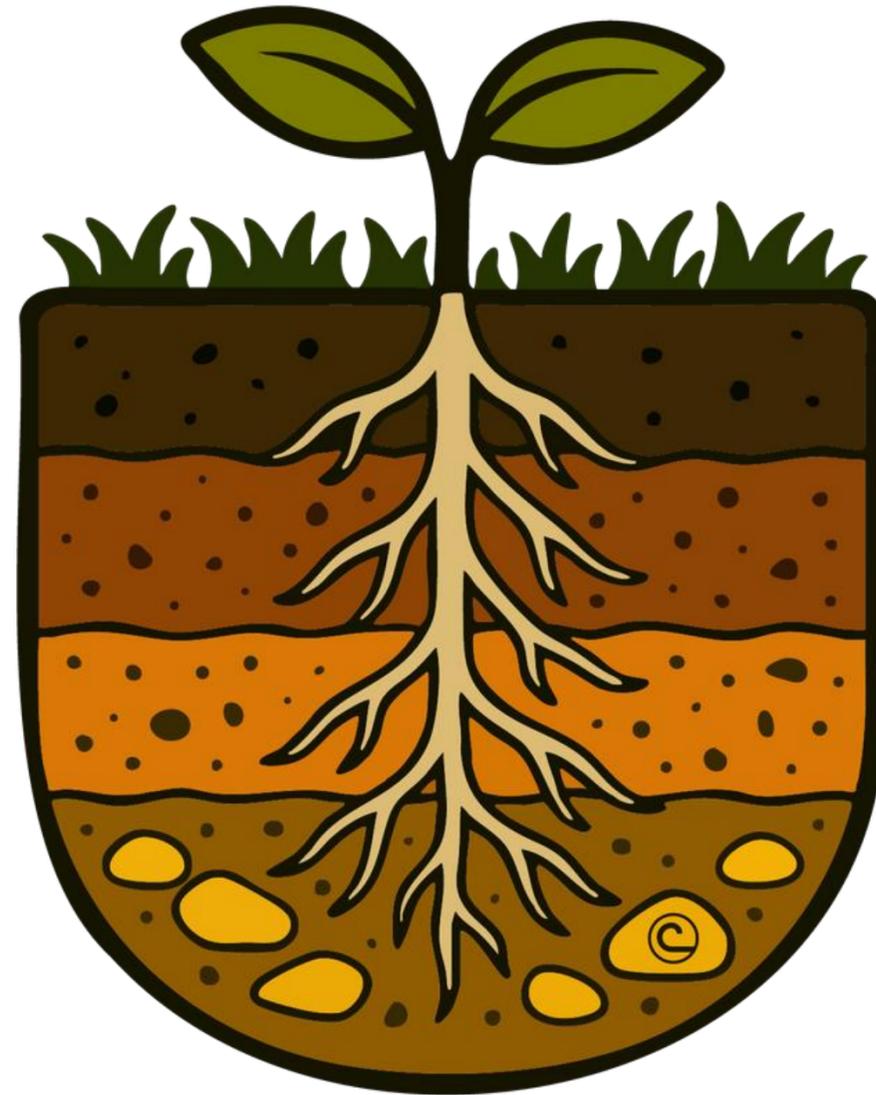


# Soil.

Where it all Begins



2026 Wadena Soil and Water Conservation District

**Conservation districts** began many years ago when we learned that caring for the land was important for everyone.

In the 1930s, large windstorms called the **Dust Bowl** blew away huge amounts of soil because conservation was not yet widely understood and many people did not realize how important it was to protect the soil. Without healthy soil, crops could not grow, and animals lost their homes.

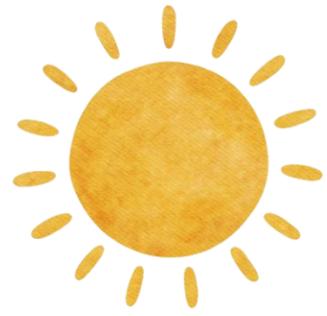


To fix the problem, farmers and neighbors worked together with the government to start conservation districts. Led by soil scientist **Hugh Hammond Bennett** and the newly formed **Soil Conservation Service**, communities met to plan better ways to protect the land, prevent **erosion**, plant windbreaks, and manage water more carefully.

These new conservation districts provided local support and guidance, helping farmers restore their soil, rebuild the land, and bring farming back in a healthier, more sustainable way.

The **Soil Conservation Service (SCS)** was created in 1935 to help farmers protect their land from erosion and restore soil after the Dust Bowl. It later became the **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**, which continues working with conservation districts and landowners to protect soil, water, and other natural resources.





The lessons learned during the Dust Bowl shaped how we care for the land today. Farmers choose to take part in **conservation programs** because they care about protecting the land for the future. These programs are **voluntary**, meaning farmers join by choice and may receive help or **guidance** to make conservation easier. They use **best management practices** such as planting cover crops, managing water wisely, and reducing erosion to keep soil healthy.

By working with their local conservation districts, farmers help protect **natural resources** for future generations while keeping their land productive and sustainable.

*Let's research it!*

*What year was your local conservation district established?*



Conservation districts are local because every community's land, water, and wildlife are different. **Local people know their own challenges best.**

Being **locally led** means the people who live and work on the land make the decisions. They work together to find solutions that fit their region, ensuring conservation practices are practical, effective, and built to last.

Today, you can find conservation districts hard at work in their communities teaching others how to protect the land so that farms, wildlife, and families can stay healthy and strong.

### **TIMELINE:**

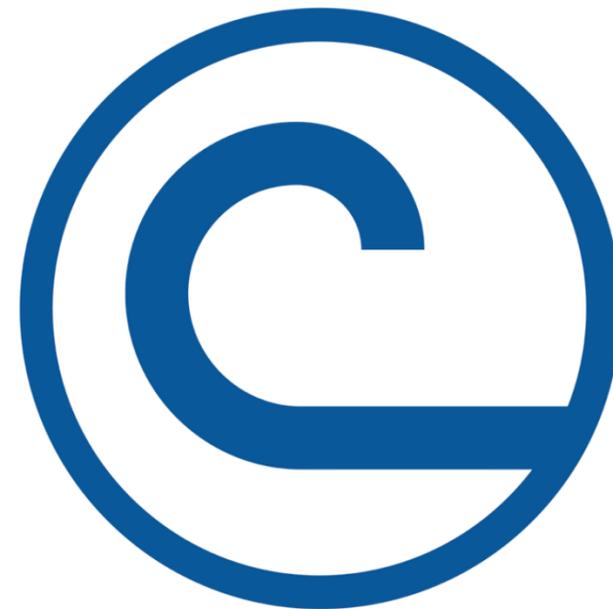
**1935:** Congress passed the Soil Conservation Act, which established the Soil Conservation Service to address soil and moisture loss.

**1937:** The first conservation district, the Brown Creek Soil and Water Conservation District, was established in North Carolina.

**1939:** Governors were encouraged to pass state-level legislation to create local conservation districts.



Conservation districts in the United States and its territories are represented by the **National Association of Conservation Districts, (NACD)**, which provides national leadership, education and outreach materials, leadership training and advocacy support for their locally led conservation work.

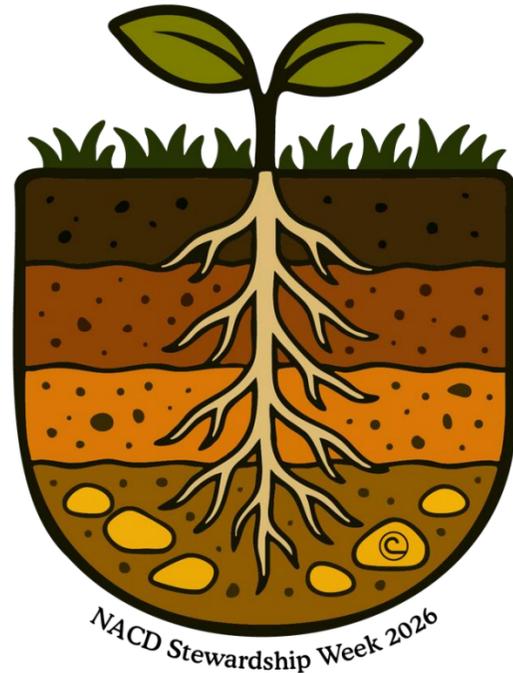


National Association of  
Conservation Districts



# Soil.

Where it all Begins



Each year, a national theme such as soil, water, or habitats sparks creativity and action across the country. The theme inspires hands-on lessons, outdoor projects, and community events that help people discover the importance of conservation.

**IN 2026 WE CELEBRATE SOIL!**

The thematic phrase “**Soil. Where It All Begins.**” reminds us that everything starts with healthy soil. Soil grows our food, filters our water, supports wildlife habitats, and provides the foundation for our communities. Without soil, there would be no farms, forests, or places for humans and animals to thrive.

This theme helps us remember that caring for soil is the first step in protecting all of our natural resources and keeping the land healthy for the future.





The **NACD Stewardship Program** is a year-round effort to explore, understand, and protect our natural resources. It brings communities together across the country to learn how soil, water, air, plants, and wildlife are connected and how each of us can make a difference in keeping them healthy and thriving.

Since 1955, this program has centered around the annual **Stewardship Week** celebration, which is held from the last Sunday in April through the first Sunday in May.

During Stewardship Week, conservation districts across the United States and its territories encourage communities, schools, and families to take part in events that protect soil, water, and wildlife and promote the wise use of natural resources.



# POSTER CONTEST

One of the most popular ways to celebrate is through the **NACD Poster Contest**. Each year, students create posters that reflect the national stewardship theme, showing what conservation means to them.

The contest encourages creativity while helping students learn how soil, water, air, plants, and wildlife work together to support life.

Winning posters can advance from local to state and national levels for recognition.



# What Makes a Good Poster?

A good poster is creative, clear, and connects to the year's stewardship theme. It should grab attention, share a strong message about conservation, and be easy to understand without using too many words. Use bold colors, neat drawings, and your own ideas to show what the theme means to you.

Remember, your poster should help others learn why caring for our natural resources is important!



## RULES TO FOLLOW

- The poster must have the words “Soil - Where it all Begins in letters 1/2” or greater, and promote the theme.
- All artwork must be original and created by the student.
- Poster size: 11" X 17".
- Back of poster must have this info:
  - Student's name
  - Parent's name and telephone number
  - Teacher, school, grade, and city
  - Wadena Soil and Water Conservation District
- Posters are judged on conservation message, visual effectiveness, originality, and universal appeal.



## 2026 POSTER CONTEST CATEGORIES

- **Hand-Drawn:** Created with markers, crayons, paint, colored pencils, or other traditional art materials.
- **Digital (Graphic Arts):** Created using digital drawing or graphic design software.
- **Braille:** Designed for blind/low vision students who create tactile posters using Braille or raised materials that can be felt.
- **Additional Assist:** For students who require support to complete their posters, ensuring accessibility.



REVIEW CONTEST RULES AND  
DETAILED INFORMATION



OR DOWNLOAD THE CONTESTS RULES AT  
[HTTPS://WWW.NACDNET.ORG/CONTESTS/](https://www.nacdnet.org/contests/)



## PRIZES WILL BE AWARDED

- **School Level: Certificates**
- **County Level: Cash**
  - **1st place: \$30**
  - **2nd place: \$20**
  - **3rd place: \$10**



**WADENA**  
Soil & Water  
Conservation District



Spread  
the  
Word

DEADLINE

Don't  
Miss  
Out

Contest Due Date

May 13, 2026

Remember the theme: Soil - Where it all Begins

Entries will be judged on May 18, 2026



# What Is Soil?

Soil is more than dirt. It's made of minerals, air, water, and organic matter (bits of plants and animals). It's alive with tiny organisms that help plants grow and keep the land healthy.



# Why Soil Matters

Soil is the foundation of life across every landscape, whether coastal, desert, forest, island, or grassland.



Soil connects ecosystems by supporting vegetation, storing and filtering water, and providing the structure that sustains biodiversity and human communities.

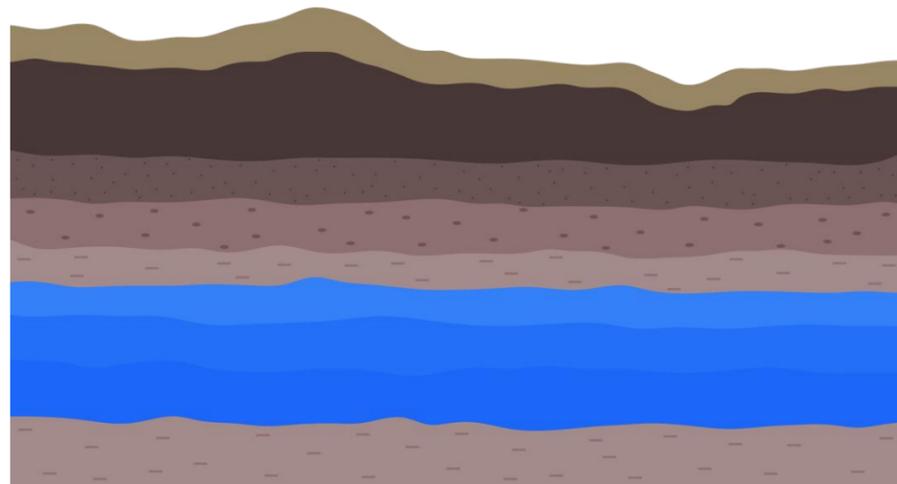


# Wait. What? The Ocean and Desert have sand!

Both the ocean and the desert rely on soil because it connects and supports their ecosystems by carrying nutrients and clean water to the sea, while storing moisture and anchoring life in dry landscapes.

## How the Ocean Relies on Soil

- Soil filters and cleans water before it flows into rivers and oceans.
- Nutrients from soil feed tiny ocean plants called plankton.
- Coastal soils support wetlands and mangroves that protect shorelines and wildlife.



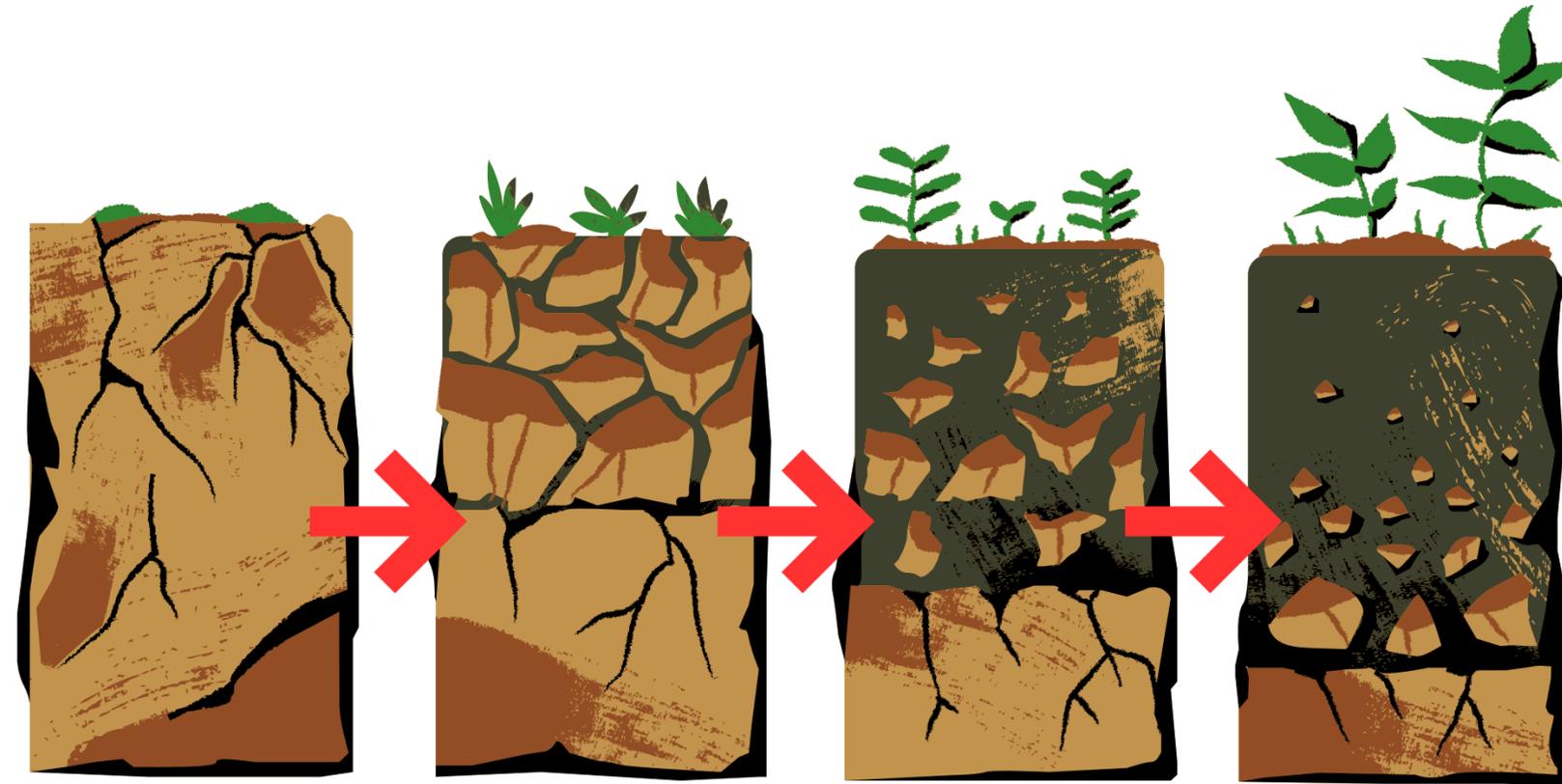
## How the Desert Relies on Soil

- Soil stores water deep underground for plants and animals.
- It anchors roots and prevents sand from blowing away.
- Healthy desert soil supports plants that provide food and shelter for wildlife.



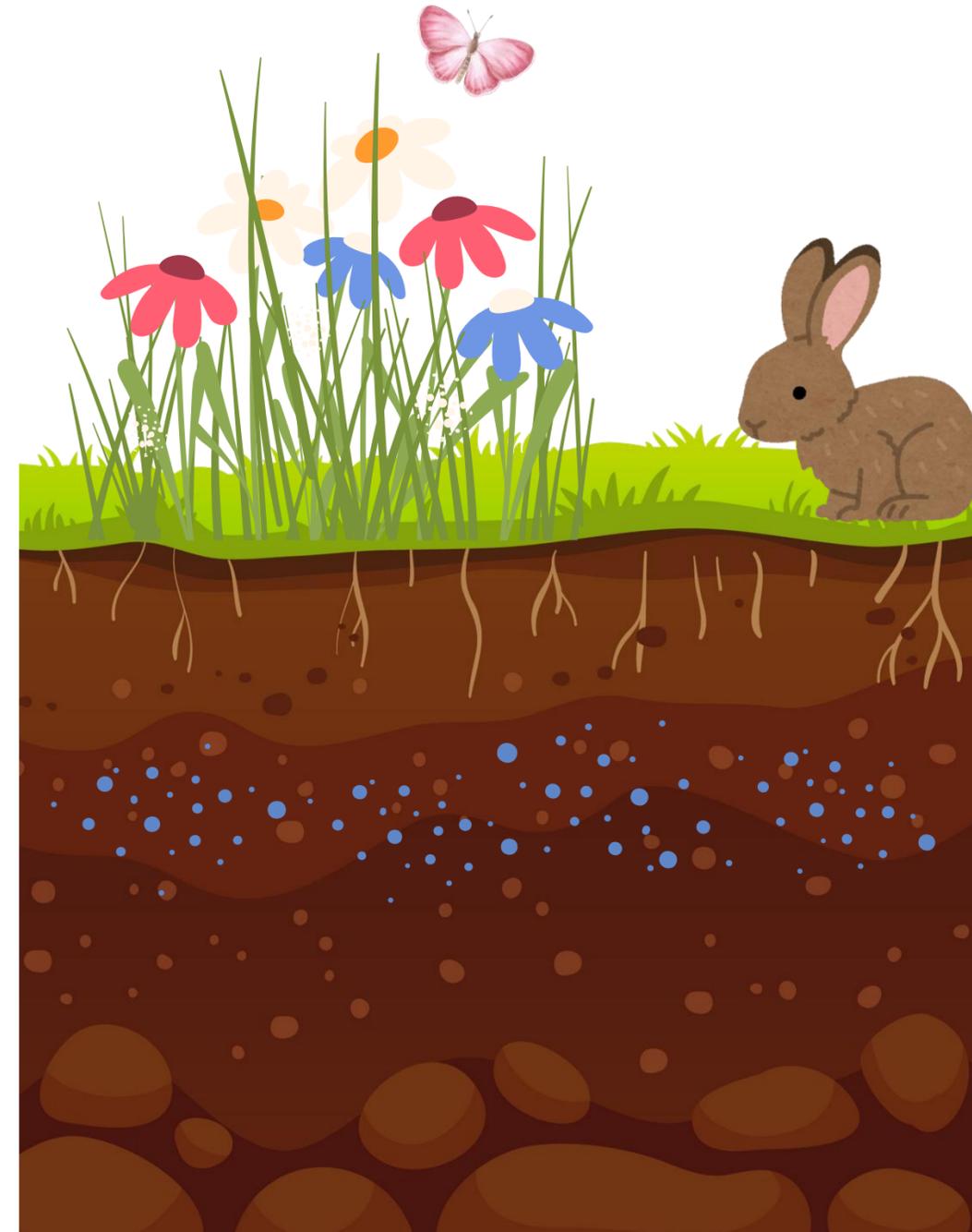
# Soil Formation

Soil forms very slowly as rocks break down and mix with bits of plants and animals. Weather, land shape, and living things all help make soil over time.



# Layers of Soil

- **Topsoil:** Where plants grow and roots live.
- **Subsoil:** Stores water and nutrients.
- **Parent Material:** Pieces of rock breaking down.
- **Bedrock:** The solid rock below all layers.



# DECOMPOSITION

**Topsoil** forms through the **decomposition** of **organic** matter as dead plants and animals break down and mix with small pieces of rock.

Rain and weather help this process, creating rich, dark soil full of **nutrients** that support new plant growth.



Healthy soil means healthy food, clean water, and strong communities.

***Soil IS where it all begins.***

How can you help care for the soil where you live?



# Class Discussion or Review Activity

1. What are Conservation Districts, and why were they created?
2. How does the National Association of Conservation Districts support local districts?
3. What happened during the Dust Bowl, and what did people learn from it?
4. Who was Hugh Hammond Bennett, and what was his role in soil conservation?
5. Give examples of Best Management Practices used by farmers.
6. Why are natural resources important to protect?
7. What does it mean for a district to be locally led?
8. Explain the meaning of the thematic phrase “Soil. Where It All Begins.”
9. What is Stewardship Week, and when is it celebrated each year?
10. What is the purpose of the NACD Poster Contest?
11. How does decomposition help form topsoil?
12. What is parent material, and why does it matter for soil formation?
13. How do organisms help create soil?
14. How does soil help the ocean and the desert?



# Answer Key

## ***What are Conservation Districts, and why were they created?***

Conservation districts were created in the 1930s to help people protect soil and water after the Dust Bowl. They work locally to promote conservation and prevent erosion.

## ***How does the National Association of Conservation Districts support local districts?***

NACD provides leadership, education, and resources to help local districts share information, teach conservation, and protect natural resources.

## ***What happened during the Dust Bowl, and what did people learn from it?***

In the 1930s, strong winds and poor farming practices caused the soil to blow away. People learned that healthy soil must be protected through conservation.

## ***Who was Hugh Hammond Bennett, and what was his role in soil conservation?***

Hugh Hammond Bennett was known as the “Father of Soil Conservation.” He led efforts to create the Soil Conservation Service and taught farmers how to protect soil.

## ***Give examples of Best Management Practices used by farmers.***

Examples include planting cover crops, rotating crops, building terraces, and using grass buffers to prevent erosion and protect water.

## ***Why are natural resources important to protect?***

Natural resources like soil, water, air, and plants are what we need to grow food, have clean water, and live healthy lives.



# Answer Key

## ***What does it mean for a district to be locally led?***

It means the people who live and work in the community make decisions about conservation based on their land and local needs.

## ***Explain the meaning of the thematic phrase “Soil. Where It All Begins.”***

It means that everything we depend on starts with healthy soil.

## ***What is Stewardship Week, and when is it celebrated each year?***

Stewardship Week is the national kickoff for the conservation theme, held from the last Sunday in April through the first Sunday in May each year.

## ***What is the purpose of the NACD Poster Contest?***

The contest helps students share what they learn about conservation through art while promoting the yearly stewardship theme.

## ***How do organisms help create soil?***

Worms, insects, roots, and bacteria mix the soil and add nutrients through decomposition, helping it stay loose and healthy for plants to grow.

## ***How does soil help the ocean and the desert?***

Soil filters and cleans water before it reaches the ocean and provides nutrients for sea life. In deserts, it stores water and supports plants and animals that live in dry conditions.

