

What is a Soil and Water Conservation District?

A soil and water conservation district (SWCD) is authorized by the Soil and Water Conservation District Act (73-20-25 through 73-20-48 NMSA 1978) to conserve and develop the natural resources of the state, provide for flood control, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of New Mexico. SWCDs coordinate assistance from all available sources -- public and private, local, state and federal -- in an effort to develop locally driven solutions to local natural resource concerns. There are 47 SWCDs covering the majority of New Mexico.

A soil and water conservation district is not:

- A conservancy district , which delivers or supplies water for irrigation or other purposes;
- The Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service), a federal agency which provides technical assistance to SWCDs and others to implement conservation practices;

What does a Conservation District do?

Among other things, conservation districts help:

- implement conservation practices to keep farm and ranch lands productive;
- protect water resources;
- plant trees and other land cover to hold soil in place, clean the air, provide cover for wildlife and beautify neighborhoods;
- help developers and homeowners manage the land in an environmentally sensitive manner; and
- reach out to communities and schools to teach the value of natural resources and encourage conservation efforts.

How does a Conservation District operate?

A board of elected and appointed supervisors, who are themselves residents and/or landowners of the district, meets regularly (usually once a month) in a public meeting to make decisions on local conservation programs. The districts work in partnership with NMDA, other state and federal agencies, and various organizations to advance conservation on private and public lands in their area. If authorized by voters in the district, SWCDs may collect a mill levy on lands in the district, up to a maximum of one mill. Many SWCDs also compete for grants from the government and private sector to fund district programs.

How can I contact my local soil and water conservation district?

[Click here](#) to see a map and list of the 47 SWCDs in New Mexico.

Do soil and water conservation districts exist in other states?

Across the United States, nearly 3000 conservation districts -- almost one in every county -- are helping local people to conserve land, water, forests, wildlife and related natural resources.

Known in various parts of the country as “soil and water conservation districts,” “resource conservation districts,” “natural resource districts,” “land conservation committees” and similar names, they share a single mission: to coordinate assistance from all available sources -- public and private, local, state and federal -- in an effort to develop locally driven solutions to natural resource concerns.

More than 15,000 volunteers serve in elected or appointed positions on conservation districts' governing boards. They work directly with more than 2.3 million cooperating land managers nationwide, and their efforts touch more than 778 million acres of private land.

What is the history of soil and water conservation districts?

In the early 1930s, along with the greatest depression this nation ever experienced, came an equally unparalleled ecological disaster known as the Dust Bowl. Following a severe and sustained drought in the Great Plains, the region's soil began to erode and blow away, creating huge black dust storms that blotted out the sun and swallowed the countryside. Thousands of “dust refugees” left the black fog to seek better lives.

But the storms stretched across the nation. They reached south to Texas and east to New York. Dust even sifted into the White House and onto the desk of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

On Capitol Hill, while testifying about the erosion problem, soil scientist Hugh Hammond Bennett threw back the curtains to reveal a sky blackened by dust. Congress unanimously passed legislation declaring soil and water conservation a national policy and priority. In 1933 the Congress created the Soil Erosion Service (which was later changed to the Soil Conservation Service in 1935). Since about three-fourths of the continental United States is privately owned, Congress realized that only active, voluntary support from landowners would guarantee the success of conservation work on private land.

In 1937, President Roosevelt wrote the governors of all the states recommending legislation that would allow local landowners to form soil conservation districts. New Mexico adopted the soil conservation district act in the same year.

(source: National Association of Conservation Districts)