

1 **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - FLOOR VERSION**

2 STATE OF OKLAHOMA

3 1st Session of the 60th Legislature (2025)

4 HOUSE BILL 1815

By: Grego and Newton of the
House

5 and

6 **Murdock** of the Senate

7

8

9 AS INTRODUCED

10 An Act relating to the Conservation Commission;
11 amending 27A O.S. 2021, Section 3-1-103, which
12 relates to definitions; alphabetizing statutory
13 definitions; amending 27A O.S. 2021, Section 3-2-106,
which relates to powers and duties of the Oklahoma
Conservation Commission; modifying powers and duties
of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission; and
providing an effective date.

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16 BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

17 SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 27A O.S. 2021, Section 3-1-103, is

18 amended to read as follows:

19 Section 3-1-103. As used in the Conservation District Act:

20 1. ~~"District" or "conservation district" means a governmental~~
21 ~~subdivision of this state, and a public body corporate and politic,~~
22 ~~organized in accordance with the provisions of the Conservation~~
23 ~~District Act, for the purposes, with the powers, and subject to the~~
24 ~~restrictions hereinafter set forth "Agency of this state" includes~~

1 the government of this state and any subdivision, agency or
2 instrumentality, corporate or otherwise, of the government of this
3 state;

4 2. "Director" means a member of the governing body of a
5 conservation district, elected or appointed in accordance with the
6 provisions of the Conservation District Act "Best management
7 practices" means a control method or combination of control methods
8 that is determined to be the most effective and practicable means of
9 preventing soil loss from erosion or reducing the amount of nonpoint
10 source pollution from a given land use;

11 3. "Commission" means the Oklahoma Conservation Commission
12 "Blue Thumb Program" means a nonpoint source educational program
13 emphasizing water quality education, including volunteer monitoring;

14 4. "State" means the State of Oklahoma "Commission" means the
15 Oklahoma Conservation Commission;

16 5. "Agency of this state" includes the government of this state
17 and any subdivision, agency or instrumentality, corporate or
18 otherwise, of the government of this state "Conservation" includes
19 conservation, development, improvement, maintenance, preservation,
20 protection and wise use of land, water and related natural
21 resources; the control and prevention of floodwater and sediment
22 damages; and the disposal of excess surface waters;

23 6. "United States" or "agencies of the United States" includes
24 the United States of America, and any department, agency or

1 instrumentality of the federal government "Cost-share program" means
2 the assumption by the state of a proportional share of the cost of
3 installing conservation structures, conservation practices or best
4 management practices on lands for public and environmental benefits;

5 7. "Government" or "governmental" includes the government of
6 this state, the government of the United States, and any
7 subdivision, agency or instrumentality, corporate or otherwise, of
8 either of them "Director" means a member of the governing body of a
9 conservation district, elected or appointed in accordance with the
10 provisions of the Conservation District Act;

11 8. "Due notice" which shall be in conformance with the
12 Administrative Procedures Act means notice published at least twice,
13 with an interval of at least seven (7) days between the two
14 publication dates, in a newspaper or other publication of general
15 circulation within the district, or, if no such publication of
16 general circulation is available, by posting at five conspicuous
17 places within the district, such posting to include, where possible,
18 posting at public places where it may be customary to post notices
19 concerning county or municipal affairs generally. At any hearing
20 held pursuant to such notice, at the time and place designated in
21 such notice, adjournment may be made from time to time without the
22 necessity of renewing such notice for such adjourned dates
23 "District" or "conservation district" means a governmental
24 subdivision of this state, and a public body corporate and politic,

1 organized in accordance with the provisions of the Conservation
2 District Act, for the purposes, with the powers, and subject to the
3 restrictions hereinafter set forth;

4 9. "District cooperator" means any person that has entered into
5 a cooperative agreement with a conservation district for the purpose
6 of protecting, conserving and practicing wise use of the renewable
7 natural resources under his or her control;

8 10. ~~"Renewable natural resources", "natural resources" or~~
9 ~~"resources" include land, soil, water, vegetation, trees, natural~~
10 ~~beauty, scenery and open space~~ "Due notice" which shall be in
11 conformance with the Administrative Procedures Act means notice
12 published at least twice, with an interval of at least seven (7)
13 days between the two publication dates, in a newspaper or other
14 publication of general circulation within the district, or, if no
15 such publication of general circulation is available, by posting at
16 five conspicuous places within the district, such posting to
17 include, where possible, posting at public places where it may be
18 customary to post notices concerning county or municipal affairs
19 generally. At any hearing held pursuant to such notice, at the time
20 and place designated in such notice, adjournment may be made from
21 time to time without the necessity of renewing such notice for such
22 adjourned dates;

23 11. ~~"Conservation" includes conservation, development,~~
24 ~~improvement, maintenance, preservation, protection and wise use of~~

1 ~~land, water and related natural resources; the control and~~
2 ~~prevention of floodwater and sediment damages; and the disposal of~~
3 ~~excess surface waters~~ "Government" or "governmental" includes the
4 government of this state, the government of the United States, and
5 any subdivision, agency or instrumentality, corporate or otherwise,
6 of either of them;

7 12. "Cost Share program" means the assumption by the state of a
8 proportional share of the cost of installing conservation
9 structures, conservation practices or best management practices on
10 lands for public and environmental benefits "Nonpoint source" shall
11 have the same meaning as such word is defined by the Oklahoma
12 Environmental Quality Act;

13 13. "Best management practices" means a control method or
14 combination of control methods that is determined to be the most
15 effective and practicable means of preventing soil loss from erosion
16 or reducing the amount of nonpoint source pollution from a given
17 land use "Nonpoint source working group" means an advisory group
18 established by the Conservation Commission to provide input into the
19 state's nonpoint source management and assessment program and is
20 open to federal, state and local environmental agencies and natural
21 resource agencies and other interested groups;

22 14. "Nonpoint source" shall have the same meaning as such word
23 is defined by the Oklahoma Environmental Quality Act "Pollution"

1 shall have the same meaning as such word is defined by the Oklahoma
2 Environmental Quality Act;

3 15. "Pollution" shall have the same meaning as such word is
4 defined by the Oklahoma Environmental Quality Act "Renewable natural
5 resources", "natural resources" or "resources" include land, soil,
6 water, vegetation, trees, natural beauty, scenery and open space;

7 16. "Nonpoint source working group" means an advisory group
8 established by the Conservation Commission to provide input into the
9 state's nonpoint source management and assessment program and is
10 open to federal, state and local environmental agencies and natural
11 resource agencies and other interested groups "Soil science" means
12 the science which:

13 a. is the study of physical, chemical, and biological
14 processes taking place in both naturally occurring and
15 reconstructed unconsolidated material formed by the
16 alteration of parent rock due to exposure at the
17 earth's surface, and

18 b. includes sampling, measuring, identification,
19 characterization, classification, and mapping of soil
20 materials and migration of water solute, air and other
21 gaseous components in the unsaturated portion of the
22 earth;

23 17. "Watershed" means an area of land that drains to a given
24 point "Soil scientist" means a person who:

- 1 a. has earned a baccalaureate or higher degree in a field
2 of soil science from an institution of higher
3 education which is accredited by a regional or
4 national accrediting agency, with a minimum of thirty
5 (30) semester hours or forty-five (45) quarter hours
6 of undergraduate work in a field of biological,
7 physical, or earth science with a minimum of fifteen
8 (15) semester hours of core soil science courses, and
9 b. has a specific and continuous record of related and
10 verifiable soil science work experience for two (2)
11 years. Publications in a soil science publication or
12 prior qualifications as an expert witness in
13 administrative or judicial proceeding, hearing or
14 trial shall be prima facie verification of experience
15 related to soil science;

16 18. "Blue Thumb Program" means a nonpoint source educational

17 program emphasizing water quality education, including volunteer

18 monitoring "State" means the State of Oklahoma;

19 19. "Soil science" means the science which:

- 20 a. is the study of physical, chemical, and biological
21 processes taking place in both naturally occurring and
22 reconstructed unconsolidated material formed by the
23 alteration of parent rock due to exposure at the
24 earth's surface, and

1 b. ~~includes sampling, measuring, identification,~~
2 ~~characterization, classification, and mapping of soil~~
3 ~~materials and migration of water solute, air and other~~
4 ~~gaseous components in the unsaturated portion of the~~
5 ~~earth~~ "Watershed" means an area of land that drains to
6 a given point; and

7 20. ~~"Soil scientist"~~ means a person who:

8 a. ~~has earned a baccalaureate or higher degree in a field~~
9 ~~of soil science from an institution of higher~~
10 ~~education which is accredited by a regional or~~
11 ~~national accrediting agency, with a minimum of thirty~~
12 ~~(30) semester hours or forty five (45) quarter hours~~
13 ~~of undergraduate work in a field of biological,~~
14 ~~physical, or earth science with a minimum of fifteen~~
15 ~~(15) semester hours of core soil science courses, and~~
16 b. ~~has a specific and continuous record of related and~~
17 ~~verifiable soil science work experience for two (2)~~
18 ~~years. Publications in a soil science publication or~~
19 ~~prior qualifications as an expert witness in~~
20 ~~administrative or judicial proceeding, hearing or~~
21 ~~trial shall be prima facie verification of experience~~
22 ~~related to soil science~~ "United States" or "agencies
23 of the United States" includes the United States of

1 America, and any department, agency or instrumentality
2 of the federal government.

3 SECTION 2. AMENDATORY 27A O.S. 2021, Section 3-2-106, is

4 amended to read as follows:

5 Section 3-2-106. A. In addition to other powers and duties
6 specified by law and except as otherwise provided by law, the
7 Oklahoma Conservation Commission shall have the power and duty to:

8 1. Offer the assistance as may be appropriate to the directors
9 of conservation districts in the carrying out of any of their powers
10 and programs and to:

- 11 a. assist and guide districts in the preparation and
12 carrying out of programs for resource conservation
13 authorized under the Conservation District Act,
14 b. review district programs,
15 c. coordinate the programs of the several districts and
16 resolve any conflicts in such programs, and
17 d. facilitate, promote, assist, harmonize, coordinate and
18 guide the resource conservation programs and
19 activities of districts as they relate to other
20 special purpose districts, counties and other public
21 agencies;

22 2. Keep the directors of each of the several districts informed
23 of the activities and experience of all other districts, and to

1 facilitate an interchange of advice and experience between the
2 districts and cooperation between them;

3 3. Enter into contracts and agreements and execute instruments
4 deemed necessary, beneficial, or convenient by the Commission for
5 the exercise of its legally conferred powers. This includes, but is
6 not limited to, creating shared positions, administering statewide
7 and locally emphasized programs, and exploring funding sources for
8 conservation programs, practices, and pilot projects;

9 4. Review agreements, or forms of agreements, proposed to be
10 entered into by districts with other districts or with any state,
11 federal, or interstate, or other public or private agency,
12 organization or individual, and advise the districts concerning the
13 agreements or forms of agreements;

14 4. 5. Secure the cooperation and assistance of the United
15 States and any of its agencies, and of agencies of this state, other
16 entities, or individuals in the work of the Commission or districts
17 and to accept donations, grants, gifts and contributions in money,
18 services or otherwise from the United States or any of its agencies
19 or from the state or any of its agencies in order , other entities,
20 or individuals to carry out the purposes of the Conservation
District Act;

22 5. 6. Disseminate information throughout the state concerning
23 the activities and programs of the conservation districts and to
24 make available information concerning the needs and the work of the

1 conservation districts and Commission to the Governor, the
2 Legislature, executive agencies of the government of this state,
3 political subdivisions of this state, cooperating federal agencies
4 and the general public;

5 6. 7. Serve along with conservation districts as the official
6 state agencies for cooperating with the Natural Resources
7 Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture
8 and carrying on conservation operations within the boundaries of
9 conservation districts;

10 7. 8. Cooperate with and give such assistance as it deems
11 necessary and proper to conservancy districts, watershed
12 associations and other special purpose districts in the State of
13 Oklahoma for the purpose of cooperating with the United States
14 through the Secretary of Agriculture in the furtherance of
15 conservation pursuant to the provisions of the Federal Watershed
16 Protection and Flood Prevention Act, as amended;

17 8. 9. Recommend the inclusion in annual and longer term budgets
18 and appropriation legislation of the State of Oklahoma of funds
19 necessary for appropriation by the Legislature to finance the
20 activities of the Commission and the conservation districts and to:

21 a. administer the provisions of the Conservation District
22 Act hereafter enacted by the Legislature appropriating
23 funds for expenditure in connection with the
24 activities of conservation districts,

- 1 b. distribute to conservation districts funds, equipment,
2 supplies and services received by the Commission for
3 that purpose from any source, subject to such
4 conditions as shall be made applicable thereto in any
5 state or federal statute or local ordinance making
6 available such funds, property or services,
- 7 c. issue rules establishing guidelines and suitable
8 controls to govern the use by conservation districts
9 of funds, property and services, and
- 10 d. review all budgets, administrative procedures and
11 operations of such districts and advise the districts
12 concerning their conformance with applicable laws and
13 regulations;

14 9. 10. Enlist the cooperation and collaboration of state,
15 federal, regional, interstate, local, public and private agencies
16 with the conservation districts and to facilitate arrangements under
17 which the conservation districts may serve county governing bodies
18 and other agencies as their local operating agencies in the
19 administration of any activity concerned with the conservation of
20 renewable natural resources;

21 10. 11. Pursuant to procedures developed mutually by the
22 Commission and federal, state and local agencies that are authorized
23 to plan or administer activities significantly affecting the
24 conservation of renewable natural resources, receive from these

1 agencies for review and comment suitable descriptions of their
2 plans, programs and activities for purposes of coordination with
3 district conservation programs and to arrange for and participate in
4 conferences necessary to avoid conflict among plans and programs, to
5 call attention to omissions and to avoid duplication of effort;

6 11. 12. Compile information and make studies, summaries, and
7 analyses of district programs in relation to each other and to other
8 resource conservation programs on a statewide basis;

9 12. 13. Except as otherwise assigned by law, carry out the
10 policies of this state in programs at the state level for the
11 conservation of the renewable natural resources of this state and
12 represent the state in matters affecting such resources;

13 13. 14. Assist conservation districts in obtaining legal
14 services from state and local legal officers;

15 14. 15. Require annual reports from conservation districts, the
16 form and content of which shall be developed by the Commission in
17 consultation with the district directors;

18 15. 16. Establish by rules, with the assistance and advice of
19 the State Auditor and Inspector, adequate and reasonably uniform
20 accounting and auditing procedures which shall be used by
21 conservation districts;

22 16. 17. Conduct workshops for district directors to instruct
23 them on the subjects of district finances, the Conservation District
24

1 Law and related laws, and their duties and responsibilities as
2 directors;

3 ~~17.~~ 18. Assist and supervise districts in carrying out their
4 responsibilities in accordance with the Oklahoma laws;

5 ~~18.~~ 19. Have power, by administrative order, upon the written
6 request of the board of directors of the conservation district or
7 districts involved, with a showing that such request has been
8 approved by a majority vote of the members of each of the boards
9 involved, to:

10 a. transfer lands from one district established under the
11 provisions of the Conservation District Act to
12 another,

13 b. divide a single district into two or more districts,
14 each of which shall thereafter operate as a separate
15 district under the provisions of the Conservation
16 District Act, and

17 c. consolidate two or more districts established under
18 the provisions of the Conservation District Act, which
19 consolidated area shall operate thereafter as a single
20 district under the provisions of the Conservation
21 District Act;

22 ~~19.~~ 20. Except as otherwise provided by law, act as the
23 management agency having jurisdiction over and responsibility for
24 directing nonpoint source pollution prevention programs outside the

1 jurisdiction or control of cities or towns in Oklahoma. The
2 Commission, otherwise, shall be responsible for all identified
3 nonpoint source categories except silviculture, urban storm water
4 runoff and industrial runoff;

5 ~~20.~~ 21. Establish and maintain an Equipment Revolving Fund for
6 the purpose of loaning conservation districts funds to purchase
7 equipment to be used for the installation of conservation practices.
8 The fund shall consist of all monies appropriated to, deposited in
9 or credited to the fund;

10 ~~21.~~ 22. Establish and maintain a Conservation District
11 Consolidation Fund for the purpose of providing financial assistance
12 to conservation districts who choose to consolidate as outlined in
13 subparagraph c of paragraph 18 of this subsection. The fund shall
14 consist of all monies appropriated to, deposited in or credited to
15 the fund;

16 ~~22.~~ 23. Administer cost-share programs for the purpose of
17 carrying out conservation or best management practices on the land
18 to benefit the public through the prevention or reduction of soil
19 erosion and nonpoint source pollution and through general resource
20 management. The Commission is not authorized to implement mandatory
21 compliance with management practices, except as otherwise provided
22 by law, to abate agricultural nonpoint source pollution;

23 ~~23.~~ 24. Plan watershed-based nonpoint source pollution control
24 activities, including the development and implementation of

1 conservation plans for the improvement and protection of the
2 resources of the state;

3 24. 25. Provide assistance to the Oklahoma Water Resources
4 Board on lake projects through stream and river monitoring,
5 assessing watershed activities impacting lake water quality, and
6 assisting in the development of a watershed management plan;

7 25. 26. Maintain the activities of the state's nonpoint source
8 working group;

9 26. 27. Prepare, revise, and review Oklahoma's nonpoint source
10 management program and nonpoint source assessment report in
11 coordination with other state environmental agencies and compile a
12 comprehensive assessment for the state every five (5) years. The
13 management program and assessment report shall be distributed to the
14 Governor, Secretary of Energy and Environment, the President Pro
15 Tempore of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of
16 Representatives;

17 27. 28. Under the direction of the Office of the Secretary of
18 the Energy and Environment, develop and implement the state's
19 nonpoint source water quality monitoring strategy in coordination
20 with other environmental agencies;

21 28. 29. Monitor, evaluate, and assess the waters of the state
22 to determine the condition of streams and rivers impacted by
23 nonpoint source pollution. In carrying out this area of
24 responsibility, the Conservation Commission shall serve as the

1 technical lead agency for nonpoint source pollution categories as
2 defined in Section 319 of the Federal Clean Water Act or other
3 subsequent federal or state nonpoint source programs;

4 29. 30. Administer the Blue Thumb Program;

5 30. 31. Enter into agreements or contracts for services with
6 any of the ~~substate~~ sub-state planning districts recognized by the
7 Oklahoma Department of Commerce;

8 31. 32. Cooperate with the federal government, or any agency
9 thereof, to participate in and coordinate with federal programs that
10 will yield additional federal funds to the state for programs within
11 the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission. This participation
12 shall be subject to the availability of state funds;

13 32. 33. Implement pilot projects and programs, subject to the
14 availability of funds, that will demonstrate the latest technologies
15 and applications in conservation programs that may provide direct or
16 residual benefits to conservation practices in the state; and

17 33. 34. Promulgate rules necessary, expedient, or appropriate
18 to carry out the purposes, objectives, or provisions or appropriate
19 to the performance of the Conservation District Act and the Oklahoma
20 Carbon Sequestration Enhancement Act and:

21 a. may establish and collect fees for services provided
22 pursuant to the Conservation District Act and the
23 Oklahoma Carbon Sequestration Enhancement Act,
24 including any services for the certification or

1 verification of sustainable agricultural production
2 practices including but not limited to the Natural
3 Resources Conservation Service Soil Condition Index,
4 and

5 b. shall promulgate all rules establishing fees in
6 accordance with the Administrative Procedures Act,
7 which fees shall be fair and equitable to all parties
8 concerned.

9 B. Nothing in this act shall take away any of the present
10 duties or responsibilities delegated by law or constitution to other
11 environmental agencies.

12 SECTION 3. This act shall become effective November 1, 2025.
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14 COMMITTEE REPORT BY: COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
OVERSIGHT, dated 03/04/2025 - DO PASS, As Coauthored.
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