

# NDSU NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Testimony of the NDSU Extension Service  
Interim Agriculture Committee  
December 19, 2017

Chairman Johnson and members of the Interim Agriculture Committee, I am Jim Gray, West District Director with the NDSU Extension Service. I am here today to discuss the role that the NDSU Extension Service plays in relation to the State Soil Conservation Committee, our duties and responsibilities, and the resources that we allocate in support of the Committee.

The NDSU Extension Service is the link between the public and our land-grant university, NDSU. Extension employees extend education from the University by providing science-based educational programming to help North Dakotans improve their lives, livelihoods, and communities. NDSU Extension is a trusted source of accurate and unbiased information that isn't always available from other sources. However, as you will gather through this testimony, NDSU Extension is largely relegated to a support role when it comes to the State Soil Conservation Committee.

The State Soil Conservation Committee is a stand-alone agency, whose duties are described in North Dakota Century Code (N.D.C.C.) 4.1-20-05. The primary duty of the Committee is to distribute state funding for local soil conservation efforts to local Soil Conservation Districts (SCDs) through the District Assistance Program. The Committee is also tasked with offering assistance to SCD supervisors as they carry out their soil conservation programs.

The duties of the NDSU Extension Service relating to the State Soil Conservation Committee are described in N.D.C.C. 4.1-20.06, which reads:

**“4.1-20-06. Extension service assistance to state soil conservation committee - Duties.** The North Dakota state university extension service shall assist the committee in performing the committee's duties, within the limits of legislative appropriation. The director shall instruct extension agents to cooperate in the delivery of information and services to the districts.”

In its support role, Extension assists the Committee chair in organizing Committee meetings, publishing open meeting notices, and keeping meeting minutes. Since the State Soil Committee's budget is administered through the Extension Service, we also manage the Committee's operating budget, reimbursing members for their Committee duties, and maintain a website for the Committee.

### Managing District Assistance Program Funds

One of the principle responsibilities of the Committee is distributing funds to local SCDs through the District Assistance Program. The legislature appropriates state funds each session to help defray costs of local SCDs for soil conservation activities. This past session, the legislature

allocated \$1,091,520 to the program. These funds are used to cover salaries of SCDs employees who plan and design local soil conservation projects. The Extension Service assists the State Soil Conservation Committee in developing a ranking process to distribute those dollars to the 54 Soil Conservation Districts in the state. Once the Committee approves the allocations, Extension notifies each district of their funding allocation, along with directions for how SCDs can submit billings to reimburse them for salary expenditures. We process those billings and provide reimbursements to local districts through the NDSU Agriculture Budget Office. We track the District Assistance Program funds throughout the biennium to ensure that they are not overspent and provide periodic updates to the Committee and SCDs. You will see the District Assistance Program allocations and the reimbursement payments made to date for the current biennium in Table 1.

#### *Maintaining Records Regarding SCD Supervisors and Oaths of Office*

Each of the 54 local SCDs is led by a five-member board of supervisors who have a six-year term. State law requires the State Soil Conservation Committee to maintain a record of the appointed supervisors in each District. Again, since the Committee does not have its own staff, the NDSU Extension Service sends an annual reminder to each SCD to ensure that they file a list of their appointed SCD supervisors each year, along with an oath of office for each supervisor. Extension maintains these records on behalf of the Committee.

#### *SCD Annual Financial Reports*

As political subdivisions, SCDs are required to submit annual financial reports to the Office of the State Auditor in lieu of a state audit. The annual financial report, formatted as a multi-sheet Excel table available on the State Auditor's website, includes a balance sheet, a statement of revenues and expenses, a bank reconciliation, a schedule of investments, accounts receivable, and accounts payable. Extension contacts each SCD in November of each year to remind them of the reporting requirement, and we work with them to ensure that their reports are completed and submitted to the State Auditor on time.

#### *Compiling Annual Sand and Gravel Surface Mining Report*

Another responsibility of the State Soil Conservation Committee is to compile a report each year of sand and gravel surface mining activities in the state as described in N.D.C.C. 38-16. The statute requires the report to include the name and address of each person conducting a surface mining sand and gravel operation, the location of the mining, beginning and ending dates, the minerals mined, the depth and acreage of the mining, estimated volume of minerals mined, and other information. Since the Committee does not have its own staff, the Extension Service gathers the surface mining information and compiles the report. The final report is then sent to each Soil Conservation District.

I would ask that the legislature take a critical look at the requirement for annual sand and gravel surface mining reporting. Since there is no specific licensing requirements for sand and gravel mining in the state, there is no database of these sorts of operations and no easy way for Extension or the Committee to compile the data. As a result, we are tasked with mailing the reporting paperwork to a list of sand and gravel operations that we have in our files. We have no way of knowing whether that list of operations is complete or up to date. And, since the reporting is voluntary, the quality of the reported data is suspect at best. Last, while the sand and

gravel mining report is mailed to local SCDs, I have not heard from any districts that it affects local soil conservation projects. This appears to be a program that requires significant expenditure of state resources, with limited (if any) returns on that investment.

If the legislature feels that compiling sand and gravel surface mining information is important, I would urge you to review the statute and look for ways to improve the quality of the data, perhaps by creating a licensing requirement so that we can more easily contact mining operations or by creating a mandate or incentive to ensure high levels of response. I would also urge you to think about whether it would make sense to move the sand and gravel mining reporting responsibilities to the Public Service Commission or another state agency that routinely works with mining activities and has a stronger relationship with the mining industry.

#### Professional Support for SCD Supervisors

Soil Conservation Districts are unique political subdivisions that are normally formed at the county level, but are part of state government. From time to time, SCD supervisors have questions related to personnel management, purchasing, or similar topics. Since most SCDs lack a human resources employee, supervisors have historically contacted the NDSU Extension Service staff who have served in the State Committee support role with these types of questions. Extension has fielded questions from SCD supervisors regarding hiring and termination of SCD employees, performance management, drug testing, leave and overtime pay, retirement, filling vacancies on SCD boards, inventory and sales of equipment, state lodging rates and per diems, insurance needs, allegations of hostile work environment, and similar questions.

Feedback from SCD supervisors indicate that this type of professional support is extremely valuable since they lack human resources personnel and professional support at the local level. In fact, it would be safe to say that many SCD supervisors would view this type of professional support to be the most important role that Extension plays related to soil conservation districts. However, although the Century Code describes Extension's duties to support the State Committee, there is no language that explicitly describes Extension's duties related to professional support for SCD supervisors.

Note that Extension administration does have expertise in human resources, personnel management, and similar topics. In fact, I as a district director offer this sort of support to our local Extension agents. However, since Extension has received significant state budget cuts, we have been forced to take a critical look at how we allocate our scarce resources. Unfortunately, this has meant allocating resources away from professional support for SCD supervisors because this is not explicitly described as an Extension responsibility, even though we recognize that supervisors have recurring needs in this area. We may be interested in allocating resources back to professional support for SCD supervisors if and when more resources become available.

#### Extension Resources in Support of State Soil Conservation Committee

At one time, the State Soil Conservation Committee was as stand-alone state agency with its own budget. However, the legislature moved the Committee's budget under the NDSU Extension Service budget in 1997. At that time, the Committee had its own staff, consisting of a director, a business manager, a program coordinator, and a support staff. Significant budget efficiencies were achieved when this transition occurred.

For the last several years and up to the present biennium, Extension had allocated 1.6 FTEs in support of the SSCC. This included one full-time program specialist, 0.4 FTE of an administrative assistant, and 0.2 FTE of an Extension agent. The total cost of salaries and fringe benefits for these 1.6 FTEs last biennium was \$257,623.

Due to recent state budget reductions, NDSU Extension took a critical look at how we can best support the SSCC, while being mindful of Extension's educational mission. Extension was approached by the North Dakota Department of Health in 2016 and asked if we could develop a leadership development program for watershed coordinators, watershed advisory groups, and others working on water-related issues. Extension and the Department of Health received a federal grant for the project that we are calling the North Dakota Watershed Leadership Academy. We will use those grant dollars to partially cover the salary and benefits of the full-time program specialist who was previously 100 percent state-funded to support the SSCC. Therefore, for the current biennium, state funds are being used to fund a total of 1.2 FTEs in support of the SSCC, with 0.6 FTE of the program specialist, 0.4 FTE of an administrative assistant, and 0.2 FTE of an Extension agent. The total estimated cost of salaries and fringe benefits for these 1.2 FTEs is \$182,752 per biennium.

A brochure describing the North Dakota Watershed Leadership Development Academy is included with this testimony. Training will be offered in all five soil conservation districts in 2018, and SCD supervisors and staff are encouraged to participate. Since topics will include human resources, enhancing facilitation skills, managing conflict, and other issues, it is our hope that building local SCD capacity in these areas will offer more local control and reduce reliance on state agencies for professional support. This grant and the Academy will terminate on June 30, 2019.

Table 2 includes information on operating expenses related to the State Committee. As you will see, operating expenses for the Committee itself have varied from \$7,562 to \$14,046 per biennium since 2007. These expenses include such things as reimbursing Committee members for their travel to Committee meetings and other events in which they represent the Committee, renting meeting facilities, and related expenses. Most of the operating expenses have been incurred by NDSU Extension as we assist and support the Committee. Operating expenses incurred by Extension include travel costs for our employees, office rent, computer equipment, IT support, office supplies, and similar operating expenses. You will also see that we have incurred minimal operating expenses this biennium due to the Committee not meeting until recently. And, as describe earlier, Extension has allocated resources away from professional support for local SCDs due to budget and staffing constraints.

### Summary

The NDSU Extension Service has had a relationship with the State Soil Conservation Committee since the Committee's budget was moved under Extension twenty years ago. The extent of that relationship has varied based on Extension resources and personnel assigned to supporting the Committee.

A confounding factor in this relationship is the fact that while the State Committee is tasked with the duties described in N.D.C.C. 4.1-20 and 38-16, the Committee lacks staff and its own appropriation. As a result, much of the work of the Committee has been done by NDSU Extension in its “assistance” role, even though those roles may fall outside of Extension’s core mission of delivering educational programming. Both the Committee and Extension would benefit from having a more clear understanding of the legislature’s intent as to what responsibilities fall to the Committee and what responsibilities fall to Extension.

Further, the language found in N.D.C.C. 4.1-20-06 clearly states that Extension is tasked with assisting the Committee “...within the limits of legislative appropriation.” We take this to mean that we will allocate resources to assist the Committee only insofar as those resources are available. Extension suffered a 14 percent reduction in state funding this past legislative session, and we have 20 FTEs that are currently unfilled due to budget constraints. With this in mind, we will continue to evaluate how we allocate available resources not only to support the State Soil Conservation Committee, but also to our educational programming efforts, which are our core Extension mission. This may mean that many of the tasks that Extension has done in support of the State Committee may need to fall back to the Committee itself.

Chairman Johnson, I thank you for the opportunity to discuss the role that the NDSU Extension Service plays relative to the State Soil Conservation Committee. I would be happy to answer any questions.

**Table 1. Soil Conservation District Assistance Program Allocations  
for 2017-2019 Biennium (as of December 13, 2017)**

District	Total Allocation	Expenditures	Remaining Balance
Adams	\$ 22,250.00	\$ 11,010.48	\$ 11,239.52
Barnes	\$ 18,500.00	\$ 4,327.36	\$ 14,172.64
Bowman-Slope	\$ 22,250.00	\$ 10,230.70	\$ 12,019.30
Burke	\$ 24,250.00		\$ 24,250.00
Cavalier	\$ 24,250.00	\$ 7,945.57	\$ 16,304.43
Cedar SCD	\$ 33,000.00	\$ 9,714.33	\$ 23,285.67
Divide	\$ 18,500.00	\$ 8,249.94	\$ 10,250.06
Dunn	\$ 20,250.00		\$ 20,250.00
Eddy	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 9,779.71	\$ 20,220.29
Emmons	\$ 28,250.00	\$ 6,300.83	\$ 21,949.17
Foster	\$ 17,500.00	\$ 11,818.08	\$ 5,681.92
Golden Valley	\$ 33,000.00	\$ 9,894.18	\$ 23,105.82
Grant	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 15,241.17	\$ 14,758.83
Griggs	\$ 17,500.00	\$ 7,928.20	\$ 9,571.80
James River	\$ 18,500.00	\$ 7,640.43	\$ 10,859.57
Kidder	\$ 24,250.00	\$ 4,258.63	\$ 19,991.37
LaMoure	\$ 20,250.00	\$ 4,538.22	\$ 15,711.78
Logan	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 5,733.40	\$ 24,266.60
McIntosh	\$ 18,500.00		\$ 18,500.00
McKenzie	\$ 16,500.00		\$ 16,500.00
Mercer	\$ 14,500.00		\$ 14,500.00
Morton	\$ 14,500.00		\$ 14,500.00
Mountrail	\$ 14,500.00		\$ 14,500.00
Mouse River (Bottineau)	\$ 20,250.00	\$ 9,635.22	\$ 10,614.78
Nelson	\$ 18,500.00	\$ 10,241.83	\$ 8,258.17
North Central (Benson)	\$ 26,250.00	\$ 3,289.39	\$ 22,960.61
North McHenry	\$ 14,500.00	\$ 8,269.29	\$ 6,230.71
Oliver	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 7,688.89	\$ 22,311.11
Pembina	\$ 26,250.00	\$ 12,149.50	\$ 14,100.50
Pierce	\$ 20,250.00	\$ 2,404.90	\$ 17,845.10
Ramsey	\$ 20,250.00	\$ 7,049.87	\$ 13,200.13
Ransom	\$ 18,500.00	\$ 13,657.71	\$ 4,842.29
Renville	\$ 24,250.00	\$ 9,106.08	\$ 15,143.92
Richland	\$ 16,500.00		\$ 16,500.00
Rolette	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 12,274.18	\$ 17,725.82
Sheridan	\$ 28,250.00	\$ 9,532.87	\$ 18,717.13
Slope-Hettinger	\$ 17,500.00	\$ 6,467.25	\$ 11,032.75
South McHenry	\$ 18,500.00	\$ 5,320.31	\$ 13,179.69

South McLean	\$ 20,250.00	\$ 20,250.00	\$ -
Stark-Billings	\$ 13,250.00		\$ 13,250.00
Steele	\$ 17,500.00	\$ 5,256.01	\$ 12,243.99
Stutsman	\$ 14,500.00	\$ 9,958.98	\$ 4,541.02
Towner	\$ 33,000.00	\$ 9,384.08	\$ 23,615.92
Trail	\$ 15,500.00		\$ 15,500.00
Turtle Mountain (Bottineau)	\$ 20,250.00	\$ 18,691.76	\$ 1,558.24
Walsh	\$ 30,000.00		\$ 30,000.00
Ward	\$ 11,260.00	\$ 5,981.87	\$ 5,278.13
Wells	\$ 22,250.00		\$ 22,250.00
West McLean	\$ 15,500.00	\$ 9,819.08	\$ 5,680.92
Wild Rice	\$ 26,250.00		\$ 26,250.00
Williams	\$ 11,260.00		\$ 11,260.00
<hr/>			
Total:	\$ 1,091,520.00	\$ 331,040.30	\$ 760,479.70

**Table 2. Operating expenses related to the State Soil Conservation Committee, 2007 to present.**

<b>Biennium</b>	<b>SSCC Operating Expenses<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>NDSU Extension Operating Expenses<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>
2017-2019	\$0	\$4,043	\$4,043
2015-2017	\$7,562	\$68,369	\$75,931
2013-2015	\$10,814	\$70,125	\$80,939
2011-2013	\$14,046	\$67,823	\$81,869
2009-2011	\$11,235	\$45,938	\$57,173
2007-2009	\$9,882	\$45,669	\$55,551

<sup>a</sup>Includes operating expenses incurred by SSCC members.

<sup>b</sup>Includes expenses incurred by NDSU Extension in support of the SSCC.





## Who should attend?

Soil Conservation District boards and employees, NRCS staff, Extension agents, County Water Resource board members, natural resource management students and others interested in water and conservation efforts.


## Why attend?

To have a better understanding of watershed and conservation efforts as well as the leadership skills necessary to protect water quality for future generations.



All participants will receive a manual with additional resources on each of the topic areas covered.

For more information on the North Dakota Watershed Leadership Academy or to sign up for a training, contact Bruce Schmidt, NDSU Extension program coordinator, at [bruce.schmidt@ndsu.edu](mailto:bruce.schmidt@ndsu.edu) or 701-328-9715.



County commissions, North Dakota State University and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. NDSU does not discriminate in its programs and activities on the basis of age, color, gender expression/identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, participation in lawful off-campus activity, physical or mental disability, pregnancy, public assistance status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, spousal relationship to current employee, or veteran status, as applicable. Direct inquiries to Vice Provost for Title IX/ADA Coordinator, Old Main 201, NDSU Main Campus, 701-231-7708, [ndsu.eoaa@ndsu.edu](mailto:ndsu.eoaa@ndsu.edu). This publication will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities upon request, 701-231-7881.



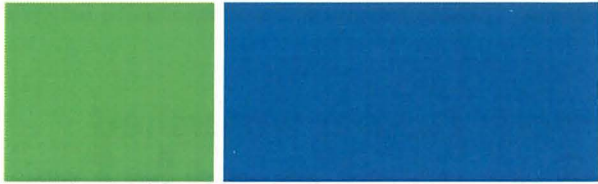
# North Dakota Watershed Leadership ACADEMY

A locally delivered educational program to build participant's skills and enhance their ability to lead watershed, conservation and community-based projects that will protect water quality for future generations.



**NDSU** EXTENSION  
SERVICE

EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE >> CHANGING LIVES



## How much time does the program take?

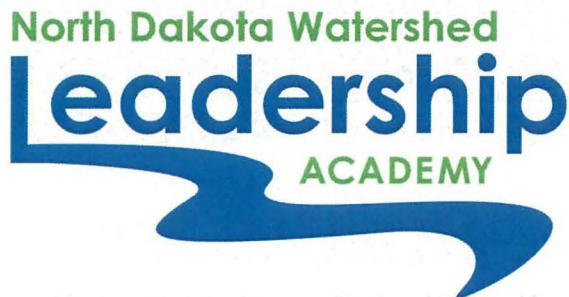
The program will include 14 hours of face-to-face educational programming in two separate sessions during a two-month period. Each training session will be from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

## Where will the North Dakota Watershed Leadership Academy be held?

The program will be offered in 2018 in each of the five North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts.

## How much does it cost?

The cost of the two-day program is \$55, which will cover food and any incidentals. A grant will cover all program materials for participants. Your local board or organization may be able to assist with registration costs.



## What will be covered during the training?

Topic areas include:

- Basics of watershed hydrology
- Managing nutrients in watersheds
- Impacts of human activities on watersheds
- Roles and responsibilities in conservation, stewardship, watershed management
- Recognizing the components of an effective meeting
- Navigating conflict successfully
- Group facilitation and the role of citizens in watershed planning
- Project planning, management and monitoring at a watershed scale
- Managing human resources
- Recognizing current water and conservation issues in the state



## Registration

Two-day sessions will be provided in Bismarck, Jamestown, Devils Lake, Minot and Dickinson, ND in 2018. The first two-day training session will be provided in Bismarck on January 17 and 31, 2018 at the ND Game and Fish Office, 100 N Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck from 9 AM to 4 PM.

Registration online (if using credit card) at: <https://bitly.com.np/8qdP4>

Registration can also be sent via mail (if sending a check) by completing the registration form below and sending to: Vicki Miller, 2718 Gateway Ave., Suite 304, Bismarck, ND 58503.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Organization represented \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**All registrations are due by January 10, 2018.**

