



**OREGON  
DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE**

**Oregon Soil and Water  
Conservation District  
Guidebook**

*A Guide to Operations and Management*

**Chapter 1**

**History of Conservation Districts in  
Oregon**

Updated 08/2022

# INTRODUCTION

The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), Natural Resource Program Area (NRPA) has various responsibilities in the management of natural resource programs within the state of Oregon. Among these are the responsibilities to provide administrative oversight of the soil and water conservation districts as outlined in Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) 561.400. The Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Program, in the NRPA at ODA, is tasked with providing this oversight and other assistance to the conservation districts (See Chapter 9 for more on this relationship).

*The Oregon Soil and Water Conservation District Guidebook – A Guide to Operations and Management* (Guidebook), provides information and directions to assist conservation district directors, associate directors, directors emeritus, and employees to carry out the conservation district's statutory responsibilities. Every conservation district director and employee should have a working knowledge of the Guidebook's contents. A suggested strategy for conservation districts is to review portions of the Guidebook at each monthly board meeting. This will establish a routine under which conservation districts can review and discuss information relating to conservation district operations and management.

The Guidebook is divided into chapters, each of which focuses on a different aspect of conservation district operations. Resources, documents, and examples will also be made available for each chapter. Where "ODA" and "the Department" is used hereinafter means the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

**Except where noted as a legal requirement, no part of this Guidebook should be taken as required by ODA.** Contents of this Guidebook are only recommendations for the best management of your district.

Each chapter of the Guidebook will be available as a separate download on the ODA website and will be updated on a continual basis. Please check the ODA/SWCD website on a regular basis for the most recent update of each chapter.

<https://www.oregon.gov/oda/programs/NaturalResources/SWCD/Pages/Guidebook.aspx>

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## History of Conservation Districts in Oregon

The “Dust Bowl” brought to the nation’s attention the need to conserve soil and other natural resources. In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed the problems of soil erosion in the nation by shepherding the passage of the Soil Conservation Act, which established the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The SCS was charged with developing a program to conserve and enhance the nation’s soil and water resources. At first, it was assumed the federal government could manage the whole program. However, during the first two years, it became apparent local leadership was needed to coordinate efforts of conservation agencies and tie their programs to local conditions and priorities. The SCS needed the assistance of local farmers, ranchers, and other land managers to put together and operate an effective program. In 1937, President Roosevelt asked all state governors to promote legislation to allow the formation of soil conservation districts. During that same year, Congress developed model conservation district law for consideration by state governments. Thus began a partnership that exists today.

### 1935 - Present

In 1939, the Oregon Legislature passed legislation to establish conservation districts in Oregon. Conservation districts were charged with directing programs to protect local renewable natural resources.

The following sequence of events traces the history of the partnership among the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Soil and Water Conservation Commission, the Oregon Department of Agriculture, the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service leading to the structure that exists today.

**1935** The USDA Soil Conservation Service was created in the USDA by the federal Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act.

**1937** USDA officials drafted a standard State Soil Conservation Districts law which President Roosevelt sent to state governors in February 1937. President Roosevelt urged the states to pass laws based on this model, stating that "to supplement the federal programs and safeguard their results, state legislation is needed."

**1939** The Oregon Legislature passed a Soil Conservation District Law that created a Soil Conservation Committee (SCC). The SCC was established on August 5, 1939 and began forming conservation districts that year.

**1939** On September 14, 1939, the SCC received the first petition to form a Soil Conservation District from South Tillamook County. Oregon’s first Soil Conservation District became official on February 10, 1940.

**1940** On March 13, 1940, the USDA Soil Conservation Service met with the SCC for the first time, and the partnership between the SCS, the SCC, and conservation districts began. A partnership agreement was developed.

**1946** The SCC hired its first Executive Secretary and became a policy- making agency.

**1948** In November 1948, the SCC formed the Oregon Association of Soil Conservation Districts (OASCD).

**1955** The Oregon Legislature changed conservation district law to require that soil conservation district directors be elected instead of appointed.

**1955** The name of the Oregon Association of Soil Conservation Districts was changed to the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD).

**1963** The Oregon Legislature added “and Water” to the name of Soil Conservation Districts and the Soil Conservation Committee.

**1963** Congress authorized Resource Conservation and Development pilot projects.

**1969** The Soil Conservation Committee’s name was changed to the Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC).

**1980** Governor Atiyeh proposed that the SWCC be merged with the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA).

**1981** On July 1, 1981, the Oregon Legislature merged the SWCC with the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The ODA formed a Soil and Water Conservation Division, which became the administrative oversight entity for Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The Soil and Water Conservation Commission was retained.

**1981** Legislation was adopted authorizing conservation districts to secure a permanent tax rate with voter approval per Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 568.806.

**1989** The Oregon Legislature changed the name of the Soil and Water Conservation Division to the Natural Resources Division.

**1993** The Oregon Legislature passed the Agricultural Water Quality Management Act and designated conservation districts as local management agencies for the implementation of agricultural water quality management area plans per ORS 568.900-568.933.

**1994** The name of the USDA Soil Conservation Service was changed to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

**1994** The USDA Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service and the USDA Farmers Home Administration consolidated to become the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

**1994** In November, the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts changed its name to the Oregon Association of Natural Resources Conservation Districts.

**1995** In November, the Oregon Association of Natural Resources Conservation Districts changed its name back to the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD).

**2003** Legislation was adopted authorizing conservation districts to hold conservation easements per ORS 271.715–271.795.

**2005** Legislation was adopted authorizing conservation districts to issue general obligation bonds with voter approval per ORS 565.550 and ORS 568.803.

**2009** Legislation was adopted giving the powers listed in ORS 568.550 directly to conservation districts without the written consent of the State Department of Agriculture.

**2012** The Oregon Department of Agriculture restructured the Natural Resources Division and the Pesticides Division by combining the two divisions under the new name of Natural Resource Program Area.

**Chronological Listing of District Formation**

Since February 10, 1940, when the first conservation district was established, many conservation districts have formed, and others have consolidated or changed their names. A chronological listing of all the conservation districts formed in Oregon, developed from records stored at ODA and at the Oregon State Archives is outlined below.

<b>Date of Formation</b>	<b>Conservation District Name at Time of Action</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>County</b>
February 10, 1940	South Tillamook SCD	District formation	Tillamook
November 22, 1940	Necanicum SCD	District formation	Clatsop
March 26, 1941	Warrenton Dunes SCD	District formation	Clatsop
May 8, 1941	Langell Valley SCD	District formation	Klamath
October 4, 1941	Hepner SCD	District formation	Morrow
May 10, 1941	Keating SCD	District formation	Baker
September 1, 1942	Monument SCD	District formation	Grant
November 20, 1942	Southern Wasco SCD	District formation	Wasco
February 15, 1944	Sauvie Island SCD	District formation	Multnomah

Date of Formation	Conservation District Name at Time of Action	Action	County
April 26, 1944	Eagle Valley SCD	District formation	Baker
March 13, 1945	Poe Valley SCD	District formation	Klamath
March 28, 1946	West Umatilla SCD	District formation	Umatilla
April 2, 1946	Union SCD	District formation	Union
August 9, 1946	Gilliam County SCD	District formation	Gilliam
October 18, 1946	Wallowa SCD	District formation	Wallowa
December 23, 1946	Clatskanie SCD	District formation	Columbia
December 23, 1946	Linn-Lane SCD	District formation	Linn and Lane
December 23, 1946	Siuslaw SCD	District formation	Lane
April 20, 1947	Scappoose-Rainier SCD	District formation	Columbia
May 12, 1947	Northern Wasco SCD	District formation	Wasco
May 13, 1947	Central Wasco SCD	District formation	Wasco
June 23, 1947	Midstate SCD	District formation	Deschutes
July 31, 1947	Lakeview SCD	District formation	Lake
August 26, 1947	Boardman SCD	District formation	Morrow
October 22, 1947	Santiam SCD	District formation	Marion
November 12, 1947	Baker Valley SCD	District formation	Baker
February 24, 1948	North Tillamook SCD	District formation	Tillamook
July 6, 1949	Klamath SCD	District formation	Klamath
September 12, 1949	Silver Creek SCD	District formation	Marion
November 30, 1949	Burnt River SCD	District formation	Baker
December 13, 1949	Illinois Valley SCD	District formation	Josephine
December 30, 1949	Josephine SCD	District formation	Josephine
April 21, 1950	Sherman County SCD	District formation	Sherman
October 24, 1950	East Multnomah SCD	District formation	Multnomah
January 18, 1951	Sams Valley-Beagle SCD	District formation	Jackson
October 24, 1951	Elgin SCD	District formation	Union
March 19, 1953	Fort Rock/Silver Lake SCD	District formation	Lake
March 19, 1953	South Umatilla SCD	District formation	Umatilla
April 2, 1953	Yamhill SCD	District formation	Yamhill
April 30, 1953	Curry County SCD	District formation	Curry
April 30, 1953	Umpqua SCD	District formation	Douglas
June 9, 1953	Rogue SCD	District formation	Jackson
June 24, 1953	Mt. Angel SCD	District formation	Marion
June 30, 1953	West Central SCD	District formation	Lane
September 16, 1953	Malheur County SCD	District formation	Malheur
September 30, 1953	Hood River SCD	District formation	Hood River
July 21, 1954	East Linn SCD	District formation	Linn

Date of Formation	Conservation District Name at Time of Action	Action	County
October 18, 1954	North Douglas SCD	District formation	Douglas
December 22, 1954	Upper Willamette SCD	District formation	Lane
June 20, 1955	Washington County SCD	District formation	Washington
August 25, 1955	Lincoln SCD	District formation	Lincoln
July 30, 1956	Grant SCD	District formation	Grant
August 30, 1956	North Lane SCD	District formation	Lane
December 28, 1956	Benton SCD	District formation	Benton
December 29, 1956	Mid-Lane SCD	Name change: formerly West Central SCD	Lane
September 30, 1957	Trout Creek SCD	District formation	Jefferson
March 11, 1958	Adrian SCD	District formation	Malheur
June 17, 1958	North Clackamas SCD	District formation	Clackamas
June 23, 1960	Jackson SCD	Name change: formerly Sams Valley- Beagle SCD	Jackson
October 24, 1960	East Umatilla SCD	District formation	Umatilla
June 8, 1961	South Clackamas SCD	District formation	Clackamas
June 12, 1962	Coos SCD	District formation	Coos
1963	“and Water” was added to the name of conservation districts by the Oregon Legislature.		
December 10, 1963	Wheeler SWCD	District formation	Wheeler
October 12, 1964	Clatsop SWCD	District formation	Clatsop
January 12, 1965	Tillamook County SWCD	Formed by consolidation of South Tillamook SCD and North Tillamook SCD	Tillamook
March 21, 1966	Clatsop SWCD	Consolidated with Necanicum SCD	Clatsop
April 25, 1966	Polk SWCD	District formation	Polk
August 16, 1966	Columbia SWCD	Formed by consolidation of Clatskanie SCD and Scappoose-Rainier SCD	Columbia
October 17, 1966	Jackson SWCD	Consolidated with Rogue SCD	Jackson
April 29, 1970	South Douglas SWCD	District formation	Douglas
May 20, 1971	Upper Willamette SWCD	Consolidated with Mid-Lane	Lane

<b>Date of Formation</b>	<b>Conservation District Name at Time of Action</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>County</b>
September 10, 1971	Marion SWCD	Formed by consolidation of Santiam SCD, Silver Creek SCD, and Mt. Angel SCD	Marion
March 16, 1972	Clatsop SWCD	Consolidated with Warrenton Dune SCD	Clatsop
May 25, 1972	Crook County SWCD	District formation	Crook
June 6, 1972	Harney SWCD	District formation	Harney
June 25, 1972	Klamath SWCD	Consolidated with Poe Valley SCD	Klamath
December 20, 1972	Morrow SWCD	Formed by consolidation of Heppner SCD and Boardman SCD	Morrow
June 10, 1973	Wasco SWCD	Formed by consolidation of Southern Wasco SCD, Northern Wasco SCD, and Central Wasco SCD	Wasco
November 2, 1973	Wasco County SWCD	Name change: formerly Wasco SWCD	Wasco
February 5, 1974	Klamath SWCD	Consolidated with Langell Valley	Klamath
March 13, 1974	Umatilla County SWCD	Formed by consolidation of West Umatilla SCD, Southern Umatilla SCD, and East Umatilla SCD	Umatilla
March 22, 1974	Clackamas County SWCD	Formed by consolidation of North Clackamas SCD and South Clackamas SCD	Clackamas
June 6, 1974	Malheur County SWCD	Consolidated with Adrian SCD	Malheur
September 5, 1974	Jefferson County SWCD	Name change: formerly Trout Creek SWCD	Jefferson
April 14, 1975	West Multnomah SWCD	Name change: formerly Sauvie Island SCD	Multnomah
March 24, 1976	Union SWCD	Consolidated with the Elgin SCD	Union



Date of Formation	Conservation District Name at Time of Action	Action	County
March 7, 1978	Linn SWCD	Formed by consolidation of Linn-Lane SCD and East Linn SCD	Linn
June 9, 1987	Douglas SWCD	Formed by consolidation of North Douglas SCD and South Douglas SCD	Douglas
September 9, 1987	Deschutes SWCD	Name change: formerly Midstate SCD	Deschutes
May 3, 1988	East Lane SWCD	Formed by consolidation of North Lane SCD, Upper Willamette SWCD, and Mid-Lane SCD	Lane
December 11, 2002	Tualatin SWCD	Name change: formerly Washington County SWCD	Washington
March 4, 2008	Upper Willamette SWCD	Name change: formerly East Lane SWCD	Lane
June 22, 2015	Clackamas SWCD	Name change: formerly Clackamas County SWCD	Clackamas
September 6, 2016	Two Rivers SWCD	Name change: formerly Josephine SWCD	Josephine

**Certified Names of Conservation Districts**

When a conservation district is formed, it must follow the procedures in Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 568.210 through 568.440 to receive a Certificate of Organization and become certificated by the Oregon Secretary of State. Once the Secretary of State approves the name for a conservation district, the certificated name of the conservation district should be used until the district decides to legally change it.

**Recommended Policy**  
 Each conservation district should use its certificated name on legal documents, contracts, correspondence, financial records, publications, to identify itself properly and legally.

## Oregon Conservation District Certified Names

Baker Valley Soil and Water Conservation District  
Benton Soil and Water Conservation District  
Burnt River Soil and Water Conservation District  
Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District  
Clatsop Soil and Water Conservation District  
Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District  
Coos Soil and Water Conservation District  
Crook County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Curry County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Deschutes Soil and Water Conservation District  
Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District  
Eagle Valley Soil and Water Conservation District  
East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District  
Ft. Rock/Silver Lake Soil and Water Conservation District  
Gilliam County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Grant Soil and Water Conservation District  
Harney Soil and Water Conservation District  
Hood River Soil and Water Conservation District  
Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District  
Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District  
Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Keating Soil and Water Conservation District  
Klamath Soil and Water Conservation District  
Lakeview Soil and Water Conservation District  
Lincoln Soil and Water Conservation District  
Linn Soil and Water Conservation District  
Malheur County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Marion Soil and Water Conservation District  
Monument Soil and Water Conservation District  
Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District  
Polk Soil and Water Conservation District  
Sherman County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Siuslaw Soil and Water Conservation District  
Tillamook County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District  
Two Rivers Soil and Water Conservation District

- Umatilla County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Umpqua Soil and Water Conservation District
- Union Soil and Water Conservation District
- Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District
- Wallowa Soil and Water Conservation District
- Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District
- West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District
- Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District
- Yamhill Soil and Water Conservation District

**Chronological Listing of Conservation Districts with Permanent Tax Rates**

The following conservation districts received voter approval to secure a permanent tax rate.

- 1986 Yamhill SWCD
- 2000 Marion SWCD
- 2002 Polk SWCD
- 2004 Benton SWCD
  - East Multnomah SWCD
  - Wasco County SWCD
- 2006 West Multnomah SWCD
  - Sherman County SWCD
  - Jackson SWCD
  - Clackamas SWCD
- 2008 Columbia SWCD
- 2012 Tillamook County SWCD
- 2016 Tualatin SWCD
- 2020 Upper Willamette SWCD

### Tribal Conservation Districts

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation formed the Tiicham Conservation District in 2003. This conservation district was formed under tribal law, as were approximately twenty other tribal conservation districts nationwide. The Tiicham Conservation District is governed by the Board of Trustees, the tribal governing body, and has its own set of by-laws. A majority of the members must be enrolled tribal members. The Tiicham Conservation District and the Umatilla County SWCD boundaries overlap where the boundaries include the tribes' ceded lands, encompassing over six million acres in Oregon and Washington.