

LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERT

Illinois 2025 Budget Slashes SWCD Funding Again

For the second consecutive year, the Illinois General Assembly and Governor Pritzker have significantly cut funding for conservation districts. The proposed FY26 state budget includes a **\$4 million reduction**—nearly a **50% cut** to operating funds for Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). These funds are essential for implementing conservation practices, educating the public on soil health, water quality, and more, as well as providing technical expertise in the field.

Illinois has **97 Soil and Water Conservation Districts** employing over **200 field office staff**, all of whom play a **critical role** in managing and conserving land and water resources. This drastic funding cut threatens ongoing and future conservation projects.

The Impact of These Cuts

A budget deficit of this magnitude will directly impact staffing levels at SWCD offices, leading to **fewer resources** to assist farmers in managing their land responsibly. Fewer on-the-ground conservation experts mean:

- **Increased soil erosion**
- **More runoff and water pollution in Illinois waterways**
- **Reduced habitat for wildlife and pollinators**

Since their establishment in 1937, Illinois SWCDs have been instrumental in assisting landowners, farmers, and communities with **natural resource management**. Their work spans crucial areas such as **soil health, water quality, flood prevention, and habitat conservation**. By working alongside federal and state agencies, SWCD employees install conservation practices funded through various grants. However, these **funding cuts put their future in jeopardy**.

What Can You Do?

SWCD directors, staff, and stakeholders must continue to raise awareness and advocate for **restoring these essential funds**. Illinois must uphold its commitment to:

- **Implementing the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS)**
- **Supporting grassroots conservation efforts**
- **Protecting the state's vital natural resources**

Several **key legislative efforts** need public support:

- **House Bill 1653 and Senate Bill 1689** aim to restore the Fiscal Year 2025 appropriation for the Department of Agriculture's **Partners for Conservation Fund** from **\$4.5 million back to \$8.5 million**—the level previously allocated to SWCDs.
- **Senate Bill 2387**, introduced by Senator David Koehler, proposes a **new funding source** through the **Agricultural Land Conservation Act**. This bill would require buyers or lessees of agricultural land **converted for solar farms, wind farms, industrial parks, or other non-agricultural uses** to pay a farmland conversion fee. The funds generated could help offset conservation funding losses.

The Future of Soil & Water Conservation is at Risk

The unpredictability of SWCD funding means **we must act now**. Conservation efforts ensure future generations have access to healthy land, clean water, and sustainable resources. Without agricultural land, **we have nothing**.

Take action today:

- **Support the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy**
- **Advocate for conservation funding**
- **Protect Illinois' natural resources**

Help us continue this vital work—**SUPPORT SWCDs!**