

CONSERVATION DISTRICTS ARE

Conserving Pennsylvania's Natural Resources

Conservation districts support a 13% increase in the FY 2026-2027 conservation district line-items to keep up with rising costs and retain valuable technical staff.

Pennsylvania's Conservation Districts Support:



AGRICULTURE

by providing funding and technical assistance to farmers



STREAM RESTORATION

by managing property along streams to reduce erosion



STORMWATER CONTROL

by implementing projects to help prevent flooding



EDUCATION

by providing environmental education programs in their communities



DIRT & GRAVEL ROADS

by helping local municipalities improve unpaved and low-volume roads

Funding Districts Brings Results

Since FY 2022-23, through the Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) alone, district technicians reached 115,000 contacts and worked with local farmers and landowners to contract over \$150 Million in agricultural improvements across Pennsylvania. The line-items make this work possible by helping districts fund, train, and maintain qualified technical staff.



Pennsylvania's conservation districts are your link to local conservation.

Pennsylvania's conservation districts thank the general assembly for maintaining the district line-items in the PA Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Agriculture budgets at \$10.185 million since FY 2022-2023. We support a 13% increase in FY 2026-2027 to help keep up with rising costs and retain valuable technical staff.

Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to implement natural resource management programs. Each district is led by a board of directors comprised of local leaders who know their communities, understand local agricultural and natural resource issues, and know how to work with their community to resolve these issues.

The budget line-items fund district staff who implement key programs on Pennsylvania's behalf, including agricultural conservation programs and the Chapter 102 Erosion and Sedimentation Control Program that reduce sediment and nutrients entering our waterways and help meet the Commonwealth's goals for the Chesapeake Bay.

The cost to hire, train, and retain qualified staff is a substantial piece of the cost to maintain these programs, and districts have found low staff retention to be an ongoing challenge. In 2023, PACD hired an outside firm to conduct a salary study that found district salaries lagging the marketplace, particularly for technical staff, who have high market value and turnover. The FY 2022-2023 increase allowed districts to increase funding for these positions and improve employee retention.

Over 70% of districts used the funding to support or retain existing staff by increasing wages and benefits, allowing at least one district to offer health insurance to its employees for the first time. About 40% also invested in workforce growth, adding more than 25 full-time-equivalent positions to increase capacity in education and outreach, invasive species management, watershed improvement, erosion and sedimentation control, and agriculture.

Employment costs continue to rise, with Pennsylvania health insurers requesting an average increase of 13% in the small business market for the 2026 plan year alone. With this in mind, the conservation districts respectfully request an increase of 13%, or 3.25% per year over four years, to maintain momentum and keep up with the cost to carry these programs.

On behalf of the Commonwealth's 66 conservation districts, PACD sincerely thanks the Administration and House and Senate members for providing the funds needed to preserve and protect our Commonwealth's natural resources through the state budgetary process.

