

## 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 state and federal source funds that directly benefit the local and state economy. The economic benefit the 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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## New Year Brings Hope and Challenges

As we enter 2014 there is hope that a source of funding can be found for the 97 Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The districts have incurred a 70% reduction in funding from the state since 2008. In the interim period, many of the districts have found other sources of funds or have managed to get by on one employee performing multiple jobs. A few districts have cutback on services so severely that they can no longer service many requests for their services.

The proposed gaming bill as currently written will provide about half of the money needed to sustain two employees for each of the districts but that still leaves many of the districts without the ability to employ two full time staff.

Why two employees? Can we get by on one person? Well, yes, we have been getting by but that will not be enough as Illinois gears up for a massive nutrient management program to reduce nutrient contributions to waters by as much as 50%.

USEPA has determined that a 45% reduction in Nitrogen and a 50% reduction in Phosphorous contributions must be achieved to reduce the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

Illinois EPA and a number of stakeholders are currently working on a strategy plan to reduce nutrient contributions but the success of the plan will depend on how well voluntary compliance is gained from those who utilize nutrients for economic return.

Without the services of the soil and water conservation districts to help users better manage nutrients for crops, lawns, green space and other plant material maintenance, it is highly probable that USEPA will impose regulatory standards severely curtailing the use of fertilizers.

We have seen the results of such regulatory standards that have been imposed on all land uses in the Chesapeake Bay states. Farmers who have in the past been able to produce food crops in abundance can now apply only enough fertilizer to produce about half to two-thirds of the food stocks they were able to grow prior to the imposition of the standards.

Production agriculture and the agricultural industry that exists because of our high productive capacity are the economic mainstay of this state, providing more revenue than any other source. To allow that economic engine to falter or fail would be devastating to the tax base as well as all programs that rely on the tax base.

Without the assistance from fully trained district staff many urban and agricultural landowners will be unable to implement the necessary measures to reduce nutrient contributions sufficiently to fend off the imposition of onerous USEPA regulations.

We need the General Assembly's assistance to find a source of funds that will allow the districts to function properly and continue to protect Illinois' economic base. 2014 is the time to act!



## 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

# PROTECT & CONSERVE



## Districts' Spotlight

**District's perform contract management duties for NRCS.** Five Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts have been selected to carry out a pilot program with the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Carroll, Christian, Iroquois, Union, and Wabash (and Richland) SWCD's have agreed to allow SWCD staff to perform management tasks on federal contracts with landowners for conservation activities. The purpose of the pilot is to determine how much time will need to be devoted to manage federal contracts and to free up the federal technical employee so that more time can be spent in the field working with clients to implement conservation practices.

We are especially interested in the Christian, Union and Wabash/Richland SWCD pilots because each of those SWCDs/work areas has a single employee. It will be very informative to learn how the extra time being spent on federal contract management will impact each SWCD's ability to manage its own state contracts.

In most cases, federal employees do not assist with state source cost shared projects because the NRCS receives no money from the state for that assistance. Federal policy dictates that the NRCS employees may only work on projects that are a source of funding for the federal employee's employment expenses.

Under the terms of the agreement for the pilot program, participating SWCDs are paid a specified amount for each contract managed by an SWCD employee.

The pilot is scheduled to end in September 2014. NRCS will evaluate the results and make a determination at that time to extend the program statewide or to look at other alternatives.

While the pilot program is providing the participating SWCDs with badly needed revenue to help with their state source funding shortfall, it also reduces the amount of time the participating SWCD employee has to make normal district services available to the public.

It is anticipated that the pilot will demonstrate that a single SWCD employee will not be able to maintain some services that have been provided in the past to persons seeking the SWCD's assistance. Just how much those services will be impacted will not be evident until farther along in the time line for the pilot program.

With increased emphasis being placed on reducing nutrient contributions to waters of the state, the need for district services to landowners will become even greater.

Some means of funding the soil and water conservation districts must be developed, and soon. The USEPA will not be satisfied with any kind of plan or strategy that does not bring about significant nutrient contribution reductions in a reasonably short time frame (likely less than 20 years).

Who else can do the job? A regulatory program can't work. It will cost the state too much to implement and carry out. There are not enough private sector contractor's to do the work and landowners may not use them because of a lack of trust or confidence in their abilities. NRCS can't do it unless they receive funding for that purpose. That just leaves the SWCDs. The districts have the authority, the knowledge, the respect and the trust of the landowners - everything they need except the funding to allow them to do the work.

We need your support and your active participation to make sure the SWCDs have sufficient trained staff to help Illinois' agricultural producers maintain the economic engine that helps keep this state running.

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SOIL &  
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