

# N. C. Soil & Water Conservation Districts Celebrate their 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Governor Beverly Perdue has proclaimed the month of August as **“SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION AWARENESS MONTH”** in North Carolina.



BEVERLY EAVES PERDUE  
GOVERNOR

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION AWARENESS MONTH

2012

BY THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, the first soil and water conservation district in the nation was established in North Carolina on August 4, 1937, by passage of NC General Statute 139 and was known as the Brown Creek Soil and Water Conservation District whose boundary is now Anson County, North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, there are now 96 soil and water conservation districts which cover all of North Carolina and are led by 492 elected and appointed North Carolina citizens known as soil and water conservation district supervisors who lead local soil and water conservation programs; and

WHEREAS, the internationally recognized soil and water conservationist, Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett, a North Carolina native from Anson County, dedicated his life to soil and water conservation and brought national attention to soil erosion; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Bennett recognized that a national soil and water conservation program with local leadership would be the most successful model for working with local private landowners in addressing erosion problems; and

WHEREAS, at Dr. Bennett's urging, President Franklin Roosevelt promoted sample state legislation that would create local soil and water conservation districts across the United States to lead and direct soil and water conservation programs at the local level; and

WHEREAS, since 1937, North Carolina soil and water conservation districts have been instrumental in improving the state's natural resources through voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs, and continue to be the primary voice for the protection, wise use, and conservation of all of the state's natural resources; and

WHEREAS, the actions of soil and water conservation districts improve the lives of all North Carolina citizens, both rural and urban, through the implementation of programs that protect and improve water quality and other natural resources of the state, on agricultural and non-agricultural lands; and

WHEREAS, North Carolina's 96 local soil and water conservation districts deliver effective conservation education programs to over 85,000 school children and adults each year; and

WHEREAS, August 4, 2012, marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first soil and water conservation district in North Carolina and the nation and represents a significant milestone in natural resource conservation;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BEVERLY EAVES PERDUE, Governor of the State of North Carolina, do hereby proclaim August 2012, as **“SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION AWARENESS MONTH”** in North Carolina, and encourage citizens to support their local soil and water conservation district.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Beverly Perdue".

BEVERLY EAVES PERDUE

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Great Seal of the State of North Carolina at the Capitol in Raleigh this twenty-fifth day of April in the year of our Lord two thousand and twelve, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-sixth.

## **HISTORY of Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

Soil and Water Conservation Districts and their governing Boards of Supervisors were formed nationwide out of concern for the nation's soil and water resources. This concern grew out of the devastating Dust Bowl in the west, severe water erosion in the south, and other conservation problems of the 1930's and even earlier. Legislation adopted by individual states, beginning in 1937, formed local Soil and Water Conservation Districts of which there are now 96 in North Carolina.

Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett, a North Carolina native from Anson County, was instrumental in coordinating national efforts toward solving the critical conservation problems that the country faced. Dr. Bennett, known internationally as the "Father of Soil and Water Conservation", can be credited with laying the foundation for the soil and water conservation programs of today.

Through the efforts of Bennett and his close working relationship with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a model law known as the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law was drafted which would enable states to create local soil and water conservation districts. The purpose of these districts was to provide local input and direction to the fledging federal conservation programs that were administered by the USDA-Soil Conservation Service which were established two years earlier in 1935. On February 27, 1937, President Roosevelt corresponded with state governors across the United States, urging each state to adopt legislation similar to the "model law". That same year, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a soil and water conservation districts law known as NC General Statute 139, and the Brown Creek Soil and Water Conservation District, in the home county of Dr. Bennett, was chartered on August 4, 1937. This District was the first Soil and Water Conservation District organized in the United States although 21 other states enacted similar legislation later in 1937. Nearly four-fifths of the states enacted similar laws in the next three years. By 1947, all of the other states and the territories of Hawaii and Alaska had passed legislation which created local Districts.

Under this law, Soil and Water Conservation Districts were organized to plan and carry out a locally led, voluntary incentive based conservation program that addressed local needs. District affairs are managed by individuals and groups involved in a coordinated conservation program, utilizing resources from local, state, and federal agencies. It was felt that local people, working with the Federal Government and federal agencies such as the Soil Conservation Service, could better guide and direct programs aimed at addressing local natural resource concerns.

At first, Districts were organized along watershed rather than county boundaries. As a result, in the early days most districts included more than one county or parts of several counties. Many of the original state laws that were established on a watershed basis were later changed to allow conservation districts to be established along county lines. Today, most districts are organized in that way. One exception in North Carolina is the Albemarle Soil and Water Conservation District which includes Camden, Currituck, Chowan, Perquimans, and Pasquotank counties.

## **HISTORY of Orange Soil and Water Conservation District**

Soil and Water Conservation has a long history in Orange County and has involved many people. It began on the local level by a group of conservation minded landowners who petitioned the State Soil & Water Conservation Committee in May of 1938 for a referendum to organize a soil and water conservation. The original conservation district was known as the *Neuse River District* and included all or portions of the following counties: Orange, Durham, Wake, Johnston and Wilson counties. The current

Orange Soil and Water Conservation District was formed in October 1964, as a governmental subdivision of North Carolina in an act providing for the division of large conservation districts that were originally established along watershed boundaries. Members of the original Board of Supervisors for the Orange Soil & Water Conservation District were: Henry S. Hogan, Robert Nichols, Jr., Reid Roberts and Herman Efland. District employees at that time were USDA Conservationist Quentin Paterson and District Clerk Jeanette Wagoner.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Today the 96 North Carolina Soil and Water Districts in North Carolina are serving over 85,000 school children and adults each year through their conservation education efforts. In addition, Soil and Water Conservation Districts are instrumental in improving the state's natural resources by providing technical assistance to landowners to help them solve their natural resource problems through voluntary, incentive based conservation programs. Their actions are improving the lives of all North Carolina citizens through implementation of programs that protect and improve soil and water quality on both agricultural and non-agricultural lands.

The current Orange Soil & Water Conservation District Board Members are Chairman Chris Hogan (grandson of Henry S. Hogan), Vice-Chair Karen McAdams, Treasurer Morris Shambley, Larry Rogers and Roger Tate.

Orange Soil & Water Conservation District Employees are Gail Hughes, Todd Roberts, Kenny Ray and Lisa Pope. USDA employees are District Conservationist Brent Bogue and Bill Woods.