



# Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Senate Corrections Subcommittee  
Testimony on HB 64  
May 21, 2015

Mr. Chairman, members of the Senate Corrections Subcommittee, I am Kris Swartz, Wood SWCD Supervisor and the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts President. I am pleased to provide written testimony on behalf of Ohio's 88 Soil and Water Conservation Districts in regards to House Bill 64, the State Budget Bill.

Ohio's 88 SWCDs are what we call "locally led" -- in that each locally elected SWCD board and their staff works with the citizens of its community to address the conservation needs of that area. So in turn, our SWCDs are very diverse networks, working with local agencies, partnered with state and federal agencies, and also with private individuals and organizations to promote responsible land and water use decisions. We are dedicated to the conservation, protection, and improvement of soil and water resources by providing information, technical guidance, and cost-share assistance. And, our goal is to coordinate and focus assistance from all available sources—public and private, local, state and federal—in an effort to develop locally-driven, cost efficient solutions to natural resource concerns.

Ohio's SWCDs receive funding from four sources on the state level: General Revenue Funds (\$2.9 million), a \$.25 per ton fee on Construction and Demolition Debris (approximately \$1.2 million), a \$.25 per ton fee on Municipal Solid Waste (approximately \$3.3 million), and a \$.50 per tire Scrap Tire Fee (approximately \$3.5 million per year) for a total of \$10.9 million. We are very thankful for the support both the Administration and the General Assembly have provided to our efforts throughout the years. Ohio's SWCDs have been fiscally responsible, efficient and effective in order to make the most of these financial resources entrusted to our operation.

While we are grateful for this consistent funding, we have not experienced an increase in state match throughout the past 4-6 years, yet the natural resources challenges have increased. With the Governor's and legislature's focus to tackle the water quality issues, our SWCDs have more responsibilities and greater demands that must be achieved as a result of passage of both Senate Bill 150 last session and Senate Bill 1, earlier this year. Districts **ALL** throughout Ohio are focused on making a positive difference by working with landowners in rural and urban settings to address these resource challenges, however, we are stretched thin in many areas and truly need to see an increase in funding to ensure we are able to meet the demands and expectations. We truly need to get back to a **1:1** match to allow our districts to receive the proper training, to hire the right staff members, and to increase our outreach efforts in order to accomplish the new regulations. And we need this to be a statewide effort – not just in the Lake Erie watershed. For SWCDs to attain a true 1:1 match, State funding would need to be raised by approximately \$2.5 million per year. State funding, as highlighted earlier, is currently \$10.9 million or at 80% percent. Local funding is roughly \$12.6 million.



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Ohio's SWCDs are also critical in delivering the conservation programs contained within the federal Farm Bill. Our partner, the USDA NRCS has experienced serious staffing declines over the past few years. During the last budget, NRCS testified that SWCDs deliver approximately 60% of the workload in Ohio. This hasn't changed. Cost-share programs for landowners have increased and in order to get these programs implemented, SWCD technicians are necessary. And federal program dollars coming into Ohio continue to grow in an effort to address water quality issues both involving the Lake Erie Basin, as well as the Ohio River (with drainage into the Mississippi River Basin). In addition to the current conservation program workload, Ohio was awarded with 3 new initiatives through the newly created RCPP: Regional Conservation Partnership Program: Tri-State Western Lake Erie Basin Phosphorus Reduction Initiative (involving 22 SWCDs in NW Ohio), Promoting BMPs for Phosphorus Reduction in central Ohio (involving 4 SWCDs) and the East Fork Nutrient Reduction Grant (involving Clermont and several additional SWCDs in SW Ohio).

Without strong SWCDs, we will be unable to assist the USDA and as a result, Ohio's federal funding will go elsewhere. Undelivered program dollars are moved to other states. In fact, Ohio, with its strong SWCD track record of delivering service, has benefitted from other states' inability to service customers. Therefore, we have been able to gain millions throughout the years of additional cost share dollars for Ohio producers to protect our land and water and we cannot lose these opportunities throughout the future.

Ohio's SWCDs are diverse. In addition to the agriculture related efforts, we have a growing number of Districts delivering the storm water/ Phase 2 NPDES regulatory program throughout communities all throughout the state. Ohio also leads the nation in water quality trading programs designed to help businesses meet Clean Water standards through conservation efforts, which SWCDs are the key partner due to the working relationship it has developed with the landowner. Additionally, Districts handle ditch maintenance, floodplain management, CAUV, pipeline standards and many more additional responsibilities in varying areas. Ohio is blessed with a vast array of natural resources and these resources need our "boots on the ground" to ensure stewardship efforts are achieved.

Ohio benefits tremendously from the economic gains resulting from a strong agriculture industry and a healthy environment. And for over 78 years, Ohio's SWCDs have stepped up and delivered. And to be honest, in addition to the 1:1 match increase – we believe we can do more for Ohio with some additional financial resources. Attached is a document titled "Water Quality 4R Tomorrow." We developed this initiative as a result of passage of SB 1. We want to expand our water quality and nutrient stewardship efforts throughout Ohio with the goal of making significant improvements in the Lake Erie watershed, but also throughout other watersheds in Ohio. We want to be proactive rather than reactive and expand landowner training efforts, get more practices on the ground and to strengthen stewardship throughout the state. We believe this increased funding is a small investment when you consider the value of both water quality and water quantity. We hope you will review our proposal and consider further strengthening our efforts for the years to come!

As I conclude with my testimony, Ohio's 88 SWCDs thank you for believing and supporting our conservation efforts on the state level. If you aren't as familiar with your county SWCD, I encourage you to spend a morning or an afternoon with these folks, tour some of the things they are doing with the constituents of your district, or just listen to the things they are doing on a daily basis to enhance our economy, natural resources, and quality of life.

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## WATER QUALITY 4R TOMORROW

Today, there is a huge emphasis on water quality efforts. The Governor's "Blueprint for a New Ohio" includes an effort to "Protect our Lake Erie Watershed: Aggressively Tackling Water Quality Issues." ODNR's top budget priority reads: "Protect and improve the water quality of Lake Erie, the Ohio River, and all streams, rivers, and lakes across the state, and find solutions to reduce Phosphorous in Ohio's waterways." And, the Ohio General Assembly has made it clear that one of its top priorities is to address water quality issues through the passage of Senate Bill 150 last session and Senate Bill 1, just completed in March 2015.

**There is a reason "water" is in our name... it is because we have experience in this arena and we ARE a key part of the solution.** For over 70 years, Ohio's Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) have been involved in conservation programs that have a positive impact on our resources. Specifically, over the last two-three years we have been involved in stressing the 4 Rights (Source, Time, Rate and Place) and have had great success with our 4R Tomorrow Water Quality and Nutrient Stewardship Outreach Campaign. We helped develop the 4R Certification Program administered by the Ohio Agribusiness Association, we are a critical component of ODNR's Clean Lakes Initiative, and we are involved in the Healthy Water Ohio Initiative. These are just a few of the many arenas in which SWCDs are involved.

On a daily basis, Ohio's SWCDs, along with partners ODNR and USDA NRCS, encourage farmers to participate in voluntary whole-farm planning and assist in offering federal, state and local financial incentives to producers to protect and improve water quality, soil health, and economic vitality for communities throughout the state.

The strength and success of the SWCDs come from the one-on-one technical and educational assistance they provide to Ohio's landowners and users. SWCDs address local needs and as a result are highly trusted and respected. The partnership developed over 60 years ago and today, after 70+ years in existence, we are clearly one of the nation's best conservation delivery services!

Over the past 20 years, federal assistance and staffing has declined – while the workload has increased dramatically. Today, USDA NRCS relies heavily on the SWCD partnership to get conservation on the ground. SWCDs provide 60%, if not more, of the technical services provided for Farm Bill programs in an effort to keep conservation practices and programs strong. As a result of changes made to move the SWCDs state match more towards a fee-based approach rather than General Revenue Funding, SWCDs' funding was reduced. We fully understood the decline because the economy was struggling. And while we support a dedicated funding approach, unfortunately, the funding has remained stagnant over the past 4-6 years while the need has continued to grow. Local resources actually have remained relatively strong throughout this period, with the local government funding providing 20% more funding than the state in terms of a true 1:1 match. **Ohio's SWCDs need to get back to the historic partnership between local and state government and obtain 1:1 match to keep programs strong and moving forward to address the conservation needs to the benefit of all Ohioans. This funding will enable capacity building for districts statewide. In order to reach this 1:1 match, an increase of \$2.5 million in state match is needed.** (Today's Local Match is approximately \$12,811,461 while State Match is approximately \$10,307,766.)

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As mentioned before, the workload has grown tremendously. The needs and conservation challenges are great. These needs and challenges not only impact the environment – but also the economy, our productivity and quality of life– all while the providers of services statewide are limited. Because of the growing concern involving water quality in the Lake Erie Watershed, as well with the Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia issues, Ohio’s SWCDs are the network that is heavily relied upon to be the “boots on the ground” to get conservation work accomplished and to teach the producers/landowners the importance, and value, of conservation practices.

With legislative changes approved through Senate Bill 150 in the 131st General Assembly, recent passage of Senate Bill 1 and other pending legislative initiatives that further rely upon the efforts of Ohio’s SWCDs, additional resources must be provided to help farmers and landowners with the needed technical assistance to protect and improve water quality and positively impact soil health and productivity.

***On behalf of the 88 SWCDs throughout Ohio, we recommend a one-time allocation of \$10 million over the biennium that would go towards funding the Ohio Water Quality Initiative. This is an investment for the future with the best delivery service to get the job done right!***

- **STAFFING RESOURCES:** Provide \$3 million for the hiring of at least **25** additional contracted technical staff who are trained to develop nutrient management plans to ensure compliance with the requirements of SB 150 and pending water quality / nutrient stewardship legislation. These staff members would serve all of Ohio and be added on a regional approach so that these individuals could be shared across county lines and serve more areas than solely one district. This shared services action plan will provide for effective services while keeping costs low and improving efficiency. Willing partnerships and strong collaboration are crucial to making a difference in the water quality efforts – and the SWCDs are well familiar with this type of approach in order to get the job done;
- **TRAINING:** To fully meet SB 150 and the newly passed Senate Bill 1, at least \$2 million in funding would be provided to districts to further train existing staff and Board Supervisors on Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, Nutrient Management Plans and Manure Management Plans. This will aide in program delivery in a more effective and efficient manner;
- **PLAN DISTRIBUTION:** As part of the additional resources offered above, \$500,000 would go towards an outreach campaign that would enable Ohio’s 88 SWCDs to provide a Nutrient Management Workbook to at least 75,000 farms throughout Ohio and coordinate training sessions to assist in the implementation of the plan, as well as how to complete the document;
- **OUTREACH:** Working with partners such as OSU Extension and others, \$500,000 in funding would be provided to SWCDs to assist in the outreach efforts for farmers throughout Ohio in terms of the Nutrient Management Plan Workbook, training sessions on 4R Nutrient Stewardship strategy, and community outreach in urban areas. We need to further provide educational programming to students through adults in an effort share the importance of water quality initiatives today – to improve our economy, our agriculture sustainability and more throughout the future;



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- **PROJECT COMPLETION:** And, \$4 million in resources would further be utilized to increase cost share practices, encourage the use of low-impact / specialized equipment developed to improve resources, and/or to initiate a pilot project in a designated watershed that would highlight innovative practices to limit the volume and pollution of runoff – including storm water runoff -- in order to improve water quality in receiving streams and rivers; reduce nutrient loadings to Ohio's streams and lakes to improve water quality and prevent harmful algal blooms; and assist in restoration efforts to increase soil fertility / productivity, biodiversity, water quality, and improve Ohioans' quality of life.

**\*NOTES:**

**Staffing Addition:** Added technical staff would be hired by the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts as approved through the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission. Each staff person would be hired solely on a contractual basis and serve accordingly to the policies and procedures established by the OFSWCD and approved by the OSWCC.

**Outreach:** The outreach and education coordinator would also be a contractual employee hired by the OFSWCD as approved through the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission. This coordinator would follow the priorities, the policies and procedures established by the OFSWCD and approved by the OSWCC. The duties will include carrying out the items outlined in the provision above, as well as provide a coordinated campaign statewide focused on water quality, nutrient stewardship, agriculture, environmental, and natural resources issues.

**Project Completion:** Project funding for cost share / pilot project purposes will be done on a competitive basis determined by the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission. Requests for proposals will be sought by the Commission and approved at a regularly scheduled Commission meeting, at which proposals will be thoroughly reviewed and discussed.