

Who are Pennsylvania's Conservation Districts?

PA county conservation districts were birthed with the 1945 passage of the PA Conservation District Law. What was the issue requiring leadership? Soil conservation. Farming practices were degrading the soil resource, risking future productivity and affecting other resources like air and water. The law provided for a "grass-roots" conservation effort to build awareness and capability of local landowners to manage the resources well. Potter County established PA's first conservation district in 1945. Bradford County established its conservation district 11 years later in 1956.

A county conservation district is a seven-member, volunteer board of local residents. County Commissioners have some input into the makeup of the board to properly reflect the county's character. The board is to consist of one county commissioner, not less than two or more than four farmer members, and not less than two or more than four public members. To make good choices for the right people to direct a conservation district, approved nominating organizations submit nominations to the County Commissioners who make appointments to the board. Directors serve a 4-year term. Bradford County has designed the board to be one County Commissioner, four farmer members, and two public members.

A conservation district inevitably ends up hiring staff to carry out its mission. In PA, you find conservation districts with staffs ranging from two to 30 people, depending upon the support or leadership it receives. A staff can often leverage resources two or three times its cost to help landowners make improvements. The board then directs these resources to address priorities that they, more than any other group are best positioned to understand. This idea of a conservation district has developed a reputation for being highly effective at taking limited resources and applying them where they will make the most difference.