

SWCD 9-1-1: IL LEGISLATIVE VETO MISSION

(Need SWCD participation to make this work and be the most effective!!!)

We all know the importance of getting the funding restored for the SWCDs in Illinois. We are not the only ones needing to state our case with the legislators. Please read the following information and take appropriate action. Please use the following information when speaking to your legislators so we can get a consistent message across to all the legislators in Illinois. Power of one voice!! Even if you have already contacted your legislators, take time to make one more call!

The Marketing Taskforce worked on preparing a fact sheet that was sent to the legislators of Illinois asking for the following action to taken:

- J the \$3.5 million restored by SB 1103 be appropriated,
- J the \$7.9 million for operations and programs appropriated to the Department of Agriculture in the FY 09 budget be released
- J and the \$1.73 million for employee insurance and benefits cut from the Department of Agriculture's Partners in Conservation Funds be restored

The taskforce requests SWCDs to follow up with their legislators before they return to Springfield for the veto session.

The Senate will be in session on November 12, 13, 14.
The House does not come back until November 19, 20, 21st.

Ways for SWCDs to contact their legislators:

1. Have directors call legislators from the combine! Read over the background information listed under each bullet as it will help you answer questions that might arise.
2. Print off the fact sheet the AISWCD faxed the legislators along with a sheet showing your local achievements to take to the legislator's office. Call ahead and ask for 15 minutes of their time. Remember that the legislator's staff members usually know everything about his/her schedule, items that need attention, etc. Keep them on your good side. A little sugar goes a long way!
3. Contact the AISWCD office and let us know which legislators you have been in contact with on following up on the fact sheet that was faxed. If you need help contacting legislators please let us know and we will be able to assist you!
4. Keep information in front of your local media outlets. Don't be afraid to show them what you do and how important you are to the community
5. Remember the Illinois Envirothon fact sheet. Print it off and take with you to your legislators.

Information is power! In an effort to try and make this as painless as possible all of the whitepapers and other important information have been added to this guide. After reading the material you should be armed with plenty of information, not to mention all of your local SWCD accomplishments, to speak with a legislator for at least 10 minutes.

Key things to keep in mind when speaking to legislators! Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

1. Ask them if they have any natural resources concerns. Great way to start communication. Who knows it might be a great way to show off programs you have completed.
2. Don't leave too much information for them to read! Short, sweet and to the point.
3. Pictures speak 1,000 words! Use them to your advantage. Show before and after photos!

FACT SHEET TALKING POINTS

(The following points were listed on a fax sent to legislators asking that the \$3.5 million restored by SB 1103 be appropriated, the \$7.9 million for operations and programs appropriated to the IDOA in the FY 09 budget be released and the \$1.73 million for employee insurance and benefits cut from the IDOA's Partners for Conservation Funds be restored)

- **Delays in releasing funding and cuts made by the Governor threaten districts' ability to serve the public. Four SWCDs have indicated that they will have to lay off their employees and cease all services by January if funding is not made available before the end of the year.**

BACKGROUND: Soil and Water Conservation Districts are the only unit of local government present in every county of the state with no ability to generate operating revenues from tax sources. They also have the unique ability to enter into agreements with local, state and federal agencies and organizations as well as individuals for works of improvement and financial assistance and are utilized by each of the State's natural resource agencies to deliver local programs.

- **Since January 2008, delays in releasing funds and the potential loss of health insurance coverage, due to the Governor's cuts, have lead to the loss of 33 SWCD employees. The loss of these highly qualified district employees requires hiring replacements and providing training. In order for new employees to be considered fully productive requires from two to four years of training and costs from \$3,000 to \$7,400 depending on the duties of the position. The loss of these 33 employees has created a \$127,600 training obligation for their replacements and cost the state over 181 years of experience.**

BACKGROUND: SWCDs employ approximately 250 individuals in various roles. These employees are among the best trained and most competent of any state in the nation.

- 37 employees are Certified Professionals in Erosion and Sediment Control.
- 6 are Certified Crop Advisors,
- 35 are members of the International Association of Administrative Professionals. Each of these designations requires continuing education to maintain certification or membership. The majority of the SWCD employees have a college degree with a number of those having completed post graduate work.

BACKGROUND: Soil and Water Conservation Districts have served Illinois' resource protection needs since 1938 when the Dust Bowl prompted Congress to encourage the states to establish a program to assure that the country would never again experience such a catastrophic and devastating event. Illinois met the challenge by enacting the Soil and Water Conservation Districts Act (70 ILCS 405). The Act ascribed responsibilities to the SWCDs including the employment of staff to help each of the 98 districts accomplish their mandate to protect Illinois environmental and natural resources.

- **The effects of a reduced staff and the delay in receiving funds combined with damages caused by excessive rainfall this year have significantly impacted SWCDs' ability to meet demands for assistance. Currently, over 1,200 customers are still waiting to be served. Landowners, municipalities and county governments depend on district services to help them solve natural resource problems. Unfortunately, in many cases, they must wait as long as six months to a year under the current funding circumstances.**

BACKGROUND: This number came from the workload analysis that SWCDs filled out earlier this month. The loss of 33 employees since July 2007 means that in many of those cases where a position has been left vacant or a new untrained employee has been hired, the district is not in a position to fully service requests for assistance. In addition, budget cuts and the uncertainty of receiving budgeted funding in a timely manner have led to many SWCDs deciding not to hire additional full and part time staff. Because of the circumstances of having fewer employees and fewer fully trained employees available to service clients the district is not able to adequately address the work load.

- **Soil and water conservation districts return more than \$33 dollars to the state's economy for every dollar of operations money the state provides.**

BACKGROUND: SWCDs assist in the annual delivery of approximately \$250 million of state and federal source incentive payments to purchase products and services for the conservation, protection, preservation and enhancement of the state's environmental (soil, water, air, plant and wildlife) resources. Considering the \$7.4 million provided in the FY 08 budget for operating funds, the return to the State is more than \$33.32 for every dollar spent.

- **Flood damages to roads, bridges and property this past spring and summer would have been much greater without the work the SWCDs have done over the years. Watershed projects and urban and rural conservation practices implemented over the years serve to slow runoff and allow the water to soak into the soil helping to reduce flood flows. Even so, there was much damage that needs to be repaired. Breached and heavily eroded structures are adding to the SWCDs' workload and must be repaired soon to prevent even further and greater damage to downstream areas.**

BACKGROUND: SWCDs sponsor flood control projects, train developers and contractors to protect water quality and work with city and county officials to craft zoning ordinances that will protect existing and new infrastructure and maintain property values. Conservation practices in rural and urban area slow runoff water giving it a chance to be absorbed into the soil. Water that does not run off will not cause flooding.

ADDITIONAL FACTS YOU MIGHT ADD

(The following points are additional material that is important for everyone to be aware of. Some of them might come in handy when speaking with your legislator or media outlets.)

- **Along with the cuts to SWCDs, eleven of the State's parks are scheduled to be closed. SWCDs have worked with DNR to help protect and improve many parks. While the opportunities afforded the general public through use of our parks will be difficult to replace, the work that SWCDs perform on private land provides habitat for wildlife on a broader scale. Those efforts help assure that future park visitors will continue to have pleasurable wildlife encounters. SWCDs work to protect all the land cover in Illinois.**

- **The following is information that was presented at Summer Conference. Illinois' health and prosperity is directly connected to the soil and water conservation districts roles and responsibilities. Below are some of the ways SWCDs support the state of Illinois and all its citizens.**

Urban Over 80% of Illinois' population resides in urban areas. The link between food, water quality, and other natural resource dependent products is not commonly recognized. Conservation in urban areas is even more important than before due to urban sprawl with soil erosion up to 10 to 20 times greater than typical soil loss on agricultural lands. However, SWCDs in urban areas are working with developers to ensure proper conservation practices are installed to protect natural resources.

Farm There are 76,000 farms covering 28 million acres which makes up 80% of the total land area used for farming practices. This large number of acres, coupled with the diversity of commodities produced, makes it difficult to describe a typical farm. Most farm acreage is thought to be utilized for corn and soybeans production; however, Illinois allows for production of several thousand acres of livestock & specialty crops such as alfalfa, canola, pumpkins, nursery products, horseradish, emus, & fresh water prawn. Many farming operations also support recreational activities such as hunting and fishing. Applying conservation on farmland in Illinois, the SWCDs are relied upon to work with and help educate landowners/users to preserve the topsoil, increase fertility and improve water quality.

Food Manufacturing There are more than 950 food manufacturing companies in Illinois making food processing the state's #1 manufacturing activity adding \$13.4 billion dollars more to Illinois' economy. Illinois is the nation's second leading exporter of both soybeans and feed grains. 44% of all grains produced in Illinois are sold as exports. Without soil conservation methods put into place by SWCDs the food manufacturing industry would not be as successful as it is today or will be in the future.

Forestry 90% of forest land in Illinois is privately owned. Forest ecosystems support half of the botanical species native to Illinois. Illinois' forest land provides watershed protection, forest land recreation opportunities, and is habitat for 3/4's of the state's wildlife. Forest land in Illinois contributes \$4.5 billion dollars annually to the state's economy. SWCD's contribute to the preservation and enhancement of forested lands by providing and promoting federal, state and local programs such as WHIP, FDA and CSP which protects our forest resources while enhancing the productivity and wildlife benefits and addresses the economic issues facing landowners today.

Illinois' economy Ag commodities generate \$9 billion dollars annually. Today SWCDs are responsible for the annual delivery of an estimated \$250 million dollars from state and federal sources to fund individuals and organizations for the conservation, protection, preservation and enhancement of the state's soil, water, air, plant and wildlife resources. In addition to the works of improvement that are generated by the influx of these dollars the state's economy receives a much needed boost. Nearly all of the money that comes from federal sources is used to provide financial incentives to landowners to practice some form of conservation. Most of those incentive payments are used to purchase products and services which have a direct impact on the economy.

Research Soil and water conservation districts are constantly finding better ways to do things. Through practical application and innovation SWCD employees, in concert with NRCS, are finding new ways to use familiar practices and components. The result is more economical and often more effective control of runoff and soil erosion. Such innovative ideas are the fruit of well trained, experienced employees who understand erosion processes and how various control measures work to reduce and control soil erosion. Structures such as block chutes, rock checks, gabion basket grade stabilization, are just three examples of structures that are in common use in many parts of

the state and nation because of an innovative idea that was put into practice with the idea of building an effective but less expensive control structure to help benefit the landowner.

During the past 70 years SWCDs have made huge strides. SWCDs were originally formed with one goal - control soil erosion. Today, without SWCDs landowners would not have access to state and federal funds for conservation programs. SWCDs provide the administrative and technical services which are a necessity for the programs to succeed. We have worked very diligently helping reduce soil erosion to tolerable limits on more than 90% of the state's agricultural acres. In urban areas SWCDs have sponsored flood control projects, trained developers and contractors to protect construction sites and worked with city and county officials to craft zoning ordinances that protect existing infrastructure and maintain property values. SWCDs have also worked through many different educational and informational programs to help individuals, groups, organizations and governmental entities understand the need to care for our limited resources and have even been able to address those concerns as well. We have made great strides with SWCD directors setting policy and establishing priorities for assistance and qualified staff working with the district constituents to address natural resource concerns. Working collectively at the local level, programs can be developed that meet specific needs and address specific problems in an effective and efficient manner.

ADDITIONAL WHITEPAPERS

As stated earlier we have attached the whitepapers that have information concerning the SWCDs. Some of the whitepapers attached might cover the same information, but we wanted you to have easy access to the most recent information. We feel once you have read this information; you should feel more comfortable about speaking with your legislators.

MATERIAL DEVELOPED BY:

The information provided in factsheet and guide was developed through the AISWCD Marketing Taskforce. If you have any questions, please contact Stacy Stremsterfer at 217/744-3414 or stacy.stremsterfer@aiswcd.org.

ILLINOIS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

15 YEARS OF PROVIDING HANDS ON LEARNING TO ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



WHAT IS ENVIROTHON? Envirothon is much more than a competition. It is a fun, outdoor, team-based program designed to help students better understand their environment through exploration of ecology, natural resource management, and current environmental issues. The **Illinois Envirothon** is co-sponsored by the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD), local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and cooperating state, federal and resource agencies. This coming year, 2009, the Illinois Envirothon will be celebrating 15 years of providing this great learning opportunity to students across Illinois.

HOW DOES THE ENVIROTHON COMPETITION WORK? The Envirothon program combines classroom learning with hands-on field experiences focused around five major topics - **Aquatics, Forestry, Soils, Wildlife and a Current Environmental Issue**. The five member teams rotate through five outdoor testing stations, where their knowledge is evaluated and scored through written examination. Additionally, the competition includes an oral presentation component that challenges students to effectively apply and communicate a solution to a complex environmental issue.

MISSION OF THE ENVIROTHON - The Envirothon experience:

- enhances a student's critical thinking and problem solving skills
- allows students to expand their knowledge concerning current environmental issues, along with showing the impact individual actions have on various environmental problems
- helps students become tomorrow's leaders, workers, and consumers who will make informed decisions
- gives students valuable exposure to careers in environmental science and natural resource management
- teaches students to become environmentally aware, action-oriented adults

ENVIROTHON COMPETITIONS IN ILLINOIS Local SWCDs and Land Use Councils (LUCs), in conjunction with partnership organizations and educators, organize local competitions in early to mid-April reaching over 1,700 students. The highest scoring team from each of the 16 LUCs (each council is made up of 5-8 SWCDs) advance on to the state competition May 14-15, 2009. The state winning team will represent Illinois at the **Canon Envirothon®** in North Carolina, August 2-8th. 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.



2007 Illinois Envirothon Participants

ILLINOIS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

COMMENTS FROM STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED

- *Envirothon has come to be my favorite extra curricular activity by far! It gives me the opportunity to learn about the environment and better prepare for the future. It is an amazing program that I have attended for the past 3 years of high school and loved it every time!*
- *I feel that I have increased by knowledge on all five categories and the jobs that people have in those areas. I know about the different problems that have arisen due to human active and how we can fix them.*



COMMENTS FROM ADVISORS WHO PARTICIPATED

- *It has created a greater appreciation of all things included in our environment - water, land, plants, animals, etc. that we sometimes don't pay enough attention to.*
- *It has exposed my students to job/careers in the environment and made them more aware of their surroundings.*

LISTING OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS IN 2008 BY LAND USE COUNCILS (LUC)

LUC 1: Morrison, Dixon, Dakota, West Carroll, Forrester, Stillman Valley, Sterling Newman, Amboy, Galena, Erie, Oregon, Eastland, Orangeville, Ashton Franklin Center, Warren, Lena, Prophetstown, River Ridge, Polo

LUC 2: Bureau Valley, Hall, Lamoille, St. Bede, Princeton, Midland, Putnam Co., Cambridge, Kewanee, Orion, Annawan, Alwood, Galva, Aledo, Westmer, Rock Island, RockRidge, Stark

LUC 3: Bradley-Bourbonnais, Cissna Park, Crescent-Iroquois, Donovan, Dwight, Herscher, Manteno, Morris, Newark, Ottawa, Pontiac, Prairie Central, Watseka

LUC 4: Abingdon, Illini West, Cuba, Galesburg, Lewistown, ROWVA, Southeastern, Spoon River Valley, United, West Prairie, Williamsfield

LUC 5: El-Paso Gridley, Midwest Central

LUC 6: Monticello, Paxton-Buckley-Loda, Bloomington, Lincoln Community, Lexington, LeRoy

LUC 7: Charleston, Paris, Oakland, Marshall, St. Thomas More, Shiloh, Catlin, Chrisman, Georgetown, Arthur, Jamaica, Fisher, Martinsville

LUC 8: Calhoun, Pittsfield, Pleasant Hill, Barry/West Pike, AC Central, Brown County, Virginia, Griggsville-Perry

LUC 9: Taylorville, Rochester, Lutheran, Gillespie, Stauton, Auburn

LUC 10: Altamont, Beecher City, Cumberland, Neoga, Newton, Ramsey, Shelbyville, South Central, St. Elmo

LUC 11: Palestine, Oblong, Edwards, Lawrenceville, Red Hill, East Richland, West Richland, Wabash

LUC 12: Triad, East Alton WoodRiver

LUC 13: Flora, Okawville, Mt. Vernon Township, Christopher, Carlyle, Cisne, Sesser-Valier, Fairfield, Nashville, Sandoval, Central, Clay City, Salem, North Clay, Patoka, Woodlawn, Webber, Odin, Salem

LUC 14: Vienna, Goreville, Carmi-White Co.

LUC 15: Anna-Jonesboro, Murphysboro, Pinckneyville, Meridian, Marion, Century, Egyptian, DuQuoin, Cobden, Dongola

LUC 16: Belvidere, North Boone, Lemont, Proviso West, Rich East, Rolling Meadows, Streamwood, DeKalb, Hiawathia, Indian Creek, Sandwich, Sycamore, Driscoll Catholic, Waubonsie Valley, Westmont, Wheaton North, Willowbrook, Batavia, Dundee Crown, Elgin, Deerfield, Grayslake Central, Vernon Hills, Warren Township, Cary-Grove, Crystal Lake South, Boylan Catholic, Rockford East, Roosevelt Community, Plainfield Central, Plainfield South

LUC MAP



For more information on the Illinois Envirothon visit the AISWCD website - www.aiswcd.org



association of illinois

SOIL & WATER

conservation districts

SWCD Funding White Paper

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Soil and Water Conservation Districts are the only unit of local government present in every county of the state with no ability to generate operating revenues from tax sources. As such, SWCDs rely on the Illinois General Assembly and the Governor for their operating expenses. With the uncertainty of the state's economic condition and the need to rely on the administration's priorities, SWCDs face a continuing struggle to generate sufficient revenues to effectively perform their mandated responsibilities. There is a need for a stable source of funding that will provide sufficient revenue to allow Illinois' 98 SWCDs to effectively employ staff and conduct their duties and responsibilities without the stress and constant interruptions created by the need to constantly seek funding just to operate.

The inability of any SWCD to fully carry out its statutory duties affects all of society. Because of their unique abilities to enter into agreements with local, state and federal agencies and organizations as well as individuals for works of improvement and financial assistance, SWCDs have become the focal point at the county level for the delivery of programs offered by numerous local, state and federal governmental bodies to conserve, protect, preserve and enhance natural resources.

SWCDs are in large part responsible for the annual delivery of an estimated \$250 million of state and federal source funds to individuals and organizations for the conservation, protection, preservation and enhancement of the state's soil, water, air, plant and wildlife resources. Without the administrative and technical services of the SWCD landowners would have no access to many of these dollars and many of the gains that have been made in reducing sedimentation, improving water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat would either stagnate or be lost. In addition to the works of improvement that are generated by the influx of these dollars the state's economy receives a much needed boost. Nearly all of the money that comes from federal sources is used to provide financial incentives to landowners to practice some form of conservation. Most of those incentive payments are used to purchase products and services which has a direct impact on the economy.

By developing a stable funding source that is not dependant on the ever shifting priorities of the administration or the uncertainty of the economy, SWCDs can be free to concentrate on the job of protecting the state's natural resources, reducing green house gases, addressing the factors contributing to the Gulf Hypoxia problem and helping Illinois remain a strong national leader in agricultural, food production, manufacturing and natural resource protection.

OVERVIEW OF ORGANIZATION

In establishing the act allowing for the creation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the General Assembly declared "... it to be in the public interest to provide (a) for the conservation of the soil, soil resources, water and water resources of this State, (b) for the control and prevention of soil erosion, (c) for the prevention of air and water pollution, and (d) for the prevention of erosion, floodwater and sediment damages, and thereby to conserve natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, assist in maintaining the navigability of rivers and harbors, conserve wild life and forests, protect the tax base, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of this State. Since the first SWCD was created in 1938 in St Clair County, the mission of all of Illinois 98 SWCDs has not deviated from the policy set forth by the General Assembly.

Through educational and informational programs, demonstrations, field days, public meetings, newsletters, mailings, public media and by word of mouth, SWCDs have been a significant force in helping individuals,

groups, organizations and governmental entities understand the need to care for our limited natural resources. And, through administrative and technical assistance, SWCDs have helped these same individuals, groups, organizations and governmental entities address their natural resource related concerns.

During the past 70 years Illinois' SWCDs have helped reduce soil erosion to tolerable limits on more than 90% of the state's agricultural acres. In urban areas SWCDs have sponsored flood control projects, trained developers and contractors to protect construction sites and worked with city and county officials to craft zoning ordinances that protect existing infrastructure and maintain property values. Water quality has improved dramatically in many of the state's rivers, streams and lakes. These years of work in protecting the natural resources have resulted in road ditches requiring less maintenance, municipalities experiencing significant reductions in treatment costs for their surface water supplies, municipal storm sewers requiring reduced maintenance and dredging operations on the state's major rivers occurring with less frequency than in the past.

All of these improvements in public infrastructure have occurred as a direct result of SWCD intervention and assistance. With SWCD directors setting policy and establishing priorities for assistance and qualified staff working with the district's constituents, programs can be developed that meet specific needs and address specific problems in an effective and efficient manner.

SWCDs employ approximately 250 individuals in various roles. All SWCDs have an Administrative Coordinator and a Resource Conservationist. Those SWCDs who are able to generate additional revenue may also have persons who serve as Executive Directors, Office managers, County Conservationists, Resource Analysts, Education Coordinators, CREP Assistants, GIS Specialists and others who serve in some capacity of providing services to the SWCDs constituents. Illinois' SWCD employees are among the best trained and most competent of any state in the nation. Each full time permanent employee is expected to undergo a training program designed to enable the employee to perform all necessary office and field work. Technical employees are expected to take fifteen different core courses and administrative employees are expected to take six core courses. These courses are designed to help the employee deal with the every day situations they will encounter in doing their job. Some employees will need additional training for software applications or management responsibilities depending on their education, experience and job duties. Thirty seven employees are Certified Professionals in Erosion and Sediment Control, an internationally recognized certification requiring a minimum of ten years experience and the ability to pass a competency exam. Six are Certified Crop Advisors, a nationally recognized certification requiring the ability to pass a competency exam. And, thirty five employees are members of the International Association of Administrative Professionals, an organization which stresses professional competency, skill development and self improvement. Each of these designations requires continuing education to maintain certification or membership. In addition to these special certifications, the majority of the SWCD employees have a college degree with a number of those having completed post graduate work.

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED PROJECT

Since Illinois' SWCD employees are well trained and must undergo such an extensive and specialized training program to be able to effectively perform their duties, there is significant benefit in retaining them. To assure that well trained competent employees remain on the SWCDs' payroll adequate funding to maintain salaries and benefits must be available. Currently, with the uncertainty of the state's ability to provide adequate funding in a timely manner, there is a need to secure alternative, stable sources of funding.

Retaining highly trained and qualified SWCD employees will assure that important and valuable programs continue without interruption. Because so many Illinois citizens actively or unknowingly depend either directly or indirectly on the SWCD for services that they take advantage of on a daily basis, having capable, competent employees available to offer assistance is critical to the entire state.

SWCDs have been quietly fulfilling their mandated responsibilities for so long that most people don't notice the benefits they are providing. Illinois citizens have come to take for granted that they have clean water to

drink and use for recreational purposes. They don't think about city storm sewers that are free from mud and debris carried by uncontrolled stormwater runoff. They enjoy plentiful wildlife to observe and hunt. They seldom encounter flood damages from excessive runoff and roadways are free from mud flows after a storm event. And, people seldom notice that we have a sustainable natural resource base to produce abundant food supplies.

There are many local units of government in Illinois. In fact, there are as many as 3,000 governmental units that exist to provide needed services to the people of Illinois. Each of these 3,000 governmental units receives some form of support from sales or property taxes. Few of these governmental bodies are able to provide a revenue source to help pay for the money they receive. SWCDs, however, serve as a mechanism to deliver federal source funds that directly benefit the local and state economy. In this way, SWCDs are unique among units of government. Most if not all SWCDs provide an economic benefit that is greater than the amount of money that is appropriated for their use by the General Assembly.

When, in April and May 2008, a number of SWCDs were forced to cut back on employee hours or lay off staff and two SWCDs were forced to suspend services due to lack of funding, it became readily apparent that many people depend on the SWCDs and their staff for assistance with natural resource concerns. Many landowners in the Illinois River Basin were unable to complete their CREP agreements because of lack of SWCD staff. Zoning variances and permit approvals were not handled in a timely manner because SWCD employees were unavailable to perform inspections and prepare the reports required by municipal and county zoning ordinances and rural landowners were unable to receive the level of service they needed to repair storm damaged conservation practices and to make planning decisions for installing new conservation practices.

Soil and water conservation districts are the only governmental unit present in every county of the state with the authority to work with any agency, organization, group or individual for the conservation, enhancement or protection of land, water and related resources. As such SWCDs fill a unique and important niche that has become a focal point for the delivery of many state, federal and local programs and initiatives to assist and benefit individual landowners and society. Technical assistance for such programs and initiatives are offered at no cost and the programs are generally offered at less than half the cost of implementation. Each year, SWCDs help deliver more than \$250 million in federal source funds for local projects. Considering the \$15 million cost of providing services to landowners, that represents a return of \$16.66 for every dollar spent. If local funds are added in at a 50% level then the ratio increases to \$20 for every dollar of funding provided to the SWCDs. No other service provider can provide that level of return which makes the SWCDs a valuable resource to the taxpayers of Illinois.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES & TIMELINE

Illinois' 98 SWCDs must speak as one voice to educate and inform legislators and the general public of the need to adequately fund SWCDs and assure their ability to continue providing the services that are being utilized as well as the economic advantages that are derived from the programs being offered. The SWCD Act will need to be amended to allow for SWCDs to take full advantage of any of the proposed funding sources.

This action will be taken up by the membership at the 2008 Annual Meeting and Summer Conference. The course of action determined by the membership will commence immediately following the Annual Meeting and culminate with legislation designed to fulfill the operational and programmatic needs of all 98 SWCDs. It is expected that legislation will be drafted and sponsors secured in the 2009 legislative session.

SWCDs and the AISWCD will utilize every opportunity to meet with and educate members of the General Assembly, partners, local groups and organizations and the general public. As elected representatives of the people for the purpose of caring for the soil resources, protecting water quality, maintaining the tax base and providing for the general welfare of the public, SWCD directors and staff have the expertise and the knowledge to provide the necessary information to allow those involved to make an informed decision.

Our focus must remain on a source of funding that will allow SWCDs to address needs well beyond the scope of current constraints. With sufficient funding, such things as flood protection, watershed protection, urban drainage, streambank protection and similar large scale projects could be carried out for the benefit of greater numbers of people.

OUTCOMES

With SWCDs having the ability to retain staff and provide for works of improvement through cost share from stable funding sources, the ability to address problems quickly and effectively will be much greater. Each SWCD's constituents should notice improvements in soil erosion control, water quality and the management of the land and water resources. Programs that the SWCD is involved in such as educational and informational programs, storm water management, surface water protection efforts, livestock waste management and others, will be able to be offered to greater numbers of people and implemented more quickly.

EVALUATION

The funding issues experienced by the SWCDs in 2008 clearly demonstrated that there is an immediate need to assure adequate funding for SWCDs. Over the past 70 years, SWCDs have gradually become the unit of government that other units of government look to for natural resource assistance and expertise. When lack of funds required several SWCDs to reduce hours or lay off staff and cease services many local programs were affected. Several counties and a number of municipalities refer to SWCDs in their zoning ordinances and utilize the SWCDs for information that the zoning body must take under consideration to make its decisions. In some cases, those decisions were delayed due to inadequate SWCD staff to address the issue.

There were also incidences of projects that were ongoing that were delayed because SWCD staff could not be available as before to help with the projects.

The delay in receiving FY 08 state funding resulted in the loss of several experienced and highly trained employees. These employees will be difficult to replace. The complexity of the duties for most SWCD employees requires that administrative employees receive more than two years of training at a cost of a little less than \$3,000 and that technical employees receive more than three years of training at a cost of about \$7,400 before they are fully productive. Illinois also has 36 SWCD employees who have achieved the designation of Certified Professional in Erosion and Sediment Control, more than any other state. The CPESC certification requires a minimum of ten years on the job experience and successful completion of a comprehensive proficiency exam.

FUNDING

It is anticipated that SWCDs will need 30 million dollars. Of that amount 15 to 18 million dollars will be used for SWCD operations including salaries and benefits and 12 to 15 million will be used for cost share. The amount recommended for operating funds will provide sufficient funding to allow for full implementation of the Turnover Task Force recommendations that were approved by soil and water conservation districts in 2004.