

Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission

SWCD Match DRAFT Policy Survey

Program Specialist Comments

Clark Hutson:

1. My view as a Program Specialist
2. Clark Hutson
5. Yes
6. Yes
7. Yes to Both in the Short Term – does not address the issue of 2 SWCD's doing essentially the same work with different funding streams, i.e. General Fund & County Auditor
8. Yes
9. Yes
10. Annual Plan of work should be tied to the SWCD Reporting Program, so the Commission can more easily compare what a District said they were going to do and what they actually accomplished.
11. Yes
12. Maybe
13. I am not sure what effect it will have on local appropriations.
14. Yes
15. Yes
16. This could cause an unintended consequence of having Districts spend surpluses on low priority or unnecessary items or programs to reduce their unassigned carry-over balance to below the acceptable financial threshold.

Rob Hamilton

I wanted to follow up and provide comments on the state match task force policy since I won't be able to make the task force meeting this week. Since sending out the survey I've

attended several board meetings and have had a number of discussions with staff and board members about the survey, draft policies, and the overall mission of the task force. Also, on June 5th Steve Hawkins reviewed the draft policies and the survey at an area 5 DA meeting. I hope that these efforts result in every district in my area completing the survey and providing feedback.

As a result of the meetings and discussions I have had I wanted to share with you a couple of items that I feel have generated the most discussion. Hopefully you can share these with other task force members at Thursday's meeting and compare it with the feedback you receive from other members and districts. Before I share these items with you I wanted to share a couple of my own observations: 1) many of our board members and even some staff struggle with understanding state match funding and what can and can't be matched and how funds are distributed to districts. I know we train new board members every year and review state match policies when we complete the form 11 but we still have a lack of completely understanding the sources of funding, policies and procedures and the formula used for distribution among some staff and board members. 2) Even though there is not a complete understanding, the current state match formula we have in place is doing a decent job at distributing state funding to districts, is still very relevant, and is accepted by most districts. From the discussions I have had this month I'd be reluctant to change the current formula we have in place for distributing state match but would look closer at the policies to make sure funds are getting distributed appropriately across the state.

In regards to the policies, the three areas that I feel generated the most discussion are: 1) The revised language for fees for services 2) Changes in the annual plan of work that would require using SWIMs for measuring quarterly progress and 3) Distribution equity and changes in the match formula.

Fees for services- The overall concern with this change is that it may change the way districts are funded in the future i.e. less from the county and more from the municipal and township sources and the potential to shift state match dollars away from more rural districts.

Annual plan of work and using SWIMs- Most of the districts I heard from have no problem with doing an annual plan of work, doing quarterly reporting, or measuring and tracking progress on goals throughout the year. The issue is using the SWIMs program to do this. I know in my area as computers are upgraded to Windows 8 that I have fewer and fewer districts that are able to use SWIMs efficiently. Most are resorting to keeping one old computer around to run SWIMs on and to enter in projects and initiatives. I think we

need to reconsider this policy recommendation if we are to hold districts accountable to doing this.

Distribution Equity and Match Formula- As I mentioned earlier what I have taken away from the discussion is that the overall match formula we have in place is working pretty well. I was surprised that in my lower funded counties that they didn't feel changing the formula would result in any more additional dollars. In fact, a few felt that if we increase the state funds through a local appropriation on the first \$20,000 that it may cause the county to give them less dollars in the end to fund the District's annual budget. On the flip side, my medium and higher funded counties certainly recognize the need to fund 88 counties, but have concerns that by changing the formula we are subsidizing counties that choose not to invest in their district at the expense of other counties that do fund their districts. So based on the discussions I have had I'm not sure the changes in the match formula would help meet the task force's guiding principles. If the goal is to keep a viable program in all 88 districts I think we need to recognize that there is little to no money in some counties to fund district programs and we will need to keep state funds in place to keep them going. One thought I have had lately is to rework the conservation assistance grants to allow a district to apply on an annual basis if they need funding to maintain their program. If a district was short of funds and has already made necessary cuts they could apply to the OSWCC annually for additional state funds based on their needs. We could look at all funds they have available (district and special funds) and take these into account to figure what is needed annually. I think by having an annual grant program in place it would help our districts that have programs in jeopardy and could help provide some reassurance to the staff in place in these counties that there will be some funding for their job. One final thought on the state match formula is to cap the maximum amount of funding any district can receive to something less than \$500,000. This could be phased in overtime if there is a concern that the changes will have a major effect on local programs. With the current 10 million state funding level I think setting a cap makes sense and could help provide more funds to all districts rather than just a few.