

Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)

There are 98 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 them our communities could not thrive!



Will Legislators Use Veto Session to Repair Damage Done to SWCDs?

Illinois' 98 Soil and Water Conservation Districts are teetering on the brink of desperation. As of November 10, no SWCD has received the remainder of their FY10 allocation or any of the funds appropriated for FY11. The cash flow crisis is threatening to close offices by mid December if something is not done to relieve the situation.



ILLINOIS SWCDs AND LANDOWNERS LIKELY TO BE IMPACTED BY LACK OF \$\$

Illinois' 98 soil and water conservation districts have incurred significant damage to their ability to meet local needs for conservation programs due to the loss of trained and experienced staff.

The State of Illinois and the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) issued a joint announcement on October 25th that the state's application to expand the Illinois River Basin Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) into the twenty-two counties in the Kaskaskia River Basin had been approved.

Signup for the newly expanded program will begin December 1, 2010 and is expected to generate a great deal of interest in both river basins.

The concern now rests with the districts and whether they will have staff to service landowner requests to be included in the state funded portion of the CREP program. Of the sixty-two SWCDs included in the two river basins, twelve have only one employee and twelve others have reduced employee hours to part time status.

The reduction in staff availability will impact the ability of many landowners to enroll their highly erosive lands in the CREP program in a timely manner and may, in some cases, jeopardize the success of the program.

The additional workload placed on staff in counties with flood prone farmland is expected to be formidable. As the districts brace for the CREP

signup, which many expect to be in the range of hundreds or even thousands of acres, they are very concerned that many landowners will not be able to participate due to the lack of available staff and staff time.

Each person who signs up for the program must have his request evaluated to determine if the land proposed for enrollment is eligible. If the land is determined to be eligible the landowner is assisted with completing a proposed contract which can take from several hours to a day or more depending on the acres enrolled. Nearly every signup will also require a site visit.

In addition to the difficulties of servicing landowners created by the lack of staff, there is a very real concern that many of the SWCDs both in and outside the CREP areas will begin ceasing services altogether during the month of December. Without their FY10 fourth quarter money or any of the FY11 money, a large number of districts are nearing the point where they will exhaust all available funds and have no choice but to lay off existing employees. Such actions will essentially assure that CREP will not be able to be implemented and landowners who have been waiting for the opportunity to enroll their erosive lands in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program will be prevented from doing so.

Fact: Iowa, Missouri and Minnesota have passed constitutional amendments to use a portion of the state sales tax to fund parks, recreation and soil and water conservation. On November 2 Oregon, Maine and Texas voters approved ballot measures to fund wildlife and soil conservation programs in those states.

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Soil and Water Conservation Districts Help Rural and Urban Landowners Address Natural Resource Related Problems

- Programs such as the Conservation Practices Program, CREP, Farm Bill Programs and others help rural landowners protect their land and improve water quality.
- Streambank stabilization and other projects in urban areas help reduce flooding and protect property owners from storm water runoff.
- Nutrient Management programs reduce nutrient contributions to our streams, rivers and lakes and in some cases help reduce greenhouse gases.



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

Districts' Spotlight

This month's issue spotlights all 98 Illinois SWCDs



The field adjacent to this stream has been enrolled in CREP and is now protected from over bank flooding and erosion.



This badly eroded field next to a stream is typical of land that is enrolled in CREP.

These five pictures, three related to CREP and two related to urban stormwater control and flood reduction are examples of the work that soil and water conservation districts perform to assist urban and rural property owners throughout the state with natural resource related problems.

The 98 Illinois soil and water conservation districts continue to be viewed as the mechanism to deliver natural resource protection programs to the landscape.



This structure is used to control water levels in a wetland that was added for enhance wildlife benefits for this landowner's CREP enrollment.



Peoria County: Gabion baskets filled with rock stabilize this open storm drain and prevent further erosion which would damage the adjacent street.



Lunkers, a type of bank stabilization and fish habitat improvement practice will also help retain property values for the sub-development adjacent to the stream.

The US and Illinois EPA are in the preliminary stages of implementing a comprehensive nutrient management program that is intended to address the Hypoxia issues in the Gulf of Mexico. It is expected that it will be an aggressive program and that there will be a need for a local entity to help with implementation. Soil and water conservation districts are the logical choice. However, if SWCDs are to be involved, the districts must be financially stable and able to assure their employees that they will be trained and given employment stability.

