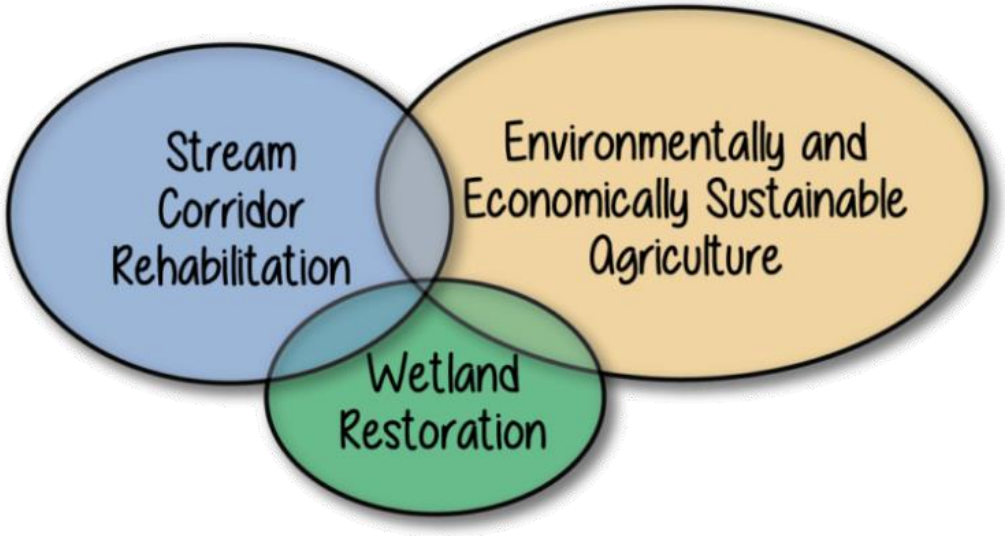
Upper Susquehanna Coalition

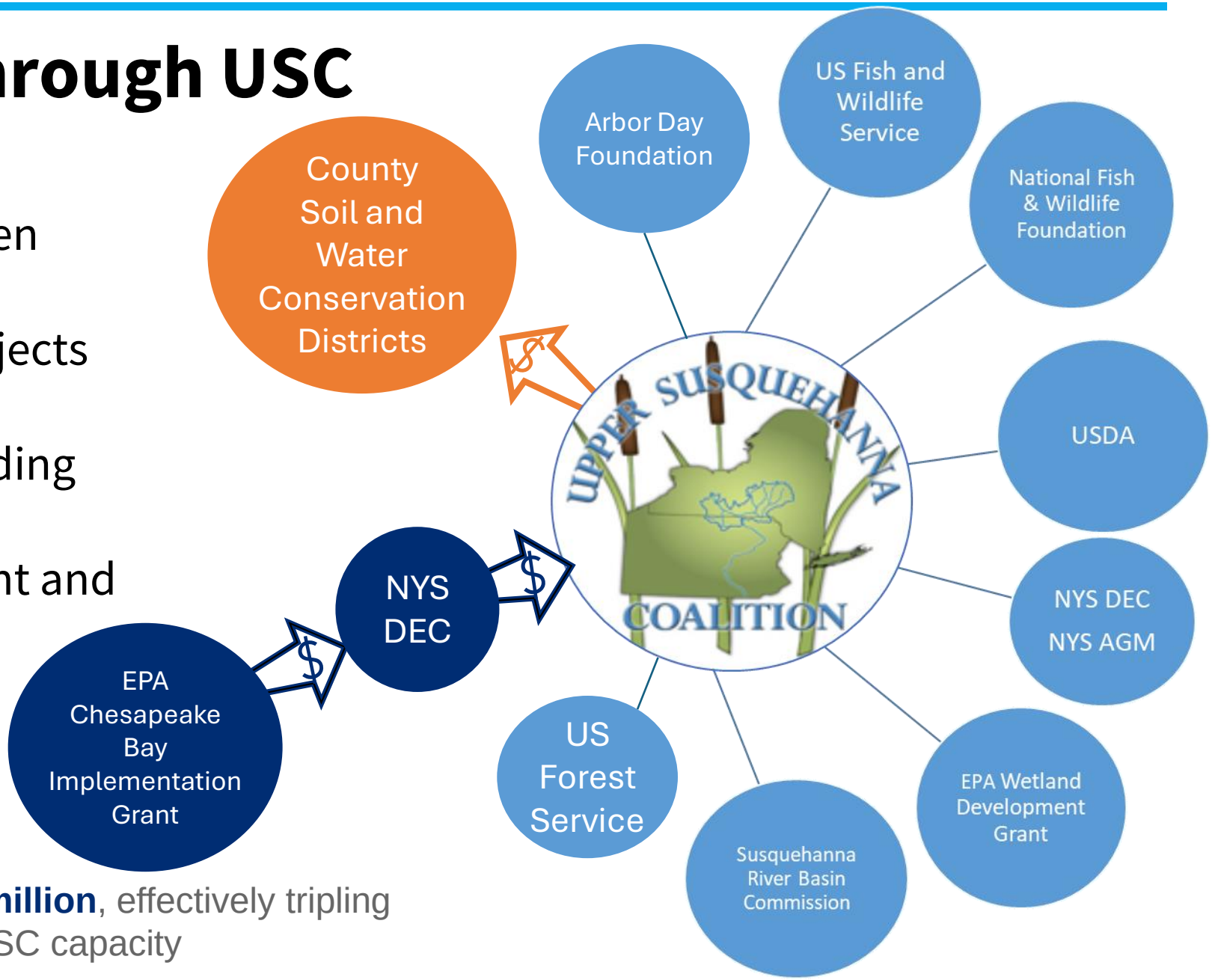
- Established in 1992
- 22 Soil and Water Conservation Districts in NY and PA
- USC collects, reports, and verifies all agriculture BMPs in NY's portion of the watershed
- Provides technical assistance to landowners and farmers
- Shares resources between districts and partners

Vision: A well functioning Susquehanna River Headwaters in harmony with itself and the entire Chesapeake Bay Watershed.



Capacity Building through USC

- Explore potential partners
- Increase collaboration between agencies
- Adds flexibility of types of projects implemented
- Provides match for larger funding sources
- Centralized grant management and coordination



Since 2014, the USC has leveraged **$32 million**, effectively tripling the amount that NYS DEC disbursed to USC capacity

Success Stories

- USC Water Quality Program
  - Designed to fill funding gaps with State and Federal funding sources to facilitate an increased rate of implementation across the Upper Susquehanna Watershed. This program is funding by a variety of grant sources with different deliverables, mostly all for a focus on riparian buffer implementation, stream restoration, wetland restoration, and grazing initiatives.

- USC Best Management Verification Program
  - The USC provides annual funding to each Soil and Water Conservation District to perform BMP Verification for the CBP. This verification work is contracted and overseen by the USC for QAQC purposes.

- USC Buffer Stewardship Program
  - The USC provides funding to SWCD's to hire summer interns specifically for riparian buffer stewardship and maintenance. There are a number of workdays scheduled throughout the watershed each week in the summer where stewards attend and perform maintenance activities together as a team while learning things such as tree species, weed ID, etc. These stewards also perform verification and stewardship activities within their own counties to identify buffers that may need future attention.

USC Buffer Stewardship Program

- Assess existing plantings
- Conduct maintenance and replanting
- Assist landowners
- Educate and coordinate volunteer groups, landowners, and municipalities
- 2024 had 12 buffer stewards across the watershed that checked 85,734 stems (1,183 acres) for survival

Challenges and Obstacles

- Competition for Funding
  - Recently, more organizations are competing for the same funding sources. They are offering support to farmers for the same practices in NY. This creates confusion among farmers, challenges with matching funds for implementation, and in the absence of District involvement becomes an obstacle for reporting and verification of practices.

- NRCS Funding Programs/1619 Agreement
  - The Chesapeake Bay Program has not been made a priority by NRCS in NYS.
  - NRCS funding programs are challenging for our landowners to navigate as well as frustrating for our SWCD staff. NRCS lack of staff and work backlog causing delays in contract program delivery.

- Data Sharing and 1619 Agreements
  - In NY, the USC hosts the database the all SWCD's report BMP data to by farm in order to perform verification on these practices later on. The USC reports to the CBP Model at the County scale only.
  - Data collection and sharing with partners including NRCS is difficult, and leaves potential for implementation and verification to be missed.

- Practices differing in NY from other CB states
  - Due to differences in climate and weather patterns, some practices are used, perform and function differently. Soil health practices, particularly cover crops, are one example. Cover crops in other states are implemented primarily for soil health and carbon sequestration, while in NY they are also a key component of nutrient management in dairy cropping systems with manure.