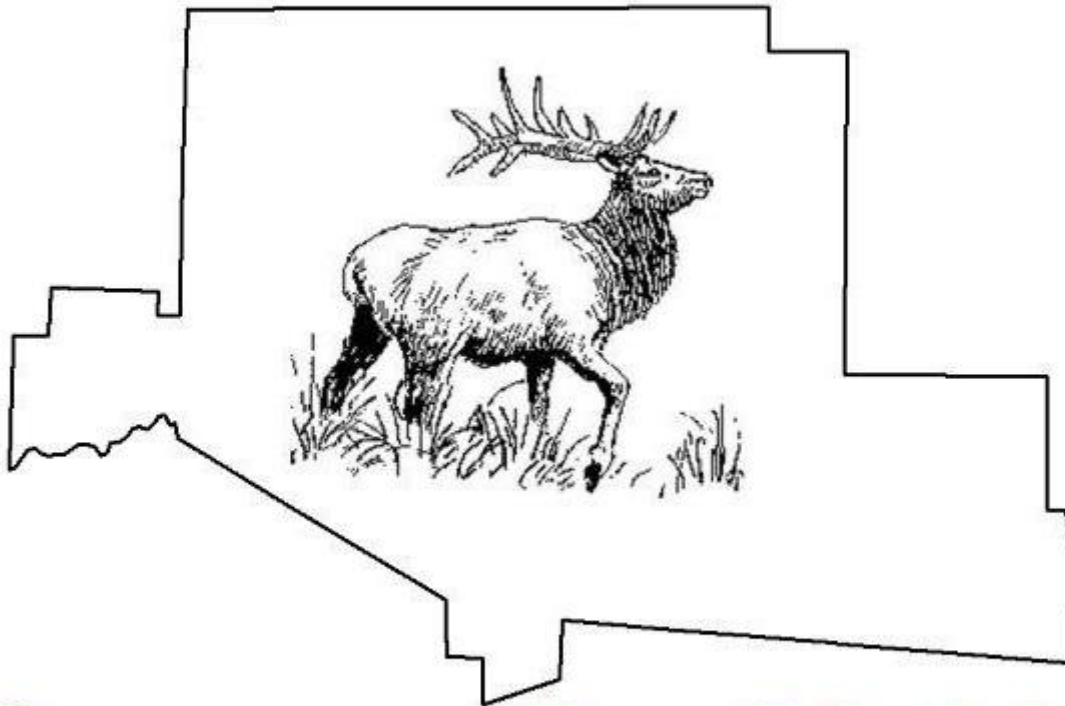


# Elk County



# Conservation District

# *2012*

# *Strategic Plan*

*Adopted: June 25, 2012*

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

The Elk County Conservation District was declared a District by the Board of County Commissioners on September 21, 1962 under the provision of the Soil Conservation Law, Act 217. This Law enacted in 1945 gives Districts broad powers to provide services, employ and manage staff, charge fees for services, own and manage property, and authorizes Commonwealth agencies (including Counties) to cooperate with District in carrying out programs.

The primary goal of the District is the development, improvement and conservation of the County's soil, water and related resources as well as educating the community in various conservation and environmental practices and methods.

The District is administered by a board of seven (7) Directors—four (4) public members, two (2) farmer members and one (1) County Commissioner. District Directors are appointed by the County Commissioners from a list of names submitted by countywide nominating organizations. The Commissioners also designate one of their members to serve as a Director. Currently, the Elk County Conservation District also has three (3) associate directors.

This Strategic Plan was developed as a tool for the District to meet the new challenges and ever-changing land use issues facing Elk County. Constant evaluation will help the District to meet the needs of Elk County, understand the benefits and impacts of Conservation District activities and make decisions based on better information.

### **2012 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Russ Braun, Chairman  
Joe Labant, Vice-Chairman  
Jan Kemmer, Commissioner  
Randy Gradizzi, Public Director  
Mike Hovatter, Public Director  
Ron McMinn, Farmer Director  
Denise Casilio, Farmer Director

### **2012 ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS**

Ray McMinn  
Jerry Olsen  
Jim McCluskey

### **2012 STAFF**

Steve S. Putt, District Manager  
Kim Bonfardine, Watershed Specialist  
Dave Stubber, Solid Waste Enforcement Officer  
Diane Myers, Secretary

**WHO WE ARE:**

The Elk County Conservation District is a non-profit group striving to be a recognized and respected leader in promoting the conservation ethic. The programs and projects the District implements will result in conserving the integrity of the natural systems that enrich the Elk County environment.

**BENEFICIARIES:**

The clients of the Elk County Conservation District's services are the citizens, landowners, businesses, industry, local governments, visitors, and future generations of Elk County.

**MISSION:**

The Elk County Conservation District's mission is to promote sound environmental stewardship through leadership, education, and technical assistance for the benefit of the environment and future generations.

**VISION:**

The Elk County Conservation District encourages the wise use of our natural resources while providing for the conservation of our soil and water resources for present and future generations.

## RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The Elk County Conservation District Directors determined that the Elk County Conservation District Program, which was completed in 1971, laid the framework for District activities and that an updated and revised Long Range Strategic Plan (the “Plan”) for the District was necessary, and

WHEREAS, with the financial assistance of the DEP and the State Conservation Commission, funding was secured to proceed with Planning; and

WHEREAS, the Elk County Conservation District Board of Directors, Staff and support personnel proceeded to draft a Long Range Strategic Plan for Elk County Conservation District; and

WHEREAS, the final plan was presented to the Board of Directors on June 25, 2012; and

WHEREAS, by unanimous vote, this Elk County Conservation District Strategic Plan was adopted; and

THEREFORE, from this day forward, this Plan will be the official Strategic Plan for the Elk County Conservation District and will be referred to for future direction of the organization.

IN ADDITION, a Committee will be formed in order for this Plan to be reviewed annually and revised no less than every five (5) years or as needed.

APPROVED on this 25th day of June, 2012.

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Russ Braun, Chairman

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Joe Labant, Vice Chairman

## Plan Development Timeline

The Elk County Conservation District held an initial meeting on February 7, 2012 to discuss the development of a Strategic Plan. This initial planning meeting was attended by District Directors and staff. At this meeting, it was decided that an online survey would be used to identify how the Conservation District is perceived and get a better idea of what services the public is interested in. A free online service provided by “Survey Monkey” was used. The Survey was distributed by email to various stakeholders and clients of the District. Additionally, a press release was distributed to local print media inviting and encouraging the general public to participate in the survey. By mid- April, we had received 137 responses to our survey. The District then decided to purchase a 2-month upgrade to the service in order to provide printable results and graphs to stakeholders and planning participants (see appendix A).

On May 15, 2012, the Elk County Conservation District held a stakeholders meeting to further discuss the development of the Strategic Plan. The session was facilitated by Timothy J. Bruno and John M. Green of the PA Department of Environmental Protection, Northwest Regional Office. This session was attended by 23 individuals representing various cooperating agencies and organizations. The following is a list of attendees:

Timothy Bruno, PA Department of Environmental Protection  
John Green, PA Department of Environmental Protection  
Kevin Jordan, PA Department of Environmental Protection  
Steven Putt, Elk County Conservation District  
Kim Bonfardine, Elk County Conservation District  
Diane Myers, Elk County Conservation District  
David Stubber, Elk County Conservation District  
Russ Braun, (Director), Elk County Conservation District  
Mike Hovatter, (Director), Elk County Conservation District  
Seth Weible, (Intern) Elk County Conservation District  
Mike Lenze, (Intern) Elk County Conservation District  
Jamie Ulrich, PA State Conservation Commission  
Toby Herzing, DCNR Bureau of Forestry  
Mathew Pfeufer, City of St. Marys  
Jodi Foster, Elk County Planning Department  
Doug Foster, Elk County Freshwater Association  
John Dzemyan, PA Game Commission  
Josh Burkett, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy  
Gary Swope, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Bekki Titchner, Elk County Recycling Department  
Rick Glover, Ridgway Township  
Bill Granche, Community Member  
Chrissy Miller, Community Member

The first order of business was to define where the District now stands and to identify what programs and services the District currently offers. The next order of business was to identify where the District would like to be in the next 5 years. Four main objectives were decided upon and each objective was discussed and prioritized. Using the input from many experienced individuals as well as the results from the online survey, an outline for the new five-year strategic plan was completed.

A “Draft” Strategic Plan was generated and distributed to the District Board of Directors, County Commissioners, staff, and all cooperating agencies and attendees. All comments / corrections were due back to the District by June 1, 2012. At this time, the final edits were completed and a discussion of the final document was held prior to the regularly scheduled June 2012 Board of Directors meeting.

## **OBJECTIVES**

### **OBJECTIVE # 1: CONTINUE TO IMPROVE AND MONITOR WATER QUALITY**

1. Erosion and Sediment Control and Chapter 102 (NPDES) Permitting
  - (a) Continue the Chapter 102 Delegation Agreement (Level 2) with the PA DEP.
  - (b) Continue to meet PA DEP’s required output measures including workshops, news releases, plan reviews, and form availability.
  - (c) Annually review permitting fee schedule.
  - (d) Maximize inspection opportunities and field presence.
  - (e) Add additional staff to increase capacity.
  - (f) Enhance electronic availability of forms and information.
  - (g) Establish a complaint protocol and make it available to the public.
  - (h) Provide prompt courteous service.
  
2. Chapter 105 (Dam Safety and Waterways Management) Permitting
  - (a) Continue the Chapter 105 Delegation Agreement (Level 2) with the PA DEP.
  - (b) Periodically review district capacity to offer this unreimbursed service.
  - (c) Pursue legislative outreach to obtain funding for Chapter 105 permitting.
  - (d) Maximize inspection opportunities and field presence.
  - (e) Add additional staff to increase capacity as resources allow.
  - (f) Enhance electronic availability of forms and information.
  - (g) Establish a complaint protocol and make it available to the public.
  - (h) Provide prompt courteous service.
  - (i) Establish policy to notify landowners of permit activities.

### 3. Water Resource Monitoring

- (a) Continue water monitoring program of county waterways through the use of data loggers and satellite telemetry systems.
- (b) Utilize and organize volunteer groups and individuals for monitoring services.
- (c) Analyze and report acquired data by developing a database and making it accessible to the public.
- (d) Identify and pursue funding sources for the sustainability of the program.
- (e) Develop public outreach and notification programs.
- (f) Explore possibility of providing private water testing to residents.
- (g) Continue working with local watershed groups to address abandoned mine drainage, acid precipitation, and other water quality issues.



Satellite Telemetry Water Monitoring System Being Installed

### 4. Dirt and Gravel Road Program

- (a) Continue utilizing annual allocation to ensure future funding.
- (b) Host / co-host Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) Training for municipal officials and road maintenance crews.
- (c) Improve outreach opportunities to include additional municipalities.
- (d) Offer technical assistance for all program activities.



5. Source Water Protection

- (a) Annually review and/or implement Source Water Protection plans.
- (b) Expand outreach, education, and coordination opportunities.
- (c) Encourage municipality cooperation with the source water protection program and planning activities.
- (d) Coordinate District Chapter 102 & 105 permit reviews to consider and protect public water supply areas.

6. Storm Water Management

- (a) Continue increasing outreach opportunities for Storm Water Management (SWM) and Best Management Practices (BMP's).
- (b) Provide technical assistance to municipalities as well as private citizens.

**OBJECTIVE # 2: EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

1. Envirothon

- (a) Continue hosting the annual Envirothon for Elk County students.
- (b) Increase recruitment activities for teachers and volunteers.
- (c) Evaluate and pursue additional funding options.
- (d) Identify cooperative opportunities with other counties.
- (e) Evaluate program and identify possible improvements.



2012 Elk County Envirothon

## 2. Homeowner Education

- (a) Provide and update educational links and website content.
- (b) Evaluate / Implement opportunities for private water well education.
- (c) Evaluate / Implement opportunities for septic system education.
- (d) Seek necessary funding to provide public workshops.

## 3. Electronic Media

- (a) Continue updating and enhancing Conservation District website.
- (b) Evaluate and improve the use of social media in communicating with the public.
- (c) Publish and distribute a quarterly electronic newsletter to District stakeholders.
- (c) Develop and implement an e-mail database to distribute information to interested parties.

## 4. West Creek Wetlands Learning Center

- (a) Provide educational opportunities and activities for the public.
- (b) Develop an operational plan for continued repairs and maintenance of the site.
- (c) Seek, develop, and coordinate with volunteer resources.
- (d) Create public awareness for the facility.



West Creek Wetland Learning Center

## 5. Workshops and Field Days

- (a) Identify needs for training and workshop activities.
- (b) Identify and coordinate events with other cooperating agencies, conservation districts, and educational institutions.
- (c) Pursue funding sources and/or sponsorships to fund events.
- (d) Host workshops and trainings as per delegation agreements.
- (e) Identify demonstration sites for possible projects and events.

## 6. Agricultural Outreach

- (a) Continue to expand agricultural E&S training opportunities.
- (b) Continue to expand nutrient management and manure management training opportunities.
- (c) Develop a database of agricultural operations with the coordination of the Farm Service Agency and other agencies.
- (d) Identify underserved segments of the agriculture community.
- (e) Promote the use of agricultural programs offered by cooperating agencies.



2012 – Manure Management Workshop



2011 – Sugar Hill Farm / Grazing Field Day

## **OBJECTIVE # 3: NATURAL RESOURCES / LAND USE**

### 1. Natural Resource Extraction (Gas, Oil, Coal, and Timber)

- (a) Continue active participation in the county's Gas Task Force.
- (b) Continue to provide technical assistance to resource industries.
- (c) Remain up-to-date with Oil & Gas policy changes.
- (d) Continue relationships with the Pa. DEP and Center for Dirt & Gravel Roads.
- (d) Investigate opportunities to represent District interests in regard to future possibilities for enhanced Act 13 funding.
- (e) Provide education and outreach to the timber industry regarding proper development and erosion and sediment controls.

### 2. Fish and Wildlife Habitat

- (a) Promote and recommend programs offered by cooperating agencies to provide habitat improvement.
- (b) Continue to work with local watershed groups on aquatic habitat and stream improvement projects.
- (c) Identify stream bank stabilization and in-stream habitat opportunities and funding mechanisms.

### 3. Invasive / Noxious Weeds

- (a) Continue partnership with Headwaters RC&D to conduct noxious and invasive weed surveys.
- (b) Create a partnership with the Allegheny National Forest to identify weed problem areas.
- (c) Create a program that encourages homeowners to use native species in landscaping and offers control methods for invasive species.
- (d) Continue working with the Sinnemahoning Invasive Plant Management Area.
- (e) Identify and map invasive and noxious weed problem areas in county.
- (f) Pursue funding opportunities for invasive species removal and control.



Japanese Knotweed

### 4. Recreation

- (a) Continue efforts to connect the West Creek Rails-to-Trails with the West Creek Wetlands Learning Center.
- (b) Assist in creating stream accessibility to planned and existing habitat improvement projects.
- (c) Host an annual 5K / 16K running event as a fundraiser for educational programs.
- (d) Contact and utilize organizations and volunteers for event planning.
- (e) Develop and promote a geo-caching event.
- (f) Maintain communication with cooperating agencies and recreational partners.

### 5. Illegal Dumping / Litter Cleanup

- (a) Continue working relationship with the Elk Co. Solid Waste Authority and the Community Recycling Center.
- (b) Update the County's illegal dump database.
- (c) Review and update the cooperative agreement between the County, the Solid Waste Authority, and the Conservation District pertaining to the position of the Solid Waste Enforcement Officer (SWEEO).
- (d) Support stream and river cleanup projects.
- (e) Identify possible funding sources for disposal costs.

## **OBJECTIVE # 4: ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONS**

### 1. Fundraising Opportunities

- (a) Develop a program for seedling and wildflower sales.
- (b) Explore opportunities for bird houses and bat box sales.
- (c) Hold an annual 5K/16K running event (Les Haas Memorial Trail Challenge).
- (d) Explore opportunities for Geo-Caching and Geo-Trail events.
- (e) Coordinate fundraisers with other events.

### 2. Staffing Issues

- (a) Add new position of “Resource Conservation Technician” that would be funded by E&S and Agriculture programs.
- (b) Continue weekly staff meetings.
- (c) Assess the need for an “Education Coordinator”.
- (d) Utilize volunteer and internships as a method of increasing productivity.
- (e) Explore AmeriCorps programs as possible staff assistance.

### 3. Conservation District Board

- (a) Recruit new Directors and Associate Directors.
- (b) Solicit for additional Nominating Organizations.
- (c) Provide Directors with ongoing education and explanation of duties.
- (d) Schedule meetings at alternate locations.
- (e) Attract public participation at meetings.
- (f) Organize an annual banquet or picnic for directors, staff, and cooperating agencies.
- (g) Develop sub-committees within the Board structure.

### 4. Budget

- (a) Continue semiannual Board review of the current year’s budget income and expenditures.
- (b) Hold budget review meetings to discuss and create the next year’s budget.
- (c) Continue to seek additional funding opportunities.

### 5. Grant Writing and Administration

- (a) Identify and pursue grant funding opportunities for programs.
- (b) Maintain consistency with goals and plan objectives.
- (c) Investigate options for local, state, federal, and private funding sources.
- (d) Identify sources of matching funds and/or in-kind services for each grant.
- (e) Maintain accurate financial management of grant funding.
- (f) Increase project management and oversight of grant funded projects.

## 6. Staff Training

- (a) Identify and participate in continuing educational opportunities.
- (b) Remain current with all related regulatory changes.
- (c) Utilize “Strength Finder” results to compare staff abilities.

## **CONTINUING EVALUATION AND MONITORING OF THE PLAN:**

The Strategic Plan is being implemented employing constant communication with the individuals and agencies which support the District on an annual basis. This will help maintain good partnerships and ensure continued support from inside and outside the District.

The Elk County Commissioners, all Cooperating Agencies, and Nominating Organizations will receive a copy of this Plan. It is also available upon request.

## **COOPERATING AGENCIES**

Elk County Commissioners  
Elk County Planning Commission  
Elk County Solid Waste Authority & Recycling Office  
PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)  
PA Game Commission  
PA Fish & Boat Commission  
PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR)  
PA Department of Agriculture  
PA Department of Community & Economic Development  
PA Department of Transportation  
PA Association of Conservation Districts  
PA State Conservation Commission  
Penn State Cooperative Extension  
Penn State Center for Dirt & Gravel Road Studies  
Allegheny National Forest  
US Army Corps of Engineers  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)  
Headwaters Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)  
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

## **NOMINATING ORGANIZATIONS**

Elk County Association of Township Officials  
Elk County Farm Bureau  
Elk County Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs  
Island Run Sportsmen’s Club  
Bennett Branch Watershed Association

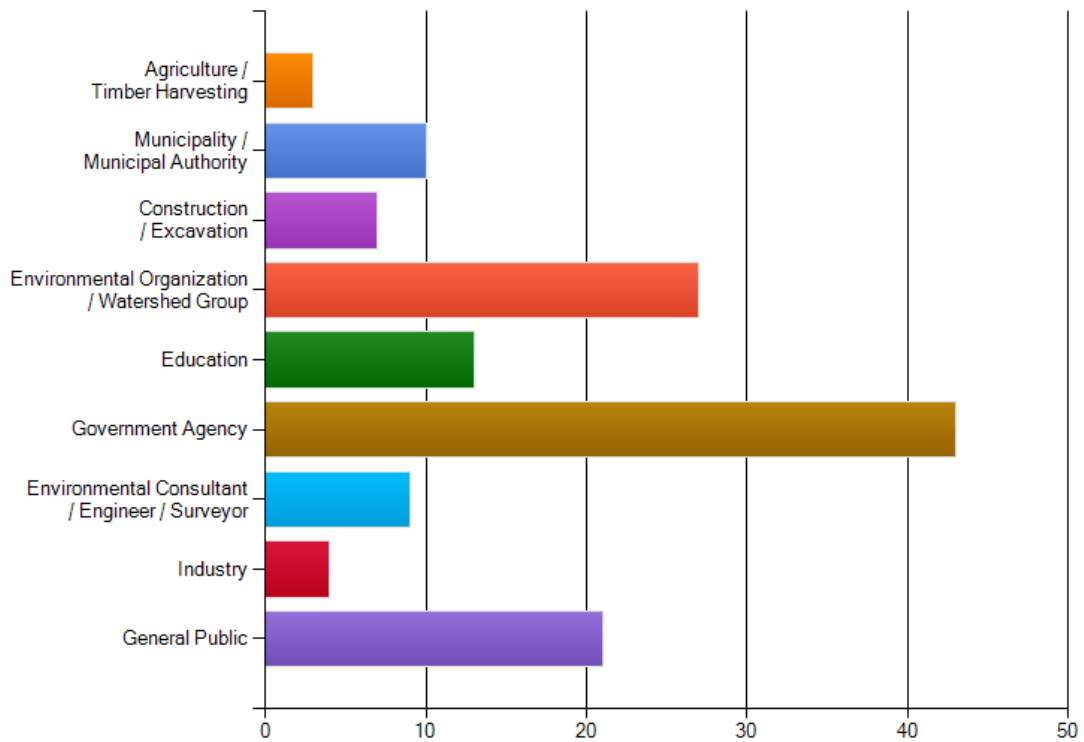
## **LIST OF ACRONYMS:**

ECCD –	Elk County Conservation District
D&GR-	Dirt & Gravel Road Program
QAB –	Quality Assurance Board for Dirt & Gravel Road Program
BMP –	Best Management Practice
E&S –	Erosion & Sediment
NPDES –	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination Systems
O&G –	Oil & Gas Development
NM –	Nutrient Management
SCC –	State Conservation Commission
DEP -	Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection
DCED –	Department of Community & Economic Development
DCNR-	Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
PACD –	Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts
PDA –	Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
FBC –	Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission
PGC –	Pennsylvania Game Commission
FSA –	Farm Service Agency
USDA-	US Department of Agriculture
NRCS –	Natural Resources Conservation Service
RC&D –	Resource Conservation & Development
WPC -	Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

# APPENDIX A

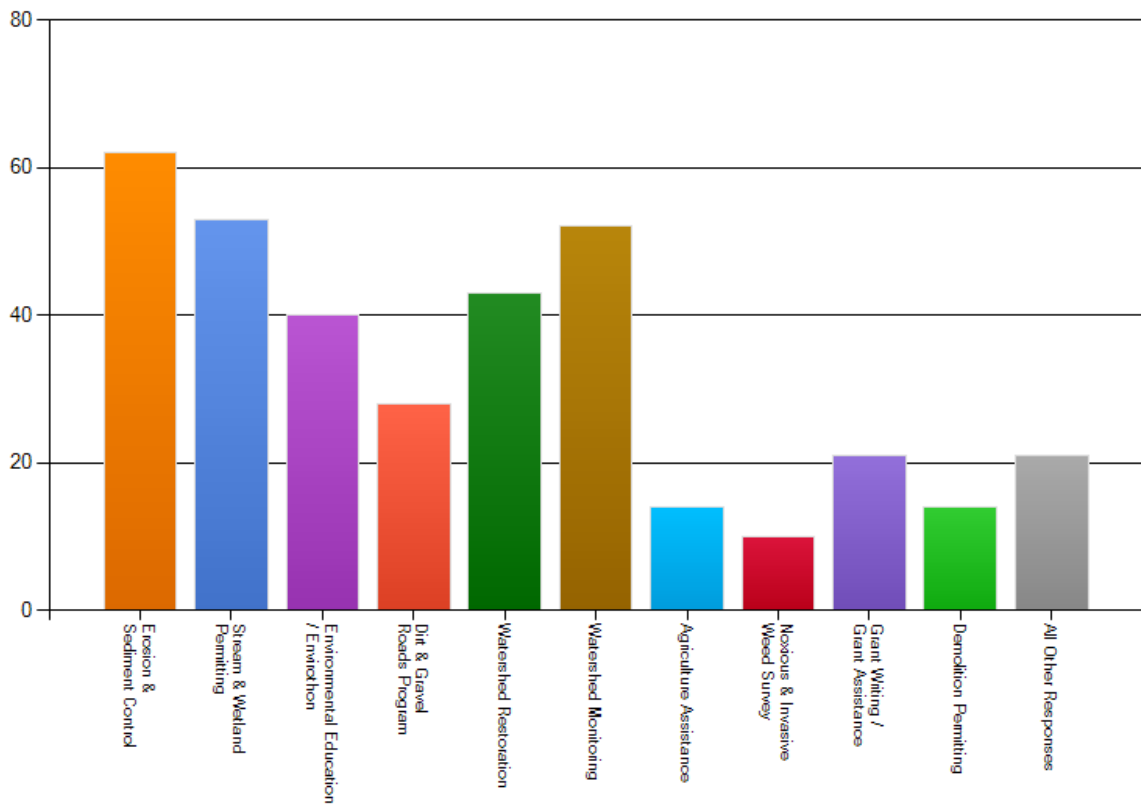
## SURVEY RESULTS

Please indicate the group or organization that best describes you and who you represent:

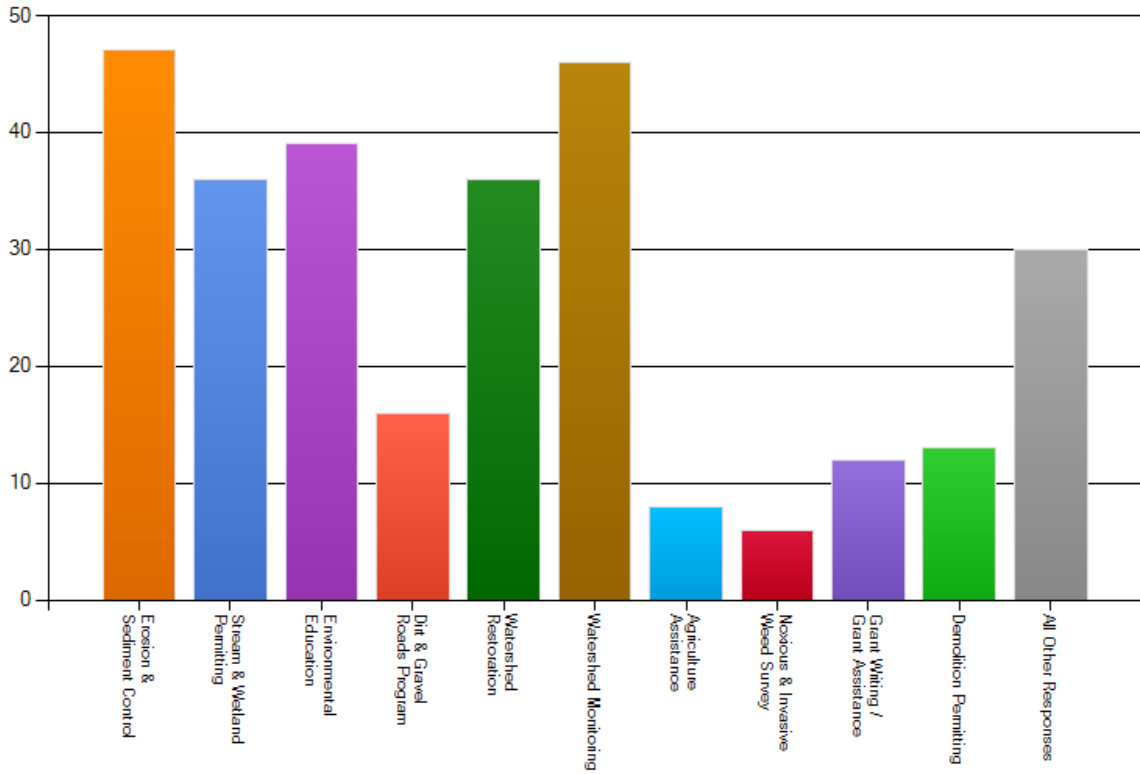




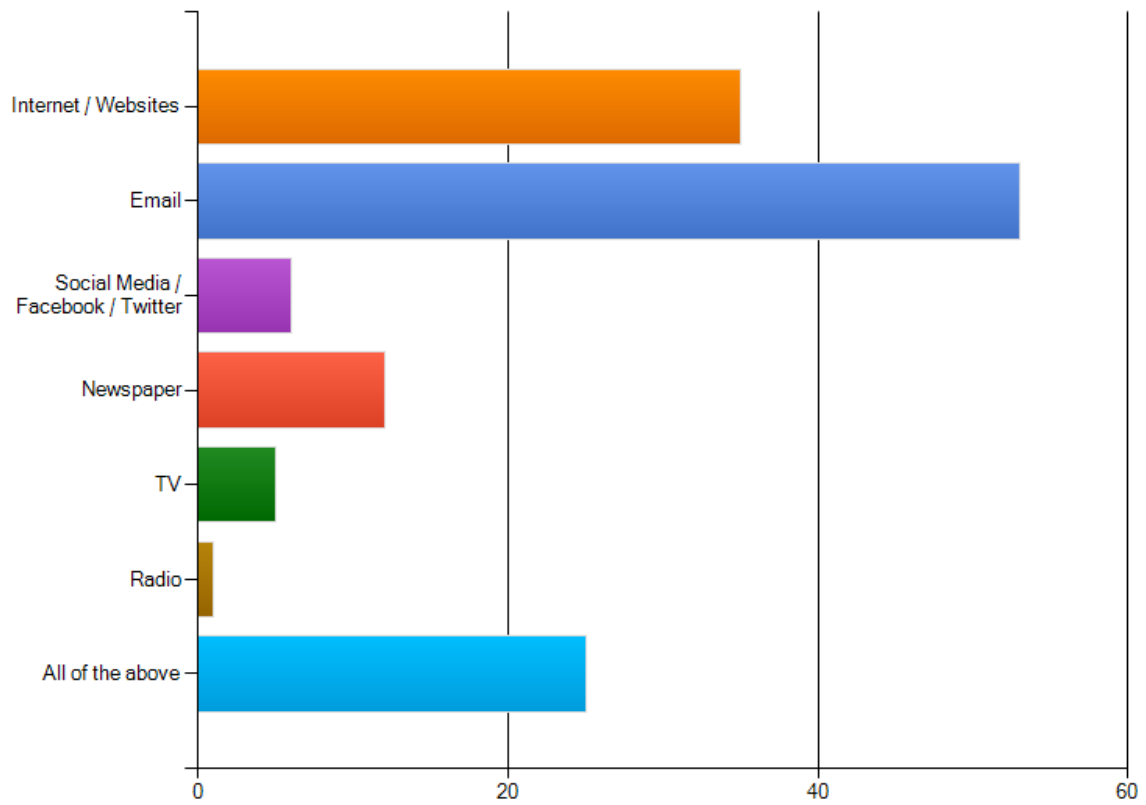
### Which Conservation District program(s) are you most familiar with?



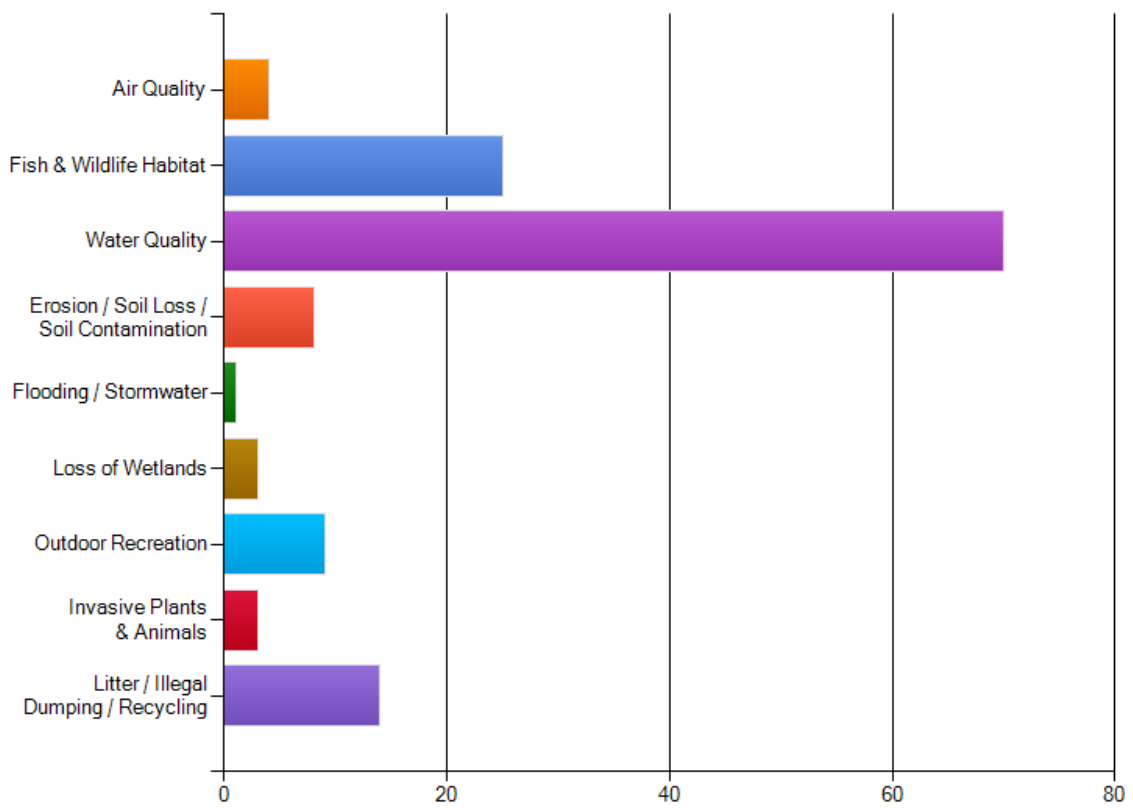
**What Conservation District programs and services have you found to be the most helpful to you or your company/organization?**



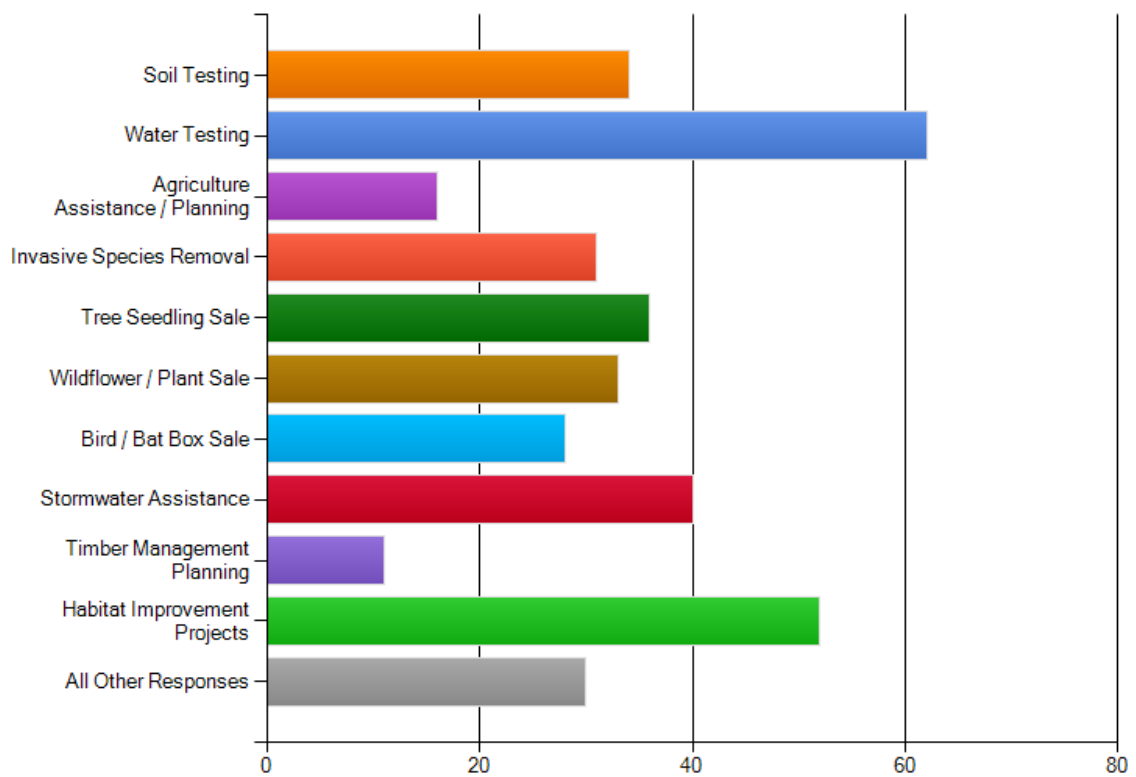
### What type of media do you use most?



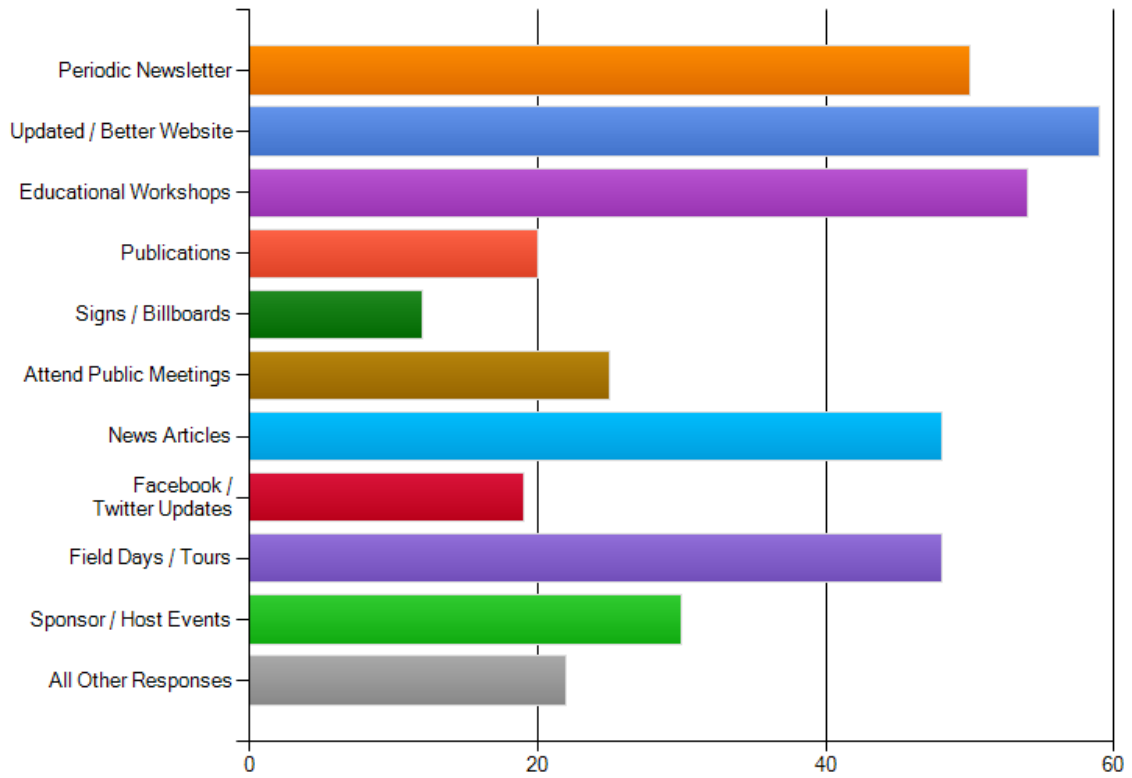
**What natural resource issue is MOST important to you and to Elk County?**



**What NEW programs or services might the Conservation District provide that would better meet your needs?**



**How can the Conservation District do a better job of reaching out to the residents of Elk County and make the Conservation District more identifiable within the community?**



**How would you characterize your satisfaction with the technical expertise, responsiveness and services provided by the Conservation District?**

