

MISSISSIPPI SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION
5 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR THE FISCAL YEARS 2025-2029

MISSISSIPPI SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

1. Comprehensive Mission Statement:

The mission of the Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission is to effectively guide and promote the conservation, development, protection and proper utilization of the soil, water and related resources of the state.

2. Philosophy

The Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission takes the lead in guiding local landowners in promoting and demonstrating the conservation, protection and utilization of soil, water and other natural resources of the state. The Commission's philosophy is to cooperate with local landowners statewide, at the highest level of respect and professionalism, to implement Best Management Practices for the conservation, protection, health and safety of the state's natural resources.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

Statewide Goal #1.: To ensure that current and future generations have access to the state's abundant natural resources through protection, conservation and wise development of those resources.

Relevant Benchmarks #1.:

- Measures of before and after soil loss for best management practices implemented
- Tons of soil saved per acre per year
- Estimates of population educated and served through district meetings, demonstrations, and field days

4. Overview of the Agency 5-Year Strategic Plan:

The MS Soil & Water Conservation Commission has three main programs that are the central focus for the agency within the next five years. These are the **District Assistance Program**, the **Water Quality Program**, and the **Surface Mining program**.

The **District Assistance Program** provides on-site assistance to the 82 soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) by way of the agency's Environmental/Natural Resources Specialists staff. This assistance includes financial and budgeting assistance, help with information/education programs, personnel issues, and training the district employees to keep and maintain commissioner elections and appointments up to date. Within the next five years, the Commission will ask for continued funding for the general fund positions that provide district assistance throughout the state, as well as funding for the travel and office expenses for those positions. As employees become more seasoned and take on additional duties within the agency, the Commission will ask for increases in General Fund Appropriations which would allow for the promotions of deserving employees through reallocations and/or reclassifications.

The main priority of the **Water Quality Program** is to educate landowners and operators statewide about water quality issues as they pertain to agricultural lands and make recommendations to best management practices or equipment to assist in the correction and prevention of soil erosion and improvement of water quality. Within the next five years, the Commission will continue to maintain and ask for increases for this program, which is considered to be a Special Fund appropriated program. The funds will maintain the current salaries for the appropriated employees and award these employees with promotions in pay and position through reclassifications and education benchmarks. The agency will also use the increased funding to pay for office supplies, vehicle maintenance, fuel and any miscellaneous supplies or expenditures that are related to the Water Quality Program. The agency will continue to submit proposals for Section 319 Clean Water Act funds to carry out demonstration projects/programs to benefit water quality. The submissions will also include funding for cost sharing assistance to landowners to install best management practices on their land to prevent soil erosion. Using the ArcGIS software application, the Commission will gather database information on these best management practices installed on all lands in the state. Funding will be used for information/education programs to target all audiences in the state to the necessity of conserving and protecting the quality and quantity of our water resources.

The Mississippi Watershed Repair and Rehabilitation Cost Share Program is a component of the Water Quality Program. Since the issuance of bond money in FY 2015 and FY 2020, the Commission has made this component another priority focus of funding. This program provides assistance in the repair, renovation, and rehabilitation of qualifying and aging watershed structures in the state. These structures are catalogued in a progressively working database using the ArcGIS software application. With funding in place, site inspections and the completion of engineering and planning stages are increasing the availability of construction proposals and work. Over the next five years, the Commission plans to expend all funds on rehabilitation construction of qualifying structures and use the ArcGIS software to maintain the watershed database. The Commission will use the database as a successful testimony for the request of more local and state funding in order to match funding through federal programs for future projects.

The Surface Mine program, requires, by rules and regulations of the Mississippi Surface Mining Law, to review all surface mining applications and make recommendations to the reclamation portions of these applications in conjunction with the 82 soil and water conservation districts. Once reclamation has taken place, the Commission reviews and comments on all requests for bond releases. In the next five years, the Commission will continue to review, comment on, and recommend surface mining applications and bond release requests. However, with the increase in surface mining applications, the Commission and MS Department of Environmental Quality has made efforts to turn this program “paperless” by using scanned forms and emailing documentation and notifications. This will be an ongoing process within the next five years. With the increase in mining applications and bond release requests, the Commission field staff has had to make more site inspections. This program is a strictly appropriated with General Funds, which allows for the continuation of this program.

5. Agency's External/Internal Assessment

- (1) Management adheres to the agency's statutes and its mission to effectively maintain and improve all performance measures assigned to each program. A change in statute can cause the agency to redirect its mission and cause changes within the implementation of the programs.
- (2) All of the agency's programs are catered towards educating the public about soil erosion prevention and improving water quality. As changes are made throughout the state, the way land is used, by farmers or commercially, will affect the installation of best management practices as to the implementation of new practices to better improve water quality and prevent soil erosion. A change in land use can affect the District Assistance program in altering or completely changing presentations or field days used to educate landowners and operators.
- (3) Significant cuts in both General Fund Funds appropriations will significantly alter the effectiveness of the agency and its staff to provide services to the soil and water conservation districts, landowners, and operators.
- (4) The agency relies heavily on the ability of the field staff to travel to their assigned soil and water conservation districts to perform assistance with any or all of its three main programs. The agency has always strived to improve its performance measures within these programs, and the availability of General Fund and Special Fund appropriations will allow the staff to continue traveling to make personal contact with the public in order to further the mission of the agency.

The agency obtains funds from the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and utilizes those funds when budget restraints prohibit the use of authorized funds for all new or existing projects. The Commission has quarterly meetings in which actions are taken to determine how well its services are meeting the needs of Mississippians.

6. Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Measures by Program

Program 1: District Assistance Program

GOAL A: To give guidance and overall supervision to districts when assistance is requested, or acceptable. To offer any assistance as may be appropriate to the commissioners of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in carrying out their powers and programs. (Miss. Code Ann. § 69-27-13)

OBJECTIVE A.1. Improve the management of soil and water conservation districts within the administrative direction given to all districts to ensure soil and water conservation efforts at the local level function effectively.

Outcome: Percentage of local Soil and Water Conservation Districts trained and assisted that will allow them to effectively carryout a SWCD program.

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Natural Resources Specialists will provide onsite district assistance and training to Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners and employees. Such assistance and training will include budgeting, personnel, purchasing, information and educational activities and programs and duties of districts and commissioners.

Output: Number of information and educational activities conducted by districts and attended by agency staff (Conservation Carnivals and Field Days).

Output: Number of District meetings attended by MS Soil and Water Conservation Commission Staff.

Output: Number of District Commissioners and District employees served by training that staff provided.

Efficiency: Percentage of meetings planned versus attended.

Efficiency: Percentage of districts actually trained versus planned training.

GOAL B: Election of three commissioners for each district and appointment, qualifications, and tenure of commissioners. (Miss. Code Ann. § 69-27-13)

OBJECTIVE B.1. Provide Soil and Water Conservation Districts with Election assistance.

Outcome: Percentage of districts in compliance with elections and appointments rules as established by MS Soil and Water Conservation Commission.

B.1.1. STRATEGY: Maintain a database of elected and appointed commissioner expiration dates.

Output: Number of districts notified of expiration dates of terms.

B 1.2. STRATEGY: Provide information to Soil and Water Conservation Districts to assist them in conducting election and appointments on the local level.

Output: Number of notices of election letters to Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Output: Number of election dates set.

Output: Number of nominating notices.

Output: Number of nominating ELC 3 petitions.

Output: Number of elections held in Soil and Water Conservation District with all 5 beats represented.

Output: Number of elections approved by MS Soil and Water Conservation Board and results published.

Output: Number of appointment and reappointment forms received from Soil and Water Conservations Districts.

Efficiency: Ratio of number of districts who have received onsite election assistance versus planned.

Efficiency: Percentage of actual and appointed process completed terms expired.

Efficiency: Percentage of actual election and appointment process completed versus total terms expired.

GOAL C: To implement the Revolving Loan Fund equipment program as established in Section. (Miss. Code Ann. § 69-2-31 and § 69-27-33)

OBJECTIVE C.1. To provide Soil and Water Conservation Districts the opportunity to purchase equipment to be used for conservation and education purposes within their district as well as to be made available to landowners within the district.

Outcome: Percentage of districts participating in the Revolving Loan Fund.

C.1.1. STRATEGY: All 82 Districts will have the opportunity to purchase equipment to be used by landowners in their district through the Revolving Loan Fund. The MS Soil and Water Conservation Commission will inform districts of this program during commissioner meetings and district trainings.

Output: Number of districts assisted through Revolving Loan Fund.

Output: Number of No-till drills purchased.

Output: Number of Lime spreaders purchased.

Output: Number of sprayers purchased.

Efficiency: Percentage of districts that are assisted compared to the number of requests.

GOAL D: To implement a yearly Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Youth Camp and Envirothon Environmental Competition.

OBJECTIVE D.1. To conduct a Soil and Water Conservation education youth camp along with an annual Envirothon environmental competition to educate our youth in the conservation of our natural resources.

Outcome: Percentage of Soil and Water Conservation Districts represented by youth participation in youth camp and the Envirothon competitions.

D.1.1. STRATEGY: Provide information to Soil and Water Conservation Districts in a timely manner so they will have ample time to help recruit students to attend the conservation youth camp.

Output: Number of students that attend Youth Camp.

Output: Number of flyers distributed to districts.

D.1.2. STRATEGY Provide information and encouragement to Soil and Water Districts along with high school teachers across the state to improve participation in Envirothon. Provide training for teams across the state to improve their knowledge of natural resources.

Output: Number of teams that compete in Envirothon Competition.

Output: Number of flyers distributed.

Output: Number of area trainings conducted to assist teams in preparing for competitions.

Efficiency: Percentage of increase in youth camp participation from one year to the next.

Efficiency: Percentage of increase for Envirothon teams from one year to the next.

PROGRAM 2: WATER QUALITY PROGRAM

GOAL A: To cooperate with the Commission on Environmental Quality in addressing agricultural nonpoint source pollution. Subject to Section 49-17-13, Mississippi Code of 1972, the Commission on Environmental Quality and the MS Soil and Water Conservation Commission shall enter into a Memorandum of Agreement of which establishes the MS Soil and

Water Conservation Commission's role in addressing nonpoint source pollution. (Miss. Code Ann. § 69-27-13)

OBJECTIVE A.1. To manage the section 319 nonpoint source pollution funds granted to MS Soil and Water Conservation Commission from the Department of Environmental Quality to address nonpoint sources of pollution on agricultural lands within Mississippi.

Outcome: Percentage of agricultural landowners within selected watersheds that implement best management practices established by MSWCC cost share program.

A.1.1. STRATEGY: To educate landowners/operators about Best Management Practices that they can implement that will reduce the amount of nonpoint source pollution coming from agricultural lands.

Output: Number of field days and/or landowner meetings.

Output: Number of educational flyers distributed.

Efficiency: Number of participants in attendance versus number of flyers mailed out.

A.1.2. STRATEGY: To cost share with landowners/operators within the watershed for the installation of Best Management Practices that address agricultural nonpoint source pollution.

Output: Number of Grade Stabilization Structures installed.

Output: Number of acres of Pasture and Hay land planting installed.

Output: Number of feet of Fencing installed.

Output: Number of Tank/Troughs installed.

Output: Number of Water and sediment Control Basins installed.

Output: Number of acres on Nutrient Management installed.

Output: Number of feet of Stream Bank and Shoreline Protection installed.

Output: Number of Ponds installed.

Efficiency: Estimated cost of Grade Stabilization Structures installed.

Efficiency: Estimated cost of acres of Pasture and hay land Planting installed.

Efficiency: Estimated cost of feet of fencing installed.

Efficiency; Estimated cost of Tank/Troughs installed.

Efficiency: Estimated cost of Water and Sediment Control Basins installed.

Efficiency: Estimated cost of acres of Nutrient Management installed.

Efficiency: Estimated cost of feet of Stream Bank and Shoreline Protection installed.

Efficiency: Estimated cost of Ponds installed.

Goal B: To implement the Mississippi Watershed Repair and Rehabilitation Cost-share Program in conjunction with the Federal Small Watershed Program implemented by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

OBJECTIVE B.1. To provide for the operation and maintenance of PL-566 watershed structures within the state in the most efficient and safe manner possible.

Outcome: Percentage of watershed structures rehabilitated versus planned to meet high hazard criteria.

B.1.1 STRATEGY: To assist local drainage districts and Soil and Water Conservation Districts in meeting the local / state match required by the Small Watershed Program in the upgrade of high hazard watershed structures in Mississippi.

Output: Number of high hazard classified watershed structures that are rehabilitated to meet high hazard specifications.

Efficiency: Estimated cost of rehabilitations and repairs.

B.1.2. STRATEGY: Assist the local drainage districts and Soil and Water Conservation Districts with the video inspections of principal spillways of PL-566 watershed structures and dewatering of those structures in order for maintenance, repairs and rehabilitation to be performed.

Output: Number of video inspections performed and structures dewatered.

Efficiency: Number of video inspections and dewatering's completed compared to number of requests received to perform video inspections and dewatering.

Goal C: To implement a feral swine eradication demonstration and education program through the Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

OBJECTIVE C.1. To work with soil and water conservation districts in demonstrating proper and efficient techniques for trapping and disposing of feral swine in Mississippi.

Outcome: Percentage of soil and water conservation districts that implement local feral swine control programs after exposure to demonstrations and educational meetings on proper methods of control.

C.1.1 STRATEGY: To assist local Soil and Water Conservation Districts in conducting demonstrations and educational meetings on the proper techniques for eradicating feral swine in an efficient manner.

Output: Number of demonstrations and educational meetings conducted through the soil and water conservation districts.

Efficiency: Number of feral swine trapped versus the number of trap settings.

PROGRAM 3: SURFACE MINING PROGRAM

GOAL A: To act as a liaison between MS Department of Environmental Quality Office of Geology and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts in surface mining reclamation programs. (Miss. Code Ann. § 53-7-31)

OBJECTIVE A.1. Forward permit application, including reclamation plan, to the appropriate SWCD.

Outcome: Percentage of comments received on reclamation portion of surface mining permit application provided to MS Department of Environmental Quality Office of Geology.

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Natural Resources Specialist will contact the appropriate Soil and Water Conservation District to request comments be provided within a timely manner.

Output: Number of requests by Natural Resources Specialist for comments from local Soil and Water Conservation Districts on reclamation portion of applications.

Efficiency: Number of comments received on reclamation portion of permit application.

OBJECTIVE A.2. To receive bond releases from MS Department of Environmental Quality of Geology.

Outcome: Percentage of comments received on bond release applications provided to MS Department of Environmental Quality Office of Geology.

A.2.1. STRATEGY: Natural Resources Specialist will make contact with the local Soil and Water Conservation District to obtain a copy of bond release.

Output: Number of requests made by Natural Resources Specialist for bond release.

Efficiency: Number of local Soil and Water Conservation Districts that provide comments on surface mine sites.