



Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Senate Finance: General Government Subcommittee
Testimony on HB 49
May 23, 2017

Mr. Chairman, members of the General Government Subcommittee, I am Harold Neuenschwander, Holmes County SWCD Supervisor and President of the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. I am pleased to testify on behalf of Ohio's 88 Soil and Water Conservation Districts in regards to House Bill 49, the State Budget Bill.

Ohio's 88 SWCDs are "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. Our SWCDs are very diverse and work collaboratively with local, state and federal agencies, as well as private individuals and organizations to promote responsible land and water use decisions. SWCDs are dedicated to the conservation, protection, and improvement of soil and water resources by providing information, technical guidance, and cost-share assistance. Furthermore, our goal is to coordinate and focus assistance from all available sources—public and private, local, state and federal—in an effort to develop cost efficient solutions to natural resource concerns.

When the SWCDs were created 75+ years ago, it was done on a partnership between the local and state governments -- with the goal of a true 1:1 match. **[ORC Section 940.15 states, "there shall be paid in each calendar year to each soil and water conservation district an amount not to exceed one dollar for each dollar received in accordance with section 940.12 of the Revised Code.]"**

Historically, the legislature strived to meet this match level each budget cycle. However, when the state began facing some financial challenges, SWCD funding changed dramatically. Once a totally GRF funded effort, our funding now comes from four sources on the state level: General Revenue Funds (\$3.25 million), a \$.25 per ton fee on Construction and Demolition Debris (approximately \$1.4 million), a \$.25 per ton fee on Municipal Solid Waste (approximately \$3.25 million), and a \$.50 per tire Scrap Tire Fee (approximately \$3.6 million per year).

We are grateful for the support both the Administration and the General Assembly have provided throughout the years. We are fiscally responsible and continue to manage in a very efficient and effective way in order to make the most of the financial resources entrusted to our efforts. However, with increased focus on water quality challenges in the Lake Erie basin and throughout all Ohio, we are concerned with the reductions of SWCD funding in this bill. SWCDs have more responsibilities and greater demands that must be achieved, especially with the implementation of both Senate Bill 150 and Senate Bill 1. And, districts ALL throughout Ohio are focused on making an impact in rural, urban and suburban settings. Yet, we are being 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. Our while our local governments are experiencing many budget challenges, these partners have continued to support our efforts financially.

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To improve water quality and ensure strong soil health, we need to get back to a **1:1** match. Without it, our efforts of to ensure the new regulations are being met and improvements in soil health, water quality and more could be negatively impacted. This must be a statewide effort and 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 \$4.0 million per year minus the earmarks. Of the current \$11.15 million, \$350,000 is specifically earmarked for Western Lake Erie Basin SB 1 Implementation, \$250,000 is for Heidelberg University's Water Lab, and an additional \$622,000 is set aside for targeted commitments determined by the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission. This leaves \$10.278 million for state match for Ohio's 88 SWCDs, whereas the local match rate is around \$14.4 million. Thus, when assessing State Funding verses Local Funding, *the match rate is at an all-time low of 70%.*

Ohio's SWCDs are critical in delivering the conservation programs contained within the federal Farm Bill. The USDA NRCS relies on SWCDs to deliver approximately 60% of the conservation workload in Ohio. Cost-share programs for landowners have increased and in order to get these programs implemented, SWCD technicians are necessary. Federal program dollars for 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 is managing 3 federally created Regional Conservation Partnership Program Grants: *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)*. Furthermore, we have 3 urban grant initiatives involving Lucas, Cuyahoga and Muskingum SWCDs – each initiative different but designed to address food deserts and other key resource needs.

Ohio's SWCDs are revered as the nation's best in conservation efforts. We would like to keep it that way as we support Ohio's #1 economic driver – Agriculture. In addition to ag.-related efforts, we have a growing number of Districts delivering the storm water/ Phase 2 NPDES regulatory program throughout communities all throughout the state. We lead the nation in water quality trading programs designed to help businesses meet Clean Water standards. And, Districts handle ditch maintenance, floodplain management, CAUV, pipeline standards and many more additional responsibilities in various areas.

Ohio benefits tremendously from the economic gains resulting from a strong agriculture industry and a healthy environment. For well over 75 years, Ohio's SWCDs have stepped up and delivered. We want to continue making a positive impact on the land and in the area of water quality and would appreciate your support in our efforts to help us get back to a 1:1 match level.

On behalf of Ohio's 88 SWCDs, we thank you for believing and supporting our efforts.

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***Here's a little glimpse of some of the work being done by the districts represented by this committee. This isn't all inclusive – and does not include all of the districts and is only a snippet of a few things being done locally. For more details on what is happening specifically in your districts, please contact the district directly or contact the OFSWCD office through mindybankey@ofswcd.org and/or alisonfoster@ofswcd.org or at 614.784.1900!**

Adams SWCD has successfully administered conservation practices focused on water quality efforts impacting an excess of 5,000 acres. Additionally, the district is a key partner in the Ohio Brush Creek Sweep, which for 26 years has removed tons of trash and tires from the stream.

Carroll SWCD's involvement in the Eastern Ohio Grazing Council is critical because it the conservation of our soil and water by growing and grazing forages and serving as advocates for sustainable and environmentally sound grazing practices.

Clermont SWCD's biggest effort involves working with federal, state and local agencies that comprise the East Fork Watershed Cooperative to better understand and manage the harmful algal blooms that have been occurring annually on East Fork Lake. The lake serves as a public water source for about half the residents of Clermont County, and from a recreational standpoint, is heavily used with two public beaches and numerous regattas, including the US Rowing Club Nationals which have been held at the lake since 2015. With the Cooperative, we are conducting monitoring ranging from edge-of-field to streams to the lake itself. Clermont SWCD's priority is to work with producers to install ag conservation practices that reduce nutrient and sediment loading which drive the blooms. We have been successful in getting more practices on the ground through three separate grants, including a Conservation Innovation Grant, an RCPP grant, and the Five Mile Creek National Water Quality Initiative.

On the urban side of things, we administer the Phase II storm water permit for Clermont County, as well as five municipalities and 10 townships, helping each of them remain in compliance with Ohio EPA's regulations.

Cuyahoga SWCD is assisting 52 of the 59 communities in Cuyahoga with their Clean Water Act mandate (public involvement and public education programs; erosion and sediment control; post construction stormwater management. In 2016, the district inspected/reported on approximately 173 active construction sites each month, completed 311 stormwater pollution prevention plan reviews, conducted 2,166 inspections and reports of active construction sites of one acre or greater and conducted 713 inspections/reports of post construction storm water facilities. They also successfully gained a grant for an urban agriculture specialist to provide personal assistance to nascent urban farmers in an effort to ensure that seasonal high tunnels on vacant lots are managed well.

Delaware SWCD provides a diverse array of services to this fast-growing area. The district's drainage program is responsible for survey, design, installation, supervision and maintenance of drainage improvements petitioned by residents of the county. The district is also heavily involved in development planning for subdivisions, lot-splits, riparian/streamside planning and drainage, soil information and much more.

Fayette SWCD is currently in the middle of a three year program using \$500k of grant monies to repair/replace failing septic systems of low to moderate income homeowners in Fayette County. Failing septic systems were identified by OEPA as a factor causing local streams to be in non-attainment of water quality goals. To date, we have obligated \$190k to replace 13 systems. These new systems will properly treat 1.9 million gallons of sewage per year.

Gallia SWCD has been extremely successful in delivering Farm Bill practices to local residents and impacting thousands of acres for both water and soil quality improvement. Additionally, the district is very involved in wildlife habitat and forest health initiatives, as well as conducting the county's Floodplain Administration.

The district hosts a Recycle Day, provides school presentations, works locally to establish community gardens, conducts a Farm City Day, started a Conservation Camp and provides demonstrations during the county's Ag Awareness Day.

Geauga SWCD conducts hundreds of plan reviews, thousands of site inspections, and hundreds of storm water basin inspections for their county. Furthermore, the district provides a diverse array of educational programs to students and adults in addition to providing landowner technical assistance in a variety of areas including: agriculture, logging, oil and gas, property evaluations, erosion, streams, ponds, and more.

Knox SWCD is working on a program with the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy that provides incentive funding to local crop growers to establish cover crops on sensitive fields. In the first three years the program has reduced sediment loading to local lakes, rivers and streams by over 110 million pounds, and reduced Phosphorus and Nitrogen discharges from participating fields by 49,000 and 98,000 pounds respectively. The relative financial impact of the sediment reduction alone is worth 1.2 million dollars based on current dredging and removal costs. Roughly 10 times what it cost to implement the program over 3 years.

The district also developed a phone APP, known as ONMRK (Ohio Nutrient Management Record Keeper) for farmers to use to more effectively keep required fertilizer and manure application records. This app also helps farmers collect weather information and more data needed before applying nutrients on their field. This tool is provided FREE and was developed with Farm Bureau in an effort to further benefit water quality efforts!

Meigs SWCD administers the county litter prevention program. They also do monthly water sampling at an old county landfill for the OEPA. Work collaboratively with the ODNR to assist in Acid Mine Drainage issues and also conducts the Leading Creek Stream Sweep and the Ohio River Sweep for our county. These programs and events are all tied to water quality improvement for their county.

Ross SWCD has been heavily involved in working hand-in-hand with landowners to get conservation practices on the ground. The district is currently offering producers unique documentation for sub-surface drainage projects. The district's GIS Coordinator is developing maps of tile projects using drones to create an aerial photograph overlaid with GPS coordinates of freshly installed tile. The drone is also being deployed to photograph, inspect and evaluate BMPs. In addition to water quality and conservation practices, the district is also serving their constituency with wildlife habitat initiatives and other critical areas.

Scioto SWCD's Education Programs are growing to reach the multitude of kids who don't understand where their food resources come from or how these are grown. So the district's "Summer Gardening" workshops were developed to get the inner city youth of Portsmouth involved in cultivating and working in the gardens to learn how to grow food, experience a new perspective on healthy foods and the importance of conservation stewardship.

In addition, the district's CSI: Shawnee Science Camp provides many area youth the opportunity to have an authentic camp experience while learning about nature and the science and jobs that are involved with natural resource conservation.

And, the district continues to monitoring logging sites to ensure proper resource management.

Summit SWCD is working diligently with the City of Akron, which is facing decades of tremendous expenses related to the consent decree and the City agreed to make extensive improvements to its sewer system to reduce or eliminate sewage overflows that have long polluted the Cuyahoga River and its tributaries. The City has collaborated with Summit SWCD to educate the residents of the City about water quality and stormwater related issues. The City and Summit SWCD purchased 200 barrels and kits to offer workshops for City residents to build their own rain barrel. This program was only feasible by the MOU, the local appropriation that Summit SWCD received from the City and the State Match.

In addition, there are 31 communities in Summit County that are required to meet the unfunded mandates of the U.S. EPA Clean Water Act for their urbanized areas that discharge stormwater to waters of the state. All these communities are facing hardships due to the loss of revenue sources from the State of Ohio. Through regionalized efforts, shared services and the State Match to the Districts, Summit SWCD is able to save these communities over a million dollars annually. Summit SWCD offers stormwater, educational outreach, plan review and inspections, municipal owned facility inspections, assistance with annual reporting to Ohio EPA and writing of the Countywide Stormwater Management plan. If each of these communities had to pay a consultant to conduct these services, this would on average cost each community \$40,000-\$50,000 annual or between 1.2 to 1.5 million collectively. Through coordination and communication, this regional effort saves these communities hardship through spreading the cost throughout 31 communities. This could only happen through a healthy and generous state match.

Trumbull SWCD has a number of partnerships with local school groups and others in an efforts to address natural resources challenges. The district's has partnered with Champion Middle School Science Club on a Habitat Project designed to remove invasive species from the Trumbull County Agriculture & Family Education Center grounds, establish a bluebird trail with new boxes built by the students themselves, repair bluebird boxes on another section of a bluebird trail, build a board walk to assist trail visitors with navigating a low area that holds water periodically, and install four honeybee hives, and graphic design of educational signage related to the bees & hives. The district is also heavily involved in the Pollinator Habitat Initiatives - Trumbull SWCD donated seeds and information to Southington Schools and the students have established a pollinator garden.