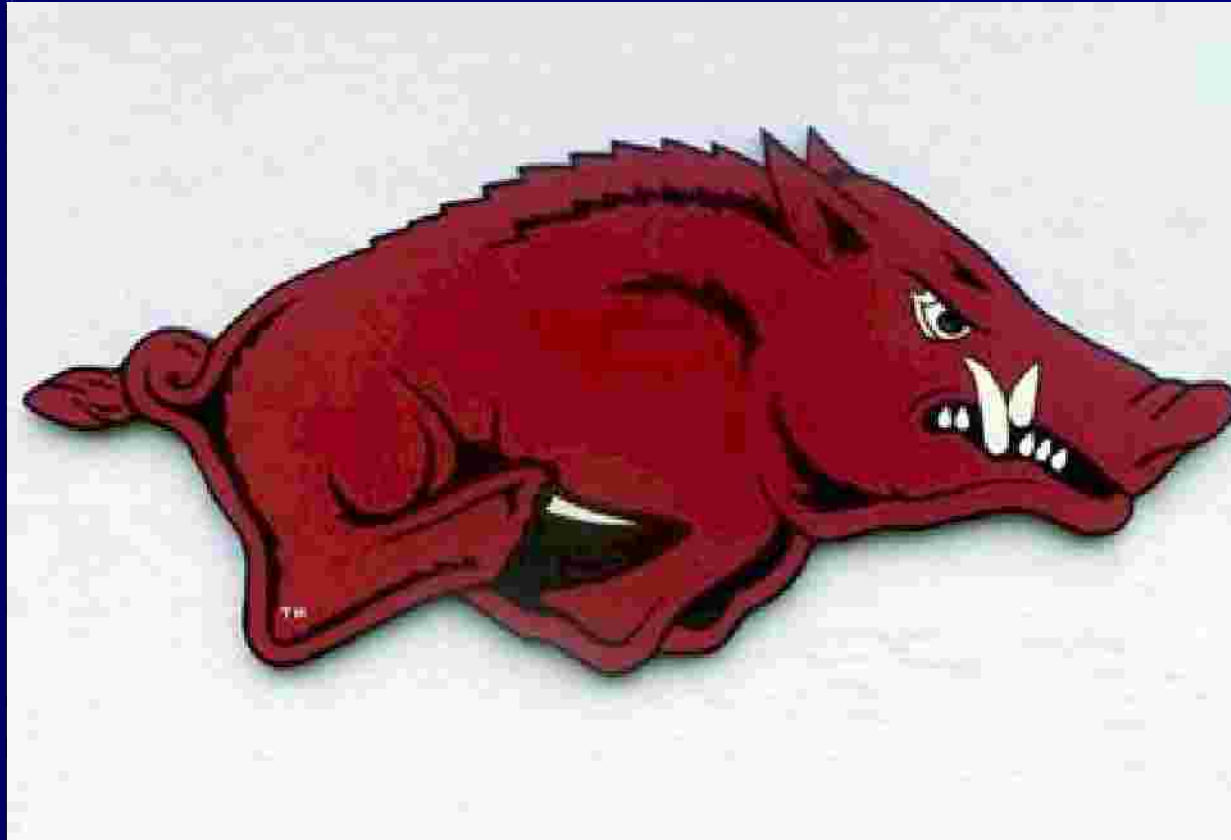




Consolidation

A Conservation District Discussion



For 75 years conservation districts have been the starting point for locally led conservation practices and education. The grass roots concept of conservation and partnership helped stabilize and bring us from the dust bowl era to a world supplier of food, and renewable resource products.

Much has changed since the 1930's. Agricultural, forestry, industrial and genetic technologies have brought tremendous advances and challenges. Current transportation, communication and information systems differ greatly from our parents and grandparents time.

The weight of these changes has led me to a discussion point I wouldn't have accepted in years past. It's time to begin the discussion and process leading to the consolidation of several Arkansas conservation districts.

Arkansas Conservation Districts



We must be able to target and maximize resources and opportunities to build for the next 75 years.

The purpose of the district is to assist in placing conservation on the ground and operational in the watersheds of Arkansas.

For the future, we need to consolidate some district offices, work load and resources. Currently, Arkansas has 75 districts containing strengths, weaknesses, challenges and resources.

Some districts have struggled for several years. It's time for frank, open discussion about how to best serve the cooperators and water sheds for the future.

We must realize local conservation is about more than just sustaining a district office, the board or employees.

Districts should review their plans and goals realistically and address several issues.

Identify weaknesses:

Local resource partners

Lack of local programs

Cash flow

Changing customer base or demographics:

Traditional

Non traditional

Absentee

Study income sources:

- Annual income streams

- Per occurrence income

- Outside the box income

- Long term income sources

Prove value to local partnerships:

- County judge and quorum court fund

- Municipal government

- Legislative support

- Civic, educational and industrial

Determine current and potential resources:

Available programs

Area “in kind” services

Personnel resources

Potential partnerships

Would consolidation increase the long term strength and stability needed to service cooperators, protect resources and reach long term goals?

What will your districts conservation foot print resemble in 5, 10, or 20 years?

Arkansas Natural Resources Commission supports voluntary consolidation of Conservation Districts



ANRC consolidation incentives:

- Legal assistance

- Maximum flexibility from ANRC

- ANRC incentive payment

- 2 or more districts may merge

- Combined line item funding

- Freedom of office locations

- Flexibility with office staffing

- CD board size (under consideration)

As NASCA personnel, my challenge to you is to critique ANRC's consolidation program and suggest better tools and ideas to build district capacity and resources for the future.

