

AN ACT concerning local government.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,  
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 5. The State Finance Act is amended by changing Section 6z-32 as follows:

(30 ILCS 105/6z-32)

Sec. 6z-32. Partners for Planning and Conservation.

(a) The Partners for Conservation Fund (formerly known as the Conservation 2000 Fund) and the Partners for Conservation Projects Fund (formerly known as the Conservation 2000 Projects Fund) are created as special funds in the State Treasury. These funds shall be used to establish a comprehensive program to protect Illinois' natural resources through cooperative partnerships between State government and public and private landowners. Moneys in these Funds may be used, subject to appropriation, by the Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Agriculture for purposes relating to natural resource protection, planning, recreation, tourism, climate resilience, and compatible agricultural and economic development activities. Without limiting these general purposes, moneys in these Funds may be used, subject to appropriation, for the following specific purposes:

(1) To foster sustainable agriculture practices and control soil erosion, sedimentation, and nutrient loss from farmland, including grants to Soil and Water Conservation Districts for conservation practice cost-share grants and for personnel, educational, and administrative expenses.

(2) To establish and protect a system of ecosystems in public and private ownership through conservation easements, incentives to public and private landowners, natural resource restoration and preservation, water quality protection and improvement, land use and watershed planning, technical assistance and grants, and land acquisition provided these mechanisms are all voluntary on the part of the landowner and do not involve the use of eminent domain.

(3) To develop a systematic and long-term program to effectively measure and monitor natural resources and ecological conditions through investments in technology and involvement of scientific experts.

(4) To initiate strategies to enhance, use, and maintain Illinois' inland lakes through education, technical assistance, research, and financial incentives.

(5) To partner with private landowners and with units of State, federal, and local government and with not-for-profit organizations in order to integrate State and federal programs with Illinois' natural resource

protection and restoration efforts and to meet requirements to obtain federal and other funds for conservation or protection of natural resources.

(6) To support ~~implement~~ the State's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, including, but not limited to, funding the resources needed to support the Strategy's Policy Working Group, cover water quality monitoring in support of Strategy implementation, prepare a biennial report on the progress made on the Strategy every 2 years, and provide cost share funding for nutrient capture projects.

(7) To provide capacity grants to support soil and water conservation districts, including, but not limited to, developing soil health plans, conducting soil health assessments, peer-to-peer training, convening producer-led dialogues, professional memberships, lab analysis, and development ~~development~~ and travel stipends for meetings and educational events.

(8) To develop guidelines and local soil health assessments for advancing soil health.

(b) The State Comptroller and State Treasurer shall automatically transfer on the last day of each month, beginning on September 30, 1995 and ending on June 30, 2023, from the General Revenue Fund to the Partners for Conservation Fund, an amount equal to 1/10 of the amount set forth below in fiscal year 1996 and an amount equal to 1/12 of the amount set forth below in each of the other specified fiscal years:

Fiscal Year	Amount
1996	\$ 3,500,000
1997	\$ 9,000,000
1998	\$10,000,000
1999	\$11,000,000
2000	\$12,500,000
2001 through 2004	\$14,000,000
2005	\$7,000,000
2006	\$11,000,000
2007	\$0
2008 through 2011	\$14,000,000
2012	\$12,200,000
2013 through 2017	\$14,000,000
2018	\$1,500,000
2019	\$14,000,000
2020	\$7,500,000
2021 through 2023	\$14,000,000

(c) The State Comptroller and State Treasurer shall automatically transfer on the last day of each month beginning on July 31, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022, from the Environmental Protection Permit and Inspection Fund to the Partners for Conservation Fund, an amount equal to 1/12 of \$4,135,000.

(c-1) The State Comptroller and State Treasurer shall automatically transfer on the last day of each month beginning on July 31, 2022 and ending June 30, 2023, from the

Environmental Protection Permit and Inspection Fund to the Partners for Conservation Fund, an amount equal to 1/12 of \$5,900,000.

(d) There shall be deposited into the Partners for Conservation Projects Fund such bond proceeds and other moneys as may, from time to time, be provided by law.

(Source: P.A. 101-10, eff. 6-5-19; 102-16, eff. 6-17-21; 102-699, eff. 4-19-22.)

Section 15. The Soil and Water Conservation Districts Act is amended by adding Sections 3.24, 3.25, 3.26, 3.27, 22.03a, 22.03b, 22.03c, and 22.03d as follows:

(70 ILCS 405/3.24 new)

Sec. 3.24. "Healthy soils practices" means systems of agricultural, forestry, and land management practices that:

(1) improve the health of soils, including, but not limited to, consideration of depth of topsoil horizons, water infiltration rate, water-holding capacity, organic matter content, biologically accessible nutrient content, bulk density, biological activity, and biological and microbiological diversity;

(2) follow the principles of: minimizing soil disturbance and external inputs; keeping soil covered; maximizing biodiversity; diversifying crop rotations; maximizing presence of living roots; integrating animals

and insects into land management, including grazing animals, birds, beneficial insects, or keystone species, such as earthworms; and incorporating the context of local conditions in decision-making, including, for example, soil type, topography, and time of year; and

(3) include practices such as conservation tillage or no-till, cover-cropping, perennialization of highly erodible land, precision nitrogen and phosphorus application, managed grazing, integrated crop-livestock systems, silvopasture, agroforestry, perennial crops, integrated pest management, nutrient best management practices, invasive species removal and the planting of native species and those practices recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service - Field Office Technical Guide.

(70 ILCS 405/3.25 new)

Sec. 3.25. "Soil health assessment" means soil health indicator measures, including, but not limited to, soil organic matter, soil structure, infiltration and bulk density, water-holding capacity, microbial biomass, and soil respiration.

(70 ILCS 405/3.26 new)

Sec. 3.26. "Initiative" means the Illinois Healthy Soils

Initiative.

(70 ILCS 405/3.27 new)

Sec. 3.27. "Healthy soil" means the continuing capacity of a soil to function as a vital, living biological system that sustains plants, animals, and humans, increases soil organic matter, improves soil structure and water-holding and nutrient-holding capacity and nutrient cycling, enhances water infiltration and filtration capability, promotes water quality, and results in net long-term ecological benefits. "Healthy soil" includes soil that hosts a diversity of beneficial organisms, grow vigorous crops, enhance agricultural resilience, including the ability of crops and livestock to tolerate and recover from drought, temperature extremes, extreme precipitation events, pests, diseases, and other stresses, break down harmful chemicals, and help convert organic residues into stable soil organic matter and retaining nutrients, especially nitrogen and phosphorus.

(70 ILCS 405/22.03a new)

Sec. 22.03a. Illinois Healthy Soils Initiative.

(a) The Illinois Healthy Soils Initiative is created. It is the purpose of the Initiative to improve the health of soils through efforts that improve soil and water quality, increase the resilience of ecosystems to extreme weather events, protect and improve agricultural productivity, and support

aquatic and wildlife habitat.

Subject to appropriation, the Initiative shall be administered by the Director of Agriculture with consultation from soil and water conservation districts, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Natural Resources, and the University of Illinois Extension Program. The Department shall create guidelines and guidance to assist soil and water conservation districts in developing soil health assessments in order to identify desired capacity and funding levels and establish regular, measurable, cost-effective, and technically achievable goals to advance voluntary and incentive-based strategies that improve healthy soils. These assessments shall be used to identify opportunities to access financial and technical assistance from local, State, and federal sources to guide resources to their best potential use.

The Initiative shall complement and improve coordination of existing resources and processes and shall not replace existing, local, State, or federal funding or technical assistance programs. The Department shall report on progress of the Initiative annually.

The Initiative shall promote voluntary and incentive-based soil health efforts. No part of this Section shall be used to impose mandates or require practice adoption.



Sec. 22.03b. Guidelines for soil health assessments. The Department shall adopt and revise guidelines to assist soil and water conservation districts in determining local goals and needs for implementing soil health assessments.

In developing its guidelines to assist soil and water conservation districts in determining local goals and needs for soil health assessments, the Department shall consider:

(1) county and State levels of conservation practice adoption. Guidance should also be provided to districts to meet USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service determined conservation practice standards or Illinois Urban Manual Practice Standards;

(2) information regarding beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers, as well as disadvantaged communities;

(3) availability of State and federal financial and technical assistance programs to soil and water conservation districts, local governments, and conservation partners; and

(4) opportunities for evaluating results-based practices utilizing tools, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's revised universal soil loss equation, that model environmental outcomes at the field, county, watershed, or State level.

The information collected through the development of the guidelines shall be compiled and provided to the soil and

water conservation districts to inform the development of local soil health assessments.

Initial guidelines shall be completed and provided to soil and water conservation districts annually and shall include the grant agreement for the Soil and Water Conservation District Grants Program as well as outlining the funding resource support contained within the grant agreement to better inform the development of local soil health assessments.

(70 ILCS 405/22.03c new)

Sec. 22.03c. Local soil health assessments. Upon the adoption of guidelines described in Section 22.03b, each soil and water conservation district shall develop annually its own soil health assessment to guide voluntary and incentive-based strategies to improve soil health. The soil health assessment shall be technically feasible and economically reasonable.

The Department shall provide a template to the districts for the local soil health assessment, including the required information listed in this Section as well as information regarding available data and support materials collected as the guidance information listed in Section 25.

Each district is encouraged to collaborate with other local governmental entities and local stakeholders in developing and implementing its soil health assessment. Each district shall use the guidelines provided by the Department

in developing its soil health assessment.

Upon the request of a district, the Department may assist in the preparation of the district's soil health assessment. Districts may also work collaboratively to establish joint plans to leverage existing capacity and resources most effectively.

To carry out its assessment, a district shall identify soil health practices. The soil health assessment must consider opportunities to access, leverage, and use State and federal resources within a specific soil and water conservation district service area.

Soil and water conservation districts may also convene producer-led dialogues to identify special initiatives or pilot projects to leverage additional resources and implement soil health practices at scale across multiple operations and land ownerships.

In developing a soil health assessment, the soil and water conservation district shall:

(1) evaluate existing assets, such as current practices, current cropping systems, crop processing and market infrastructure, riparian buffers, wetlands, public lands, funding, education, research and peer-to-peer training opportunities, and existing partnerships;

(2) consider the eligible funding categories available through the Partners for Conservation Fund and the district's ability to advance healthy soils practices

consistent with Natural Resource Conservation Service soil health principles within a soil and water conservation district service area;

(3) determine vulnerabilities, such as runoff risk, riparian function, stormwater, floodplains and stream impairments, and observed and predicted impacts from climate change, especially to socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and communities;

(4) identify opportunities to conduct outreach to agricultural producers and landowners and to develop individual soil health plans;

(5) establish goals for achieving measurable outcomes for soil health and farmer viability through voluntary and incentive-based activities. This includes identifying opportunities to support beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers as well as small and mid-scale farmers;

(6) estimate 2-year funding levels needed from State, federal and private sources in order to achieve goals; and

(7) identify opportunities to develop partnerships and leverage resources from local governments, utilities, and State and federal agencies.

The Department shall identify shared goals and priorities between districts and shall assist in developing partnerships and shared funding approaches to maximize capacity and resources. Initial soil health assessments shall be submitted

to the Department by September 1, 2024.

(70 ILCS 405/22.03d new)

Sec. 22.03d. Compliance and standards; cost sharing. To be eligible to receive State cost-share support after September 1, 2024, soil and water conservation districts shall have an updated soil health assessment.

The Department shall update its rules and procedures for cost-share funding to be inclusive of all relevant soil health practices promoting the rapid adoption of cost-effective and technically feasible projects. Updates to the rules and procedures for State cost-share programs shall also address barriers to access experienced by beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers.

The Department may require results-based practices or the assessments of the environmental outcomes of projects, at the field or county level, as a condition of cost-share funding.

Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon becoming law.