

## **Soil and Water Conservation Council Conference Call and First Organizational Meeting**

Meeting Minutes

*February 6, 2013, at 10:00 a.m., EDT*

### **Council Members Present**

Bud Crisafulli  
Cindy Eade  
Eric Hjort  
Andy Jackson  
Nancy McDonald  
Jimmy Wohl  
*Wilbur Dean (Absent)*

### **Others Present**

Mike Joyner  
Rich Budell  
Ron Russo  
John Costigan  
Sherman Wilhelm  
Darrell Smith  
Clegg Hooks  
Susan Reese  
Elisa Ackerly  
Susie Bishop  
Kristen Melton

*Next meeting scheduled for March 19, 2013, in Tallahassee, Fla.*

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## **I. Introductions and General Discussion**

**Mike Joyner, Assistant Commissioner**, welcomed and thanked the members for agreeing to serve on this council. He indicated that the department has no specific agenda for the council other than to generally seek their input on helping with Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) issues.

**Rich Budell, Office of Agricultural Water Policy Director**, also welcomed the members and suggested the council initially focus on helping advise the department regarding SWCD statutory requirements, including state reporting compliance, and SWCDs that are inactive or requesting dissolution.

He also noted that during the last three legislative sessions, there has been discussion and draft legislation regarding abolishing Chapter 582, F.S. The department has worked to resolve these issues, which led to the Chapter 582, F. S. changes during the last session.

The department seeks assistance from SWCDs to forward Best Management Practice programs, cost share programs, Mobile Irrigation Labs, and local officials to help to provide programs to agricultural producers. He indicated the Council can forward ideas to strengthen SWCDs. Historically, counties have funded some SWCDs, but economic hard times have reduced the number of SWCDs with county funding.

Over time, the department has contracted with at least a third of the existing SWCDs for delivery of services. OAWP will keep meeting summaries and otherwise provide administrative assistance to the council. The Council will plan to meet once or twice per year as needed.

**Council members** requested a written mission and focus description for the Council, as well as more information regarding the activity status of SWCDs, state level compliance status, and information related to specific SWCD issues. Several members suggested updating the SWCD Supervisor Handbook and providing regional trainings for new supervisors.

**Jimmy Wohl, council member**, indicated that one of the main challenges for SWCDs is the ability to secure funding, a key to empowering SWCDs.

**Andy Jackson, council member and Association of Florida Conservation Districts president**, offered help to the Council with gathering SWCD status information. He estimated that 60-75 percent of Florida's 63 SWCDs pay dues to the association and also emphasized that SWCD supervisor training is needed.

**Rich Budell** briefly discussed investigation by the department's Inspector General regarding issues concerning the Broward SWCD.

**Elisa Akerly, the new Martin SWCD supervisor**, requested help and any information regarding SWCDs statewide.

**John Costigan of the department's General Counsel** provided a brief overview of the Sunshine and public records law, including the requirement for meeting notices to be published, the requirement that related documents be kept on file, and that no Council business should be conducted outside of official meetings.

**Mike Joyner** directed the Council to send any related information to Clegg Hooks, SWCD administrator, as needed for distribution to other members and for record keeping. The department will provide additional information regarding Sunshine and public records requirements. Council members will not be required to file financial disclosure forms.

## **II. Round Table/Open Discussion**

**Jimmy Wohl** noted that the Association of Florida Conservation Districts needs a good executive director.

**John Costigan and Andy Jackson** discussed the role Doyle Connor played in Florida's SWCDs and the desire to know the role of SWCDs in other areas of the country. **Jimmy Wohl** suggested that there was not enough time on this meeting's conference call.

**Andy Jackson** asked about districts with funds or staff.

**Jimmy Wohl** asked about how strong of a move there is to abolish SWCDs in Florida. **Rich Budell** noted that there was no effort during this legislative session. **Mike Joyner** mentioned Representative Sands and the Broward SWCD issue, noting that last year's legislation may have been helpful to the cause.

**Rich Budell** asked for needs for the next meeting, especially training needs and information about issues.

**Susie Bishop** offered her assistance with certain legislators and inquired about the value of merging SWCDs. **Andy Jackson** noted that some SWCDs share staff. **Cindy Eade** requested more information regarding SWCDs in Florida as soon as possible.

**III. Action Items**

1. Call Andy Jackson and work with Association of Florida Conservation Districts to provide information on SWCDs, and also help develop a list of SWCDs desiring dissolution.
2. Develop a snapshot of the activity status of SWCDs across the state, including a summary of board status, frequency of meetings, funding, projects, and compliance issues.
3. Check on the status of USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services memorandum of understanding with the Association of Florida Conservation Districts.
4. Develop and forward a package of related information to Council members by March 8, 2013.