

## 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 could not thrive!



The loss of SWCD staff is continuing at an accelerating rate. As of August 1, 2011, there were 27 soil and water conservation districts with only one employee. SWCDs have now lost more than 118 trained staff with a combined total of more than 800 years of experience. The loss of so many staff and the lack of funding to pay for training for new staff is resulting in a decreased ability to deliver needed services in a timely and effective manner.



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## Lack of Funds Continues to Plague Illinois' SWCDs

Outside the Chicago Metropolitan area, harvest is beginning for the 2011 crop. As the corn and soybean harvest progresses, soil and water conservation districts will begin the fall construction season. That is the opportune time to construct soil conservation and water quality improvement practices on agricultural land.

Because last spring was so wet, there was little opportunity to construct agricultural soil and water conservation practices before farmers' fields were planted and once the fields are planted, farmers are very reluctant to destroy any part of their crop to install a conservation practice.

Now that the crops are coming out of the fields, the damage caused by heavy spring rains is becoming apparent and many farmers are looking to the soil and water conservation districts to help them repair the damaged land.

This cycle is becoming normal for Illinois' SWCDs. The last four years have seen abnormally wet springs with heavy and frequent rains that have caused significant erosion in some fields, particularly those where the previous year's crop residue was disturbed by tillage.

The difference this year is that there is less cost share money to offer farmers for assistance and there are fewer soil and water conservation

district employees to assist landowners in planning, designing and constructing the conservation practices.

It is of great concern that soil and water conservation districts have lost 93 full-time trained staff and 25 part-time staff in the past three years due to budget cuts. The loss in staff represents more than 800 years of experience. To properly train replacements for their lost staff, districts will need to spend more than \$541,000 over a three to seven year period. Before the replacements will be fully productive.

While the soil and water conservation districts continue to struggle to provide assistance to landowners, there is no opportunity to seek new program dollars from other sources to aid in best management practice application for water quality enhancement, water conservation, wildlife habitat restoration or other similar practices that enhance or improve conditions that in the past have proved to be an economic benefit to the state.

SB744 offers a means of addressing the district's funding problems. Please support SB744.

### Fact:

Individuals use about 150 gallons of water every day.

The average household consumes 350 gallons of water a day, which is more than 100,000 gallons of water every year.

45% of the water used every day is flushed down the toilet.



## Soil and Water Conservation Districts do Much to Save Soil, Improve Water Quality, Provide Quality Wildlife Habitat and Aid the State's Economy

- Conservation practices that include vegetative components provide significant benefits to wildlife.
- Incentive payments for landowners encourage the installation of many practices that would otherwise be unaffordable for most landowners
- Conservation practices return about \$1.70 to the state's economy for every dollar spent. Soil and water conservation is an investment in the State's future as much to day as it ever has been.



**NOTE:** SWCDs DO NOT have taxing authority and must rely on state source funding to employ staff to administer programs.

The \$10 million line in SB0744 will allow SWCDs to be funded at a sustainable level for the first time in 74 years.

PROTECT & CONSERVE

## Districts' Spotlight

### Jasper County:

The District has been fortunate to enroll over 2,400 acres in the Quail Buffer Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) since 2005. The District has implemented a Quail Buffer Seeding Program to help the landowners establish their quail buffer field border acreage.

The program the District offers consists of purchasing the native warm season grasses and forbs required by NRCS and FSA then seeding the acreage for the landowners. Throughout the enrollment and seeding process, District employees provide technical and administrative assistance to the landowner, NRCS and FSA.



The District's drill pulled by a rental tractor to plant this buffer.



A well established buffer providing quality quail habitat.

The District owns 2 no-till drills equipped to seed the native warm season grass and forbs species. Rental tractors are used to pull the drills and part-time employees are hired to complete the seeding.

This program has benefited marginal cropland acres by establishing field borders for more than 265 landowners. These buffers not only reduce annual soil losses by an average of 2 tons per acre but they also improve water quality and provide habitat for wildlife, specifically the bobwhite quail.

This program will utilize over \$300,000 of federal funds annually over ten years. These funds include annual rental payments, cost-share for establishment and incentive payments.

The Quail Buffer Seeding Program has been successful for both the landowners and the District. It has provided a service to the landowners and also allowed the District to maintain financial stability during this time of funding cuts.

### Brown County:

This grassed waterway was recently constructed on the Beverly Thomas property in Brown County. Thomas took advantage of cost-share funds through the Partners for Conservation Program administered by the Brown County Soil and Water Conservation District. Three acres of grassed waterway have been built and seeded and 2860 feet of underground drainage tile were installed which will help protect 35 acres of adjacent cropland reducing gully erosion by around 60 tons of soil per year. Bauch Dozing was the contractor and did an excellent job of shaping and seeding the practice. Total cost of the project was \$8819.50.



### Cumberland County:

This grade stabilization structure was installed on August 22, 2011 to replace an existing structure that was in service for over 25 years and funded under the old federal Agricultural Conservation Program. This new structure has a 42" inlet standing 11'7" tall and a 74' long outlet pipe 30" in diameter. The project has a 55 acre drainage area, and it is designed to handle 82 cfs at full flow. Structures such as these are



Old structure undergoing renovation



Outlet pipe in place for new structure

vital in helping to save soil, especially during the past years where we have seen such huge rainfall totals. And as one can see the conservation work is never done. This project was put in once and then 25 years later was in need of a complete overhaul. Conserving the soil is something that needs to be done past, present and future. It is a never-ending job to save for future generations to have clean water to drink and rich soil to grow crops so we can all eat.



A trash guard is added and the new structure is ready for seeding