



Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

Representing Local Conservation Districts

**The Kansas Association of Conservation Districts’
EDUCATING
CONSERVATION
DISTRICT
FUNDING SOURCES**

Compiled by the
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CONSERVATION DISTRICT FUNDING AND ITS FUNDING SOURCE

Conservation districts need adequate and reliable funding to ensure the resource conservation concerns of their constituencies are being met. To obtain adequate and reliable funding, conservation districts must educate their funding sources on the value of the conservation district's programs and services. Before a conservation district can educate its funding sources, the district must first know who its funding sources are.

A funding source is any entity that originates or directs the flow of resources to a conservation district.

Funding can be divided into two types, direct and indirect. Direct funding is any monies available to the district to use to carry out its programs and accomplish its goals. Indirect funding is any other resource available to a conservation district to use that would save the district monetarily. Examples of direct funding are Aid to Conservation Districts, Water Resources Cost Share Program, grants, sales of services or products, and donations. Examples of indirect funding are in kind services, training and any other materials or non-monetary resources provided by cooperating agencies and volunteers.

Ultimately, all direct public funding originates with the tax paying people of Kansas or the people of each respective conservation district. These funds are raised through income tax, property tax and/or user fees. State public monies are then allocated to various government agencies through the state legislature and governor of Kansas. The monies are then used to fund cost share programs, aid to conservation districts, grants for educational programs and special projects.

Public funds originating from a county tax are allocated through the local county government. In some cases, public funding may be raised and allocated through a municipal government.

All direct state funding of conservation districts in Kansas is through the Division of Conservation (DOC), Kansas Department of Agriculture.

All monies received by a conservation district are considered public funding and can only be used by the conservation district to implement the Kansas Conservation District Act, or District Law.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT A

“Here are the sediment control guidelines we talked about at our last meeting, Commissioner.”

“Thank you. Anything else we should know about?”

“We’re working on a grant for a wellhead protection program that should keep the county in compliance with the state’s environmental code. We’ll probably ask for a \$3,000 increase at budget time to cover the manpower needed to implement the program.”

“The county budget is kind of tight this year. We’re encouraging each agency to hold the line.”

“We’ll send you the dollar figures on how much the state grant will cover. It’s a pretty good chunk of change and it’s going to save the county in the long run.”

“We’ll see what we can do.”

CONSERVATION DISTRICT B

“Commissioner, we want a \$3,000 increase in our budget.”

“What for?”

“For the Conservation District.”

“What’s a Conservation District?”

**WHICH
CONSERVATION DISTRICT
IS
MORE LIKELY
TO GET A FUNDING INCREASE?**

EDUCATING CONSERVATION DISTRICT FUNDING SOURCES

A Conservation District will not receive adequate funding if it has not educated its funding sources on the value of the district's programs and services.

A Conservation District can not sustain adequate funding if it does not continually educate its funding sources on the value of the district's programs and services.

A Conservation District must continually educate its funding sources to ensure adequate funding of the district's programs and services.

When we speak of conservation education, many of us immediately think of conservation education for kindergarten through grade 12. This is a very important part of laying a basic foundation of conservation knowledge and understanding. And, it is only a beginning of a lifetime of continuing conservation education: Education of the general public and specific resource users on the value of sound conservation practices, and education of our funding sources.

“CONSERVATION DISTRICTS SHOULD BE ADEQUATELY FUNDED.”

Why? What makes a Conservation District so important that it should receive public monies? What services and programs do they provide? Why should a Conservation District get a share of limited funds instead of some other deserving agency? What is a Conservation District? **“WHY SHOULD A CONSERVATION DISTRICT EDUCATE ITS FUNDING SOURCES?”**

Before a Conservation District can educate its funding sources, it must first educate itself. The district Board of Supervisors and staff must be familiar with the programs and services of the conservation district. They must be familiar with how a district works so it can deliver its programs and services. The board and staff must be familiar with the current issues that affect conservation so they can adapt its programs and services to fit the needs of the community. A Conservation District must be familiar with its programs and services so it can justify its existence to its funding sources.

“WHO ARE THE CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S FUNDING SOURCES?”

Conservation districts receive resources and services from many entities. Most important to Kansas conservation districts are the taxpaying people of Kansas, the state legislature, the governor, and the local county commissions. Conservation education directed at these and other sources is a continuous, ongoing effort.

“HOW DOES A CONSERVATION DISTRICT EDUCATE ITS FUNDING SOURCES?”

All positive conservation activities that raise the visibility of the Conservation District in the community are ways to educate the general public, as well as specific funding sources, on the value of conservation. When every Conservation District conducts a comprehensive conservation education program in their respective districts, it is doing its part in educating all the people of Kansas on the importance of adequate conservation funding.

Conservation education is not a one shot deal. It requires an ongoing continuous effort on the part of a conservation district to make it a success. Conservation Districts do not like effort. Effort takes time and resources away from the district. Effort requires more than just going to the monthly board meeting and approving the local cost-share program. Without a commitment to conservation education, there will be no local cost-share program. Or conservation district.

Conservation education of a district's funding sources is no different than conservation education for students. The same principles apply:

- A. Tailor the information to fit the targeted group.
- B. Use the most effective teaching aids to maximize the impact and retention of the information.

No, we're not saying we should have a poster contest for the legislators and county commissioners. But, it might not be a bad idea!

WHAT CAN WE DO TO EDUCATE OUR FUNDING SOURCES?

Personal Contact - There is no substitute for one-to-one personal contact with a funding source. By personally speaking to a funding source, you are putting a face on your conservation district and showing them you are a real person working for solutions and not some faceless agency perpetuating its existence.

Meetings - Meetings are an opportunity to make presentations in a controlled environment. They can be general information for targeted audiences or specific information for general audiences. Annual meetings are good opportunities to educate the patrons of the district on what the district is doing. Inviting funding sources to meetings is a must. If they come, great. If they don't, by inviting them, you are keeping the district's name before them.

Correspondence - Writing letters to funding sources is a good way to bring specific information to them. Remember, be brief. Don't ramble on about stuff they may not care about.

Phone Calls - Phone calls work best as follow-ups to correspondence. They are an offshoot of one-to-one personal contact, but no substitute.

Mailings - This is not to be confused with correspondence, which tends to be more formal and personal. Mailings can be mass mailing of information to targeted groups or newsletters.

Newsletters - Most conservation districts have a newsletter which is mailed to patrons and targeted groups within the district. A newsletter is a good way to present the ongoing activities of the district. Special newsletters with specific information of interest for a target group can be used in addition to the district's usual newsletter. An example would be a newsletter featuring the conservation district's education programs and activities for teachers, schools, and libraries. Remember, a newsletter, like any mailing, only works if somebody reads it.

Tours/Field Days - Tours and field days are ways to show the general public or target groups specific conservation problems, activities, or projects in progress. A tour showing funding sources basic conservation practices gives them a better understanding of the value of conservation. Tours of problem areas in a district should always include stops at places where the conservation district has helped correct or, really stress this to your funding sources, PREVENT a problem from occurring.

Did you see that?! Prevent a problem from occurring. **AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE! PREVENTION IS WAY BIG TIME CHEAPER THAN REMEDIATION!!** Every conservation district knows this. Conservation districts work best when they are used to prevent problems from occurring. Conservation districts can correct problems. Correcting problems requires more time, resources, and effort; time, resources, and effort that could be used to prevent twenty or more times the cost of one lousy problem. This is what needs to be conveyed to our funding sources. Conservation districts prevent problems. Conservation districts save money.

CONSERVATION DISTRICTS SAVE TAXPAYERS MONEY.

An adequately funded conservation district can work to save the most taxpayer dollars through education on the use of sound conservation practices and implementation of the preventive conservation programs available through the district.

Media – Using news articles and news stories is a good way to reach large numbers of people. By inviting members of the media to tours and field days, there is a good chance a news story will be aired or published that will show the conservation district in a positive light. There is no guarantee that the story will be one that the district can say is totally accurate. This is why a conservation district must take the necessary time to educate the media on conservation to make the story more accurate. Press packets explaining the event are a start. Individual representatives of the district need to be available to the media to answer questions and give more personal attention to the media during the event. Many reporters have no knowledge of what conservation districts do. They are there to come up with a story and meet a deadline. Anything that a conservation district can do to help them do that will be reflected in the accuracy of the story, and in how positive the story is for the district.

Press Releases – This is another avenue into the media. A press release has no guarantee it will be printed due to space restrictions or whims of editors. If it is printed, it will tell the story the conservation district wants told because it will have been written by the conservation district. Remember, the briefer the better. All things printed in newspapers are subject to editing.

TV and Radio Appearances – Conservation districts may sometimes have access to television and radio stations in their area. Send them a press release or notice of an upcoming conservation event and you may have an opportunity to appear on a local program and publicize the upcoming event. These types of opportunities will usually always show the district in a positive light. It also increases the likelihood of a follow-up story by that station. Be prepared to provide brief information of the event to the interviewer so he/she can ask appropriate questions.

Advertising – This is a way to get the name of the conservation district before large numbers of people. Advertising can be as elaborate as slick produced public service announcements or billboard ads to as simple as pencils and refrigerator magnets with the districts name and phone number. Advertising a conservation district is a little different than advertising for products like booze, cigarettes, soda pop, cars, or tennis shoes. The services of a conservation district are not something that most people feel they need to have to live their lives in a certain style. By keeping the conservation district name before the public, you will be increasing awareness in the community of an agency that can assist with resource conservation. When individuals have a need for resource conservation assistance, instead of wondering who to call, they will think of the local conservation district.

Booths and Displays – Whether static displays or manned, booths are ways to showcase district activities to target groups. Manned booths provide an opportunity for the district to interact one-to-one with individuals that are interested in the information displayed. Districts can display at their own sponsored events, or it may be more cost effective and easier to display at an existing event such as trade shows, farm shows, home remodeling or homebuilder shows, flower and garden shows, local fairs, Earth Day events, and other environmental activities.

Kansas conservation districts have a unique opportunity to showcase their programs and activities to the Kansas Legislature at the KACD sponsored Legislative Conservation Fair. Individual districts and supervisors can bring their displays to the Kansas Statehouse and contact their legislators and talk about conservation.

Reports – Reports to specific funding sources are ways to inform them of the ongoing progress of the conservation district. Regular reports should be followed up with periodic meetings with the funding source to summarize activities and answer questions.

Involving Funding Sources in District Activities – Ask your county commissioners to help judge your speech contest. Ask a local media contact to help judge a poster contest. The district might get a story out of it. Ask

people from other agencies that your district works with to participate in some of your activities. This helps them understand your programs and develops trust and good working relationships.

FLY THE COLORS!

Next to one-to-one personal contact, conservation district participation in the activities of others is the most effective way to educate others of the district's programs and services. By attending and showing an interest in the activities of others, a district demonstrates that it is there to serve the community. The opportunity may arise to provide input that will advance the cause of the conservation district in a way that is compatible with the goals of that group. Join civic groups. As members of these groups, you have a right to give input to their organization. The conservation district may be asked to put on programs for the benefit of the organization's members. Offer to present a program if they don't ask.

By helping these groups, a conservation district is developing partners and allies. Partners to work with the conservation district for sound resource management, and partners to support the conservation district's efforts to fund sound resource management. Partners to support the conservation district.

WHO WILL HELP CONSERVATION DISTRICTS EDUCATE THEIR FUNDING SOURCES?

The short answer: No one. A conservation district must step forward and make a commitment to a comprehensive conservation education program directed at everyone within its district. It is the conservation district's responsibility to do this, no one else. No one will speak for the conservation district if the conservation district will not speak for itself.

The not-so-short answer: A lot of people can help: individuals, public and private agencies, civic organizations, special interest groups. Anyone that has received the benefit of a conservation district's education can be in a position to help the district obtain funding. But, they can't and won't help if they do not know what a conservation district is and what a conservation district does.

When each conservation district conducts a comprehensive conservation education program in their district, they are doing their part to raise the awareness of conservation and its benefits. This helps create a climate more favorable for funding of conservation on a county, state, and national level.

SO, WHAT DO WE DO?

Hunt for the money. Constantly seek funding sources. Go after the money. Ask for it. Apply for it. Tell them why you want it. Use every available education technique to reach the conservation district's goals. Show them the benefit they will receive by funding you. **SHOW THEM WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM!** Don't wait until you need more funding to educate them.

Justifying the conservation district's existence to a funding source for a second check begins the moment they cut the first check.

Or you can do nothing. And pray your lottery ticket wins before the funding dries up and there is no conservation district.

AFTERWORD

The following is a personal statement by Roy Rodgers, past supervisor, Coffey County Conservation District, based on the “Educating Funding Sources” discussion at the 1999 Area V Fall Meeting. Most of this has been covered in the preceding text; however, it has a little different perspective. The underlined text is phrases and terms used by the Area V districts in the discussion.

“Ultimately all taxpayers need to be educated as to the problems and potential solutions that we encounter in conservation and the environment.

“But before credible education of the taxpayer takes place, it is necessary to educate the lawmakers and staff of all concerned entities as to those problems and potential solutions in conservation and environment. Therefore:

1. recognize the problem
2. develop the laws and regulations
3. educate and advise taxpayers of the plans and cost
4. establish funding mechanisms

“Sometimes it is impossible to separate the legal and funding aspects of a problem because the problem may be funding of something already in effect by law or regulation, especially the changes needed.

“This, therefore, requires a step by step process involving several entities that must be educated and “brought up to speed” in order to advance to the next level. This is time consuming, but necessary. Even in dealing with local funding sources like our County Commissioner, it is first necessary to educate the District Board of Supervisors before they are able or capable of educating the Commissioners as to the needs of the District.

“Therefore, it is not surprising that usually the taxpayer is the last to be educated. For this very reason, we must always be promoting and explaining our programs and positions on possible solutions to our conservation and environmental programs. We must become more inventive in our presentations and adaptive to changes around us, especially as to the perception of the public on conservation issues.”