



Oklahoma Conservation Commission

District Directors' Responsibilities: A 10-Minute Guide Series

This is one in a continuing series of informational/discussion topics designed to help conservation district directors become more informed and knowledgeable about their responsibilities. It is suggested that board members review these guides before a board meeting, and then have a 10-minute discussion on them at a meeting.

Guide No. 8 - Legal Responsibilities of Conservation District Boards

Conservation districts were formed under the authorization of the Conservation District Enabling Act passed by the legislature on April 15, 1937. The legislature, in passing this Act, designated conservation districts as the primary local unit of government responsible for the conservation of the renewable natural resources in the state.

While conservation district directors serve without pay, they are much more than volunteers. They are elected or appointed members of a subdivision of state government and have responsibilities and duties set out by law.

The authors of the Conservation District Act understood that broad authorities would be needed to deal with changing environmental and conservation needs. The Act provides conservation districts with discretionary powers that allow them to be innovative in carrying out a wide-range of activities and actions to meet conservation needs. Some of these discretionary powers are listed on the second page of this guide.

	Conservation District Authorities and Powers
Legal Responsibilities	<p>Maintain a full and accurate record of district business, including board meeting minutes and financial records that is available for review by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, State Auditor, and the public.</p> <p>Carry out a complete audit of financial records every three years and a review or compilation in other years.</p> <p>Conduct district director elections.</p> <p>Prepare annual and long range plans, annual reports and statement of needs each year as required by the Conservation Commission.</p> <p>Obtain surety bonds for all employees and officers who shall be entrusted with funds or property.</p> <p>Conduct all conservation district meetings in accordance with the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act.</p> <p>Carry out requirements related to the USDA Watershed Program, such as operation and maintenance of dams, annual watershed dam inspections, and development and management of emergency action plans for high hazard dams.</p>

<p>Discretionary Activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employ staff.• Solicit legal council.• Appoint advisory committees.• Appoint associate members.• Conduct, in cooperation with OCC, surveys, investigations and research on erosion, flood water and sediment damages and the preventive and control measures.• Carry out preventive and control measures on public and private lands with the consent of the landowners.• To cooperate, or enter into agreements with governmental agencies and landowners to furnish aid to carry on erosion control and watershed protection, and flood prevention operations.• To acquire land or property by purchase, lease, gift, or condemnation, and to make use of the property to carry out the purposes of the Conservation District Act.• To make available to landowners agricultural equipment, machinery, fertilizer, seeds, and seedlings, etc. to assist in carrying out conservation practices.• To construct, improve, operate, and maintain such structures as may be needed for conservation in the district.• To develop resource conservation programs for the conservation of the renewable resources and a joint plan of operations with NRCS.• To administer any project or program concerned with conservation of renewable natural resources within the district boundaries undertaken by any public agency; to accept services, funds, materials, and other contributions from such agencies to carry out the purposes of the Conservation District Act; to enter into contracts and negotiate with any agency of the United States or the state of Oklahoma in any plan related to conservation of renewable natural resources.• To sue and to be sued in the name of the district (generally individual board members cannot be held personally liable for district matters.), to have a seal, to make and execute contracts necessary to exercise the district's powers, to make amend and repeal rules and regulations inconsistent with the district law, and to carry out the purposes for which the districts were formed.
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Resources:

- Chapter 2 of the Conservation District Handbook.
- Conservation District Enabling Act.