

**SUSSEX COUNTY
SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

SUSSEX COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

DISTRICT PLAN

June, 2015

MISSION

The Sussex County Soil Conservation District (SCSCD) is one of 15 Soil Conservation Districts established within the State of New Jersey. The function of conservation districts are to take available technical, financial and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that the needs of the landowner and landuser are balanced with and are compatible with the maintenance of healthy soil, water and related resources.

The jurisdictional area of the SCSCD is Sussex County. The Mission of the Sussex County Soil Conservation District is to provide leadership in the planning and implementation of natural resource management programs for the agricultural and development communities and the general public through a locally based delivery system in coordination with local state and federal partners.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Sussex County Soil Conservation District is a special purpose unit of local government. The District was chartered by the State Legislature in 1950 and was established pursuant to the NJ Soil Conservation Act. Although autonomous, the District is subject to overview by the State Soil Conservation Committee (SSCC). The SSCC has adopted guidance in which all Districts are encouraged to prepare and adopt an Annual Business Plan. This document is prepared in accordance with that request.

All too often at its meetings, the governing body of the District known as the Board of Supervisors is so busy with the regular business of the District that we neglect to plan, to look at where we are and where we are going. This plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors at its meeting of May 27, 2015. In developing the Business Plan, the Supervisors were challenged to create a vision of what the District should look like in 2020 and to analyze what they saw as the current trends in conservation. The goal was to identify weaknesses and strengths of the District and to identify what steps we must take to ensure that the Sussex County District is well prepared to adjust to those trends. The plan must involve an examination of the District's vision and mission. The vision is where we want to be. The mission is the strategies as to how we can get there.

As such, the key questions which were posed to the Supervisors were:

- a) If we only had the time, money and energy to work on one critical natural resource issue, what would it be? This was and will be expanded to include the top five critical natural resource issues facing our District.
- b) If we only had the time, money and energy to work in one geographical area of our District, what would it be? And
- c) What are the critical organizational and management issues for our District?

Using those questions and the issues identified, the goal was to develop a short statement for each critical natural resource and organization issue. The question was then expanded to identify and develop midpoints or interim steps or strategies as to how to reach each desired outcome.

SUMMARY

THE TOP CRITICAL PRIORITIES FOR THE SUSSEX COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

- 1) Water Quality
 - a) Control of Runoff from Construction Sites
 - b) Other Water Quality Issues
- 2) Agriculture
 - a) Agricultural Outreach
 - b) Stewardship of Preserved Lands
 - c) Animal Waste Management issues
 - d) Small acreage owners.
 - e) Absentee Landowners
- 3) Education
- 4) Land Use/Soil Survey
- 5) District Networking and External Relationships
- 6) Internal District Operations
 - a) District Operational Management
 - b) District Land Management

PRIORITY GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS FOR THE SUSSEX COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

- 1) Delaware River Watershed
- 2) Highlands Area.
- 3) Wallkill Watershed

1. WATER QUALITY

A) CONSTRUCTION SITE RUNOFF/251 PROGRAM

ISSUE: By statute, the SCSCD is charged with the regulation and enforcement of soil erosion and stormwater runoff from construction sites. The SCSCD plan must involve both external and internal elements. The external elements are critical in that the state law requires uniform enforcement. The State Soil Conservation Committee sets guidance and policy for 251 enforcement.

1) Internal issues and goals

The SCSCD will strive to be the recognized leader in the control of soil erosion from construction sites within Sussex County.

The District will strive to ensure that 95% of the construction sites in Sussex County will at all times, be in compliance with the Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Law and the NJPDES General Permit for stormwater runoff from construction sites.

The District will work to ensure that all construction sites within Sussex County will utilize Best Management Practices (BMPS) to minimize the need for frequent district monitoring outside the normal district inspection schedule.

The District will regularly meet with the NJDEP and develop a liaison procedure to address all known violations under the RFA program.

The District will develop a system to receive input from the regulated community, from exempt municipalities and from non-exempt municipalities as to how 251 operations can be improved.

The District will continue to improve communications with all local Construction Officials and Building Inspectors. The SCSCD will continue its membership in Sussex/Warren Building Official organization.

The District will continue efforts to improve communication with Planning Board, Zoning Boards and Land Use Boards regarding the role of the District.

The District will reach out to the Sussex County League of Municipalities and offer to conduct a presentation on the role of the Districts in water quality management.

The District will continue to input location and design data relative to stormwater retention basins within Sussex County. The District will purchase and train personnel in the operation and use of a GPS unit.

2) External issues and goals

The District will work with others to convince the NJ Legislature to modify the NJ Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Act to:

- a) Eliminate the exempt municipalities provision
- b) Eliminate the single-family exemption.
- c) Provide for alternate Board members and alternate members of the SSCC

The District will work with the SSCC and NJDEP to ensure uniform enforcement of the NJPDES General Permit for Surface Water discharges of Construction Site stormwater runoff.

B. OTHER WATER QUALITY PROBLEMS

ISSUE: Soil Erosion from Construction Sites is not the only source of non-point pollution to Sussex County waterways. The SCSCD enabling legislation authorizes District action in all areas where soil erosion can be a source of pollutant.

The SCSCD will embark on additional cooperative efforts with municipalities to identify soil erosion sites contributing to water pollution.

The SCSCD will identify and seek funding to correct eroding streambank sites within the county.

The SCSCD will seek funding to create the position of Agricultural Specialist to conduct outreach efforts to producers so as to promote the use of the CREP program within Sussex County.

The SCSCD will offer cooperative assistance to municipalities in the amendment and update of municipal stormwater management plans.

The SCSCD will identify and reach out to watershed groups within our area to identify possible future areas of cooperation.

.

II. AGRICULTURE

ISSUE: The traditional national role of Soil Conservation Districts has been to provide assistance to agricultural producers. Throughout its 65 year history, the SCSCD in cooperation with the USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and later, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has provided significant assistance to farmers who voluntarily agree to conduct conservation planning and implements conservation measures. The SCSCD has identified three significant problems in the agricultural area:

PROBLEM No. 1. The SCSCD has had insufficient resources to adequately provide service to all farmers requesting or needing assistance. Much of this problem is financial/economic in nature. This has been due to the following items:

- a) Cutbacks in State funding;
- b) Cutbacks in Sussex County funding
- c) Competing demands for District staff time for the 251 program;
- d) Physical separation of the NRCS and district staff; and
- e) Federal legislative changes in the Farm Bill.

Another problem that has recently become more apparent is a shift in emphasis within the District's federal counterpart, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) from providing general conservation technical assistance to Farm Bill programmatic assistance. An effort must be made to have general Farm Conservation Planning returned to a priority function within NRCS. Alternately, a program should be developed to assist farmers/producers in the development and implementation of Farm Conservation Plans.

DISTRICT PLAN

The SCSCD will seek funding to create the position of Agricultural Specialist to conduct outreach efforts to agricultural producers.

The SCSCD will develop a computerized list of current cooperators and producers involved in various NRCS/SCSCD assistance programs.

The District using the records of the Sussex County Planning Department and Sussex County Board of Taxation will develop a list of agricultural producers in Sussex County.

The SCSCD will develop a program to reach out program to new or nontraditional members of the agricultural community, i.e. "suburban farmers", "farmettes", and horse community.

The SCSCD will seek to make the digitized Sussex County Soil Survey available for use by farmers. The SCSCD will sponsor a minimum of two training sessions on the use of soil surveys by farmers.

AGRICULTURE CONTINUED

PROBLEM NO.2.

Throughout its history the SCSCD has relied on the use of a voluntary approach.

Only landowners or land users who volunteered to participate in District/SCS/NRCS programs have been serviced. This approach has yielded significant water quality and other improvements. Unfortunately, much of the land in Sussex County that is currently dedicated to agriculture consists of "rental" land and involves absentee owners. Such tenancies benefit both the farmer and the landowner. The farmer benefits from the income generated by the property and the landowner qualifies for a tax exemption. Too often this simply is a form of land banking where the owner allows the land to be farmed until he can gain more profit by selling the property for development. Unfortunately, this situation is also not conducive to the installation of proper conservation practices. There is no incentive for the farmer to make a capital commitment to install practices on land he doesn't own and for which he has no long-term guarantee of use.

The District strongly believes that there must be a combination of both voluntary and mandatory approaches to proper agricultural land use. Voluntary compliance is preferred in lieu of regulation. The District would strongly suggest a change to State Law relative to the farmland assessment to provide that only lands which have a fully effective and implemented farm conservation plan can qualify for the reduced assessment.

AGRICULTURE CONTINUED

PROBLEM NO. 3.

Over the past 10 years, the State of New Jersey as well as Sussex County have expended significant funds to either purchase in fee or to purchase development easements on a significant amount of farmland. Over 20,000 acres of farmland have been preserved through the County Farm Preservation Program. The District has had a role in many of these preservation efforts. It appears that much of this land is now lying fallow or that operations are not being conducted using fully recognized conservation practices. There is currently no requirement for a full farm conservation plan for preserved land and apparently little or no policing of farm operations on publicly preserved lands.

DISTRICT PLAN

The District will seek resources so that by 2020, 75% of preserved agricultural land will have a conservation plan through the District and will be implementing the same

The SCSCD, in cooperation with the Sussex County Agriculture Development Board (SCADB) and others, will develop a program to identify all preserved lands within Sussex County, the managers thereof and the form of ownership thereof. The list from above will be analyzed with NRCS assistance to determine which lands have an up to date FCP and the status of implementation

The SCSCD, in cooperation with the SCADB and others, will conduct an outreach program to the owners of preserved lands as well as to the easement holders as to the availability of District/NRCS services.

The SCSCD will develop a program to assist public entities with the management of preserved lands

III. EDUCATION

ISSUE: One of the major functions of a conservation district is to educate its constituents and clients as to proper conservation techniques. The SCSCD has an obligation to provide education opportunities to the entire population of Sussex County. In the past these services have included: formal education program, i.e. Projects Wet and Wild, assistance to school programs, Essay Contests, Poster Contests, Bumper Sticker contests, Envirothon, adult seminars, displays at the Sussex County/NJ State Fair, Displays at Springfest, and conducting seminars for the regulated community. The major limitation to the SCSCD to conduct a full education program is funding. Previous funding that was available through the State Soil Conservation Committee (SSCC) and through the Sussex County Freeholders has been eliminated. NJDEP grants are limited in size and scope and require matching funds. The SCSCD has no stable source of revenue to fund its educational efforts.

The SCSCD has actively participated in efforts with the New Jersey Association of Conservation Districts (NJDEP) to develop a Master Plan for Conservation Education in New Jersey.

The SCSCD has actively participated in efforts with the New Jersey Association of Conservation Districts (NJDEP) to develop a Soils Curriculum for use in New Jersey schools. That curriculum is available to the public and to educators on the District website.

The SCSCD has actively participated in efforts with the Lake Hopatcong Regional Planning Board to develop a Lake Curriculum for use in NJ schools. That curriculum is available to educators and to the public on the District website.

DISTRICT PLAN

The SCSCD will seek funding to allow the hiring of a part time staff position dedicated toward conservation education. The entire SCSCD staff should be conversant and integrated into the educational function.

The SCSCD will establish a contact person with each school district within Sussex County

The SCSCD will develop a plan for the use of the District property in Frankford Township located between Lake Owassa and Culvers Lake as a nature center.

The SCSCD will develop an adult education program and commit to running at least 2 seminars per year.

The SCSCD will contact the appropriate persons within the Sussex County Community College to ensure that soils information is incorporated into the Environmental Studies and Agricultural Curriculums.

The SCSCD will continue to work with the NJACD to incorporate conservation educational principals into the NJ curriculum.

IV. LAND USE/SOIL SURVEY

ISSUE: Conservation Districts are the primary sponsor and repository for soil survey information through the United States. The first Sussex County Soil Survey was conducted in 1911. An update was conducted in the 1970s. The most recent Sussex County Soil Survey was completed in 2005 and is available in a digitized format on the USDA/NRCS website.

DISTRICT PLAN

The SCSCD will continue to conduct education efforts to encourage the use of the Sussex County Soil Survey in land use and land development decisions.

The SCSCD will upon request meet with the Land Use Boards/Planning Boards/Zoning Boards/Governing Bodies of all municipalities within Sussex County to present the Soil Survey update.

The District will continue to train its staff in the retrieval of soil survey information. .

The SCSCD will continue to conduct Professional Development in the use of GIS.

V. NETWORKING/EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS OUTREACH

ISSUE: In order to fully fulfill its role, the SCSCD must establish and maintain a relationship with other governmental and private entities charged with protecting the environment. This is to avoid overlap and also to develop a network of persons who are familiar with the District and its role.

DISTRICT PLAN

A. Relationship with Sussex County Municipalities and County

The SCSCD will seek to be recognized by Sussex County Municipalities as a leader in conservation issues.

The SCSCD will conduct an outreach effort to all municipal land use boards relative to the new Soil Survey

The SCSCD will assist municipalities in any necessary updates to their municipal ordinances due to the changes brought upon by the new soil survey.

The SCSCD will commit to appear on a biannual basis at all Planning Board/Zoning Board/Land Use Board meetings throughout Sussex County.

The SCSCD will commit to annually meet with all exempt municipalities for whom we administer the 251 program to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the District operation.

The SCSCD will update MOUs with all municipalities for whom we administer the 251 program

The SCSCD will develop a contact person to each municipal Environmental Commission within Sussex County

The SCSCD will establish an outreach program to all municipal Construction Officials and Building Inspectors within the County so as to improve communication and establish cooperative efforts.

B. OTHER OUTREACH

The SCSCD will seek to identify all environmental watershed groups within the Sussex County region.

The SCSCD will contact and established a liaison with all environmental watershed groups within Sussex County.

The SCSCD will contact and meet with the local office of the Trust for Public Land.

The District will update its mailing list so as to include all cooperators, and all participants in NRCS programs.

The District will commit to the publication of 2 newsletters per year.

The SCSCD will act to develop a legislative network within its jurisdictional area. Each federal and state and county legislator will be assigned to a supervisor who will commit to establishing a relationship with that official.

The SCSCD will develop and maintain a relationship with each of the newspapers and media outlets within Sussex County and develop a quarterly press release.

VI. DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

ISSUE: In order to be fully effective the SCSCD must implement proper management tools. This section is dedicated to mechanisms necessary to improve District function and effectiveness.

A. INTERNAL DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

The SCSCD will reactivate and conduct a locally led process in accordance with NRCS guidelines.

The SCSCD will develop a mechanism to survey its client base in order to improve District effectiveness.

The SCSCD will complete revisions to its Personnel Policy Manual and develop a process to review the manual on an annual basis.

The SCSCD will develop a system to automatically track the costs of district review and enforcement of each 251 application.

The SCSCD will develop and implement a training plan for all staff.

CONCLUSION

This document represents a continuing attempt at planning for the future. It is an effort to identify the District's strengths and weaknesses and to identify trends in conservation. The goal is to ensure that the District is fully prepared to face the challenges of the future. Much of this is funding dependent. In excess of 90% of the District's revenue emanates from the Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Program. State law limits the use of SESC fees solely to the implementation of that program. In addition, the downturn of the nation's and state's economy has resulted in a serious downturn in the construction industry. In 2015 the District is functioning on approximately 40% less staff hours than in 2008. The District's ability to move forward is dependent on developing other areas of income and support.

The Sussex County Soil Conservation District welcomes input and comment on the Business Plan. It is anticipated that this Plan will be reviewed on minimum of an annual basis. It is anticipated that the Plan can be used to monitor District progress. Any and all comments on the Plan should be directed to the SCSCD at 186 Halsey Road, Newton, NJ 07860. Comments on the Plan may also be e-mailed to the District at sussex@sussexscd.org.

**THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
OF THE
SUSSEX COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

Barbara Rosko, Chairman – Term expires 6/20/2016

Philip Deacon, 1st Vice Chairman – Term expires 6/30/2017

James Kilduff, 2nd Vice Chairman – Term expires 6/30/2015

Fred Hough, Secretary/Treasurer – Term expires 6/30/2015

Matthew Fox, P.E. – Term expires 6/30/2016