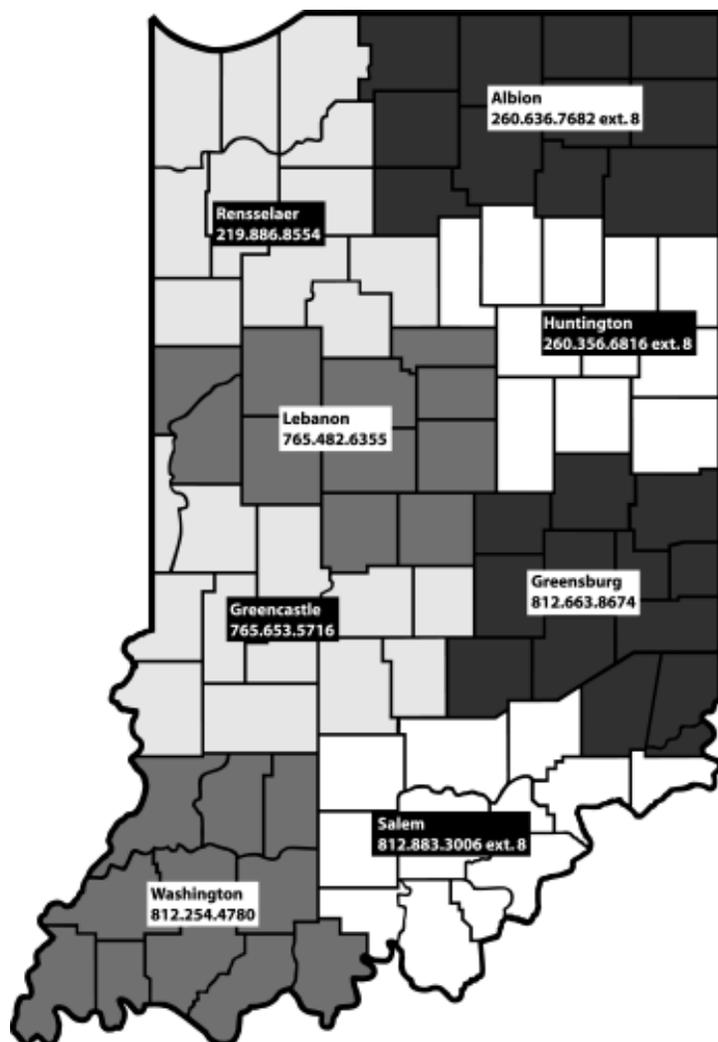


## Technical Service Teams



# Serving Your Local Community as an Indiana Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisor

*A reference for Elected/Appointed  
Supervisors on the roles,  
responsibilities, and relationships  
of SWCDs*

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# Table of Contents

<b>Soil and Water Conservation Districts .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	
<b>Governance</b>	
<b>Funding</b>	
<b>Powers</b>	
<b>SWCD Supervisor .....</b>	<b>3-5</b>
<b>Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Compensation</b>	
<b>Key Supporting Agencies .....</b>	<b>6-9</b>
<b>County Government</b>	
<b>State Soil Conservation Board</b>	
<b>Indiana State Department of Agriculture -</b>	
<b>Division of Soil Conservation</b>	
<b>USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service</b>	
<b>Purdue Cooperative Extension Service</b>	
<b>Affiliated Organizations .....</b>	<b>9-10</b>
<b>Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts</b>	
<b>National Association of Conservation Districts</b>	

## **Affiliated Agencies**

### *National Association of Conservation Districts*

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents some 3,000 districts throughout the nation, including the 92 in Indiana. NACD is a policy-forming body and national voice of districts to the U.S. Congress and federal agencies. Each district can help guide national conservation policy efforts through their respective state association to NACD. Policies are determined by state associations working together in regions. Indiana is in the North Central Region, along with Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin.

## **Key Supporting Agencies**

### ***Purdue University Cooperative Extension Program***

Through cooperative working agreements with each SWCD, the Extension Service assists with educational efforts such as workshops and seminars, tours, field days, demonstration sites, etc., designed to further district conservation program goals. Primary sources of this assistance are the local Agriculture and Natural Resources Educators and campus based specialists.

## **Affiliated Agencies**

### ***Indiana Association of SWCDs***

The Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Inc. (IASWCD) is a 501-C-3, not-for-profit organization dedicated to serving the 92 individual districts. The IASWCD gives districts a unified voice in making requests to the state legislature and to state and federal agencies. It also facilitates the exchange of ideas among districts on administration needs, program accomplishments, and experiences. Because it is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization, the association can lobby the state legislature for increased funding, program authority and other legislation that helps conserve and enhance our state's soil and water and related natural resources on behalf of districts and the conservation partnership.

The association's membership consists of the 92 soil and water conservation districts across the state. The association officially represents Indiana districts in working with the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), which serves over 3,000 districts nationwide.

The IASWCD has approximately 6 meetings to conduct business throughout the year, plus an annual meeting to elect officers and consider resolutions. Its board of directors consists of four Association officers (e.g., president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer), elected regional representatives, and the immediate past president. Ex officio members include the Executive Director, Indiana District Employee Association (IDEA) president, and a NACD Board Representative for the North Central Region.

The IASWCD committees consist of Executive, Legislative, Governance, Finance, and the Natural Resources Policy Advisory group which plan, coordinate, and implement various portions of the Association's program. Special ad hoc committees may also be appointed by the president as the need arises.

## **Conservation Districts**

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of a soil and water conservation district is to:

1. Provide information about soil, water and related natural resource conservation
2. Identify and prioritize local soil and water resource concerns
3. Connect land users to sources of educational, technical and financial assistance, to implement conservation practices and technologies
4. Offer all interested people in a county the opportunity to work for natural resource conservation and development.

### ***Governance***

In Indiana, a Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a governmental sub-division of state government. There are 92 Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the state with each district aligned with its respective county boundaries. The official governing body of a district consists of five supervisors. Three are elected (one each year for a three-year term) at an annual meeting of land occupiers held in January, February, or March. Two are appointed (also for staggered three-year terms) by the State Soil Conservation Board based upon recommendations of the leadership in the district. Thus, selection of all five supervisors is based on input from the local people they serve. As public officials responsible to the district and state, supervisors are required to subscribe to a standard public oath of office.

### ***Funding***

The district's programs are funded through a variety of sources including county and state appropriations, grants, revenue generating programs (ie; tree sales, conservation equipment rental) — private donations, and, to a limited extent, reimbursable agreements for services. (ie; NRCS Contribution Agreements)

### ***Powers***

As a governmental subdivision of the State of Indiana and a public body (corporate and politic), Soil and Water Conservation Districts exercise public powers. A summary of the powers given to SWCDs and their supervisors to help them serve as the local hub for putting people with questions and concerns about soil, water and related natural resources issues in touch with people with answers and solutions are outlined in the Soil and Water Conservation District Act (Indiana Code 14-32).

## **SWCD Supervisors**

### ***Responsibilities***

The most important roles of the five supervisors are to evaluate local soil and water conservation needs and opportunities, set priorities, and provide for the development of programs to meet those prioritized needs within the district. The following are examples of some of the basic responsibilities of SWCD supervisors that support the key roles mentioned above:

1. Know the land and water conditions in the district and the practices required to conserve and develop those resources.
2. Meet officially at least monthly to conduct district business.
3. Participate in planning and executing program activities of the district.
4. Invite appropriate local leaders to meet with you to discuss particular conservation problems and opportunities.
5. Understand the powers, authorities, and responsibilities placed upon you by the Soil and Water Conservation District Act.
6. Keep in close contact with the State Soil Conservation Board and the Indiana Department of Agriculture (ISDA), Division of Soil Conservation on administrative matters.
7. Update the district's Business Plan (also referred to as the Long-Range Plan) approximately every five years to provide a current roadmap for conserving and enhancing soil, water and related natural resources of the district (*discussed in the SWCD Operations Manual*).
8. Develop and carry out an Annual Action Plan (Annual Plan of Work) based on statements of intent in the Business Plan (Long-Range Plan).
9. Establish policies and priorities for implementing the district's program.
10. Hire and provide supervision for district employees.
11. Arrange for the help and cooperation needed in the district, enlisting assistance from whatever sources are available.

## **Key Supporting Agencies**

### ***Indiana State Department of Agriculture***

### ***Division of Soil Conservation***

(c) develop both Business Plans (Long-Range Plans) and Annual Action Plans (Annual Plan of Work). The division conducts training at regional sites around the state, as well as on-site with individual districts to help support these program functions. It also helps plan and conduct training at the Annual Conference of SWCDs, as well as assists districts with conducting their annual meetings, supervisor elections and appointments, and annual financial reports.

Other key responsibilities of the Division, as outlined in the Indiana Soil and Water Conservation District Act, include:

1. Performing all administrative duties required by the rules of the State Soil Conservation Board.
2. Assisting districts and other cooperating agencies in the planning, coordination, and training for adult and youth natural resource conservation education and information programs and activities.
3. Providing professional soil and water conservation technical assistance to districts.
4. Administering the Clean Water Indiana Program in cooperation with conservation districts.

### ***USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service***

NRCS provides personnel, equipment, and office space to help districts attain the objectives set forth in their Business Plans (Long-Range Plans). NRCS also provides consultative, technical and financial assistance to individuals through federally funded conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Security Program (CSP) established under the last several Farm Bills. Districts help establish the priorities for providing assistance to land users under these federal programs.

NRCS field offices are located in USDA Service Centers and are staffed by NRCS District Conservationists. These centers are located in most Indiana counties. Additional technical assistance is provided upon request by Regional Technical Teams consisting of engineers, planners and technicians. All NRCS staff is administratively responsible to the NRCS State Conservationist through the Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations.

## **Key Supporting Agencies**

### ***State Soil Conservation Board***

The State Soil Conservation Board was established by IC 14-32 and sets policy governing the activities of districts and the Division of Soil Conservation. It consists of nine members - six of whom are freeholders appointed by the Governor (four with agricultural interests and two with non-agricultural interests). The other three are ex-officio members representing the Director of the State Department of Agriculture, Director of IDNR and the Director of Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service. Duties of the State Board include:

1. Arranging for assistance to districts to carry out their programs.
2. Keeping supervisors informed of the activities and experiences of all other districts.
3. Coordinating the diverse programs of districts through advice and consultation.
4. Securing cooperation from other state and federal agencies in the work of districts.
5. Overseeing the administration of the Clean Water Indiana Program, and other soil conservation and water quality protection programs of the ISDA, Division of Soil Conservation through the SWCDs in cooperation with other state and federal agencies, public and private land users, organizations, companies and groups.
6. Developing a statewide regulatory program to be implemented after all reasonable voluntary approaches to erosion and sediment reduction have been exhausted.

### ***Indiana State Department of Agriculture Division of Soil Conservation***

As directed by the Indiana District Law, the Division of Soil Conservation directly assists districts under the direction of the State Soil Conservation Board. It provides assistance in district program planning, coordination and training for district supervisors and staff. It does so, in part, by helping them: (a) conduct district programs in accordance with state law, (b) seek ways to secure the administrative, managerial, educational, and technical resources needed to carry out those programs, and (*continued page 8*)

## **SWCD Supervisors Responsibilities**

12. Enter into memoranda of understanding or working agreements with county, state, and federal agencies as appropriate and necessary to carry out the district's conservation and resource development program.
13. Coordinate district programs with other entities engaged in natural resource planning and development, such as the plan commission, county surveyor, private conservation organizations, and various units of state government.
14. Manage all district-owned funds, facilities, and equipment.
15. Participate in appropriate multi-district activities such as: watershed project planning and implementation; river basin projects; resource conservation and development efforts; the Clean Water Indiana Program; and multi-county conservation education events, such as field days, seminars and workshops.
16. Prepare an annual report of accomplishments, and conduct an annual meeting as required by the District Act.
17. Cooperate with the U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the ISDA, Division of Soil Conservation as "technical partners" of the district in helping land users plan and apply needed conservation practices.
18. Cooperate with the ISDA, Division of Soil Conservation in administrating the Clean Water Indiana program.
19. Cooperate with the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and other SWCDs in promoting the Clean Water Indiana initiative.
20. Cooperate with the DNR-Division of Fish and Wildlife in implementing the Lake and River Enhancement Program (LARE). This includes pursuing and administering LARE Watershed Land Treatment Grants that are available to districts for watershed projects aimed at controlling and/or reducing sediment and associated nutrients in public-access lakes and rivers.

## **SWCD Supervisors**

### ***Responsibilities***

21. Cooperate with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) in carrying out the districts role of reviewing erosion and sediment control plans for construction sites in compliance with 327 IAC 15-5 (“Rule 5”). Also, cooperate with IDEM in the biannual landfill erosion/sedimentation inspections as part of the implementation of 327 IAC 15-5 (“Rule 5”).

### ***Compensation***

The Indiana Soil and Water Conservation District Act 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 that amount is \$35.00.

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.

While the 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.

## **Key Supporting Agencies**

### ***County Government***

Although soil and water conservation districts in Indiana are based on county lines, the only legal relationship between a district and a county is the provision that a district employee is considered to be an employee of the county in which the employee works, except as provided in subsection (c) which states: 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. IC 14-32-4-18 2 (b) and IC 14-32-4-18 2 (c).

County government, however, can be very helpful to the district in many other ways. Among them: (a) providing group health care and other employee fringe benefits; (b) appropriating funds for district programs and operations; (c) co-sponsoring watershed projects and assuming responsibility for their operation and maintenance; (d) providing use of county-owned equipment; (e) practicing good conservation on all county-owned land; and (f) co-sponsoring Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) projects.

A district, in turn, can help the county, particularly its plan commission; surveyor; drainage board; and highway, health, and parks departments. Some technical services that the district can provide to them include: (a) soil survey interpretations, (b) consultation on soil problems requiring specific structures, (c) consultation on highway and urban development-related erosion/sediment problems, (d) drainage consultation and recommendations, (e) assistance on flooding and water supply problems and (f) protection of prime farmland. Supervisors or designated staff of the district may serve on technical review or advisory committees for the plan commission or serve on other county resource committees.

A starting point of establishing good district-county relations is to invite interested citizens and public officials to see conservation work being done and to ask for their assistance. District supervisors also should be familiar with the conservation-related responsibilities of county and municipal officials and build working relationships by helping them carry out those responsibilities.