

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 1017

(Frederick County Delegation)

Environment and Transportation

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Boundary of the Frederick County Soil Conservation District - Alteration

This bill consolidates the two soil conservation districts in Frederick County (the Catoctin Soil Conservation District and the Frederick Soil Conservation District) into one Frederick County Soil Conservation District with boundaries corresponding to the boundaries of Frederick County.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect State expenditures for the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) to provide financial, technical, and staffing assistance with respect to soil conservation district operations in Frederick County. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Consolidating the two soil conservation districts in Frederick County is not anticipated to materially affect county operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal or none.

Analysis

Current Law: There are 24 soil conservation districts in 23 counties (Frederick County contains two districts) established in statute and continued with boundaries corresponding to county boundaries, except for Frederick County, and include all land and water and incorporated areas. Chapter 621 of 2021 authorized a Baltimore City soil conservation district to be established and continued with boundaries corresponding to the boundaries of Baltimore City, although the district has yet to be established.

Frederick County is the only county in the State with two soil conservation districts: (1) the Catoctin Soil Conservation District, within the area of Frederick County bounded by the Washington-Frederick County line, the Potomac River, and the eastern and northern boundaries of the Catoctin Creek watershed; and (2) the Frederick Soil Conservation District, comprising the balance of Frederick County land and water area.

The governing body of each soil conservation district consists of five supervisors who must be interested and knowledgeable in the conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources. One of the supervisors is appointed by the county governing body and four are appointed by the State Soil Conservation Committee. Of the four supervisors appointed by the committee, one is appointed from a list of three district residents submitted by the county farm bureau, one is appointed from a list of three district residents submitted by the county extension service, and the remaining two are appointed from among residents of the district.

A soil conservation district constitutes a political subdivision of the State and a public body corporate and politic, exercising public powers. The supervisors have various authority, including the authority to (1) conduct surveys, investigations, and research relating to the character of soil erosion and the preventive and control measures needed; (2) disseminate information concerning preventive and control measures; (3) conduct demonstration projects; (4) carry out preventive and control measures; (5) develop comprehensive plans for conserving soil resources and controlling and preventing soil erosion within the district; and (6) approve and disapprove sediment control plans for clearing, grading, transporting, or otherwise distributing soil pursuant to provisions of the Environment Article; soil conservation districts are designated as approval authorities under those provisions.

The Governor must include in the annual budget bill an amount sufficient to employ not less than 110 field personnel in the soil conservation districts. Beginning in fiscal 2011, the mandated appropriation for the 24 soil conservation districts is \$10.0 million.

Additional Comments: MDA provides department staff and other assistance to soil conservation districts in partnership with county governments and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The fiscal 2025 budget as introduced includes 134 positions and \$15.6 million in general and reimbursable funds for MDA in support of the soil conservation districts, primarily for personnel costs. The two Frederick County districts share a district office.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 1153 (Frederick County Senators) - Rules.

Information Source(s): Frederick County; Maryland Department of Agriculture; Department of Budget and Management; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Department of Legislative Services

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