

**Presentation to the
House Agriculture Committee on
Operations and Activities Conducted by
Conservation Districts**

Good Morning. My name is Brenda Shambaugh and I am the Executive Director for the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts. Our association represents all 66 conservation districts across Pennsylvania. Thank you for allowing us to explain how and why conservation districts were created and their value to our residents.

Pennsylvania's conservation districts were established in 1945 when the General Assembly passed Act 217, the Soil Conservation District Act. Today there is a conservation district established in every Pennsylvania county except Philadelphia. In general, districts work with partners such as government agencies, private organizations and businesses offering technical assistance and educational guidance to landowners and managers, local governments, teachers, students and people from every walk of life. They can provide information and help on matters such as reducing soil erosion, protecting water quality, cleaning up acid mine drainage, or preventing hazardous situations such as flooding.

Act 217 also created the State Conservation Commission under the concurrent authority of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Environmental Protection. The Commission provides oversight of the districts and directs the implementation of conservation programs.

Initially conservation districts were established during the dust bowl to promote the value of conserving soil and water to farmers but today, district expertise has expanded to almost every area of natural resource conservation. As mentioned in the video, each district is led by a volunteer board of directors consisting of farmers, public members, and a member of county government. The county district board identifies local conservation needs, decides which programs and services to offer, and develops a strategic plan so the district can assist with their county natural resource needs.

Conservation districts receive funding from various entities and each district's funding sources are unique depending on the programs they administer in their county. Thanks to you as members of the PA General Assembly, every district receives state funding through the annual Commonwealth budget process and the state impact fee. Also, many districts enter into delegated agreements with state agencies to administer programs in their county. Some districts receive county funding or in-kind services as well. Additionally, most districts apply for grants to further their mission and to provide funding for projects in their county. We are very grateful for the



state funding provided through the state budget process and all the other funding sources to provide the necessary financial support allowing conservation districts to assist in preserving and protecting land and water resources.

I would like to turn the microphone over to my colleagues to discuss several programs administered by conservation districts, namely the interaction between conservation districts and the agricultural community, stormwater concerns, and an overview of the dirt and gravel/low volume road program in PA.

