

Nuts and Bolts of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Purpose of Soil and Water Conservation Districts:

The purpose of a conservation district is set out in the state statute; the Soil and Water Conservation District Act (73-20-25 through 73-20-48 NMSA 1978). The purpose of the act is to:

- Control and prevent soil erosion
- Prevent floodwater and sediment damage
- Further the conservation, development, beneficial application, and proper disposal of water
- Promote the use of impounded water
- Conserve and develop the natural resources of the state

Through the conservation district, a **local government entity**, the residents and landowners of a local area can use their knowledge to accomplish conservation work appropriate for the locale, by their own work or by coordinating with and advising federal and state agencies, as well as other local government entities such as counties and municipalities.

Function of a Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD):

To take available technical, financial, and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so they meet the needs of the local land user.

Qualifications:

Elected supervisor positions 1-4 require residency and landownership within the district boundaries. Elected supervisor position 5 only requires residency within district boundaries. Elected supervisors serve 4 year terms in office. There is no limit to the number of consecutive terms a supervisor can hold.

The Soil and Water Conservation Commission appoints people to fill positions 6 and 7. Appointed supervisors need not be residents or landowners in the district, and serve one-year terms. There is no limit to the number of consecutive terms an appointed supervisor may hold. Positions 6 and 7 allow non-resident landowners, and residents who do not own land, to be represented on the board.

In addition to the requirements relating to residency and land ownership, a few desirable qualifications include: interest/background in conservation of renewable natural resources, business/management experience and communications skills.

Position numbers are unrelated to the selection of officers; chair, vice chair, and secretary/treasurer for the board. Any supervisor may serve as an officer of the board.

Role of a SWCD supervisor (board member):

Your duty as district supervisor is to positively represent and serve the people of your district as a member of the official governing body that has the responsibilities of resource planning and promoting the development of a coordinated program to conserve, wisely use, and protect the natural resources within the district.

As a member of the SWCD board, you will identify conservation needs in the district and create a plan of action to fill those needs. Based on the plan of action, you will carry out the business of the district through your own effort, and/or through supervision and direction of district employees and volunteers, as well as through cooperation with your fellow board members and various partners.

Duties of a supervisor:

A SWCD supervisor is expected to attend monthly board meetings consistently, participate on committees, and periodically represent the district with other agencies and organizations at local, regional, or state events. Time commitment to fulfill this role is estimated at 30 days per year.

- Identify local conservation needs, and develop, implement, and evaluate programs to meet them.
- Educate and inform landowners and operators, general public, and local, state, and federal legislators on conservation issues and programs.
- Supervise other volunteers and paid staff working with the district; coordinate with cooperating agency personnel.
- Administer the district by delegating tasks through a structure of board officers and members, committees, and others.
- Raise and budget district funds; oversee spending to ensure accountability to taxpayers, and compliance with the district plan and priorities, state laws and regulations.
- Report on district activities to the public.
- Coordinate assistance and funding from federal, state, and local government, district associations, and private groups.
- Participate with partner agencies and auxiliary organizations to represent your district's interests.

Soil and Water Conservation District Law:

Soil and Water Conservation District Act: Sections 73-20-25 through 73-20-48 NMSA 1978. The District Act defines an SWCD as "a governmental subdivision of the state, a public body politic and corporate." A copy of the District act may be found on the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) website at: <http://nmda.nmsu.edu/> under Agriculture Programs and Resources, click Soil and Water Conservation Programs.

Watershed District Act:

Watershed districts may be formed as subdistricts of soil and water conservation districts in a watershed area, with a separate board of directors, as provided in the Watershed District Act [73-