



Oklahoma Conservation Commission

District Directors' Responsibilities:

A 10-Minute Guide Series

This is one in a continuing series of informational/discussion topics designed to help conservation district directors become more informed and knowledgeable about their responsibilities. It is suggested that board members review these guides before a board meeting and then have a ten-minute discussion on them at a meeting.

Guide No. 4 - Cooperator Agreements - Revised May 2009

Conservation districts have used district cooperator agreements since the formation of districts. Rules for using cooperator agreements for eligibility to be a district director were changed in 2008 with the passage of Senate Bill 1766, thus the 10-Minute Guide originally issued in March 2007 is being revised and updated. A new cooperator agreement that covers non-landowners and organizations is now a part of this guide, along with an application form for becoming a district cooperator.

What is a District Cooperator Agreement?

Every district has its own cooperator agreement form, although most are very similar. Most are a one page document signed by individual(s) and by a board member.

For 70 years producers have entered into cooperator agreements with districts. In the agreements producers (that own land) agree to develop and carry out a conservation plan and maintain conservation measures and the district agrees to provide technical and other assistance.

When districts were first formed they obtained cooperator agreements from landowners and used them to request the Natural Resources Conservation Service (known then as Soil Conservation Service) to provide technical assistance and assistance in the development of a conservation plan for the cooperator.

As time passed the formality and use of the district cooperator agreement has changed. This has caused some confusion as to how the document should be used.

Currently it is not uncommon for NRCS technicians or district conservationists to have blank district cooperator agreements for landowners to sign when they are in the field working on conservation plans or one of the Farm Bill programs. This works well as long as the signed form gets to the district staff so they can be approved at a district board meeting.

The document is neither legally binding nor required in order for an individual to receive technical assistance from the NRCS.

Who Can be a District Cooperator?

Historically, a district cooperator either owned or operated a farm or ranch. However, there is no provision in the statute that states that an individual must own land.

Older forms of the cooperator agreements imply that the cooperator must be a landowner. The new cooperator agreement included in this guide provides boxes that can be checked for landowners or non-landowners, organizations and businesses.

Some districts sign up cooperators who provide assistance to the district with conservation education and other projects.

Approval of District Cooperator Agreements

A cooperator agreement must be approved by the district board of directors during a regularly scheduled board meeting and signed by an authorized district director to be in effect.

The name of each cooperator for who an agreement is approved must be listed in the board meeting minutes.

(continued on next page)

Importance of District Cooperator Agreements in Election or Appointment of District Board Members

For individuals to file as candidates for a position on the board, they must have a cooperator agreement on file with the district or have filled out an application requesting a cooperator agreement. *This is a change made by Senate Bill 1766 passed in 2008.*

Prior to this bill a cooperator agreement had to be on file for 30 days prior to filing for election or appointment. Now people can fill out an application for a cooperator agreement and go ahead and file for election. But the application must be part of the agenda for the next regular board meeting and a cooperator agreement approved and signed at that meeting.

District Document

The district cooperator agreement is a district document. The approval of these agreements is done in open session at a board meeting. They are not a part of the approval process for conservation plans and contracts.

Therefore, these files should be maintained in a manner which keeps them current on a monthly basis.

It would be beneficial for districts to go through their files and develop a database of current district cooperators.

Other Uses of Cooperator Agreements

Conservation districts represent their cooperators when developing annual and long range plans, promoting needed conservation practices in the district, and searching for funding and other resources needed by landowners.

When talking to legislators, civic groups, and other agencies and organizations, district officials can use the number of district cooperators to make the point that the district is not just a board of five members.

When people sign up as district cooperators they agree to cooperate and support the district and in turn the district agrees to support their conservation efforts. So these cooperators actually become part of the conservation district.

*Oklahoma Conservation Commission
District Services Division
May 2009*

This publication is issued by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission as authorized by Mike Thralls, executive director. Copies have not been printed but are available through the agency website. Two printout copies have been deposited with the Publications Clearinghouse of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

APPLICATION FOR CONSERVATION DISTRICT COOPERATOR AGREEMENT

This is a formal application to have a Conservation District Cooperator Agreement executed between the _____ Conservation District and the following person(s):

Name of Applicant(s) _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Signature of Applicant(s): _____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____

The next regular board meeting is scheduled on _____, 2 ____
and this application will be a part of the meeting agenda.

District Representative: _____ Date: _____

**CONSERVATION DISTRICT
COOPERATOR AGREEMENT**

This is an agreement between the _____ Conservation District, hereinafter referred to as District and _____, hereinafter referred to as Cooperator(s), address: _____

Check either Landowner or Non-landowner box:

Landowner:

The Cooperator(s) Agrees to:

1. Cooperate with the representative of the District to develop as rapidly as feasible, a conservation plan for his/her land.
2. Start applying one or more conservation practices as provided in the conservation plan and which meets the technical standards of the District.
3. Maintain all conservation practices established in an effective condition and continue the use of all conservation measures put into effect.

The District Agrees to:

1. Furnish Cooperator(s) with technical assistance as needed in developing a conservation plan based upon a soil and plant inventory of the land.
2. Furnish the Cooperator(s) a conservation soils map, aerial photo and job sheets for needed conservation practices.
3. Furnish the Cooperator(s) with information, guidance and needed technical assistance as available for proper maintenance of established conservation measures.
4. Keep Cooperator(s) informed of conservation programs suitable for implementation on their land.

Individual Non-Landowner, Organization or Business:

The Cooperator Agrees to:

1. Work with representatives of the District to carry out planned projects, assist with district activities and participate in district events.
2. Become knowledgeable about the District. Suggested ways to do this are attend board meetings, volunteer to help with District activities, read District materials, attend conservation meetings or visit with district directors or staff.
3. Provide input to the District as they develop their conservation goals and needs assessments.

The District Agrees to:

1. Provide information and education to the Cooperator(s) so they will be informed about the District, conservation programs, and District activities.
2. Provide opportunities for Cooperator(s) to become involved in information and education events and activities, and other District activities and projects.
3. Provide recognition to Cooperator(s) for assistance to the District.

It is mutually agreed that:

1. Provisions of this agreement are understood by the Cooperator(s) and the District and that neither shall be liable for damage to the other's property resulting from carrying out this agreement unless such damage is caused by negligence or misconduct.
2. This agreement supersedes any previous Cooperator Agreement between the Cooperator(s) and the District.
3. This agreement will become effective on the date of the last signature and may be terminated by either party upon written notice.

Signature of Cooperator(s) _____ Date _____

_____ Date _____

Signature of District Chair _____ Date _____

Date approved by district board _____