

THE CONSERVATION CONNECTION

News from MCSWCD



Protecting Today, Providing Tomorrow

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2026-2030 AEM Strategic Plan

The District has released our updated Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Strategic Plan for 2026 through 2030. Through AEM, the District assists farmers with evaluation, installation, and improvement of conservation management practices, serving as the primary tool used to help farmers implement conservation projects on the ground since 1998.

The AEM Strategic Plan provides the framework for the next five years of agricultural conservation work across the county including soliciting new farms and farmers to join the program, expand on existing work already done through AEM, update farm information, and more.

The mission of the Monroe County AEM program is to promote the awareness and adoption of agricultural conservation practices on local farms and increase environmental stewardship and climate resiliency among agricultural producers while enhancing the economic viability of agriculture in Monroe County. The AEM program also seeks to improve awareness of the benefits of agriculture throughout the County, assist agricultural producers with achieving their farm’s objectives, and protect and improve local water quality and natural resources.

To learn more about AEM and read the AEM Strategic Plan for 2026-2030: <https://monroecountyswcd.org/aem/>

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AGRICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

2026 District Dates & Deadlines

April 23-24

Tree & Shrub Distribution

April 25

Tree & Shrub Overstock Sale

Our office will be closed:

Memorial Day -

May 25th

Juneteenth -

June 19th

Tree & Shrub Pick-Up is Right Around the Corner!



If you ordered trees and shrubs through our 2026 Conservation Tree & Shrub Program and are itching to get them planted, you don't have to wait much longer!

Pre-ordered seedlings will be available for pick-up between **9am and 5pm on April 23rd or April 24th** at the Monroe County **ecopark** located at **10 Avion Drive**. Orders not picked up by May 1st will be forfeited without refund.

Planting trees and shrubs provides numerous benefits including wildlife shelter and food, soil erosion prevention, air and water quality improvement, oxygen production, rainwater and snowmelt runoff reduction, temperature regulation assistance, noise reduction, and increased property aesthetics. By participating in this program, our customers assist in all these conservation efforts and more!

If you missed out on pre-ordering, our first-come, first-serve overstock sale will be Saturday, April 25th from 9am - 11am (or earlier if all items sell out) at the Monroe County ecopark (same location as pre-order pickups). Stock will be limited and not all species in our catalog may be available.

For more details on the Annual Conservation Tree & Shrub Program or to make sure you do not miss out on pre-ordering next year by signing up for our mailing list visit our website:

<https://monroecountyswcd.org/tree-shrub-program/>



IMPORTANT TREE & SHRUB PROGRAM DATES & TIMES

Tree & Shrub Distribution	4/23 & 4/24 (9am - 5pm)
Overstock Sale	4/25 (9am - 11am)

Spring Tree Planting Volunteers Needed!

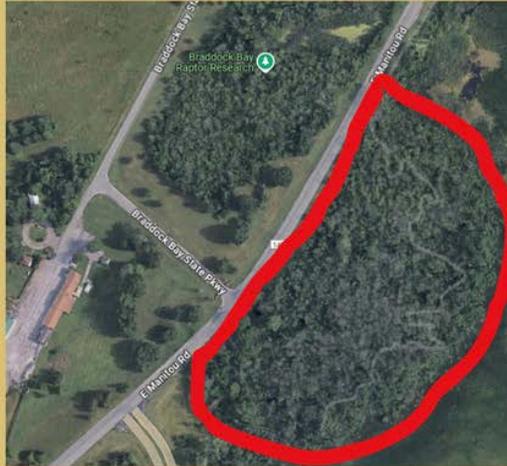
The MCSWCD is entering the third and final year of tree planting efforts of a large reforestation project funded through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) US Department of Agriculture Forest Service.

Over 140 trees are scheduled to be planted in the Braddock Bay Wildlife Management Area on Saturday May 2nd. Details can be found on the graphic below:

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!
TREE PLANTING AT BRADDOCK BAY

Where: Forest Across From
Braddock Bay Park
(199 E Manitou Rd
Rochester, NY 14612)

When: Saturday May 2nd
Time: 10am – noon



Come help restore canopy lost to the invasive emerald ash borer
Limited tools will be available to borrow
Please bring your own tools if you can

USDA FS NEW YORK STATE Department of Environmental Conservation

A few of our partners within this effort are also organizing planting events and in need of volunteers including the **Oatka Creek Watershed Committee** and the **Rush Recreation and Park Association**.

These organizations will be planting on the southwest region of the county.

To connect with the Oatka Creek Watershed Committee about the upcoming planting events at Canawaugus Park, please email the chairman, Peter Lent, at

LENT@FRONTIERNET.NET

To connect with the Rush Recreation and Park Association about the upcoming planting events at Hundred Acre Nature Park please email their organization at

RUSH.NY.RPA@GMAIL.COM

Local High School Students Prepare for Annual Envirothon Competition

Nearly 80 students who will be participating in the Monroe County Envirothon in May joined the District and our topic instructors for the year at Seneca Park Zoo to get an introduction to each of the topics they will be tested on come May.

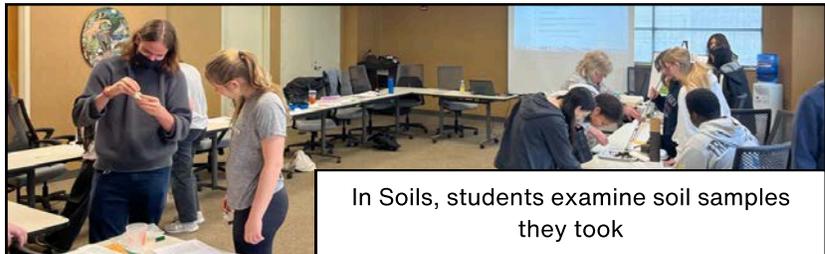


Teams from Brockport High School, Greece Arcadia High School, and The Harley School learned about each topic from instructors from Rochester Institute of Technology (Aquatics), Seneca Park Zoo (Wildlife), NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (Forestry), Oatka Creek Watershed Committee (Soils), and District staff (Current Issue).

Thanks to all the instructors for leading the presentations and many thanks to the Seneca Park Zoo for once again hosting the workshop!

Teams will now study up and prepare oral presentations for the Envirothon on May 19th where they will compete to move on to the state competition.

In Forestry, students take DBH measurements



In Soils, students examine soil samples they took



In Aquatics, students examine water samples

Youth Environmental Education Volunteers Needed!

The annual Monroe County Envirothon at Ellison Park will need volunteers to make the event a success! To learn more about what Envirothon is all about, visit our website: <https://monroecountyswcd.org/envirothon/>.

Volunteers will help with event set-up and take-down, picture taking, and student team management! If you are interested in volunteering in May, please reach out to our office at mcswcd@monroecounty.gov or 585-753-7380.

2026 Rochester Urban Agriculture Conference



Earlier this month the District participated in the 2026 Rochester Urban Agriculture Conference held at East High School for local community gardeners, policymakers, organizations, and more! This conference is an annual effort coordinated by the Urban Agriculture Working Group (UAWG), of which the District is a proud member of. The mission of UAWG is to strengthen the urban agriculture movement in Rochester, develop community gardening policy, and address resource and educational barriers to urban agriculture and community gardening of all kinds.

The District was one of 20 organizations who tabled at the conference providing the opportunity to learn about our work with urban agriculture to nearly 300 attendees, selling tickets out again! The conference also featured various workshops including growing in small spaces, gardening for resilience, building and sustaining school gardens, seed saving, and more.

Thanks to everyone who attended this year and dedicated they day to sharing their own gardening experiences and learning more about the many different facets of urban gardening! We hope to see you again next year!

For more information or to be added to the UAWG list-serve, please contact our office.



The opening welcome at the start of the conference



Workshops included "Irrigation 101 for Small Growers" and "Berries as an Ideal Crop for Gardens"



Attendees visit the District's table

Attention Farmers: Upcoming Pesticide Collection

On May 7th, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) will be hosting a CleanSweepNY pesticide collection event in Spencerport for Monroe County farmers and certified pesticide applicators/technicians. Additional collection events are being held that week in Erie County, Niagara County, and Seneca County.

In addition to pesticides the following materials may also be accepted at no charge: fertilizers, paints and other coatings, devices containing mercury, motor oil, antifreeze/coolant, cleaners, sanitizers, degreasers, gasoline, sealers, and light bulbs.

Pre-registration is required to participate in this program! To register email the DEC at cleansweep@dec.ny.gov or call them at 518-225-8146. You must register by April 27th. For more information visit the DEC website: <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/pesticides/special-initiatives>

Household chemicals are NOT accepted through this event. Residents with household chemicals and other hazardous waste should make an appointment with the Monroe County ecopark (<https://www.monroecounty.gov/ecopark/>)

Invasive Oak Wilt Fungus Expands its Range

A new invasive fungus has expanded its range and has been found closer to Monroe County in summer of 2025. Formerly limited to Central New York, Oak Wilt has now been found in Ontario and Yates counties leading to quarantine zones. Movement of oak wood out of quarantine zones is restricted, thus limiting the spread of oak wilt and giving DEC time to treat the confirmed infected areas and monitor nearby areas for additional infections.

Oak Wilt is a fungus that blocks the flow of water and nutrients from the roots to the crown, causing the leaves to wilt and fall off, usually killing the tree. Trees in the red oak group (red oak, scarlet oak, pin oak, black oak) can die within a few weeks to six months, and the disease can spread quickly from tree to tree. Trees in the white oak group (white oak, bur oak, chestnut oak, swamp white oak), often take years to die and the disease usually does not spread to additional trees. Signs of Oak Wilt include wilting and falling leaves in summertime, brown coloration on leaves, and branch dieback. Early fallen leaves are the most obvious sign that an oak tree may be infected.

If you think you have Oak Wilt present report it by following the steps on the DEC Oak Wilt webpage: <https://dec.ny.gov/nature/forests-trees/forest-health/oak-wilt>

Fallen browning leaves of an infected oak

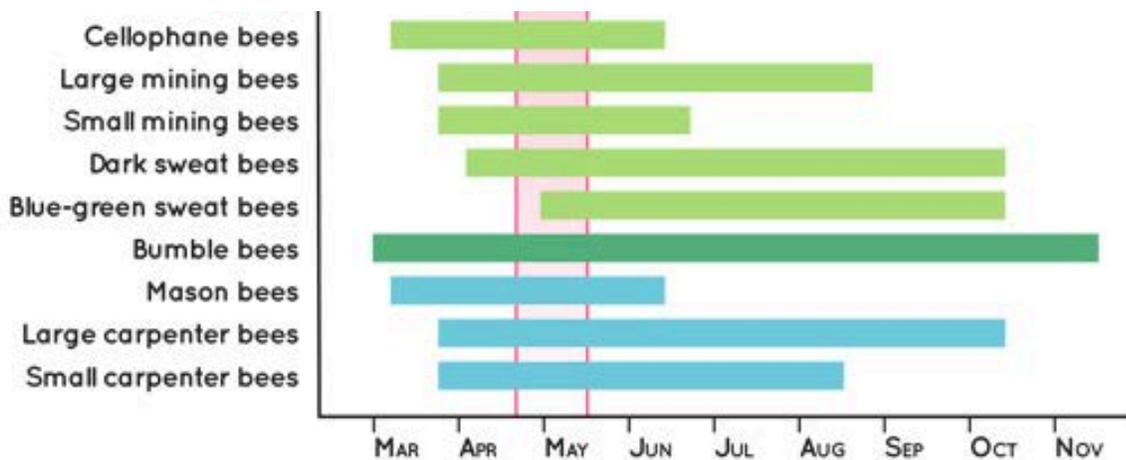


Conservation-Minded Spring Yard Maintenance

The unusually warm weather earlier in March was certain to get everyone itching to get ready for spring, but for some of wild neighbors it can be more harmful than helpful to get an early jump on spring yard maintenance. Warm weather isn't the sole trigger for spring pollinator species to emerge and get back to work, so delaying garden and yard clean-up until true constant spring temperatures (at least 50F for over a week) can help protect still overwintering pollinators. Brush piles, still-standing vegetation stalks, and leaf piles are all providing valuable cover for them. New York State is home to over 450 native bee species; most of which overwinter as pupae, patiently waiting to emerge come spring. Other species, like bumblebees, have only the queen remaining come fall



and if her overwintering nest habitat is destroyed she won't be able to start a new colony. Some adult butterflies overwinter under debris and leaf piles as well like the mourning cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*) (L). Other native species using those piles for cover include beneficial beetles, firefly larvae, moths, rabbits, and more.



The above chart, courtesy of the Xerces Society, shows the diversity of emergence times for all of our different native bee groups. This is why it is important to delay yard and garden maintenance until absolutely necessary.

Conservation-Minded Spring Yard Maintenance (cont.)

So what about No Mow May? Should I actually delay all yard maintenance for that long? While the idea of letting your lawn go and be naturally wild is a nice idea, the fact is that letting it go for that long may be doing more harm than good in the long run.

Unless you are never going to mow your lawn again, letting it grow and grow for two months may attract pollinators, but then once you cut all that vegetation the extra pollinators you attracted will suddenly be without the habitat or flowering species they had relied upon the last two months, not to mention those pollinators will likely be there when you mow. Pollinators won't be the only insects attracted to your "wilding" lawn either. Ticks and other pests will be more abundant which can be troublesome for you or your pets given the threats of disease carrying.

Additionally, native flowering or meadow species may not be what grows in your lawn if you let it go. Especially in more urban and suburban areas, not maintaining your lawn will likely lead to invasive species establishing over native species. Beneficial pollinator species like coneflowers, asters, and susans are not naturally in the seed bank of your property after the foundation and yard were built.

Once it is time to cut your lawn the dense and high vegetation can also put more wear and tear on your equipment.

If you want to create pollinator habitat on your property consider a pollinator garden or go through the steps to create a real pollinator meadow including stripping the topsoil and planting specific native species for pollinators.

Additionally, be sure to check your town or village code for regulations on vegetation height in lawns.

Water Quality Symposium Returns to Rochester!

Each year in March, District employees and affiliated agency employees from around the State gather for a week-long training experience known as Water Quality Symposium.



District staff member Kristin White speaks to the conference during the annual meeting

This symposium features trainings tied to all the unique facets of District work including Technician Forums, Wildlife Habitat Improvement, Cover Cropping, AEM Showcases, Planting Forums, and more. We were excited to welcome the symposium back to the City of Rochester at the Hyatt in Downtown once again! The home base location ensured District staff were able to take full advantage of

the week long event!

Welcome Jackie Smith

The District wants to give a warm welcome to one of two new members on our Board of Directors - Legislator Jackie Smith! Representing the 2nd legislative district, Jackie is also the Chairwoman of the Planning & Economic Development Committee, along with being a member of the Transportation and Human Services Committee. A long-standing supporter of community resources, she was involved in a number of community organizations including the Clarkson Town Board. A resident of Monroe County all her life, Jackie is a graduate of Brockport High School and Monroe Community College, and currently resides in Clarkson. Welcome to the Monroe County Soil & Water Conservation District Jackie!



Welcome Marvin Stepherson



The District is also giving a warm welcome to Legislator Marvin Stepherson! Marvin joins our Board this year along with Jackie. He represents the 3rd legislative district and currently serves on the Recreation & Education Committee as well as the Public Safety Committee.

Marvin is a lifetime resident of the Greater Rochester community, where he has spent his life serving his community and raising his family. Marvin has 27 combined years of military experience including the Marine Corps and Coast Guard Reserve.

Marvin is also a longtime professor at two Monroe County schools. Welcome to the Monroe County Soil & Water Conservation District Marvin!

For the full directory of current Monroe County Soil & Water Conservation District Board Members and Staff please visit our website: <https://monroecountyswcd.org/about/>

**Monroe County Soil & Water
Conservation District**

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The annual New York State burn ban runs from March 16th until May 14th. During this time, the state is at increased risk of wildfires due to early spring-warming temperatures, low humidity, and dead vegetation revealed after snowmelt. Wildfires don't just affect wildlife and wildlands, they also damage homes and personal property, and can be life-threatening if not contained. Wildlife smoke also causes several irritations due to smoke pollution.

Do your part in preventing wildfires by checking the [fire danger map](#) to ensure conditions are safe, never leaving a fire unattended, and fully extinguishing fires once finished.

For more information visit the DEC website:

<https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/air-quality/open-burning>

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