

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 cannot thrive!



The Illinois General Assembly will have the opportunity to address funding issues that have had devastating effects on many downstate programs when they return for the second half of the 2011 veto session.

The gaming initiative will most likely come up for a vote. We respectfully request that members of the House and Senate give careful and positive consideration to dedicating a portion of the anticipated gambling revenue to natural resource programs and SWCDs.



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What Happens if there is no Gaming Bill?

SB0744 in its original form is all but dead. The Governor has indicated he will veto the bill if it ever gets to his desk and there seems to be little interest in testing him on that issue.

There will likely be a gaming bill that will be put to a vote sometime during the second half of the 2011 veto session. What that bill will look like is currently open to speculation for all but those who are writing it. The important thing that SB0744 did that we hope the new bill will also do, is to provide \$25 million for down state agricultural and natural resource program efforts. The programs that were included in SB0744 have seen draconian cuts over the past four years and can not survive any further reductions. The Extension Service has been able to reorganize to some extent and to save money by closing offices for which they paid rent. Soil and Water Conservation Districts do not pay rent and can't save any money by closing offices. The offices that the SWCDs utilize are leased by the federal government and the SWCD is housed with the NRCS through a memorandum of understanding that has been in place since the districts were first formed.

Without sufficient funding, the only thing the SWCDs can do to save money is to reduce hours or lay off staff. Unfortunately, that is exactly what has happened.

Currently, there are 29 vacant positions out of a total of 194 positions in the 97 SWCDs. Of the remaining 165 positions, 75 are working at less than 40 hours per week, with several working as few as 20 hours per week.

Since July 2008, a total of 128 SWCD employees have been lost.

Without the influx of additional revenue from the gaming bill or from some other source, the remaining SWCDs that have not yet had to lay off staff or reduce staff hours will soon be affected. The majority of the 97 SWCDs do not have the ability to generate funds locally. Those who do will continue to function for a short time but within a year or two, they too will be forced to cut back on staff hours or lay off staff.

With the reality of the loss of significant amounts of funding from General Revenue sources, the outlook for the SWCDs is very dim.

It is especially troubling that this funding crisis is occurring at the same time that the SWCDs are being looked to more and more by state and local governments for their expertise and by individuals who need advice and assistance in dealing with natural resource issues. While the SWCDs can collect fees for providing those services, the fees will not generate sufficient income to sustain the district.

So, what happens if there is no gaming bill? We believe that by the end of FY2013, more than half of the SWCDs will have closed their doors and within three years, there may be no functioning soil and water conservation districts in Illinois.

Fact: According to the Illinois Department of Agriculture's Annual Progress Report for fiscal year 2010, Soil and Water Conservation Districts worked with landowners to construct 708 conservation practices on 21,878 acres, reducing soil erosion by 55,685 tons.



Soil and Water Conservation Districts Provide Educational Opportunities for Adults and Students

- The 97 SWCDs are continually involved in educational efforts for adults and students.
- SWCDs work with schools and teachers to deliver both formal and information instructional programs.
- Many of the programs offered by the SWCDs are in the form of contests that allow students to test their knowledge against their schoolmates or other schools.
- Materials provided to teachers help them understand and better teach natural resource focused lessons.



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

Gaming expansion being considered by the 97th General Assembly has the potential to create thousands of jobs and fund SWCDs at a sustainable level.

PROTECT & CONSERVE

Districts' Spotlight

White SWCD:

Five members from Grayville High School travelled to Monticello, Illinois and competed with 14 other teams from across Illinois at the 17th Illinois Envirothon competition. This two-day environmental competition for high school students determined which team advances to represent Illinois and compete at the Canon Envirothon for college scholarships and Canon prizes July 24 – 29 in Sackville, New Brunswick, Canada. The Canon Envirothon is North America's largest high school environmental education competition featuring teams from across the United States and Canada competing for prizes and college scholarships.



Team members from Grayville High School included: Austin Rahmoeller, Hunter Short, Jacob Judge, Marshall Schroeder, and Dan Gray, along with their advisor, Marci Anderson

GHS Ag teacher and FFA Advisor, John Gray accompanied the team as their chaperone. Grayville placed 8th overall while obtaining the highest score on the Wildlife category test.

The Envirothon program combines classroom learning with hands-on field experiences focused on five major topics - Aquatics, Forestry, Soils, Wildlife and a Current Environmental Issue. This year's current issue was "Salt and Fresh Water Estuaries".

The competition includes written examinations and an oral presentation component that challenges students to effectively apply and communicate a solution to a complex environmental issue.

Marion SWCD:

Since 1983 the Soil and Water Conservation District has been hosting and providing technical experience to High Schools, FFA Land Use Judging contests and the local community college. Soil judging is a technique for determining the physical characteristics of soil and soil suitability for various uses. Soil properties, such as landscape position, percent slope, color, texture, and structure can be seen felt, and measured. These properties affect other soil features, such as drainage, permeability, rooting depth, and water holding capacity. All of these soil characteristics determine the suitability of a soil for use as cropland, home site, septic tank filter fields and many other uses.



FFA Section 21 contest, 14 out 15 schools, 60 students. Hosted by Kaskaskia College. The College awards 18 free credit hours to the individual high scoring junior/senior and 9 free credit hours to the 2nd high scoring individual.



Tri County contest Effingham, Fayette, and contest 6 schools with 60 students.

"The Mt. Vernon High School agriculture classes and the Mt. Vernon FFA chapter really appreciate the hard work and effort by the Jefferson and Marion County Soil and Water Conservation Districts to provide the hands-on training with the Jefferson County Land Use event and the Section 21 (FFA) Land Use Event. The activity helped to give my 32 Mt. Vernon High School students hands-on judging of about 18 different aspects of soil science. The students do not learn the material until they actually do it in the field. The Jefferson County high schools have placed in the top four teams at the Section 21 Land Use Event because of the training we receive from the Soil and Water District. I have taught for 27 years and there is no better hands-on teaching of math and science than what we receive at this competition." (John T. Kabat, Agriculture Teacher - Mt. Vernon High School)