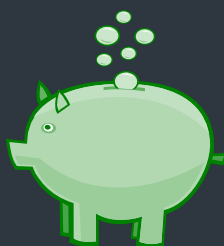


## Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)

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!



## SWCD Importance

SWCDs are an important link to deliver federal source funds that directly benefit the local and state economy. The economic benefit that SWCDs provide is far greater than the amount of money that is appropriated for their use by the General Assembly



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## IF IT'S JANUARY OR FEBRUARY, IT MUST BE SWCD ELECTION TIME

January and February are the months when many of the State's Soil and Water Conservation Districts have their Annual Meetings. Generally, the districts will invite local legislators so that they will have an opportunity to see what the district has done during the past year and how it has spent money appropriated for the district by the General Assembly. It is also the time of year when all of the districts elect directors to the governing board. Why January and February?

When the Soil Conservation Districts Law (*now the Soil and Water Conservation Districts Act, 70 ILCS 405/*) was first enacted in 1937, it was felt that the winter months were more appropriate for electing soil and water conservation district directors because most of them were farmers and that was a time of year when they wouldn't be occupied with preparing the land for the spring planting season or in the fields planting the crops. At the time the enabling legislation set the tie for the elections, it also allowed the districts to hold their election during an annual meeting. Nearly all of the districts took advantage of that provision and have, since the legislation passed, held their elections at their annual meeting. However, because of rising costs, reduced appropriations and the fact that many farmers now take winter vacations, many of the districts are now holding their annual meetings at other times during the year, often in conjunction with other organizations' meetings and field days.

Though the times and circumstances may have changed and soil and water conservation districts do much more than serve the farming community, the election process has never been altered.

Newly elected directors still take office for a two-year term on the first Monday in March in the year in which they are elected.

The process may seem a bit archaic but the programs and responsibilities of the district's certainly aren't. Attend a district's annual meeting whether it is held in January, February or at some other time during the year and you will learn a great deal about what your district does for all of the people within its jurisdiction, not just the agricultural land.

Soil and water conservation districts are an excellent model for providing needed services to anyone interested or concerned with caring for the environment.

The districts work closely with and often recognize local, state and federal agencies, schools, municipalities, county government, individuals and businesses who make an effort to help protect our precious natural and environmental resources and who help teach, train or serve as an example to others. These managers, leaders and concerned citizens are an important asset and help make sure that future generations will have the opportunity to enjoy the same productive soils and clean, abundant water that we care so much about.



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

- The 97 SWCDs are continually involved in implementing the most up-to-date 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 recognition and the various programs they administer and the technical assistance they provide, SWCD's encourage the protection, conservation and wise use of our environmental 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.

There is an urgent need to develop a funding source to help Illinois SWCDs retain staff and provide services. Without additional revenue environmental problems can

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## Districts' Spotlight

Soil and Water Conservation Districts throughout Illinois utilize their annual meetings to recognize people in the community who have helped further the cause of protecting Illinois' vital land and water resources. Often, as is the case with the Winnebago SWCD, the district gives back to the community. The funds generated from the sale of the rain barrel and other auction items will benefit numerous educational programs including the Illinois Envirothon. Without adequate funding the SWCDs will be forced to abandon many of the activities they currently perform, including their annual meetings.

**Winnebago SWCD:** The soil and water conservation district recently hosted its 72nd annual meeting and Awards Luncheon on Friday, January 26th at Klehm Arboretum. About 95 people attended the event. It included a short business meeting, and the election of three directors. Elected were Harlan Tipton (one year term); and John Carlson and Larry McPherson (two year terms). Organizations and individuals were recognized for their outstanding efforts in the areas of Environmental Awareness; Conservation and Youth Education; and Dedicated Conservation.



Judy Barnard was given the "Friend of SWCD" Award, for her long standing commitment and dedication to the District, having served as a Director for 20 years.

The District held a rain barrel design contest last fall. The winning design came from 6<sup>th</sup> grade student **Sierra Holz**, from **Rockford Environmental Science Academy**. A live auction of the barrel was conducted by **Jim Sacia**, with the proceeds from the auction going to the school to cover expenses for field trips. This was definitely one of the highlights of the meeting, as the bidding wars generated **\$1,050** for the school!! The photo to the left displays the barrel with the student-**Sierra Holz**, Chairman **Mark Johnson**, and the winning bidder - **John Carlson**.



Our "Dedicated Conservationist" Award was presented to **Jerry Paulson**, retiring Executive Director of the **Natural Land Institute**.



**Rockford Christian School** was selected to receive the District's "Environmental Awareness" Award.

The **Torstenson Family Youth Conservation Education Center** was awarded the "Conservation and Youth Education" Award. This 750 acres parcel was originally owned by the late **Robert Torstenson**, who developed the farm into a "model of forest, wetland and upland prairie land management;" only farming the areas that made sense to farm. It is now owned by the **Illinois Conservation Foundation**, where it serves as not only a wildlife sanctuary, but as a living classroom for students and youth groups. Many groups utilize the site for youth hunts and other educational activities and events, to get children outdoors and learn about conservation stewardship, and hunting ethics and sportsmanship. The **Pecatonica** school district also utilizes the property as part of their curriculum, offering hands-on experiences for all age groups.



Issue 2 Vol. 4 • February 2013

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SOIL &  
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