



Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Ohio House of Representatives
Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
House Bill 33
May 10, 2023

Chairman Shaffer, Vice-Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing us to provide testimony before your committee this morning. My name is Janelle Mead and I am the CEO of the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

I know many of you have great relationships with Soil and Water Districts in your communities. Our 88 county SWCD's pride themselves on being "boots on the ground" to get essential conservation work accomplished. Each district is diverse and is "locally-led," which means each district serves to address the vast array of conservation, agriculture, natural resources and environmentally-based issues focused on the needs to the communities each district represents. SWCDs operate critically needed programs centered around soil health and water quality and rely on non-mandated funding allocated at the local and state level.

Ohio's SWCDs consist of 440 locally elected, uncompensated board members who employ over 500 people statewide. We work "one-on-one" with farmers and communities to survey and design environmentally responsible projects such as surface and subsurface drainage and livestock waste management facilities, and provide resources for stormwater assistance, among others; We work collaboratively with partners to deliver technical assistance, financial support and valuable conservation programs to land owners; and, we engage and educate the public about natural resources issues through special programs, workshops, events and academic experiences.

Ohio SWCDs have been funded through a combination of local and state match funding with a goal of 1:1 match. Local governments have, for the most part, tried to remain strong and provide some funding to the SWCDs. The state match comes from four different places: General Revenue Funds, a fee on Construction and Demolition Debris, a fee on Solid Waste and a Scrap Tire Fee.

Before I go too much further in this process, I want to thank Governor DeWine and the members of the 134th General Assembly for the confidence and trust they have placed in Soil and Water Districts. Our districts have experienced some difficult times, but the Governor and the 134th General Assembly invested in our districts, through state match and H2Ohio funding and I am pleased to say our districts have stepped up to the challenge. With this investment, and the help of many industry partners we have reached out to new farmers and have assisted in putting meaningful conservation practices on the ground.

"The Leader in Promoting Natural Resources Stewardship to Enhance Ohio's Quality of Life".



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Districts have a lot to be excited about in the Governor's proposed budget. The increase in appropriation to the 5BVO or "tipping fees" fund will help direct more money to districts with no new taxes or fees.

We support the Governor's executive budget and would like to see some of the changes made in the house restored in the Senate. For instance, the \$1 million reduction in the state match line item. Our goal is always to be at a 1:1 match, but currently and for some time, local funding has outpaced the state match. With the \$1 million reduction, we anticipate the match rate would be about 83-84%. The FY 22/23 budget match rate averaged ~91%, which is approximately a 7% reduction. The state match is essential in drawing in local support dollars for our district. We would also like to see a change in the budget text allowing \$5 million to be used for statewide H2Ohio support from this line item.

In addition, we would like to see the \$2 million in the soil and water division be restored. Those funds would be used to support the unfunded regional watershed coordinators and additional employees that will implement the H2Ohio programs with our district personnel in regions of the state beyond the Western Lake Erie Basin.

We would appreciate your support in the restoration of these items as our districts continue to work with farmers and rural and urban communities in their conservation work.

Thank you for your time and attention. I will be happy to answer any questions.