited staffing available to the District, the District will seek the services of a professional consultant or other entity to plan, program and administer the workshops with assistance from the District manager in 2020.

The workshops’ theme will focus on progressive, state-of-the-art activities, practices and programs associated with stormwater management, especially those that will both improve water quality and reduce the risk of impacts associated with flooding. The spring workshop will be open to the general public with no restrictions on audience size and present a relatively broad overview of new ideas and technologies concerning the management of stormwater runoff. It will be a theater-style seating workshop with expert speakers and panelists. The December workshop will be more of an interactive workshop whereby audience members will sit at tables, listen to speakers, be asked to do problem-solving assignments in groups, and tour sites related to stormwater management. This workshop also will be open to the general public but it will be clearly aimed at professionals with some expertise in the subject. It will complement the first workshop. Audience size will be restricted to a manageable number.

The District also will try to sponsor a third workshop on meadow and grassland restoration for small, medium and large properties, both privately and publicly owned. Because the District is currently engaged in restoring the largest grassland within a 50-mile radius of Croton Point Park (see above), a workshop on this topic is timely and will help draw attention to this restorative work. The Croton Point Park project will be completed in 2020. The District manager will work with the consulting firm that designed and is managing construction of the Croton Point Park grassland restoration project to develop a half- to full-day workshop with a field trip component that is open to the general public and tailored to non-professionals and professional alike, including homeowners and large property owners. The workshop would be in either May or June or September or October. Its audience size is expected to be modest compared to the first stormwater management workshop noted above.
As in recent years, the stormwater management workshops will be held at the Westchester County Center in White Plains. And as with past workshops, the target audience of the first, larger workshop will include public and private sector professionals, municipal board and commission members, and county residents and other non-professionals with an interest in the workshop topic. The meadow and grassland restoration workshop may be held at a location near Croton Point Park or another meadow and/or grassland that is suitable for a participant field trip.

IV. Agricultural Education

The District will continue to work with the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) to develop educational information concerning agriculture’s relationship with soil and water resources and conservation practices in Westchester County. It also will partner with WAC, when practicable, to promote sound agricultural stewardship on individual farms. WAC's East of Hudson Office is based at County-owned Hilltop Hanover Farm in Yorktown.

Forming a partnership to cooperatively address their mutual goal of educating the public about soil and water resources is a natural fit for both the District and WAC. The District, therefore, will work with WAC in 2020 to develop and execute educational activities and/or projects that will benefit the agricultural community in Westchester County.

V. General Public Education and Outreach

Planning Department staff, on behalf of the District, will assist the following other educational activities in 2020:

1. **2020 Hudson Valley Regional Envirothon and New York State Envirothon:** In previous years, the District had reached out to Westchester County school district superintendents, high school principals, and teachers who led Envirothon teams in the past in mid-fall and –winter advising them of an upcoming Hudson Valley Regional Envirothon. The regional Envirothon is usually held in April or May. This effort has had limited success. For the 2020 regional Envirothon, the District will develop an email list of public and private high school science department chairs and reach out to them as well as superintendents, principals and teachers. Based on feedback from teachers, this approach might yield greater participation in the event that just reaching out to superintendents and principals. The District manager will reach out to all those on the District’s email list in mid-fall as well as mid-winter.

The date and location of the 2020 Hudson Valley Regional Envirothon is uncertain at this time (November 2019). In 2019, it was held May 1 at the Taconic Retreat Center in Milan. The following counties participate in the regional Envirothon: Columbia, Delaware, Dutchess, Greene, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester. For the past decade, Westchester County has had more high school teams competing in the regional Envirothon than any other county in the Hudson River valley. Nearly 50 high school students from Westchester County participated in 2019.
The District will continue to financially support the Hudson Valley Regional Envirothon with a 2020 contribution of at least $500. The seven participating conservation districts and a small number of individual donors provide financial support for the regional Envirothon. The District also will pay the New York State Envirothon entry fee for the highest scoring Westchester team. Last year, the fee was $475. Each county’s highest scoring team is eligible to participate in the state Envirothon. The state competition is usually held at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva in May.

2. **Westchester County Soil and Water Conservation District Webpage and Facebook Page:** The District’s webpage is accessible via the County of Westchester website. The District’s webpage offers visitors a substantial amount of information, through links to various county, state, federal and other publications related to soil and water conservation and management.

The District’s webpage address can be accessed from the following websites:

- [www.westchestergov.com/soilwater](http://www.westchestergov.com/soilwater)

The District’s Facebook page address is:

- [www.facebook.com/westchesterswcd](http://www.facebook.com/westchesterswcd)

The webpage and Facebook page will continue to be updated to expand or refresh the information they contain.

3. **Develop Educational Signs for County-Owned Hudson River Parks:** The District manager has applied for a state grant that would enable the County of Westchester to hire a consultant to develop a plan, to include conceptual sketches, for installing public educational signs in four Westchester County-owned parks fronting the Hudson River. The grant’s cash match would be paid for by the District. The grant also would allow the County to install up to approximately 10 signs in at least two of the parks. The parks to be included in the plan are George’s Island Park, Croton Point Park, Kingsland Point Park and Lighthouse, and Habirshaw Park (partially leased to the Center for the Urban River at Beczak). Notification of grant awards will be made by the end of 2019. If the grant is awarded to the County, this project will likely begin in mid- to late 2020.

If the grant is awarded, the plan and signboards, including their graphics, would be developed and designed by a consultant with assistance from County staff. A sign manufacturer would then transform the designs into mounted signboards on posts. Similar signs have been installed at other County-owned sites, including stormwater management project sites in the Bronx River Parkway Reservation, Lasdon Park and Arboretum and Saxon Woods Golf Course.
The educational signs would educate the public about the benefits of and threats to natural resources, including fish and wildlife, along the Hudson River and what the public can do to protect them. They also will educate the public about stormwater management practices to both improve water quality and reduce the rate and/or volume of stormwater runoff (i.e., flood control). Information may include an explanation of restoration techniques for natural resources, such as wetlands and grassland, as well as describe various best management practices, including stormwater management practices.

**Provide Technical Information to the Public and Municipal and County Staffs on Soil and Water Conservation Issues:** Planning Department staff, on behalf of the District, will continue to assist county residents and others, including municipal representatives, with soil and water conservation, natural resources and stormwater management, and general environmental issues. This assistance includes the dissemination of mapping, publications, guidance documents and other information obtained from County, state and federal sources, including soil surveys, model ordinances and environmental educational materials.

Much of this information is digitally available through the District’s webpage at:

- [www.westchestergov.com/soilwater](http://www.westchestergov.com/soilwater)

and other County webpages, such as:

- [www.westchestergov.com/restoration](http://www.westchestergov.com/restoration)
- [www.planning.westchestergov.com/environment/flooding](http://www.planning.westchestergov.com/environment/flooding)
- [www.planning.westchestergov.com/environment/water-quality](http://www.planning.westchestergov.com/environment/water-quality)

### VI. Other Activities

**Hydrilla Control Program in Westchester County**

Hydrilla or "water thyme" (Hydrilla verticillata) is an aquatic plant from Asia that is one of the most difficult aquatic invasive species to control and eradicate in the United States. Infestations can adversely impact recreation, tourism and aquatic ecosystems. It is a federally listed noxious weed. Its movement between states and in foreign commerce is prohibited. It is a popular aquarium plant but prohibited from sale or possession in New York State.

Hydrilla was discovered in the Croton River in October 2013 and later found in Croton Bay during a site survey in 2014 in the towns of Cortlandt and Ossining. Croton Bay is at the confluence of the Croton and Hudson rivers. This survey also revealed that hydrilla is well-established in the Croton River and the New Croton Reservoir. Because hydrilla remains in the Croton River and Croton Bay, it threatens habitats in the Hudson River and its tributaries. Herbicide treatments by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) began in 2017.
Approached by the NYS DEC in 2017, the District agreed to formally partner with it and New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYS DAM) for two years beginning in 2018 to assist the NYS DEC’s efforts to eradicate hydrilla from the Croton River, excluding New Croton Reservoir managed by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, and Croton Bay. The District entered into a contract with the NYS DAM so that the NYS DAM could transfer funds received from the NYS DEC to the District. The NYS DEC and NYS DAM have a separate agreement enabling the transfer of hydrilla-related funds between the two agencies. The District then contracted with a consultant chosen by the NYS DEC and District to provide public education and outreach and manage the NYS DEC’s herbicide treatment program for the Croton River and Bay. The consultant is directly supervised on a daily basis by the NYS DEC. All contracts related to this arrangement will expire on March 31, 2020, thereby fulfilling the District’s commitment.

Agricultural Protection

The District has long been concerned about the needs of the agricultural community and the declining amount of agricultural land in Westchester County. The District will continue to support projects and programs that encourage agricultural viability in the County and which complement the Westchester County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, whose implementation is a charge of the Westchester County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board.

1. **Soil Group Worksheets**: The Planning Department, on behalf of the District, will continue to offer assistance to residents seeking tax relief for agricultural lands by completing soil identification forms for agricultural parcels. The form, called a “soil group worksheet,” is required by municipal tax assessors from landowners applying for reduced property taxes under municipal agricultural tax assessments, which allows qualifying farmland to be taxed at an agricultural value rather than a market (non-agricultural development) value. The form must be completed by the District. The Planning Department, whose staff completes the form on behalf of the District, uses the County’s Geographic Information System (GIS) and the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service’s *Soil Survey for Putnam and Westchester Counties, NY* to identify and characterize soil types on selected parcels.

4. **New York State Grown and Certified Program**: The New York State Grown and Certified program identifies and promotes producers who adhere to the state’s food safety and environmental sustainability programs. The program makes it easy for consumers to identify local, safely-handled, and environmentally responsible agricultural products. This voluntary program is a cooperative effort among producers, processors, wholesalers, retailers, restaurants, and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to meet consumer demand for high-quality food and agricultural products. Qualifying participants can display a label clearly denoting that their products meet the quality standards of the state’s Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program and food safety programs, such as the federal Department of Agriculture’s Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) program. Soil and water conservation districts must be involved in the
certification process due to the requirements of the AEM program.

The District no longer participates in the AEM program, but it is willing to work with any participating district from another county who is willing and able to inspect Westchester County farms to verify that they meet AEM program standards. However, no Westchester County farms have yet expressed a desire to participate in the Grown and Certified program.

VII. Regional Programs

The District will continue to participate in the following regional efforts that support and complement the goals and objectives of the District in 2020:

1. **Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC):** As mentioned several times above, the District and WAC have a long-established and active partnership that will continue in 2020. According to WAC, its mission is “to promote the economic viability of agriculture and forestry, the protection of water quality, and the conservation of working landscapes through strong local leadership and sustainable public-private partnerships.” Its mission, therefore, is closely aligned with that of the District. This collaboration is strengthened by reciprocal participation by a District representative on WAC’s East of Hudson Agricultural Program Committee and by WAC representatives on the District’s Board of Directors.

2. **Lower Hudson Coalition of Conservation Districts (LHCCD):** The District will continue to participate in the LHCCD, which is comprised of soil and water conservation districts from Albany, Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Ulster and Westchester counties and New York City. The LHCCD was formed under a Memorandum of Agreement signed by member districts to promote and facilitate regional projects in the Hudson River valley. Under the LHCCD’s mission, participating districts work together to preserve, protect and enhance the natural resources of the Hudson River estuary and its watershed, particularly to improve water quality. It focuses on:

   - stormwater management and green infrastructure implementation
   - stormwater education for professionals
   - small acreage farm conservation
   - water resources management and watershed planning

The LHCCD is administered by a part-time coordinator who assists member districts, develops programming for an annual stormwater management conference, and applies for grants to support the LHCCD mission.

*The 2020 Annual Plan of the Westchester County Soil and Water Conservation District was unanimously approved by the District’s Board of Directors on October 18, 2019.*