



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara receives 'Appreciation Award' from New York Association of Conservation Districts: Regional conservation leaders highlight O'Mara's commitment to soil and water quality, watershed protection, farm and farmland protection

THOMAS F. O'MARA October 31, 2016

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I greatly appreciate this recognition from the New York Association of Conservation Districts. And I can't say enough about all of our regional Soil and Water Conservation District Managers and their staffs who, day after day, carry out this important work to protect and strengthen our watersheds, protect our farmlands, and preserve the overall quality of our land and water resources.

**Horseheads, N.Y., October 31**—The New York Association of Conservation Districts (NYACD) today announced that State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), chairman of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, is the recipient of the association's 2016 "Appreciation Award" recognizing O'Mara's long-standing efforts to soil and water quality, watershed protection, the protection of farms and farmland, and conservation overall.

The association presents the award to "a member of the media, or farmer or educator or legislator who has provided a service, not just to the SWCD, but to the conservation ethics we hold dear."

A presentation ceremony took place today at the Conservation Cabin at the Chemung County Fairgrounds in Horseheads where NYACD President Dan Farrand was joined by district managers representing Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) in Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Tompkins and Yates counties which encompass O'Mara's 58th Senate District.

**New York Association of Conservation Districts President Dan Farrand said,** "The New York Association of Conservation Districts is proud to have this opportunity, on behalf of district leaders and staff throughout the Southern Tier, Finger Lakes and statewide, to express our gratitude to Senator O'Mara for his long-standing work to address the conservation challenges, crises and other issues facing every county. Our 'Appreciation Award' recognizes the contributions of a leader who makes conservation a priority and whose actions reflect that commitment. Senator O'Mara has done outstanding work on behalf of soil and water conservation districts throughout all of the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes counties he represents. This award is just one way for all of us to express our appreciation."

**Chemung County Soil and Water Conservation District Manager Mark Watts said,** "Senator O'Mara has been a strong supporter and good friend to the Soil & Water Conservation

Districts. When needed, he has been able to secure the necessary resources to get the job done! Throughout his term as assemblyman and now as our Senator, a great deal of work has been accomplished to protect our environment and conserve our natural resources.”

**Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District Manager Jerry Verrigni said,** “Senator O’Mara believes in a common sense, cost effective, municipal shared service approach to conservation which he has supported through our region’s Soil and Water Conservation Districts for many years. His dedication to our Soil and Water Conservation Districts, our communities, and our water quality is second to none. He has made himself available at all times and is a true partner in every meaning of the word.”

**Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District Manager Jeff Parker said,** “Senator O’Mara has been a huge supporter of Soil and Water Conservation Districts locally and statewide. With his help, our Soil and Water Conservation Districts have recently been assisted by state aid to district programs and the Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance. This aid assisted the Soil and Water Conservation Districts locally to implement projects important to their local programs.”

**Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District Manager Jonathan Negley said,** “Senator O’Mara has been a long-standing supporter and advocate for the conservation work conducted by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts in New York State. His efforts to find solutions to the environmental challenges faced by Tompkins County residents in his district are very much appreciated.”

**Yates County Soil and Water Conservation District General Manager Jim Balyszak said,** “The staff and board of directors of the Yates County Soil & Water Conservation District would like to take this opportunity to thank the Senator for his longstanding commitment to protecting our soil and water resources. His support in Yates County is very evident with work that is

currently underway to repair storm damage along the Keuka Outlet Trail with funding he secured.”

Balyszak was referring to \$150,000 in state funding O’Mara secured in the 2015-16 state budget to assist in repairing the Keuka Outlet Trail, which was severely damaged by washouts from the flash flooding that hit Yates County in May 2014.

**O’Mara said**, “I greatly appreciate this recognition from the New York Association of Conservation Districts. And I can’t say enough about all of our regional Soil and Water Conservation District Managers and their staffs who, day after day, carry out this important work to protect and strengthen our watersheds, protect our farmlands, and preserve the overall quality of our land and water resources. They are the conservation champions and we can’t thank or support them enough. State assistance in support of their efforts are wise investments to protect our natural resources, keep our farmers competitive and strengthen local economies for the long run. We’re investing in a long- standing and successful state-local partnership to achieve vital economic and environmental conservation goals.”

O’Mara, who in addition to chairing the Environmental Conservation Committee also serves as a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, was instrumental in this year’s state budget for:

> establishing a fully funded, \$300- million Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), something many conservation advocates have been fighting for for years. The EPF supports many critical conservation initiatives including clean air and water projects, flood control and restoration, and open space preservation. The EPF helps create local jobs and studies have shown that for every dollar of EPF funds invested in land and water protection, the state and localities get back seven dollars in economic benefits; and

> a \$200-million increase for the “Water Quality Infrastructure Improvement Act,” a grant program established last year to help localities undertake water infrastructure improvement projects including sewer and municipal water line repairs – an action which has become particularly timely as drinking water quality concerns and crises regionally, statewide and across the nation become increasingly acute.

O’Mara has also been a strong supporter and longtime advocate for funding which has been vitally important to county SWCDs statewide through New York’s Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program. The program provided important funding in July to SWCDs and farms in Chemung and Schuyler counties. The funding assists farmers in addressing water quality issues in priority watersheds. The overriding goals are to prevent water pollution, reduce erosion and limit the amount of harmful sediments and other deposits in New York’s waterways. This year’s state budget increased funding for the program to \$19 million.