



# Annual Report

October 1, 2023 - September 30, 2024





# Our Mission

To provide leadership to help people conserve, improve and sustain the natural resources and environment of Highlands County.

# Statutory Purpose

Soil & Water Conservation Districts' statutory purpose, per Ch. 582.02, F.S. is to provide assistance, guidance and education to landowners, land occupiers, the agricultural industry and the general public in implementing land and water resource protection practices.

# MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Having served as the Executive Director of this organization for 12 years, the 2023-2024 year proved to be one of the most intense yet rewarding during my tenure with the District. This Annual Report of the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District reflects the significant accomplishments of the year. Some of these include the hiring of an entire new team, implementation of a succession plan, redesign of the website to be ADA compliant, transition from paper files to digital, updates to the District 5-year Work Plan and most importantly completion of the OPPAGA Audit as ordered by the State Legislature. Highlands was selected as a pilot District for the entire state in the auditing process.

Overall, our District had an above average OPPAGA Audit Report. The few findings identified by the OPPAGA team were addressed immediately or were beyond the district's control. Once OPPAGA released the reports statewide it became evident Florida's Districts would be facing Legislation in 2025. Highlands initiated a group effort to be proactive and prepare ourselves for our future. This potential Legislation will be our primary focus in 2024-2025 as we collaborate with Florida Legislators to keep the compliant and active Districts in place so the critical services we provide to our citizens and agriculture producers will continue. Changes will be seen but we grow with change and our District is ready to GROW!

Sincerely,

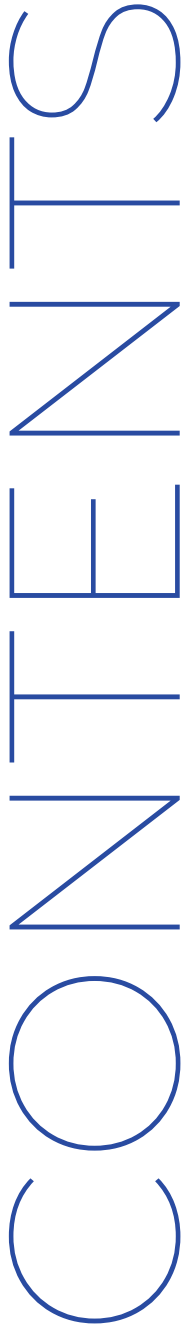
Susie Bishop  
Executive Director



**The 2023-2024 year proved to be one of the most intense yet rewarding during my tenure with the District.**



# Table of Contents



## OVERVIEW

Who We Are	Page 1
Significant Accomplishments	Page 2

## DISTRICT OPERATIONS

Management of FDACS Programs	Page 3
Success in Partnerships	Page 6
Public Initiatives	Page 7
Website Re-Design	Page 8
Educational Programs	Page 9
Community Garden	Page 10
Staff Development	Page 11

## FINANCES

Financial Reports	Page 12
-------------------	---------

## OPPAGA AUDIT & LEGISLATION

Statewide OPPAGA Audit	Page 18
Highlands SWCD OPPAGA Summary	Page 19
Legislation Planning	Page 20

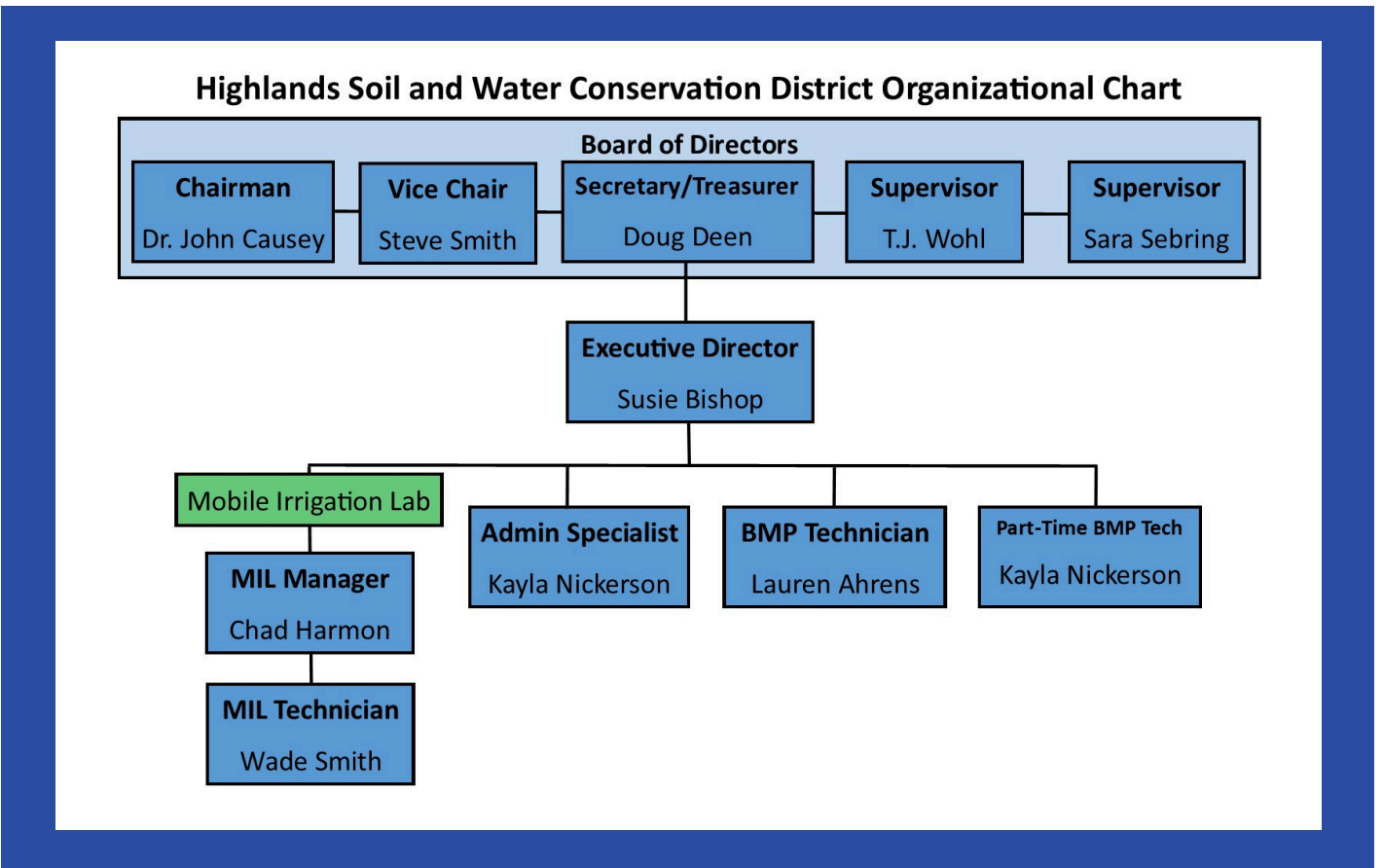
## CLIENT SATISFACTION

Client Feedback Survey	Page 21
------------------------	---------

# WHO WE ARE



Supervisors, left to right: T.J. Wohl, Sara Sebring, Dr. John Causey, Doug Deen and Steve Smith



# SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

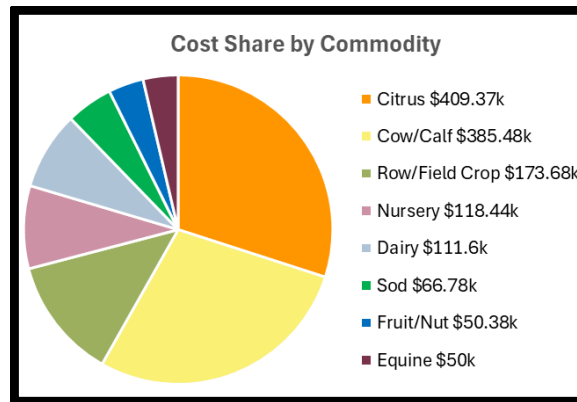
-  Completion of the OPPAGA Audit as ordered by the State Legislature.
-  Annual audit completed with one minor finding. Finding was corrected within 7 days of presentation to the Board and corrective response to the Auditor General was accepted upon submission.
-  Strategic Work Plan for years 2023-2028 developed, approved and adopted with better defined success measures.
-  Disposition of hard copy historical records for multiple years completed and recorded according to state statute requirements.
-  Migration of paper files to digital files completed.
-  Succession Plan for District Executive Director developed and implemented.
-  District increased directly employed staff from one to two, adding an Administrative Specialist position.
-  Cross training of staff for better understanding of programs/services and uniform messaging to clients.
-  Generation of feedback from clients / agricultural producers on effectiveness of District Offerings & Services.

# BMP COST SHARE ADMINISTRATION

**07/2023 - 06/2024**

**74**

**NUMBER OF AG PRODUCERS ASSISTED FINANCIALLY**



**\$1.4 Million**  
**DISTRIBUTED FOR BMP PROJECTS**

**\$3.6 Million**  
**LOCAL ECONOMIC IMPACT**

Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District (HSWCD) successfully managed and administered two Best Management Practices cost share contracts for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services - Office of Agricultural Water Policy (FDACS-OAWP).

04/2021-06/2027

**\$14.5 Million**

**TWO MULTI-YEAR CONTRACTS TOTAL**

AGRICULTURAL BEST  
MANAGEMENT PRACTICES



Cesar Martinez of Costa Farms discussing BMP implementation with Kayla Nickerson, BMP Conservation Technician.

10/2023 - 09/2024

**55**

FARMS/RANCHES  
ENROLLED

**11,378**

ACRES ENROLLED

**319**

IMPLEMENTATION  
VERIFICATION  
VISITS

The district supervised and managed two (2) FDACS - OAWP contracted conservation technicians who successfully enrolled willing participants into the Best Management Practices (BMP) program for a presumption of compliance with the State Water Quality Standards. Technicians identified opportunities for achieving greater nutrient, irrigation, or water resource management efficiencies, and opportunities for water conservation. BMP implementation was verified through routine site visits where nutrient records are reviewed, and university recommendations are made per commodity type.



# MOBILE IRRIGATION LAB

Working diligently to conserve the use of water in agriculture production, the Highlands Soil & Water Conservation District completed its 10th year managing its Mobile Irrigation Lab. The Highlands Lab analyzes irrigation systems for efficiencies, conservation of water use and identification of water quality improvement opportunities. The District provides this service free of charge to the producer via a contract with FDACS-OAWP; a multi-year contract totaling \$881,673.00.

10/2023 09/2024

**277**

COMPLETED EVALUATIONS

**3,262**

ACRES EVALUATED

**263.7**  
**Million**

GALLONS OF POTENTIAL WATER SAVINGS IDENTIFIED



Pictured: Chad Harmon, MIL Manager, and Wade Smith, MIL Technician, measuring and recording irrigation pressure uniformity.

The District's team proposed and led a statewide effort to streamline the Scope of Work and develop a consistent training program for all the Labs in Florida. The revisions to the Scope of Work and the draft of the new Standard Operating Procedures were presented to FDACS-OAWP to be incorporated into the contracts.

# SUCCESS IN PARTNERSHIPS



Managed and successfully administered four (4) contracts with FDACS-OAWP: one (1) Mobile Irrigation Lab, one (1) Conservation Technician and two (2) Producer Cost Share.



Drafted and secured USDA-NRCS Administrative Support Contribution Agreement to implement FYs 2024-2029.



Partnership with Highlands County to provide support in the protection of natural resources and the sustainability of agriculture for all its citizens.



Planning with the Central Florida Regional Planning Council for the future of Highlands and surrounding counties, focusing on sustainability of natural resources and agriculture.



Managed and successfully administered a \$500,000 Department of Environmental Protection contract for a feasibility study of the Stolen Saddle Ranch Project, a proposed water storage project in DeSoto County.



Funded the AgriTest Initiative for the Highlands County Extension Office, to provide free soil and tissue testing samples for agricultural producers to comply with BMPs. Twenty-eight producers assisted in Q3 & Q4 of FY 2024.



Completed 10-year agreement with City of Avon Park and US Fish and Wildlife for annual inspections of mitigation sites.



Provided funding for 24 months of connectivity fees for soil moisture probe systems on a cover crop research project The Nature Conservancy is conducting with Buck Island Ranch.

# PUBLIC INITIATIVES



HSWCD collaborated with the Central Florida Regional Planning Council to host the 4th Annual Landowner Assistance Expo (LAX) in Sebring, FL, held on June 11th, 2024. During the Expo, attendees received insights from more than ten public and private organizations about various programs available to landowners who are interested in implementing conservation activities on their properties. Participation in the Expo has increased year over year since its' inception, from 55 attendees in 2021 to 128 in 2024.



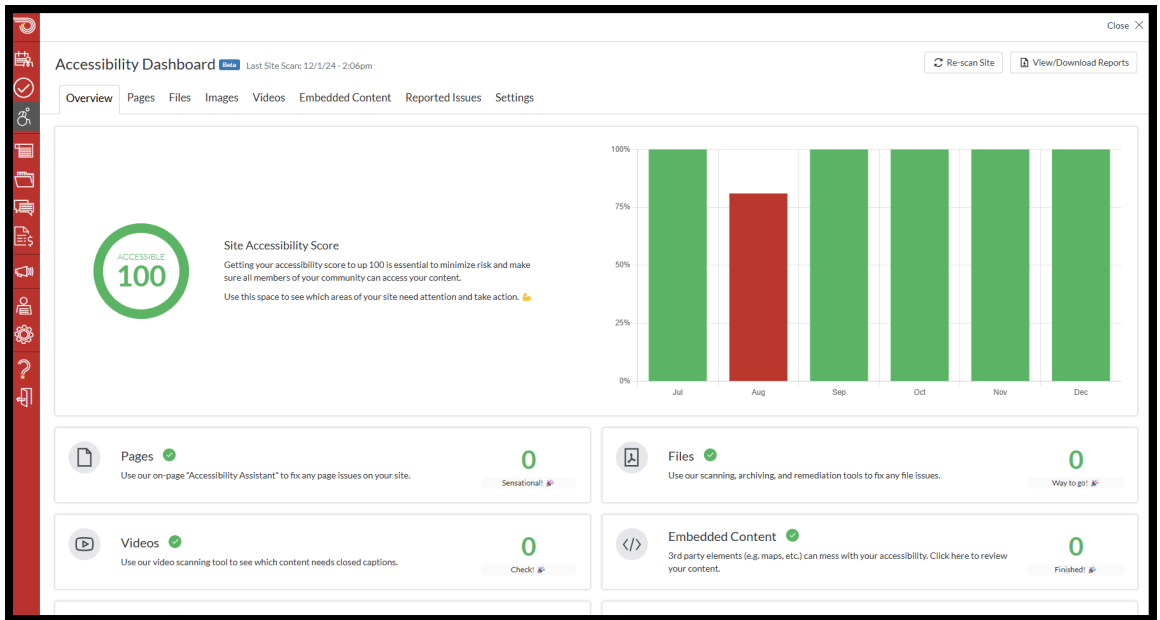
Annually, the District hosts a Local Working Group Meeting to brainstorm and provide feedback to the USDA on the most critical natural resource concerns in the area. The recommendations developed at the Local Working Group Meeting are presented to the USDA-NRCS State Technical Committee at their meeting each year. Historically, Highlands Local Working Group recommendations have been incorporated into the NRCS funded programs in future program years.



# WEBSITE REDESIGN



HSWCD has partnered with Streamline, the only platform dedicated exclusively to serving the unique needs of special districts, to redesign the district webpage for the improvement of functionality and to provide accessibility to all.



Dashboard monitoring compliance with ADA & CH. 189, F.S.

# EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS



A total of \$3,000 awarded in scholarships to upper classmen at Warner University majoring in Agriculture or Natural Resources.



District Staff completed the 24th year serving as an instructor and board member for the Highlands County Ag-Venture Program.



Promoted Florida Agriculture as a co-host of the "Taste of Florida Reception" at the Annual Meeting of the SouthEast Region of the National Association of Conservation Districts.



District Staff completed 15+ years Teaching the Leadership Highlands Team Building and Ag Days.



Financial sponsorship to Ag Angels who provide basic needs and Christmas joy to school aged children in need as well as scholarships to students entering Trade Programs.





The “Growing in the Heartland” Community Garden has done just that... GROWN! Since it’s inception in 2014, this project of the District has proven to be a very successful initiative to provide citizens a location to produce their own garden of vegetables, fruits, herbs or fresh flowers with all the necessities provided by the District. The success of the Community Garden is proven by its full capacity of all 45 plots.

COMMUNITY GARDEN





DIVISION OF LIBRARY and INFORMATION SERVICES

Administrative Staff completed Public Records Management Training from the Division of Libraries and Information Services and received certification.

*Serving the Special Needs of Your Community*



FLORIDA ASSOCIATION of SPECIAL DISTRICTS, INC.

In an effort to be more informed and knowledgeable on current best practices for Special Districts, HSWCD joined the Florida Association of Special Districts and began tapping into trainings and other resources offered by the Association. In the future, Administrative Staff will pursue Certified District Manager and/or Certified District Administrative Professional Certifications.



HSWCD Staff attended the Annual Conference of the Southeast Region of the National Association of Conservation Districts to collaborate with fellow District representatives on providing services to our communities. Trainings and workshops provided many opportunities to network and brainstorm new ideas.



HSWCD Staff are active members of the Florida Conservation District Employee's Association. FCDEA hosts quarterly meetings to provide collaboration and trainings. Through this membership, HSWCD is leading an effort to develop a unified voice concerning the future of SWCDs in Florida.

*Income*

Year	General Revenue	Special Revenue
2024	\$440,301*	\$2,539,164*
2023	\$520,725	\$5,224,992
2022	\$344,824	\$2,886,103
2021	\$315,709	\$2,524,527
2020	\$409,710	\$4,917,038

*Expenses*

Year	General Expenditures	Special Revenue Expenditures
2024	\$466,633*	\$2,539,164*
2023	\$368,967	\$5,224,992
2022	\$394,416	\$2,886,103
2021	\$367,627	\$2,524,527
2020	\$366,279	\$4,917,038

\*Unaudited totals

## Balance Sheet

### As of September 30, 2024

	<b>Total</b>
<b>ASSETS</b>	
<b>Current Assets</b>	
<b>Bank Accounts</b>	
1010200 Heartland National Bank CD 6672	200,000.00
1010201 First Southern Bank CD	200,000.00
1010202 Heartland National Bank - CD 6673	200,000.00
1010204 Certificate of Deposit - HNB 20160315	270,013.04
1010305 General Fund # 21615- Heartland National	297,868.60
1010306 BMP Acct. #21054-Heartland National Bank	352,229.27
1010307 FCO Acct. #21062-Heartland National Bank	737,499.60
1010310 DEP Grant Fund #31297-HeartlandNational Bank	250.00
1010311 USDA-NRCS Agreement #4628	250.00
1020100 Petty Cash	300.00
<b>Total Bank Accounts</b>	<b>\$ 2,258,410.51</b>
<b>Accounts Receivable</b>	
1010206 Grant Receivable	13,112.71
<b>Total Accounts Receivable</b>	<b>\$ 13,112.71</b>
<b>Other Current Assets</b>	
2010201 General Fund- Loans Receivable	500.00
<b>Total Other Current Assets</b>	<b>\$ 500.00</b>
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>\$ 2,272,023.22</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 2,272,023.22</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	
<b>Liabilities</b>	
<b>Current Liabilities</b>	
<b>Other Current Liabilities</b>	
2010205 DEP Grant - Loans Payable	250.00
2010206 USDA-NRCS Agreement-Loan Payable	250.00
5377706 Employee 401k	-649.52
<b>Total Other Current Liabilities</b>	<b>-\$ 149.52</b>
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>-\$ 149.52</b>
<b>Long-Term Liabilities</b>	
2230001 Deferred Revenue for Tech. Grant	42,000.00
2230002 Deferred Revenue - Mobile Irrigation Lab	46,327.00
2230010 BMP-AgNPS Deferred Income	311,850.00
2230011 BMP - NEEPA Deferred Income	737,500.00
<b>Total Long-Term Liabilities</b>	<b>\$ 1,137,677.00</b>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$ 1,137,527.48</b>
<b>Equity</b>	
2710000 Fund Balance	1,198,801.28
Net Income	-64,305.54
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>\$ 1,134,495.74</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	<b>\$ 2,272,023.22</b>



## Profit and Loss

### October 2023 - September 2024

	27694 - Ag NPS April 2021-June 2024	28763-FCO NEEPA 5/2022- 6/30/24	DEP Grant	General Fund	TOTAL
<b>Income</b>					
3343906 BMP Grant Rev Admin - 5%	70,690.02				70,690.02
3343907 BMP Tech. Admin Fee				7,064.55	7,064.55
3343929 FCO Grant Rev. - 5% Admin. Fee		41,054.90			41,054.90
3343930 BMP Technician Grant Rev				141,300.22	141,300.22
3343931 HCBCC Reimbursement Rev				13,569.96	13,569.96
3343941 27694 - BMP Ag NPS - 2021-2027	1,379,962.93				1,379,962.93
3343942 28763 FCO-NEEPA May 20 - June 30, 2025		821,097.75			821,097.75
3343943 LPA 0447 - DEP Grant			215,537.92		215,537.92
3343944 LPA 0447 - DEP Grant - 5% Admin. Fee			10,820.03		10,820.03
3611001 CD Interest Income				24,351.48	24,351.48
3810001 Grant Admin Fee				117,416.55	117,416.55
3894002 Mobile Irrigation Lab				128,638.25	128,638.25
3894003 MIL Grant Rev. Admin. Fee - 5%				6,431.92	6,431.92
3894005 Services - General				1,000.00	1,000.00
3894006 Community Garden				528.30	528.30
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 1,450,652.95</b>	<b>\$ 862,152.65</b>	<b>\$226,357.95</b>	<b>\$440,301.23</b>	<b>\$2,979,464.78</b>
<b>Gross Profit</b>	<b>\$ 1,450,652.95</b>	<b>\$ 862,152.65</b>	<b>\$226,357.95</b>	<b>\$440,301.23</b>	<b>\$2,979,464.78</b>
<b>Expenses</b>					
5373201 Accounting				8,899.00	8,899.00
5373202 Audit				11,010.00	11,010.00
5373203 Insurance-D & O, Gen. Liab., Bonds				4,030.75	4,030.75
5374002 Mileage reimbursement				696.78	696.78
5374010 Employer FRS Contribution				35,272.29	35,272.29
5374101 Communications				1,519.41	1,519.41
5374102 Internet				2,488.65	2,488.65
5374902 Special District Fee				175.00	175.00
5375010 Community Garden Expense				980.69	980.69
5375011 Mobile Irrigation Lab Expenses				2,112.02	2,112.02
5375101 Office Supplies				3,820.40	3,820.40
5375202 Computers and Software				4,630.44	4,630.44
5375403 NACD Dues				775.00	775.00
5375404 AFCD Dues				350.00	350.00
5375405 Travel / Meetings				5,110.13	5,110.13
5375406 Vehicle Expenses				46,410.64	46,410.64
5377000 Employee Health Insurance				35,233.28	35,233.28
5377001 Workers' Comp. Ins.				5,821.32	5,821.32
5377002 Payroll Tax Expense				19,032.79	19,032.79
5377005 Wages				277,710.84	277,710.84
5377704 Office Security				552.72	552.72
5378300 BMP Grant Distribution	1,379,962.93				1,379,962.93
5378396 BMP Admin Fee	70,690.02				70,690.02
5378401 FCO-NEEPA Grant Dist.		821,097.75			821,097.75
5378406 FCO Grant Dist. - 5% Admin. Fee		41,054.90			41,054.90
5378407 LPA 0447 - DEP Grant Distribution			215,537.92		215,537.92
5378408 DEP Grant Distribution-5% Admin. Fee			5,671.63		5,671.63
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 1,450,652.95</b>	<b>\$ 862,152.65</b>	<b>\$221,209.55</b>	<b>\$466,632.15</b>	<b>\$3,000,647.30</b>
<b>Net Operating Income</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 5,148.40</b>	<b>-\$ 26,330.92</b>	<b>-\$ 21,182.52</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>					
5375000 Other non-operating					0.00
5374906 Ag Venture				7,000.00	7,000.00
5375003 Special Projects				36,123.02	36,123.02
<b>Total 5375000 Other non-operating</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 43,123.02</b>	<b>\$ 43,123.02</b>
<b>Total Other Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 43,123.02</b>	<b>\$ 43,123.02</b>
<b>Net Other Income</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>-\$ 43,123.02</b>	<b>-\$ 43,123.02</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>\$ 5,148.40</b>	<b>-\$ 69,453.94</b>	<b>-\$ 64,305.54</b>



## Budget vs. Actuals October 2023 - September 2024

	Actual	Budget	over Budget	% of Budget
<b>Income</b>				
3343906 BMP Grant Rev Admin - 5%	70,690.02	70,690.02	0.00	100.00%
3343907 BMP Tech. Admin Fee	7,064.55	7,064.55	0.00	100.00%
3343929 FCO Grant Rev. - 5% Admin. Fee	41,054.90	41,054.90	0.00	100.00%
3343930 BMP Technician Grant Rev	141,300.22	141,300.22	0.00	100.00%
3343931 HCBCC Reimbursement Rev	13,569.96	13,569.96	0.00	100.00%
3343941 27694 - BMP Ag NPS - 2021-2027	1,379,962.93	1,379,962.93	0.00	100.00%
3343942 28763 FCO-NEEPA May 20 - June 30, 2025	821,097.75	821,097.75	0.00	100.00%
3343943 LPA 0447 - DEP Grant	215,537.92	215,537.92	0.00	100.00%
3343944 LPA 0447 - DEP Grant - 5% Admin. Fee	10,820.03	10,820.03	0.00	100.00%
3611001 CD Interest Income	24,351.48	24,351.48	0.00	100.00%
3810001 Grant Admin Fee	117,416.55	117,416.55	0.00	100.00%
3894002 Mobile Irrigation Lab	128,638.25	128,638.25	0.00	100.00%
3894003 MIL Grant Rev. Admin. Fee - 5%	6,431.92	6,431.92	0.00	100.00%
3894005 Services - General	1,000.00	1,000.00	0.00	100.00%
3894006 Community Garden	528.30	528.30	0.00	100.00%
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 2,979,464.78</b>	<b>\$ 2,979,464.78</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Gross Profit</b>	<b>\$ 2,979,464.78</b>	<b>\$ 2,979,464.78</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Expenses</b>				
5373201 Accounting	8,899.00	8,899.00	0.00	100.00%
5373202 Audit	11,010.00	11,010.00	0.00	100.00%
5373203 Insurance-D & O, Gen. Liab., Bonds	4,030.75	4,030.75	0.00	100.00%
5374002 Mileage reimbursement	696.78	696.78	0.00	100.00%
5374010 Employer FRS Contribution	35,272.29	35,272.29	0.00	100.00%
5374101 Communications	1,519.41	1,519.41	0.00	100.00%
5374102 Internet	2,488.65	2,488.65	0.00	100.00%
5374902 Special District Fee	175.00	175.00	0.00	100.00%
5375010 Community Garden Expense	980.69	980.69	0.00	100.00%
5375011 Mobile Irrigation Lab Expenses	2,112.02	2,112.02	0.00	100.00%
5375101 Office Supplies	3,820.40	3,820.40	0.00	100.00%
5375202 Computers and Software	4,630.44	4,630.44	0.00	100.00%
5375403 NACD Dues	775.00	775.00	0.00	100.00%
5375404 AFCD Dues	350.00	350.00	0.00	100.00%
5375405 Travel / Meetings	5,110.13	5,110.13	0.00	100.00%
5375406 Vehicle Expenses	46,410.64	46,410.64	0.00	100.00%
5377000 Employee Health Insurance	35,233.28	35,233.28	0.00	100.00%
5377001 Workers' Comp. Ins.	5,821.32	5,821.32	0.00	100.00%
5377002 Payroll Tax Expense	19,032.79	19,032.79	0.00	100.00%
5377005 Wages	277,710.84	277,710.84	0.00	100.00%
5377704 Office Security	552.72	552.72	0.00	100.00%
5378300 BMP Grant Distribution	1,379,962.93	1,379,962.93	0.00	100.00%
5378396 BMP Admin Fee	70,690.02	70,690.02	0.00	100.00%
5378401 FCO-NEEPA Grant Dist.	821,097.75	821,097.75	0.00	100.00%
5378406 FCO Grant Dist. - 5% Admin. Fee	41,054.90	41,054.90	0.00	100.00%
5378407 LPA 0447 - DEP Grant Distribution	215,537.92	215,537.92	0.00	100.00%
5378408 DEP Grant Distribution-5% Admin. Fee	5,671.63	5,671.63	0.00	100.00%
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 3,000,647.30</b>	<b>\$ 3,000,647.30</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Net Operating Income</b>	<b>-\$ 21,182.52</b>	<b>-\$ 21,182.52</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>				
5375000 Other non-operating			0.00	
5374906 Ag Venture	7,000.00	7,000.00	0.00	100.00%
5375003 Special Projects	36,123.02	36,123.02	0.00	100.00%
<b>Total 5375000 Other non-operating</b>	<b>\$ 43,123.02</b>	<b>\$ 43,123.02</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Total Other Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 43,123.02</b>	<b>\$ 43,123.02</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Net Other Income</b>	<b>-\$ 43,123.02</b>	<b>-\$ 43,123.02</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>-\$ 64,305.54</b>	<b>-\$ 64,305.54</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

CAPITAL ASSETS



2018 F150 Series 4x4  
Supercrew



2020 F150 Series 4x4  
Supercrew  
2023 Diamond Cargo  
Enclosed Trailer



2022 John Deere  
Gator Side by Side



2025 Ford Explorer Active

## Contracts/Grants Managed by HSWCD

### Tabulation of Cost Share Projects Processed per County October 1, 2023 - September 30, 2024

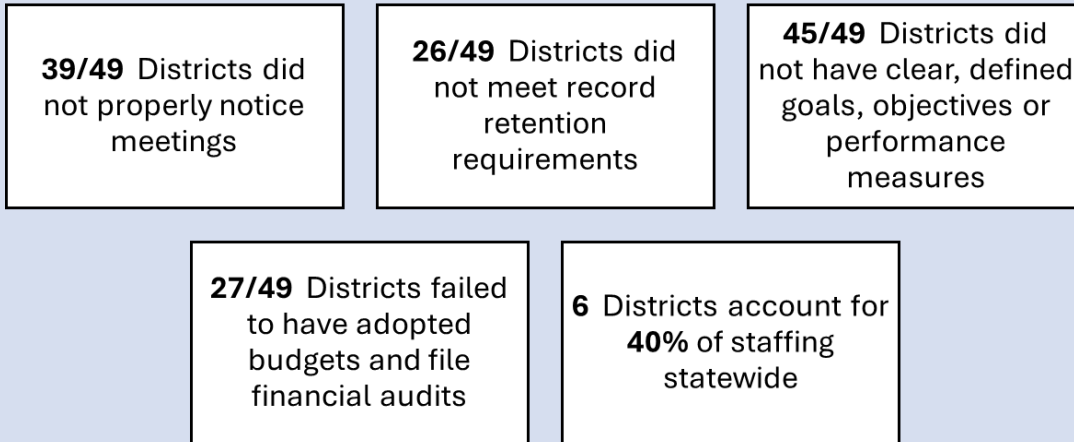
2019-2027 Contracts	Total Amount of Contract	Term of Contract
FCO - NEEPA - # 28763	\$ 5,734,972.38	Yrs. 2022-2025
BMP - Ag NPS - # 27694	\$ 8,805,663.30	Yrs. 2021-2027
MIL Program - # 27059	\$ 881,673.00	Yrs. 2020-2026
BMP - Technician - # 26243	\$ 872,129.49	Yrs. 2019-2025
DEP - Grant Agreement LPA 0447	\$ 500,000.00	Yrs. 2024-2025
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 16,794,438.17</b>	
Approx. Cost Share Amt. Distributed in FY	\$ 2,416,599.00	FY 10/1/23-09/30/24
Reimbursement BMP Projects Processed in FY 2023-2024	Sorted By County	Total Number
Brevard		1
Collier		9
DeSoto		16
Hardee		3
Hendry		1
Highlands		6
Hillsborough		5
Indian River		4
Lake		1
Lee		5
Martin		1
Miami-Dade		1
Okeechobee		2
Orange		1
Osceola		1
Polk		29
St. Lucie		1
<b>Total</b>		<b>86</b>
Guide to Acronyms		
BMP: Best Management Practices		
AgNPS: Ag. Non-Point Source Lands outside Northern Everglades Reg.		
NEEPA: Northern Everglades Estuary Protection Area		
MIL: Mobile Irrigation Lab		
FCO: Fixed Capital Outlay Funds		
FDACS-OAWP: Florida Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services-Office of Ag Water Policy		
DEP: Dept. of Environmental Protection		



## OFFICE OF POLICY ANALYSIS AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AUDIT

At the request of the Florida Legislature, OPPAGA completed a performance review of the State's 49 independent SWCDs with the final reports being released August 19th, 2024.

### Significant Statewide Findings:



### Statewide Recommendations:

- The Legislature intends for Soil and Water Conservation Districts to work in conjunction with federal, state, and local agencies in all matters that implement the provisions of Ch. 582, F.S.
- Whether maintaining the status quo or considering District consolidation or regionalization, the State should continue reevaluating how the Districts meet their statutory obligations.
- There is a correlation that Districts with no staff and limited funding provide fewer programs or activities than those with dedicated staff and consistent annual revenue sources.
- The districts' current operating environment limits their ability to improve programs, increase services, or respond to constituent demand. The Districts will continue to struggle, which will require them to transform or face possible dissolution.

Statistics and statements taken directly from the OPPAGA Executive Summary Report.

To view, visit: <https://oppaga.fl.gov/ContractedReviews>



# HIGHLANDS SWCD OPPAGA SUMMARY

As the largest District in the State, Highlands was selected as a Pilot District for the OPPAGA Audit team.

## Key Takeaways:

- Active, engaged Board who conducts monthly meetings and consistent oversight of programs and activities
- Diversification of programs and activities including technical assistance and cost share support to agricultural producers, conservation education, outreach and funding for special projects focused on conservation and agriculture.
- Multiple revenue sources via contracts/agreements with FDACS-OAWP, Highlands Co. Board of County Commissioners, City of Avon Park, community garden and certificates of deposit earnings
- Guided by a five-year strategic work plan that establishes short-term and long-term goals and objectives

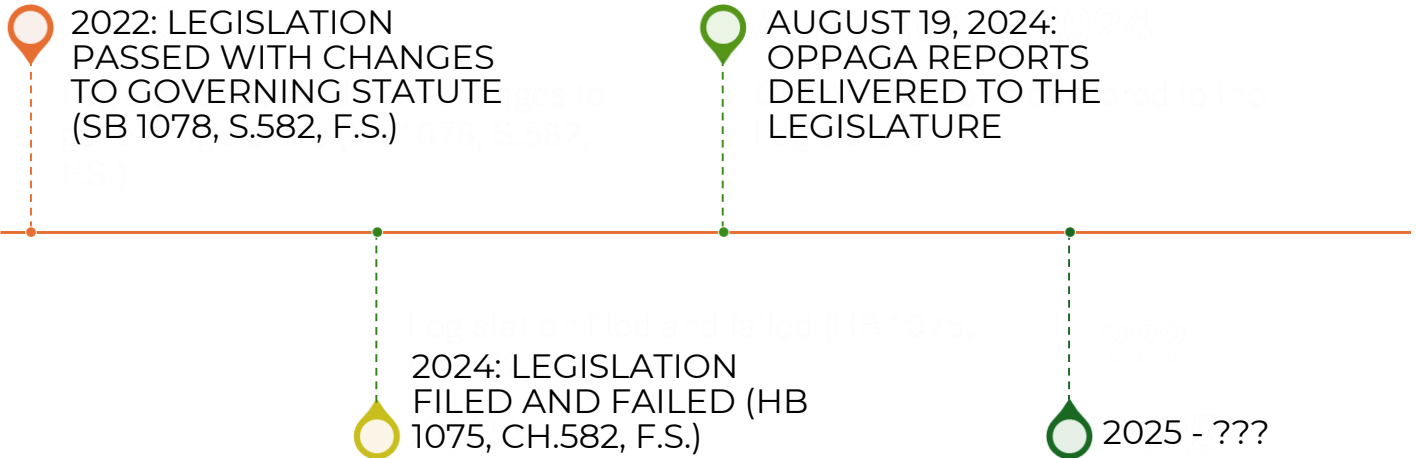
Five findings/recommendations were made, in which the district had either already addressed prior to the conclusion of the audit or provided proper clarifying statements that the recommendations were beyond the district's control.

**“As of September 30, 2023, the fund balance in the general fund was \$1,198,802, which is more than adequate to sustain the District in the event of unexpected expenditures or the loss of a major revenue source. To put this in prospective, the fund balance at September 30, 2023 would cover the deficits incurred in FY 2021 and FY 2022 for over 23 consecutive years.”**

Statement from Mike Carter, CPA & District Accountant Consultant, in response to expenditures exceeding revenue during the review period

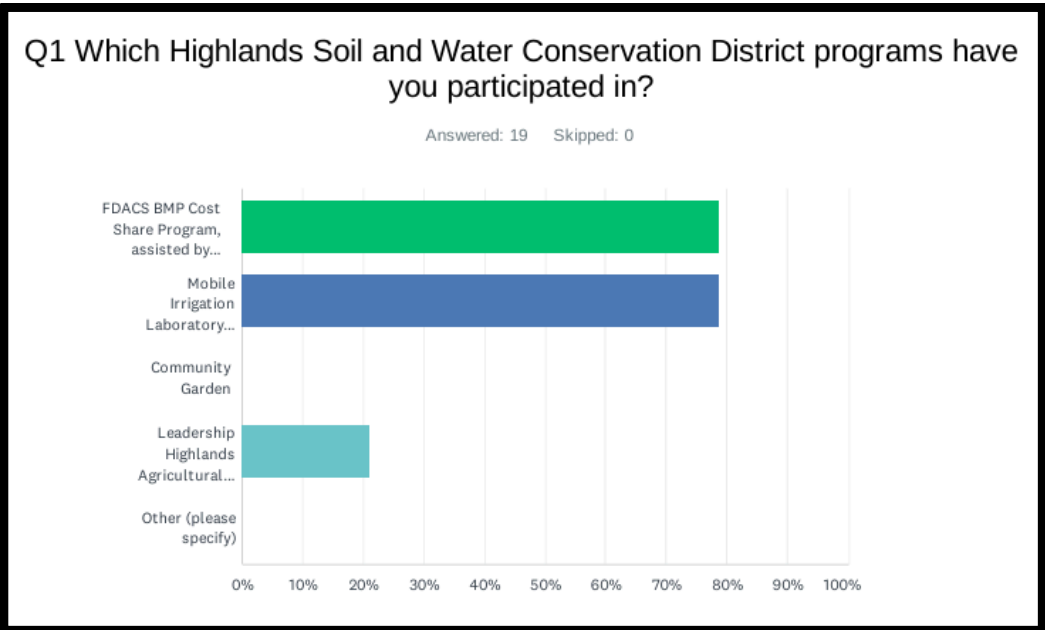


# LEGISLATION PLANNING



- Developed a proposal of the future of conservation districts in Florida and presented to State Legislators. The proposal was used to draft House Bill 1075, Ch. 582, F.S.
- Engaged lobbying services to support the district through the Legislative Session after the filing of House Bill 1075, Ch. 582, F.S.
- Adjusted to new requirements for Special Districts per Chapter 189.0694, F.S following the 2024 Legislative Session (ethics training, goals and objectives, website requirements etc.)
- Teamed with fellow members of the Florida Conservation District Employees Association to organize a statewide effort to develop a unified position and proposals for reorganization of Districts under legislation in upcoming 2025 Session.

# CLIENT FEEDBACK SURVEY



# CLIENT FEEDBACK SURVEY

