

## 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 is represented equally. 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!



During the 2012 spring session, the Illinois General Assembly will have the opportunity to address a number of issues that have had devastating effects on many natural resource conservation programs.

Proposed legislation such as HB5539 will help fund SWCDs, HB5315 will help SWCD directors comply with Open Meetings Act requirements and the gaming bill will provide stable funding for the SWCDs. We respectfully request that members of the House and Senate give careful and positive consideration to supporting these measures.



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## When SWCDs Fail

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service is conducting a nationwide exercise called "Field Office of the Future (FOTF)." The purpose is to look at what can be done in the face of federal budget reductions and how customers might be affected. The AISWCD has already conducted a similar exercise concerning the State's 97 SWCDs. What we have learned from talking with the SWCDs and with people who rely on the SWCDs for assistance has led us to believe that we have done and we are doing everything possible to live within our means but we are failing anyway. All we can do is to manage as best we can by sharing employees and reducing hours to less than full time.

Illinois' Soil and Water Conservation Districts are failing! "So what?," you ask. "How does that affect me? The SWCDs only do ag work and farmers or somebody else can do that, right?"

**No, it is not right!** We recently worked through a scenario where we asked each soil and water conservation district to tell us what would happen if their district was to suddenly fail and just go away. Some of the responses were very revealing concerning the amount of work the SWCDs do for the people in their district. I will pick just one district's responses to use as an example.

This is not the most active nor the least active district. It is smaller than the average size SWCD but its activities are typical of what all of the 97 SWCDs do.

Here is the question and one district's responses.

**Question:** What would your county look like if the SWCD failed and was no longer able to offer services?.

**Answer:** Education Opportunities would no longer be provided.

- During each month of the school year an average of 55 classes receive agricultural and natural resource classroom presentations that reach approximately 1500 students and 65 teachers. These presentations teach K-8 graders about where food comes from, the importance of our natural resources and stewardship. On average during the school year, over 400 classroom presentations are provided reaching over 10,000 students.
- Teacher workshops throughout the year provide teachers with additional resources to use in their classroom. Books, hands-on materials and activities supplement the curriculum.
- Community workshops and events such as our annual pond shocking demonstration and pond seminar teach the community about managing their local natural resources. By learning about proper pond management, residents are able to have a direct impact on water quality and quantity.

Sales Opportunities would no longer be available to local residents.

- Native plants, trees, fish, rain barrels and composters available through office sales allow local residents to reduce their



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

- The 97 SWCDs are continually involved in educating and assisting students and adults to maximize use of available resources while also protecting these essential environmental resources.
- SWCDs provide needed information 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, 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 being considered by the 97th General Assembly has the potential to create thousands of jobs and fund SWCDs at a sustainable level.

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environmental footprint on our earth. By planting native plants and trees, they provide more opportunities for carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, pollutant filtration and help to improve soil, air and water quality. Rain barrels and composters help to treat water and food/yard waste as a resource.

Cost-share assistance opportunities would decrease for agricultural landowners seeking to address erosion, nutrient management and drainage issues on their fields.

- The SWCD administers the Partners for Conservation Program locally and saw a 95% increase in cost-share spending between FY11 and FY12. With the economic downturn, the pace of development has slowed drastically highlighting the need for continued technical and cost-share assistance provided to agricultural landowners.
- In addition, the partnership between the SWCD and NRCS helps to continue to allow landowner assistance and access to Farm Bill Programs. During FY11 over \$598,000 was administered locally between the SWCD and NRCS Programs. That's over half a million dollars or over \$33,000 per mile square. (Note: for many of the SWCDs, these program dollars will exceed \$2 million)

Assistance provided to local residents, communities and partners would no longer be available.

- The annual used oil pickup allows local residents to properly dispose of their oil. Over 1500 gallons per year are collected.
- Technical assistance provided to the County on a variety of land use issues (zoning, development impacts, ordinances such as the recently drafted countywide Stormwater Management Ordinance) on both the suburban and rural landscape would no longer be available.
- Natural Resource Information Reports provided to landowners, municipalities and the county would no longer be prepared. This could lead to future issues with flooding, drainage and structural concerns with future development.
- Construction Site Inspections ensuring that local development maintains appropriate soil erosion and sediment control measures effectively keeping sediment on site would no longer continue. As a result, developers and contractors would no longer receive specialized onsite training regarding important regulations designed to protect our water quality. The SWCD provides representation to the Illinois Urban Manual Steering Committee and Technical Review Committee. Without our district and others throughout the state, this effort and initiative would cease, leaving the Illinois EPA without a current resource to ensure that NDPES regulations throughout the state are being met.

With dwindling resources, partnerships with local environmental organizations are increasingly important to maximize the impact of local efforts. Without the SWCD to assist partners with activities such as watershed planning, the ability and opportunity to protect our local natural resources for future generations will decrease.

The ability to assist everyday customers, who contact our office looking for a variety of information (pond management, soils information, assistance to address local natural resource concerns and many others), would be eliminated.

Please don't let Illinois' soil and water conservation districts fail! The gaming bill, SB1849, contains \$12.5 million for soil and water conservation districts. It is critical that a source of funding be found that will support the SWCDs. The Governor's proposed budget does not appropriate sufficient funds to keep about 1/3 of the State's 97 SWCDs from failing by October or November 2012. The districts have used all available reserves and are doing everything they can to maintain needed services including sharing employees, reducing staff hours to as little as 18 hours per week and trying to generate local funding. Unfortunately, it just isn't enough.

**Please support SB1849 or its replacement.**

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SOIL &  
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