

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!



Thank You

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.

Thank you for supporting funding levels for the SWCDs for FY2014.

Please support gaming legislation that includes funding for the SWCDs



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Federal Shutdown Makes for Creative SWCDs

The Federal Government shutdown on October 1, 2013 meant that employees in 94 soil and water conservation districts were locked out of their normal office site.

The soil and water conservation districts in Illinois and throughout the nation are almost all co-located with the federal USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Nationwide more than 17,000 district employees were locked out of their work location.

I am proud to say that Illinois' soil and water conservation districts continued to provide the usual high level of service in spite of the fact that they had no access to the federal computer system and file resources they normally use to provide their services.

Several of the SWCDs have written to explain how they were able to continue to work under the unusual circumstances imposed by the federal government's shut down.. Following is what they had to say.

Saline County: The District employees were on administrative leave from October 1 – 4 thinking that the shutdown might be resolved quickly. "After that we were able to continue to work from a portion of the building that is available for lease. The landlord pays all of the utilities so he allowed us to use the extra rooms and entrance. We have our own SWCD computer so we moved it and any files, checkbook and other SWCD equipment

over there. The RC worked off her personal laptop. We, of course, had no phones, but we work from the RC's personal cell phone in the field anyway so most of the landowners already have that phone number. We were able to keep in contact with the contractors and any construction that was going on. We did work abbreviated hours at the office but worked from our homes also. "

Adams County: "We were aware we 'could' be shut-down (or more specifically, shut out; as we share office space with NRCS, RD, and FSA), but we, truly, didn't believe it would actually happen. Yes, we had put a few things together just in case, but we really were not prepared.

We had a fish sale on Day 10, which I coordinated from my home. I had taken all the contact information from the office to make sure we could fulfill that obligation to our customers. It was not a good time to be shutdown, though. The week we closed was our biggest week for orders- the shutdown cost us almost \$1000.00 loss for one fish order alone! We were disappointed but trudged on.

It was very fortunate that our QuickBooks is the online edition- I had access to all our accounts and could keep up to date, but I couldn't get the mail with the monthly statements because it was bundled with the FSA and NRCS mailings. Those mailings were being held at the post office until we reopened.

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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.

Your efforts as a member of the General Assembly, have resulted in a \$515,000 increase for soil and water conservation districts in the FY14 state operating budget.

THANK YOU!

PROTECT & CONSERVE

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Our contact information was posted online but we didn't receive any email from clients during the closure.

Overall, I think it was just shock and disbelief that a furlough happened that caught us so unaware. We will be better prepared next time, with a contingency plan for a temporary office elsewhere and a better grasp on what materials are needed."

Jo Daviess: "We continued to work, almost more than ever. Anticipating the shutdown, I brought as much data as possible home with me, along with District owned survey equipment. The district does a great deal of outside consulting work, so we always have plenty to do outside of the USDA assistance.

Currently, I am working on bathymetric mapping of a 200 acre recreational lake in our county. Six days were spent recording GPS points and depths at over 50,000 locations on the lake. Luckily, I am currently enrolled in a GIS course as part of my graduate degree program (funded through a scholarship by AISWCD!), and so have a temporary ArcGIS license on my home computer. This allowed me to continue to work extensively on our bathymetric mapping project as well as doing survey and design work in other areas.

IDOA's data access site allows access to all of the cost-share files so working on CPP cost-share for cover crops continued, business as usual.

Weekly watershed meetings, a meeting with the farm bureau, and with a county Ag-Coalition actually had me working overtime throughout the "shutdown".

Our AC was also able to continue payroll activities, coordinating our monthly board meeting, working on computer database needs (through a district owned laptop) for our projects, and helping in other area educational programs.

These are just three of the responses received from the SWCDs but they are very typical of all of the responses - "we just kept working".

Illinois' soil and water conservation districts are the front line for all conservation programs in the state. The local people know them and know they can be trusted to provide honest, sincere, and worthwhile information and services. With the probability that Illinois will soon be facing standards for nutrient loading of rivers, lakes, and streams, it is critical that soil and water conservation districts receive the necessary resources to be able to assist both rural and urban landowners in meeting the anticipated standards.

The Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force nutrient reduction plan issued in 2008 indicated that nutrient reduction of 45% for nitrogen and 50% for phosphorous were necessary to have a positive impact on the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

To achieve those goals, soil and water conservation districts will need to be available to assist farmland owners with implementation of best management practices without sacrificing crop yields.

With the high nutrient demands of today's high yielding crops, a forced 50% reduction in nitrogen usage would be devastating to Illinois' economy and the agricultural industry.

The SWCDs have the technology to accomplish the reduction with the use of other practices such as cover crops or split applications of fertilizer.

We need to make sure the SWCDs are there to help accomplish this huge task.

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YOUR LAND, YOUR WATER, YOUR ILLINOIS

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SOIL &
WATER

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