MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Celebrating 50 Years of Environmental Stewardship

# Building Capacity for Conservation in MO

**NASCA Annual Meeting**

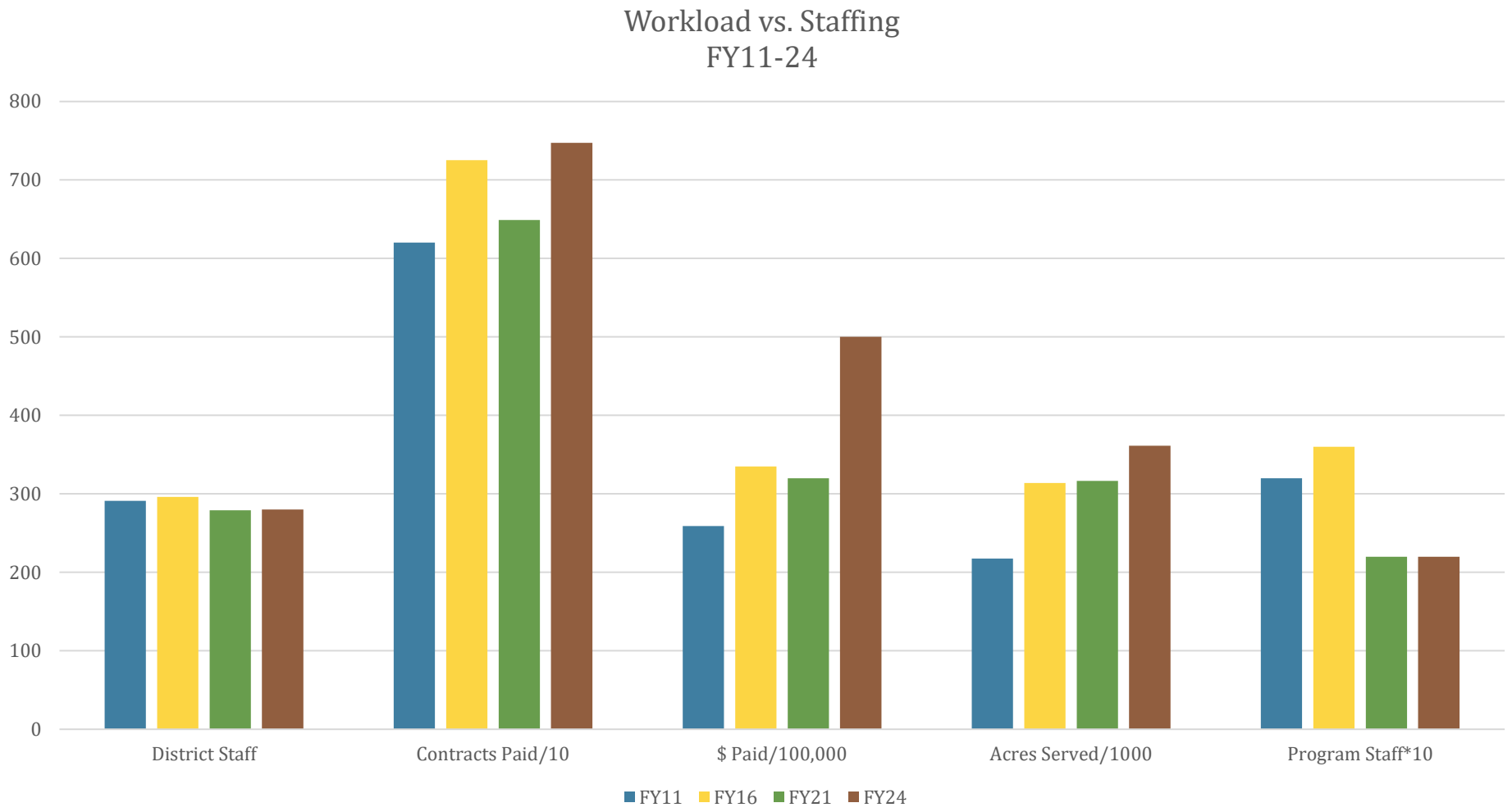
Oct. 7, 2024

Melissa Simmons-District Coordinator

Jake Wilson-Environmental Supervisor

50 YEARS MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# State Cost-share Program

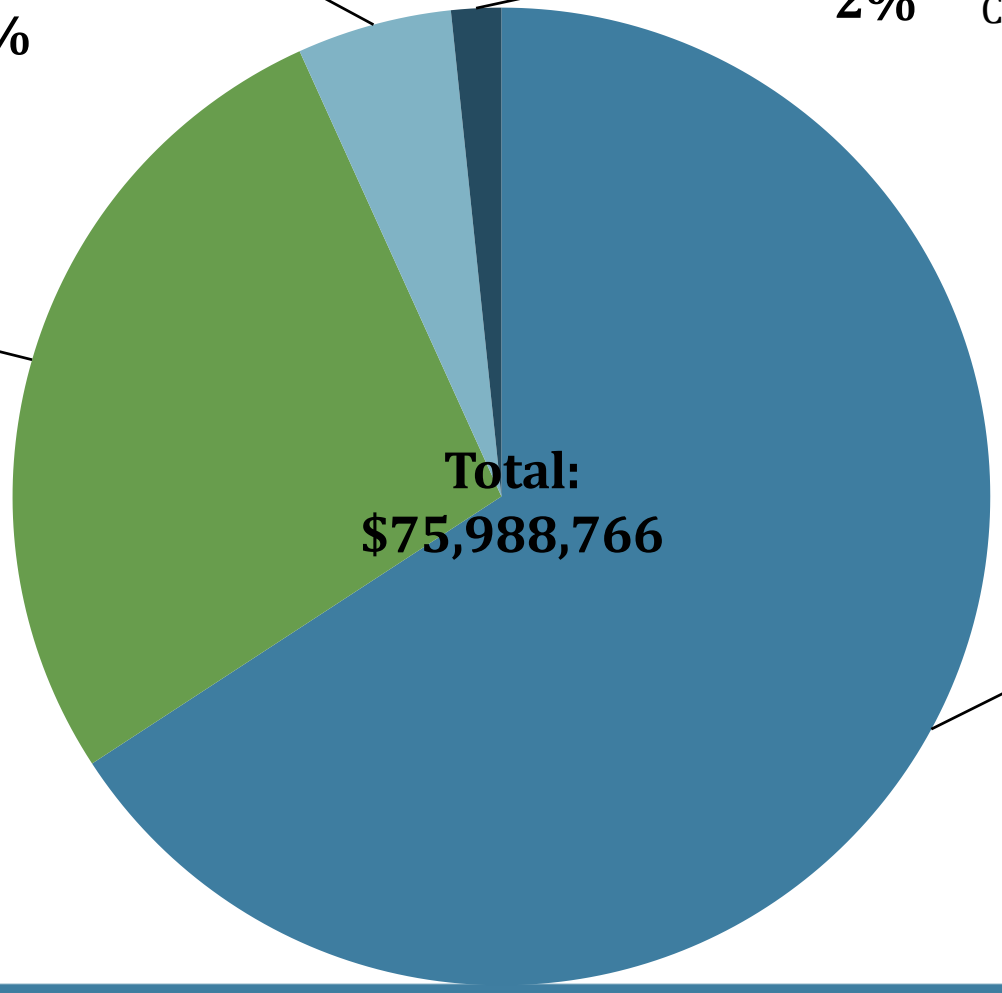


# FY25 Appropriations

## Soil and Water Conservation Program

**Program Administration**
Program Salary
Social Security/Medicare
Health Insurance
Retirement
Worker's Comp
Program E&E
Building Costs
ITSD
DNR Department Support

**District Operations**
District Salary
Social Security/Medicare
Health Insurance
Retirement
Worker's Comp
District Administration
ITSD
District Contract Audits
Surety Bond
Technical Assistance




**Other**
Research
Conservation Monitoring
Refunds
Sales Tax Collection
State Auditor
Attorney General

50 YEARS MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Where we are now

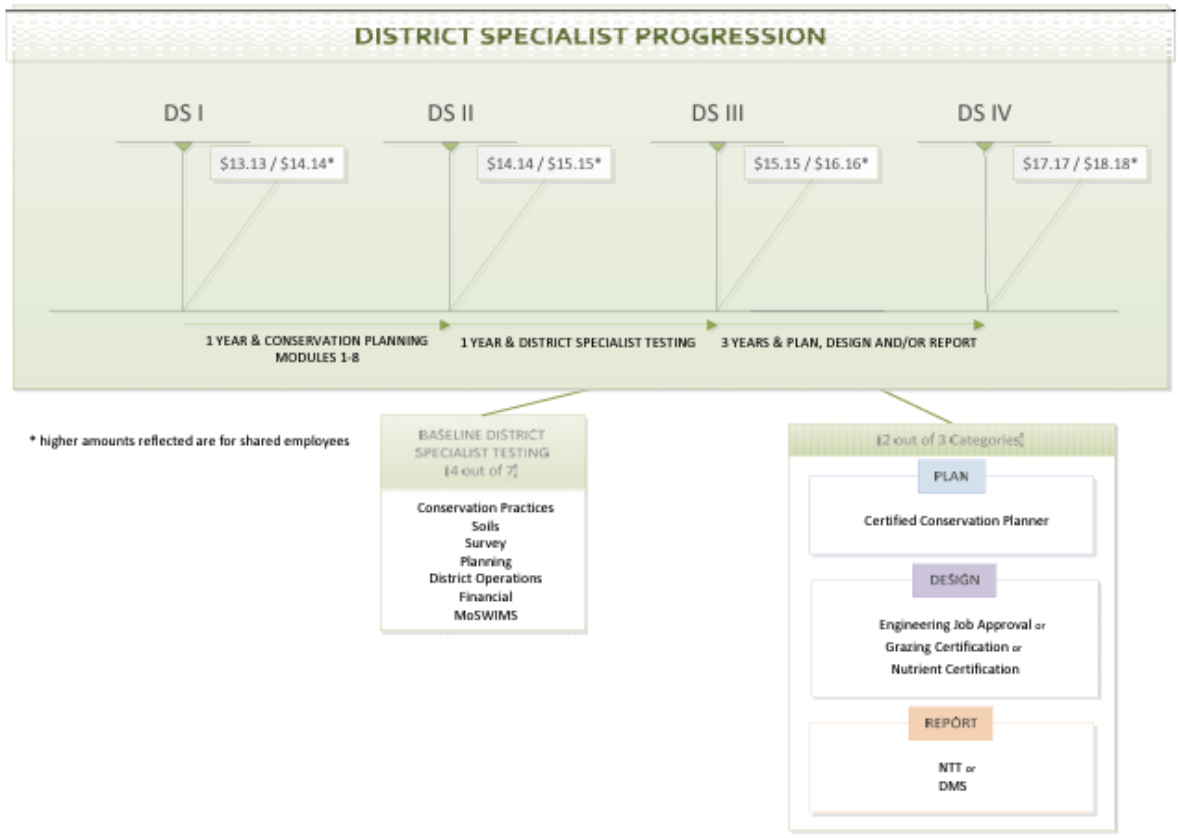
- With increasing workloads on both the state and federal side, and tremendous turnover rates, technical capacity (engineering, conservation planning, CR) is reaching a breaking point
- This is both a hiring and training issue
- Adding Technical staff at the state level has proven impossible due to legislative budget process
- State is somewhat unique in how we support SWCDs (Personnel and admin funding)

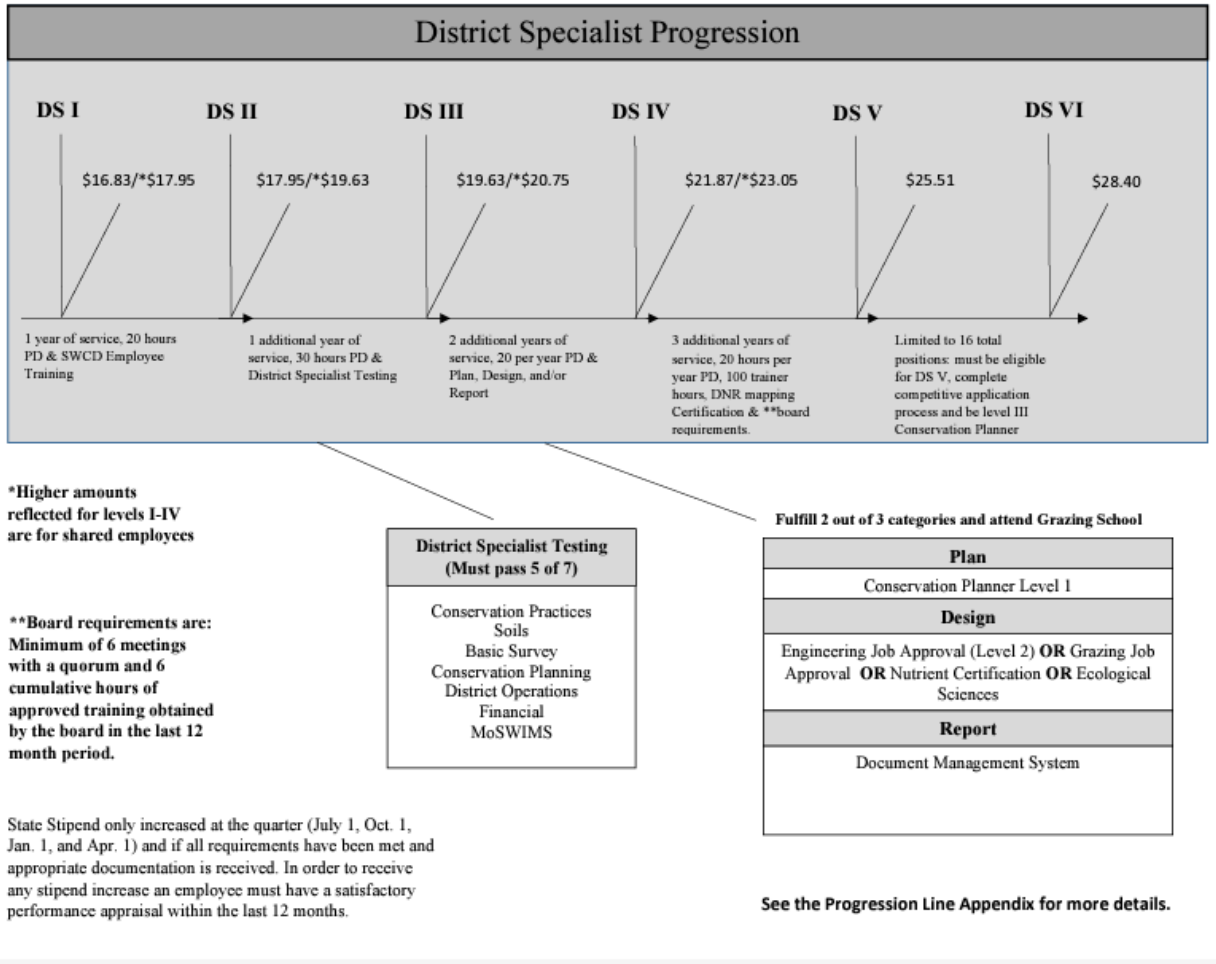
# What have we tried?

- Failures/Lessons Learned
  - Placing Engineers in Districts (District Grants)
  - Sharing Employees across districts
  - Encouraging Cross Training
- Successes
  - Sharing employees across districts
  - Encouraging cross training
  - Private Technical Assistance (not TSPs)
  - Leaning on partners

# Progression Line

For each DSVI we are adding a new DSI position for a total of 16 additional staff (296 total)



# Performance Funding

- Districts may receive up to 1% of previous years cost-share payments
- Board chooses how they use
  - Salary, health insurance premium, mileage, info-ed
- Are presented with metrics (percentile rank) so they see what areas need improvement
- Based on 4 measures
  - Administrative score, acres served, diversity of practices, board metrics
- $320,000 going to districts this FY
  - Highest=$11,900!

# Contribution Agreements

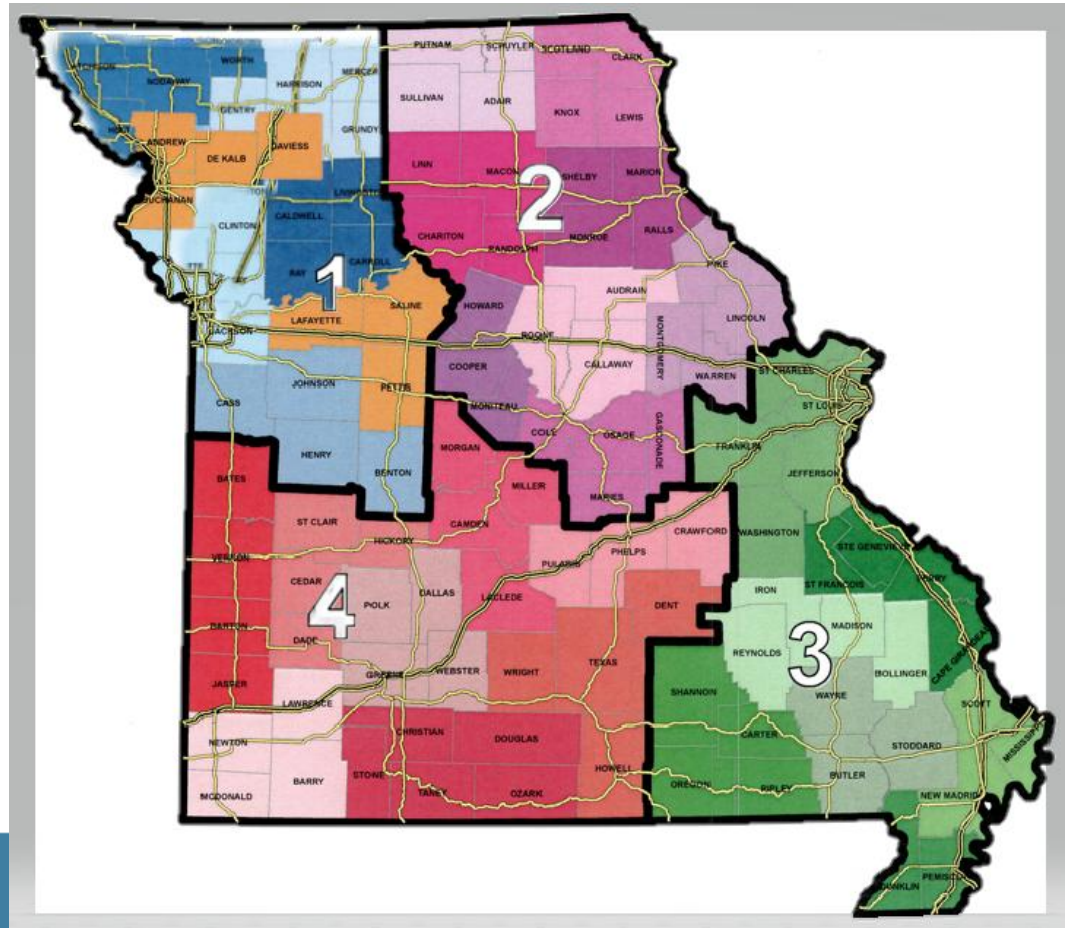
MFA

- Assist the Department in development and implementation of workshops and field days for private landowners to help promote soil and water management objectives, as well as the common-ground conservation improvement mission of both MFA and the Department.
  - 20 landowner visits per year
  - 4 field days
  - Identify training opportunities
  - New and emerging technologies

# Contribution Agreements

NRCS

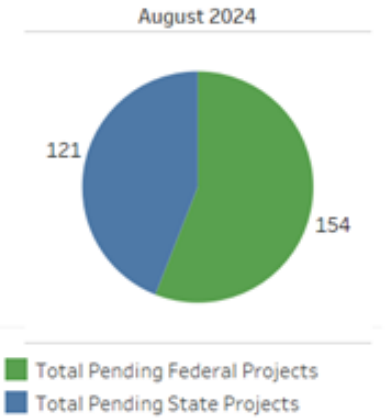
- Original 5 year agreement provided for 30 FOSA shared employees
- 50/50 State and NRCS
- $1 million annually
- Also provided District engineers
- Amended to support an Archaeologist

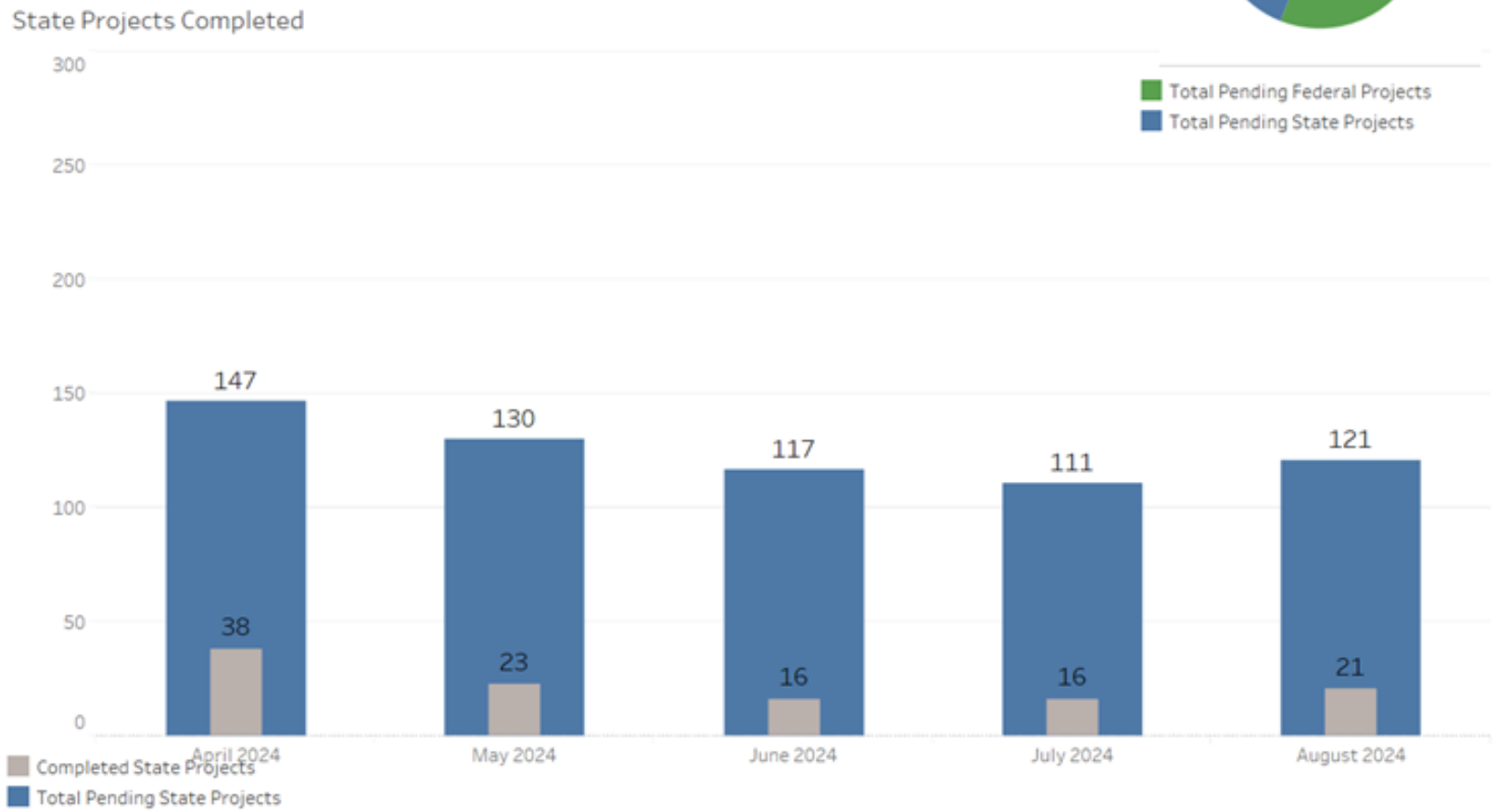


# CR Tracker

## Soil and Water Conservation

Archaeological Review for State Cost Share Programs




Note: While the Soil and Water Conservation Program is tracking all state projects in real time, the federal numbers are supplied by our partners at the Natural Resource Conservation Service and will be updated as received.

50 YEARS MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Contribution Agreements

- New NRCS Agreement
  - Continue with FOSA shared model
    - 18 FOSA techs
  - Provide engineering assistance
    - 5 PEs housed in NRCS area offices, but administered through a SWCD
  - Provide specialized conservation planning assistance
    - 4 rapid response specialty conservation planners
  - Continue to support Archaeologist

# Partner Contributions

MASWCD

- CA for Archaeologist, Training Coordinator, and Engineer
  - Conducted Training needs and mentorship survey
  - Hosted Grazing management trainings
  - Working on more analysis and training development

- Seeking NACD Grant for District Staff

# Partner Contributions

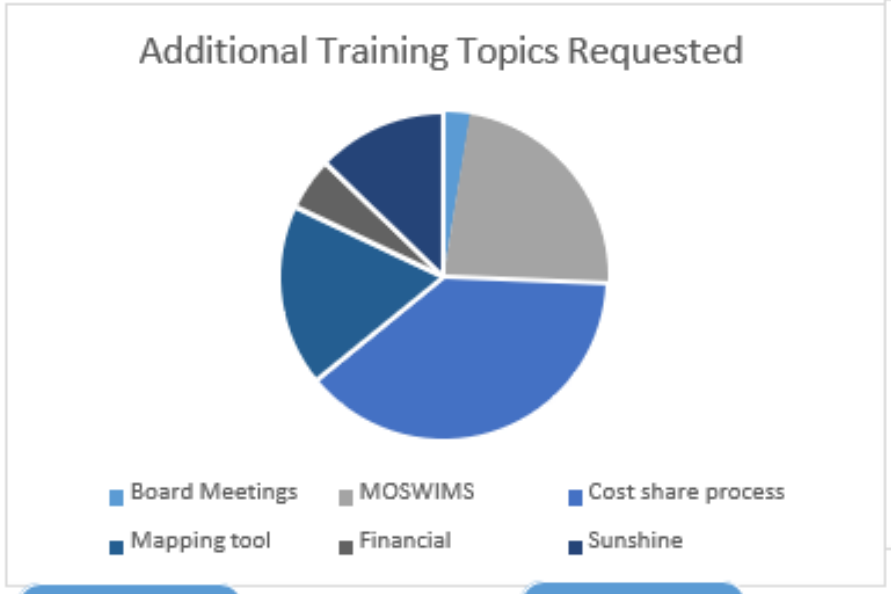
- NRCS
  - Due to reporting district work in CD/CART, have been able to increase staffing: 289 in 2019 to 400+ today
  - Financially support CAs with DNR-SWCP, MASWCD, PF/QF, NWTF, MO Cattlemen etc…
  - EQIP+CSP for this year >$100 million

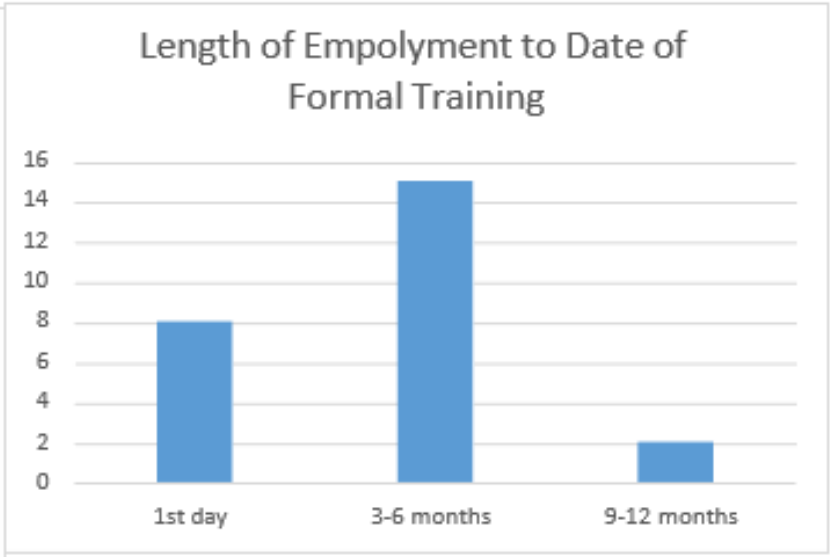
# Training

- Implemented standardized District Specialist training in FY21
  - 150 have completed
- Implemented online testing app*
- Implemented program planning retreat* that led to in depth analysis and rework of how we organize and deliver training resources
- Six Sigma Green Belt/Lean analysis of efforts to date.
- Incentives for board training*

*Idea Implemented in part from NASCA Annual Meeting

# Onboarding New District Specialist Process




**Day 1 of Employment**

- Meet with Coordinator for basic contact information and to put face to a name
- Coordinator to provide a brief history and overview of the soil and water program
- Job description

**3-6 months of Employment**

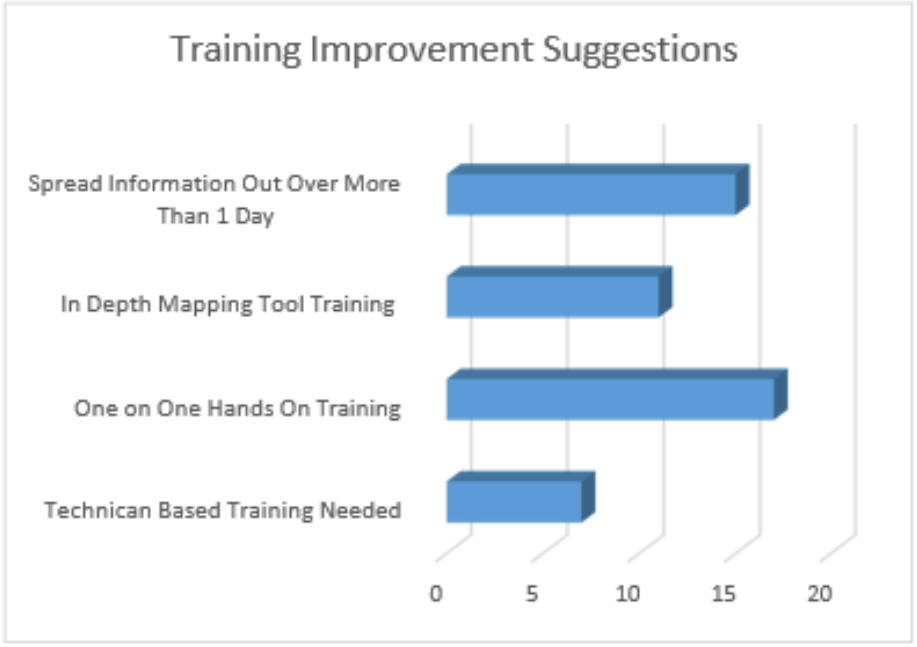
- 1-2 Day group training with Coordinator and SWCD peers
  - MOSWIMS
  - Cost Share Process
  - Mapping Tool
  - Financial

**6-9 months of Employment**

- Follow up with District Coordinator
- Ask Specific questions from what has been learned

**12 months of Employment**

- SWCD staff fully trained with little guidance
- Allow staff to take group training again if they would like to




50 YEARS
MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Training Portal

- At our first ever program retreat, a facilitated deep dive into our operations showed that our training resources were not well standardized, accessible, and organized.
- As a result, program staff have been working on a training portal that employees and board members will have access to:
  - best hiring practices
  - employee management
  - district policies
  - videos on how to do things in our accounting and contract management system for visual learners
  - quick reference guides and tools

# Technician MOU

**Shared Employee Memorandum of Understanding**
_____ County Soil and Water Conservation District,
_____ County Soil and Water Conservation District,

This Memorandum of Understanding is entered into by and between the _____ County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and _____ County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

**I. Purpose**
The above districts agree to participate in a shared employee program through the Department of Natural Resources Soil & Water Conservation Program.

**II. Roles and Responsibilities**
_____ and _____ Counties agree to share a District Specialist (1-V) as needed, between the four counties for technical duties. The administrative county will be _____ County. The employee will be required to attend training to keep current/up to date on job related criteria. It will be the employee's responsibility to keep all NRCS certifications and required documentation current and active.

**III. Duties**
The employee agrees to provide support for technical duties in _____ and _____ County to help implement State Cost Share and Federal Farm Bill practices. The employee will be shared within the two counties, no less than 200 hours per year, outside the administrative county. There is no maximum limit on hours for any county, due to fluctuation of workloads throughout the counties.

**_____ and _____ County Duties:**

- Provide technical support for State Cost Share practices
- Provide technical support for Farm Bill related practices
- Serve as a liaison between SWCD and NRCS, internally and externally
- Complete other duties as assigned

**IV. Reporting Requirements**
The employee will be responsible for documenting their shared hours on their time sheet. Records will be accessible to either board upon request.

**V. Meetings**
An annual Board meeting will be held as determined by the Partnership agreement.

**Shared Employee Memorandum of Understanding**
_____ County Soil and Water Conservation District and
_____ County Soil and Water Conservation District

This Memorandum of Understanding is entered into by and between the _____ County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the _____ County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

**I. Purpose**
The above districts agree to participate in a shared employee program through the Department of Natural Resources Soil & Water Conservation Program.

**II. Roles and Responsibilities**
_____ and _____ Counties agree to share a District Specialist (1-V) as needed, between the two counties for manager duties. The administrative county will be _____ County. The employee will be required to attend training to keep current/up to date on job related criteria. It will be the employee's responsibility to keep all NRCS certifications and required documentation current and active.

**III. Duties**
The employee agrees to provide support for manager duties in _____ and _____ Counties to help implement State Cost Share practices and update financial records. The employee will be shared within the two counties, no less than 200 hours per year, outside the administrative county. There is no maximum limit on hours for any county, due to fluctuation of workloads throughout the counties.

**_____ and _____ County Duties:**

- Provide manager support for State Cost Share practices
- Update and maintain financial records for the counties
- Serve as a liaison between SWCD and NRCS, internally and externally
- Complete other duties as assigned

**IV. Reporting Requirements**
The employee will be responsible for documenting their shared hours on their time sheet. Records will be accessible to either board upon request.

**V. Meetings**
An annual board meeting will be held as determined by the Partnership Agreement.

# Manager MOU

50 YEARS MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

**SWCD Board Member Training:** **INTERVIEWING and HIRING DO's and DO NOT's**

**DO:**

1. When an employee leaves, make sure the Outgoing staff form has been sent into the Program Office at the Soil & Water Conservation Program soil&waterconservationprogram@swcd.mo.gov, with LEAVE amounts paid out in the final payout section. Do not include final hours paid, just leave amounts. Include a board letter requesting to hire to replace the position. Copy your coordinator on the communication.
2. Wait to receive communication from the Program Office BEFORE you start the hiring process. Otherwise, local funds will need to be used for advertising and hiring.
3. Verify when a new person can start based on the leave payout and amount of 2080 hours remaining for that position.
4. The board should devise a job description for the vacant position with a list of expected job functions and duties before advertising.
5. Advertise in a location that has wide circulation. That could be in your local paper, Indeed, Monster, another web based hiring platform, Facebook, TV/Radio, etc.
6. IF it is a Shared FOSA position, be sure to communicate with the other boards that share the position for the advertising and interviews. Update the Shared FOSA MOU before advertising.
7. Review *all* applications and select the top ones for interviews.
8. POST THE INTERVIEWS as a SPECIAL OPEN/CLOSED meeting at least 24 hours in advance to meet Sunshine law requirements.
9. Do avoid NEPOTISM. If a relative of the board member applies for the job, the board member should recuse themselves from the interview and hiring committee. If the committee feels that the relative is the best candidate for the position and is hired, the board member should resign immediately.
10. Have a panel of at least 3 folks. It would be best to include: at least one board member; diversity in race and gender; an individual with expertise, technical knowledge, or skill required in the position; an independent third party; a peer/co-worker to the position being filled.
11. Information pertaining to the position should be provided at each interview. This should include: job description, pay, and any benefits provided. Benefits may include: health, eye, dental, retirement/LAGERS, paid leave accrual, and paid holidays. Inform the candidate the expected hours and days worked.
12. All interview questions must be job related and must not violate state and federal laws or regulations pertaining to equal employment opportunity and fair employment practices. For more information, visit https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/discrimination
13. The interview panel should ask all candidates the same set of questions. Individual follow-up questions are permitted.
14. The interview panel should ask candidates if they are U.S. citizens or authorized to work in the United States and have a valid driver's license.
15. The interview panel should provide the same amount of time to each candidate.
16. References should be asked for and checked.
17. Do inform the candidate that a Federal Background check is a requirement.
18. Thank them for their time and interest in the Soil and Water Conservation Program.

# Hiring Do's...

**DO NOT:**

1. Discrimination against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability, genetic information, military/veteran status, national origin, pregnancy, race, religion or sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity) is prohibited.
2. Do not ask about family status, marital status, or future family plans.
3. Do not decide on a candidate based on their future family plans.
4. Do not decide on a candidate based on their age, either too young or too old.
5. Do not decide on a candidate based on their family relations.
6. Do not circumvent the hiring process and hire the neighbor. This may open the board up to a lawsuit based on unfair hiring practices.
7. Do not ask if the candidate plans to stay or if this will be a temporary position.
8. Do not ask if the candidate has any disabilities: physical, mental, or emotional.

# ...and Do Not's

50 YEARS MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Board Meetings

*Quick Reference Sheet*

## Requires Vote

- Previous Minutes
- Treasurer's Report
- Uncommon Expenditures
- Cost-share ( contracts, change orders, payments)
- Policy Change
- Entering Closed Session (roll call vote to enter and any decisions made while closed)
- Exiting Closed Session (roll call vote)
- Adjournment
- Certifying an election (majority of members not on the ballot)

## Should It Be Discussed in Closed Session?

- Personnel Decisions
- Legal Actions
- Real Estate Transactions
- Cost Share (when discussing landowner names, conservation practices, plans or location)

## When Should I Abstain From Voting?

- When the issue could provide monetary benefit to yourself or an immediate family member
- When a relative to the fourth degree* is under consideration for employment, if hired must abstain from all personnel discussions and decisions
- When there is any conflict of interest real or perceived.

*Fourth degree relations include first cousins, great aunt/uncle, grandniece/nephew, great-great grandchildren or great-great grandparents of individual or spouse.

Board Meetings

*Quick Reference Sheet*

## Required in Meeting Minutes, Vote Not Needed

- Qualified Candidates for Supervisor Election
- Resolutions
- Variance Requests to Commission

## Required to Review Annually

- Memorandum of Understanding ( MOU) or Cooperative Working Agreement
- Individual Employee Performance

## Recommended to Review Annually

- Lease Agreements
- District Budget vs. Expenditures
- Rental equipment policies and contracts
- District Goals

50 YEARS
MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Where do we go from here…

- Staffing
  - Continue to ask for FTE
  - Hire/Onboard 20+ district specialists, 5 engineers, 4 specialty planners, 1 watershed coordinator…
- Training
  - Meet and greet for district staff on first day
  - District networking/idea sharing in each coordinator area 2-3 times a year
  - Group mapping training in each area 2 times a year
  - Work with NRCS to develop a training plan for new technicians with monthly goals(in MOA)