

Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)

There are 97 soil and water conservation districts making a difference in your community. No matter how big or small, each of the 102 counties has the services of a SWCD. From educating homeowners on practical utilization of water to helping rural landowners save soil and improve water quality; it takes everyone working together to protect our soil and water! Without these vital resources our communities cannot thrive!



The 2013 State Budget contains funding levels for the 97 SWCDs that are \$739,500 (more than 10%) below 2012 levels, an amount that is sure to see many SWCDs falter and cease providing services during the 2013 fiscal year. Without further action by the General Assembly it is likely that 31 SWCDs will cease to function by January 1, 2013.



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Conservation Saves Water and Creates Jobs

The two things that are uppermost in many people's thoughts these days are the need for rain to ease the drought and the need for jobs to help the state's economy recover. Conservation practices applied on private lands with the assistance of the soil and water conservation districts address both of these concerns.

The use of conservation practices began in the 1930s following the devastation brought about by the Dust Bowl. The Dust Bowl was the result of a set of circumstances occurring over time that came together to bring about the huge clouds of dust arising in the Great Plains and moving east to sift through the windows of the Capitol in Washington D.C. and beyond to give ships at sea a gritty covering of dust.

The circumstances that led to the Dust Bowl arose in part from increased mechanization on the farm. Powerful tractors and larger tillage equipment allowed farmers to break out more ground eliminating the deep rooted prairie plants and replacing them with shallow rooted crops. Several years of drought dried out the soil and the shallow rooted plants couldn't prevent the strong winds from picking up and moving the top soil off the fields. In many cases, farm land in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas and other Great plains states lost most, if not all, of the nutrient containing top soil, leaving very poor soils behind that were ill suited for farming.

To help address this national catastrophe, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Hugh Hammond Bennett to head the Soil Erosion Service (SES), a new agency within the Department of Interior, and address the nation's soil erosion problems. To accomplish the task, the SES was given the responsibility of installing conservation practices to try to stop the devastation brought about by soil erosion from both wind and water.

With the assistance of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), hundreds of thousands of people were put to work to plant a belt of trees from the Canadian boarder to Abilene, Texas, build reservoirs and construct other works..

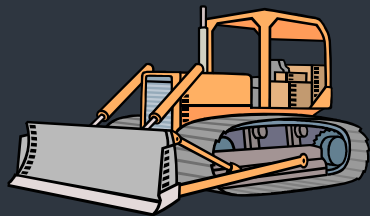
The SES was soon changed to the Soil Conservation Service and transferred to the US Department of Agriculture. The agency was given the task of assisting farmers to teach them new ways to farm that helped conserve the soil and protect it from erosion and to install conservation practices such as terraces and grass waterways to conserve water and help stop soil erosion.

To help the SCS (now Natural Resources Conservation Service) work with farmers, most of whom did not trust the federal government, soil and water conservation districts were created. The SWCDs, governed by locally elected farmers, were trusted and paved the way for the federal employees to assist framers with installing conservation practices.

Today, the SWCDs employ their own staff and work side by side with the NRCS employees to install conservation practices on agricultural lands and on urban lands where the NRCS cannot provide such assistance.

As time passes, the SWCDs are gradually taking on a greater role in conserving our natural resources. NRCS is limited by federal funding sources and must spend their time only on Farm Bill programs. The SWCDs have no such limitations and can assist everyone. They just need to receive sufficient funding to allow that to happen. When the SWCDs are able to perform the job they were created to do, the results are conservation on the land, more contractors working and more people employed.

Funding SWCDs makes sense. It allows for the conservation of the state's land and water resources and, as conservation has in the United States from its beginning, it creates jobs.



Soil and Water Conservation Districts Provide Many Kinds of Services and Assistance.

- The 97 SWCDs are continually involved in implementing conservation practices to maximize use of available resources while also protecting these essential environmental resources.
- SWCDs provide needed information for urban and rural decision makers so that they can make wise choices that will protect people and property in the future
- Through the various programs they administer and the technical assistance they provide, SWCD's encourage the protection, conservation and wise use of our natural resources to assure sustainability for future generations.



NOTE: SWCDs DO NOT have taxing authority and must rely on state source funding to employ staff to administer programs.

Gaming expansion legislation being considered by the 97th General Assembly has the potential to create thousands of jobs and fund SWCDs at a sustainable level.

PROTECT & CONSERVE

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Districts' Spotlight



Journal-News - Mike Plunkett

Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District secretary treasurer Dave Schluckebier and vice chairman Dave Pastovich observe water and sediment control basins under construction in Audubon Township.

Montgomery Co. SWCD

Members of the Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District inspected over \$100,000 in projects Wednesday morning during their annual conservation tour.

Resource Conservationist Kris Reynolds, District Conservationist CJ Liddell, and Soil Conservation Technician Dave Hobson hosted the tour of six sites in Fillmore Township, South Fillmore Township, and Audubon Township.

All of the projects received cost-share funding from various state and federal

programs. "We have the need for from \$300,000 to \$400,000 in projects," Reynolds said, "but funds are becoming more and more difficult to get."

The first tour stop included a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) project where eight dry dams along with 1.8 acres of grass waterways are under construction to control gully erosion. Habitat buffers will be planted next spring along the timber edges to provide a secondary erosion control.

The tour next stopped at a farm in Fillmore Township, where 13 water and sediment control basins and 5,000 feet of tile were installed last summer. Grass waterways and dry dams are to be constructed this fall through CRP. The total project has an estimated soil savings over 100 tons per year.

Tour stop three was to view a project that includes eight water and sediment control basins, a grass waterway, and rock chute will save 80 tons of soil annually on another property in Fillmore Township.

An Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and CRP on Triangle Development ground in South Fillmore Township includes terraces, diversion, grass waterways, and is surrounded by habitat buffers.

The photo shows work underway at the time of the tour. Contractors were working on three water and sediment control basins and over 1000 feet of tile. The project will save over 20 tons of soil per year by control-

Cumberland Co. SWCD

This large aluminum grade stabilization structure was installed to protect the lower end of a 2160 foot grass waterway in western Cumberland County. This waterway and structure carry the runoff from 100 acres of cropland. Prior to installation a large gully was washing through the crop field. An estimated 140 tons of soil per year was saved due to this project. This structure is made of aluminum, meaning it will not rust away. It is permanently set in concrete, meaning it will not wash out. This structure will help save soil for many, many years to come. Projects such as this and many like it are part of the reason Soil and Water Conservation Districts are vital to Illinois.



Contractor installing large grade stabilization structure

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SOIL &
WATER

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