



# Ohio's Conservancy Districts

Conservancy districts are political subdivisions of the State of Ohio, provided for in the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) under Chapter 6101. They are formed at the initiative of local landowners or political subdivisions to solve water management problems, most frequently flooding. Each conservancy district operates under the jurisdiction of a conservancy court, consisting of one common pleas judge from each county that is within the district. Pursuant to implementing its court-approved work plan, a conservancy district has the right of eminent domain, and may charge user fees, levy special assessments, and issue bonds. In addition to controlling floods, other authorized purposes include: conserving and developing water supply, improving drainage, collecting and disposing of waste, providing for irrigation, and arresting erosion on the Lake Erie shoreline. Many conservancy districts also provide recreational opportunities in connection with their water management facilities.

Conservancy district authority was frequently used during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s for administering local obligations under the USDA's Small Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention program (P.L.85-566). When sponsoring projects under this authority, conservancy districts have worked with county soil and water conservation districts to promote watershed protection through accelerated land treatment measures. Several conservancy districts have served as local sponsors for US Army Corps of Engineers projects entailing reservoir construction, channel work, and Lake Erie shoreline protection.

The conservancy act was enacted less than a year after the devastating 1913 flood as a mechanism for flood prevention and control. It was the first such statute enacted in the United States, and has served as a model for other states. It has been amended several times over the years to meet changing needs. The Upper Scioto Drainage and Conservancy District was established on February 27, 1915 and is still operating today. The Miami Conservancy District was created four months later, and has been one of the most effective and successful conservancy districts created. Both of their flood control programs have been financed entirely with local funding. The Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District is the largest in Ohio and has, in cooperation with the US Army Corps of Engineers, provided flood control and recreation since the 1930s with ten lakes and four dry dams. The next largest is the Maumee Watershed Conservancy District, which has, in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, provided flood control and improved drainage for the Auglaize River Basin. There are many other conservancy districts that have also been successful in formulating and implementing water management projects in Ohio. Of the 57 conservancy districts or subdistricts created, 20 are currently active, 22 are inactive, 5 have merged with another, and 10 have been dissolved.

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