

## **Chapter 2: Supervisor Duties and Responsibilities**

### **Sec. 1 General Overview**

Chapter One introduced you to the purpose, powers and duties of SWCDs. An SWCD is the only agency in a county specifically charged by state statute to oversee and protect soil and water resources. Companion agencies work closely with SWCDs to assist with many aspects of conservation such as: reforestation; protecting and preserving wildlife; designing and installing conservation practices, providing cost sharing and other conservation application incentive programs; adult and youth education programs; and numerous other conservation initiatives. However, no other state or local agency is specifically mandated to protect soil and water resources. The following Mission statement, Visions of Success and Measures of Excellence serve as guiding principles for districts.

#### **Mission**

To provide information to the public about soil, water, and related natural resource conservation; identify and prioritize local soil and water resource concerns; and connect land users to sources of educational, technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices and technologies.

#### **Visions of Success**

The district is respected for putting people with questions and concerns about soil, water, and related natural resource issues in touch with people with answers and solutions.

The district is recognized as the local hub for connecting land users to direct sources of educational, financial, and technical assistance for applying conservation practices and best management technologies on the land to address soil and water quality problems.

Local citizens recognize the district as the key player in improving soil and water quality.

#### **Measures of Excellence**

1. The district is governed by a Board of Supervisors that possess diverse backgrounds, talents, skills, and experiences.
2. The district has a current long-range plan that identifies, prioritizes, and addresses the soil, water, and related natural resource concerns.
3. The district has a strategic action plan that addresses priority issues and engages many partners.
4. The district has formal agreements and excellent working relationships with a number of local, state, and federal agencies and organizations.
5. The district employs a professional manager with training in program development and evaluation, financial and personnel management, public

- relations, and revenue enhancement. The district manager understands agriculture and urban soil and water conservation issues.
6. The district administers a website and maintains an electronic directory of natural resource professionals and resource materials.
  7. The district employs a skilled receptionist or information specialist to assist customers in a timely, courteous manner.
  8. The district's information and education outreach focuses on soil, water and related natural resource conservation.
  9. The district works with the local Cooperative Extension Service to carry out an education program. Youth education is also accomplished by equipping classroom teachers and education multipliers with resource materials on soil and water quality.

## **Sec. 2 Supervisor Responsibilities**

SWCD Supervisors are not volunteers, but public officials, elected or appointed, to a position of responsibility to oversee and protect the soil, water and related natural resources of the state. In addition to providing local leadership conserving soil, water and related natural resources, supervisors have the responsibility to oversee personnel and any real property and financial holdings of the district.

District supervisors are responsible for the operation and management of the SWCD. They develop policy which is carried out by employees and personnel available to the district. An effective board utilizes personnel from a number of state and federal agencies to help the district to carry out programs. They also solicit financial support for conservation programs that help protect soil and water resources from local, state and federal elected officials and partner with private groups, organizations, community leaders and private industry, to achieve their mission.

Some of the responsibilities of supervisors are:

1. Identify local soil, water and related natural resource concerns, set natural resource priorities, and then develop, implement and evaluate long and short range plans and programs to address these prioritized resource concerns.
2. Participate in appropriate multi-district activities such as watershed projects, river basin projects, resource conservation and development efforts, and multi-district educational efforts such as field days, workshops, and seminars.
3. Educate and inform landowners and operators, general public, and local, state, and federal officials and legislators on conservation issues and programs.
4. Seek funding and coordinate program assistance from local, state and federal sources, commercial sources, charities, and private groups and individuals.
5. Administer the SWCD programs and activities by delegating tasks through a structure of SWCD supervisors, staff, committees and volunteers.
6. Supervise SWCD staff and volunteers working with the SWCD, and coordinate conservation efforts with cooperating agency personnel.

7. Manage all district-owned funds, facilities and equipment.
8. Attend and participate in all board meetings and functions.
9. Make decisions in response to all proposals presented to the board.
10. Cooperate with fellow board members in establishing district policies.
11. Participate in setting district priorities in providing technical assistance to land users.
12. Employ personnel and determine their qualifications, duties, and compensation. Keep abreast of performance and provide administrative supervision. Understand working agreements established with personnel and comply with all conditions.
13. Conduct employee evaluations at least annually to recognize good performance as well as to address any needed improvements in performance.
14. Keep informed on legislation and policies of local, state, and federal government pertaining to conservation problems. This includes maintaining contacts with local, state, and national public officials to keep them informed of the district's activities and the district residents' conservation needs.
15. Prepare for, conduct, and participate in SWCD board meetings and attend IASWCD state and area meetings, and state and regional training sessions conducted by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) and partners.
16. Encourage land users and public entities to become aware of and utilize the services of the district.
17. Serve as the "up-front" person for the district by representing the SWCD at public functions sponsored by the district and at functions related to natural resource conservation activities.
18. Cooperate with fellow board members to secure adequate operating funds for the district. Examples: county appropriations; state appropriations; retail sales; equipment rental; etc.
19. Cooperate with fellow board members in establishing sound business practices required for adequate accounting and financial management of the District's fiscal affairs in accordance with state law.
20. Know the functions of other agencies that operate in the district.

### **Sec. 3 Working with Government Officials**

Maintaining frequent and on-going communications with local elected officials and effective working relationships with local departments of government are critical to maintaining local support for your district program.

First and foremost, it is important that the County Commissioner and Council are fully aware of what the District can offer the county residents. These two groups are vital decision-makers in how much financial support the District will receive through the County budget to conserve and improve the soil, water and related natural resources. There are also a number of departments that your district may want to be working closely with, including but not limited to the County planning, surveyor, parks and recreation, highway and health departments. Each of these departments has a need for good soils information and interpretation. Often the projects that departments oversee or manage

land with needs for conservation practices to reduce adverse impacts of sediment and nonpoint source pollutants in water runoff.

### **Some Ways Districts Can Enhance Communications with County Elected Officials**

- \* Include them on the mailing lists for newsletters, e-newsletters, minutes of monthly SWCD meetings, special meetings, etc.
- \* Include them in invitations to SWCD special meetings, tours, field days, workshops, Annual Meeting, etc.
- \* Invite them to regular SWCD meetings. (Explain to them the district's function and how it can provide assistance.)
- \* Arrange at least one special meeting/tour with them each year prior to submitting your budget request. Review local soil and water related resources concerns in the county and what the district, along with its partners, are doing to address them. Be sure to highlight the amount of money your district brings in to the local economy through state and federal conservation program dollars, etc. (See more in Chapter 5 under funding on the use of the leveraging tool.)

### **Some Ways Districts Can Enhance Working Relationships with County Departments**

- \* Include department heads on the mailing lists for newsletters and special mailings.
- \* Invite department heads to special meetings, tours, field days that may be of interest to their department.
- \* Attend some of their special meetings and events, as well as routine meetings such as County Council meetings. This shows that the district is interested in issues they have to address and is willing to help when and where appropriate.
- \* Offer district assistance when appropriate.
- \* Develop working agreements or memorandums of understanding with appropriate departments (Be sure to review them at least once every three or four years with department representatives.)
- \* Publicize successful cooperative ventures.

### **Contacting Elected Officials**

SWCDs are locally led, grass roots organizations that speak collectively for the landowners. You have knowledge of the local resource issues and real solutions, and the elected officials are interested in your opinions.

Districts need support from all three levels of government (local, state and federal) to carry out their responsibilities as prescribed by the District Law. Supervisors should keep local, state and federal elected officials informed about district activities throughout the year. Because all elected officials are faced with limited revenues and with constant pressure to allocate funds to an ever-increasing number of worthy causes, supervisors need to maintain close relationships with local elected officials. Don't just contact them when you are requesting money.

Stay in touch with your state legislators to remind them that your district cares about what they are doing; that it wants to provide input on conservation matters and that it is looking for their support. Supervisors should also be contacting federal legislators often enough that they know what federal conservation program support you district wants.

Remember them when your SWCD sends out invitations to events such as Annual Meeting, elected official tours, and conservation workshops. As well, consider including them when distributing key outreach materials such as your Annual Report or newsletters.

When contacting local, state or federal elected officials, supervisors need to be prepared with a clear message they want to convey and what their expectations are. The message should be framed in understandable terms. Stick to this message and avoid bringing up other topics or straying in conversation.

Here are a few suggestions regarding contacting elected officials for supervisor consideration:

1. Elected officials were placed in office to serve the public, and most of them want to do just that. They are interested in what SWCDs have to say, especially when the benefits go directly to their constituents.
2. Supervisors should develop a “game plan” for contacting elected officials, including who is going to make the contacts, when, and how. The game plan should be specific. Include evidence that your local constituents are supportive of your message, such as results from your locally led meeting or other public input sessions.
3. There are many ways in which public officials may be contacted—e.g., letter, telephone, personal visit, email, etc. Elected officials should understand the district program, the benefit it provides to their constituents, and what resources are needed to do an adequate job.

4. Before making contact with elected officials, supervisors need to “do their homework.” Regarding state and federal legislators, for instance, it’s important to know such things as their party affiliation, their committee assignments, their rank in the legislative body, personality, and their receptivity to district/soil and water conservation issues. If a member has little interest in these issues or does not have the political influence to help accomplish the district’s goals, then he/she is likely to be of little help. While there’s advantage to cultivate relationships with all elected officials, supervisors should concentrate on those that can help most.
5. Concerning conservation or funding initiatives at the federal levels; supervisors would do well to support the legislative efforts of their state and national conservation district associations. Basic to that support is active involvement and prompt dues payment.
6. Regarding interest/involvement of elected officials, supervisors should not give up if at first they fail. It’s important to remember that elected officials receive and must respond to requests from many different groups who feel as strongly about their cause as do districts about conservation. Persistence is the key to helping elevate the priority of district/soil and water conservation issues and needs.
7. Don’t express disappointment if you meet with legislative staff instead of the elected official, or be discouraged. This situation has several advantages. Sometimes, they can offer more time and may be more knowledgeable about your specific issues. Staff play an invaluable role in shaping a legislator’s agenda and position on issues, and represent another relationship that should be cultivated.
8. Follow up is important. If you promise to get back with an elected official on something, be sure to do so. If you didn’t have an answer to a question, don’t worry, but make sure to get back to them with an answer. Thank them for their time and consideration. Sending a thank you card shows appreciation.

## **Summary**

If local elected officials and departments of local government understand and participate in district programs, your districts objective of conserving soil, water and related natural resources has a much better chance of being achieved. The work of the district should not be allowed to be “the best-kept secret in the county.”

## **Sec. 4 Staff Relations**

### **Hiring**

The five supervisors of an SWCD are the employers of their SWCD staff. It is the supervisors’ responsibility to provide administrative supervision to those who work for the SWCD. It is the responsibility of supervisors to hire and fire (if necessary) district

employees. A job description should be developed for each position in an SWCD office. More information is available in Chapter 8, entitled “Staff Employment”.

The Indiana District Act (IC 14-32-4-18) provides that “In any district, except a district containing a consolidated city, an employee of the district is considered to be an employee of the county in which the employee works and is eligible for and shall be included in all fringe benefit programs provided for employees of the county. An employee of a district whose position is funded entirely from sources outside the county, in which the employee works solely on the basis of the funding of the employee’s position, is not considered an employee of the county.”

### **Supervising**

SWCD supervisors are responsible for the administrative supervision of the district’s employees. If the district has several employees, the supervisors could delegate supervision to one of those individuals. “Executive Director” is a primary example of a position that would have supervisory authority. This person would then be directly responsible to and be supervised by the SWCD supervisors. State and federal employees should not supervise district employees. .

When a district employs technical staff, it may be necessary that such staff have technical oversight to ensure that standards and specifications are being followed. SWCD boards should consult with an NRCS representative and the ISDA District Support Specialist (DSS) to determine the best method to provide that technical oversight. Once a decision is reached and policy established, it must be clearly understood by all parties involved, including each employee, his or her direct supervisor (i.e. Executive Director), SWCD Supervisors, and cooperating agency providing technical oversight.

SWCDs may retain the services of contract personnel who are not under the same guidelines as “employees.” An SWCD may have an employee who is not considered to be a county employee (see the District Law definition in the second paragraph of this section (section 4) above. It may be necessary to have an internal policy for your SWCD to address your personnel. A policy that’s written and followed is key to successful district operation.

### **Providing Training Opportunities**

Training is valuable and necessary to retain highly efficient personnel. Supervisors should support applicable training which employees may desire to attend. A policy should be established by the SWCD Supervisors to guide the types of training employees should seek.

Technical personnel should be encouraged to attain and maintain engineering ‘certification’ levels and to seek pertinent training opportunities from NRCS and other conservation partners to expand their skills.

## **Evaluating**

Employee evaluation or performance appraisal is an important function to support and reward exemplary employees and to draw attention to opportunities necessary to increase productivity of employees in need of improvement. An evaluation, based on the employee's written job description, should be performed at a minimum, annually.

Evaluations should be in written form and should be fully discussed to assure that employees understand any directives for improvement. If directives are provided, a date for review should be written and performance re-evaluated at that time.

Chapter 8, entitled "Staff Employment", goes into greater detail about evaluating employees.

## **Disciplinary Action**

Cases may arise when an employee does not perform up to standards or acts inappropriately and therefore discipline is necessary. As employer it is the supervisors' responsibility to discipline employees in order to assure that corrective action is taken. Actions should be taken quickly, should be clear and well understood by the employee and should have follow-up to assure that corrective measures are made by the employee(s).

Many counties have personnel departments with well developed guidelines for employee discipline. It is important to consult with county officials to assure that the district's policies are parallel with those of other county departments.

## **Documentation**

Supervisors and staff sometimes face difficult situations which may require review at a later date or possibly even litigation. It is extremely important to realize the value of documenting the events and the details of a problem situation, names and addresses of people present, the content of conversations, actions taken, etc. Recollection of details at a later date is nearly impossible without written documentation.

Supervisors should discuss documentation procedures with staff to assure that a record is maintained relating to potential problem situations which may arise in day-to-day office operations. It is of equal importance for supervisors to document sensitive situations that may arise with staff. Reprimands, directives, performance improvements, etc. should be documented and retained in a secure location. (Chapter 8 goes into more details on this topic and other issues related staff employment.

## **Sec. 5 Managing Public Funds**

The management of funds will be discussed in various sections of this manual. It is very important to realize that the State Board of Accounts (SBOA) views all funds received by districts to be “public funds” and the guidelines for receiving, utilizing and accounting for funds are very strict. This section only addresses the approval of expenditures and the development of annual budgets, so refer to Chapter 6, entitled Receiving, Managing, and Disbursing Funds”, for more information on managing public funds..

### **Approving Expenditures**

Expenses are incurred during the course of normal business and payments are made from various SWCD accounts to retire those expenses. A strict guideline is to be followed to provide a clear ‘audit trail’ to account for the expenditure. The board of supervisors is to approve all expenditures in advance in open session; and after purchases are made (again in open session) is to approve payment of the expenditures. A record of approval and payment is to be maintained in the minutes of the SWCD meeting.

Purchases are normally made through credit ‘accounts’, while payments are made in ‘arrears.’ It is recommended that an invoice (or bill) copy be kept to document expenditures. The original invoice is to be attached to an approved claim form for payment by SWCD check. No checks may be written without the preparation of an approved claim form.

Certain claims, if authorized by the SWCD Board, may, subject to review and approval at the next regular meeting, authorize the following to be paid between meetings: payroll, insurance premiums, utility payments, bulk mailing fees, maintenance agreements and service agreements, lease agreements and rental agreements, expenses that must be paid because of emergency circumstances, recurring or periodic expenses specifically authorized by a resolution adopted at a governing body meeting. Each payment under this section must be certified by the district's fiscal officer. The certification must be on a form prescribed by the SBOA.

Many Districts have numerous claims for supervisors to sign at a regular meeting. It is permissible to prepare an “Accounts Payable Voucher Register (ST-364)” (per authority - IC-5-11-10-2) listing the claims for supervisors to sign in lieu of multiple signatures on individual claim forms. The form then becomes a part of the financial report and is documented in the minutes of the meeting.

### **Developing a Yearly Budget**

Supervisors are responsible for all funds of the SWCD. It is important for supervisors to be involved in the development and oversight of the district’s annual budget. A budget is to be developed with employee input, but should not become the sole responsibility of the district employee(s). The budget process is normally ongoing. Individual counties will provide specific deadlines for submitting budget information (usually July 1).

An extremely important budget function for SWCD supervisors and staff is to maintain a relationship with County Commissioners and Council personnel during the entire year. If the county leaders see SWCD personnel only at budget time, it is not likely that the budget will be highly regarded by the fiscal leaders and results may be disappointing.

With an ongoing relationship, SWCD officials have an opportunity to impress upon the county leaders the value of the SWCD to the various ‘fellow’ agencies as well as to the entire county economy. The District’s ‘Business Plan’ and financial ‘Leveraging Form’ are two key “tools” which may be of value to supervisors in this process.

At the budget hearing or meeting, it is important representatives from the SWCD attend the session even if it is not required. This shows commitment, provides time to promote and defend the budget request, and gives Council or Commissioners time to engage in dialogue with the SWCDs. Supervisors should anticipate possible questions in advance, both routine and tough, and be prepared to answer them.

If the SWCD has grants or other funding sources beyond the county, it is important the Supervisors review these budgets as well and incorporate them into annual planning. The amount of funds available for the year (and associated workload/tasks) should be monitored throughout the year to help remain in good standing.

## **Sec. 6 Committees**

Each SWCD in Indiana faces numerous soil, water and related natural resource concerns. To address these concerns SWCDs have found it useful to develop committee structures to separate concerns into manageable groups for committees of interested citizens to address. Committees may include a number of supportive citizens interested in various aspects of soil and water conservation. A public outreach program for committee formation helps to diversify the scope of the five supervisors. Active committees also help a District manage workload and offers an opportunity for potential supervisors.

Committees can be valuable resources to an SWCD. It is wise, however, for a supervisor to lead, or at least sit in on each committee, so that the mission of the SWCD is maintained. Committees should be closely tied to individual district business plans, and may actually be based on the district’s critical natural resource concerns to better focus committee activities on needed concerns. A list of potential SWCD committees may include, but is not limited, to the following:

- Personnel
- Finance
- Legislative
- Soil and Water Quality
- Forestry and Wildlife
- Land Use and Urban Growth
- Education and Information

## **Sec. 7 Compensation**

The Indiana SWCD Law provides that district supervisors may be paid a salary per diem for any part of a day that they are engaged in official business of the district, in any amount not to exceed the salary per diem that may be paid by the state under IC 4-10-11-2.1(b). Currently the amount is \$35.00. Supervisors have the option of accepting all, none, or a portion of the salary per diem.

Additionally, supervisors may be reimbursed for travel, lodging, meals, and other incurred expenses, not to exceed the amount that employees of the county in which they reside would receive under the policies and procedures established by the county. Mileage expense to and from a supervisor meeting should be handled under the same guidelines as those for governmental officials in the county.

While the salary per diem compensation is very limited, for most supervisors the main reward is the satisfaction of making a valuable contribution to the present and future conditions of the soil, water and related natural resources of the district, state, and nation.

Supervisors are to comply with all Federal, state, and local tax guidelines. For example, paid supervisor per diem and commuting mileage to Board Meetings is subject to all federal, state, and local withholding/reporting tax requirements.

## **Sec. 8 Officer Responsibilities**

### **Officers**

District law requires that the supervisors designate a chairman (IC 14-32-4-14) and further states (IC 14-32-4-20) that the supervisors may delegate powers and duties that they deem proper to: (1) the chairman; (2) any number of supervisors; (3) any number of agents or employees.

### **Duties of the Chair**

1. Leads all district meetings in accordance with State policy and the district's locally accepted practices.
2. Calls the meeting to order at the appointed time and assures that a quorum is present before determining any matter. (IC 14-32-4-16)
3. Presides over all district meetings.
4. Announces the business before the board in its proper order.

5. Preserves order and decorum.
6. When necessary, authenticates by his/her signature all acts, orders, and proceedings of the district.
7. Calls for a vote on all properly presented motions. (The chair cannot make a motion.)
8. Votes when necessary to break a tie.
9. Receives input from other board members, administrative/executive director, office staff, NRCS District Conservationist, ISDA-DSC District Support Specialist, Purdue CES Extension Educator and others to assemble topics for the agenda for each meeting.
10. Acts as, or appoints, a liaison between the board and the SWCD employees.

#### **Duties of the Vice-Chair**

1. Is familiar with the duties of the chairperson.
2. Presides as chairperson in his/her absence.

#### **Duties of the Secretary**

1. Is familiar with the duties of the chairperson.
2. Presides as chairperson in absence of vice-chairperson and chairperson. (Note: A quorum, a majority of the five directors, must be present. (IC 14-32-4-16)
3. Supervises all written reports.
4. Supervises the recording of the minutes of all District meetings and is accountable for their accuracy. Assures that meeting notices and agenda postings are accomplished according to the Open Door Law
5. Supervises the preparation of the Annual Report. Attends planning meeting for annual report with the administrator/executive director and reviews the final draft before publication.

#### **Duties of the Treasurer**

1. Supervises the paying of all bills of the district.

2. Verifies the district's financial standing.
3. Deposits the district funds in compliance with State Board of Accounts Guidelines
4. Presents treasurer's report at board meetings.
5. Signs and verifies all bank statements.

Chapter 6, entitled "Receiving, Managing and Disbursing Funds", provides more detailed information that will be beneficial to the treasurer.

### **Sec. 9 Tools to Assist Districts**

Several training/educational tools have been developed to assist districts and these are located on SharePoint at: <https://myshare.in.gov/isda/swcd> under District Tools. Some of the tools relate to marketing, supervisor recruitment, specific training modules, etc.

### **Sec. 10 Policy Development**

Districts should follow the policies of state and local governments, as well as develop internal policies which address the needs of the district. Individual districts may wish to put into place specific policies which improve the efficiency of the district. Potential policies include:

- Supervisors: term limits, attendance requirements, committee requirements, duties of each officer (e.g. Chair)
- Associate Supervisors: expectations, attendance
- Employees: dress code, conduct code, monthly activity reporting, training, nepotism
- Structure of the District: chain of command, delegation of activities to Executive Director/Administrator, committees
- Finances: petty cash, credit card , spending authorizations
- Business: internal control, travel, ethics
- Equipment rental
- Communications: position on key issues, public comment and media
- Committees

Policies which are developed should be written, agreed upon by a quorum of the board and should become a record in the minutes of the SWCD. Policies should be reviewed periodically (e.g. annually) and should be updated as needed to remain effective. It is recommended that a copy of all the policies be kept in a separate notebook, file folder or policy handbook for easy reference.

## **Sec. 11 Landfill Reviews**

The district law requires districts to inspect every active landfill located within the boundaries of the district at least two times annually. (14-32-5-4)

In counties containing landfills it is important to assure that sufficient vegetated cover be present and maintained in good condition over the life of the landfill. In addition, runoff water from landfills must be monitored for proper containment to assure that adequate measures are in place to eliminate off site sedimentation.

Districts should coordinate these inspections with the appropriate IDEM regional inspector. For specific contact information refer to:  
<http://www.in.gov/idem/landquality/2492.htm> .