

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. Please support the governor's proposed funding for the SWCDs for FY2014.



THIS ISSUE

Education is Major Component of
all SWCD Programs P. 1

SWCDs Important to Economy P. 1

Districts' Spotlight P. 2

SWCDs Provide Many Kinds
of Services and Assistance P. 2

EDUCATION IS MAJOR COMPONENT OF ALL SWCD PROGRAMS

Illinois' ninety-seven soil and water conservation districts have been involved in educational activities since they were created. From the beginning of the soil conservation movement in the late '30s, education has been a key component of all conservation programs.

People often realize that something is wrong but may not understand just what they can do to correct the problem. The role of the SWCDs has, and continues to be that of providing educational assistance to help people understand solutions to problems related to soil erosion, water pollution, poor quality wildlife habitat, poorly managed forests, flooding and poorly planned development.

Education is a never ending process. New problems arise continuously as do new methods of dealing with the problems. As these conditions occur, people who are in control of the land and water resource will need to understand how best to utilize the new methods of dealing with the problems. Education is the key to that understanding.

Knowing what kinds of conservation practices will work with the conditions present at the site, including soils, topography, climatic conditions at the site, and other external factors is essential for the successful treatment of the problem. Somehow, the SWCD must transfer that knowledge to the party or parties

responsible for caring for the property where the problem exists.

How that knowledge is transferred is important to the success of treating the problem. Soil and water conservation districts are very good at providing this particular kind of educational assistance.

Over the years the SWCDs have developed a very effective means of educating the public whether it be through small meetings, workshops, field days, demonstrations, tours, class room presentations, poster and essay contests, Envirothon, Earth Fairs for students or some other means, the SWCDs are talking to people solving problems.

According to the Illinois Department of Agriculture's Annual Report for 2011, soil and water conservation districts had contact with more than 235,000 people.

To be able to continue to carry on their educational efforts, the SWCDs are in critical need of funding. Thirty-six SWCDs have only one employee. That person performs work that two people did prior to the severe budget cuts that have taken place since 2002.

With program implementation a high priority, the one person offices often have no time for educational activities. Without proper educational assistance, solutions to problems will be harder for people to find and Illinois' environment will suffer.



Districts' Spotlight

Jackson SWCD:

The Winds of Change

In the 1930's, the wind grew black over the Midwest. Dust was so thick it choked the livestock that stood in the field. Dust clouds traveled all the way to the east coast and into the White House. As soil scientist Hugh Hammond Bennett stood before Congress testifying about the severe soil erosion problem, curtains were drawn back to reveal a dust covered sky. Congress unanimously passed legislation declaring soil and water conservation a national policy and priority. Congress also realized three-fourths of the land was privately owned and the success of the projects would have to rely on volunteer support, so on April 27, 1935, Congress established the Soil Erosion Service.

For 68 years, volunteers have played a major part in preventing, teaching, and promoting soil and water conservation in Jackson County. From the beginning, watershed studies were conducted and monitored, and farming practices were evaluated. In the sixties, the District worked with the Shawnee Resource Conservation and Development to protect 660 acres of agricultural land from flooding. Some of the conservational practices applied were drainage outlets, waterways, and concrete erosion control structures. They also signed an agreement with the Kinkaid Reeds Creek Conservancy District to have 40,000 acres of the Kinkaid Watershed mapped.

During the 70's and 80's, hundreds of erosion and water control projects were completed throughout the county on public and private land with cost share dollars from state, federal, and private funds. Educational tours and events, for all ages, were conducted. With the promotion of no-till farming, hundreds of thousands of tons of soil have been saved throughout the county.

During the 90's, funding for erosion control projects and operations began to dwindle. We still promoted and practiced erosion control, but the District volunteers felt it was time to start changing directions. Education on the benefits of preserving our natural resources became a major portion of the District's Annual Plan of Work. Modern technology was quickly evolving, so the District was also a major contributor in the completion of the Jackson County digitized soil survey.

Through the years, waves lapped at the shores of Kinkaid Lake causing severe erosion. To prevent further erosion around the lake an erosion inventory was conducted. Results of the studies showed eroded soil was entering the lake at estimated amount of 124,725 tons each year. Therefore the District worked with the Kinkaid Conservancy District, other agencies, and many volunteer groups to install several erosion projects around the lake. Tours, demonstrations, and brochures were presented to show the progress.

Today education is becoming even more important. We have been involved with educational events like the Conservation Fair and Envirothon for over twenty years, but we are realizing it is time to expand our audience. To do this tours, seminars, and classes have been held on Sustainable Agriculture, Organic Initiatives, pollinators, managed grazing, and forest management. Meetings on cover crops and soil health will be held soon. We also support the 4-H and FFA and work closely with the Farm Bureau and University of Illinois Extension to further our educational endeavors.

Note: The Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation District was created December 14, 1944. It's legislated mandate and that of the other 96 SWCD's "to protect Illinois' land, water, air, plant, wildlife and human resources" has expanded over the years but has not deviated since the state statute was enacted July 9, 1937.

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 educational assistance to urban and rural decision makers so that they can make wise choices that will protect people and property in the future
- Through education 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 not be adequately addressed.