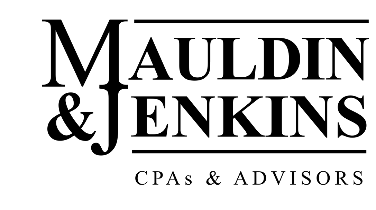
**Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District Performance Review –**

**Real Insights. Real Results.**

*Draft Report for Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District* Mauldin & Jenkins | 1



**Draft Report**

Prepared for:

**The Florida Legislature’s**

**Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA)**

June 17, 2024

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# Key Takeaways

* Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors is active, meeting all but one month ~~most months~~ in the review period.
* Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District has no consistent funding, resulting in limited District programs and activities but includes an annual environmental contest for students, a statewide Land Judging Contest for Future Farmers of America, a photo contest, community outreach, agriculture workshops, participation in SERVE to restore creaks, lakes, and wetlands, advocate for conservation and related infrastructure projects, track and publicize pollution events on social media, create a museum exhibit, presented information to two civic groups, recognized the Ag Conservationist of the Year, provided a liaison to the Board of County Commissioners, hosted the Local Working Group for our NRCS conservationist, and participated in private well testing for residents.
* Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District has no inventory, facilities, vehicles, staff, or consistent revenues and expenditures. The District’s operations are sometimes ~~all~~ conducted in conjunction with other public entities and the District’s contributions to these events usually to organize and lead the event, ~~are typically~~ volunteering Supervisor time rather than funding.
* Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District’s operations are ~~not~~ guided by a strategic plan~~, or performance measures, though~~ The District has developed a list of goals for both the District’s activities and future land-use in its service area.

# Background

Pursuant to [s. 189.0695(3)(b),](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0100-0199/0189/Sections/0189.0695.html) *Florida Statutes*, Mauldin & Jenkins (“M&J”) was engaged by the Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to conduct performance reviews of the State’s 49 independent soil and water conservation districts. This report details the results of M&J’s performance review of Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District (“Seminole SWCD” or “District”) conducted with a review period of October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024.

## A: District Description

### Purpose

Chapter [582](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0500-0599/0582/0582ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2023&Title=%2D%3E2023%2D%3EChapter%20582) of the *Florida Statutes* concerns soil and water conservation within the State of Florida. The chapter establishes the processes for creation, dissolution, and change of boundaries of districts; the qualifications, election, tenure, and mandatory meetings of District Supervisors; the oversight powers and duties of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (“FDACS”); and the powers and purpose of the districts. The District’s statutory purpose, per [s. 582.02,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.02.html) *Florida Statutes*, is “to provide assistance, guidance, and education to landowners, land occupiers, the agricultural industry, and the general public in implementing land and water resource protection practices. The Legislature intends for soil and water conservation districts to work in conjunction with federal, state, and local agencies in all matters that implement the provisions of ch. [582,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0500-0599/0582/0582ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2023&Title=%2D%3E2023%2D%3EChapter%20582) *Florida Statutes*.”

The District’s website states that “the mission of the Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District is to provide the administration of programs to conserve and promote healthy soils, water, forests, and wildlife in Seminole County.”

### Service Area

When the District was established in 1947, the service area included the entirety of Seminole County, and the current borders and territory remain the same. The District’s service area includes unincorporated Seminole County; the County’s seven cities;[1](#_bookmark3) and part or all of the following federal and State conservation lands:

* + Charles H. Bronson State Forest
  + Lake Jesup Conservation Area
  + Lake Monroe Conservation Area
  + Little Big Econ State Forest
  + Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park
  + Mills Creek Woodlands
  + Wekiva River Aquatic Preserve
  + Wekiva River Buffer Conservation Area
  + Wekiwa Springs State Park

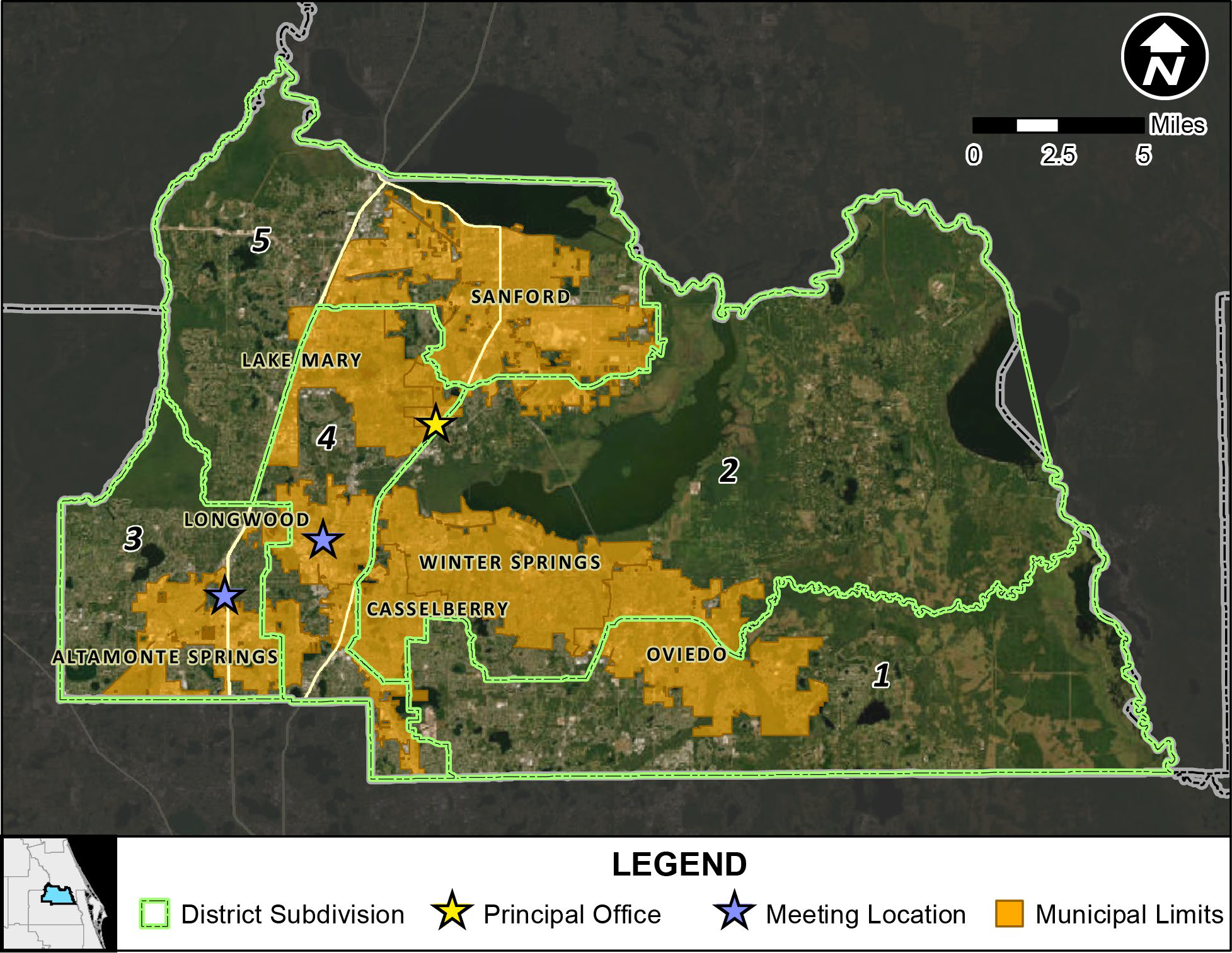
The District is bounded on the north by Volusia County, east by Brevard County, south by Orange County, and west by Lake County. The total area within the District is 345 of square miles, with 309 square miles of land and 36 square miles of water.

1 Cities: Altamonte Springs, Casselberry, Lake Mary, Longwood, Oviedo, Sanford, Winter Springs.

The District’s ~~primary office and~~ meeting location is 250 County Home Road, Sandford, Florida 32773 – the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension office in Seminole County. The District previously met at Longwood City Hall for Board of Supervisors meetings and in the Community Room at the Seminole County Sheriff’s Office West Division Offices in Altamonte Springs for ~~occasional~~ Board work sessions. The District has no office.

[Figure 1](#_bookmark4) is a map of the District’s service area, based on the map incorporated by reference in Rule 5M- 20.002(3)(a)42., *Florida Administrative Code*, showing the District’s boundaries, electoral subdivisions, major municipalities within the service area, the District’s principal office, and a secondary meeting location used by Supervisors for monthly workshop meetings, which are open to the public but do not usually include the conduct of regular business.

#### Figure 1: Map of Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District



*(Source: Seminole County GIS, Florida Commerce Special District Profile, Board Meeting Minutes)*

### Population

Based on the Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research population estimates, the population within the District’s service area was 486,839 as of April 1, 2023.

The Yellow Star is our current meeting location. The Blue Star are former meeting locations. There is no office.

### District Characteristics

Seminole SWCD is located in the central part of Florida. The economy of the service area is diversified. Given its proximity to Orlando, major economic drivers include the housing industry, the hospitality industry, healthcare services, and educational institutions. The District has a mix of urban and rural areas. The rural areas are more prominent in the eastern and northwestern parts of the county, where agricultural activities are more common. Key agricultural products are predominately cattle ranching with ornamentals, citrus, row crops, and timber. ~~include nursery plants, sod, and citrus. There is also a presence of cattle ranching and other livestock operations.~~ The service area experiences a humid subtropical climate, with hot, humid summers and mild winters. Environmental phenomena that might threaten the District include hurricanes, flooding, and occasional droughts. These weather patterns can significantly impact agriculture and water conservation efforts.[2](#_bookmark6)

~~The topography of Seminole is generally flat, with some rolling hills. The area includes several lakes, wetlands, and the St. Johns River, which influence land use and conservation practices. The region’s geology primarily consists of sandy soils and clay, which affects agricultural productivity and water management.~~[~~3~~](#_bookmark7) ~~Portions of the District are included in the Lake Jesup, Lake Harney, Lake Monroe, Middle St. Johns River, and Smith Canal, the Wekiva River, the Gemini Springs, and the Wekiwa and Rock Springs Basin Management Action Plan areas.~~ [~~4~~](#_bookmark8)~~,~~[~~5~~](#_bookmark9)

The topography of Seminole is generally flat, with some rolling hills. The area includes ~~several~~ 220 lakes according to the Seminole County Watershed Atlas, in addition to wetlands, springs and major rivers including ~~and~~ the St. Johns River, the Econolatchee, the Wekiva, and the Lockhart Canal, which influence land use and conservation practices.

The region’s geology primarily consists of sandy soils, clay, and chlorides which affects agricultural productivity and water management because of salt water intrusion caused by relic sea water in our aquifer.[3](#_bookmark7) ~~Portions of the District are included including~~ Lake Jesup, Lake Harney, Lake Monroe, the Middle St. Johns River Basin, ~~and~~ Smith Canal, the Wekiva River, and the Econolatchee River have Basin Management Action Plans.

There are 17 drainage basins within the county, many of those basins have impaired water bodies that are not fit for swimming or recreation. Lake Jessup has a health advisory for no swimming or fishingɫ. It has toxic algae at times. The concern of the SSWCD is that cattle routinely drink from that lake. ~~the Gemini Springsɫ~~, ~~and~~ ~~Seminole County has 17 the Wekiwa and Rock Springs Basin Management Action Plan areas~~ [4](#_bookmark8),[5](#_bookmark9)

ɫGemini Springs is not in Seminole County.

The diverse urban and rural landscape, agricultural activities, and environmental challenges create distinct community needs. Urban areas require efficient stormwater management and pollution control, while rural areas need support for sustainable agricultural practices. ~~and~~ Water resource management is important for the entire county. The District’s education, conservation practices, and disaster preparedness efforts are crucial for addressing these needs.

## B: Creation and Governance

Seminole SWCD was chartered on November 7, 1947, as the Seminole Soil Conservation District following a successful referendum of local landowners and subsequent petition to the Florida State Soil Conservation Board. The District was created under the authority of the State Soil Conservation Districts Act (herein referred to as “ch. [582,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0500-0599/0582/0582ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2023&Title=%2D%3E2023%2D%3EChapter%20582) *Florida Statutes*”).[6](#_bookmark10) The Florida Legislature amended ch. [582](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0500-0599/0582/0582ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2023&Title=%2D%3E2023%2D%3EChapter%20582), *Florida Statutes*, in 1965, to expand the scope of all soil conservation districts to include water conservation, which renamed the District to the Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District.[7](#_bookmark11)

2 UF/IFAS Extension Seminole County. 2024. *2024 Guide to Seminole County Farms and Farmer Markets*. January

24. Accessed May 19, 2024. https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/seminoleco/2024/01/24/2024-guide-to-seminole- county-farms-and-farmers-markets/.

3 United States Department of Agriculture. 1990. “Soil Survey of Seminole County, Florida.” Soil Conservation Service, Washington.

4 The Florida Department of Environmental Protection defines a Basin Management Action Plan as “a framework for water quality restoration that contains local and state commitments to reduce pollutant loading through current and future projects and strategies.”

5 Florida Department of Environmental Protection. 2024. *Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs)*. April 19.

Accessed May 7, 2024. https://floridadep.gov/dear/water-quality-restoration/content/basin- management-action-plans-bmaps

6 [s. 582,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0500-0599/0582/0582ContentsIndex.html) *Florida Statutes*

7 ch. 65-334, Laws of Fla.

The District is governed by a Board of Supervisors. Supervisors are unpaid, nonpartisan public officials elected by the voters within the service district. M&J analyzed the Supervisors’ elections, appointments, and qualifications within the in-scope period pursuant to applicable *Florida Statutes*.[8](#_bookmark13)

~~As of this report, the District has five Supervisors. At the time of writing this report, M&J has not been provided with documentation affirming the Supervisor’s required qualifications. M&J has also requested copies of any signed affirmation of qualification from the Seminole Supervisor of Elections, which have not been provided. Therefore, M&J is unable to confirm any current Supervisor's compliance with the required qualification.ɫ~~ During the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024), there have been two vacancies ~~one vacancy~~ on the Board, as illustrated in [Figure 2](#_bookmark12). The District had a vacancy from June 2023 to February 2024. Additional assessment of the District’s electoral patterns is detailed in section II.D (Organization and Governance) of this report. ɫ (Exhibit B – Figure 2)

#### Figure 2: Supervisor Terms

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Seat** | **FY21** | | | | **FY22** | | | | | **FY23** | | | | | | **FY24** | | |
| **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | | **Q4** | **Q1** | | **Q2** | **Q3** | | **Q4** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** |
| **1** | **Jennifer Webb** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **2** | **Karen Heriot** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **3** | **Amy Volpe** | | | | | | | **Sarah Hall** | | | | **Megan Betche** | | | | | | |
| **4** | **Ed Young** | | | | | | | | | | **Gabbie Milch** | | | | | | | |
| **5** | **Jason Kirby** | | | | | | | | | | **Pat Wilson** | | |  |  |  | **Peggy Green** | |

*(Source: District meeting minutes) I provided an accurate chart*

During the review period, the District met 42 ~~38~~ times[9](#_bookmark14) and met the mandatory meeting requirement of [s.](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.195.html) [582.195,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.195.html) *Florida Statutes*, to meet at least once per calendar year with all five Supervisors for both 2022 ~~(April and September)~~ and 2023 ~~(January, February, and April)~~. The District also held twelve ~~six~~ work sessions within the review period.[10](#_bookmark15) M&J has determined that the District did not properly notice Board meetings and work sessions. Additional assessment of the District’s pattern of providing meeting notices and adherence to relevant statutes is detailed in section II.D (Organization and Governance) of this report.

Later in the Review Document it states, “the District produced meeting minutes going back to January 2019”.

Seminole County created a land acquisition program in 2023 named Seminole Forever, which “aims to protect and conserve lands by identifying and acquiring properties that conserve green space, provide passive recreational opportunities, and protect water resources and natural habitats.” An ordinance was passed in 2023 stating that Supervisors from Seminole SWCD can serve on the County's Acquisition and Restoration Committee, which runs the Seminole Forever program, as nonvoting ex-officio members.[11](#_bookmark16)

One of the Seminole County Supervisors, Gabrielle Milch was appointed to the committee as a full, voting member.

8 Including [s. 582.15,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.15.html) *Florida Statutes*, [s. 582.19,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.19.html) *Florida Statutes*, Rule [Rule 5M-20.002,](https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ruleNo.asp?id=5M-20.002) *Florida Administrative Code*, and ch. [2022-191,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0100-0199/0191/0191ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2022&Title=%2D%3E2022%2D%3EChapter%20191) Laws of Fla.

9 Meetings occurred in January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, and December 2021; January, March, April, May, July, September, October, November, and December 2022; January, February, March, April, May, July, September, October, and November 2023; and January, February, March, and April 2024.

10 Work sessions occurred in April, May, and October 2023; and January, February, and March 2024.

11 Seminole County Code of Ordinance (Ord. No. 2023-17, § 2, 8-8-2023) Sec. 190.203(c)

## C: Programs and Activities

The following is a list of programs and activities co-hosted by the District within the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024), along with a brief description of each program or activity. The District’s programs and activities will be described in detail in section [II.A (Service Delivery](#_bookmark24)) of this report.

* + Envirothon
    - Envirothon is an outdoor competition in which students develop hands-on skills related to aquatic ecology, forestry, soil and land use, wildlife, and other current environmental issues.

**Land Judging Contest**

The Land Judging Contest is a statewide competition for students who participate in Future Farmers of America. It is hosted by different counties each year to give students a variety of soils to examine. These students are expected to know the science of healthy soil in preparation for their entry into an agricultural profession. Approximately 250 students attended the event.

**Wildlife Photo Contest**

As a result of the popularity of the images of wild animals captured by the five trail cameras owned by the District, The wildlife images attracted citizens to our FaceBook page. The District held a Wildlife Photo Contest, awarding prizes, and displaying the winning photos in the County Commission Building, where they continue to hang today. Seminole County residents were surprised and amazed at the variety of wildlife that still remains in our conservation areas.

**Local Working Group**

In 2021, 2021, and 2024 the NRCS conservationist was required to hold a local working group with agricultural producers in Seminole County to determine the spending priorities for the Farm Bill programs.

* + Private Well Water Testing
    - The District tests private wells to screen for bacteria and other contaminants. Private well owners who attend meetings at the Geneva Citizens Association can bring water samples to be tested. The District provides the water testing service in coordination with a Water Resource Specialist from the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences Seminole Extension office.

**Community Outreach**

The district has a table at several community events each year including: EarthFest in Casselberry, the Arbor Day tree give away in Oviedo, and the Great Day in the Country in Oviedo. Typically, the supervisors hand out information about soil health. Children dig in a box of soil to find earthworms which they take home. No other group promotes healthy soil.

* + Agriculture Workshops
    - The District holds a variety of workshops on topics such as pasture management and dealing with invasive or poisonous plants. Supervisors speak at some of these workshops, while external speakers are brought in for others like the pasture management workshop. What differentiates this from IFAS/ Extension programs is that we mailed postcards to every ag producer in Seminole County. The ulterior motive was to introduce producers to our conservationist.

**The SERVE Program**

District Supervisors participate in the Seminole County SERVE Program as leaders of

small groups of volunteers, typically students. SERVE cleans out creek beds, restores wetlands, and removes invasive plants from lakes and waterways.

**Advocacy for Conservation and Related Infrastructure**

District Supervisors have relationships with other elected officials, Stakeholders, and civic

groups. We use the opportunities afforded to us to advocate for the protection of environmentally sensitive lands and critical infrastructure projects that serve our goals of water quality and water

conservation.

**Track Pollution in Seminole County using DEP data**

While many urban areas contribute non-point source pollution, fertilizer run off, to our already impaired waterways, one of our municipalities, in particular, has sewage spills. One of the Supervisors takes the data from the DEP website where the location in given in latitude and longitude, and translates the location to a point on a map making it easier for residents to understand. The sewage spills which affect that lake contribute to toxic algae blooms during parts of the year. The SSWCD is interested in tracking this because cattle drink the water from that same lake. The map and description of the spill are posted on the Districts’ Facebook Page.

**SSWCD Celebrated its 75th birthday**

We sifted through our archives and worked with the Seminole History Museum to create an exhibit and hold a birthday party. The exhibit that our Supervisors created remained on display for the following month.

**Recognized the Ag Conservationist of the Year**

We created an award for the Ag Conservationist of the Year and presented it for the first time. This award was requested by our district conservationist. He chose the recipient.

**Presented information about the Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District to two civic groups.**

One group was only a 5 minute talk, for the other, we were the main speaker for the evening. The 20-minute presentation was followed by 30 minutes of questions and discussion.

**Providing a liaison to the Board of County Commissioners**

Our Supervisor conducted two presentations for the entire Board and met often with individual Commissioners about items on upcoming agendas

Exhibit B – Photos)

## D: Intergovernmental Interactions

The following is a summary of federal agencies, state agencies, and/or public entities with which the District interacts, including the means, methods, frequency, and purpose of coordination and communication.

* + Congressman for the 7th District, Cory Mills
  + City of Longwood
  + University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Office
  + Natural Resource Conservation Service
  + Osceola and Orange Soil and Water Conservation Districts
  + Seminole County Sheriff’s Office
  + Seminole State College, Oviedo
  + Seminole Board of County Commissioners
  + The City of Oviedo
  + The City of Sanford
  + Calno (Community Leaders and Elected Officials)

Congressman for the 7th District, Cory Mills

One of the Supervisors is a member of one of the Congressman’s advisory boards. Most of the interaction is with his staff. There have been substantial conversations regarding soil and water conservation issues and infrastructure needs. He recently announced a federal appropriation for $10 million to upgrade the Oviedo wastewater treatment plant (Exhibit CD– Cory Mills Announcement)

### City of Longwood

The District asserted a verbal agreement exists with the City of Longwood, allowing the Board to meet monthly at the Longwood City Hall for no cost. The District met at the Longwood City Hall until April 2022.

### University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Office

The District has a verbal agreement with the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences Extension office in Seminole County (“UF/IFAS Extension”) that allows the Board to meet monthly at the UF/IFAS Extension building for no cost. The District has also coordinated with UF/IFAS Extension on holding workshops and running the Private Well Water Testing program.

### Natural Resource Conservation Service

The District has a Memorandum of Agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”), which allows for mutual information sharing between NRCS and the District. A Conservationist from NRCS regularly attends District Board meetings to give updates about financial assistance programs available. The District has held workshops on behalf of NRCS, teaching subjects such as pasture management and combating invasive weeds.

### Osceola and Orange Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Seminole SWCD collaborates with the neighboring Osceola and Orange Soil and Water Conservation Districts to run the annual regional Envirothon.

### Seminole County Sheriff’s Office

The Seminole County Sheriff’s Office has a community room that is available to be reserved at no cost for civic and community meetings. This community room was reserved for the Board’s work sessions for drafting its five-year plan.

Seminole State College, Oviedo

Seminole State College, Oviedo Campus, provided the facilities and volunteers for the Envirothon in 2022.

Seminole Board of County Commissioners

Our Liaison presented twice on topics the board requested. She has also met with individual Commissioners to answer their questions relating to issues coming before the board. Notice that they could have asked the County Environmental Services to provide information, but the SSWCD Supervisor was more credible on the topics they were concerned about.

The City of Oviedo

The City of Oviedo requested the opinion of one of the Supervisors relative to stormwater and flooding problems they were facing. The Supervisor met with the Mayor and city staff, and separately with a member

of the City Council, and city staff.

## E: Resources for Fiscal Year 2022 – 2023

The following figures quantify and describe the District’s resources for Fiscal Year 2022 – 2023 (October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023, herein referred to as “FY23”). [Figure 3](#_bookmark20) shows the total amount of revenues, expenditures, and long-term debt maintained by the District in FY23. [Figure 4](#_bookmark21) shows the number of paid full-time and part-time staff, contracted staff, and volunteers by employer. [Figure 5](#_bookmark22) shows the number and type of vehicles, number and type of major equipment, and number and type of facilities owned, leased, and used by the District. Descriptions of the District’s resources and the change in resources over the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024) will be included in section

1. B (Resource Management) of this report. (Exhibit E – Ledger)

#### Figure 3: FY23 Finances

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Revenues** | **Expenditures** | **Long-term Debt** |
| **Total for Year** | ~~$0~~ $2979.29 | ~~$0~~ $1081.20 | $0 |

*(Source: Interview with District Supervisors)*

#### Figure 4: FY23 Program Staffing

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Full-time Staff** | **Part-time Staff** | **Contracted Staff** | **Volunteers** |
| **District- employed Staff** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Board of County Commissioners-**  **employed staff** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** |

*(Source: Interviews with District Supervisors)*

#### Figure 5: FY23 Equipment and Facilities

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number** | **Ownership Status** | **Type(s)** |
| **Vehicles** | 0 | N/A | N/A |
| **Major Equipment** | 0 | N/A | N/A |
| **Facilities** | 2 | 1 owned by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension  1 owned by the Seminole County Sheriff’s Office | 1 Primary Meeting Space  1 Former ~~Alternative~~ Meeting Space |

*(Source: Interviews with District Supervisors)*

# Findings

The Findings sections summary the analyses performed, and the associated conclusions derived from M&J’s analysis. The analysis and findings are divided into the following four subject categories:

* + Service Delivery
  + Resource Management
  + Performance Management
  + Organization and Governance

## A: Service Delivery

### Overview of Services

M&J has identified the following programs that the District has performed during the review period.

*Envirothon*

Envirothon is an outdoor competition encouraging student interest in natural resource conservation and environmental management. Students in grades 9-12 work in teams to compete at a local or regional level and develop hands-on skills related to five core environmental subjects – aquatic ecology, forestry, soil and land use, wildlife, and a current environmental issue selected by competition organizers each year. Winning teams have the opportunity to advance to the Statewide and national competitions. The District has collaborated with neighboring soil and water conservation districts to run an annual regional Envirothon. The event is primarily hosted by Seminole SWCD, with Osceola and Orange Soil and Water Conservation Districts volunteering time to help run the event. The event was canceled in FY21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in FY22 due to a lack of staffing, but the event was held in FY23.

*Private Well Water Testing*

In coordination with the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension office in Seminole County (“UF/IFAS Extension”) and its Water Resource Specialist, the District supports a program to help private well owners screen their water for bacteria, salinity, and 1,4-dioxin.[12](#_bookmark25) The project was kicked off in November 2023, with a District Supervisor making a presentation at the Geneva Citizens Association informing attendees of the project. The District attended the meeting in February 2024, where private well owners brought samples of their well water to be tested by UF/IFAS.

**Land Judging Contest**

The Land Judging Contest is a statewide competition for students who participate in Future Farmers of America. It is hosted by different counties each year to give students a variety of soils to examine. These students are expected to know the science of healthy soil in preparation for their entry into an agricultural profession. Approximately 250 students attended the event.

**Wildlife Photo Contest**

As a result of the popularity of capturing the images of wild animals by the five trail cameras that were moved throughout the county and posting them to FaceBook, the District held a Wildlife Photo Contest, awarding prizes, and displaying the winning photos in the County Commission Building, where they continue to hang today. Seminole County residents were surprised and amazed at the variety of wildlife that still remains in our conservation areas. This event helps build interest and knowledge about the need for conservation and natural spaces.

**Local Working Group**

In 2021, 2021, and 2024 the NRCS conservationist was required to hold a local working group with agricultural producers to determine the spending priorities for Farm Bill programs. The District hosted these events. Each year it has grown. The keys to success are renting a hall in Geneva, in the rural portion of the county. The most recent event had 23 producers as well as a county commissioner who stayed for the entire event. To defray the cost of the hall rental, a drawing was held for a rain barrel.

In September of 2023, at the AFCD Annual Meeting, soil and water conservation districts were tasked with

Finding applicants for NRCS programs. These are the results for SSWCD.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2020 | 2021 | 2022\* | 2024 |
| Experienced Conservationist serving 4 counties | Brand new Conservationist serving 2 counties | Experienced Conservationist serving 2 counties | Experienced Conservationist serving 2 counties and  Soil and Water Boards were asked to reach out to producers because of the increase in funding due to IRA |
| 1 EQIP applicant from Seminole County in a year | 1 EQIP applicant from Seminole County in a year | 3 EQIP applicants from Seminole County in a year | 18 EQIP applicants from Seminole County in two months of SSWCD being involved |

No Local Working Group meeting was held in Florida in 2023

**Community Outreach**

The district has a table at several community events each year including: EarthFest in Casselberry, the Arbor Day tree give away in Oviedo, and the Great Day in the Country in Oviedo. Typically the supervisors hand out information about soil health. Children dig in a box of soil to find earthworms which they take home in a sandwich bag. No other group promotes healthy soil.

**The SERVE Program**

District Supervisors participate in the Seminole County SERVE Program as leaders of small groups of volunteers, typically students. SERVE cleans out creek beds, restores wetlands, removes invasive plants from Waterways.

**Advocacy Efforts**

The District was successful in two important efforts:

1. The City of Oviedo received a $10 million federal appropriation to upgrade their wastewater treatment plant spearheaded by Congressman Cory Mills.

2. The Yarbrough Ranch was granted development rights by the legislature in the

1970’s, before the Rural Boundry was established. After the matriarch of the family

became terminally ill, the ranch was slated for development. However, the ranch sits

on top of a “bubble” of fresh water in the aquifer. Tens of thousands of residents nearby were worried about the effect of 300 septic tanks sitting above their drinking water.

The Seminole County Board of County Commissioners recommended the ranch for Florida Forever funding to place the land in conservation. The SSWCD Supervisor was the only elected official to testify before the Florida Forever Committee. The BOCC also created the Seminole Forever program that could be used in a similar way if the property was not selected by Florida Forever. The property was selected by Florida Forever and is now officially conservation land.

**Track Pollution in Seminole County using DEP data**

While many urban areas contribute non-point source pollution, fertilizer run off, to our already impaired

waterways, one of our municipalities, in particular, has sewage spills. One of the Supervisors takes the

data from the DEP website where the location in given in latitude and longitude, and translates the location

to a point on a map making it easier for residents to understand. The sewage spills which affect that lake

contribute to toxic algae blooms during parts of the year. The SSWCD is interested in tracking this because cattle drink the water from that same lake. The map and description of the spill are posted on the Districts’ Facebook Page. A large portion of the consistent pollution is from sewage being discharged into Lake Jessup. Cattle drink from Lake Jessup.

**SSWCD Celebrated its 75th birthday**

We sifted through our archives and worked with the Seminole History Museum to create and exhibit and hold a birthday party. The exhibit that our Supervisors created remained on display for the following month.

**Recognized the Ag Conservationist of the Year**

We created an award for the Ag Conservationist of the Year and presented it for the first time. Our NRCS conservationist asked us to create the award and he chose the recipient. He is not allowed to present awards.

**Presented information about the Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District to two civic groups.**

One group was only a 5 minute talk, for the other, we were the main speaker for the evening. The 20-minute presentation was followed by 30 minutes of questions and discussion.

**Writing an Amicus Brief for a Rancher**

The SSWCD wrote an Amicus Brief for a Rancher after the Circuit Court judge incorrectly ruled that the homestead on a rural parcel was 1 acre. The Florida Constitution Article X, section 4 (1) stated that it is 160 acres. Because we are all elected officials and have taken an oath to support and defend the U. S. Constitution and the Constitution of the State of Florida, the Supervisors unanimously voted to fulfill the obligations of our Oath of Office.

This did not happen during the review period so it should not be part of the final report.

12 1,4-Dioxin is a contaminant formed during the production of organic compounds, including some herbicides. 1,4- Dioxin is classified as a persistent organic pollutant, meaning it takes a long time to break down once in the environment. Consuming 1,4-Dioxin can cause cancer, immune system damage, and developmental problems.

*Agricultural Workshops*

The District ~~helps~~ advertises and conducts ~~and advertise~~ various workshops in coordination with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”) and UF/IFAS Extension. ~~and Seminole County Public Schools.~~ ~~Alongside an~~ to introduce the NRCS Conservationist. The District has held workshops intended to inform local producers of opportunities to obtain funding ~~or reimbursement~~ through NRCS cost-share programs. In coordination with the UF/IFAS Extension, the District has supported workshops on the ~~management~~ eradication of poisonous plants and the newest thinking on pasture management ~~of a pasture~~. ~~The District also visits Seminole County Public Schools that have vegetable gardens and provides the schools with hoop structures (metal frames that can serve as a canopy or cover for a garden) for their gardens and agriculture projects. The garden projects themselves are funded by Seminole County Public Schools, with the District providing resources paid for by Supervisors themselves.ɫ~~

ɫ SSWCD had a series of meetings and discussions regarding this possibility. It has not materialized

### Analysis of Service Delivery

M&J evaluated each of the District’s programs or activities and assessed whether the program or activity aligns with the District’s statutory purpose and authority.

All of the programs and activities identified by M&J are within the scope of the District’s statutory purpose and authority. Programs and activities meant to provide or assist in providing training and education (Envirothon, workshops), activities related to conducting training events, attendance at meetings, and the provision of financial support align with the District’s purpose to conduct conservation education programs. M&J has evaluated the District’s service delivery and has not identified any alternate methods for the District to provide services that would reduce costs or improve performance.

### Comparison to Similar Services/Potential Consolidations

The following soil and water conservation programs are provided by other public and nonprofit entities within the District’s service area:

* The UF/IFAS Extension partners with the local 4-H chapter to provide agriculture and conservation educational programming for youth within the District’s service area~~, and is a resource between agriculture scientists and the local community~~.

However, they are very different from Future Farmers of America, and do not instruct children and youth in the science of soil to the extent that FFA does in preparation for agricultural careers.

They do not organize the regional Envirothon that allows teams of high school youth who are enrolled in Environmental Science programs at local high schools to win scholarships.

Mostly adults and homeschooled children interacted with the museum exhibit. The extension programs are not presented to 150 adults at a time as our public speaking did. This was an opportunity to begin to make the public aware of conservation issues. .

* NRCS provides technical advice and data collection assistance to landowners implementing conservation practices.

NRCS did attempt to hold an event for which the Cocoa office mailed 900 postcards. Only four people attended. The SSWCD is much more effective in bringing in agricultural producers to meet the conservationist which results in more applications for NRCS conservation programs. SSWCD mailed 584 post cards and brought in 23 agricultural producers and a County Commissioner. Our NRCS conservationist asked our board to create and present the Ag Conservationist of the Year because he cannot do this.

* The Seminole County Department of Environmental Services disseminates information on water conservation to residents. The Department of Environmental Services maintains a Water Conservation Demonstration Garden in partnership with the St. Johns Water Management District, which demonstrates “Florida-friendly” landscaping that conserves water and reduces the use of pesticides.

However, no governmental or charitable entity is educating the public on healthy soil, a prerequisite for nutrients in food. Nor do they spark the imagination of the public regarding local wildlife like the wildlife photo contest which sways public opinion to support conservation. Nor do they do the work of improving the natural waterways in Seminole County and providing hands-on experiences to youth. While there are many voices in the county that advocate for the protection of the environment, our relationships were useful in achieving those goals. Government employees are not usually politically active enough to have strong relationships with elected officials. DEP does publish pollution data buried in their website, but most residents don’t know their latitude and Longitude coordinates, and we use maps and social media.

~~The District does not have consistent funding, and therefore, the events that the District hosts are primarily in coordination with other groups, including NRCS, UF/IFAS Extension, and other soil and water conservation districts.~~

According to Chapter 582, UF/IFAS is required to support the SWCD’S. We only use their facility for meetings and the agricultural seminars.

## B: Resource Management

### Program Staffing

The District does not employ or pay the salary of any full-time, part-time, or contract employees. As the District has no recorded expenditures, the District’s form of contribution to the events it participates in consists primarily of time dedicated by the Board Supervisors as volunteers and does not include financial donations. ~~The District indicated in interviews with M&J that, were the District to receive funding, one of the District’s first priorities would be to hire an administrative position to help with clerical duties and serve as a source of institutional knowledge for the District~~. This is not true!

### Equipment and Facilities

Seminole SWCD does not own or rent any equipment or facilities. The District Board, at the beginning of the review period, held its meeting in Longwood City Hall for no cost through a verbal agreement with the City. The regular meeting venue was changed in April 2022 to the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences Extension office in Seminole County (“UF/IFAS Extension”) building, which is also being used at no charge and through a verbal agreement.

#### Figure 6: Ownership Status of District Facilities by Type

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Facility Type** | **Ownership Status** | | | |
| **FY21** | **FY22** | **FY23** | **FY24** |
| **Primary Meeting Space** | Meeting Space owned by Longwood City Hall and used by the  District at no cost | Meeting Space owned by Longwood City Hall and used by the  District at no cost | Meeting Space owned by UF/IFAS and used by the District at no cost | Meeting Space owned by UF/IFAS and used by the District at no cost |
| **Alternative Meeting Space** | N/A | N/A | ~~Meeting space owned by Seminole County Sheriff's Office and used by the District at no~~  ~~cost~~ | ~~Meeting space owned by Seminole County Sheriff's Office and used by the District at no~~  ~~cost~~ |

*(Source: District Meeting Minutes)*

### Current and Historic Revenues and Expenditures

Seminole SWCD does not have consistent revenue sources. As such, the District has not developed an annual budget and ~~does not have~~ only now is beginning to have documented expenditures. In an interview with M&J, District Supervisors asserted that any money the District spent within the review period was donated by the Supervisors. When that money was put into the bank account, to pay AFCD dues, for instance, it was ~~and not~~ documented ~~or~~ and recorded as a District expenditure. In its FY22 Annual Financial Report, the District reported $168 in operating expenditures and a cash balance of $131, but no other information about these expenditures and cash reserves was provided to M&J. Exhibit D - Ledger

### Trends and Sustainability

The District will need to obtain a consistent and reliable source of revenue to improve its long-term financial position and continue its ability to aid the community. The Seminole SWCD proposed a method of funding Soil and Water Conservation Districts that provided both transparency and accountability. The requirements for a strategic plan, and annual plan based on the strategic plan, and a budget based on the annual plan was adopted by the legislature, word for word from their proposal.

ɫ The text is in statute. The funding needs to follow. The idea is that if a District has a strategic plan, it should receive $5,000 per year to cover the costs of maintaining a website, having a server to maintain public records, and have an email provided by the district. This would also cover the premiums for Director and Officer insurance since statute 582 states specifically that the Board can sue and be sued. Additionally, when the district presents its budget, based off the annual plan to FDACS, it should receive funding for that budget, up to $20,000. Beyond that, if there is a special project that the District would like to undertake, it can petition FDACS for the cost of that project, up to an additional $20,000.

Seminole SWCD ~~should explore~~ has explored opportunities to secure funding from entities such as the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (“FDACS”) by requesting the contract for the Mobile Irrigation Lab located in our neighboring county, Lake County. FDACS jumped over Seminole County to award the contract to Brevard County, a board with no strategic plan and none of the programs found in Seminole.ɫ

ɫ There should be clearly defined criteria for awarding FDACS contracts. In all other parts of government there are delineated procurement procedures. This appears to the SSWCD as the remnants of the “good ol’ boy” system, and no one on the SSWCD knows the secret handshake.

Seminole County Board of County Commissioners did provide funding for the SSWCD twenty years ago, but the Board was dominated by young, political opportunists who squandered taxpayer funds on pizza after political canvassing for one of their supervisors running for a higher office. Two former supervisors from that group are still elected officials today. Or solicit donations from private donors.ɫ

**Recommendation:** The District should consider identifying new sources of revenue to fund District outreach and conservation programming. The District could consider identifying grant opportunities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, FDACS, the National Association of Conservation Districts, or another public or private conservation-related entity. The District could also consider proposing an agreement with the Seminole County Board of County Commissioners to allow for the District to present an annual budget request, which would be subject to approval by the Board of County Commissioners.

**ɫ The SSWCD has identified a new source of revenue – the money paid by FDACS (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services) and NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Service, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture) to AFCD (Association of Florida Conservation Districts).**

AFCD receives $1,142,964.74 per year in fundingɫ. They have an Executive Director – salary and benefits are $75,000, one secretary, a small office in Chieftain, Florida, and spends less than $50,000/year paying for websites for districts. They must hold an annual meeting for 75 people who pay for their own travel, hotel and dinner. They also travel to six Area Meetings for one half day at each. No food is provided. Excerpts from the contracts are on the last pages. **(Exhibit F – Contracts)**

If AFCD kept half of what they now receive, they would still have $571,482. If the Soil and Water Conservation Districts divided the rest by 49, each district would have $11,662 to pay for technology to comply with Sunshine Statutes, records storage and information system, even training on performance indicators – all the recommendations found later in this report.

SSWCD is working with a grant locator. She has identified grants that alien with the programing that we would like to offer. Her commission is 7%.

The Seminole Board of County Commissioners is not likely, nor do we think they should, fund our budget. They are happy to provide in-kind services.

ɫ This level of funding raises many questions.

## C: Performance Management

### Strategic and Other Future Plansɫ

### **ɫ I don’t understand where the notion came from that every district needs a strategic plan. AFCD has never had any training about strategic plans. The SSWCD developed a Strategic Plan because I was familiar with them as an Army officer. Where did this expectation come from and how was it communicated to the Districts? Without communicating the expectation and providing the training, this becomes and exercise in “gottcha”.**

The District, in September 2023, developed a strategic plan for five years through 2028. The plan outlines the guiding principles and perspectives that direct the District’s operations and services. The District then details how it intends to use the strategic plan to develop work plans for each program. After listing the District’s natural resource priorities, as documented in the [Goals and Objectives](#_bookmark28) subsection below, *the District lists its action plans to address these priorities.* The individual work plans consist of:

* + A Water Quality Plan to address excessive nutrients and water pollution within the District
  + A Conservation Plan to better perform outreach and teach best management practices to the community
  + An Invasive and Poisonous Plant Species Plan to hold workshops and aid in eradication efforts within the District
  + A Habitat Conservation Plan to better engage the public about the importance of rural areas to wildlife conservation
  + A Flooding Education Plan to help educate citizens on flood planning
  + A Fundraising Plan to help the District raise money to pay for these initiatives

*Each plan includes a number of steps toward achieving the plan’s objective. This strategic plan, as it currently exists, is a detailed topline review of the District’s priorities and strategies to address them.ɫ*

The District has also converted the framework of this strategic plan into a template spreadsheet it has sent to the boards of other districts. In interviews with M&J personnel, District Supervisors asserted this plan could serve as a model for standardized strategic planning within soil and water conservation districts.

ɫ Yet on the first page it says the SSWCD does not have a strategic plan and in the paragraph below it says the there needs to be actionable, measurable tasks, which they say we have on the last sentence of the previous page.

***Recommendation:*** *The District should consider refining its current strategic plan to better establish actionable and measurable tasks for accomplishing its plan. The strategic plan should address the needs of the community and the changing land use patterns within the District’s service area. A strategic plan does not need to be extensive as long as the document provides the District with direction for addressing the community’s needs. This appears to be boiler plate language that is not applicable to SSWCD.*

### Goals and Objectives

Seminole SWCD developed a strategic plan in September 2023. In this plan, the District articulates its priority areas with goals and desired conditions for each area. These priority areas are:

* + Water Quality: Ensuring the District maintains clean drinking water
  + Soil Health: Ensuring the District maintains healthy soil and works to prevent erosion
  + Water Quantity: Performing outreach regarding flood preparedness and water conservation
  + Farmland Protection: Ensuring the District maintains a “critical mass” of farmland and agricultural infrastructure
  + Informing/Involving the Public in Conservation Practices: Ensuring the public is aware of the District’s outreach and educational programs

### Performance Measures and Standards

Seminole SWCD does not have any performance measures or standards, written or *unwritten*ɫ, related to program offerings that the District provides or activities that the District participates in. The District is not party to any contracts that contain required performance metrics to track because we are not party to any contracts. ɫHow could anyone know this – clairvoyance?

**Recommendation:** The District should consider identifying performance measures ~~and standards~~ as part of the refinement of its strategic plan, such as number of interactions at outreach eventsɫ. The District should then track the identified performance measures against established standards and use the collected data to monitor the District’s performance, evaluate progress toward the goals and objectives the District adopts, and support future improvements to the District’s service delivery methods.

ɫ The number of interactions at an outreach event depend on many factors, including: where the organizer decides our table will be located, the outside air temperature and probability of rain, the system the city uses to give away the trees, and what other activities are going on in the area (the competition for the public’s attention). Florida does not have established standards, but I am willing to be on the writing team.

ɫThe National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) has training specifically about performance measures that are related to Soil and Water Conservation Districts. However, the District cannot afford the membership in NACD. AFCD, the state organization, could solve this problem for all the districts by conducting training during their annual meeting, but they have not ever provided training related to conservation.

There are no established standards.

### Analysis of Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures and Standards

The District has developed a strategic plan, and a list of conservation priorities as part of that plan. While the strategic plan will require additional refinement of its action steps and the development of performance measures to accurately track progress, the plan’s development did use the District’s statutory purpose and Supervisor insight on the needs of the community.

~~As stated earlier in this section of the report, M&J recommends that the District consider developing and adopting a strategic plan, and subsequently performance measures and standards to provide the District direction and ensure that current and future programs and activities align with its intended statutory purpose, as defined in~~ [~~s. 582.02(4)~~](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.02.html)~~,~~ *~~Florida Statutes~~*. This paragraph contradicts the paragraph above. Either we have a strategic plan or we don’t.

### Annual Financial Reports and Audits

Seminole SWCD is required per [s. 218.32,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0200-0299/0218/Sections/0218.32.html) *Florida Statutes*, to submit an annual financial report to the Florida Department of Financial Services within nine months of the end of the District’s fiscal year (September 30).

Pursuant to Section [218.32,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0200-0299/0218/Sections/0218.32.html) *Florida Statutes*, the District is required to submit an Annual Financial Report every fiscal year by the compliance deadline 9 months after the end of the fiscal year (June 30 of the following year)ɫ. The District filed its FY21 Annual Financial Report within the compliance deadline, but its FY22 Annual Financial Report was filed after the compliance deadline. In addition, the District did not submit its FY23 Annual Financial Report by the compliance deadline of June 30, 2024.

*ɫ“by the compliance deadline 9 months after the end of the fiscal year (June 30 of the following year”*

The fiscal year for SSWCD is the calendar year. Supervisors are sworn in in January. The Treasurer is chosen each January. It doesn’t make sense to us to have a fiscal year that starts on October 1st which is just 1 month prior to elections. 9 months after the end of our fiscal year is October 1st, and one month before elections are held. My resolution of this issue is to file the report in June to appease the staff person in Tallahassee. There was a problem this year because the Supervisor who was the treasurer last year departed on a road trip for the entire month of June. The difficult part of filing isnot the math, it’s how to find LogerX, how to get into LogerX, and how to navigate within LogerX. As each Supervisor takes a turn at being treasurer, the knowledge must be transferred, but remembering something one did once, a year earlier, is not optimal. The staff person’s response was, “Read the manual.”

This problem could be solved with the electronic publication of a Supervisor’s Handbook.

FDACS is currently paying AFCD to update the Supervisor’s Handbook, but it has not been published since 2018. AFCD is specifically tasked in their FDACS contract with assisting districts to comply with deadlines and answer districts’ questions. None of this is happening.

Seminole SWCD does not meet the criteria in [s. 218.39,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0200-0299/0218/Sections/0218.39.html) *Florida Statutes*, to require the District to submit an annual financial audit report, as the District’s annual revenues and combined expenditures and expenses are below the $50,000 threshold, the lowest requirement threshold for special districts.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider refining its timeline for preparing and submitting the Annual Financial Report to the Florida Department of Financial Services to ensure that the District is meeting the requirements of [s. 218.32(1)(a),](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0200-0299/0218/Sections/0218.32.html) *Florida Statutes*.

### Performance Reviews and District Performance Feedback

During the review period, Seminole SWCD did ~~not~~ receive ~~any~~ performance reviews for District operations. The District does ~~not~~ have a system of feedback collection from members of the public ~~or~~ andother stakeholders regarding its programs and activities. Our Conservationist, a County Commissioner, a city Mayor, the teacher who consistently enters teams of students in the Envirothon, and the president of the Audubon Society provided letters to M&J. (**Exhibit G – Letters from Stakeholders)**

The District listens to the comments made by the agricultural producers we serve at each seminar and the Local Working Group. As we develop a routine, we will formalize our analysis and retention of feedback.

**Recommendation:** ~~The District should consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from partners, agricultural producers that the District serves, and other conservation stakeholders.~~ As the District develops and implements additional programming, the District should ~~consider creating~~  institutionalize a process to systematically review feedback.

## D: Organization and Governance

### Election and Appointment of Supervisors

Supervisors are required by [s. 582.19(1)(b),](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.19.html) *Florida Statutes*, to sign an affirmation that they meet certain residency and agricultural experience requirements. These signed affirmations are required of both elected and appointed Supervisors. Beginning with the November 2022 Supervisor elections, Chapter [2022-191,](https://laws.flrules.org/2022/191) *Laws of Florida*, amended [s. 582.19(1),](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.19.html) *Florida Statutes*, and required that candidates for election to a Supervisor seat had to live in the district and have agricultural experience, as defined by the Florida Legislature. Candidates in the November 2022 election were required by [s. 582.19(1)(b),](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.19.html) *Florida Statutes*, to sign an affirmation that they met the residency and qualification requirements.

Since the start of the January 2023 term, one Supervisor has been appointed. Written qualifications have not been provided by the District, and signed affirmations of qualification have been requested but not yet provided by the Seminole Supervisor of Elections for the current elected and appointed Supervisors. If the District failed to require appointed Supervisors to complete documentation that affirmed their compliance with the residency and qualification requirements of [s. 582.19(1)*,*](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.19.html) *Florida Statutes*, the District may have unqualified and/or ineligible Supervisors occupying seats. **(Exhibit G - Sunbiz)**

Two of the five Supervisor seats are up for election in November 2024.

**Recommendation**: The District should consider collaborating with the Seminole Supervisor of Elections to ensure that appointed Supervisors complete the affirmations necessary to document each Supervisor’s compliance with the requirements of [s. 582.19(1),](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.19.html) *Florida Statutes*.

### Notices of Public Meetings

Section [189.015,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0100-0199/0189/Sections/0189.015.html) *Florida Statutes*, requires that all Board meetings be publicly noticed in accordance with the procedures listed in ch. [50,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0000-0099/0050/0050ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2023&Title=%2D%3E2023%2D%3EChapter%2050) *Florida Statutes*. This chapter has been amended twice during the review period, and M&J reviewed for compliance with the governing statute in effect at the time of each meeting date and applicable notice period.

The District submits meeting notices to the Association of Florida Conservation Districts to be posted in the Florida Register. Notices are also posted on the District’s public Facebook page. No other notices have been posted in local newspapers, confirmed by a review of local public notice archives.

M&J’s review concluded that the District notices did not meet the requirements of the version of ch. [50,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0000-0099/0050/0050ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2023&Title=%2D%3E2023%2D%3EChapter%2050) *Florida Statutes*, in effect at the time of each meeting date and applicable notice period. Prior to January 2023, ch. [50,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0000-0099/0050/0050ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2023&Title=%2D%3E2023%2D%3EChapter%2050) *Florida Statutes*, required any board located in a county with a county-wide newspaper to publish meeting notices in that newspaper. The District did not meet this requirement for meetings held in 2021 and 2022. Since January 2023, ch. [50,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0000-0099/0050/0050ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2023&Title=%2D%3E2023%2D%3EChapter%2050) *Florida Statutes*, has permitted publication of meeting notices on a publicly accessible website (such as the Florida Administrative Register) as long as the board publishes a notice once a year in the local newspaper identifying the location of meeting notices and stating that any resident who wishes to receive notices by mail or e-mail may contact the board with that request. The District did not meet this requirement for meetings held in 2023 and 2024.

Failure to provide appropriate notice may deny the public an opportunity to attend meetings and participate in District business. Violation of ch. [50,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0000-0099/0050/0050ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2023&Title=%2D%3E2023%2D%3EChapter%2050) *Florida Statutes*, may subject District Supervisors and staff to penalties, including fees, fines, and misdemeanor charges, as outlined in [s. 286.011,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0200-0299/0286/Sections/0286.011.html) *Florida Statutes*. Additionally, business conducted at such meetings may be invalidated.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider improving its meeting notice procedures to ensure compliance with [s. 189.015](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0100-0199/0189/Sections/0189.015.html) and ch. [50,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0000-0099/0050/0050ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2023&Title=%2D%3E2023%2D%3EChapter%2050) *Florida Statutes*, that governed notice requirements at the time of each meeting date’s applicable notice period. The District should retain records that document is compliance with the applicable statutes.

### Retention of Records and Public Access to Documents

The District has posted some meeting minutes and agendas on its public Facebook page, but the most recent one posted was from March 2024 ~~2023.~~ The District also doesn’t post meeting minutes on its website, with only two agendas uploaded for the November and December 2023 meetings. Upon M&J request, the District produced meeting minutes going back to January 2019. The District was able to provide the other existing records and documentation requested by M&J for this performance review, and includes the appropriate link to the District’s Annual Financial Reports on its website. M&J concludes that there are notable exceptions with the District’s records retention and public access to information as required

[s. 119.021,](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0100-0199/0119/Sections/0119.021.html) *Florida Statutes*.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider improving record retention procedures and access to public records in accordance with ch. 119, *Florida Statutes*, to enhance transparency and avoid loss of institutional knowledge. The District could consider duplicating records to be stored in separate locations to mitigate loss of records due to technology failures, accidental disposition of records, or natural disasters and other acts of God. The District could further consider designing or acquiring an electronic recordkeeping system, either independently or through partnership with a local government, another soil and water conservation district, or other public entity.

# Recommendations

The following table presents M&J’s recommendations based on the analyses and conclusions in the Findings sections, along with considerations for each recommendation.

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| **Recommendation Text** | **Associated Considerations** |
| The District should identify new sources of revenue to fund District outreach and conservation programming. The District could consider identifying grant opportunities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, FDACS, the National Association of Conservation Districts, or another public or private conservation-related entity. The District could also consider proposing an agreement with the Seminole County Board of County Commissioners to allow for the District to present an annual budget request, which would be subject to approval by the Board of  County Commissioners. | * Potential Benefit: Increase the District’s long-term viability and expand the District’s ability to provide services. * Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. * Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. * Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change. |
| The District should consider refining its current strategic plan to better establish actionable and measurable tasks for accomplishing the District’s plan. The strategic plan should address the needs of the community and the changing land use patterns within the District’s service area. A strategic plan does not need to be extensive as long as the document provides the District with direction for addressing the community’s  needs. | * Potential Benefit: A more actionable roadmap to help the District achieve its plans and address the community’s needs. * Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. * Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. * Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change. |

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| **Recommendation Text** | **Associated Considerations** |
| The District should consider identifying performance measures and standards as part of the refinement of its strategic plan, such as number of interactions at outreach events. The District should then track the identified performance measures against established standards and use the collected data to monitor the District’s performance, evaluate progress toward the goals and objectives the District adopts, and support future improvements to the  District’s service delivery methods. | * Potential Benefit: A more effective assessment of the District’s performance towards goals and objectives. * Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. * Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed.   Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change. |
| The District should consider refining its timeline for preparing and submitting the Annual Financial Report to the Florida Department of Financial Services to ensure that the District is meeting the requirements of [s. 218.32(1)(a),](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0200-0299/0218/Sections/0218.32.html) Florida Statutes. | * Potential Benefit: Help ensure the District submits its Annual Financial Reports before the deadline, protecting the District from penalties. * Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. * Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. * Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from   the proposed change. |
| The District should consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from partners, agricultural producers that the District serves, and other conservation stakeholders. As the District develops and implements programming, the District should consider creating a process to systematically review feedback. The District should consider to use the findings from the review of feedback to refine the District’s future service delivery  methods. | * Potential Benefit: Allow the District to refine its service offerings to better address the needs of constituents. * Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. * Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. * Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change. |

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| **Recommendation Text** | **Associated Considerations** |
| The District should consider collaborating with the Seminole Supervisor of Elections to ensure that appointed Supervisors complete the affirmations necessary to document each Supervisor’s compliance with the requirements of [s. 582.19(1),](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0500-0599/0582/Sections/0582.19.html) Florida Statutes. | * Potential Benefit: Better transparency and avoidance of business potentially being voided. * Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. * Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. * Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change. |
| The District should consider improving its meeting notice procedures to ensure compliance with [s. 189.015](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String&URL=0100-0199/0189/Sections/0189.015.html) and ch. 50, Florida Statutes, that governed notice requirements at the time of each meeting date’s applicable notice period. The District should retain records that document is compliance with the applicable statutes. | * Potential Benefit: Ensure better transparency, provide more public access to all meetings, and avoid the risk of penalties. * Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. * Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. * Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change. |
| The District should consider improving record retention procedures and access to public records in accordance with ch. 119, *Florida Statutes*, to enhance transparency and avoid loss of institutional knowledge. The District could consider duplicating records to be stored in separate locations to mitigate loss of records due to technology failures, accidental disposition of records, or natural disasters and other acts of God. The District could further consider designing or acquiring an electronic recordkeeping system, either independently or through partnership with a local government, another soil and water conservation  district, or other public entity. | * Potential Benefit: Improving transparency and avoiding potential loss of important records. * Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. * Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. * Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.   When discussing public records. M&J only discuss meeting minutes and agendas. M&J never mention emails. Currently many districts without funding use free email accounts for their public emails. When the Supervisor leaves office, there is no way for the District to retrieve emails. Then, two years without activity, the email account is closed. |

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| ***Deliverable*** | ***Minimum Performance Standard*** | ***SSWCD’s Response*** |
| Deliverable #1: **Conduct quarterly surveys** of the Florida Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The surveys will be developed in coordination with FDACS on topics to include but not limited to trends, research, funding, technology, training and development, or OAWP programmatic issues. This survey shall be conducted electronically. | Minimum Performance Standards: The RECIPIENT shall contact every SWCD in Florida to give them the opportunity to respond to the survey. Survey results shall be compiled by the RECIPIENT and submitted to the FDACS Project Manager in a report no later than the 10th day of following the end of each fiscal year quarter (September, December, March and June). Note: Failure to meet Deliverable 1 within 5 business days of the deadlines determined above will subject the RECIPIENT to financial consequences as defined in Section IX. FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES unless waived by both the FDACS Contract Manager and FDACS Project Manager. | The SSWCD has never received any survey |
| Deliverable #2:  **Host Area educational/outreach workshops and meetings, annually.** The RECIPIENT must **host a workshop in each of the six areas.** For each workshop, the RECIPIENT shall attempt to include at least one Supervisor from a minimum of three SWCDs in each area and must include an FDACS staff member. Educational workshops shall include topics such as supervisor responsibilities, water quality and conservation programs, requirements for annual auditing and financial reporting, and funding sources, and any new regulatory updates (local, state, or federal) for SWCDs. These workshops may be held electronically or in person. The RECIPIENT shall identify locations for the in-person workshops, as applicable, advertise the workshops to the targeted audience, advise the participating SWCDs to notice workshops in compliance with the Florida Sunshine Law, and notify FDACS at least 30 calendar days in advance of the workshops. | Minimum Performance Standards: The RECIPIENT shall complete a brief summary for each workshop, Supervisor training, and annual meeting. The RECIPIENT must submit the summaries, workshop/training advertisements, agendas, presentations and sign-in sheets to FDACS Project Manager within 10 business of the event with that month’s payment submittal. | AFCD does host an Area Meeting each year.  I have never seen an FDACS staff member attend (I have attended the last 6 years)  The same training on Sunshine and Public Records takes place at least once a year. What good is it to have the Supervisors know about Sunshine and Public Records and without having a website that allows uploads?  Topics not covered in six year;  water quality and conservation programs, requirements for annual auditing and financial reporting, funding sources, and any new regulatory updates (local, state, or federal) for SWCDs. |
| Deliverable #3:  **Respond to requests from districts for SWCD-related information.** The Project Manager shall respond to all incoming requests to include the number of initial e-mail requests and telephone calls responded to, and the topic of concern. | Minimum Performance Standards: All requests shall be documented on the form, AFCD ACTIVITY LOG and TIMESHEET (Attachment A) and submitted to the FDACS Project Manager monthly with each payment request. | The response SSWCD receives for help with the website is -  Technical support costs $125/hour |
| Deliverable #4:  Provide assistance to the SWCDs, special districts, **to develop, host and maintain an official website** that complies with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements, minimum content, and include links to those sites on the official website of the Association of Florida Conservation Districts. The RECIPIENT may contract with a website development company to assist with the technical aspects of developing and maintaining an official website pursuant to Chapter 189.069, F.S. **at no cost to the SWCDs.** | Minimum Performance Standards: Provide the web address of the AFCD website and links to the individual conservation district official websites, roster of SWCD supervisors and their contact information, **PowerPoint presentations, or other informational/training materials used for training** to the FDACS Project Manager quarterly. | AFCD contracted with Streamline in California. SSWCD received an invoice from Streamline for $1000.  AFCD notified Streamline that AFCD will pay for the first year.  At the last annual meeting the AFCD President put members on notice that the Bylaws would change from providing “operational support” to “operational support guidance” I have the recording.  A year earlier AFCD changed the bylaws to give different levels of support to members and non-members. SSWCD has always paid dues.  The entire list of requirements is below. The items highlighted in blue indicate that the Supervisors need to be able to upload items. |
| Deliverable #5:  **Assist SWCDs with meeting and reporting requirements**. The RECIPIENT shall monitor meeting, recordkeeping, annual auditing and financial reporting requirements of the UNIFORM SPECIAL DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, Chapter 189, F.S. and provide guidance for re-establishing a district that is considered inactive by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO). | Minimum Performance Standards: Monitoring shall be recorded on the form, AFCD ACTIVITY LOG and TIMESHEET (Attachment A) and a list of all districts not in compliance with the reporting, meeting, recordkeeping, annual auditing and financial reporting requirements shall be compiled and submitted to FDACS Project Manager as a part of the Final Report to be submitted within 15 business days of the contract termination or of the final payment, whichever is later. | SSWCD has never received assistance, notice that the deadline is approaching, help finding, logging onto, or navigating in LogerX.  AFCD waits until the deadline has passed and sends out emails to all districts listing the districts that have not filed.  **There is no mention of the Ethics Commission requirements in this review.** |
| 5  Maintain a website of the SWCDs supervisor roster, links to their websites, current education information, conservation programs and individual SWCD activities. Website; summary of updates; |  | Accomplished  Maintain a website of the SWCDs supervisor roster, links to their websites,  Not accomplished  current education information, conservation programs and individual SWCD activities. |
| 6 Repeat  **Assist SWCDs with meeting and reporting requirements of section** 189.4031, F.S.  List of non-compliant districts; and noted on the AFCD |  | The don’t do this. |
| 7  Annually, provide meeting schedule for each SWCD to FDACS/OAWP.  SWCD meeting schedules electronically; |  |  |
| 8  **Assist with updating the Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor Handbook**  **A draft electronic copy with suggested changes;** |  | The Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor Handbook has not been updated since 2018  (Exhibit V – Handbook) |
| 9  Attend Meetings related to the work of this contract Meeting agendas, sign-in sheets and  travel reimbursement forms; |  |  |

NRCS Contracts: To organize Local Working Groups in each county. Other duties related to Local Working Groups. $75,000

Plan and organize the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council’s funding priorities $100,000

Addendum paying $99,998.53

To facilitate partnership objectives $333,966.21

AFCD receives $1,142,964.74 a year to support Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Deliverable #4: **Provide assistance to the SWCDs, special districts, to develop, host and maintain an official website** that complies with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements, minimum content, and include links to those sites on the official website of the Association of Florida Conservation Districts. The RECIPIENT may contract with a website development company to assist with the technical aspects of developing and maintaining an official website pursuant to Chapter 189.069, F.S. at no cost to the SWCDs. The website must comply with and include at a minimum the following information: 1. The full legal name of the special district. 2. The public purpose of the special district. 3. The name, official address, official e-mail address, and, if applicable, term and appointing authority for each member of the governing body of the special district. 4. The fiscal year of the special district. 5. The full text of the special district’s charter, date of establishment, the establishing entity, and the statute or statutes under which the special district operates, if different from the statute or statutes under which the special district was established. 6. The mailing address, e-mail address, telephone number, and website uniform resource locator of the special district. 7. A description of the boundaries or service area of, and the services provided by, the special district. 8. A listing of all taxes, fees, assessments, or charges imposed and collected by the special district, including the rates or amounts for the fiscal year and the statutory authority for the levy of the tax, fee, assessment, or charge. For purposes of this subparagraph, charges do not include patient charges by a hospital or other health care provider. 9. The primary contact information for the special district for purposes of communication from the department. 10. A code of ethics adopted by the special district, if applicable, and a hyperlink to generally applicable ethics provisions. 11. The budget of the special district and any amendments thereto in accordance with s. 189.016. 12. The final, complete audit report for the most recent completed fiscal year and audit reports required by law or authorized by the governing body of the special district. If the special district has submitted its most recent final, complete audit report to the Auditor General, this Page 22 of 38 DocuSign Envelope ID: 84F948B2-3CB3-4C54-BEB6-A3D4BA779092 requirement may be satisfied by providing a link to the audit report on the Auditor General’s website. 13. A listing of its regularly scheduled public meetings as required by s. 189.015(1). 14. The link to the Department of Financial Services’ website as set forth in s. 218.32(1)(g). At least 7 days before each meeting or workshop, the agenda of the event. The information must remain on the website for at least 1 year after the event. The RECIPIENT must maintain the following on its website: Links to the individual conservation districts’ official websites, A calendar of all conservation district, area or regional meetings, upcoming events, training opportunities, Roster of current conservation district supervisors and their contact information, and PowerPoint presentations and other informational/training materials used for supervisor training. The RECIPIENT will continue to work with FDACS to improve the data available on the RECIPIENT’s website.

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