

Conservation District History in the United States

- Early 1930s–Depression rocked the country
- Dust Bowl–unparalleled ecologic and agricultural disaster that drove people from their homes



- In 1933, FDR summoned Hugh Hammond Bennett, a soil scientist, to the White House to see what could be done
- Bennett told FDR that 100 million acres had lost its topsoil, nearly half had been destroyed and could never be farmed again.
- FDR gave Bennett \$5 million in relief funds to start the Soil Erosion Service, a temporary agency intended to provide relief



- In 1935, Hugh Hammond Bennett testified before Congress to persuade them to fund a permanent agency to heal the land.
- He wanted there to be local control, with every farm community setting up a soil conservation district.
- While talking to Congress, he looked out the window –revealed a “cloud of dust” coming from the Great Plains, two days after the infamous Black Sunday.
- Congress unanimously passed legislation making soil & water conservation a national policy and priority.

- 1937–President Roosevelt wrote governors of all states recommending conservation district enabling legislation
- Standard Soil Conservation Law–to persuade farmers & landowners to utilize soil conserving methods
- Brown Creek SWCD (NC) first conservation district established on August 4,1937

First PA Conservation Districts

- Pennsylvania's first districts were formed in 1945 under the authority of the Conservation District Law (Act 217).
- An earlier law was passed in 1937 which allowed the creation of Conservation Districts along watershed lines was later superseded by Act 217 of 1945.



- The Potter County Commissioners were the first in the state to create a Conservation District - which they did by resolution dated November 28, 1945.
- Within a year, eight more districts were created - Allegheny, Berks, Clarion, Clinton, Fulton, Jefferson, Lehigh, and Tioga.
- Currently there are 66 districts throughout the state.
- Philadelphia was designated as an Urban Conservation Partnership which is similar in philosophy and function to a conservation district.

Today in PA Conservation Districts

- In 1979 the state recognized the potential of districts ability to educate, promote and deliver sound soil and water conservation programs on a local level through their local partnerships and connections.
- As a result the state may enter into formal contracts, delegations and grants to deliver these programs. Some of these programs include:
 - Erosion and Sediment Pollution Control

- Watershed Specialist
- Nutrient Management Act Program
- Chesapeake Bay Non-Point Source Pollution Program

