Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Soil and Water Conservation in Georgia

Mission and Vision

Georgia 40 Soil and Water Conservation Districts are led by 370 elected and appointed District Supervisors. Along with Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission state staff, these local community leaders work in voluntary cooperation with private landowners to encourage the conservation of the state’s natural resources that are the basis of economic growth and prosperity. Aided by the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, this effort ensures productive lands and healthy ecosystems.

Healthy Soil and Clean Water Sustain Your Life

Agronomic Water Meter program includes installation, inspection, and maintenance of meters on agricultural irrigation systems to obtain data for policy makers so they can make the best decisions about water policy.

Mobile Irrigation Lab assists farmers with in-field irrigation tests to improve the water efficiency of their ag water irrigation systems.

Soil Erosion and Certification program provides certification of individuals involved in urban land-disturbing activities, and the Urban Program assists districts with the review and approval of urban land development plans to protect water resources.

Flood Control Watershed Dams program protects lives and properties through the operation and maintenance of 357 dams in Georgia.

Education of Adults and Youth through Field Days, the Natural Resources Conservation Workshop and Envirothon teaches best management practices and an appreciation of the state’s natural resources.

Water Quality Improvement Projects improve the quality of water in targeted areas by the installation of best management practices in agricultural operations to reduce nonpoint source pollution and reduce the costs to downstream municipal water filtration systems.

Partners in Conservation

Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission
http://gaswcc.georgia.gov

Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors
http://gaswcc.georgia.gov/soil-water-conservation-fact-sheet

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
http://www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov

National Association of Conservation Districts
http://www.nacdnet.org

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Challenge to Conservation: Fully Fund the Agricultural Act of 2014

Enacting the Agricultural Act of 2014 was a major victory coming after the expiration of the 2008 Farm Bill, but conservation programs contained in the bill can only be implemented if Congress fully funds the activities required by the legislation.

Under the new law, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) become the major programs. These programs need to be fully funded at levels that reflect the intent of Congress.

Conservation programs included in the new law can improve the nation’s natural resources, but conservation programs contained in the bill can only be implemented if Congress fully funds the activities required by the legislation. Congress should support this rule change and not permit EPA to ignore the will and intent of Congress.

The Conservation Reserve Program declining by 3.5 million acres by fiscal year 2018, it is important in the law. With the maximum number of acres allowed under the Conservation Reserve Program declining by 3.5 million acres by fiscal year 2018, it is important that CSP be funded to reach the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) operating with a reduced annual enrollment cap of 10 million new acres, it is important that CSP be funded to reach its full level of $1.65 billion in FY 2015, as mandated by the new law. The Water-Viated Rehabilitation Program is funded through the 2014 Farm Bill.

Challenge to Conservation: EPA Regulations

Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts have proved that voluntary cooperation by private landowners has been the most effective approach in conserving and improving water resources in Georgia. Mandatory compliance can be counterproductive.

Defining EPA’s jurisdiction over water. A proposed rule by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) arbitrarily defines the scope of waters protected under the Clean Water Act. If EPA implements this rule, it will allow regulatory control over virtually all waters, which ignores the intent of Congress in the original legislation. Congress should oppose this rule change and not permit EPA to ignore the will and intent of Congress.

Setting Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs). EPA is asking authority in the Chesapeake Bay region to set specific water quality standards for industry sectors, as well as setting timelines to meet these detailed allocations. If successful, EPA will have the authority to set their own mandates on industry stakeholders rather than work with local stakeholders within a state. Setting mandates removes the incentive to work with local stakeholders in improving water quality in locations such as Lake Lanier in Georgia. This contradicts the experience of conservation districts in obtaining voluntary compliance to improve water quality standards.

Challenge to Conservation: Deepening the Port of Savannah

The success of Georgia’s soil and water conservation programs depends on the economic health of the state’s agricultural producers, and many of these producers depend on the Port of Savannah to reach foreign markets. In fact, agricultural exports are the reason Savannah is one of the few ports in the nation with more exports than imports.

The state is ready to make the investment needed to deepen the harbor to accommodate larger vessels, but the federal government has not provided the appropriate authorization or construction funding for the $652 million project and won’t let Georgia jumpstart the project by using its own money.

Investing in the state’s water resources makes sense both for the state as well as for the nation, as the port represents $22.4 billion in state GDP (7.8% of Georgia’s total GDP) and contributes $4.5 billion in federal taxes annually.

The federal roadblock should be removed. Congress needs to provide the federal construction funds needed for the deepening, and either reauthorize the project through the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) which contains billions of dollars for dam, harbor, and river improvements nationwide; or allow the state of Georgia’s appropriated construction funds to be used to deepen the port while awaiting approval of WRDA.

Challenge to Conservation: GMO Labeling

One of the challenges of the 21st Century is to feed more people using existing water supplies on an ever-shrinking amount of farm land, as urban development squeeze out agricultural land. One solution is to produce crops bred with specific characteristics that require less water for growth and can produce on smaller acreage. Farmers have been selectively breeding livestock and plant material for centuries to improve their yields, and genetically modifying animals and plants is merely an extension of this centuries-old practice.

The FDA has found no basis for concluding that bioengineered foods differ from other foods in any meaningful or uniform way.

Many localities are considering or implementing new rules affecting foods made with genetically modified ingredients rather than adhering to one national standard. In a global market, a 50-state patchwork of laws and regulations addressing genetically modified food ingredients continues customers and does nothing to improve yields or food safety.

Congress should pass legislation that allows companies to voluntarily choose to label their products for the absence or presence of GMO food ingredients. By passing this federal legislation, farmers will have a consistent national regulation with genetically modified food ingredients confuses customers and does nothing to improve yields or food safety.

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