



## **So You Are A New SWCD Director....** ***Congratulations!***

Welcome and congratulations on becoming a conservation district director! You have joined 1,085 other soil and water conservation district directors in Texas, and more than 15,000 other leaders of conservation district programs and services across the United States committed to the stewardship of natural resources at the local level.

Texas soil and water conservation districts are subdivisions of state government created by law. Texas has 217 conservation districts, each led by individuals who believe decisions affecting natural resources are best made by people closest to those resources – the people in the local community.

As a conservation district director, you are a public official that will represent and protect the needs and interests of the public through your actions and decisions. You'll be at the helm with your unique knowledge, experience and interest in natural resources and you'll be looked to for guidance and to add valuable expertise to your conservation district team. More importantly, you are being entrusted with the power to administer state and local programs; receive and spend public funds; educate the public on conservation issues; and much more. The citizens of your local district as well as the state of Texas as a whole are counting on you and are pleased you have come aboard.

### **District Director Roles**

Your new role as a conservation district director is an important one. Your main responsibilities will include:

- Setting and scrutinizing the district's mission and overall strategy and working to achieve it;
- Supporting your district employees, and assuring they function efficiently and responsibly. They represent your district to the community on a day-to-day basis;
- Managing the district's resources - both funds and property;
- Serving as a bridge and buffer between the district and its cooperators and partners; and serving as an advocate for the district to build support in the community.

The good news is that Texas has some of the most effective conservations districts in the country with professional and knowledgeable staff willing to support you in your new role. A network

of local, state, and national conservation partners are also available to help. This pamphlet was designed to help you get started.

### **Helpful Hints**

- There are a variety of ways you can use your time and talents to be successful in taking on your new responsibilities.
- Attend and participate in monthly board meetings;
- Ask questions. Most likely you are not the only one who would like clarification, and it is a friendly reminder to district employees that the public may need more information as well;
- Offer your expertise to assist district employees with programs and projects;
- Serve on committees where your knowledge and experience can contribute to district programs or operations;
- Be open and honest in communications with your fellow directors and with district employees;
- Communicate your needs and expectations to your fellow directors and district employees and ask what they need from you.

### **Where to Start**

It's important to remember that you can't learn everything at once. Individuals who have been involved with conservation districts for years are still finding new opportunities for learning and growth. As a start, during the next six months, try to find time to do the following (Use this checklist to track your progress):

- Sit down with the District Chair and the district employees to hear what your conservation district is all about. Become familiar with the topography, demographics, including past and present resources that are useful to influence the specific goals of your conservation district.
- Schedule some one-on-one time with your district employees to find out specifics about the Board and employee relationship. Also, see which roles you will need to play to make sure the relationship is successful.
- Schedule some one-on-one time with your Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board Field Representative. Their job is to assist you through advice and consultation about the state soil and water conservation laws to include rules and regulations under which SWCDS operate.
- Read the Texas Conservation District Law. Pay special attention to the powers of conservation districts.
- Ask for copies of your district's annual goals and objectives, annual report and long-range strategic plan. These documents will give you a picture of what the district is all about and what they are trying to accomplish.
- Ask your fellow directors about regional and statewide meetings and opportunities for training on specific aspects of the conservation district.

For more information about the “big picture” of conservation districts, try these websites:

***www.tsswcb.state.tx.us***- This is the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board’s website. The website lists and describes the many programs and services provided to districts by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board. Through this website you can learn how to locate conservation districts in Texas. In addition, the website will enable you learn about the Association of Texas Soil and Water Districts and its function.

***www.nrcs.usda.gov***- This is the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) website. The NRCS provides leadership in a partnership role with local soil and water conservation districts to help America’s private land owners and managers conserve soil, water, and related natural resources. Their website can help you learn more about NRCS.

***www.nacdnet.org***- This is the website of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). The mission of NACD is to serve conservation districts by providing national leadership and a unified voice for America’s 3,000 conservation districts on conservation issues.

### **Helpful Telephone Numbers**

Conservation District Technician: \_\_\_\_\_

Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Office: \_\_\_\_\_

District Secretary: \_\_\_\_\_

Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Office: \_\_\_\_\_

SWCD Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Office: \_\_\_\_\_

District Conservationist: \_\_\_\_\_

Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Office: \_\_\_\_\_

TSSWCB Field Representative: \_\_\_\_\_

Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Office: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

TSSWCB State Office: (254) 773-2250

## **District Director Duties**

- Be familiar with the Texas Conservation District Law. Know the powers, authorities, responsibilities, and limitations placed upon you by the law.
- Attend regular and special meetings of the district board.
- Accept the responsibilities of any office to which you are appointed. Serve on committees and present reports on their accomplishments and activities.
- Assure that the actions and policies of the district and its employees remain within the limitations of the Conservation District Law.
- Set local policy to reflect the balanced need of the community you represent.
- Act as a district representative in communicating district action, policy, etc. to your local community.
- Develop, set and implement personnel policies for the hiring and supervision of district staff.
- Encourage landowners to become cooperators with the district..
- Attend state, national and other conservation meetings on behalf of the district to stay current with conservation issues and programs. Always remember to represent the policies of your board as a whole, not just your personal feelings.
- Pursue funding for district programs and initiatives.
- Develop in cooperation with other board members an annual district budget and guard to assure district fiscal responsibility.
- Develop a working relationship with county government, legislators, agency officials, local municipal and county officials, and organizations that do or could cooperate with your conservation district.
- Stay informed on conservation issues in your county and be familiar with important laws, policies, and programs.
- Be familiar with district programs and activities. Be positive, innovative, and action-oriented.

## **Texas State Soil & Water Conservation Board**

The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) is a state agency that administers Texas' soil and water conservation law and coordinates conservation and pollution abatement programs throughout the State. Headquartered in Temple, Texas, the TSSWCB offers technical assistance to the state's 217 soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs). A seven-member State Board governs the TSSWCB. The State Board is composed of two Governor appointees and five landowners elected from across Texas by more than 1,000 SWCD Directors.

The TSSWCB is the lead state agency for the planning, management, and abatement of agricultural and silvicultural (forestry) nonpoint source pollution, and administers the Texas Brush Control Program. The TSSWCB maintains regional offices in strategic locations in the State to help carry out the agency's responsibilities.

Of specific importance to you is the TSSWCB field representative assigned to assist your district. Your field representative's role is to help you to be an effective director by keeping you

and your fellow board members up to date on TSSWCB policies and programs in addition to keeping your board current on state and national issues affecting conservation interests.

*“The soil conservation district is the workshop through which those who love the land pool their efforts and information in making the land more stable and productive and our country more prosperous, more attractive and a better land in which to live. The fact that landowners themselves have the responsibility for petitioning for and voting in a district, formulating its program and work plan, administering its business and entering into cooperative agreements with their fellow landowners and operators, makes soil conservation districts a democracy in action.”*

*V. C. Marshall*

*(Credited with being the “Father of the soil and water conservation district program in Texas)*

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