

Improving District Staff and Program Capacity with Level or Declining State and Local Funding

Is Consolidating Districts a Viable
Option?

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Background on Indiana's Situation

- We're the smallest state west of the Appalachian Mountains but we have 92 counties and 92 conservation districts

Background on Indiana's Situation

- Current state funding for conservation districts comes primarily from cigarette tax revenue which is, at this time, a slowly declining funding source
- County funding for districts has been either flat or declining the last few years, due to both the economic recession and recent legislation that put caps on the amount of local property tax that can be assessed on homes, farmland and business property

Indiana's Situation Continued

- Our current state funding that goes to conservation districts for district operations and competitive grants is about 1.6 million dollars
- This provides each district \$10,000 for district operations and the opportunity for two or more districts, working jointly, to apply for grants up to three years in length and up to \$20,000 per year
- Bottom line is ----when we divide our state budget for funding conservation districts 92 ways, it's very hard to have much financial impact on improving district program or staff capacity.

Current District Staffing in Indiana

- A few districts have good, professional, progressive District Managers
- Many districts have employees that came on staff in past years as secretaries or youth educators and have over time been renamed as program coordinators or administrative assistants in order to get more pay under their respective county position/pay guidelines, but they have little or no professional training in management or program development.
- A number of district boards are realizing they need to upgrade staff capacity but the counties are not funding additional staff or staff position upgrades

Would District Consolidation Help or Would it be Political Suicide?

- Are there other states in a similar situation to Indiana?
- Are you considering district consolidation? If so, are you thinking about maintaining county boundaries or would you go to a watershed boundary structure?
- Have any states gone through conservation district consolidation? If so, when, why, and how was it done, how were the local political issues handled? Do you think it helped improve district staff and program capacity?

What are some other Options for Improving District Staff and Program Capacity

- Does your state have any District Managers covering more than one district? If so, when and how did this come about and how is it working?
- Are there other options in place or being contemplated by other states for improving district staff and program capacity?