

MARION SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT 2024-2028 LONG-RANGE PLAN

Chairman's Statement

The mission of the Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD) is to manage programs that conserve soil, improve water quality, and enhance water quantity in Marion County, while also providing leadership in the conservation of these natural resources through local involvement and community education. We are dedicated to these principles every day, striving to better our community through outreach, education, and cost-share programs highlighting the importance of our natural resources. Our goal is to create a better future for upcoming generations. By passionately working to inform and engage people of all ages, the MSWCD aims to emphasize the crucial role of water and soil in our lives.

VIVI SERENA

CHAIRMAN

HISTORY AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MARION SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

In 1937, the Florida Legislature established Florida's Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), governmental subdivisions of the State of Florida, under Florida Statutes Chapter 582. These districts were initiated by local residents to promote and encourage the wise use, management, and conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources.

The Marion Soil and Water Conservation District was initially established as the Oklawaha Soil Conservation District, encompassing Marion County and the Oxford area of Sumter County. However, on April 22, 1947, the district's name was changed to Marion Soil Conservation District, excluding Sumter County. In 1965, the Florida Legislature amended Chapter 582 of the Florida Statutes, renaming the district to the Marion Soil and Water Conservation District.

MISSION

To administer programs to conserve soil, improve water quality, and enhance water quantity in Marion County, Florida.

VISION

To promote the conservation, improvement, and sustainable management of our natural resources through outreach and educational programs.

OUR VALUES

- **Learning:** Expanding our collective understanding of natural resources and conservation practices.
- **Stewardship:** Leading initiatives to conserve natural resources and advocate for environmental awareness and responsible management.
- **Community:** Engaging and collaborating with our community and partners for collective growth.
- **Support and Sustainability:** Promoting Best Management Practices (BMPs) and providing continuous support for environmental health.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Collect data, surveys, and information for District partners.
- Conduct demonstrations and presentations.
- Educate stakeholders, particularly the public, on local natural resource concerns.
- Assist in the implementation of BMPs through partners.
- Provide incentives, when feasible and applicable, to stakeholders who implement best management practices or conserve natural resources.
- Make conservation materials available
- Assist in developing Comprehensive Plans

PRIORITIES

1. Natural Resource Protection

- Natural Resource Conservation
- Water Quality
- Soil Health

2. Community Outreach and Education

- Community Outreach
 - Farmland Preservation Day
 - Springs Festival
 - School Presentations
 - Community Group Presentations
 - Springs Working Groups
- Youth Conservation Education Programs
 - Poster Contest
 - Found "Junk" Art
 - Essay Contest
 - Envirothon
 - Land Judging
 - Grace Force Scholarship
 - Conservation Landscape Tray

- Public Speaking Contest
3. **Farms of Environmental Distinction (FED) Program**
 4. **Central Florida Springs Cost Share Program**

NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION & PROTECTION

WE WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS BY:

- Promoting participation in USDA, NRCS (WHIP, EQIP, CSP, etc.) and FDACS programs, making landowners aware of deadlines and application processes.
- Encouraging applicants to sign up for our FED Program.
- Educating the public on the Water Management District(s) water use policies by holding an annual workshop.
- Establishing and continuing a relationship with County representatives on County Comprehensive Land Use Plan(s).
- Continuing our relationship and working with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as advisors for local land management reviews.

GOAL 1: WATER RESOURCE CONSERVATION & PROTECTION

Continue to promote water conservation. By 2028, we aim to increase participation in our Farms of Environmental Distinction Program by 1 producer per year and recognize 1 producer annually for exceptional contributions to best management practices.

WE WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS BY:

- Promoting participation in the Farms of Environmental Distinction Program through targeted outreach efforts.
- Directing producers, ranchers, and landowners to United States Department of Agriculture/ Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA/NRCS), Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), and Water Management Districts (WMDs) cost-share programs that address conservation stewardship.
- Addressing stakeholders' inquiries on conservation programs.
- Hosting at least 2 outreach events annually that focus on promoting conservation stewardship.

GOAL 2: WATER RESOURCE AWARENESS AND SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES

By 2028, we aim to educate 60 residents on the importance of water and soil health, direct 15 residents to soil testing services, provide soil survey information to 9 stakeholders.

WE WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS BY:

- Working with and educating the public about water resources through workshops and events.
- Directing residents to agencies that provide soil testing to improve land management.
- Providing soil survey information and distributing BMP-related literature at public

events.

- Promoting soil health through dissemination of literature at festivals, events, and presentations.

GOAL 3: COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Outreach Events 2024: Continue to expand the 8 existing youth conservation education programs

WE WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS BY:

- Developing a contest presentation annually to target teachers, advisors, and community program leaders.
- Increasing youth involvement in conservation initiatives through partnerships and interactive contests.
- Creating and distributing conservation literature at local events and gatherings.
- Strengthening collaboration with partner organizations and neighboring SWCDs to enhance participation in programs.
- Expanding outreach efforts by promoting our programs to community leaders annually through direct engagement and timely reminders.

By 2028, we aim to reach 100 students annually, distribute literature at 9 local events, partner in our contests with 3 neighboring counties for contests, and host 1 conservation event that addresses conservation stewardship. We will promote our programs to a minimum of 25 teachers, advisors, and community leaders annually with timely reminders.

GOAL 4: CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP EDUCATION

WE WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS BY:

- Providing demonstrations, setting up informational booths, and giving presentations at community events.
- Attending area festivals, outreach events, community forums, and area working groups to disseminate conservation stewardship information.
- Collaborate with local, state, and federal agencies to identify and address resource concerns by holding an annual LWG.
- Expanding BMP education through partnerships that offer technical assistance and promotion of BMP resources.

By 2028, we aim to participate in 9 community events that focus on conservation stewardship. We will continue to hold an annual Local Working Group, educating a minimum of 15 landowners in BMPs by 2028.

GOAL 5: EXPAND MEDIA EDUCATIONAL PRESENCE

By 2028, we aim to 36 updates and host 3 virtual presentations. We will utilize media platforms to enhance conservation education and community engagement.

WE WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS BY:

- Launching a media presence in 2025 to engage with the community and promote natural resource conservation.
- Creating and sharing educational content such as demonstrations, informational posts, and virtual presentations through media.
- Regularly updating the Marion Soil and Water Conservation District website with accurate and timely information, ensuring it remains a reliable resource for the community.

By 2028, we aim to post 36 updates and host 3 virtual presentations.

GOAL 6: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

We aim that all District personnel (staff, volunteers, board members) attend at least 1 relevant training per year.

WE WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS BY:

- Encouraging staff to identify and pursue relevant opportunities to improve District effectiveness.
- Having the Board of Supervisors actively support and promote relevant training opportunities for District personnel (staff, volunteers, board members) that align with the District's mission and improve its effectiveness.
- Requiring attendees to share key takeaways and insights at a board meeting to discuss the training's value and applicability to the District.

ADOPTION OF PLAN

The Marion Soil and Water Conservation's Board of Supervisors expects to have a major, positive impact on land use and the conservation of natural resources in Marion County. The purpose of this Long-Range Plan is to state the Marion Soil and Water Conservation's priorities, objectives, and goals. These actions will be reviewed routinely at regularly scheduled board meetings to evaluate the effectiveness of these actions. This Plan is in effect through December 2028 and is not all inclusive and is subject to modification at any time by a majority vote of the Marion Soil and Water Conservation's Board. This document supersedes all earlier Long-Range Plans.

Updated and re-adopted this 10th day of March 2025 by majority vote:

Original adopted on 8/12/24 by majority vote:

Marion Soil and Water Conservation's Board of Supervisors:

Vivi Serena
Justin Albright
Colleen Stenstream
David Shults
Amy Davis