

Chairman VanWoerkom and members of the Subcommittee:

I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the importance of Michigan's Conservation Districts.

Since 1983 I have been involved with Conservation Districts, first as a Federal employee of the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service, where I was responsible for delivering technical and financial assistance to private landowners with and through local Conservation Districts. Throughout my career and in many different capacities it became clear to me that my job of assisting Michigan landowners to protect, conserve and improve their natural resources was made much more effective and efficient when working with a well-staffed, well-funded and well directed Conservation District.

For over 75 years, Michigan Conservation Districts have leveraged Federal, State, local, public and private resources and focused them like a laser beam on the most important natural resource issues on private lands across the State. Without well-funded Conservation Districts as a local delivery and guidance system, access to private lands for the purpose of planning and implementing conservation activities for our soil, water, animals, plants and other natural resources is in jeopardy.

It is commonly accepted knowledge that without the assistance of Conservation Districts, State agencies including the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), and Department Natural Resources (DNR) would not enjoy the access to private lands and the cooperation of private landowners that they do when delivering their programs through Conservation Districts.

Today I serve as a Conservation District Director in Jackson County and as a volunteer for the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts providing training to the Directors and Staff of our 75 member Districts who serve all 83 of Michigan's Counties. Many Conservation Districts have indicated to me that they are struggling financially and are finding it increasingly difficult to continue their important functions and current level of programming without a reasonable investment in the form of general operations funding from the State. By providing base funding for Conservation Districts, Michigan will reap the benefits of vigorous and proactive conservation of our soil and water resources on private land.

I strongly encourage your support of State investment in Michigan's Conservation Districts.

Thank you for your consideration.

Steven V. Law

Vice Chair

Jackson County Conservation District