

Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Conservation districts have played an important role in conserving the nation's natural resources since the dust storms of the 1930s.

The U.S. Congress passed legislation declaring soil and water conservation a national policy and priority. President Roosevelt urged the states to create legislation enabling landowners to form soil conservation districts. There are nearly 3,000 conservation districts nationwide.



"The conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem, it will avail us little to solve all others."

Theodore Roosevelt - October 4, 1907

In the 1930s, agricultural damage, coupled with drought and windstorms, resulted in the severe damage and destruction across the Plains states that became known as the Dust Bowl.



(Photo Credit: Corbis)

Modern day dust storm, Kansas: Erosion is a serious concern during periods of drought. Precious topsoil is blown away by winds due to the lack of stabilizing foliage.



(Photo Credit: Jim Reed/Science Faction/Corbis)

Florida

In 1937, the Soil Conservation Act, Chapter 582, was enacted by the Florida Legislature. There are 63 conservation districts in Florida, all organized by local people for the purpose of promoting and encouraging the wise use, management and general conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources.

An elected five-member, non-partisan board of supervisors, who volunteer their services, manages each soil and water conservation district.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts are non-taxing and are supported by maintaining relationships and partnerships with organizations, government agencies, and receive voluntary contributions.

Conservation districts have a long-standing partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Districts serve as the link between agriculturalists and federal, state, and local government policies and programs.



"The mission of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is to address natural resources conservation on private lands. NRCS accomplishes this mission by working directly with Soil and Water Conservation Districts. These locally elected or appointed community leaders are vitally important. They do their best to ensure that local conservation concerns are met. We do our best to balance their specific, local needs with a national conservation effort."

Dave White, Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Services

Conservation Districts:

- connect private landowners with federal and local cost share programs;
- teach conservation best management practices;
- reach out to communities and schools to teach the value of natural resources and encourage conservation efforts;
- assist communities and homeowners to plant trees and other land cover to hold soil in place, clean the air, provide cover for wildlife and beautify neighborhoods;
- help developers control soil erosion and protect water and air quality during construction;
- serve as a liaison between landowners and regulatory agencies;
- support Mobile Irrigation Labs (MILs) to facilitate water conservation in agricultural and homesite irrigation systems by providing free irrigation evaluations.

Since 2004, these MILs have conducted more than 7,800 evaluations on more than 167,000 acres of land, resulting in water savings of more than 8.5 billion gallons of water a year, with the potential to save more than 18.7 billion gallons a year if all their recommendations were implemented.

Resource: <http://www.floridaagwaterpolicy.com/MobileIrrigationLabs.html>

Annual Events

Each Soil and Water Conservation District sponsors a variety of events. Below are some examples.

LAND JUDGING Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H students take turns examining soil in pits dug especially for the contest, to judge adaptability of land for various purposes including farming, range management, and home site construction. The first place team has the opportunity to go on to the state and national competitions.



The skills tested at the contest involve principles that can be valuable in career fields like environmental and agricultural management, natural resources conservation, home building, engineering, and construction.

ENVIROTHON Envirothons are a natural resource education event where students work in teams to answer written questions and conduct hands-on investigations relating to aquatics, forestry, soils, wildlife, and current environmental issues. The first place team in each participating county has the opportunity to go on to the state and national competitions.



Soils Station

POSTER CONTEST The poster contest provides kindergarteners through twelfth graders with an opportunity to share their thoughts about water and related natural resource issues. Winning posters proceed from the local contest to regional, state, and national competition.

SPEECH CONTEST The speech contest is designed to develop leadership and stimulate interest in conserving natural resources. From the local contest, the first place winner can advance to regional and state contests.

TREE GIVE-AWAY



Free tree seedlings are given in honor of Arbor Day.