

## **Chapter 3      District Operations**

### **Contingency Plans for District Functions**

Supervisors need to develop a plan for District operations in the event of a governmental shutdown or other event where normal operations of the District are interrupted. This plan should include procedures for alternative communications and office locations, if conditions warrant.

### **Coordination with County and Municipal Governments**

Many county governments across Tennessee recognize the benefits and the overall economic impact from conservation programs to their citizens, and have included funding in their annual operating budgets for personnel and other expenses for the local District. SCD Supervisors should seek to keep local elected officials informed on the progress of soil conservation programs and the value of the District to the local economy in order to secure these funds into the future.

### **Annual Planning and Goal Setting**

The SCD Supervisors should set goals on an annual basis for all programs governed by the District. The District Board of Supervisors should discuss and set plans for implementing the intent of the grant funds allocated from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Resources Conservation Fund, and if applicable, plans for projects from all other sources. In addition to the responsibilities above, the Board of Supervisors has a number of tasks related to the USDA Farm Bill Conservation Programs. Other key planning responsibilities of each District Board are to implement the Locally Led Conservation process, and conduct the USDA-NRCS Local Working Group meetings, as outlined in the following NRCS Directives:

### **Locally- Led Conservation and Local Working Groups**

#### **Part 500 of the NRCS Directives, “Locally Led Conservation”**

<http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/RollupViewer.aspx?hid=27712>

#### **Subpart A - Locally Led Conservation Defined 500.0 Executive Summary**

Locally led conservation consists of a series of phases that involve community stakeholders in natural resource planning, implementation of solutions, and evaluation of results. Locally led conservation begins with the community itself, working through the local conservation district. It is

based on the principle that community stakeholders are best suited to deal with local resource problems. Generally, the locally led process will involve the phases listed in figure 500-A1.

Figure 500-A1

Phase	Activity	Further Information
1. Public Involvement and the Conservation Needs Assessment	The conservation district leads the effort to gather public input from a broad range of agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals in the local area who have an interest in natural resource conditions and needs. These community stakeholders evaluate natural resource conditions in a conservation needs assessment and establish broad conservation goals to meet those needs.	Section 500.3.
2. Conservation Action Plan	The conservation district involves community stakeholders developing and agreeing on a conservation action plan that documents decisions and time schedules, identifies priorities, sets goals, and identifies Government and nongovernment programs to meet those needs. Community stakeholders, under conservation district leadership, identify which Government and nongovernment programs are needed to address specific natural resource concerns. Note: USDA conservation programs are just some of the many programs that can be used to satisfy the community's goals and needs.	Section 500.4.
3. Implementation of the Conservation Action Plan	Community stakeholders, under conservation district leadership, obtain Government and nongovernment program resources and assist in implementing the programs that can satisfy the community's goals and needs, as identified in the action plan.	Section 500.5.
4. Evaluation of the Conservation Action Plan	The effectiveness of plan implementation should be evaluated to ensure that the community stakeholders' planned goals and objectives are achieved. An evaluation should be made to determine where the actual results differ from those anticipated. The difference may result in retracing one or more of the steps in the locally led conservation effort.	Section 500.6.

## Subpart B - Local Working Groups

**501.10 Purpose:** In accordance with [federal regulations and policies] 7 CFR Part 610, Subpart C, local working groups are subcommittees of the State Technical Committee and provide recommendations to USDA on local and state natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs.

### 501.11 Responsibilities of the Local Working Group

It is the responsibility of the local working group to –

- (1) Ensure that a conservation needs assessment is developed using community stakeholder input.
- (2) Utilize the conservation needs assessment to help identify program funding needs and conservation practices.
- (3) Identify priority resource concerns and identify, as appropriate, high-priority areas needing assistance.
- (4) Recommend USDA conservation program application and funding criteria, eligible practices (including limits on practice payments or units), and payment rates.
- (5) Participate in multicounty coordination where program funding and priority area proposals cross county boundaries.
- (6) Assist NRCS and the conservation district with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.
- (7) Recommend state and national program policy to the State Technical Committee, based on resource data.
- (8) Utilize the conservation needs assessment to identify priority resource concerns that can be addressed by USDA programs.
- (9) Forward recommendations to the NRCS designated conservationist or Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Executive Director, as appropriate.
- (10) Adhere to standard operating procedures identified in Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 501, Subpart B, Section 501.14.

### 501.12 Local Working Group Membership

A. Local working group membership should be diverse and focus on agricultural interests and natural resource issues existing in the local community. Membership should include agricultural producers representing the variety of crops, livestock, and poultry raised within the local area; owners of nonindustrial private forest land, as appropriate; representatives of agricultural and environmental organizations; and representatives of governmental agencies carrying out agricultural and natural resource conservation programs and activities.

B. Membership of the USDA local working group may include but is not limited to Federal, State, county, Tribal, or local government representatives. Examples of potential members include—

- (1) NRCS designated conservationist.
- (2) Members of conservation district boards or equivalent.
- (3) Members of the county FSA committee.
- (4) FSA county executive director or designee.
- (5) Cooperative extension (board members or manager).
- (6) State or local elected or appointed officials.

- (7) Other Federal and State government representatives.
- (8) Representatives of American Indian and Alaskan Native governments.

C. To ensure that recommendations of the local working group take into account the needs of diverse groups served by USDA, membership must include, to the extent practicable, individuals with demonstrated ability to represent the conservation and related technical concerns of particular historically underserved groups and individuals including but not limited to women, persons with disabilities, socially disadvantaged and limited resource groups.

D. Individuals or groups wanting to become members of a local working group may submit a request that explains their interest and outlines their credentials for becoming a member of the local working group to the local working group chairperson and the NRCS district conservationist (or designated conservationist). The district conservationist (or designated conservationist) will assist the soil and water conservation district in making decisions concerning membership of the group.

### 501.13 Responsibilities of Conservation Districts and NRCS

#### A. Conservation District

It is the responsibility of the conservation district to—

- (i) Develop the conservation needs assessment as outlined in 440-CPM, Part 500, Subpart A.
- (ii) Assemble the USDA local working group.
- (iii) Set the agenda.
- (iv) Conduct the USDA local working group meetings.
- (v) Transmit the USDA local working group's priority area and funding requests to the NRCS designated conservationist or the State Technical Committee, as appropriate.

Note: Where a conservation district is not present or chooses not to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A, Section 501.13, the NRCS designated conservationist will have these responsibilities.

#### B. NRCS Designated Conservationist

It is the NRCS designated conservationist's responsibility to participate in the USDA local working group and to—

- (i) Encourage and assist other USDA agencies to participate in the locally led conservation and working group efforts, as feasible.
- (ii) Assist with identifying members for the local working group.
- (iii) Help identify program priorities and resources available.
- (iv) Assist in the development of program priority area proposals.
- (v) Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, nondiscrimination statement, and other environmental, civil rights, and cultural resource requirements.
- (vi) Support and advise the local working group concerning technical issues, program policies and procedures, and other matters relating to conservation program delivery.
- (vii) Ensure that populations are—
  - Provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered.
  - Allowed to share the benefits of, not excluded from, and not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by Government programs and activities affecting human health or the environment.
- (viii) Analyze performance indicators and reports.
- (ix) Report the conservation programs' impacts on resources.

- (x) Perform the responsibilities of the conservation district where a conservation district is not present or chooses not to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A, Section 501.6A.
- (xi) Give strong consideration to the local working group's recommendations on NRCS programs, initiatives, and activities.
- (xii) Ensure that recommendations, when adopted, address natural resource concerns.

#### 501.14 Standard Operating Procedures for Local Working Groups

##### A. Organization and Function

Local working groups provide recommendations on local natural resource priorities and criteria for USDA conservation activities and programs. **Local working groups are normally chaired by the appropriate soil and water conservation district (SWCD).** In the event the SWCD is unable or unwilling to chair the local working group, NRCS district conservationist (or designated conservationist) is responsible for those duties.

##### B. Meeting Scheduling

**The local working group should meet at least once each year at a time and place designated by the chairperson, unless otherwise agreed to by the members of the local working group.** Other meetings may be held at the discretion of the chairperson. Meetings will be called by the chairperson whenever there is business that should be brought before the local working group.

##### C. Public Notification

(1) Local working group meetings are open to the public and notification must be published in one or more newspapers, including recommended Tribal publications, to attain the appropriate circulation.

(2) Public notice of local working group meetings should be provided at least 14 calendar days prior to the meeting. Notification will need to exceed the 14-calendar-day minimum where State open meeting laws require a longer notification period. The minimum 14-calendar-day notice requirement may be waived in the case of exceptional conditions, as determined by the chairperson or NRCS district conservationist (or designated conservationist).

(3) The public notice of local working group meetings will include the time, place, and agenda items for the meeting.

##### D. Meeting Information

Agendas and information must be provided to the local working group members at least 14 calendar days prior to the scheduled meeting. The district conservationist (or designated conservationist) will assist the local working group chairperson, as requested, in preparing meeting agendas and necessary background information for meetings. The minimum 14-calendar-day notice requirement may be waived in the case of exceptional conditions, as determined by the chairperson or NRCS district conservationist (or designated conservationist).

##### E. Public Participation

Individuals attending the local working group meetings will be given the opportunity to address the local working group. Opportunity to address non-agenda items will be provided if time allows at the end of the meeting. Presenters are encouraged to provide written records of their comments to the chairperson at the time of the presentation, but are not required to do

so. Written comments may be accepted if provided to the chairperson no later than 14 calendar days after a meeting.

**F. Conducting Business**

(1) The meetings will be conducted as an open discussion among members. Discussion will focus on identifying local natural resource concerns that can be treated using programs and activities identified in 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A, Section 501.0C. All recommendations will be considered.

2) The following guidelines will govern meeting discussions:

(i) The chairperson will lead the discussion.

(ii) Only one person may speak at a time. Every participant should have an opportunity to speak. The chairperson or his or her designee is responsible for recognizing speakers.

(iii) The chairperson, in consultation with those members present, may establish time limits for discussion on individual agenda items.

(iv) State Technical Committees are advisory in nature and all recommendations are considered.

(v) Members may be polled, but voting on issues is not appropriate.

(vi) The chairperson will defer those agenda items not covered because of time limits to the next meeting.

**G. Record of Meetings**

Summaries for all local working group meetings will be available within 30 calendar days of the meeting and will be filed at the appropriate local NRCS office.

**H. Input to State Technical Committee**

Local working group recommendations are to be submitted to State Technical Committee chairperson, the district conservationist (or designated conservationist), or both (as appropriate) within 14 calendar days after a meeting.

**I. Response to Local Working Group Recommendations**

The designated conservationist will inform the local working group as to the decisions made in response to all local working group recommendations within 90 days. This notification will be made in writing to all local working groups members and made available for the public at the appropriate local NRCS office.

## **Records Retention**

Soil Conservation Districts are public entities, and should follow recommended policies regarding the retention of records for District activities, such as election documents and meeting minutes. The Tennessee Secretary of State's Division of Records Management has developed Records Disposition Authorizations for a wide range of state records. Districts have record retention requirements in their grant contracts with TDA that are required to be followed also. More information can be found at this website:

<http://www.tn.gov/sos/rmd/>

## **District Annual Reports/ Newsletters**

The Cooperative Working Agreement between the SCD, USDA, and TDA (Figure 5) and the grant contract between the SCDs and TDA both require annual reports be submitted. Districts should summarize the activities on a calendar year basis and submit a report detailing activities for the year, including the amount of funds spent on projects. The report should be submitted by April 1<sup>st</sup> each year.

## **Conservation District Youth and Volunteer Training**

Many Districts have had experience with Youth Boards in the past, as a means of developing the next generation of leaders for the local District. Other Districts have a process for recognizing interested citizens as Associate Board members, in order to cultivate more local interest and involvement. NRCS has the “Earth Team” program for volunteer workers to support the conservation programs locally. Supervisors are encouraged to investigate these various activities and adopt them where feasible and practical.

## **SCD Relationships with Federal and State Agencies**

### **USDA-NRCS/TDA/SCD Agreement**

Soil Conservation Districts in Tennessee operate under a Cooperative Working Agreement with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Under this agreement, NRCS staff provides technical assistance for various conservation projects and programs agreed upon by the District. This partnership is voluntary; there are no fees for the services provided by NRCS, and no taxes are levied on county residents.

Figure 5 is an example of a Cooperative Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding between the District, the NRCS and TDA, which is currently in effect in each District.

*“...soil conservation is not just an incidental bit of the mechanics of farming; it becomes part and parcel of the whole business of making a living from the land, and is the only way by which we may have permanently productive land for a permanent agriculture to support a permanent nation.”*

*— Hugh Hammond Bennett- USDA*

## **Figure 5: Cooperative Working Agreement**

### **COOPERATIVE WORKING AGREEMENT Between the**

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**and**

**THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**and**

**THE \_\_\_\_\_ COUNTY SOIL CONSERATION DISTRICT**

**For their Cooperation in the  
Conservation of Natural Resources**

This AGREEMENT is between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, and the Madison County Soil Conservation District, collectively referred to as the parties, to define clearly the roles and responsibilities of the parties.

### **AUTHORITIES, STATUTES, LAWS**

NRCS is authorized to cooperated and furnish assistance to the parties in the conservation of natural resources as referenced in the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, 16 U.S.C. 590; The Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, Public Law 103-354; and Secretary's Memorandum no. 1010-1, Reorganization of the Department of Agriculture, dated October 20, 1994.

The State of Tennessee's authority for participation is defined in Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 43-14-101 and Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 43-14-218. The District Authority is defined in Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 43-14-201.

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The purpose of this agreement is to supplement the Mutual Agreement between the United States Department of Agriculture and the State of Tennessee and the \_\_\_\_\_ Soil Conservation District. This cooperative working agreement documents those areas of common interest of the state, federal, and local partnership in natural resources conservation.

The customers of the parties to this agreement are individual landowners/land users, Federal and state land management agencies, other individuals, groups, and units of government. The parties mutually agree to provide leadership in resource conservation. To accomplish this we share a commitment to listen, anticipate and respond to our customers' needs; anticipate, identify, and address issues; maintain decision-making at the lowest level; advocate comprehensive resource management planning; maintain and improve our grass-roots delivery system; build new alliances to expand our partnership; foster economically viable environmental policies; improve the quality of life for future generations; and conserve and enhance our natural resources.

The parties pledge to work together by advancing and practicing teamwork; including input in the decision making process; communicating, coordinating, and cooperating; sharing training opportunities; promoting mutual respect, support, trust, and honesty; and sharing the leadership and ownership, the credit and the responsibility. A mutual goal is to improve our efficiency and effectiveness by putting quality first; empowering people to make decisions; demonstrating professionalism and dedication and striving for continuous improvement.

## Cooperative Working Agreement (cont.)

### **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **PERSONNEL**

Each party is responsible for the hiring, management, supervision, development and evaluation of its own personnel, including creating an environment that supports a diverse workforce. NRCS, through their State Conservationist, will designate a representative to be the primary staff member for assisting the District and will locate its personnel, insofar as feasible, at headquarters mutually satisfactory to all parties.

#### **TRAINING**

The parties will provide appropriate leadership in administrative and technical training as determined by program needs. Training also includes the orientation of all employees and officials in organizational philosophies, programs, authorities, roles and responsibilities of the parties.

Parties are encouraged to offer training opportunities to each other.

#### **EMPLOYMENT**

The parties will work together to coordinate individual staffing plans to include necessary disciplines for the purposes of this agreement and in accordance with respective operating procedures.

Employee evaluations will be done independently by the employing organization, but others may provide input.

### **TECHNICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE**

The parties will work together to determine the amount of technical and administrative assistance needed and available for program delivery at each level. Such assistance may include contracts, agreements, procurement, personnel, engineering, and/or other assistance provided by the parties.

### **PROGRAM DELIVERY**

#### **NATURAL RESOURCE PLANS**

The parties will coordinate with public and private resource groups, other resource agencies, and interested parties to share information and resources in developing comprehensive natural resource plans.

#### **RESOURCE INVENTORIES**

The parties agree to identify, define, and coordinate the collection and use of resource inventory data and to share in the responsibility of disseminating the information.

The parties will cooperate in monitoring and validating the resource inventory data to assure that the data meets the needs of resource planning and evaluation processes.

#### **INFORMATION/DATA SHARING**

The parties will designate who has responsibility for collection and maintenance of particular resource information, if necessary, under separate agreement.

The parties will agree to work toward establishing and maintaining accessible data bases, when feasible.

## Cooperative Working Agreement (cont.)

### **BOUNDARIES**

The parties will agree on common boundaries for program delivery.

### **MARKETING**

The parties will coordinate their efforts in the communication of program information to their customers.

### **TECHNICAL STANDARDS**

The parties will adopt the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) and other science-based technical standards, as appropriate.

### **JOB APPROVAL**

Each party will assign conservation practice (job approval) authority to its personnel based on employee knowledge, skill and ability levels and within applicable laws and guidelines.

### **MAINTENANCE OF STANDARDS**

The parties will develop a process to establish and maintain consistent standards.

### **RECORDS, FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT**

#### **WORKING SPACE**

The parties will work together to provide office space within respective funding limits, operating guidelines, and authorities. NRCS facilities will be located, insofar as feasible, within quarters mutually satisfactory to all parties.

#### **EQUIPMENT**

The parties will agree to share equipment for common use within established guidelines and procedures.

#### **VEHICLES**

The parties will agree to share vehicles subject to the requirements of state and federal laws.

#### **RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

The parties will agree to share access and use of relevant records subject to the requirements of state and federal laws.

The parties will maintain, update, and dispose of relevant records according to respective operating guidelines and authorities.

### **FUNDING**

The parties will work together to maximize available resources and actively seek funding to accomplish natural resource priorities and programs.

### **FEE FOR SERVICES**

The parties recognize that nonfederal signatories may establish procedures to collect fees, where permissible, for delivery of such services which are not provided through federal financial or technical assistance.

**Cooperative Working Agreement (cont.)**

**TORT LIABILITY**

The parties will each assume responsibility for the actions of their officials or employees acting within the scope of their employment to the extent provided by federal and state laws.

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

The parties will design and implement an outcome based-evaluation system to determine if resource and customer needs are being met and share accomplishments accordingly.

At the end of each calendar year, or of each fiscal year of the State, the District will submit to the Department of Agriculture, through the State Conservationist of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, an annual report on the District's activities and accomplishments.

**SCOPE OF AGREEMENT**

Authority to carry out specific projects or activities, such as transfer of funds, acquisition of services and property, will be established under separate agreement.

**CIVIL RIGHTS**

The parties will be in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions contained in Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended. The Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-259) and other nondiscrimination statutes, namely, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and in accordance with regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7CFR-15, Subparts A & B) which provide that no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance from the Department of Agriculture or any agency thereof.

**TERMINATION**

This agreement can be modified or terminated at any time by mutual consent of all parties or can be terminated by any party giving 60 days written notice to the other parties.

This agreement supersedes the Supplemental Memorandum of Understanding.

**USDA, NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
(State Conservationist)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Commissioner)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **NRCS General Manual Part 180, Section 401**

Subpart D Setting out the Relationship between NRCS and the Soil Conservation District:

**401.30 Personnel:** Each party is responsible for the hiring, management, supervision, development, and evaluation of its own personnel, including creating an environment that supports a diverse work force.

### **401.31 Training Personnel of NRCS and Partners:**

(a) NRCS can provide administrative and technical training for conservation partnership employees in conjunction with its own training, providing their attendance will not result in additional cost to the government (Ref. 410.20, sec).

(b) SCA and District officials shall be offered the opportunity to attend any and all NRCS training sessions that relate to their duties, providing their attendance will not result in additional cost to the Federal Government (Ref. 410.20, sec 1).

(c) When enrolling a SCA, District employee or official in a training course, indicate the Type of Employee or Official in the title field of the employee data.

### **401.32 Handling Funds**

(a) NRCS employees are prohibited from handling District funds. Funds payable to a District should be directed to persons who are responsible for District business activities.

(b) NRCS employees may handle advances to a trust fund account, reimbursements by a District, or cooperator, for use by NRCS under the terms of a duly executed agreement. Such funds shall be expended and accounted for pursuant to the agreement by authorized NRCS employees.

### **401.33 Charges by Districts**

(a) Districts may charge as they deem appropriate for services rendered and materials supplied by them independently of any services or materials available from Federal resources (i.e., funds, manpower, and equipment).

(b) Fees, donations, or other gratuities to districts, may not be a condition to receiving services, materials, or cost sharing from the Federal Government.

(c) If it appears that a District is making improper charges, the STC will be notified and the matter reviewed immediately with the appropriate district governing body and others. The District governing body is to be counseled, to take necessary actions to correct the improprieties. If such inappropriate actions persist, the RC is to be notified. Then, if such inappropriate actions continue, the CWA may be terminated. The Chief will be notified of any situation that cannot be resolved before the CWA is terminated.

### **401.34 District or Tribal Cooperators**

(a) The District governing body will establish its own criteria for cooperators. NRCS representatives assisting a district must know and understand the criteria. The district must ensure NRCS that services will be provided without regard to race, religion, color, handicap, sex, age, marital status, or national origin. Failure to provide such assurance, and to act in accord with it, can be the basis for termination of all agreements.

(b) NRCS gives information to land owners and users about District programs and encourages those who could benefit from participation to cooperate with the district in planning, applying, and maintaining conservation programs.

#### **401.35 Responsibilities of the State Conservationist to the Partnership**

State Conservationist shall:

- (1) Ensure that all NRCS employees are familiar with NRCS's partnership relationship with State Conservation Agency (SCA), Tribal Groups (TGs) and Districts;
- (2) Once every two years, review the CWA and the partnership relationship, with the SCA, TGs and Districts (see 401.22, sec. b (4));
- (3) Keep all partners informed of any changes in Federal Laws, regulations or policies that may affect the conservation partnership;
- (4) Be responsible for the hiring, management, supervision, development and evaluation of NRCS personnel, including creating an environment that supports a diverse workforce;
- (5) Inform the District of personnel changes that will affect the District and;
- (6) Provide assistance to all customers within District boundaries and, when requested, use all means possible to create an environment and relationship and provide assistance within counties or areas that are not serviced by and established District to protect the natural resources of the State.

#### **401.36 Assistance to Conservation and Tribal Districts**

- (a) **NRCS employees shall not be involved in District administrative operations, including the election or selection process of the appropriate District governing bodies.**
- (b) NRCS employees, in providing services to customers, shall comply with USDA regulations (7 CFR-15, subparts A&B), the civil rights policies found in Title 230, General Manual, and the civil rights provision of the MA, CWA and the OA (if applicable).
- (c) The DC is responsible for furnishing technical guidance and assistance to the governing bodies of the District.
- (d) The DC shall maintain a close working relationship with the governing body of the District and insure coordination of field office activities with the District programs, and with all agreements and work plans.
- (e) A district employee can receive technical guidance from NRCS for those technical activities of the District that require technical consultation and technical approval (see f).
- (f) NRCS will provide technical supervision only when a District employee is assigned by the District to NRCS to carry out Federal functions (e.g. FSA, EWP, (see f)). A separate agreement will be entered into between the STC, the governing body of the District, and SCA (where applicable), covering but not limited to, the appropriate approval authorities, and working and training arrangements.
- (g) NRCS employees will not provide administrative supervision to district and other non-federal employees. In all cases and at all times, a district employee is under the administrative supervision of the District or designated district employee.
- (h) All technical work performed by District employees will follow the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide and other approved science-based technical standards.

## **USDA-Farm Services Agency**

The Farm Services Agency interacts with Soil Conservation District staff on a regular basis in the offices where all agencies are located together. A member of the local FSA committee serves on the SCD Nominating Committee for elections and appointments. FSA administers the Conservation Reserve and the Emergency Conservation Programs, which are important conservation programs.

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=copr&topic=landing>

## **Tennessee Valley Authority**

The Tennessee Valley Authority has jurisdiction through the TVA Act of 1932 to manage the Tennessee River system for certain key functions; including, flood control, navigation, and recreation. SCDs have been the recipients of direct grants from TVA for certain specialized projects. TVA also administers the Section 26a permitting process, through which certain practices receive prior approval from TVA so as to not cause a negative impact to the river system.

<http://www.tva.com/river/26apermits/regs.htm>

## **United States Fish and Wildlife Service**

The Fish and Wildlife Service within the US Department of the Interior has had regular interaction with a number of Districts for several years. F&WS has a grant program called “Partners for Fish and Wildlife” through which funding for specific conservation projects is provided in certain geographic or watershed areas where known threatened or endangered species exist.

<http://www.fws.gov/partners/aboutus.html>

## **TDA-Agricultural Resources Conservation Fund**

The Agricultural Resources Conservation Fund of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture provides cost-share assistance to Tennessee landowners to install Best Management Practices (BMPs) that reduce agricultural water pollution. This assistance is facilitated primarily through Soil Conservation Districts although Resource Conservation and Development Councils, universities, and other agricultural associations may participate. A wide range of BMPs are available for cost-share, from those that curtail soil erosion to ones that help to remove pollutants from water runoff from agricultural operations. Normally, landowners may be eligible to receive 75% of the cost of a BMP installation. Part of the fund is available for educational projects which raise awareness of soil erosion/water quality problems and promote BMP use.

<http://www.tn.gov/agriculture/water/arcf.shtml>

## **SCD Annual Operational Grants**

Grants are provided annually to each District to assist with the administrative costs associated with the local programs. A report detailing these expenditures for the previous state fiscal year must be submitted to TDA with the District Annual Report each year.

## **TDA-Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program**

The Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program provides funding to the Water Resources Program to assist Soil Conservation Districts with lessening soil erosion and improving water quality through providing technical assistance funding in partnership with USDA-NRCS and various county governments.

<http://www.tn.gov/agriculture/enhancement/index.shtml>

## **TDA-319 Nonpoint Source Grant Program**

The TDA-NPS Program is non-regulatory, promoting voluntary, incentive-based solutions. Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, local governments, state agencies, soil conservation districts, and universities. It is a cost-share program, paying for 60% of the cost of a project. It is up to the grantee to come up with the remaining 40%, usually in cash and “in-kind” services. It primarily funds three types of programs:

- **BMP Implementation Projects** improve an impaired water body, or prevent non-impaired water from becoming placed on the 303(d) List. Projects of this type receive highest priority for funding. All projects involving BMPs must be based on an approved “Watershed Based Plan”.
- **Monitoring Projects.** Up to 20% of the available grant funds assist water quality monitoring efforts in Tennessee streams, both in the state's 5-year watershed monitoring program, and also in performing before-and-after BMP installation, so that water quality improvements can be verified.
- **Educational Projects** funded through TDA-NPS raise public awareness of practical steps that can be taken to eliminate NPS pollution.

[www.tn.gov/agriculture/water/nps.shtml](http://www.tn.gov/agriculture/water/nps.shtml)

## **UT/ TSU Extension**

The UT Extension provides a gateway to the University of Tennessee as the outreach unit of the Institute of Agriculture. With an office in every Tennessee County, UT Extension delivers educational programs and research-based information to citizens throughout the state. In cooperation with Tennessee State University, UT Extension works with farmers, families, youth and communities to improve lives by addressing problems and issues at the local, state and national levels. A UT Extension County Committee member serves on the SCD Nominating Committee for elections and appointments.

<https://utextension.tennessee.edu/Pages/default.aspx>  
<http://www.tnstate.edu/extension/>

## **TDA- Division of Forestry**

The Division of Forestry has a variety of programs in which SCDs can become involved. There are Area and District Foresters across Tennessee willing to provide technical advice and direction to tree planting efforts of the SCD. These staff should be provided notice to the SCD Board meetings, Local Working Group meetings and SCD functions.

<http://www.tn.gov/agriculture/forestry/index.shtml>

## **Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency**

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has four Private Lands Biologists (PLBs) that are cost-shared by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and who operate from the NRCS Area offices alongside the NRCS Area Biologist.

In their daily activities, the PLBs coordinate with District personnel as it relates to providing technical assistance and guiding people through USDA conservation programs. Approximately 40 native grass no-till drills are located at District offices and are rented to the public. The PLBs work with District personnel to make sure that they are knowledgeable on the operation and maintenance of the drills. The PLBs and TWRA Private Lands Liaison will also occasionally coordinate with Districts and conservation organizations to conduct workshops on wildlife and land management. Current listings of PLBs and other natural resource professionals' contact information and a list of native grass drills available to the public can be found at

<http://www.twraprivatedlands.org/>

## **Tennessee Stream Mitigation Program**

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Foundation provides funding for targeted riparian zone improvements in order to provide compensatory mitigation for highway projects or other projects that have unavoidable impacts. SCDs could connect and collaborate with this program to help find suitable sites for projects.

<http://tsmp.us/>

## **Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation**

The State Water Quality Control Act contains a broad Agricultural Exemption in TCA §69-3-120(g), which states, "Nothing whatsoever in this part shall be so construed as applying to any agricultural or forestry activity or the activities necessary to the conduct and operations thereof or to any lands devoted to the production of any agricultural or forestry products, unless there is a point source discharge from a discernible, confined, and discrete water conveyance." This means that for a few specific exceptions, agricultural and forestry activities do not require permits from TDEC.

**Permits:** TDEC, Division of Water Resources has the responsibility to enforce the Tennessee Water Quality Control Act, and accompanying regulations, and associated EPA regulations. There are permits required by TDEC to be obtained on certain conservation practices, depending on the impact to waters of the state.

**Construction Stormwater Permits.** If a farm building is constructed, and the total area disturbed in the construction activity is greater than one acre, a construction stormwater permit is required from TDEC.

<http://www.tn.gov/environment/permits/conststrm.shtml>

**Aquatic Resource Alteration Permits:** Any project that will result in dredging, filling or alteration of a stream channel must comply with the provisions of this set of permits.

<http://www.tn.gov/environment/permits/arap.shtml>

**Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs):** Large confined livestock operations that are defined as a CAFO require a permit for operation from TDEC, as they are defined in the regulations as a point source discharger.

<http://www.tn.gov/environment/permits/cafo.shtml>

**Complaints:** TDEC takes numerous complaint inquiries from citizens each year, many of which get addressed by contact from TDA or the SCD staff, and through the implementation of conservation practices.

**West Tennessee River Basin Authority:** This regional authority is created in state statute TCA§64-1-1101 with the purpose of maintaining, and preserving, and restoring flow and function to a number of West Tennessee River basins. Districts in West Tennessee have had interaction with WTRBA staff on projects of common interest.

[http://www.tn.gov/environment/board\\_west-tn-river-basin-authority.shtml](http://www.tn.gov/environment/board_west-tn-river-basin-authority.shtml)

### **SCD Relationships with Local Agencies, Organizations and Groups**

The Soil Conservation Districts were created in order to raise awareness and cause the erosion of our soils to be controlled. While the erosion of productive farmland is of primary importance in most Districts, the state law does not limit the work of the Districts to only agricultural lands. Therefore, it is important that each Board of Supervisors evaluate the land uses and concerns in their specific District and reach out to the following groups to partner to achieve the maximum control of soil loss in the District.

#### **Local Stormwater Agencies**

Many Tennessee counties and cities have permitted stormwater programs that seek to regulate the erosion of soils from land development. These entities need to be contacted by the District and should be invited to become affiliate members of the District, as there is much to be gained by forming these partnerships.

#### **County Public Works Officials**

Much erosion occurs in many counties from road ditch and right-of-way concerns. Each District Board should invite the Public Works and/or Road Superintendents to the monthly meetings and seek to partner on areas of mutual interest.

#### **Local Parks and Greenways Officials**

Local officials that oversee the maintenance of local parks and greenways should be invited to partner with the local SCD Board, due to the educational opportunities that may be available.

## **Utility District Boards/Municipal Water and Wastewater Systems**

Water and wastewater treatment managers have similar interests as the SCD Board, in working to improve and maintain water quality in local streams. There should be a great deal of support from these local utilities, as it is fact that less erosion means less sediment, and cleaner water. Cleaner water is less expensive to treat for drinking and may reduce the cost of local wastewater treatment.

## **Nonprofit Organizations**

Districts should build upon relationships with local nonprofit interests that share common values concerning soil loss reduction and improved water quality. Historically, Districts have worked closely with Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&Ds) on projects of common interest, and also groups such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Tennessee Environmental Council (TEC), and Ducks Unlimited (DU), Land Trust/Conservancy groups and many other local watershed groups.

## **Agricultural Commodity Associations**

District Supervisors should seek out the leaders of the various commodity associations in each District and invite them to attend District meetings, so that local successes and challenges can be discussed and help enlisted to promote the positive activities and to address the challenging situations.

## **Animal Waste Associations**

Certain locales have the need for specialized waste pumping and land application services. Associations have been formed through regional, multi-District sponsorship to form animal waste associations. These entities are stand-alone non-profit associations that provide a fee-based service, while promoting the agronomic utilization of manures.

## **County Boards of Education**

This county board along with the Superintendent of Schools should be informed of any and all educational activities planned, so the school system can make maximum use of the event in lesson planning and incorporation into system-wide educational requirements. Vocational Agricultural programs should be contacted as potential partners for various District programs.

## **Civic Groups**

Leaders of the various civic groups should be kept informed about the work of the District, as they may have mutual goals. These groups may be interested in providing funding or volunteers to help with certain events or activities of the District.

## **Watershed Districts**

TCA §69-6-101 through 149

The purpose of the Watershed Districts Law was to facilitate the planning for and funding and operation of watershed projects, pursuant to PL-566. While the Soil Conservation Districts have no statutory authority over Watershed Districts, SCDs and Watershed Districts are encouraged to cooperate on projects of mutual interest. Older watershed structures in some cases have been transferred to Soil Conservation Districts to establish them as the owner of record.

## **Conservation Assistance and Education to Citizens**

### **Conservation Practices**

A suite of conservation practice standards are available to address a wide range of soil erosion concerns from all agricultural operations. Technical assistance is also offered to many urban and suburban landowners to assist with resource concerns in these situations. The USDA-NRCS Field Office Technical Guide is an important reference for conservation practices.

### **Conservation Field Days and Events**

Many Districts sponsor a variety of activities where local citizens are invited to view conservation practices installed and working on a particular farm or farms. These events are popular and serve to raise awareness in the community about the conservation programs offered through the District and the local partners. Some SCDs hold “tree days” to provide free or low-cost seedlings to individuals for promotion of the work of the District.

### **Agricultural Complaint Resolution**

District Boards and staff can assist in the resolution of citizen complaints by providing information and education to the parties about possible solutions.

### **Urban Issues**

Soil Conservation District Supervisors and staff can provide technical assistance to help with resource concerns in urban areas. This is consistent with the broad mission of Districts. This is a daily occurrence in Tennessee’s more urban Districts. Much of the assistance is requested from homeowners and small acreage owners.

## **Soil and Water Education**

There are numerous programs that District Supervisors, staff and volunteers can become involved in related to education of the public about the importance of soil erosion prevention and water quality improvement.

## **NACD Soil Stewardship**

The National Association of Conservation Districts has developed materials for general use in classrooms and at various public events, such as “Sammy Soil” and “Ruby Raindrop”, along with annual Soil Stewardship materials.

<http://www.nacdnet.org/education>

## **Agriculture in the Classroom**

(Sponsored in Tennessee by the Tennessee Farm Bureau)

In 1981 the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) invited representatives of agricultural groups and educators came to a meeting in Washington, D.C. to discuss agricultural literacy. A national task force was selected from this group. Representation came from agriculture, business, education, and governmental agencies, some of whom were already conducting educational programs in agriculture.

This task force recommended that the USDA be the coordinator for national agricultural classroom literacy and that it sponsor regional meetings to help states organize their own programs. They also urged the department to encourage the support of other national groups. Since that time, significant progress has been made through these partnerships of agriculture, business, education, government and dedicated volunteers.

Each state organization addresses agriculture education in a way best suited to its own needs. In some cases, an all-volunteer network is responsible for teacher education and materials distribution. States have formed educational nonprofit organizations which have the benefit of a tax-deductible status. In some states leadership is provided through the departments of education, agriculture or other government agencies; in other states through agriculture organizations or commodity groups; some through universities or colleges; and in some cases through the dedicated efforts of one or two individuals.

<http://www.tnfarmbureau.org/content/agriculture-classroom-teacher-workshops>

## **Envirothon**

Many SCDs across Tennessee along with NRCS staff and the Tennessee RCD Council sponsor teams to compete in the annual Envirothon. This environmental education program consists of the annual North American Envirothon Competition in which winning teams from participating states and Canadian provinces compete for recognition and scholarships by demonstrating their knowledge of environmental science and natural resource management. The competition is focused on four universal testing categories (i.e., soils/land use, aquatic ecology, forestry, and wildlife) and a current environmental issue.

The Envirothon program is an effective educational tool, capable of supplementing environmental education both inside and outside the classroom. Led by a volunteer advisor, teams usually meet from late autumn until spring. Teams work collaboratively to develop their knowledge of ecology and natural resource management and to practice their environmental problem-solving skills in preparation for Envirothon competitions.

<http://www.envirothon.org/>

## **Project WET**

WET stands for Water Education for Teachers. Project WET is an international, interdisciplinary, water science and education program for formal and non-formal educators of K-12 students. In Tennessee, the mission of Project WET is to help teachers provide water education to their students with the goal of reducing nonpoint source pollution and improving water quality. This service is provided primarily through educator workshops. Project WET is located in The Center of Excellence for Field Biology of Austin Peay State University.

<http://www.apsu.edu/wet>

## **Project WILD**

Project WILD is sponsored in Tennessee by TWRA and links students and wildlife through its mission to provide wildlife-based conservation and environmental education that fosters responsible actions toward wildlife and related natural resources.

<http://www.projectwild.org/TennesseeCoordinator.htm>

## **Project Learning Tree**

PLT is sponsored in Tennessee by the TDA-Division of Forestry and uses the forest as a "window" on the world to increase students' understanding of our environment; stimulate students' critical and creative thinking; develop students' ability to make informed decisions on environmental issues; and instill in students the commitment to take responsible action on behalf of the environment.

<https://www.plt.org/mission-goals-governance>

## **State and National SCD Associations**

### **Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts**

The Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts (TACD) is an association made possible by the 95 Soil Conservation Districts across Tennessee. TACD is a not-for-profit corporation officially registered through the Tennessee Secretary of State.

TACD started with discussions among the Districts already formed in 1943 and 1944, after the passage of the Soil Conservation District Act for Tennessee in 1939. Toward the end of World War II, the Association-then called the Tennessee Association of Soil Conservation Districts, held the first official meeting in August of 1945. W.F. Fletcher of Haywood County was the first President of the Association.

The mission of TACD is: Helping Conservation Districts conserve and enhance the natural resources of Tennessee through education, leadership and advocacy.

Some of the objectives of the TACD are:

- To advance the programs of Soil Conservation Districts;

- To promote the welfare of the people of Tennessee through the work of Soil Conservation Districts;
- To develop citizen participation and leadership in the affairs of Soil Conservation Districts;
- To encourage cooperation among Districts and Local, State and Federal agencies;
- To promote education and information about soil and water conservation;
- To encourage the exchange of information and promote cooperation among Districts;
- To promote effective organization and management of Soil Conservation Districts; and
- To develop and recommend legislative proposals as needed to promote and enhance the conservation of Tennessee's soil and water resources.

TACD encourages every supervisor, district employee, state and federal employees, interested landowners and other professionals to actively participate in TACD programs and initiatives to expand their ability to protect Tennessee's abundant natural resources through the local Soil Conservation District and to assist in making our Association even more successful in the future.

[www.tnacd.org](http://www.tnacd.org)

### **Tennessee Conservation District Employees Association**

The purposes for which TCDEA is formed are:

- To promote resources conservation in Tennessee and in local conservation districts;
- To more adequately assist in the implementation of district programs and activities;
- To establish and maintain a standard of quality for conservation district employees;
- To carry on an education and improvement program for conservation district employees;
- To instill in conservation district employees the same pride and dedication as is displayed by district supervisors.

TCDEA administers a Professional District Employee Program which includes the certification levels of Standard, Associate Standard, Professional, and Master I through III. The purposes of this certification process are:

- To make the position of District Employee, Office Manager, Administrative Assistant, Soil Conservationist, Soil Conservation Technician more professional;
- To make the general public more aware of the duties and responsibilities involved with these positions;
- To stimulate TCDEA members to augment their education and to increase their general knowledge;
- To become better qualified for these positions by completing course work and other activities which will enhance the work that is being performed; and
- To create and enhance pride in their chosen profession.

Any district employee in Tennessee shall be eligible for membership in the Tennessee Conservation District Employee Association. Dues are \$25.00 per year per employee and they are payable at the TACD annual convention or by November 30th. Dues are required to be paid by February 1st of the forthcoming convention to be a voting member. Any past district employee shall be eligible to be an affiliate member with the same dues as a regular member. Affiliate members shall be non-voting members.

[www.tcdea.tnacd.org](http://www.tcdea.tnacd.org)

## **National Association of Conservation Districts**

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) is the non-profit organization that represents America's 3,000 conservation districts and the 17,000 men and women who serve on their governing boards. Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs at the local level. Districts work with millions of cooperating landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on all private lands and many public lands in the United States. **NACD's mission is to serve conservation districts by providing national leadership and a unified voice for natural resource conservation.** Among the goals of the organization are to:

- Represent districts as their national voice on conservation issues;
- Provide useful information to conservation districts and their state associations;
- Build partnerships with federal and state agencies and other organizations in order to carry out district priorities and programs;
- Analyze programs and policy issues that have an impact on local districts; and
- Offer needed and cost-effective services to districts.

The association was founded on the philosophy that conservation decisions should be made at the local level by local people with technical and funding assistance from federal, state, and local governments and the private sector. As the national voice for all conservation districts, NACD supports voluntary, incentive-driven natural resource conservation programs that benefit all citizens. The association's programs and activities aim to advance the resource conservation cause of local districts and the millions of cooperating landowners and land managers they serve.

NACD maintains relationships with organizations and government agencies; publishes information about districts; works with leaders in agriculture, conservation, environment, education, industry and other fields; and provides services to its districts. NACD is primarily financed through voluntary contributions of its member districts and state associations.

<http://www.nacdnet.org/>