

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

Wednesday, April 1, 2015

I hope everyone is enjoying the warmer weather!

The past several weeks have been a roller coaster ride, from budget issues...again, to legislative visits, SWCD meetings and much more. So by now each district should have received \$8,419.00 for operations plus the health insurance has been paid. Each district also received a "form" letter from IDOA stating any operation dollars still remaining have been suspended. I sent out an email to everyone stating this is just a form letter that is required by the state. AISWCD, Mike Hoffmann, legislators and our friends at IL Farm Bureau are helping to get the remainder of SWCD operation dollars released. It is fairly complicated but due to the sweeps bill there is now money available. More info is in the Legislative section below.

AISWCD OFFICE UPDATE

Luke Garver, from IDNR CREP Program Coordinator, and I conducted interviews for the vacant CRS position in LaSalle Co. We offered the job to Mr. Richard Rappley and has accepted the position. He will start the week of May 18th in Springfield to complete paperwork then begin in LaSalle Co. SWCD later that week.

This week Gina has taken a much needed vacation with her husband to sunny Florida. If you have any questions for her or have sent her an email this week she will respond upon her return next Monday.

SWCD LONG RANGE PLANS

Don't forget about SWCD Long Range Plans! AISWCD can't stress enough how important these plans are to future funding ventures. The Long Range Plan acts as a Business plan which once completed will likely open doors to more funding opportunities. While IDOA is not providing a template for districts to use, you are welcome to Google "Business Plans" to see the structure and layout. There are several districts who have already completed their plans and would be more than happy to answer questions or let you borrow their plan as a template. Just remember, while we are all SWCDs, each is uniquely different in that districts have a wide range of partners and projects within their county. If AISWCD can help in anyway please let us know or contact your IDOA Area Rep. for more information.

AISWCD INTERNSHIP

Myron and I will be conducting interviews for a summer intern the week of April 20th. More information is to come. If your district is interested in hiring a summer intern please let us know as we can post the announcement on our website.

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

NUTRIENT LOSS REDUCTION STRATEGY (NLRs) TASKFORCE

Members of the NLRs Taskforce have met with several key partners over the past month. Myron, Steve Stierwalt and I met with Jean Payne of IL Fertilizer and Chemical Association the week of March 16th.

We discussed the Taskforce's idea to have a Watershed-based Pilot Program, within the watersheds identified in the NLRs Science Assessment, to begin documenting implementation efforts along with helping to increase BMPs on land in Illinois. The project would run for two years in the 5 watersheds then we would like to expand the project to the entire state.

Myron, Tom Beyers and I met with Laura Gentry from IL Corn Growers Association the week of March 23rd to discuss this same project. That same week, Myron, Steve Stierwalt, Lee Bunting, Kara Downin and I met with IEPA Bureau of Water Bureau Chief, Marcia Willhite, Amy Walkenbach, Trevor Sample and Dick Breckenridge to discuss the Pilot Project. Later that week, Myron, Tom Beyers, Lee Bunting, Steve Stierwalt, Terry Davis, Steve Fulling, Kara Downin and I met with IL Farm Bureau to discuss the same project. Rich Guebert, Chris Hausman, Lauren Lurkins and Mark Gebhards were in attendance from IL Farm Bureau. The meeting was productive and the idea was well received. Kara Downin and I have a meeting with IL Farm Bureau, IL Corn Growers Association and IL Council on BMPs in two weeks to further discuss this project.

Our goal is to have SWCDs be the overall delivery system for the NLRs work moving forward. The infrastructure is in place, we just need to get each district fully staffed to be fully functional again!

CDSI – CLIENT GATEWAY – CONTRIBUTION AGREEMENTS

Many of you know AISWCD was approached by NRCS to enter into an agreement which allows SWCDs to complete administrative work for NRCS for a nominal stipend. AISWCD is currently working on this contract and hopes to have it signed and in place by May of this year. In addition to the administrative work NRCS has asked if AISWCD could also hold the Contribution Agreements. NRCS does not have the capability to hold individual contribution agreements with districts due to restructuring of the organization. AISWCD will receive a small administrative fee for the work required to process payments and generate reports to fulfill the contract requirements.

CDSI-Client Gateway

This grant refers to fulfilling administrative duties required when landowners enroll or re-enroll in USDA programs. The list of duties will be outlined similar to past contribution agreement Plans of Work. This grant is open to any district interested in participating. Work can be completed by admin or technical SWCD staff. The amount the district will receive, to complete administrative duties as it relates to NRCS programs, is approximately \$4639.18 for the duration of the grant agreement (approximately 1 year). The amount is in the form of a block grant offered to the district regardless of how many

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

administrative duties you complete within the contract year. AISWCD will require each district to track the amount of hours they spend on tasks and number of tasks completed but the district will not get paid per item. AISWCD will re-evaluate this method after the first contract year.

CRP Contribution Agreements

This grant refers to fulfilling technical duties as it relates to NRCS & FSA programs. The list of duties will be outlined similar to past contribution agreement Plans of Work. This grant is open to any district interested in participating. Work must be completed by technical SWCD staff only. Districts are allowed to work with other districts who may not have technical staff in order to complete agreement requirements. AISWCD will still require each district, who plans to participate, to send in an estimated Plan of Work. The local District Conservationist will still need to sign off, stating the amount of work the district intends to complete is valid and readily available to complete. The minimum and maximum amounts will remain the same as previous agreements – min. 10K to max 50K. The contribution agreement will still be a 50/50 match. The district will get paid on a per plan/review/ac, etc. basis, which is no different than past contribution agreements with NRCS.

General Questions

Please see the attached document for a list of general questions and answers regarding the grant opportunity.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Budget - Update

Over the past several week, Myron, Mike, and I have worked tirelessly advocating for SWCDs to receive the 2nd operations allocation from the State of Illinois. As you know the 2nd half of the FY15 allocation was frozen, that was before the bill sweeps in both the House and Senate. As all of you are now aware, GOMB did release a portion of the operations allocation as well as pay for the insurance. Every district, except McHenry-Lake, should have received \$8,419.00 for operations. While this is not a large amount, we hope it will keep your district afloat while we continue to work with legislators and GOMB to release the remainder of the operations money.

The General Assembly is on Spring Break this week and next, which means they are typically in their home offices. Please visit with them over the next week. Upon their return we will continue efforts to get the remainder of the funds released.

PLEASE CONTINUE TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS!

Discuss with them ***how will funding cuts will and are affecting their legislative district and the state as a whole***. Keep reminding them throughout the legislative session on how important Soil and Water Conservation is to Illinois. Legislators need to hear from their constituents. One last time, **I can't stress how important it is to call your legislator to let them know how a cut in funding will not only affect SWCDs but their legislative district as well.** Please continue to carry this message throughout the year as it is imperative that we are all carrying a clear and concise message.

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

Legislative Visit(s) – Thank you to the districts who attended the meeting with Senator Sam McCann on Tuesday in Jacksonville. We had a great turn out of Directors, so thank you! Senator McCann would like to work with SWCDs to help find a dedicated source of funding. He is a huge proponent of districts and is willing to do what he can to help keep districts alive and thriving.

Legislative Book

The legislative book is available on the website for anyone who is interested in downloading. This is a great resource to use when having meetings with legislators or any local government offices. Use this book to showcase activities your district is involved in as well as the Land Use Councils in surrounding counties. Should you have any questions regarding this book or if your district would like to add or update a page, please contact Gina Bean.

AISWCD ANNUAL MEETING

The new schedule and registration forms will be posted to the AISWCD website next week so be looking for an email via IL.ALL with that information.

NEW THIS YEAR ...

An **Exhibit Hall** will feature partners and products. We have several exhibitors already signed up and confirmed. If you know of someone who might be a good fit please contact us ASAP as space is limited and filling up quickly.

A **Sunday Tour** will be offered for those who like to travel to Springfield a day early. You don't want to miss out on this tour...on the agenda is a visit to a local restaurant with a roof-top garden, a local brewery complete with beverage samples and much more! The full agenda will be posted next week on the website. Be sure to sign-up early as space is limited!

The **Hospitality Rooms** will once again be offered during the conference.

Live Auction is slightly different from the past few years. We are seeking 10-12 auction items (value \$250+) for the live auction. We are also taking other donations (i.e. wine, hand-made items, housewares, wall art, etc.) for the silent auction (value <\$250). The silent auction will take place in conjunction with the Live Auction this year. If your LUC would like to pool their money to purchase an item to place in the Live Auction (i.e. seed corn, Terry Redland print, firearms, etc.) it is greatly appreciated. Some items might be paired and placed as a "basket-type" item. We need a list of all items no later than June 1st so we can advertise on the website and in the auction booklet. **Please note:** the auction is a money-maker for education programs. Our partners: Auxiliary, Envirothon, ISWCDEA all hope to receive a portion of the money raised to help fund their individual education/outreach needs.

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

Bring your spouse and family to this year's Annual Meeting & Summer Conference. There will be plenty of activities for the whole family!

AISWCD DUES

When budgets get tight so do the checkbooks...we've all been in a similar situation. While we understand the dues amount - 3% assessment of district operational funds – seems to be a large amount, especially when districts are fighting to keep their doors open and pay employees. However, that amount we feel is invaluable because it assures districts that they will receive some amount of funding from the State of Illinois each year, as long as AISWCD is in place and functioning properly. The more dues we receive the better off we are at keeping a lobbyist on staff and offering districts programs, grants and services at a discounted rate. Without dues, AISWCD does not function, and quite frankly, will not exist.

***Q:** Why is the dues amount a 3% assessment of district operational funds when the district isn't allowed to use operational dollars to pay dues?*

A: The 3% assessment of district operational funds is to ensure the AISWCD is doing their job – lobbying to get funding for districts which in turn empowers each SWCD in Illinois. The more money districts receive the better off AISWCD will be financially and can focus on finding additional forms of revenue for districts.

***Q:** If my district pays a portion of the dues will my district be considered in good standing, have voting privileges and be allowed to participate in AISWCD led programs, grants or other activities listed in the AISWCD Bylaws?*

A: The AISWCD Bylaws state in **Section #6: Dues**. The dues of the Association shall be paid in full annually by January 1. A district paying only a portion of the dues will not be considered "in good standing" for that year.

***Q:** My district just cannot afford the 3% dues amount required to be a member of AISWCD but I need AISWCD's help to continue lobbying efforts in order to receive funding from the State of Illinois. What are some options for my district?*

A: At the discretion of the AISWCD President and under advisement from the Executive Committee, your district can be granted a dues variance. The dues variance is a one-time opportunity extended to districts with extenuating circumstances.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY AISWCD

AISWCD is grateful for Soil and Water Conservation Districts! We'd like to provide a list of services that we currently offer to our SWCD members.

- ❖ **Lobbying** for SWCD funds
- ❖ Registered **Lobbyist**
- ❖ **Discounted Insurance Premiums** (AISWCD holds the master policy and gets reimbursed by IDOA)
 - Directors and Officers Liability

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

- Business Auto
- Package Policy (property, inland marine and general liability)
- Umbrella Policy
- Workers Compensation
- ❖ **Program & Grant Opportunities** – Contribution Agreements
- ❖ Informational material – email based (il.all subscription)
- ❖ Conservation Catchall publication
- ❖ Legislative Day Reception
- ❖ Tech Soup – technology discounts

AISWCD was set-up to lobby for funding to support districts. Without AISWCD efforts over the past few months, districts would not have received any of the 2nd operations allocation. District staff are not allowed to lobby unless they are taking time off. District Directors are allowed to lobby, however most have full-time jobs and are unable to take the time required to travel and time to visit legislators at the state house. Without our lobbyist and efforts of the Executive Committee (President & Executive Director) districts would not have received the amount they did nor would the state consider releasing the remainder of the 2nd allocation.

We greatly appreciate your membership! Please let us know how we can better serve your district by submitting comments to Kelly.thompson@aiswcd.org. I will direct any comments or question to the AISWCD Executive Board members.

As always, if you have any questions or comments at all, don't hesitate to call the office! Remember, AISWCD works for Districts...without SWCDs, the Association would not exist!

Remember to **INFORM** your Legislators!

You can never send them enough information on activities taking place in your district!

Enjoy the warm weather!



Kelly Thompson

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

CDSI-Client Gateway & CRP Contribution Agreements GRANT

Question & Answer Sheet

Q: *Does my district have to be in "good standing" with AISWCD in order to participate in this new program?*

A: Per AISWCD Bylaws, Section #5: Membership states, A district in good standing shall have privileges of being represented by the Association and directors able to hold office, vote in Association matters, and participate in Association programs. Yes, your district must be in good standing in order to participate in this program.

Q: *How can AISWCD withhold Federal Program dollars from my district?*

A: AISWCD is not withholding any Federal Program dollars from your district. No document states Soil and Water Conservation Districts have to be the contracting partner to complete the CDSI and CRP admin and technical work. NRCS has extended this opportunity to AISWCD to subcontract with districts because they are the logical partner and have been an asset to NRCS operations. Overall, if NRCS would have hired a third party to administer this program, it is likely the third party could hire whoever they wanted to get the job done and there would be no guarantee the districts would play a role in any part of the process.

Q: *If my district only have one employee, am I still eligible to partake in both opportunities?*

A: Any and all districts can participate in the CDSI-Admin grant. In order to participate in the CRP Contribution Agreement your district must have a technical employee on staff.

Q: *If my district has one administrative employee and a neighboring district has a technical employee, can my district complete the CDSI-Admin grant for the neighboring county and they complete the CRP Contribution Agreement technical grant for my district?*

A: AISWCD has been tasked with assuring the entire state is covered for both administrative work and technical work. If neighboring districts want to coordinate and combine efforts they may do so. A contract will be signed stating that (name of district) agrees to complete technical or administrative work for (name of districts).

Q: *When will AISWCD ask districts to review and sign a contract?*

A: AISWCD is in the process of signing the agreement with NRCS. Once the agreement is signed, AISWCD will request that districts with a strong interest in said agreement to contact AISWCD. AISWCD will then prepare a contract to be reviewed and signed. Work will begin once a signed contract is received.

Q: *Will training be provided for district staff to complete the administrative duties?*

A: Yes, AISWCD & NRCS will hold training sessions once contracts are signed.