

Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission State Matching Fund Policies – adopted November 2014

Updated November 2023

The historical approach of Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) and the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission (OSWCC) of matching local funds with state dollars has proven very effective in allowing SWCD boards of supervisors and their local partners the flexibility to develop local plans and programs for the conservation of our natural resources. This approach has led Ohio to become one of the most respected and effective state/local partnerships in the United States. The Commission and ODA want to continue that dynamic relationship, remain flexible and innovative, and at the same time protect the core responsibility they have to assist in the growth of Ohio's conservation movement, fairly benefiting all Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs).

Background:

Beginning in 1959, the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Committee (now the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission) was given authority by the Ohio legislature to match local funds with state funds through ODNR (now ODA) to carry out local conservation programs. From 1959 to 1980, as then specified in Chapter 1515 (now chapter 940), they matched funds appropriated and received through the county's "inside millage" or from the county's general fund.

As Ohio's landscape changed and district programs and services grew, SWCDs led an effort to change Section 1515.14*(now 940.15) to allow funds appropriated to SWCDs from municipalities and townships to also be matched. The ability to match municipal and township appropriations has created tremendous funding opportunities for SWCDs, especially those serving their county's urban conservation needs. In the late 2000s, Section 1515.14 (now section 940.15) was amended to clarify matching funds from millage "outside" or in excess of the ten-mill limitation due to the increase in SWCDs (with permission of county commissioners) looking for funding through dedicated property tax levies. Both these changes have provided expanded revenue opportunities for SWCDs but have also created concern about match distribution equity among all 88 SWCDs.

In 2013, the OSWCC created and charged the SWCD Match Task force to revisit the 2004 OSWCC policy and make recommendations at the July 2014 OSWCC meeting. This policy was approved and adopted by the OSWCC in November 2014. The following policy statement and guidelines are the result of that effort.

Purpose:

Clarify and communicate the Commission's policy on the matchability of local funds provided to a SWCD to carry out their mission and goals as directed by the board of supervisors.

Guiding Principles:

- Develop, communicate, and implement a policy that is within the authorities of the Ohio Revised Code.
- Set policies reflective of and responsive to districts' changing needs; and
- Maintain an equitable distribution of state matching funds that support a strong statewide program.
- Support every SWCD to have enough staff to have a viable program to meet local needs.

The proceeding policy addresses four areas related to the matching of local revenue received by Ohio SWCDs:

- Matchability;**
- Accountability;**
- Distribution Equity; and**
- SWCD Financial Status.**

Matchability

The Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission will authorize state match of funds received only in accordance with sections 940.12 and 940.15 of the Ohio Revised Code.

- *Funds appropriated and received from a county General Fund or from the county's first ten-mill of property tax (inside millage)*
- *Funds appropriated by a municipality or township.*
- *Funds received from a special property tax levy for SWCD operations section 940.12.*

Limitations and exceptions to the above:

- All funds (cash considered for match shall be directly deposited into the Special Fund of the SWCD within 90 days of being received by the SWCD and prior to April 30. Exceptions will be considered only by individual SWCD requests to the Commission.
- Each state fiscal year, only \$8,000 of appropriations dedicated for implementation of capital improvements will be matched.
- The OSWCC may choose to limit the match percentage of funds dedicated to those programs where the legal authorities of implementing those programs fall under another local unit of government.

Examples of sources and programs which would not be matchable:

The OSWCC will not match revenue received directly to the SWCD from the following sources:

- *Direct assessments for agricultural drainage maintenance programs*
- *Direct assessments for fees for urban storm water maintenance programs*
- *Direct payment from Stormwater Utilities*
- *Fees for services performed for private landowners.*
- *Insurance payments/settlements*
- *Rental payments from occupiers of SWCD-owned or leased buildings or property*
- *Appropriations/Grants/Transfers from County Engineer Departments; County Boards of Health or Health Departments or any other county-wide department, board, or commission.*
- *District Fund Transfers into the Special Fund (not received as an appropriation)*
- *Sale of SWCD property*

The OSWCC will not match revenue received for or expended for the following uses:

- *Any cost-share payments*
- *Transfers to other agencies or organizations*

Accountability

SWCD revenue eligible for state match dollars will be matched fully at the current fiscal year match rate when the following criteria are met:

- The OSWCC is presented with a SWCD Annual Plan of Work (APW) for the current calendar year, reflecting district resource inventory and needs, developed by the SWCD board, meeting OSWCC minimum standards. (See APW Template Attachment B).
- The SWCD is using the OSWCC approved reporting system in accordance with OSWCC policy. The approved system is currently Beehive. (See Beehive Use and Guidance Document Attachment C).
- SWCDs will document the review of the Annual Plan of Work on a quarterly basis to evaluate progress toward implementing the plan.
- The OSWCC may reduce total match dollars by 25% or more for those SWCDs that do not meet the above requirements.

Distribution Equity

Among the OSWCC match guiding principles is the goal of state match distribution which supports a strong program in each of the 88 SWCDs. To accomplish this is the following statewide distribution policy:

- Regardless of total local matchable revenue, each SWCD will be provided a base state match of \$15,000.
- **Provided that total match funds available are equal to or greater than the total funds available during the previous state fiscal year:** the first \$20,000 of local matchable revenue will be matched at a 200% rate the remainder at the current fiscal year formula percentage up to \$500,000.
- All funds above \$20,000 and below \$500,000 will be matched at the uniform formula rate depending on the remaining available state match funds.
- Any local matchable revenue above \$500,000 will be matched at 60 percent of the overall match rate.
- SWCDs that have experienced a catastrophic loss of local matchable revenue resulting in a greater than 40% reduction over the past three years or districts receiving less than \$40,000 from combined local matchable revenue may be eligible for Conservation Assistance Grants from the OSWCC. Districts may apply for up to \$25,000 per year of additional state funds through this policy annually. SWCDs will be eligible to receive a maximum of \$40,000 in combined state matching funds, flat rate, and conservation assistance funds. Applications should be submitted along with the OSWCC Form 11 (See attachment D). The maximum combined amount shall be reviewed by the OSWCC on an annual basis.
- The state match on revenue received for SWCD operations from a special property tax levy will be limited to an amount which does not exceed 5% of total available state match dollars.

SWCD Financial Status

To promote efficient, effective, and prudent use of public funds for the benefit of all SWCDs the following policy shall be implemented:

- Annually on the OSWCC Form 11, the SWCD shall report District Fund and Special Fund balances including the amounts as reported on the previous year's Cash Basis Annual Financial Statement.
- SWCDs should maintain an unassigned balance of all SWCD funds (Special and District) at a minimum of 25% of the current year annual budget or an amount designated by the county.
- SWCDs will maintain a combined total balance of the Special Fund and District Fund (as reported on the previous year's Cash Basis Annual Financial Statement), less grant and contingency funds, not to exceed 200% of the current year's operating budget as stated in the SWCD Special Fund budget submitted to each county board of commissioners.
- State match dollars will be reduced, for those SWCDs with operating budgets in excess of \$150,000 and combined total balance of the Special Fund and District Fund (as reported on the previous year's Cash Basis Annual Financial Statement), less grant and contingency funds as documented on the Cash Basis Annual Financial Statement, in excess of 200% of the current year's budget, by an amount equal to the difference between the combined previous year's Special and District Fund balances and 200% of the current year's budget amount. Exceptions may be considered on a case-by-case basis when presented to the OSWCC.