

NC Conservation District Employee Training & Certification Initiative

Background

On August 13, 2009, a strategic planning workgroup was convened at the Mecklenburg Soil and Water District office. Participants were Michael Pardue, President of the NC Conservation District Employees Association (DEA); Edward Davis, President-Elect of the NC Conservation District Employees Association; James Summers, Iredell Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Soil Conservationist; Vernon Cox, Division of Soil and Water Conservation (DSWC) Technical Services Section Chief; David Williams, DSWC Nonpoint Source Programs Section Chief; and Josh Spencer, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Water Quality Specialist. Eddie Culberson, Durham SWCD Director, was unable to attend. The discussion was facilitated by Ray Ledgerwood, consultant for the National Association of State Conservation Agencies. The purpose of the meeting was to identify needs and objectives for training, certification and professional development of District employees in North Carolina. This document is intended to facilitate discussion of the merits and potential strategies for implementing this initiative.

Objective

Develop a sustainable, statewide, comprehensive training and certification program for District employees that will foster a professional, qualified District staff to maintain the highest levels of customer service and program delivery.

Statement of Need

North Carolina SWCDs employ approximately 270 individuals to promote voluntary natural resource management and conservation on the private lands of North Carolina. In Fiscal Year 2008-2009, the State of North Carolina provided \$2,719,838 as match to local governments to fund 116 District employees to administer a wide variety of state and local programs to include the NC Agriculture Cost Share Program, the Drought Response Program, the Community Conservation Assistance Program (CCAP), the Swine Floodplain Buyout Program, state and local Envirothon competitions, conservation field days and other similar conservation and educational activities.

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Historically, NRCS has provided a majority of technical training to District staff, but budget and staff constraints have placed significant limitations on the ability of NRCS to provide these types of training opportunities. In addition, as District objectives become more diverse, NRCS technical training may not be adequate to meet local District needs (ex. CCAP). Because of the expanding demands and scope of District conservation programs, it is critical that a coordinated, statewide training program for SWCD employees be developed that provides a comprehensive set of training opportunities for administrative, educational and technical staff.

Plan of Action

- Fall 2009 – Discuss training and certification concept with partners (SWCDs, DEA, SWCC, DSWC, NRCS)
- Fall 2009 – Area resolution(s) adopted in support of SWCD employee training and certification initiative.
- Jan. 2009 – Resolution adopted at NCASWCD annual meeting in support of SWCD employee training and certification initiative.
- Mar. 2010 – Assemble an Oversight Group charged with responsibility to assess training needs, identify existing training resources and funding opportunities, initiate training program, evaluate and maintain program effectiveness.
- Aug. 2010 – Draft implementation strategy developed by Oversight Group.
- Fall 2010 – Present draft implementation strategy at Area Fall meetings.
- Jan. 2011 – Review and assess draft implementation strategy at NCASWCD annual meeting.
- Mar. 2011 – Initiate training program.

Outcomes

- Coordinated and standardized training programs for technical, educational and administrative positions.
- Regular schedule of training opportunities throughout the state.
- Increased capacity of district employees to deliver conservation programs.
- Demonstration to District Boards, County Commissioners and General Assembly of professional competence.