



NORTH DAKOTA ASSOCIATION OF
SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
3310 University Drive ~ Bismarck, ND 58504
(701) 223-8518

Honorable Chairman Monson and Members of the House Appropriations Committee
Support for SB 2020 – March 11th, 2025

My name is Rhonda Kelsch and I serve as the Executive Director to the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts (NDASCD). A grass roots organization that represents the 54 Soil Conservation Districts in North Dakota. The objectives of the Association, is to further the widespread application of sound and practical soil and water conservation practices on North Dakota farms and ranches by promoting the welfare of conservation districts and the people therein.

NDASCD supports SB 2020. We strongly encourage the committee to consider funding the full request for the ND State Soil Conservation Committee. The funding request falls within the SBARE program initiatives category 2 defined as operational support to the North Dakota State Soil Conservation Committee.

The ND Soil Conservation Districts work in partnership with various local, state, and federal partners delivering, educating, and promoting sound conservation practices. Soil Conservation Districts are established within the ND Century Code 4.1-20. Within this chapter it provides for the conservation of the soil and soil resources of this state and for the control and prevention of soil erosion, and to preserve the state's natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, assist in maintaining the navigability of rivers, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base, protect public lands, protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of this state.

The funding structure for the North Dakota Soil Conservation Districts varies by county, services provided and staff capacity. Soil Conservation Districts have the ability to levy up to 2.5 mills yearly from property tax revenues in their counties. We do have several SCD Offices where the mill levy requested is a deficient for their operational needs. We are actively watching any proposed changes impacting property taxes during this legislative session. The funding request to the North Dakota State Soil Conservation Committee doesn't meet the full request of financial demand and any reduction would have a substantial effect in the delivery of conservation programs and education. The county offices are also being affected by the reductions that have taken place within USDA – Natural Resource Conservation Service with staff reductions. This will add additional workloads to county offices already impacted with short staff and budget restraints.

Each SCD operates within their availability of operational funds, while some counties struggle to provide an adequate wage along with a benefit package to retain employees. The funds received through the legislative process are used for staff capacity linked to conservation deliverables and to provide administrative office support. District programs and services continue to evolve as the needs of customers change. We are working to address training needs through a statewide district employee training program and are adding resources including technical specialists at NDASCD to provide assistance and outreach on Urban Conservation practices. These efforts are being made to work towards better employee retention. This coupled with the continued state appropriated funds will help create a stronger locally led conservation delivery system.

The Soil Conservation Districts in North Dakota delivered these key activities in 2024 from the 54 counties reporting. I would like to highlight a few of these accomplishments.

- Administration Management for 27,000 hours
- Livestock Pipeline Watering Facilities for a total of 105,790 feet
- Grassland and Prairie Management Seeding on 12,449 acres
- School Education presented to K-12 students with 18,861 attendees
- Education and Agriculture sponsored tours and workshops with 9,321 adult participants

We would appreciate your full support in SB 2020 to the North Dakota State Soil Conservation Committee for our county Soil Conservation Districts to continue the agricultural legacy in the great state of North Dakota.

Rhonda Kelsch

North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts – Executive Director

3310 University Drive

Bismarck, ND 58504

(701) 321-0627

Rhonda@LincolnOakes.com