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## **FISCAL YEAR 2020 ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2019 - JUNE 30, 2020**

### **Background**

Berkshire Conservation District (BCD, the District) is a non-profit, tax-exempt state organization founded in 1946 as one of more than 3,000 conservation districts across the country mandated by state law and guided by an elected volunteer Board of Supervisors. Working in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), BCD is dedicated to environmental education and the conservation of natural resources and best land use and agricultural practices in Berkshire County, MA. The District does not receive regular state aid for its operations. Available programming is dependent year-to-year on funds provided by grant awards, fundraising sales, and private donations. Past programming has included funding of environmental scholarships for local students at Berkshire Community College and UMass Amherst, hosting educational workshops, and providing community/school programs.

### **Mission**

*"The Berkshire Conservation District helps farmers, landowners and land managers improve and protect their natural resources. In cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we offer assistance through education and outreach."*

### **Fundraising Efforts**

In the past, BCD has hosted a spring plant sale and a fall bulb sale that offered flowers, trees, and shrubs to beautify our communities, promote gardening, build wildlife habitat and encourage reforestation. In FY20, our spring and fall sales were suspended in order for the District to focus on implementing the No-Till rental and nutrient management programs. The District is considering a fall 2020 sale, incorporating an emphasis on pollinator-friendly and native species.

In early 2020, the District was awarded a grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) to implement Phase 1 of a Nutrient Management Initiative. Nutrient management is the process of managing the amount, source, timing and method of nutrient application with the goal of optimizing farm productivity while minimizing nutrient losses that can create unintended environmental consequences. The goals of this program are to research current nutrient management regulations in 2020 and in FY21, Phase 2 would reach out to landowners and farmers about these regulations and assist them in their efforts to reduce excess nutrients washing into neighboring wetlands through runoff from lawns, pasture, and farmland within Berkshire County.

BCD also received funding in 2020 through the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund to initiate a pilot program to educate residents and implement small-scale pollinator gardens in one Berkshire town that passed a 'Pollinator-Friendly Community' resolution. This initiative builds on the District's mission of protecting natural resources by bringing a tangible project directly to the community while raising awareness about the importance and decline of pollinators. Outreach and planning took place in 2020 and anticipated design and planting will occur in the spring of 2021.

The No-Till Seeder rental program, in its second year, was used on approximately 300 acres in 2020. This program allows farmers to try the no-till method for seeding as an alternative to purchasing the equipment. The concept of no-till practices is to minimize disturbing the soil structure when planting to reduce erosion and decrease evaporation. No-till seeding methods also decrease CO2 emissions, which in turn help to slow the global climate crisis. The seeder is housed by a local farmer and is available for rent by farmers

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who share the use of the machine over the growing season. The daily rental rate and a per-acre fee helps to cover maintenance of the seeder and provide administrative support. The District is deeply grateful to our Associate and Caretaker of the seeder, Mike Balawender, for his time and expertise in interacting with farmers and facilitating the rentals.

We also want to thank all of our friends who have supported us within the last year. We could not have done it without all of your generous support! Most especially:

- The District Board of Supervisors: Adam Galambos, Ron Kujawski, Donna Kittredge, David Ellis and Ned Kirchner.
- Natural Resources Conservation Services: Gary Blazejewski, District Conservationist; Daniel Tighe and Jake Rathbun, Soil Conservationists.
- Thomas Anderson, Executive Secretary, State Commission for Soil, Water and Related Resources, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.
- Michael Leff, Executive Director, Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts
- Our fellow conservation/environmental/agricultural community partners including BEAT, Berkshire Grown, Housatonic Valley Association, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures.

#### **Looking Ahead to FY 2021**

In addition to the on-going No-Till program, the District was awarded grant funding for Phase 2 of the Nutrient Management Initiative through EOEEA to implement the outreach and education part of the Initiative.

The District is considering offering a fall bulb and tree seedling sale in 2021.

The goals and objectives of the District in FY21 include:

- Continue to prioritize our relationship with local NRCS agents
- Attract and maintain a diverse board of supervisors
- Cultivate and leverage strategic partnerships that compliment our mission
- Regularly engage with our local, state, and national counterparts

#### **Board Members(Supervisors)**

The District is currently looking for two individuals interested in serving on our diverse and active board. Board members attend a monthly meeting (remotely), help guide the focus of the District and volunteer for special events offered throughout the year. The District welcomes new faces and ideas as they relate to conservation of our natural resources of Berkshire County. If you are interested or know of someone who would be a great fit, please contact the District via email, [berkshireconservationdistrict@gmail.com](mailto:berkshireconservationdistrict@gmail.com).

#### **BCD Board of Supervisors**

Adam Galambos, Chair  
Ron Kujawski, Vice Chair  
Donna Kittredge, Secretary  
David Ellis, Treasurer  
Ned Kirchner

**Associate:** Mike Balawender