



COVER PHOTO: PENQUIS 5TH GRADE ENJOYED THEIR ANNUAL FIELD TRIP TO
THE WILLIAMSBURG FOREST

PISCATAQUIS SCHOOLS PARTNERING WITH PCSWCD

This year has been packed with programs and events at Piscataquis schools! We are so excited to start a new school year and continue to offer our conservation educational services to local youth. This year, we are delivering two *Trout in the Classroom* programs, field trips to Williamsburg Forest and Law Farm Nature Trails, soil health activities, our 2nd annual Green Jobs Fair, Teen Wilderness Expedition, featuring FREE registration, and so much more! Keep reading to learn all about the support we've received through cooperators and partnerships. to bring quality services to Piscataquis County!

WHAT'S IN THIS YEAR'S ISSUE:

- Meet our Board & Staff
- Message From our Executive Director
- PCSWCD Annual Appeal
- Who is a Cooperator?
- Local Working Group Meeting Announcement
- UMaine SFR 2023 Educators of the Year
- FSA Programs for Landowners
- Rod Hamel 2023 Volunteer of the Year
- PCSWCD Receives Support for Special Projects and Programs
- Support our Advertisers!

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www.piscataquisswcd.org

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PCSWCD Dedicated Staff



**Sarah Robinson,
Executive Director**

**Kacey Weber,
Education
Coordinator**

**Marc Warren, Stream
Restoration Project
Manager**



PCSWCD Board of Supervisors
left to right, top to bottom: Jensen Bissell,
Chair; Steve Tatko; Sam Brown; Jim
Ferrante, Vice Chair; Kent Black; Mike
Pouch; Molly London; Toby Hall; Kim
Merritt; Carolyn Ziegler



**Stay Tuned for PCSWCD's 2024 Events,
Programs, Trainings & More!**



MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SARAH ROBINSON



It's always appropriate to reflect when the Cooperator Newsletter comes out - when the leaves are falling and the season is turning again. I am able to look back at the year and the time we have spent bringing conservation education to Piscataquis County, all the partnerships we made or maintained, and the work we completed on our privately-owned and managed public lands. We've been "right out straight," as some would say! As the year blurred by, we celebrated huge accomplishments as an organization. We completed our year-long strategic planning process and from that work, we created a new mission and vision statement that I'm most proud of and excited to share with everyone. Our organization also held the first ever Green Jobs Fair at the Law Farm Nature Trails with the cooperation of so many like-minded agencies, organizations and partners from the area. You can read more about this on page 10. PCSWCD continues to partner with The Nature Conservancy to bring stream restoration and improved aquatic organism passages to Piscataquis County by working with local landowners and municipalities through WATRSS (Watershed Approach to Restoration Stream Systems) - a grant through the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) that was awarded to the District 3 years ago. I know, so many acronyms! I keep testing folks to see if they can say our organization's name...it's a mouth full, but people know who we are and we continue to show up. PCSWCD has been able to do many new outreach activities this year with the

support from funding that was awarded to the District from the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). We were present at Worcester's Wild Blueberry Days, Maine Forest Heritage Days, Piscataquis Regional YMCA's Trunk or Treat, hosted a film at Center Theater with the American Chestnut Foundation and joined our friends from University of Maine Piscataquis Extension at the Piscataquis Valley Fair. Through these outreach activities, we've been able to reach new people, and greet those familiar, continuing to share that we are here as a resource. Additionally, we have programs and events for everyone, and continue to grow and create a presence in our county. We feel supported by Piscataquis residents and our partners. People notice when you are making momentum and gains and want to be a part of it. I welcome you to be a part of this amazing work! Join us as we learn together about the evolving ways to fight for conservation, as we approach the continued climate crisis, become more sustainable in our everyday lives, protect our waters and increase our soil fertility. We are here to keep raising the bar and help our county residents to continue to become and stay best stewards of the land. Our mission is to build resilient, sustainable farms and forests through education, technical services, demonstration and stewardship. I was once told, "you know you are successful when you can look back at the year and know you are meeting your mission." We wouldn't be able to do all that we do without the incredible team of people that stand beside me. Without our Board of Supervisors, dedicated staff, the valuable partnerships we have and financial support, all this work would not be possible. I look forward to next year and all the possibilities that we have not yet explored to continue to keep our forests resilient, soil healthy and water clean in Piscataquis County.

Thank you so much,

Sarah



PCSWCD'S ANNUAL APPEAL: HOW YOU CAN HELP!

Our mission is to build resilient, sustainable farms and forests through education, technical services, demonstration and stewardship and we need your help to accomplish it. We provide information and educational programs to farmers, landowners, and interested citizens and most importantly, we provide programs for the children of Piscataquis County about the natural resources around them. We are good at what we do, but we need your help. If we have more, we can do more.

PCSWCD has been working in our communities for 79 years. With the funding support we receive from the state and county, we have been a consistent force for positive progress in our region. PCSWCD needs partners in the fight for conservation. We do this because we care about the future of Piscataquis County. That is what we do. Will you help us?

Please consider a donation to become a PCSWCD Conservation Champion! At this page - www.piscataquisswcd.org/support/ - you will see targeted ways you can give to the District. Any gift, any size, makes a BIG difference. We appreciate your consideration and support! It is an exciting time in Piscataquis County, and we are ready to keep serving our community with our conservation efforts!

Please send donations to PCSWCD 42 Engdahl Dr, Dover-Foxcroft ME 04426

or https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=DZFB95H9US3S8



WHAT AND WHO IS A COOPERATOR?

Cooperators are individuals (or entities) who have an agreement with Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District (PCSWCD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Farm Service Agency (FSA). The individual or organization “cooperates” with the USDA offices by developing and managing their lands in ways that reflect land and water suitably with good management practices.

The PCSWCD, NRCS and FSA assist cooperators to meet their land use goals by providing them with technical guidance related to the land uses with which they participate. The USDA offices also may provide cost-share assistance for some land use activities.

In providing cooperators with technical assistance, the District acts independently or coordinates with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. District staff can help cooperators learn about NRCS programs available to them, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) that provides financial assistance to land managers to help them install conservation practices addressing resource concern.



LOCAL WORKING GROUP NOTICE

The Local Working Group (LWG) is made up of farmers, foresters, landowners, personnel from agencies involved in natural resource management, and the general public working and/or residing in Piscataquis County. The purpose of this group is to provide guidance to NRCS concerning the implementation of conservation programs in Piscataquis County. The LWG advises NRCS on the environmental concerns in the area and determining local natural resource priorities. NRCS advises the LWG of Farm Bill updates, the local application process, including

ranking criteria and application periods, and eligible conservation practices. We encourage farmers, foresters, and landowners to consider joining us and sharing your feedback! Our next Local Working Group meeting is scheduled for December 5th. Please send an email to info@piscataquisswcd.org if you can join us for this important meeting!

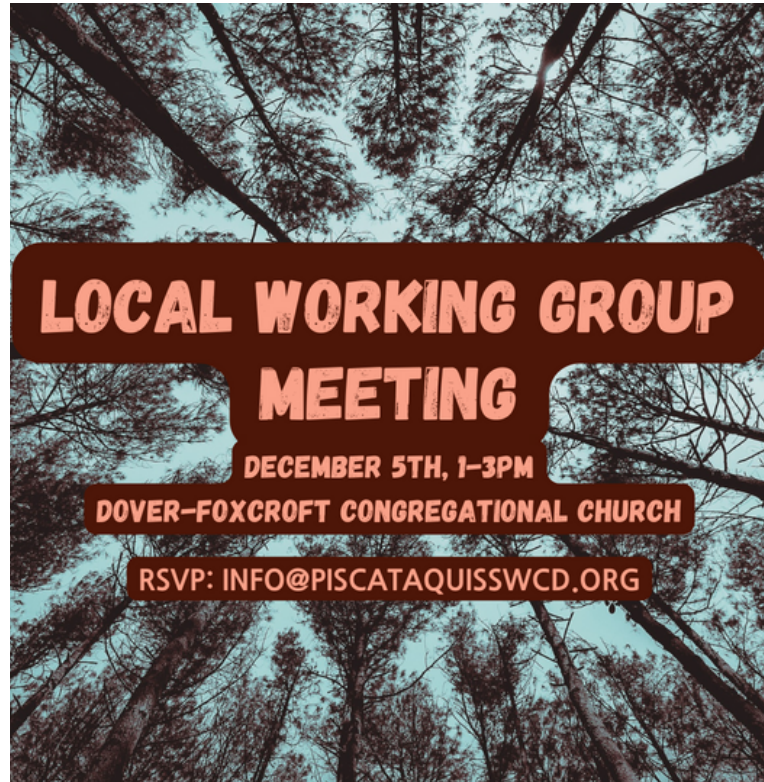


PHOTO: THE LOCAL WORKING GROUP IN ACTION.

**NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION STAFF:**
Seth Jones, District
Conservationist
seth.jones@usda.gov

Soil Conservationist position currently vacant.

UMAINE SCHOOL OF FOREST RESOURCES NAMED PCSWCD OUTSTANDING CONSERVATION EDUCATORS OF THE YEAR

Think back on an experience you had with an educator who took the time to connect you to opportunities outside of the classroom and to your local community. At the college level, those experiences often cement career paths, encourage new interests or connect you with future employers. College professors that have passion for their subject area are always looking for that next opportunity for students and that passion is how the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District (PCSWCD) established a strong partnership with this year's Outstanding Conservation Educators of the Year. Every other year, the PCSWCD Board of Supervisors recognizes an educator or educators who have worked in our county to receive the Outstanding Conservation Educator of the Year Award, and this year they have chosen to honor the University of Maine School of Forest Resources (SFR).

The Outstanding Conservation Educator of the Year Award is in place to recognize educators who work to connect students to conservation education, whether it be through learning in the classroom, work with conservation partners, through research efforts and beyond. When educators build conservation education into their curriculum offerings, students form a connection with their natural environment. That connection often provides the spark for future environmental stewards. University of Maine School of Forest Resources is under the UMaine College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture. Since 2018, faculty and students from SFR have worked on numerous projects in Piscataquis County, which resulted in improved forest management, efforts to better connect local youth to natural resource careers, exciting new partnerships, opportunities for college students to experience and work in Piscataquis County, expertise and



PHOTO: DR. JAY WASON TALKING ABOUT THE CLIMATE CHANGE PROJECT AT THE LAW FARM.

information sharing with county residents, research projects and a noticeable presence in our communities. The knowledge, expertise and effort that SFR faculty have committed to Piscataquis County is so valuable and has been well-received by PCSWCD staff, local residents and community partners. UMaine School of Forest Resource staff have worked extensively with the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District. In 2018, Dr. Sean Birkel and Dr. Jay Wason made their way to Piscataquis County to present on Climate Change: Forest & Ecosystem Impacts. PCSWCD worked with Dr. Wason again through our 2022 Forestry Series when he presented on Climate Change and Forest Ecology with Dr. Sean Fraver. Currently, we are embarking on a Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC) Climate Change project at the Law Farm Nature Trails, property the District owns and maintains for the public, with Dr. Wason. Here we will be studying and examining the impacts of climate extremes on tree regeneration in the Northern Forests. This research project will involve District staff, UMaine students and faculty. Another research trial underway at the Law Farm is the American Chestnut Germplasm orchard, which is a project exploring the northernmost range of the American Chestnut tree. This project is a collaboration between PCSWCD, the American Chestnut Foundation and UMaine External Graduate Faculty, Dr. Brian Roth. The American Chestnut orchard has increased the draw to

Educator of the Year Article Continued...

the Law Farm. These research projects align with PCSWCD's mission to have the Law Farm serve as a land for education and demonstrations and we are energized by the opportunity to work with and learn from UMaine. In addition to research projects, PCSWCD has worked with UMaine faculty to produce several interesting and unique educational offerings. We worked with Dr. Nicole Rogers on a well-attended Silviculture 101 workshop through our 2022 PCSWCD Forestry Series. Additionally, Dr. Jessica Leahy has worked with our District on a Forestry for Maine Birds program, held on her property, Wicopy Woods, in Sebec Maine. Jessica also worked alongside forester Terri Coolong to present Teas & Trees, an informative gathering of women landowners, offering them an open discussion on needs, challenges and resources available. Dr. Leahy has worked with our District to provide mutually beneficial opportunities for PCSWCD and UMaine students. PCSWCD worked with senior capstone students to update the forest management plan at the Law Farm Nature Trails. The students presented their plan to our Board and worked collaboratively with us throughout the entire process. We also had the pleasure of working with UMaine students when updating the trail map at the Williamsburg Forest - another public land owned and maintained by PCSWCD. Students completed all the GIS work needed for the trail map, making it accessible through the Avenza app. This project added clarity and accessibility for the public and was a great first step for PCSWCD to begin work on bigger projects at the forest. PCSWCD is currently working with UMaine graduate student, Elisa Schine, on updating the forest management plan at the Williamsburg Forest. Elisa is actively working on a cruise of the forest alongside UMaine alumni, forester Molly London, and together they are incorporating practices into the plan that help make the forest an active example for women landowners. We are excited about their

ideas to make the space a "Forest for Everyone, Managed by Women." Additionally, Elisa is serving as the Wood Bank Outreach Coordinator, a new position through UMaine, managed by Dr. Leahy. Elisa is based in Piscataquis County through the Extension office and the PCSWCD looks forward to this exciting new work happening in our county. Outside of working with the District, UMaine professors Dr. Mindy Crandall and Dr. Jessica Leahy spearheaded a research project in Piscataquis and Somerset County called the Rural Youth Futures Project. This project examined the shift in economic and demographic conditions in rural areas, the traditional natural resource-rich heritages of rural areas and how several factors relating to heritage economies and rural areas impact the next generation of workers and residents. A survey was distributed to Piscataquis and Somerset youth and the results from this survey have been used by local industry leaders, schools and conservation organizations to frame how we are connecting youth to their communities and the opportunities that are there. Additionally, UMaine is working with the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) on a resilience and restoration project involving the planting of 30,000 red spruce on AMC land. PCSWCD enjoyed having



PHOTO: UMAINE STUDENTS TOURING THE LAW FARM AT THE EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR CELEBRATION

Educator of the Year Article Continued...

UMaine School of Forest Resources represented at our Green Jobs Fair in May, introducing Piscataquis County youth to all the learning opportunities UMaine provides. The future of UMaine School of Forest Resources in Piscataquis County looks to include continued educational opportunities for local students, UMaine students and residents of Piscataquis County. PCSWCD looks forward to continuing to work with UMaine School of Forest Resources faculty on exciting projects on our public lands, by having them be a part of our educational programming and more.

Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District staff, Board Supervisors and local partners highlighted and celebrated all the impressive accomplishments of SFR faculty and students at an award ceremony in September 2023. It was wonderful to showcase the work they have done at the Law Farm and in our community. Additionally, current UMaine students attended the presentation and that same day, they were able to tour the Law Farm, learning about public land maintenance. SFR faculty are deserving of being recognized for their extensive efforts in Piscataquis County and we are pleased to be able to honor them with our Outstanding Conservation Educators of the Year award.

Congratulations!



PHOTO: PCSWCD BOARD AND STAFF AWARD UMAINE SFR AT THE LAW FARM. DR. JAY WASON HOLDING THE CERTIFICATE AND DR. JESSICA LEAHY HOLDING THE POTTED TREE.

FARM SERVICE AGENCY STAFF:
Scott Speck, Executive Director
Janice Ramirez, Loan Officer
Madison Thew, Program Technician
Contact FSA: 207-564-2151 x2 or
207-474-8323 x2

FARM SERVICE AGENCY COUNTY COMMITTEE:
Chairperson: Lee Worcester
Vice-Chairperson: Blake Smith
Member: Owen Brown

FSA PROGRAMS FOR FARMERS & LANDOWNERS

PCSWCD works to connect Piscataquis residents and landowners with resources that can be used as they work to improve or maintain production on their farms or woodlots. The following are current relief and/or assistance programs offered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and are available to producers in Piscataquis County:

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) – this is similar to crop insurance but is for weather related losses only. There is a fee to sign up but this fee is often waived so that it's 100% free. This is particularly useful for farmers who have grazing animals. More details on the program are available [here](#).

Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP) – This program is of particular use to honeybee producers. It's aimed at providing cash payments to farmers who lost honeybee colonies/hives due to weather, had to transport water for livestock due to weather, or buy additional feed for livestock due to weather. More details are available [here](#).

Livestock Indemnity Program – This program is aimed to provide money to farmers who lost livestock due to weather, lost livestock due to an eligible disease exacerbated by weather, or livestock lost due to an attack by another animal that is federally protected (includes avians). More details are available [here](#).



2023 VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: RODNEY HAMEL



PHOTO: PCSWCD BOARD AND STAFF AWARD ROD HAMEL (MIDDLE) AS OUR VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR.

PCSWCD is a small organization that provides many services, programs and resources for Piscataquis communities, making volunteers essential to our success. We simply can't do it all and so we reach out and ask for help - help with weeding gardens, sawing downed trees, planting and even programmatic help.

Since 2014, Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District has run our Teen Wilderness Expedition program - a 3-day, 2-night trip involving a stay at Appalachian Mountain Club's wilderness lodges, lots of hiking, paddling, and learning, which has evolved over the years to now accommodate 26, 12-16 year old kids at no cost.

We are fortunate to work with the talented AMC education staff, AMC guides and the lodge staff. Even with all that stellar help, PCSWCD still needs responsible and caring adults to make sure all the kids are supported, looked after and have a good time. This is where PCSWCD Education Coordinator, Kacey Weber, heavily leans on amazing volunteers. We need skilled, reliable help to have this program run smoothly. We have been fortunate to have some excellent Teen Wilderness Expedition volunteers over the years, but none quite like Rod Hamel. Rod started volunteering for Teen Wilderness Expedition in 2018. The kids connected with him and enjoyed his humor, energy, up-for-anything attitude and his fantastic stories about his many adventures. Outside of Teen Wilderness, Rod has helped at the Williamsburg Forest with trail clearing and signage.

He has always been a part of our wonderful collaborative event, Cider Pressing with the East Sangerville Grange, and each year, we look forward to seeing him bounce around the presses, helping folks press and bottle fresh cider.

Unpaid volunteers are vital to the success of organizations like ours, making these programs better and brighter. Without the help we receive from Rod, and other Teen Wilderness volunteers, we would have to significantly decrease the number of kids who get to enjoy this amazing trip each year. They also help us safely enjoy some really exceptional activities! Rod continues to go above and beyond and words can't express how grateful we are for his time and efforts! We appreciate what Rod brings to the table and he is so valuable to us. We consider him a friend and an essential colleague and thank him for his continued time and support. Congratulations to Rod Hamel, PCSWCD's 2023 Volunteer of the Year!



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PCSWCD RECEIVES SUPPORT FOR CREATIVE PROJECTS, WORK IN SCHOOLS & PUBLIC LAND UPDATES

Our organization is one of 16 Conservation Districts in Maine. We all have different focuses that are based on the unique nature of the counties we represent. We are funded partially by the State and outside of that funding, a number of us rely on funding from municipalities and the counties we represent. In order for us to expand our offerings, improve our infrastructure, or support innovative ideas and programs, we often need grant funding to put those things into place. Piscataquis County Soil and Water has been very aggressive in seeking grant funding to help keep our public lands updated, maintained, and safe, and to increase the general capacity for our organization to function with the quality staff that bring in-demand services to our region. Our aggressive approach has led to notable successes and big, positive impacts in our local communities. Here's an overview of the funding we received in 2023 and what we have been able to do with the support:

Maine Community Foundation - PCSWCD was awarded a grant from Maine Community Foundation in 2022, which provided



funding for significant updates and improvements to our Williamsburg Forest in 2023. Updates included a new forest management plan, signage, road improvements and much more. Additionally, the grant focused energy and funding on ideas and updates to the trail systems, making the Williamsburg Forest into a safe and accessible outdoor learning space for women to explore forestry and conservation. PCSWCD rallied a team consisting of a women foresters, professionals and masters student to collect information and direction that would help steer the progress at the property. From this work, we coined a new slogan for Williamsburg Forest, which is "A Forest for Everyone, Managed by Women."

The trails now have updated interpretive signage, an all-vehicle access road, a repaired road crossing and soon will have an updated forest management plan. In that plan, there will be areas of the forest designated for women's chainsaw safety courses, demonstration sites, harvests and much more. Be on the lookout in 2024 for unique programs offered at the Williamsburg Forest. **Onion Foundation** - PCSWCD was awarded a 2-year, \$25,000 grant to help fund two of our most impactful youth-focused programs. These funds will help support our staff as we meet the demand from schools for special natural-resource based programs. These programs are designed to introduce students to natural resource conservation in hands-on ways and with lessons that integrate and align with existing school curriculums. Additionally, the Onion Foundation grant will support our popular Teen Wilderness Expedition program. Teen Wilderness Expedition is a 3-day, 2-night trip offered in partnership with the Appalachian Mountain Club. It's designed for ages 12-16 and allows kids an opportunity to learn about and explore the outdoors. We enjoy recreational activities, games and all accommodations at the impressive AMC wilderness lodges. With help from the Onion Foundation, through sponsorships from Friends of Wilson Ponds and an anonymous donor, we are able to offer the Teen Wilderness Expedition free to Piscataquis County youth. We are so grateful for the support we have received for Teen Wilderness and will continue to look for sponsorship to keep this program free for years to come!



PHOTO LEFT, UPDATES AT THE WILLIAMSBURG FOREST. PHOTO RIGHT, TEEN WILDERNESS EXPEDITION 2023.

Support Article Continued...

Piscataquis Environmental Education Collaborative (PEEC) - Support doesn't always come in the form of funding. Sometimes, it comes when people work collaboratively and recognize that when efforts are combined, everyone wins. PCSWCD has worked closely with the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), Rural Aspirations Project (RAP) and the Natural Resources Education Center (NREC) for a number of years. We support each other's programs by working together, recognizing that each organization brings something valuable to the table and sharing resources. In 2023, representatives from each organization decided that in order to bring the highest quality educational product to the schools in Piscataquis County, we should band together formally, and so we created PEEC. Since our inception, we have worked together to offer high quality programming and meet the needs of our local schools. One of our first big events we did together was the Green Jobs Fair at the Law Farm Nature Trails. We brought in an additional partner, Maine TREE Foundation, for this event. Together, we hosted SeDoMoCha 7th graders and Guilford 6th graders at the Law Farm for a day where they all were exposed to "green" careers in hands-on ways. The event was a huge success and as we plan for the 2024 Green Jobs Fair, we are receiving support from organizations like Dover-Foxcroft Kiwanis, Weyerhaeuser and Pleasant River Lumber. This support means PEEC and Maine TREE Foundation can focus our efforts into expanding student access to this event, provide additional resources to students and support our staff.

The Nature Conservancy - Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District (PCSWCD) was awarded a three-year contract



with the Maine Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) that focuses on implementation of stream restoration and aquatic organism passage projects. This work will be administered through the Watershed-scale Approach to Restoring Stream Systems (WATRSS), a program developed to restore aquatic organism passage to road-stream crossings on private lands funded through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). Additionally, TNC awarded PCSWCD a private award, which provides capacity support to enable an increased focus on stream and river connectivity, restoration activities, and educational events and opportunities for youth and adults related to aquatic ecosystem health and stream restoration. WATRSS is supported by a collaboration of nine tribal, state, federal and nonprofit organizations (such as PCSWCD) and covers 25,255 square miles of project area, including the last endangered Atlantic Salmon spawning waters in the U.S. and critical Eastern brook trout habitat. Recently, PCSWCD learned that this grant has been extended to 5 years, continuing this valuable work in our county.

District Funding - In 2023, PCSWCD received long-awaited news that the funding we receive from the state will be increased. Conservation Districts operate to serve Maine residents and are required to do so under state law. Our services go well beyond what we are funded. Governor LePage once referred to us as "the best bang for the buck" as we work efficiently to turn funding into low-cost, impactful, long-term change in Maine. PCSWCD is also supported by county funds through the Piscataquis County Commissioners. Although our funding was cut in 2023 by 10%, we were able to accomplish an impressive amount of projects, increased our program offerings, services and reach, and will continue to serve our county residents to the best of our abilities. We remain hopeful that our work will continue to be supported by Piscataquis County.

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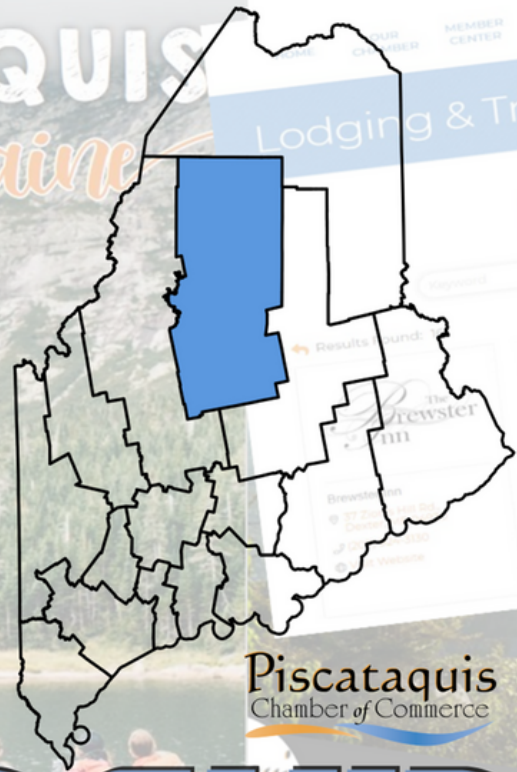
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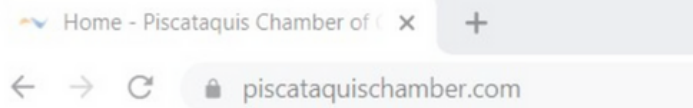
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- 3) Pay for your first year online or request an invoice. You'll get a call from the director to discuss your specific needs and to determine how the chamber can best support you.

Join by March 1st for inclusion in this year's Relocation & Visitor's Guide!

why *join?* We're glad you asked.

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