



TEXAS STATE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION BOARD

TEXAS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Protecting and enhancing Texas' natural resources for tomorrow

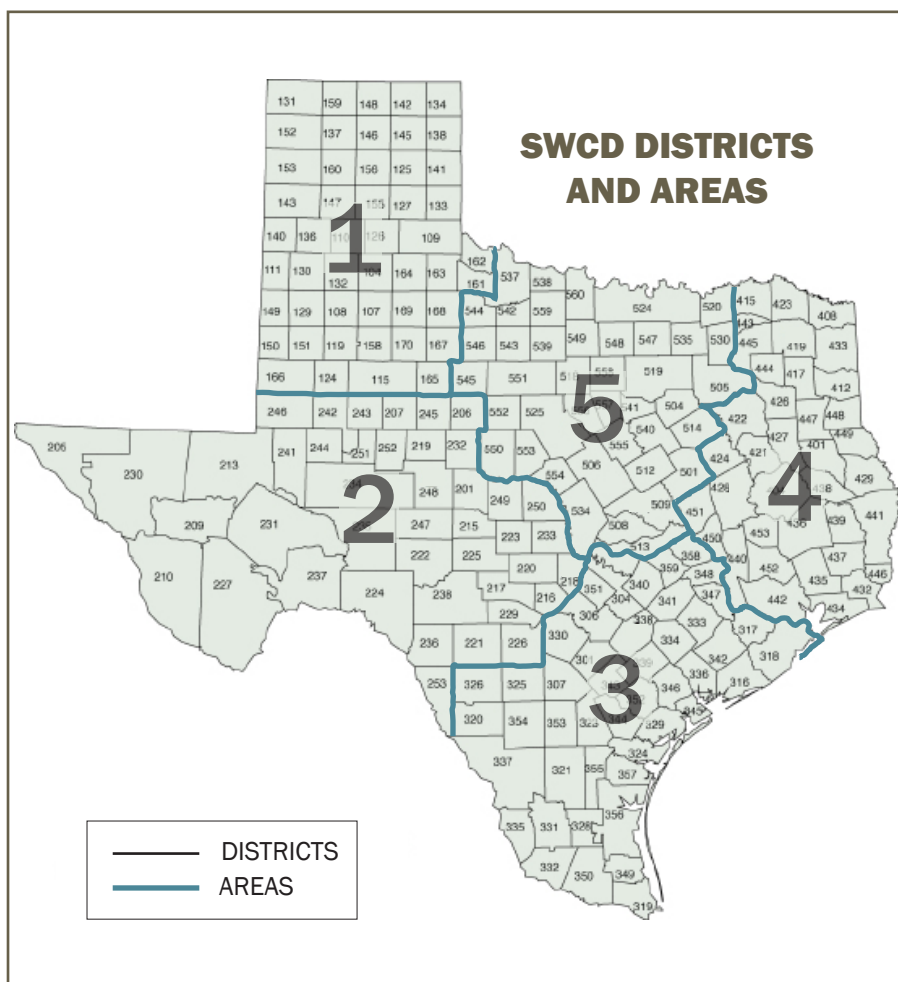
Background

The Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are political subdivisions of the State of Texas that cover the entire state. There are currently 216 SWCDs. Each SWCD is responsible for coordinating natural resource conservation activities such as preventing soil erosion, protecting water quality, and enhancing water conservation through technical and financial assistance to landowners and agricultural producers within the district. SWCDs are also responsible for operation and maintenance of flood control dams located on private properties. All of a SWCD's efforts are to support voluntary conservation efforts within their jurisdiction. SWCDs are the local component to a Local-State-Federal Conservation Partnership between the SWCD, the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB), and the United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). This partnership exists across the entire state and is formalized through a memorandum of understanding.

SWCD Governance

Each SWCD is governed by a board of five directors. In order to serve as a director, a person must be an eligible voter who owns land within the numbered subdivision from which the person is appointed or elected and must be actively engaged in the business of farming or animal husbandry. Persons who are eligible voters and own land in a SWCD are entitled to elect the directors for the SWCD.

SWCDs also receive significant technical and administrative support from employees of the TSSWCB and NRCS as needed. SWCD directors meet once a month. The meeting location, frequency, and timing is at the discretion of the board. Directors serve staggered terms of four years with the term of one or two members expiring each year.



SWCD Operating Budgets

SWCDs are not taxing authorities, therefore the majority of their operating budgets are acquired through grants from the TSSWCB, NRCS, or donations from other conservation organizations. Some SWCDs conduct fundraisers and conservation materials sales in order to raise additional funds. While SWCDs may hold trust funds and other accounts for special purposes, funds received as grants from the TSSWCB are held and processed through a separate account for auditing purposes.

Conservation Assistance – Matching Funds

These grants, which are allocated annually, require SWCDs to raise matching funds from sources other than State Funds or earnings from State Funds. These provide for annual recurring operating expenses including management, clerical, technical support, educational programs, conservation equipment, and daily operations.

Conservation Implementation Assistance – Technical Assistance

Grant distributions are made contingent upon SWCDs filing performance and expenditure reports to the TSSWCB. These funds are directly associated with the local-level administration of state conservation programs administered by the TSSWCB. While these funds are exclusively for providing salary and wage assistance, all expenditures are made toward the effort of developing a conservation plan and the implementation of conservation practices to conserve natural resources.

Conservation Activity Program

The Conservation Activity Program (CAP) provides SWCDs an opportunity to offset operating expenses after completing ten core conservation activities. These funds provide assistance in maintaining a strong educational program to inform landowners on local conservation concerns and encourage the voluntary implementation of conservation practices.

Important Duties of SWCDs

SWCDs select delegates to cast votes toward the election of five members of the TSSWCB's seven-member governing State Board of Directors, which governs the TSSWCB. More information on the TSSWCB can be found at: <https://www.tsswcb.texas.gov>.

Many aspects of the programs made available by the Texas Legislature through the TSSWCB are administered at the local level by the SWCD. Examples of these programs include the Water Quality Management Plan Program, Flood Control Dam Operation and Maintenance Grant Program, and the Flood Control Structural Repair, Rehabilitation, and Upgrade Grant Program, and the Rio Grande Carrizo Cane Eradication Program.

SWCDs participate on each of the NRCS' Local Work Groups for each county that make recommendations for various programs authorized by the Federal Farm Bill. Recommendations for Farm Bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) are then transmitted to the Texas NRCS State Conservationist and impact how millions of dollars in conservation funding are used throughout the state.

One of the most important responsibilities of any SWCD is operation and maintenance activities on floodwater retarding structures (flood control dams) constructed within its jurisdiction. SWCDs are sponsors for these structures, and therefore "owners" as specified in Texas' Dam Safety Program rules at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

In addition to the local administration of state or federally authorized conservation programs, SWCDs participate and support a wide variety of educational programs for school age children such as soil and water stewardship public speaking contests, conservation awards programs, Wildlife Alliance for Youth activities, and conservation education models.