

PMNRCD Staff

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Fair Haven Stormwater Project

An update from District Manager, Hilary Solomon

Throughout the summer of 2024, PMNRCD worked with the Town of Fair Haven to facilitate the final design of a stormwater project that will be located under the town green. PMNRCD hired Fitzgerald Environmental Associates (FEA) to survey the area and create the design. This project was funded by the DEC Clean Water Initiative Program (CWIP) through a grant administered by Vermont’s Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC).

The existing storm drain system serves 24-acres of neighborhoods north of the Town Office and the main storm drain runs past the town green prior to emptying into the Castleton River. This low impact, passive stormwater project, when built, will mitigate roughly 12 Kg of Phosphorus per year from this drainage area that otherwise drains directly to the river and eventually to Lake Champlain. Except for several cleanout lids located flush with the ground, this project will not be visible once installed.

Projects funded through DEC CWIP grants come with funds that offset potential costs associated with ongoing or future maintenance. Please contact Hilary Solomon, PMNRCD Manager, (802) 287-6880 or hilary@pmnrcd.org for more information.

Spring 2025 Newsletter



POULTNEY METTOWEE NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Spring 2025 Plant Sale

Our annual fundraiser is happening now!

In addition to native trees, shrubs, and perennial flowers, we’re offering fruit trees (apple, pear, peach, cherry), berries (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries), asparagus and horseradish crowns, lilacs, a native wildflower and grass seed blend, and tree protection materials.

We have added to District gear and now have hats and shirts available, as well as a 2025 calendar featuring local farms. The calendar is available for early pick up.

Ordering is open until **April 10th**. Pickup will be **Saturday, May 3rd (9:00 am - 1:00 pm)** at the Champlain Valley Native Plant Restoration Nursery, 685 York St., Poultney.

Find our **catalog** and **order form** on the PMNRCD website’s nursery tab or contact us to request a mailed catalog. Please check availability before placing an order after March 31st.

If you’d like to make some beneficial additions to your landscape, this is your opportunity! Create wildlife habitat, offer birds and pollinators a treat, increase flood resilience, improve soil and water quality, and enjoy nature’s beauty through the seasons.



The Champlain Valley Native Plant Restoration Nursery (CVNPRN) is a partnership with PMNRCD and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) with support from the Village of Poultney. We grow native plants from local seed for statewide conservation and restoration projects. PMNRCD and CVNPRN provide education to schools and the wider community: sale proceeds will fund educational and technical programming.

Website: www.pmnrcd.org/champlain-valley-native-plant-restoration-nursery

Questions? Contact Nursery Manager Sadie Brown:
sadie@pmnrcd.org or (802) 287-6606

Sale info! >>



Volunteer with us!

The Nursery has a variety of volunteer opportunities throughout the growing season. Join us for Spring and Fall tree planting, seedling propagation and transplanting, seed collection, and more!



Alfalfa Stand Management

An update from Agronomy Specialist, Jennifer Alexander

A variety of winter weather and soil conditions can significantly affect plant survival. There is always a particular risk of winter kill in areas with little snow cover, which exposes plants to extended periods of below freezing temperatures. In addition, freeze-thaw cycles can push plants out of the soil, exposing roots to harsh conditions and potentially snapping taproots, killing the plants. This is known as plant heaving and is especially problematic in fields with heavy or wet soils. Another cause of winter kill in alfalfa is ice sheeting. Ice sheeting occurs when the entire crown of the alfalfa plant is encased in ice, which freezes and kills the plant. This is most often seen in fields with wet areas or depressions.

Assess Stands this Spring

As the snow melts and fields begin to green up, assess your alfalfa stands for winter kill. Look for signs of dead plants or thin stands. Depending on the level of damage, you may need to replant dead patches, interseed with grasses or clover, or rotate the field to a new crop.

If you need to reseed, frost seeding in March and April can be effective, or ask your local conservation district, UVM extension office, or farmers watershed alliance about borrowing a no-till grain drill for best results.

Plan for Next Winter

While we can't change the weather, other factors are within our control. It all comes down to this: don't stress out your plants!

Don't overharvest in late fall.

While it is tempting to take that 4th or 5th cut, you need to make sure that your plants going to have enough time to recover before the killing frost – and with climate change, that is increasingly uncertain.

Raise your cutting bar.

Leave at least four inches of stubble on your final cut to help protect the crown and reduce regrowth energy demands.

Optimize soil conditions.

Alfalfa prefers soils with a pH between 6.7 and 7.2 and does not survive well in acid soils (below 6.2). Annual applications of potassium are recommended to meet the growing needs of alfalfa. Potassium assists in plant growth, stress management, drought survival, competition with grasses in mixed stands, and more. However, if using Muriate of Potash, be mindful that it can lower soil pH.



Nutrient Management Planning

An update from Agricultural Specialist, Whitney Burgess

Throughout the winter season, our agricultural staff have been working on land treatment planning, which is an important step for nutrient management planning. Producers took a nutrient management class with us at the district in January. The class covered topics from nutrient cycling to environmental concerns that are associated with agriculture. An important part of the class was working with producers to make an approved nutrient management plan with an online program called “goCrop”.

While all agricultural producers are required to comply with the Vermont’s Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs), nutrient management plans are only required by farms of a certain size, as defined in the RAPs. Routine soil and manure samples are required by producers to keep their nutrient management plan current. District staff can support our local producers by collecting these soil samples that demonstrate fields’ current soil conditions, equipping producers to make ecologically and economically conscious decisions about their manure and fertilizer additions.

If you are an agricultural producer in this area and could use assistance with nutrient management planning, soil, manure or compost testing, or even have a question about updating a nutrient management plan you already have in the goCrop program, we would be happy to help.

Frog Hollow Farmstead: A Success Story

Update provided by Sadie Brown, PMNRCD Nursery Manager

Janis and Jason Reinke operate a small, diversified farm in Castleton, Vermont located along Sucker Brook, within the Castleton River Watershed. This parcel has historically been used for agricultural purposes and housed a small beef herd prior to the Reinke’s purchased in 2020. Since moving to Vermont, the Reinke family have been working on expanding their farm and rebuilding the soils of the close to one hundred acres that make up the Frog Hollow Farmstead.

The Farmstead bases their operation on organic and permaculture principles with a focus on raising heritage breed animals, including cattle, sheep, pigs, and chickens, and growing heirloom, open pollinated produce. Following their passion for food and community, the Reinkes also operate a small café which sells a variety of goods from their own farm, provides a seasonal menu, and features products from other local farms and small businesses.

With Sucker Brook and a small tributary running through the farming operation, the Reinkes were mindful of the impacts their farm may pose to the waterway, especially as they grow their operation. “The pasture, where the buffer and planting were done, is where animals would over-winter. The brook is a downstream water source for many of our neighbors, and the animals have had unrestricted access to the brook in past years.” Says owner Janis Reinke.

Past water quality monitoring data through the DEC LaRosa Monitoring Program has shown this section of Sucker Brook as having elevated nutrient levels. In addition to the known water quality concerns in the watershed, the parcel, which is now the Frog Hollow Farmstead, was identified as a project location in the 2016 Storm Water Master Plan (SWMP) conducted by the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District (PMNRCD). This area of the watershed has long been a focus for PMNRCD, so when staff with the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) reached out about partnering on this project, the District was more than happy to collaborate.

The 2024 project included a 3.88 acre planted buffer, invasive plant removal, exclusion fencing along Sucker Brook and a small tributary, and three designated stream crossings for animals. In May 2024, District staff, through the Champlain Valley Native Plant Restoration Nursery, and local volunteers planted the area, converting former low-quality pasture into a diverse forested buffer. “We are really looking forward to recreating natural woodland areas throughout the farm that attract wildlife, birds, and are filled with native trees and shrubs.” Janis shared, “Many of our neighbors have also stopped to share their excitement for the project and are anxious to see the changing landscape.”

The new buffer, planted with 1,360 native tree and shrub species such as willows, dogwoods, viburnums, and evergreens, will have many positive impacts and help to address several issues the farm and this watershed are experiencing. The goals of this project include reducing nutrient runoff, managing the active erosion occurring on the stream banks, shading the water to promote fish habitat, and allowing the brook access to a functioning vegetated floodplain.

“The project at Life of the Table (Frog Hollow Farmstead) has allowed us to protect both Sucker Brook and its tributary from livestock impacts. Through CREP we were able to install fencing to exclude the livestock from the streams and establish a riparian forest buffer at no cost to the landowner. The exclusion fence improved water quality protections immediately and a mature riparian forest buffer will improve both water quality and aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitat.” Says Phil Wilson with the CREP program at the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets (VAAFMD).

The success of projects like these requires coordination and collaboration between partners, while keeping the farmer and their goals for the land at the forefront of the work. “The Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District was a valuable partner on the project. They sourced high quality plant material and, as always, took great care with handling and planting the trees and shrubs” shared Ben Gabos with CREP, “The District staff also creatively worked around farm logistic issues that delayed planting in some project areas and communicated effectively with CREP staff and farm owners to complete the planting without compromising the health of the plant material and success of the project.”



