

10 Minute Supervisor Trainings



December 2023

Watersheds, Watershed Dams, and Watershed Conservancy Districts

What is a watershed?

A watershed is the drainage area of a landscape where water from rain or melting snow and ice drains downhill into a body of water such as a river, lake, reservoir, pond, estuary, wetland, aquifer, sea, or ocean. Watersheds include the streams, lakes, and shallow aquifers that store and convey the water as well as the land surfaces from which water drains and the aquatic ecosystems that they support. Topography and geology determine where the water flows, and thus are used to separate adjacent drainage basins into a hierarchical structure in which small watersheds drain into progressively larger ones. ([USDA U.S. Forest Service](#)). We all live in a watershed.

What are watershed dams?

Since 1944, NRCS and local sponsors have built some 10,400 small watershed dams in the United States. Kentucky's watershed program includes about 200 dams in 32 watershed projects, which were constructed between the mid 1950's through 2009. These were primarily constructed under the authority of PL 566. These dams were constructed to provide benefits such as flood control, rural water supply, recreation, and wildlife habitat. Many of these structures are now reaching the end of their designed life, and unless rehabilitated or decommissioned, can pose significant threats to human health, and to the environment. The biggest threat in KY dam hazard is reclassification due to development downstream of low hazard dams.

What are watershed conservancy districts?

A watershed conservancy district is a sub-district of conservation district. They are also Special Purpose Governmental Entities (SPGE). In many instances in Kentucky, watershed conservancy districts are the sponsors of watershed dams. These districts are formed "for the purpose of developing and executing plans and programs relating to any phase of conservation of water, water usage, flood prevention, flood control, erosion prevention and control of erosion, floodwater and sediment damages." [KRS 262.700](#).

All of Kentucky's conservation districts have 7 members on their board of supervisors. Watershed conservancy districts, however, do not all have the same number of members on their board of directors. If the territory of the district goes across county lines, the county with the majority acreage has 5 members of the board, and each county with minority acreage has 3 members.



Watershed Conservancy District Director's qualifications:

- Must be a landowner within the watershed
- Must be a resident of the county where the watershed is located
- Must submit a petition to the board of supervisors of the county where he/she is a landowner and legal resident. The petition must be signed by 25 or more landowners in the watershed and from the county he/she will be representing

Subject to approval by the board of supervisors, watershed conservancy district directors can be paid per diem or paid for actual expenses incurred while performing their duty.

Watershed Conservancy District Director's administrative duties:

- Set the tax rate
- Prepare and furnish to the PVA a list of landowners in the watershed showing real property subject to assessment
- Prepare an annual budget by April 1st
 - Submit to conservation district for approval
 - Submit to the Division of Conservation
 - Submit to the Department of Local Government
- Prepare an annual financial report by Sept. 1st
 - Submit to the conservation district
 - Submit to the Division of Conservation
 - Submit to the Department of Local Government
- Publish a legal notice by August 31st
- Provide for an audit at least every 4 years
 - Submit to the Department of Local Government
- Ensure adequate liability insurance and bonding coverage
- Meet all SPGE reporting and fee requirements
- Follow Open Meetings and Open Records laws

Important links for more information:

[US Forest Service Watershed information](#)

[The Kentucky Open Records & Open Meetings Acts: A guide for the public and public agencies](#)

[Kentucky Revised Statutes Chapter 262 \(conservation and watershed conservancy districts\)](#)

[Kentucky Revised Statutes Chapter 65A \(special purpose governmental entities\)](#)

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