



## What is a Conservation District?

**By: Fred Deneke**

Conservation districts came out of the “dust bowl” years when the federal government revamped the Soil Erosion Service into the

Soil Conservation Service in 1938. That same year President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a letter to all governors asking them to pass legislation creating soil conservation districts for the purpose of assisting the SCS (now Natural Resource Conservation Service- NRCS) in getting landowners to combat soil erosion problems. The first district was created in North Carolina in 1938 with virtually all states passing legislation by 1950.

Today the United States is blanketed with nearly 3,000 conservation districts, with more than 8,000 district employees working at the local level on conservation issues. Those numbers continue to increase as districts have demonstrated their ability to solve resource problems.

Conservation districts are subdivisions of local government and generally organized along county boundary lines. However, districts have been formed on sub-boundaries such as watersheds or parts of a county, and a state like Washington has more conservation districts than counties. Conservation districts do not function as local units of government in any state except Nebraska because they lack power to pass ordinances, tax or condemn. In a few states, districts have taxation power or can tax by referendum or request county governments to provide tax revenue for their operation.

While the majority of district supervisors are connected to agriculture, many come from all professions, teachers, lawyers, legislators, businessmen, actors, entertainers etc. These leaders are elected by general ballot in 33 State’s, and in the rest, in special elections or through state committee appointments.

## What Conservation Districts Can Do For You.

Conservation districts have broad-based charters in natural resources, allowing them to fully engage in all resource management programs including soil and water conservation, forestry, flood control, water quality monitoring, recreation, fish and wildlife and various aspects of resource development.

### Conservation districts can:

- Take technical, financial, and educational resources (whatever their source) and focus or coordinate them so they meet the needs of the local land user for conservation of soil, water, and related resources.
- Prepare resource plans for landowners and others.
- Hire staff to provide technical services and other functions.
- Receive federal, state, county or other funding such as grants from foundations.
- Prepare long range and annual plans for resource management within district boundaries.
- Conduct research and cooperate in research projects.
- Provide education assistance to schools, landowners and others.
- Administer other agencies programs in part or in whole.

Conservation districts provide an excellent opportunity for assisting local governments and landowners with all facets of land management, including forestry.

By becoming involved in a conservation district, foresters and other natural resource professionals can help landowners – through the local conservation district – develop land management plans and programs or set local policy direction by becoming involved in the district movement.

### Jefferson County Conservation District:

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**Jefferson County Conservation District**  
PORT HADLOCK, WASHINGTON, U.S.A.

### Why Should I Care?

Conservation districts provide a ready-made vehicle to address local resource problems and to help landowners and citizens address issues important to them.

The current emphasis of many conservation district forestry efforts include biomass utilization, community wildfire planning and protection, wildlife habitat enhancement, forest health improvement, and stemming the tide of forest fragmentation and invasive plants. In addition, many conservation districts have very successful tree and native plant sales programs.

### How Do I Get Involved?

The best first step is to get familiar with your local conservation district, find out what it needs, stop by and meet the people who get conservation projects completed "on the ground". Find out who the supervisors are and what roles they play in your community. Volunteer to help with the next tree sale event. Learn about what the conservation district programs are and visit their web site at **[Jeffersoncd.org](http://Jeffersoncd.org)**

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