

## Conservation Districts in the Great Lakes Region (U.S.)

This fact sheet aims to provide information on conservation district enabling legislation throughout the Great Lakes region, support regional staff working to develop Farm Bill recommendations around soil health and payment for ecosystem services programs, and highlight relevant emerging topics. This table provides an overview of the governing bodies for soil and water conservation districts in each Great Lakes U.S. state, and the authorizing legislation that grants the powers of each entity.

Jurisdiction	Who is in charge?	Authorizing Legislation	How does it work?	Number of conservation districts	Conservation district association
Illinois	Soil and Water Conservation District Directors	<a href="#">Soil and Water Conservation Districts Act</a>	Each district is governed by five directors, each of whom are elected to two-year terms and must be owners or occupiers of lands within the district.	97	<a href="#">Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts</a>
Indiana	Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors	<a href="#">Indiana Code Title 14 Art. 32 Soil and Water Conservation</a>	Each district is governed by five supervisors, two of whom are appointed by the Soil Conservation Board to three-year terms, and three of whom are elected to three-year terms. Additional leadership is provided by non-voting associate supervisors.	92	<a href="#">Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts</a>
Michigan	Conservation District Board	<a href="#">Michigan Compiled Laws Act 451 of 1994 Part 93 Soil Conservation Districts</a>	Each Conservation District Board is composed of five directors, each of whom are elected to four-year terms. Districts are under the purview of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.	75	<a href="#">Michigan Association of Conservation Districts</a>
Minnesota	Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors	<a href="#">Minnesota Statutes Ch. 103C. Soil and Water Conservation Districts</a>	Each Conservation District Board is composed of five supervisors whom are elected to four-year terms.	88	<a href="#">Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts</a>
New York	Soil and Water Conservation District Directors	<a href="#">Consolidated Laws of New York Ch. 9-B Soil &amp; Water Conservation Districts</a>	The county board appoints two of its own members to one-year terms and three others (two of whom must be farmers) to three-year terms, though some boards are comprised of seven members.	58	<a href="#">New York Association of Conservation Districts</a>
Ohio	Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors	<a href="#">Ohio Revised Code Title 9 Ch. 940 Soil and Water Conservation Commission</a>	The Ohio soil and water conservation commission conducts Board of Supervisor elections whereby Board of Supervisors are elected by local electors who participate in the process during a 30-day election window, by which five supervisors are elected to three-year terms. Oversight is provided by the Ohio Department of Agriculture on behalf of the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission.	88	<a href="#">Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts</a>
Pennsylvania	Conservation District Board of Directors	<a href="#">Conservation District Law</a>	County governing bodies appoint seven directors, comprising one member of the governing body appointed to a one-year term, two to four farmers appointed to four-year terms, and two to four members of the public appointed to four-year terms.	66	<a href="#">Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts</a>
Wisconsin	Land Conservation Committee	<a href="#">Wisconsin Statutes Ch. 92 Soil and Water Conservation and Animal Waste Management</a>	County boards appoint at least two members of the committee on agriculture and extension education, a person engaged in agricultural use, any number of county board members, and at most two other members each to two-year terms.	72	<a href="#">Wisconsin Land + Water</a>

This table summarizes key elements of each jurisdiction's conservation districts and some information on how they carry out their work to fulfill their respective authorities.

## Illinois

### How is the work funded?

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts are funded by a combination of state appropriations through the Treasury, cost share payments, federal subsidies, special taxes, and state aid.

### What is the entity's specific legislative mandate?

- To strengthen and extend the present erosion and sediment control activities and programs for both rural and urban lands and establish and implement a statewide erosion and sediment control program to conserve and protect land, water, air and other resources.

### How is the mandate supported through district work?

- District directors may build and administrate conservation project; conduct research and investigations; make natural resource information available; provide financial aid; acquire property; provide equipment and machinery; and maintain renewable natural resource programs.

## Indiana

### How is the work funded?

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts are funded by a combination of the Clean Water Indiana Fund, county appropriations, and donations.

### What is the entity's specific legislative mandate?

- To provide for the proper management of soil and water resources; the control of soil erosion; the prevention of flood water, sediment damage, and water quality impairment; and the conservation, development, use, and disposal of water in the watersheds of Indiana.

### How is the mandate supported through district work?

- District supervisors may carry out soil erosion and water runoff preventive and control measures; develop comprehensive plans for and manage any soil and water conservation, erosion control, water quality protection, or flood prevention project; construct necessary structures; obtain, maintain, or sell property; and make agricultural equipment available to landowners.

## Michigan

### How is the work funded?

- Conservation Districts are funded by a combination of appropriations from the state general fund, grants, and donations.

### What is the entity's specific legislative mandate?

- To provide for the conservation of natural resources and the control and prevention of soil erosion; control floods; prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs; assist in maintaining the navigability of rivers and harbors; preserve wildlife; protect public lands; and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of Michigan.

### How is the mandate supported through district work?

- District Board members may develop comprehensive plans for the conservation of farmland, forestland, and natural resources and for the control and prevention of soil erosion; conduct surveys, research, and demonstrational projects; acquire, maintain, and sell property; make machinery and equipment available to landowners; provide technical assistance to other conservation districts; and take over a natural resource conservation project.

## Minnesota

### How is the work funded?

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts are funded by a combination of state and local fundings sources. State funds include state aid, general service grants, and the water and soil conservation easement stewardship account. Other funding, primarily for projects, includes the Clean Water Fund, federal subsidies, special taxes, and donations. Local funding sources are primarily through SWCD and county agreements with funding derived from county property taxes.

### What is the entity's specific legislative mandate?

- To encourage the conservation of soil, water, and natural resources through the implementation of practices that control or prevent erosion, sedimentation, and siltation; ensure continued soil productivity; protect water quality; prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs; reduce damages caused by floods; preserve wildlife; protect the tax base; and protect public lands and waters.

### How is the mandate supported through district work?

- District supervisors may accept delegation from the state, a county, or a city of authority to administer soil and water conservation-related official controls; conduct surveys, research, and demonstration projects; implement any necessary practices; acquire and maintain property; make machinery and supplies available to landowners; and construct and maintain necessary structures.

## New York

### How is the work funded?

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts are funded by a combination of state aid, the farm drain tile revolving loan program, appropriations and grants for nonpoint source abatement, and donations.

### What is the entity's specific legislative mandate?

- To conserve soil and water resources; control and prevent soil erosion; and prevent floodwater and sediment damages when it is determined that these are problems of public concern in the county and a substantial proportion of the rural land occupiers of the county favor the creation of a Soil and Water Conservation District.

### How is the mandate supported through district work?

- District directors may carry out preventive and control measures regarding water management, prevention of floodwater and sediment damages, or the abatement of nonpoint sources of water pollution; conduct surveys, investigations, and research; and develop and update comprehensive plans for the conservation of soil and water resources.

## Ohio

### How is the work funded?

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts are funded by a combination of state aid and local funds. Some districts have local levies.

### What is the entity's specific legislative mandate?

- To encourage proper soil, water, and other natural resource management for farm, rural, suburban, and urban land.

### How is the mandate supported through district work?

- District supervisors may develop plans for the conservation of soil resources, for the control and prevention of soil erosion, and for works of improvement for flood prevention; conduct surveys, investigations, and research; and construct, maintain, and operate preventive and control measures for natural resource conservation and development and flood prevention.

## Pennsylvania

### How is the work funded?

- Conservation districts receive dedicated funding from the state through the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Line Item, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) Line Item and the Unconventional Gas Well Fund (Act 13). These funds are placed in a special fund in the State Treasury called the Conservation District Fund and distributed by the PA State Conservation Commission. Districts are also funded through fees for service, grants, and donations.

### What is the entity's specific legislative mandate?

- To provide for the conservation of soil, water, and related resources, and the control and prevention of soil erosion; control floods; prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs; assist the agricultural community; preserve wildlife and public lands; administer delegated state programs; and protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of Pennsylvania, as defined in Conservation District Law.

### How is the mandate supported through district work?

- District Board members may carry out preventive and control measures regarding changes in use of land and drainage operations through policy development; engage in activities related to wetland construction and maintenance, reclamation of soil erosion, and stormwater management; construct, improve, and maintain necessary structures; and conduct surveys, investigations, and research.

## Wisconsin

### How is the work funded?

- Land Conservation Committees and their respective Land Conservation Departments are funded by an appropriation from the State Department of Agriculture annual budget, other government or private grants and contracts, county appropriations and a combination of cost-share payments, donations, gifts, and other unspecified contributions.

### What is the entity's specific legislative mandate?

- To establish goals and standards for conservation of soil and water resources; provide for cost sharing, technical assistance, educational programs and other programs to conserve soil and water resources; encourage coordinated soil and water conservation planning and program implementation; and enable the regulation of harmful land use and land management practices.

### How is the mandate supported through district work?

- Committee members may develop standards for management practices to control erosion, sedimentation, and nonpoint source water pollution; carry out preventive and control measures and works of improvement for flood prevention and conservation, development, utilization and control of water; and acquire and administer any soil conservation, flood prevention, water management or nonpoint source water pollution abatement project.

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This handout contains information gathered by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and is formatted and provided with the assistance of Great Lakes Commission staff. Additional edits have been provided in 2025 by members of the GLC's Conservation Workforce Development [Project Team](#).