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SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSIONER HANDBOOK



Written in joint cooperation by:

- Conservation Districts of Iowa
- Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship - Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality
- Natural Resources Conservation Service

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PREFACE

Congratulations upon election to your local Soil and Water Conservation District Board and welcome to your role as a Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner in the State of Iowa. As a Commissioner, you are a locally elected conservation leader; understanding your role and responsibilities as a Commissioner will assist you to effectively promote and implement conservation in your community. This Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner Handbook provides you with an orientation to your role and responsibilities.

Every effort has been made to make this handbook beneficial. Please note that this handbook is a basic resource for commissioners. The general statement of powers, duties, and specific provisions of the Conservation Districts are contained in Iowa Code Chapter 161A. Also, references listed in the Appendix will help you develop effective district programs.

When you have questions, call upon the experience of your fellow commissioners or district staff. You may also contact one of the following:

<p>Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality 502 E 9th Street Des Moines, IA 50319 Phone: (515) 281-5851 https://iowaagriculture.gov/dscwg</p>	
<p>Natural Resources Conservation Service 210 Walnut Street #693 Des Moines, IA 50309 Phone: (515) 284-4769 https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ia/home/</p>	
<p>Conservation Districts of Iowa 315 E 5th Street, Suite #134 Des Moines, IA 50309 Phone: (515) 289-8300 https://cdiowa.org/</p>	

“I consider the soil conservation districts movement one of the most important developments in the whole history of agriculture.”

- Hugh Hammond Bennett

- Pioneer in the field of soil conservation
- Founded and headed what is now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

It is often said that “necessity is the mother of invention”. In the case of the soil conservation movement, necessity appeared as a national emergency in the 1930s. Improper use of farmland and overuse of rangeland teamed up with recurring drought to produce the Dust Bowl era. During this time, dust storms originated in the Great Plains and swept across the nation, resulting in ruined land, dead livestock, untold human suffering, and forced abandonment of farms by many families. Storms sometimes carried the precious topsoil thousands of miles, dumping it into the ocean. However, it was the “dust” enveloping the United States Capitol that brought government action.

National Action

Nationally, August 25, 1933, saw the creation of the Soil Erosion Service within the U.S. Department of the Interior. This was the first soil conservation action taken by the United States government, and in fact was the first program of its kind anywhere. The Service began gathering data on the condition of the nation’s soil resources and established the first demonstration projects.

In 1933, Hugh Hammond Bennett (April 15, 1881 – July 7, 1960), often called the Father of Soil Conservation, became Director of the Soil Erosion Service. Before congressional committees, Bennett used tactics such as pouring water on a table to demonstrate the effect of rain on unprotected, bare soil. When a dust storm moved eastward from the Great Plains in the spring of 1935 as Bennett testified before a congressional committee, he used the darkness caused by the storm to the Washington, DC day to illustrate the need for soil conservation. As Bennett guided the young agency, his concepts proved wise.

On March 26, 1935, the Soil Erosion Service was transferred to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and became the Soil Conservation Service.

The same year, Public Law 46 of the 74th Congress, known as the Soil Conservation Act of 1935, went into effect. The Act, passed unanimously by the House of Representatives and the Senate, was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Act stated “. . . soil erosion is a menace to the national welfare and it is hereby declared to be a policy of Congress to provide permanently for the control and prevention of soil erosion . . . “

The Soil Conservation Service addressed the challenge by establishing a number of large-scale demonstration projects around the country. Although the projects themselves were successful, it soon became clear that this method was not far-reaching enough. It was much too slow to accomplish the desired results, it was far too costly, and it did not provide long-lasting conservation results. In addition, it lacked grass roots support and participation.

What was needed was a local organization through which conservation would be accomplished. However, no such organization existed. A totally innovative, locally-administered unit of government was needed—the Soil Conservation District. Finally, a model state Soil Conservation Districts law and a letter from President Roosevelt was sent to each of the state governors in February 1937.

The states did act, but with varying degrees of speed. Twenty-two states passed enabling legislation within the same year. Eventually all fifty states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands adopted enabling laws.

Iowa Action

In Iowa, the soil conservation program was initiated in 1939 when the Iowa General Assembly passed enabling legislation to allow soil conservation districts to organize and to provide for their administration. Legislation of the 48th General Assembly was responsible for the Conservation Districts Law and establishment of the State Soil Conservation Committee.

Iowa's first organized district was the Marion Conservation District in 1940. However, the Montgomery District was also organized in 1940 and was the first district organized on a county-wide basis. Today all districts are organized by county boundaries; however, Pottawattamie County is divided into two districts. The final district organized was the Howard Water Conservation District in northeast Iowa in 1952.

In 1987 legislation was adopted to add "water" to the district title, creating the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The State Soil Conservation Committee is now known as the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee.

Local Action

The history of the development of the Soil and Water Conservation District is contained in each district's soil and water resource conservation plan. The document is on file in each district's office and at the County Recorder's office. The Commissioners should review the soil and water resource conservation plan for this information.



"If we are bold in our thinking, courageous in accepting new ideas, and willing to work with instead of against our land, we shall find in conservation farming an avenue to the greatest food production the world has ever known - not only for the war, but for the peace that is to follow."

Hugh Hammond Bennett

- Pioneer in the field of soil conservation
- Founded and headed what is now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

ORGANIZATION OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS UNDER STATE LAW

The District Commissioner

Soil and Water Conservation Districts are the local legal subdivisions of state government responsible under state law for soil and water conservation work within their boundaries. Iowa Code Chapter 161A.3 defines a “District” or “Soil and Water Conservation District” as a “governmental subdivision of this state, and a public body corporate and politic, organized for the purposes, with the powers, and subject to the restrictions in this chapter set forth.” Districts promote protection, maintenance, improvement, and wise use of the soil and water within the district.

Topic	Explanation
Number of Districts	Iowa has 100 Districts.
Number of Commissioners	Each district board is comprised of five commissioners.
Fiscal Year	The fiscal year is July 1 – June 30.
Qualifications	Any candidate for commissioner must be an eligible elector residing in the district. Not more than two commissioners can be a resident from any one township at the same time.
Election	Candidates for the position of commissioner are elected locally on a nonpartisan ballot during the general election, held in even-numbered years.
Term of Office	Each commissioner is elected for a four-year term, beginning the first day of January that is not a Sunday or a holiday, following the election.
Oath of Office	Elected commissioners take the oath of office prescribed by Iowa Code Section 63.10 prior to or on the first day of January that is not a Sunday or holiday in odd-numbered years.
Compensation	Commissioners receive no compensation for services but may be reimbursed for actual expenses necessary to discharge the duties of commissioner.
Civil Liability	Commissioners are protected from personal liability in the discharge of their duties by tort liability under Chapter 161A of the Iowa Code. In addition, Chapter 161A.6 of the Iowa Code specifies that commissioners shall be bonded: “The commissioners shall provide for the execution of surety bonds for all employees and officers who shall be entrusted with funds or property. . .” Effective July 1, 2016, districts are covered under the state’s blanket bond policy. The applicable costs associated with the policy premiums are covered by IDALS. This bond coverage satisfies the requirements in Chapter 161A.6 of the Iowa Code.
Vacancies	A vacancy in the office of commissioner can be created through death, resignation, a move out of the district, or a move into a township where another two commissioners reside. Any commissioner who misses 60% or more of the meetings in a calendar year may be removed from the office by unanimous vote of the other commissioners in the district. A

Topic	Explanation
	vacancy is filled by appointment by the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee until the next general election. Districts are encouraged to recommend the name of a suitable replacement candidate to the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee.

Statutory Powers

To be an effective commissioner, a working knowledge of commissioner powers, as given in Iowa Code Chapter 161A.7, is essential. Summarizing Chapter 161A.7, a Soil and Water Conservation District has the power to:

- Conduct surveys, investigations, and research relating to the character of soil erosion, floodwater, and sediment damages as well as preventive and control measures. This is to be done in collaboration with the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station located at Ames, IA.
- Conduct demonstration projects within the district on lands owned or controlled by the state or its agencies, with consent and cooperation of the agency owning or controlling the land. This is to be done in collaboration with the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, whose offices are located in Ames, IA.
- Carry out conservation practices within the district on lands owned or controlled by the state or any of its agencies, in collaboration with the agency administering and having jurisdiction of the land.
- Enter into agreements with and furnish financial or other aid to carry out erosion control, watershed protection, and flood prevention operations within the district.
- Maintain, administer, and / or improve acquired properties; receive income from these properties to be used in furthering the provision of the district.
- Make soil conservation equipment, fertilizer, lime, and other materials necessary for resource conservation available to landowners.
- Build, improve, and maintain conservation structures.
- Develop comprehensive conservation plans.
- Sue and be sued in the name of the district. Make and revise rules to carry out the district programs.
- Accept donations, gifts, and contributions from the United States or any of its agencies and from the state or any of its agencies to be used in district operations.
- Change the name of the soil and water district, with the approval of the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee.
- Encourage local school districts to provide education related to natural resources, environmental awareness, soil conservation, and water quality.
- Develop a soil and water resource conservation plan for the district.
- Enter in agreements to protect the state’s groundwater and surface water.
- Require contributions by landowners as a condition of extending soil and water conservation district activities.
- Require the landowner to file an agreement identifying the particular lands upon which state cost-sharing funds are used for conservation and water quality activities.

Additional commissioner powers, as stated in the Iowa Code, include:

- Chapter 161A.13: Approve formation of and govern sub-districts for watershed protection programs and flood prevention programs.
 - <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/2016/161A.13.pdf>
- Chapter 161A.20: Approve special annual tax to acquire land rights, maintain practices, etc.
 - <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/161A.20.pdf>
- Chapter 161A.21: Subdistrict may condemn land.
 - <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/2016/161A.21.pdf>
- Chapter 161A.44: Establish soil loss limits; review soil loss limit regulations adopted by the district at least every five years.
 - <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/161A.44.pdf>
- Chapter 161A.51: Enter private lands, except private dwellings, to determine if soil erosion is occurring in violation of the district's regulations.
 - <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/161A.51.pdf>
- Chapter 161A.72: Require landowners receiving state funds for conservation practices to enter into maintenance agreements.
 - <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/161A.72.pdf>

For additional information, refer to Iowa Code 161A.7: Soil and Water Conservation:
<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/161A.7.pdf>

District Commissioner Responsibilities

As elected officials, district commissioners are responsible for managing the activities of the district; district board members are expected to perform the following duties:

- Hold regular monthly business meetings that conform to the state's Open Meeting Law, Iowa Code Chapter 21 (<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/ico/chapter/21.pdf>).
- Hold annual organizational meeting that conforms to the state's Open Meeting Law, Iowa Code, Chapter 21 (<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/ico/chapter/21.pdf>).
- Develop an understanding of Iowa Soil Conservation Laws as listed in Iowa Code Chapter 161A (<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/ico/chapter/161A.pdf>).
- Be aware of soil and water conservation and water quality conditions in the district.
- Maintain contact with Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) - Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality (DSCWQ) through correspondence, phone calls, and meeting attendance.
- Cooperate with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other federal, state, and local organizations.
- Establish acceptable soil loss limits for soil types in the district.
- Administer state and federal cost-share programs, including but not limited to:
 - Iowa Financial Incentive Program (IFIP).
 - Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP).
 - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).
 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

- Adjudicate soil loss complaints.
- Develop and implement annual work plans.
- Assist IDALS- DSCWQ with the selection of the Conservation Assistant (CA) and any other state employees that may be located in the district office, including but not limited to:
 - State Soil Conservation Technician.
 - State Environmental Specialist.
- Publish an annual report of the district activities and accomplishments.
- Manage all funds, both state and district; facilities; and equipment consistent with the best interests of the district.
- Enter into maintenance agreements for permanent conservation practices.
- Employ and manage district personnel.

Activities vary from district to district, depending on the priorities set by the district commissioners. District activities for youth and adults may include:

- Personal contact.
- Inviting persons to district board meetings.
- Conservation practices demonstrations.
- Education offerings / workshops / outdoor classrooms.
- Brochures and literature.
- Field days / tours.
- Communicating with local, state, and federal legislators.
- Newspaper articles.
- Newsletters.
- Poster contests.
- Scholarship recognitions.
- Tree sales.
- Awards programs.

District commissioners can best determine what activities will be most effective in promoting soil and water conservation in their area. Remember:

- Keep the public informed about conservation programs and other local, state, and federal conservation and water quality programs.
- Find ways to evaluate the progress of the conservation and water quality programs in your district, with annual and long-range progress identified and documented.
- Support the mission and goals of the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) by participating in its conferences, workshops, and other events; paying annual dues; and promoting CDI programs.
- NEVER relinquish your responsibilities. Staff, whether district, CDI, IDALS, or NRCS, exist to help the board implement programs and activities. The board's responsibility is to plan, implement, and evaluate these programs and activities; staff's responsibility is to assist the board.

THE DISTRICT BOARD

Each conservation district is governed by five commissioners as specified in Iowa Code Chapter 161A. During the January organizational meeting, the district board elects a chairperson and a vice-chairperson. The district board appoints a secretary and a treasurer. These elections and appointments are official acts of the district and must be noted in the official minutes of the district. District boards may appoint the Conservation Assistant to serve as the district board's secretary. Districts may rotate officer positions amongst the commissioners, affording each commissioner the opportunity use leadership talents effectively.

In addition, Chapter 161A.6 of the Iowa Code specifies that Commissioners shall be bonded: "The commissioners shall provide for the execution of surety bonds for all employees and officers who shall be entrusted with funds or property. . ." Effective July 1, 2016, Districts are covered under the state's blanket bond policy. The applicable costs associated with the policy premiums are covered by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS). This bond coverage satisfies the requirements in Chapter 161A.6 of the Iowa Code.

Duties of all Board Members

- Attend and participate in board meetings. Iowa Code 161A.5 states that if a commissioner is absent for sixty or more percent of monthly meetings during any twelve-month period, the other commissioners may declare the office vacant and take measures to fill the vacated office.
- Advocate for conservation and water quality issues with the public, landowners, farm operators, and legislators.
- Adopt sound financial policies.
- Arrange for an annual district financial self-review of district funds by two commissioners other than the treasurer and co-treasurer (Assistant commissioners may participate and sign off on the annual district financial review. It is acceptable for them to review and sign without an elected commissioner present). Within 90 days after the fiscal year end; send an email containing the financial review to IDALS-DSCWQ.
- Complete Soil and Water Conservation District Financial Policies Annual Checklist (see Appendix
- Accept duties and carry out activities as assigned by the chairperson.
- Assist other board officers, as requested.
- Familiarize self with all district programs to ensure ability to work with the public, officers, staff, other board members, and committees.
- Ensure long-range plan and annual plan of work are written and enacted on time and carried out on an appropriate time schedule.
- Be prepared to serve in one or more of the board offices.

Duties of the Chairperson

- Develop and prepare the agenda for the monthly board meeting in a timely manner.
- Consult with the District Conservationist and the Conservation Assistant to ensure all necessary items are included in the agenda.

- Request assistance of the Conservation Assistant in typing and distributing the agenda to interested individuals and in posting the agenda in advance of meeting. Ensure Freedom of Information Act requirements are met.
- Preside at all meetings or arrange for vice-chairperson to preside.
- Call meetings to order on time and end meetings on time. Ensure a quorum (minimum of three of five Commissioners) is present, announce order of business, provide all of those in attendance with a typed agenda, and recognize visitors and others at the meeting.
 - Lead the discussion in an orderly manner.
 - State each motion before it is discussed and before it is voted upon. Put a motion to vote and announce the outcome.
- Appoint committees, assign responsibilities, and ask for reports when due.
- At close of term of office, turn over chairperson's materials and explain responsibilities to successor.
- Ensure all new commissioners and assistant commissioners are properly oriented, informed, and understand their duties.
- Give thanks and credit for work progress and completion.
- Observe proper parliamentary procedures during the meeting.

Duties of the Vice-Chairperson

- Act in place of the chairperson whenever needed.
- Consult with and advise chairperson on matters of program and policy.
- Assume duties at the request of the chairperson.
- In case of chairperson resignation or death, the vice-chairperson succeeds the chairperson until the board is reorganized.

Duties of the Secretary

- Collaborate with chairperson to ensure all necessary items are included in the agenda.
- Type and distribute meeting notice and agenda to board members and other interested individuals.
- Provide public notification of each meeting.
- Record and maintain official board meeting minutes, making a complete record of all proceedings with the following information:
 - Type of meeting (i.e., regular, annual, special).
 - Date, location, and time of meeting.
 - Name of presiding officer.
 - List of commissioners in attendance.
 - List others in attendance, such as agency representatives and guests. If a large group attends, name the organization and list the spokesperson.
 - Summary of reports made at the meeting. Ask agency representatives and committees to submit written reports, if needed.
 - All motions, including who made the motion, who seconded it, and action taken.
 - All important statements, even though action was not taken.
- Sign minutes and official records.
- Forward a copy of the meeting minutes to IDALS-DSCWQ.

- Complete and retain copies of all correspondence.
- Maintain a record of all committees, both standing and special. Notify committee members of their appointment if they are not present when appointment was made.
- Initiate correspondence on behalf of the board, as needed. Assistance may be obtained from the District Conservationist, other agencies, other commissioners, or the Conservation Assistant.

Duties of the Treasurer and Co-Treasurer

- Use due diligence to ensure that all funds and records of funds are handled properly.
- Maintain complete and accurate records of receipts and expenditures for the district.
- Issue receipts for all monies received and pay bills when authorized and approved by the board. Make sure that all authorized payments are recorded in the meeting minutes.
- Complete monthly financial review using a standardized form; retain completed checklist in SWCD office. NOTE: The Monthly Financial Checklist (refer to Appendix G) is a useful, but not a mandatory, form.
- Present a monthly financial report to the board.
- Reconcile year-end financial documentation following IDALS-DSCWQ guidance (Conservation Assistants have access to this guidance via the policy and procedure manual).
- Publish an annual financial report in the annual report to the public and to IDALS-DSCWQ of all district funds, both local and state.
- Deposit and issue checks in and from the district account.
- Communicate with the Conservation Assistant to reconcile the treasurer's report with the bank statement monthly and provide accurate financial statements to the board.

Iowa Code prohibits commissioners from delegating their responsibilities and authorities regarding official district business to others. Therefore, they cannot appoint assistant commissioners to act for them on official district business. This includes making motions or voting on official district business at district meetings.

Assistant commissioners may act in an advisory capacity and offer suggestions or comments but may not assume the full authority.

Duties of Assistant Commissioners

Assistant commissioners are officially appointed by the district board as advisors and representatives; in addition, they assist with board activities. Assistant commissioners do not vote; they augment the board's knowledge and experience. Activities may include, but are not limited to, field days, annual meetings, contests, education events, and special observances, such as Soil and Water Week. Assistant commissioners may also serve on committees and serve as committee chairperson. Assistant commissioners may participate and sign off on the annual district financial self-review; it is acceptable for them to review and sign without an elected commissioner present. Appointment of assistant commissioners is important to creating a network of volunteers, both youth and adult. In addition, adult assistant commissioners are an avenue to cultivating potential new commissioners.

Assistant commissioners are eligible for reimbursement for actual expenses incurred while performing their duties. This reimbursement is made from the district commissioners' expense account. All travel and expense claims must be approved by the elected district commissioners and certified as a just claim by the chairperson or a member of the governing board. Claims for assistant commissioners should be clearly marked as such.

Generally, assistant commissioners are appointed for one calendar year, January through December. However, appointments may be made at any time and there is no limit on the number of appointments.

Committees

Committees offer districts an excellent means to manage their work more efficiently and make greater use of available resources, including volunteer time and expertise. Soil and water conservation districts typically maintain committees on subjects such as education, district operations, personnel, conservation programs, budget, legislation, contests, and awards.

Committees with well-defined goals and objectives are most effective. The elected commissioners remain responsible for the actions and decisions of the various committees to which they delegate responsibility. It may be advisable to have at least one elected commissioner or an assistant commissioner serve on each committee.

In the case of the specially appointed committee or task force, it is important that the committee disband once its established objective has been accomplished. Likewise, a district's committee structure should not be so complex as to become an administrative burden and render itself ineffective.

District Employees

District employees may hold positions such as technicians, information specialists, education specialists, or others, as needed. Positions may be funded by the County Board of Supervisors, Experience Works, or income from district projects or grants. These employees are responsible to the district commissioners. The soil and water conservation district commissioners are responsible for all aspects of employment including setting wages, benefits, and all terms of employment. Each district employee should receive an employee handbook.

“Out of the long list of nature’s gifts to man, none is perhaps so utterly essential to human life as soil.”

Hugh Hammond Bennett

- Pioneer in the field of soil conservation
- Founded and headed what is now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

District Meetings

A major responsibility of the district commissioner is to participate in the conservation district's meetings. Because commissioners are elected officials, implement legislated authorities, and manage tax dollars, meetings must be held in accordance with the Iowa Open Meetings Law. See <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/ico/chapter/21.pdf> for additional information. In addition, at least three commissioners must be present to constitute a quorum; official business cannot be transacted without a quorum.

Planning by the chairperson and the staff is essential. The agenda should be set by the chairperson and staff in advance so that commissioners and other interested parties can receive the agenda and the minutes of the previous meeting a minimum of 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

The chairperson must have and retain control of the meeting so that orderly and constructive discussion occurs. The secretary must maintain complete and accurate minutes; it is possible there could be a legal need for them in a soil loss case where they might be used as evidence in court. The reading aloud of the previous meeting minutes can be eliminated when the previous meeting minutes have been sent to all commissioners in advance of the present meeting. Minutes are required to be made available in a timely manner upon request.

Committee reports should be well organized and succinct. If action is needed, recommendations for consideration by the board should be provided.

All meetings should be conducted under standard parliamentary procedures; refer to Roberts Rules of Order at <https://robertsrules.com/>. On file in the district office is a copy of an Iowa State University Extension publication to be used as a reference for conducting productive meetings. The Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) recommends that districts consider operating under Roberts Rules of Order, Relaxed Version. Primarily these rules state that some of the formality that is necessary in large assemblies would hinder business in small boards. Under the relaxed rules of procedure for committees and small boards:

- You can make motions or speak without the necessity of formal recognition.
- Your motions do not have to be seconded.
- You can speak as often as you can politely obtain the attention of the other members. In fact, Motions to Limit Debate are not in order, and the motion to Reconsider practically knows no limit in a committee.
- You can discuss things without a motion on the floor.
- The chairperson can make motions, participate in discussion, and vote.

Annual Reports

An annual report is an important part of the district administration. The annual report gives the public an opportunity to know how the district is spending public funds. The report should contain a statement of the district's activities and accomplishments throughout the year. The form of the report is

determined by the district; some districts use an educational as well as an informational format. Many districts publish their annual report on their district website.

Contests and Awards

Districts have numerous opportunities each year to honor persons who are doing outstanding work in the field of soil and water conservation. Honoring those who are accomplishing conservation measures is an excellent way to promote conservation. In addition, entering a variety of contests provides districts the opportunity to compare their programs with others in an effort to continually improve activities and services. Many districts host an annual awards event to recognize persons in the district who do outstanding conservation work.

Contests and award programs can be an important part of the district’s annual activities. A committee charged with exploring, identifying, and managing nominations and awards may be helpful.

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) presents awards to individuals, organizations, businesses, agencies, and others for outstanding work and leadership in soil and water conservation. For additional information refer to the NACD website at <https://www.nacdnet.org/>.

The following are awards given in Iowa. Refer to the Policies and Procedures Manual for specific rules and regulations. Additional information is found at the Conservation Districts of Iowa website, <https://cdiowa.org/>.

Award	Comment
CDI Champion Commissioner	Recognizes commissioners and assistant commissioners who attend Iowa Conservation Partnership Day, Spring Regional Meeting, and the Annual Conference.
CDI Honorary Member	Recognizes individuals who exerted a significant influence on the Iowa soil and water conservation program.
CDI Poster Contest	For grades K – 12. State winning posters are forwarded to NACD for national competition. The contest is sponsored by Grinnell Mutual Insurance Company.
CDI Scholarship Awards	Recognizes outstanding high school graduates choosing to further their education in a conservation-related or agriculture field.
Conservation Woman of the Year Award	Recognizes women who have made significant contributions to conservation and the improvement of Iowa’s natural resources conservation through achievements on her own land, her career, or voluntary efforts.
Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality Award	Recognizes individuals for outstanding service to soil and water conservation efforts in Iowa.

Award	Comment
Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Awards Program	Recognizes the efforts of Iowa's farmers as environmental leaders committed to healthy soils and improved water quality.
Iowa Soil Conservation Awards Program	Recognizes outstanding conservation farmers and teachers in several categories.
Izaak Walton Windbreak Award	Recognizes individuals for implementing windbreaks.
Ken Wagner Award	Recognizes outstanding commissioners.
Outstanding Soil Conservation District Commissioner	A state-wide award given to commissioners for exemplary service.
Outstanding Watershed Award	Recognizes a watershed project that showcases conservation at its best.
Ruth Wagner Award	Recognizes outstanding assistant commissioners.
Woodland Owner of the Year	Recognizes individuals who are doing an outstanding job of woodland management.

District Finances

Funding to the districts is provided by appropriation of the Iowa Legislature through IDALS-DSCWQ, county government, agency and private grants, and through local district fund raising activities.

Commissioner Expense Fund

The Commissioner Expense Funds (commonly called 1M funds) are appropriated to provide reimbursement to soil and water conservation district commissioners and assistant commissioners for actual mileage, meals, lodging, and registration fees incurred in the discharge of their duties. These funds also provide for payment of certain soil and water conservation district office supplies and expenses.

At the beginning of each fiscal year, the state budget appropriation for commissioner expenses is allocated to soil and water conservation districts by IDALS-DSCWQ. Any unused funds remaining in this appropriation at the close of the fiscal year are reverted to the General Fund of Iowa and consequently cannot be carried into the next fiscal year.

To submit commissioner expenses:

- All requests for travel and expense reimbursement must be submitted to the Conservation Assistant within 90 days of the time that the expense is incurred.
- Mileage is reimbursed at the rate of \$0.39 per mile for official business. Commissioners should record their travel expenses and must submit them to the treasurer for payment.
- When commissioners attend meetings that have a registration fee, the following must be submitted with the request for reimbursement:
 - Original receipts that show the expense.
 - Copy of the registration form.
 - Copy of the program agenda.

- When commissioners attend meetings in which a charge is made only for cost of the meal, they can simply submit a claim for reimbursement for the cost of the meal.
- Commissioner expense funds can only be used for travel and expenses within the state of Iowa.

Revolving Fund

Each district may establish a revolving fund. Some districts promote fund-raising activities as a means to obtain money for district programs. Revolving funds can be used where state and federal appropriated funds cannot be used. Districts cannot charge for services rendered by federal or state employed personnel. The revolving fund should be self-reviewed each year by the district.

There are several methods employed by districts for the purpose of raising funds for district activities. Examples are:

- Cooperative clubs, booster clubs, terrace clubs, no-till clubs, etc.
- Sales of trees and shrubs for forestation, wildlife refuge, and windbreak projects when the district is not in direct competition with local nursery dealers.
- Sales of ads in district newsletters or annual reports.
- Contributions from local businesses, contractors, and industries.
- Sales of tickets to district annual and biennial dinner meetings.
- Sale or rental of district-owned materials, such as seeders, no-till planters, flags, fabric check machines, etc.
- Income from property received as a gift, endowment, estates, or portions thereof.

All employees on the state payroll shall not be paid commissions or salaries for services rendered in annual report or newsletter ad sales, tree sales, or other fund-raising campaigns. Such tasks shall be considered a part of the state employee's duties.

State Cost Share

Iowa soil and water conservation programs are appropriated by the Iowa legislature to provide financial incentives for soil conservation practices and water quality protection. These funds are administered through the SWCD, supporting the locally led process. Commissioners are responsible for approving all state cost share, no matter the program.

Each district is required by Administrative Rule to establish and maintain a priority ranking system for the distribution of IFIP and REAP program cost share allocations. These ranking criteria should be reviewed and evaluated annually by districts to ensure that funding distributions are meeting the intended purpose of the program objectives and local public benefits. Additional information on these requirements can be referenced in Iowa Administrative Code Chapter 10.73(6)

(<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/iac/rule/05-19-2010.27.10.73.pdf>) and Chapter 12 (<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/DOCS/ACO/IC/LINC/Chapter.12.pdf>).

Iowa Financial Incentives Program

Iowa Financial Incentives Program (IFIP) was the first state cost share program for conservation on agricultural lands. IDALS-DSCWQ has received appropriations for conservation cost sharing since 1973. Eighty-five percent of the cost share funds appropriated are allocated to districts to provide state funding of not more than 50% of the approved cost of permanent structural soil conservation practices. Under IFIP, only \$15,000 of the district's allocation can be used for management practices such as cover crops, no-tillage and strip-tillage, plus 30% of any allocation to the district above \$15,000 (initial or supplemental).

Five percent of the amount appropriated is set aside by IDALS-DSCWQ for cost sharing not to exceed 75% of the approved cost of permanent and management soil conservation practices on watersheds above publicly owned lakes. These lakes have to be on an approved list of the Natural Resources Commission.

Five percent of the appropriation is set aside for cost sharing with landowners or farm operators who are required to install soil erosion control practices as a result of an administrative order from the district implementing the state's Erosion Control Law.

It is the responsibility of the commissioners to prioritize and allocate financial incentives funds to landowners within their district. It is important that each commissioner be familiar with Chapter 10 of the Iowa Administrative Code: Iowa Financial Incentive Program for Soil Erosion Control: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/iac/chapter/27.10.pdf> . These are the rules that cover the financial incentives program and are on file in the Policies and Procedures Manual in the district office.

There are several additional state funded programs offered through the district. This information is found at https://www.iowaagriculture.gov/soil/pdf/IDALSDSC_ProgramSummary_Nov08.pdf .

“History is largely a record of human struggle to wrest the land from nature, because man relies for sustenance on the products of the soil. So direct is the relationship between soil erosion, the productivity of the land, and the prosperity of people, that the history of mankind, to a considerable degree at least, may be interpreted in terms of the soil and what has happened to it as the result of human use.”

Hugh Hammond Bennett

- Pioneer in the field of soil conservation
- Founded and headed what is now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

District Plans and Planning Activities

Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plan

The soil and water resource conservation plan is a comprehensive document which sets forth strategies, goals, and priorities for the wise use, protection, and improvement of land, water, and all related natural resources.

Each conservation district should have a soil and water resource conservation plan on file in the district office. This document states the district's current needs in resource development and the authorities with which districts are empowered. In addition, consider including state and national plans, such as Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy (<http://www.nutrientstrategy.iastate.edu/>) and the NRCS Strategic Plan (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/about/acc/strategy/>). Plans should be reviewed annually when preparing the annual plan of work and the plans should be updated at a minimum every five years. Add amendments to the plan, as needed.

As a district becomes more involved in various resource conservation programs, a soil and water resource conservation plan becomes more important. A properly completed plan can be of benefit in budgeting and providing overall direction for the district.

District commissioners are urged to take an active role in the development of the district soil and water resource conservation plan. Using the funds of a five-year grant that began in 2019, CDI has hired area planners to help each district write, review, and improve the district soil and water resource plan. The goals, objectives, and policies should be set by the commissioners. When the soil and water resource plan is completed, a statement page should be recorded with the county recorder.

District Annual Plan of Work

On an annual basis, a plan of work for the ensuing year should be developed, based on the goals set forth in the five-year Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plan (SWRC). This gives commissioners an opportunity to review the goals and objectives set forth in the SWRC Plan and to update these goals and objectives as needed.

The annual plan of work should consider any new partner agreements which have been entered into during the previous year that may change the direction of the previously identified goals within the SWRC Plan. It should also reflect the progress made in accomplishing the goals and objectives set out in the SWRC Plan and recommend additional work needed to achieve the remaining portion of those goals.

This is also an opportunity to re-engage the local working group. By bringing the local working group together on an annual basis, commissioners receive vital public perspective of soil conservation and water quality. As the environment, agriculture, and the general economy change, having public input will keep the plan both relevant and vibrant.

Steps to preparing, implementing, and evaluating the plan are listed below.

Phase #1: Inventory, Problems, and Objectives	
Step #1	<p>Identify the major issues and concerns in your district.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be beneficial to enlist other organizations, legislators, and individuals to help identify the major areas of concern. Commissioners may get new insight into some concerns, as well as help to build support for district programs.
Step #2	<p>Determine actionable objectives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once the issues have been identified, develop SMART goals and objectives to address these concerns. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is to be accomplished? ▪ Why is this goal important? ▪ Who is involved? ▪ Where is it located? ▪ Which resources or limits are involved? ○ Measurable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How much? How many? ▪ How will it be known when it is accomplished? ○ Achievable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How will the goal be accomplished? ▪ How realistic is the goal, based on other constraints, such as financial factors? ○ Relevant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does this seem worthwhile? ▪ Is this the right time? ▪ Does this match other efforts / needs? ▪ Is this applicable in the current socio-economic environment? ○ Time bound: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When? ▪ What can be done six months from now? Six weeks from now? Today?
Step #3	<p>Inventory resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine what natural, financial, technical, and human resources are available to help meet the objectives.
Step #4	<p>Analyze resource data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once resources are available, determine what can realistically be accomplished or what additional resources may be necessary.
Phase #2: Decision Support	
Step #5	List potential activities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the information from the previous phase, list potential activities for the district. Note, you will probably have more activities on the list than can realistically be accomplished.
Step #6	<p>Evaluate list of activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given limited resources and often seemingly unlimited needs, recognize that not all potential activities can be accomplished. Ask these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the most critical needs /priorities of the people in the district? What are the board’s strengths? Where will the board be most effective? What resources are available to the board? What partnerships can be formed to address the need and gather the needed resources?
Step #7	<p>Make decisions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make decisions and document them. Write the plan.
Phase #3: Implementation and Evaluation	
Step #8	<p>Implement the plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without implementation, conservation benefits are not realized, and without evaluation, it is difficult to improve the plan and the planning process.
Step #9	<p>Evaluate progress and outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuously monitor the plan and its outcomes to determine if objectives are met. If it appears that circumstances have changed or the original plan is not meeting the objectives, modify the plan. Share findings with all appropriate individuals and agencies.

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between districts, NRCS, and IDALS is located in each office. The Operational Agreement is the document developed locally to detail working arrangements between the District and the local field office. This Operational Agreement can be used to replace the annual plan of work. The Operational Agreement should be developed jointly between the commissioners and the District Conservationist; it should state what the district expects to achieve and how it will be accomplished. Copies should be emailed to IDALS-DSCWQ and the area NRCS office.

While the locally led process was formally organized under the 1996 Farm Bill for determining EQIP priority areas, the process has been used by many districts since their founding. The following is how former NRCS Chief Paul Johnson describes locally led conservation:

“What do I mean by locally led conservation? Basically, locally led conservation means local people, usually with leadership of conservation districts, assess their natural resource conditions and needs; set goals; identify programs and other resources to solve those needs; develop proposals and recommendations to do so; implement solutions; and measure their success...

Locally led conservation is based on an assessment of conservation needs and all the assistance available to the community from government and non-governmental sources. Locally led conservation uses all federal, state, and local conservation programs – and private sector programs – singly and in combination, as tools to solve natural resource concerns. . .”

COMMISSIONER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Annual Conference for Soil and Water Conservation Commissioners

The Annual Conference for Soil and Water Conservation Commissioners is a statewide annual business meeting of Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) and an educational event for all commissioners and assistant commissioners. At the CDI business meeting, resolutions are discussed and officers elected. The awards ceremony honors numerous individuals for their efforts in soil and water conservation.

Educational sessions are a major component of the conference. The agenda varies from year to year, but often includes keynote speakers, tours, workshops, and small break-out sessions. These provide commissioners with diverse learning opportunities. The intent is to provide a broad range of topics pertinent to commissioners, whether they are newly elected or have served for several years.

The conference is co-sponsored by CDI and the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee (SSCWQC), in cooperation with the IDALS Division of the Department of Soil Conservation and Water Quality (IDALS-DSCWQ) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Regional Meetings

CDI and SSCWQC hold regional meetings in the spring. These are often half-day meetings where commissioners gather to discuss issues of mutual interest. In addition, commissioners hear updates on a variety of topics from CDI and its partners, IDALS-DSCWQ and NRCS. Resolutions submitted in advance of the meeting can be discussed. Regional directors and alternate directors are elected on a rotating basis.

Online Training Videos

CDI and IDALS-DSCWQ often collaborate to produce commissioner training videos. To view these videos, see <https://cdiowa.org/get-involved/new-commissioner-training/>.

PARTNER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS WORKING WITH DISTRICTS

Districts work in close partnership with many federal, state, and local agencies and organizations. Formal working agreements exist with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship – Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality (IDAL – DSCWQ).

On the federal level, the Board of Commissioners works with NRCS:

- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
 - NRCS is the technical agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that helps landowners and operators on a voluntary basis to write conservation plans and apply conservation practices. NRCS also provides financial assistance, develops soil surveys, monitors soil and water resources, and assists with conservation compliance. NRCS personnel work through the Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Districts. NRCS in Iowa provides office space, computers, vehicles, and other supplies for the Soil and Water Conservation District offices and the state conservation employees.

Below is a list of NRCS personnel with whom the Board of Commissioners work:

- State Conservationist (STC)
 - The State Conservationist is responsible for overall operations of NRCS in Iowa. The State Conservationist and the State office staff are housed in the Neal Smith Federal Building in Des Moines.
- Assistant State Conservationist - Field Operations (ASTC – FO)
 - The State of Iowa is divided into five NRCS regions, each served by an Assistant State Conservationist – Field Operations employee. This individual works closely with the district personnel in each of their regions and is the immediate supervisor of the District Conservationist serving the district.
- District Conservationist (DC)
 - The USDA NRCS individual assigns a District Conservationist to each soil and water conservation district; some District Conservationists are assigned to more than one district through a management unit. The District Conservationist supplies technical assistance, administrative services, conservation planning assistance, professional advice, and public information through the district.
- Resource Conservationist (RC)
 - The Resource Conservationist position provides assistance to District Conservationists within an assigned area consisting of more than one county, by providing technical guidance in the development of conservation plans and providing ongoing technical training for the Field Office staff. In addition, the Resource Conservationist is responsible for completing all annual Food Security Act Compliance reviews for their service area. This position is on the Area Office staff and is located in a Field Office.
- Soil Conservationist (SC)
 - A Soil Conservationist may also be assigned to work in the district with the District Conservationist, depending on the workload. Soil Conservationists provide landowner assistance with conservation planning work.

- Soil Conservation Technician (SCT)
 - Some districts, depending upon workload, may be assigned a Soil Conservation Technician. A Soil Conservation Technician is primarily involved with field layout and design of conservation practices.

Federal partners are:

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
 - Environmental Protection Agency is the federal agency with oversight for many environmental quality programs. Districts most often work with the Environmental Protection Agency on water quality projects, such as non-point source (319) projects.
- U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (CORPS)
 - The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers has responsibility for many activities on streams and rivers. In addition, it administers the 404 permit process.
- USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA)
 - The USDA Farm Services Agency administers USDA price support, crop insurance, CRP, and other USDA benefit programs. It also provides GIS images for conservation work and natural disaster relief. Farm Services Agency is guided at the county level by locally elected, three-member county committees. State level management and guidance is provided by a presidentially appointed State Executive Director and a five-member State FSA Committee. FSA and NRCS are considered USDA “sister agencies” and work closely at the field level.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
 - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with districts on many wetland issues. In addition, the agency provides assistance with habitat improvement.
- USDA Rural Development (RD)
 - USDA Rural Development provides government loans for housing, business, industry, and community facilities.
- State Technical Committee
 - The State Technical Committee members come from a broad range of agencies and organizations. Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, districts, conservation organizations, farm groups, and farmers are represented on the committee. The committee helps Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency address program and planning issues by giving those affected by the programs and policies an opportunity to voice suggestions, recommendations, and concerns. State Technical Committee meetings are open to the public.

State partners are:

- Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship – Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality (IDALS – DSCWQ)
 - This group is responsible for the administrative functions of the soil and water conservation laws of Iowa. The State Soil Conservation Committee (SSCC) is the policy-making body for the DSCWQ. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship – Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality staff plan, administer, and execute the Division’s responsibilities. Division staff advise and assist districts with local resource management programs, allocate state financial incentive program funds, and assign state technical and secretarial positions to each soil and water district. The staff provide assistance to landowners in the reduction of non-point source pollution

and the protection of groundwater quality. The staff also administer the state's mine reclamation laws.

- State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee (SSCWQC)
 - The State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee is the policy-making body for IDALS – DSCWQ. This group is comprised of nine appointed voting members, two ex-officio non-voting members, and two advisor non-voting members. Meetings are open to the public.
 - The nine voting members are appointed for six-year terms by the Governor, subject to confirmation by the Senate. Six of these nine members must be actively engaged in farming. Three of the nine members are appointed from the state at large, one to represent cities, one to represent tree farmers, and one to represent the mining industry.
 - The two ex-officio non-voting members are representatives from the Iowa Cooperative Extension Service and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.
 - The two advisory non-voting members are representative of the Secretary of Agriculture of the United States and the Iowa County Engineers Association.

For information on the relationship of state employees to the district and to NRCS, refer to the formal District's Cooperative Working Agreement between NRCS, IDALS – DSCWQ, and the District. In addition, this written agreement delineates responsibilities and use of resources. IDALS – DSCWQ personnel are:

- Director
 - The Director of IDALS – DSCWQ has overall administrative responsibility for the division and is appointed by the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture. The Director and the state office staff are located in the Wallace State Office Building in Des Moines.
- Field Representative
 - Each district is served by a Field Representative who is responsible for assisting the district with questions and concerns regarding all statutory authorities, legal issues, cost-share, and other state funds. The Field Representative also supervises the Conservation Assistant and any other state employee assigned to the district office.
- Conservation Assistant (CA)
 - Each district is assigned a Conservation Assistant, as funding allows. The Conservation Assistant is a state employee and is supervised by the Field Representative. Daily coordination is provided by the NRCS District Conservationist. The Commissioners and the District Conservationist assist Department of Soil Conservation and Water Quality personnel with interviewing candidates for state positions. This position is filled by the Department of Soil Conservation and Water Quality in accordance with state hiring practices.
 - The Conservation Assistant's duties include receiving office visitors and phone calls, typing, filing, record keeping, reading and distributing mail, preparing correspondence, sending meeting agendas, assisting with state cost-share, assisting the District Conservationist, keeping the district's financial records current, and other duties assigned by the Department of Soil Conservation and Water Quality.
- Soil Conservation Technician (SCT)
 - Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship – Department of Soil Conservation and Water Quality has technician positions that are assigned to soil and water conservation districts. These positions are placed in districts that have the greatest need for added technical assistance. These individuals are state employees. They are hired and supervised similar to the Conservation Assistant.

- Environmental and Urban Specialist
 - Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship – Department of Soil Conservation and Water Quality has project coordinator positions that are assigned to soil and water conservation districts to assist with special projects. Some individuals are state employees, hired and supervised similar to state conservation assistants. Others are district employees supervised by commissioners.

Additional State of Iowa partners are:

- Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)
 - Iowa Department of Natural Resources administers parks, lakes, recreation areas, wildlife areas, forests, natural and cultural preserves, and associated user facilities and services. Agency programs include the research and management of fish, wildlife, forest resources, lakes and streams, and other unique natural features. They also regulate hunting, fishing, boating, and other outdoor recreational activities. They help coordinate county conservation board activities. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is responsible for coordinating statewide water pollution abatement and water quality management programs funded by the Environmental Protection Agency.
- Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (ISUEO)
 - Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is responsible for providing leadership for educational programs of the USDA. The administrative, support staff, faculty specialists, and program specialists are located on campus at Iowa State University in Ames. Field specialists with responsibility for agriculture and natural resources, communities, families, and youth are located in county offices across the state. In addition, a county extension education director, in each of Iowa's 99 counties, serves as the local contact for Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Each soil and water conservation district may also collaborate with local boards and committees, such as:

- County Conservation Board
 - County conservation boards are established at the discretion of each county. The five members of the County Conservation Board are appointed by the County Board of Supervisors to oversee the operation of the county conservation program and staff. County conservation boards are authorized to levy property tax for the acquisition, development, and management of county parks, museums, wildlife areas, and other natural areas.
- County Board of Supervisors
 - The County Board of Supervisors is comprised of three or five members and is responsible for the operation of county government. The Supervisors cooperate with soil and water conservation districts in the planning and installation of works of improvement along highways, roads, and farmlands. At times, the Board of Supervisors may allocate money to the Soil and Water Conservation District for educational purposes, installation of conservation practices, staff, and other specified purposes.
- Drainage District and Levee District
 - Drainage districts and / or levee districts may be formed by petition of landowners requesting the Board of Supervisors to establish and manage such a district to solve local water problems. Drainage and levee districts assist the Soil and Water

Conservation District by integrating soil conservation, flood control, and drainage projects.

Commissioners are advised to collaborate and participate in Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) activities:

- Conservation Districts of Iowa is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. It is a voluntary, entirely independent organization which represents the interests of the soil and water conservation districts and commissioners in Iowa. It is governed by a board of directors who are elected by the soil and water conservation district commissioners of Iowa. One director is elected from each of the nine state regions. The President and Vice-President are elected at-large at the annual meeting. The Secretary and Treasurer are elected by the Board of Directors from members of the Board. Districts are encouraged to keep in touch with their regional director.
- The primary purpose of CDI is to augment the work of the 100 local conservation districts by providing programs and services that help make each individual district more effective. CDI helps to promote communication amongst districts with its annual report, quarterly bulletins, monthly newsletters, email updates, regional meetings, annual meetings, and a website.
- Public programs are aimed at improving knowledge of natural resource issues and the work of conservation districts in Iowa. CDI programs include the Iowa Envirothon, District Poster Contest, and the CDI Scholarship Program. The Iowa Envirothon is an environmental education competition for high school students; the winning team of the state competition competes at the National Envirothon, held in various states or Canadian province each year. The poster contest is offered to all students from elementary to high school; winning entries compete at the national level through the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). The CDI Scholarship Program is offered to graduating high school seniors continuing their education in natural resources, conservation, or agriculture.
- CDI, through its resolution process, provides a forum for commissioners to address state and national issues. Resolutions requesting changes in Iowa policy are passed to the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee or the State Legislature for required action. Resolutions regarding national issues are addressed by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) at their annual meeting. If these resolutions pass the NACD resolution process, they become part of the NACD National Policy and gain support from districts across the country. Refer to the CDI website for the CDI Resolution Process:
<https://cdiowa.org/resources/resolutions/>.
- CDI employs a lobbyist and hosts the annual Iowa Conservation Partnership Day at the Iowa Capitol with their conservation partners. Because many federal and state policies affect district activities, commissioners are encouraged to develop a productive working relationship with their federal and state legislators. Commissioners often provide legislators with important information on the status of natural resources in their district and may have opportunities to give testimony in formal meetings or hearings on conservation issues. Each district is encouraged to appoint an individual to serve as the primary legislative contact for the district.
- CDI administers Farm Bill funding to districts to ensure conservation is on the ground.
- Through agreements with other state and federal agencies CDI is able to employ planners (who assist districts in developing their five-year plans), private lands wildlife specialists, and wetland easement specialists. For a complete list of CDI employees visit:
<https://cdiowa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CDI-Staff.pdf>
- CDI is funded by dues from the districts, projects, grants, and contributions.

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) also serves as a resource for commissioners:

- NACD is the non-profit organization that represents the United States' 3,000 conservation districts and the 17,000 individuals serving on their governing boards. NACD's mission is to serve conservation districts by providing national leadership and a unified voice for natural resource conservation.
- The organization was founded on the philosophy that conservation decisions should be made at the local level 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.
- 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 the districts.
- Each state has representation on the NACD Board of Directors.
- NACD is partially supported by the dues paid by conservation districts and state associations.
- For additional information: <https://www.nacdnet.org/>.

LEGAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES

Civil Rights

The Mutual Agreement between the USDA and each soil and water conservation district and the Cooperative Working Agreement between USDA – NRCS, the State of Iowa, and each soil and water conservation district specify that each district 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, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Discrimination

Discrimination is the intentional process of creating division, distinction, partiality and / or hurt on the basis of perceived feature or characteristic.

The following are brief descriptions of each of the referred requirements to which conservation districts have agreed to adhere. Consult the USDA – NRCS General manual for more details:

- Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
 - As amended, prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and sex in employment practices and prohibits reprisal or retaliation for civil rights activities.
- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
 - Ensures that no individual is denied participation in district education programs because of gender.
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
 - Ensures that disabled individuals have access to district program services and benefits.
- Age Discrimination Act of 1975
 - Ensures that no person is denied participation in district programs because of age. The requirement does not apply where age distinctions are established under the authority of any law that provides benefits or established criteria for participation on the basis of age.
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
 - Ensures reasonable accommodations are made to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of employment; services to people with disabilities; participation in programs or activities which are available to people without disabilities; that all new construction and modifications are accessible to individuals with disabilities; and that barriers to service are removed in existing facilities.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

There are two types of sexual harassment:

- Quid pro quo: “I can do this for you if you do this for me.”
- Hostile environment: Creating an atmosphere that interferes with the employee’s work performance.

The Civil Rights Act of 1991 states that sexual harassment is seriously recognized as a form of prohibited discrimination. It provides additional remedies under federal law to deter unlawful harassment. The act facilitates bringing actions against employers and encourages litigation by providing for compensatory and punitive damages and trial by jury.

Diversity

Diversity, within the Conservation Partnership, refers to the concept of inclusiveness concerning both the clientele being served and those who are coordinating and providing the services. It goes beyond notions of race and gender, and embraces all cultures and all people who use, manage, and receive the benefits of our natural resources.

The makeup of the soil and water conservation district board should reflect the diversity of the people that the commissioners serve in their district.

Ethics

As elected officials, commissioners are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to ensure fair and equitable program delivery. Anything that violates the public trust can be considered unethical behavior. In brief, any activity that prevents a commissioner from making impartial decisions or results in some form of favoritism in the delivery of service should be considered unethical.

Iowa Code Section 68B.2A at <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/68B.2A.pdf> discusses conflicts of interest. These may occur at the district level. Commissioners need to recognize when their personal interests may influence the partiality of a vote. A common example is when commissioners are requesting cost-share dollars for practices on their own property. In such situations, the affected commissioner should abstain from voting on the issues. Other situations may develop when a commissioner with a certain business interest could personally benefit from a district project. Similar to “insider trading”, commissioners should not use knowledge gained from their position in a manner that would benefit them personally. Commissioners employed by the district is a conflict of interest.

Commissioners should also exercise good judgement in the handling of all district funds, including their revolving account. While these funds may have been raised by the commissioners at local events, they are public monies, must be accounted for in all district financial statements, and used for furthering the work of the district.

Personal Liability

Soil and water conservation districts are protected from civil liability under the state tort claims act as expressed in Iowa Code Chapter 669, which specifically identifies soil and water conservation districts as state agencies for the purpose of tort claims. Tort claims are civil actions that are brought on allegations of wrongful death or injury to a person or damage to property. The lawsuits are typically based on

negligence, breach of duty, or nuisance. Providing commissioners are cited within the limits of their duties, the State Attorney General's office will defend against suits.

See Iowa Code Chapter 669 for information: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/ico/chapter/669.pdf> .

When unsure of possible liability, contact IDALS-DSCWQ. They will contact the Attorney General's office for advice.

“Almost invariably, conservation farming – which, after all, is common sense farming with scientific methods – begins to show results the very first years it is applied.”

Hugh Hammond Bennett

- Pioneer in the field of soil conservation
- Founded and headed what is now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

APPENDIX A: ACRONYMS

Acronym	Meaning
ACEP	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
ADW	Agricultural Drainage Wells
BMP	Best Management Practices
CA	Conservation Assistant
CAFO	Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations
CCC	Commodity Credit Corporation
CCRP	Continuous Conservation Reserve Program
CDI	Conservation Districts of Iowa
CED	County Executive Director
CEED	County Extension Education Director
CNMP	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
CREP	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
CSA	Conservation Security Act
CSP	Conservation Security Program
CTIC	Conservation Technology Information Center
DC	District Conservationist
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
DOT	Department of Transportation
DSCWQ	Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality
EBI	Environmental Benefits Index
ECP	Emergency Conservation Program
EI	Erosion Index
EPA	Environmental Protection Act
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
EWP	Emergency Watershed Program
FARMS	Financial and Reports Management System
FCA	Farm Credit Agency
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FSA	Farm Service Agency
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
HEL	Highly Erodible Land
HUA / HUC	Hydrologic Unit Areas / Codes
ICM	Integrated Crop Management
IDALS	Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
IFIP	Iowa Financial Incentive Program
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
LICA	Land Improvement Contractors of America
LTA	Long Term Agreement
MCM	Mid-Contract Management

Acronym	Meaning
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MRBI	Mississippi River Basin Initiative
NACD	National Association of Conservation Districts
NASCA	National Association of State Conservation Agencies
NCDEA	National Conservation District Employees Association
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHEL	Non-Highly Erodible Land
NPS	Non-Point Source
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
PF	Pheasants Forever
PL566	Public Law 566
PTO	Paid Time Off
RC	Resource Conservationist
RC&D	Resource Conservation and Development
RCA	Resources Conservation Act
RCPP	Regional Conservation Partnership Program
REAP	Resource Enhancement and Protection
REAP - P	Resource Enhancement and Protection – Practices
REAP F / NG	Resource Enhancement and Protection – Forestry / Native Grasses
RUSLE2	Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation, Version 2
SARE	Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education
SC	Soil Conservationist
SCT	Soil Conservation Technician
SIP	Stewardship Incentives Program
SRF	State Revolving Fund
SSCWQC	State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee
SWCD	Soil and Water Conservation District
SWRCP	Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plan
TA	Technical Assistance
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Loads
TSP	Technical Service Provider
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	United States Geological Service
WHIP	Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
WIRB	Watershed Improvement Review Board
WQI	Water Quality Initiative
WRE	Wetlands Reserve Easement
WRP	Wetlands Reserve Program

APPENDIX B: REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Office	Reference / Resource	Description
CDI		Website provides information about CDI's education, acknowledgement, commissioner development, policy, and on-the-ground conservation programs. In addition, the website provides information on upcoming events of importance to districts and commissioners. Partner job announcements and ways for districts, commissioners, and the public to get involved in soil and water conservation is highlighted. https://cdiowa.org/
DNR		Website provides information on water quality in Iowa, resources for making improvements, and case studies of successes in Iowa. https://www.iowadnr.gov/
IDALS-DSCWQ		The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship exists to connect Iowans with programs and information about crops, food safety standards, livestock and more. We work together with local farmers markets and Iowa farmers to continue to support the robust industry and culture Iowa has focused around agriculture. https://iowaagriculture.gov/
NACD		Website provides news, information, and resources about soil and water conservation events, education, and policy. https://www.nacdnet.org/
NRCS	Field Office Technical Guide	Provides standards and specification for conservation practices used by NRCS and districts. https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home/
SWCD	Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plan	Reviewed every five years, the plan recognizes the district's current resource development needs and the authorizations with which the district is empowered.
SWCD	District Annual Work Plan	Reviewed annually, the plan lists goals set by the district and the specific activities that will be used to achieve these goals.

APPENDIX C: SEDIMENT CONTROL LAW

The State of Iowa's Sediment Control Law (House File 73) was passed by the 64th Iowa General Assembly in 1971. This bill provided that soil erosion could be declared a nuisance and abated as such after due process. The burden of proof is the responsibility of the soil and water conservation district.

Each soil and water conservation district has adopted regulations to establish soil loss limits for the district that have been approved by the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee following a public hearing. The soil loss limits are expressed in terms of rates of soil erosion that will be permitted annually in the different soil types and land uses of the district.

Individual landowners, government agencies, and others having an interest in property being damaged by sediment from soil erosion on lands other than their own may file a complaint against owners of land on which excessive erosion is alleged to be occurring.

The soil and water conservation district commissioners will inspect or cause to be inspected any land within the district upon receipt of a written and signed complaint that soil erosion is occurring in excess of the limits established by the district. If the soil erosion exceeds loss limits, the commissioners should make every effort to obtain voluntary compliance with application of needed conservation or erosion control practices. An effort should be made to bring the parties involved in the complaint together and to offer assistance, including financial incentives, to help correct the erosion problem without further formal action. In the event that voluntary compliance is not possible, the law provides that the district or districts shall issue an administrative order to the parties in violation and that corrective action must be started within six months and completed within twelve months.

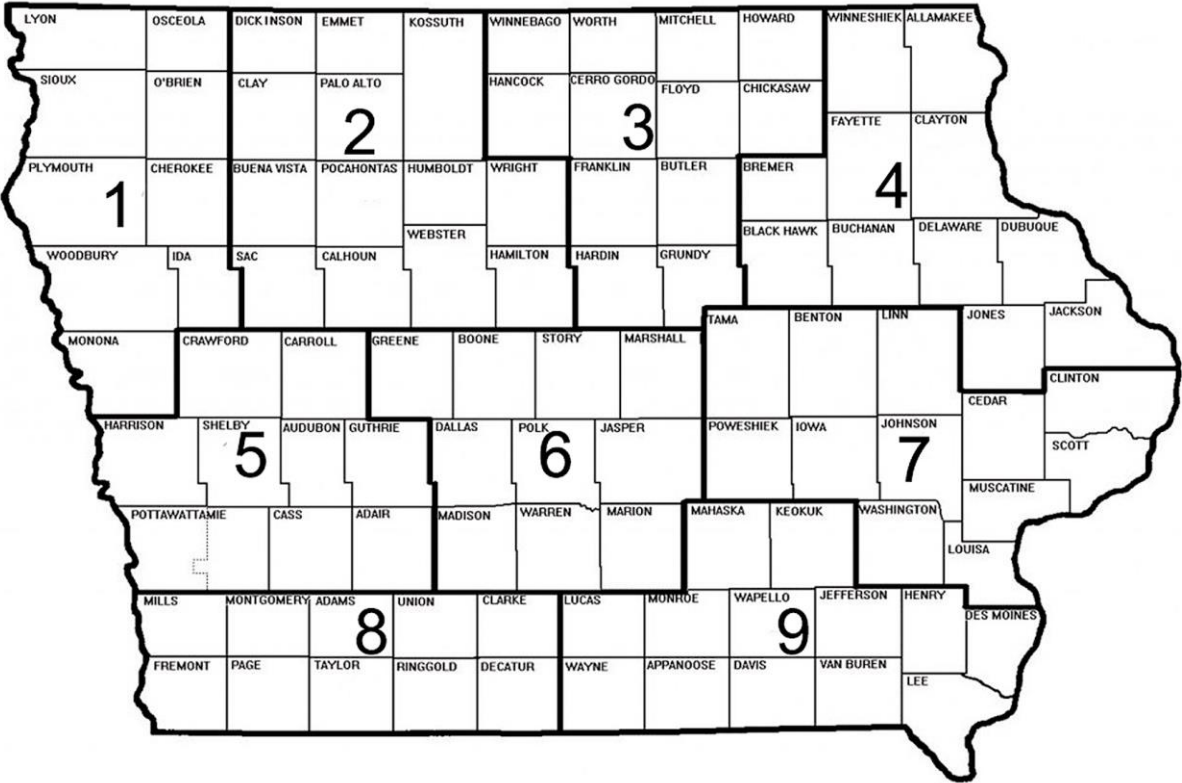
In the case of erosion occurring on the site of any construction project, the party has five days to start and thirty days to complete corrective action. Cost-share funds are not available for erosion control on construction projects.

It should be noted that district commissioners should act on all soil loss complaint letters in a timely manner. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship – Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality will assist district commissioners with soil loss complaints.

For additional information, refer to

<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/publications/search/document?fq=id:1084383&pdid=1075758&q=sediment+control#161A.47>

APPENDIX D: CDI REGIONS MAP



For CDI regional officers contact information, refer to the CDI Website at <https://cdiowa.org/> .

APPENDIX E: IDALS FIELD REPRESENTATIVE AREAS MAP

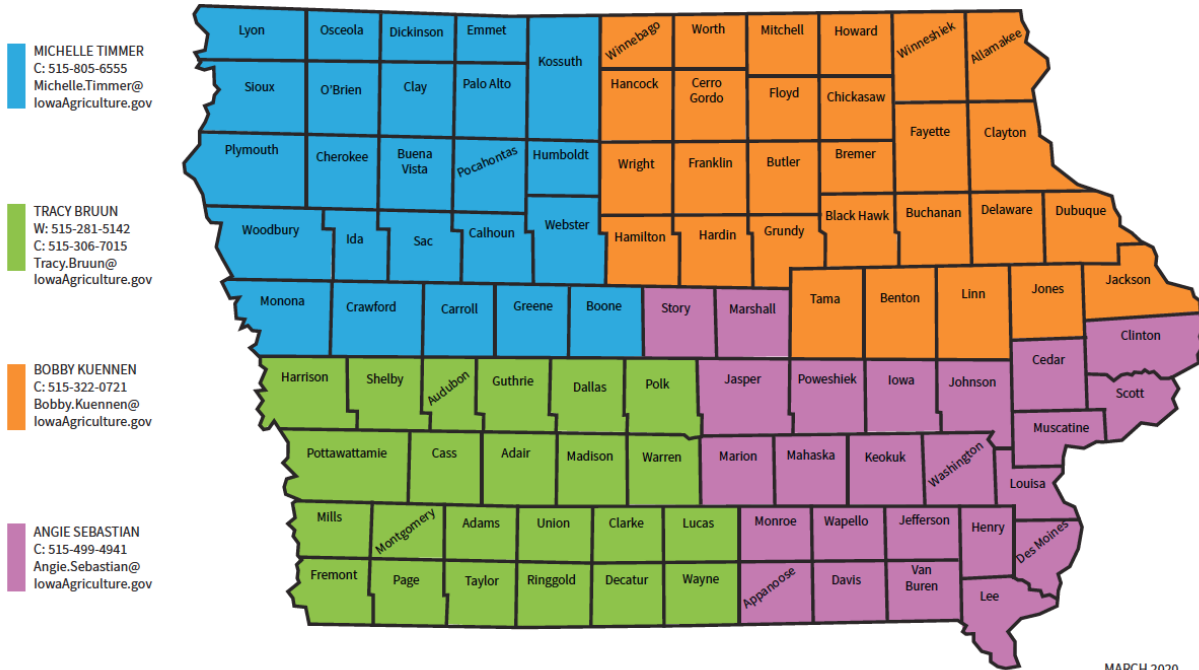


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FIELD SERVICES BUREAU

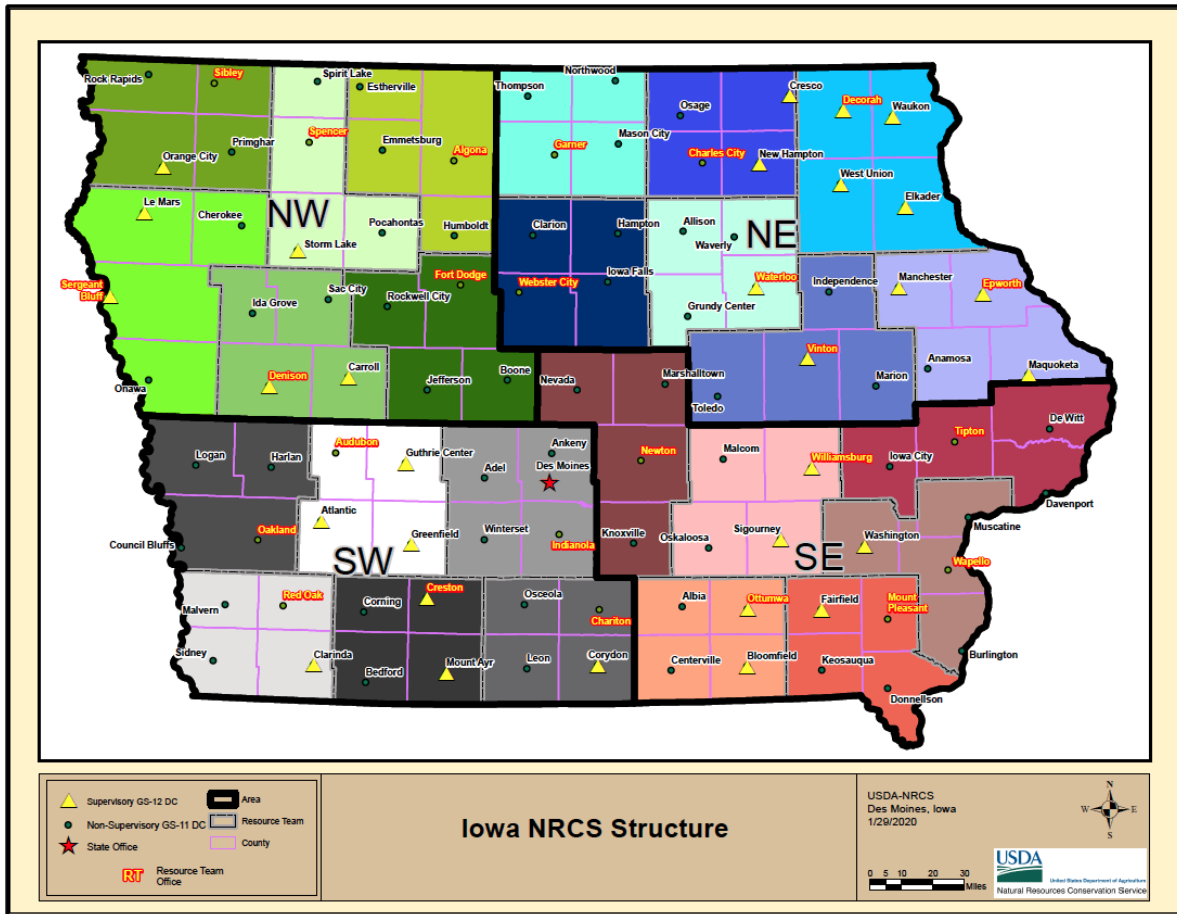
WILL MYERS, BUREAU CHIEF
DESK: 515-281-7818

FIELD REPRESENTATIVE AREAS



For additional information, refer to IDALS website at <https://Iowaagriculture.gov/>.

APPENDIX F: NRCS AREAS MAP



For additional information, refer to the Iowa NRCS website at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ia/home/>.

APPENDIX G: MONTHLY FINANCIAL CHECKLIST

Soil and Water Conservation District Financial Policies Monthly Review Checklist

Disbursements

- All disbursements have been categorized correctly
- All disbursements have been preauthorized
- All disbursements being withdrawn from 1M or grant specific sources are allowable expenses
- All disbursements have appropriate documentation, a valid invoice with the vendor name, vendor address, date of service, itemized list of goods or services provided and amount due
- Travel vouchers for reimbursement of employees have proper documentation including mileage documentation (google maps, etc.) and itemized receipts of meals, lodging, other misc. travel expenses
- Any voided checks are recorded, retained and filed

Receipts

- All funds received have been categorized correctly
- All money received by the SWCD, cash and checks, has a receipt

Petty Cash

- Petty cash funds may not exceed \$50
- All petty cash fund expenses are reasonable and in compliance with the petty cash fund policy as stated in the Financial Policies Annual Checklist
- Withdrawals from the petty cash fund are recorded in a log with the name of employee requesting disbursement from petty cash fund, date of transaction and general description of transaction
- Employee requesting disbursement from petty cash fund will provide receipt for actual cost for which the withdrawal from fund was made
- Receipts have been provided for all disbursements from the petty cash fund
- The amount needed to replenish the petty cash fund has been calculated, recommended to the Board and the fund has been replenished

Reconciliation

- The Treasurers Report and original bank statement(s) agree for all disbursements in the checking and savings accounts
- The Treasurers Report and original banks statement(s) agree for all funds received in the checking and savings accounts
- The Treasurers Report reconciliation and original bank statement(s) agree for beginning and ending bank statement balances
- The Treasurers Report and original banks statement(s) agree for all Certificates of Deposit

- The designated recipient of the second bank statement(s) will review the statement(s) they received against the statements accompanying the Treasurers Report to ensure that the information contained within the statement is identical
- The original bank statement(s) agree with invoices and receipts, verify Treasurer and/or Co-Treasurer have initialed and dated
- The Petty Cash Report agrees with the funds in the Petty Cash Box or Safe

District Employee Payroll

- Timesheets are signed by the employee and a commissioner
- A record of leave balances by leave type is maintained
- Verify that SWCD employees working from multiple funding sources track the amount of time worked in each funding source
- Verify the timesheet is being reconciled with the invoice from the payroll provider
- Commissioner will ensure the payroll company pays the correct hourly wage and withholds appropriate taxes and fees, including:
 - State and Federal taxes
 - IPERS
 - FICA
 - Unemployment Insurance
 - Other required withholdings specific to the employee (i.e. child support)

Treasurer

Date

Co-Treasurer

Date

APPENDIX H: FINANCIAL POLICIES ANNUAL CHECKLIST

Soil and Water Conservation District

YEAR COUNTY Soil and Water Conservation District Financial Policies Annual Checklist

Financial Policies Adoption/ Segregation of Duties

- These financial policies listed below are adopted by the COUNTY SWCD Board on DATE ADOPTED

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Initial/Date Initial/Date Initial/Date Initial/Date Initial/Date

- The adoption of these financial policies is noted in the COUNTY SWCD Meeting Minutes for DATE OF MEETING
 - The YEAR Treasurer of the COUNTY SWCD Board is: NAME OF COMMISSIONER APPOINTED
 - The YEAR Co-Treasurer of the COUNTY SWCD Board is: NAME OF COMMISSIONER APPOINTED
 - The following individuals will be authorized to sign checks: NAMES OF COMMISSIONERS WITH SIGNATURE AUTHORITY
 - The following individual will be the designated recipient of the bank statements(s) each month: NAME OF COMMISSIONER WHO WILL BE DESIGNATED RECIPIENT
-
- The District's bank statement(s) will be received, reviewed and initialed and dated by the Treasurer and/or Co-Treasurer each month
 - Two signatories will be required to sign checks over \$500, with the exception of payroll checks
 - Two signatories will be required to sign CDs when purchasing and cashing them
 - The designated recipient will compare his/her copy of the bank statement(s) with the copy received by the district to verify they are identical, and both will be initialed and dated by the designated recipient

Disbursements

- Authorization of all disbursements will be approved by the SWCD Board at a regular monthly or special meeting
- All invoices will be initialed and dated by the Treasurer and/or Co-Treasurer
- Pre-numbered checks will be used for all disbursements
- All disbursements will have appropriate documentation, a valid invoice with:
 - Vendor name
 - Vendor address
 - Date of service
 - Itemized list of goods or services provided

- Amount due
- Travel vouchers will be required for reimbursement of employees with proper documentation:
 - Mileage documentation (Google Maps, etc.)
 - Itemized receipts of meals, lodging, other misc. travel expenses
- All financial documentation will be retained for 7 years on file at the SWCD Office or longer if required by the funding agent
- The checkbook will be kept in a locked cabinet
- Pre-signed checks will not be used
- No checks will be written for cash other than to replenish the petty cash fund
- Records of voided checks will be retained and filed
- Details of expenditures will be noted in the meeting minutes
- All supporting financial documents will be initialed and dated by the Treasurer and/or Co-Treasurer

Receipts

- All funds received by the SWCD will be deposited on a regular, timely basis (i.e. weekly)
- All money received by the SWCD, cash and checks, will have a receipt
- A pre-numbered receipt book will be used to issue all receipts
- A duplicate copy of the receipt will be retained and filed
- The receipt book will be retained and filed
- The receipt book will be reconciled with the original bank statement(s) and treasurer's report monthly by the Treasurer and/or Co-Treasurer
- All checks will be endorsed "For Deposit Only" upon being received
- All funds will be maintained in a secure locked location until deposited
- All funds will be paid to the SWCD in this order of preference, Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), check, cash
- If possible, the SWCD will ask people not to pay in cash

Petty Cash

- The SWCD petty cash fund is for small unexpected expenses
- Eligible SWCD petty cash fund expenses include meeting or office supplies
- Ineligible SWCD petty cash expenses include check cashing and travel expenses
- The SWCD will limit the petty cash to \$50
- Petty cash will be kept in a locked location
- Withdrawals from the petty cash fund will be recorded in a log with information:
 - Name of employee requesting disbursement from petty cash fund
 - Date of transaction
 - General description of transaction
- The Treasurer and/or Co-Treasurer will reconcile the petty cash fund monthly
- The Treasurer and/or Co-Treasurer will verify receipts have been provided for all disbursements from the petty cash fund during the monthly reconciliation of the petty cash funds
- The Treasurer and/or Co-Treasurer will verify expenses are reasonable and in compliance with the petty cash fund policy during the monthly reconciliation of the petty cash funds

- The Treasurer and/or Co-Treasurer will recommend an amount needed to replenish the petty cash fund to the whole SWCD Board at the monthly meeting
- A check will be written and approved at the monthly SWCD Board meeting to replenish the fund

Monthly Financial Review / Annual Financial Review

- The SWCD will perform a monthly review of financials
- The SWCD will conduct an annual financial review of District funds and submit an annual financial review report of all accounts including a listing of assets, to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship – Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality
- The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship – Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality and/or the State Auditor's office will complete an on-site visit annually

District Employee Payroll

- Timesheets will be signed by the employee and a commissioner
- Payroll services will be provided by a qualified payroll company
- Maintain record of leave balances by leave type
- SWCD Employees working from multiple funding sources will track the amount of time worked in each funding source
- Commissioner will ensure the payroll company pays the correct hourly wage and withholds appropriate taxes and fees, including:
 - State and Federal taxes
 - IPERS
 - FICA
 - Unemployment Insurance
 - Other required withholdings specific to the employee (i.e. child support)
- Obtain documentation from payroll provider showing evidence of quarterly payroll tax filing

Inventory / Sales

- Maintain accurate inventory of district-owned items (i.e. furniture, computers, etc.)
- Maintain current record of equipment rental or fundraiser/sale items (i.e. trees, flags, seed, etc.)
- Track fees collected from rentals or fundraiser/sales
- Provide receipts/invoice for all transactions
- Evaluate money lost or made from rentals, sales, or fundraisers at least annually.
- Sales tax will be collected