

Conservation districts: past, present

Every county in the Great Lakes basin lies within a soil and water conservation district (SWCD). When they were formed in the 1930s, districts focused on helping farmers implement soil conservation practices in order to safeguard the nation's economic future.

Today the district mission has grown to address all natural resource issues facing a variety of landowners in the Great Lakes basin – from farmers to suburbanites, small businesses to large corporations, and school districts to municipal governments.

An assessment of conservation needs

The National Association of Conservation Districts' (NACD) Great Lakes Committee surveyed the 209 districts in the Great Lakes basin to assess their conservation needs. The results indicate that a concerted effort from federal, state and local government, in cooperation with private landowners, is needed to improve and maintain the health of the basin's unique land and water resources.

Federal and state agencies have a limited ability to expand their staff as new needs arise. Districts have begun to fill the increasing personnel gap by hiring professional and experienced natural resource managers. While this provides a larger base of scientific knowledge at the local level and is ultimately more cost-effective than hiring at the state or federal level, more technical personnel require larger district budgets.

Dollars Required:	(in millions)
District Staff	\$25
Equipment	\$5 *
Incentive	\$50
Research & Education	\$6
Total	\$86 million

* biennial need

Our annual Basin-Wide Needs

Helping us at the federal level

Congress should:

- Increase funding support for technical assistance provided by federal agencies. Technical assistance dollars are spent at the local level in every one of the 209 soil and water conservation districts. This should include funding to provide technical training for districts personnel and engineering support for districts.
- Increase funding to allow adequate levels of expenditures for equipment so SWCD personnel can efficiently carry out their functions.
- Increase funding to support cost-share incentives to landusers to install Best Management Practices to improve soil and water resources.

- Increase the level of funding for research and education to provide better conservation improvement tools and to facilitate their implementation.

Federal Natural Resource Management Agencies should:

- Establish formal partnerships with districts to assist and support the delivery of programs and services at the local level. This should include increasing district opportunities to receive direct funding and technical assistance support from these agencies.
- Involve districts in Great Lakes projects, initiatives and studies where attention to soil and water conservation will advance overall goals of resource management and environmental quality.

Helping us at the state level

State legislatures should:

- Increase funding for district activities in the Great Lakes basin to meet state objectives at the local level.
- Direct a portion of funds raised from environmental bond issues for use by conservation districts. Seven Great Lakes states have already passed legislation or bonds programs designed to restore and protect water, land and air resources.

State soil and water agencies should:

- Work with state conservation district associations to implement an internship or exchange program that would enable districts to develop the requisite technical expertise for implementing complex programs.

Helping us locally

Local governments should:

- Ensure that districts are adequately supported to deliver a full range of services through budgetary appropriations and administrative support.

For more information...

You can learn more about the issues facing Great Lakes soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) at the following web site:

www.glc.org/swcdsurvey

**For more information,
please contact:**



NACD

**Great Lakes Committee
% Great Lakes Commission**

Eisenhower Corporate Park

2805 South Industrial Hwy.

Suite #100

Ann Arbor, MI 48104-6791

Web: nacdn.net.org and glc.org

For more information about
issues facing soil and water
conservation districts, see:

www.glc.org/swcdsurvey

To our partners:

Helping Great Lakes conservation districts



...meet the
regional challenge
of improving our
natural resources
at the
local level