

Conservation District History

During the 1930's, the Dust Bowl made the need to conserve natural resources, particularly soil, very clear. Agencies ranging from Land Grant Universities to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration researched and implemented conservation practices throughout the nation. Eventually, the Soil Conservation Service, now named Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was created under the Soil Conservation Act of 1935, to develop and implement soil erosion control programs.

Sometimes agencies working with conservation ended up competing with each other. Local leadership was needed to coordinate their efforts and tie them into local conditions and priorities. Because of this, the President developed a model Conservation District Law, for consideration by state governments.

In March 1941, the State Legislature passed an enabling act which established conservation districts in Wyoming. Conservation districts were to direct programs protecting local renewable natural resources. Wyoming now has 34 conservation districts in 23 counties.

Timeline

February 1937: President urges all states to pass legislation authorizing a soil conservation program.

March 1937: First Soil Conservation District law enacted in United States (Arkansas).

February 1941: Washakie County Senator Earl Bower introduces a bill establishing the Wyoming Soil Conservation Act.

March 1941: Wyoming governor signs the Conservation District legislation.

December 1941: First Soil Conservation Districts in Wyoming are certified.

December 1945: Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) organized, Herman Kreuger elected Chairman.

October 1954: First time funds allocated for district supervisors' mileage expenses.

December 1954: WACD votes to incorporate.

April 1957: State Soil Conservation Committee provided their first allocation.

November 1957: WACD President presents governor with school textbook, *Wise Use of Wyoming's Resources*.

July 1959: Wyoming Soil Conservation Districts name changes to Wyoming Soil & Water Conservation Districts.

July 1967: Conservation districts receive first state appropriation from state legislature.

February 1971: Legislation changes name Wyoming Soil & Water Conservation Committee to State Conservation Commission (WSWCC to WSCC).

November 1982: Local conservation district hires first full-time employee. (Bridger Valley Conservation District).

July 1987: Legislation abolished State Conservation Commission. Duties transferred to Wyoming Board of Agriculture. Other legislation passed to allow conservation districts to request "up to one mill" on local ballots and to request a capital improvement tax of up to 1 percent for special projects.

December 1987: Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts hires first Executive Director.

November 1988: Fourteen conservation districts request mill levies. Eight districts successful.

November 1990: Twenty districts requested mill levies, seven districts are successful, fifteen now funded.

October 1992: Twenty districts have voter supported mill levies. Four other districts receive substantial appropriations from county commissioners.

October 1995: SCS changes it's name to Natural Resources Conservation Service.

November 1996: Twenty-one districts have voter supported mill levies. Five other districts receive appropriations from county commissions.

November 1996: Districts adopted the "Watershed Strategic Plan" to assist them in taking the lead in watershed efforts.

March 1998: State Legislature funds districts to develop local water quality programs.

November 2001: Twenty-two districts have voter supported mill levies. Six other districts receive appropriations from county commissioners.