

Idaho's Best Return on Conservation Investment

In coordination with federal, state, and private organizations, Districts provide technical assistance, education, and affordable resources to landowners and farmers across the state. They also provide natural resources education and opportunities to students to grow the next generation of farmers & resource managers.



Idaho's **50 conservation districts** provide assistance to landowners to conserve and enhance Idaho's natural resources.



Millions of acres are impacted by Districts through irrigation improvements, fuels mitigation, restoration projects, and more.



For each dollar districts manage in State Funding and Programs, they manage \$2.82 from other entities and programs - making a bigger conservation impact.



Over **146,000 people**, are impacted by Conservation Districts across the State.

(All graphics shared in this article from the IASCD FY 24 Performance Report are courtesy of IASCD).

CELEBRATING THE MAJOR IMPACT OF IDAHO'S 50 CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

By Steve Stuebner

For the first time ever, the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts (IASCD) has produced a statewide performance report – in this case, for Fiscal Year 2024 – documenting the impact of District conservation, education and outreach activities.

The colorful, professionally designed eight-page report provides a comprehensive look at what the state's 50 conservation districts have achieved in partnership with landowners, their communities, the SWCC, and other state and federal agencies.

Each year, the Districts produce their own annual reports and submit them to the SWCC.



"I'm really pleased with the performance report – I want to do it every year," says Tori O'Neal, a Pahsimeroi rancher and Board President of IASCD.

"There's a lot of high points in the report. What's really cool is to look at those numbers in the aggregate

to see all of the stuff we're getting accomplished all over the state. I was really impressed with that."

Jessica Harrold, Director of the Ada Soil and Water Conservation District, compiled the report for IASCD by reaching out to all 50 districts to obtain the information.

Page 1 of the report underscores the Districts' mission – they work on locally led, non-regulatory, boots-on-the ground voluntary conservation projects with participating landowners.

The Districts also invest heavily in education and outreach programs in partnership with local schools and communities.

The Statewide Conservation Partnership between the Districts,

Restoration Projects & Ecological Impact



176,062
trees



22,450
flowering
plants



1,800
native shrubs

20 Districts coordinate plant sales. Producers & landowners use these cost-effective materials to create windbreaks, add pollinator habitat, and restore native landscapes.

RESTORATION PROJECTS:

- 10 Districts completed streambank restoration projects to reduce erosion, provide cooler water temperatures for fish, and stop sediment, phosphorus, nitrogen from entering waterways
- Riparian & Prairie projects improved over 17,000 acres for landowners
- 6 Districts replaced over 17 aging culverts to allow for better salmon passage through creeks, reduce sediment, and mitigate storm water runoff more effectively
- Russian olive removal, mowing, and invasive species management projects help restore native plant communities on over 6,000 acres

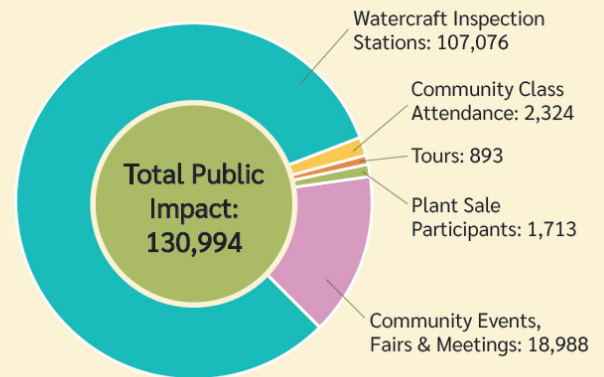
Landowners, SWCC, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is at the heart of how projects get accomplished statewide.

Many districts work with additional partners and government agencies to increase their impact. Districts located in the Salmon and Clearwater river basins, for example, can apply for grants and funding related to endangered salmon and steelhead habitat restoration.

"In coordination with federal, state, and private organizations, Districts provide technical assistance, education, and affordable resources



Community Impact



to landowners and farmers across the state. They also provide natural resources education and opportunities to students to grow the next generation of farmers & resource managers," the report says.

In this newsletter issue, we will share the high points of the IASCD report along with the conservation accomplishments of the Districts and Commission in the implementation of Water Quality Program for Agriculture (WQPA) grants statewide to give a comprehensive picture of conservation achievements statewide in fiscal 2024.

All of the state's Districts are run by 72 full- or part-time administrators. Each one has an all-volunteer board of supervisors, involving 280 producers statewide and 37 associate supervisors.

With \$1,468,933 in state funding in FY 24, along with \$1.13 million received through the ISDA

Watercraft Inspection Program and \$448,000 in state administrative funds through the WQPA grant program, the Districts more than double that funding through partnerships and community support.

Or, put more simply, they invest \$2.81 in local projects for every \$1 received from state funding.

LOW INTEREST LOANS FOR IDAHO SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION

- Sprinkler Irrigation
- No-Till Drills
- Fences
- Livestock Feeding Operations
- Solar Stock Water Pump Systems

3% - 6%
Terms 7-15 Years
Up to \$600,000



swc.idaho.gov

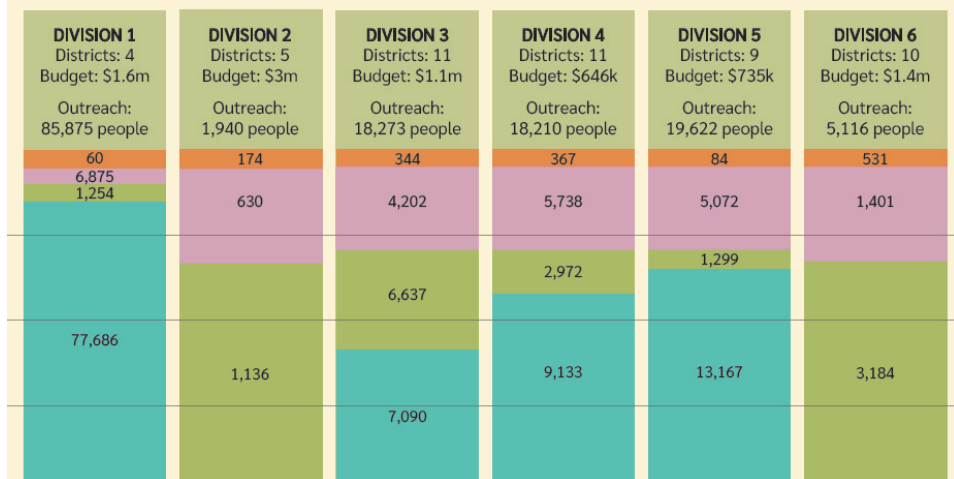
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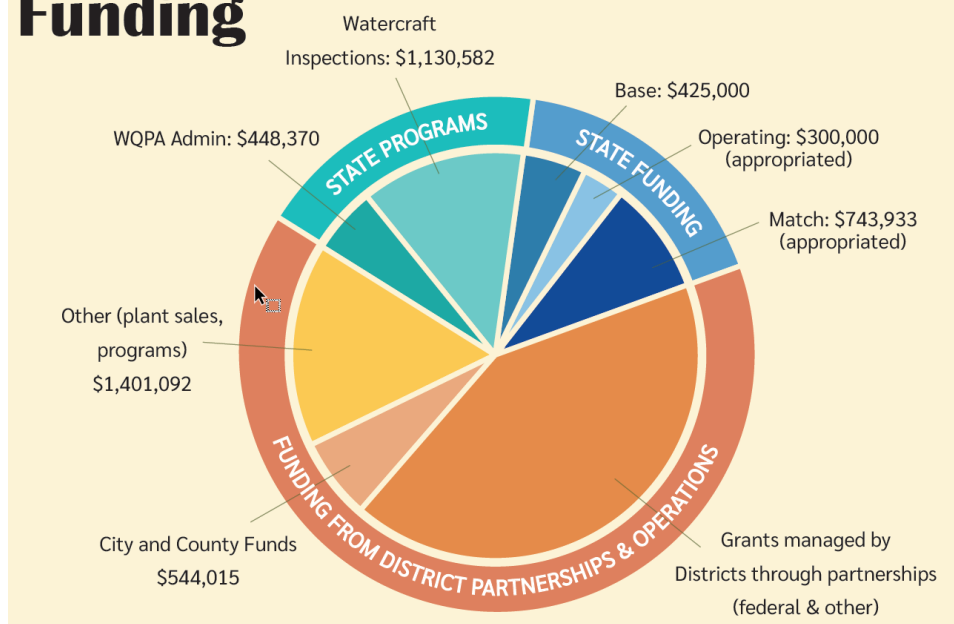


Districts by the Numbers

PRODUCERS
COMMUNITY
STUDENTS
WATERCRAFT



Funding



Devin Fielding, IASCD past board president and a Bingham County farmer, said he was impressed with that economic impact number. “Big picture, we are leveraging state funding to more than double our impact to our local communities,” he said. “We build partnerships with the community and producers to put projects on the ground.”

Fielding also underscores the importance of the farmers and ranchers across the state who volunteer to serve on each district’s board of supervisors. “I think that’s one of the most powerful thing about the conservation districts,” Fielding said. “They volunteer their time to make their communities better. You’re seeing over 280

producers volunteering to make things better for their kids and future generations.”

That has occurred over multiple generations since the formation of the conservation districts and the Commission, dating back to the “Dust Bowl” era of the 1930s.

While many farmers and ranchers who are involved as district supervisors are approaching retirement, new generations are rising up to take on that responsibility, and they are eager to get things done, Fielding says.

“The young people we’re getting are top-notch,” Fielding says. “They’re like, if we’re going to put the time into this, we’ve got to do something. Let’s get ‘er done!”

O’Neal, a regenerative rancher in the Pahsimeroi Valley and member of “Desert Mountain Grass Fed Beef,” has stepped up to serve as Board President of IASCD in 2026. Fielding describes her as a “rock star.”

O’Neal serves on the board of supervisors for the Custer Soil and Water Conservation District. A WQPA grant project featuring a K-line mobile irrigation system that she installed on her ranch appeared in the August 2025 issue of *Conservation the Idaho Way*.

District Conservation Achievements

The IASCD report indicates that Districts accomplished 132 conservation improvement projects statewide. With a \$5 million budget in FY 2024, the SWCC awarded WQPA grant funds to assist Districts in implementing 48 projects with a total cost of \$15.79 million.

WQPA funds leveraged \$11.03 million of matching funds or \$2.32 for every state general fund dollar spent.

(IASCD story continues on page 5)



WQPA

WATER QUALITY PROGRAM FOR AGRICULTURE

Sidebar: FY 2024 WQPA Accomplishments

The Water Quality Program for Agriculture (WQPA) was revitalized in FY 2023 by the Idaho Legislature with a \$5 million supplemental enhancement to the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission budget.

The program had been unfunded from FY2012-FY2022.

In FY 2024, the Idaho Legislature provided another \$5 million in funding. Idaho's conservation districts acted quickly to apply for funds. The Commission reviewed the applications and awarded grant funds to Districts statewide, providing crucial cost-share funds for 48 conservation projects with a total value of \$15.79 million.

On this page, you'll see a breakdown of the funding benefits at the project level.

The WQPA grant funds have been super popular with the state's conservation districts. The funds have made it possible for districts to install more conservation projects at the ground level, often with additional multiple funding

partners involved. WQPA grants can be "stacked" with other grants to help cover total project costs.

In general, WQPA conservation projects may involve the installation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) on private farms or ranches to reduce the impact of livestock feeding and watering facilities. Other projects may involve enhancements to water quality in streams or water efficiency projects for irrigation.

WQPA projects often improve the environment and water quality

while also reducing sediment in streams and – in some cases – conserving water. Twenty-six of the conservation projects reduced sediment by 25,458 tons, phosphorous by 39,956 tons, and nitrogen by 75,365 pounds per year.

The irrigation BMPs reported served 30,803 users and 250,025 acres of farmland, saving 11,985 acre-feet of water per year.

For more about WQPA, go to: <https://swc.idaho.gov/>.

FY24 WQPA BMP Funds Invested in Idaho Agriculture:

- Irrigation Infrastructure - \$1,508,966
- Irrigation Efficiency (on field) - \$539,793
- Irrigation Efficiency (w/water quality) - \$1,229,944
- Streambank, Riparian, Erosion BMPs - \$736,036
- Livestock BMPs - \$167,084
- Soil Health BMPs - \$150,000
- Administrative funds to Districts - \$418,879
- Reappropriated to FY25/26 Projects - \$249,298

FY 2024 WQPA Funding BMPs Installed

- | | |
|--|--|
| • 137,114 feet - Irrigation Water Conveyance (<i>lined or piped</i>) | • 17,027 feet - Streambank Stabilization |
| • 6 each - Structures for Water Control | • 82 acres - Riparian Restoration |
| (<i>headgates replaced or automated</i>) | • 3,030 feet - Riparian Fencing |
| • 1,132 acres - Sprinkler Irrigation installed | • 5 each - Stock Water Developments |
| • 78 acres - Drip Irrigation installed | • 2.5 miles - Forest Road Improvements |
| • 2,807 acres - Irrigation Water Management (<i>soil moisture sensors</i>) | • 10,396 acres - Nutrient Management |

George Hitz, Deputy Director of SWCC, said he was impressed with the IASCD performance report. "I think it's awesome – I think it will make an impact," he said. "It's important to let our policy makers know at the state and local levels how District dollars are being spent, and how those investments have a ripple effect, providing a greater benefit for local communities."

"Our collaborative efforts continue to yield long-lasting conservation efforts and beneficial boots on the ground results for Idaho farmers, ranchers and landowners," added Darvis Jordan, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships.

Steve Stuebner writes for Conservation the Idaho Way on a regular basis.

Fuels reduction on over 5,500 acres

POLLINATOR & WILDLIFE HABITATS:

- Four monarch butterfly way stations planted to increase native milkweed
- Forb & seed sales
- 44 owl boxes installed
- Replace traditional fencing with more wildlife-friendly fencing options



MONITORING & TESTING EFFORTS:
Water testing monitors local drains & protects natural waterways.

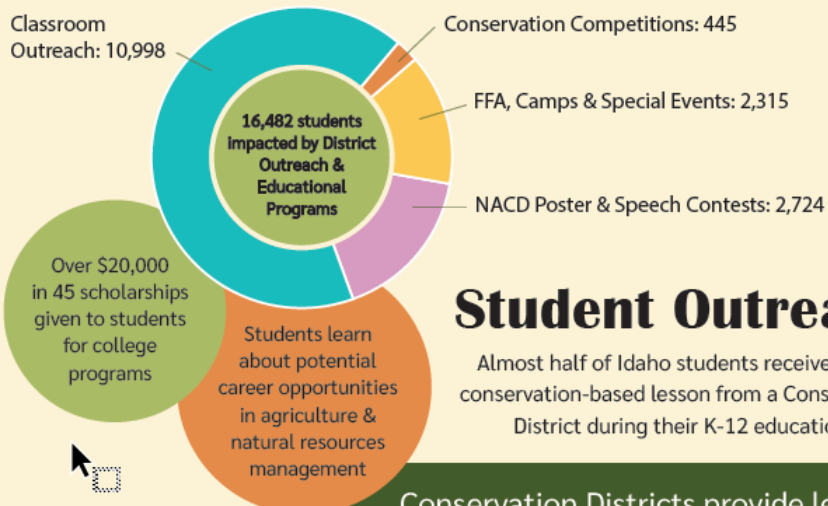


10 Arbor Day events hosted, with over 1,200 participants

COMMISSION

Erik Olson, Chairman
Wendy Pratt, Vice-Chairman
Blake Hollingsworth, Secretary/Treasurer
Karen Sharpnack, Commissioner
Mitchel Silvers, Commissioner
Joan Cloonan, Commissioner
Richard Savage, Commissioner
Mathew Weaver, Interim Administrator

Education



Student Outreach

Almost half of Idaho students receive a free conservation-based lesson from a Conservation District during their K-12 education.

Conservation Districts provide lessons to students on topics including:

- Agriculture in Idaho
- Land Stewardship
- Pollinators
- Soil Health
- Rivers & Watersheds
- Fish, Streams & Dams
- Riparian Habitats
- Volunteer Habitat Restoration Plantings

Each year, thousands of students across the state participate in poster & speech contests sponsored by their local Districts. The Conservation theme is chosen by the National Association of Conservation Districts.

Conservation Districts host agricultural competitions for students throughout the state, which gives students the chance to put their knowledge to the test. These projects are supported by hundreds of volunteers and local agency partners.

100 Students compete at the Idaho Envirothon

60 students compete in Soil & Range Judging

200 students compete at the State Forestry Contest

85 students compete in the State Land & Soil Evaluation Event



To obtain a copy of the full 8-page IASCD Performance Report, send email to IASCD Past President Devin Fielding: fielding.iascd@gmail.com

Special thanks to Jessica Harrold from the Ada District for compiling the IASCD report and to Tara Dial for the graphic design: www.littlestudiocollective.com.



SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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Conservation the Idaho Way: Sowing Seeds of Stewardship