

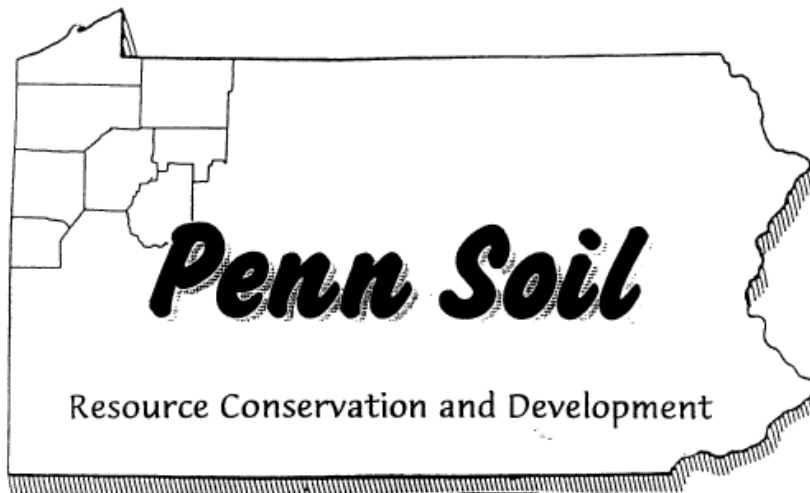
**Penn Soil RC&D  
Resource Conservation and Development**

**2018-2023**

**Area Plan**



**Prepared by the Penn Soil RC&D Council  
Acting for the following sponsors:  
County Commissioners and Conservation Districts from  
Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, and Warren Counties**



November, 2018

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## **Introduction**

This document is a five-year plan outline for the Penn Soil Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council Inc. It was developed by soliciting input through a survey of council members in the eight-county area served by Penn Soil RC&D. This Area Plan serves the following northwestern Pennsylvania counties: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, & Warren.

The purpose of this plan is to provide a strategic direction for the organization. The organization is stronger than ever before, yet more efforts are needed to ensure a strong sustainable organization that serves the communities in our area.

Congress passed the Food and Agricultural Act of 1962, which authorized Resource Conservation and Development areas. The purpose of the act was to expand opportunities for conservation districts, local units of governments, and individuals to improve their communities in multi-county areas. This included assistance in enhancing the economic, environmental and social well-being of the RC&D Areas.

## **Organization Overview:**

**Vision** – The following vision statement was reviewed in 2018.

**The Penn Soil Resource Conservation and Development Council will serve as a facilitator for sustaining the resources of our region.**

**Mission** – This is the mission statement as revised in 2018.

**The mission of the Penn Soil RC&D is to improve the economy, environmental and social well-being of the people of Northwest Pennsylvania.**

## **Background and Structure of the Council.**

The original sponsors of Penn Soil RC&D were the County Commissioners and Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Mercer, Crawford, and Venango Counties. In 1963, they asked for help from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to improve the economy through orderly development and conservation of resources through the Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D). After USDA approved this request in February 15, 1964, the Penn Soil Resource Conservation and Development Area was established. The RC&D Council was established to represent the sponsors and carry out an Area Plan of action. The original authorization included 3 counties-Mercer, Crawford and Venango in Northwestern Pennsylvania. In 1970, the boundaries were extended to include Erie County. Then, in 1975, four more

counties, Warren, Forest, Clarion, and Lawrence were added so that the area became the eight-county Northwest Region.

The sponsors of the Penn Soil RC&D recognized the opportunities available to not-for-profit organizations and filed for an official determination letter from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). In April of 1988, The Penn Soil Conservancy Charitable Trust was incorporated in the State of PA as a Charitable Trust. The Penn Soil Conservancy Charitable Trust served as the primary financial agent for the Penn Soil RC&D Council for the period 1988 to 2003.

In September of 2003, Penn Soil RC&D Council filed separate Articles of Incorporation with the state of Pennsylvania and sought approval of its own status as a standalone 501(c) (3) organization. In August of 2004, the IRS issued a letter of determination recognizing Penn Soil RC&D Council as a 501(c) (3) organization. Since that time, The Penn Soil RC&D Council has been the eligible 501(c) (3) applicant for new grants. In 2011 federal funding was lost and the organization hired a part-time Executive Director to assist in running the Penn Soil RC&D day-to-day operations and to oversee grant implementation.

The governing body of Penn Soil RC&D is the voting membership consisting of four voting members from each of the eight-member counties. Each year the members elect a four-member Executive Board to carry on the day-to-day operations of the Council. Penn Soil RC&D provides an open forum for individuals, agencies, organizations, and students to participate in RC&D planning process and all activities.

**Organization Priority Goals:**

1. Support programs in Penn Soil RC&D's focus areas of Water Quality, Land Conservation and Community Development
2. Implement plan for sustainable funding
3. Strengthen relationships with external partners
4. Develop clear and targeted communication
5. Develop program and policy efficiency

**Overview of the Area.**

The Penn Soil RC&D area is located in northwest Pennsylvania and includes eight Counties. The area is bordered on the west by the state of Ohio and Lake Erie and New York State on the North. The eight county area is home to 721,580 people according to the 2010 census data.

**Natural Resources**

The Penn Soil RC&D area includes the eight counties of Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango and Warren -- an area of 3,536,640 acres or approximately 5,526 square miles. The area has an abundant network of creeks, rivers, natural lakes, and manmade reservoirs. These bodies of surface water not only provide a readily available source of water for

domestic and industrial use, but also add a special dimension to the scenery and recreational potential.

The region has an abundance of natural resources which have contributed greatly to the regional growth and prosperity. Some, such as coal and oil, are nonrenewable. A large portion of the area's land and water resources has a primary or a secondary use for recreational activities. A wide variety of wildlife abounds – bear, deer, turkey, geese, ducks, grouse, pheasants, woodcock, squirrel, rabbits, and woodchucks. Migratory waterfowl including wood ducks are the most abundant species present. The area is heavily forested providing a large base for forest industries as well as recreational activities, and wildlife habitat. Approximately one half of the Allegheny National Forest is within the Penn Soil RC&D Area, whereas, the entire Oil Region National Heritage Area is contained within the Penn Soil RC&D service area.

### **Resource Needs and Opportunities:**

#### **Public Participation Activities**

Penn Soil RC&D conducted a multifaceted solicitation of public and member input to identify resource needs and opportunities for consideration during the creation of the original area plan and subsequent updates. This included letters, RC&D meetings held in three counties and information placed on the website. At the time, NRCS approval was required and received. In 2011, NRCS funding was no longer available for RC&D administration and Penn Soil RC&D became a stand-alone organization.

The current five-year plan is being developed with former goals in mind as well as new goals and strategies. In addition, an important goal established is to attempt to find new ways to sustain the operation of the RC&D Council to continue pursuit of the mission and vision.

### **Goal 1: Support programs in Penn Soil RC&D's focus areas of Water Quality, Land Conservation and Community Development**

- 1.) Land Conservation and Land Management
  - ❖ Continue to provide technical assistance to reduce streambank, cropland, pasture land, forestland, and urban erosion
  - ❖ Focus conservation efforts to address issues of critical concern, ie streambank improvements, wetlands, and greenways
  - ❖ Assist Organizations and Agencies by providing technical assistance when possible
- 2.) Support and Promote the Sustainability of Natural Resources
  - ❖ Partner with local, state, federal, and other community organizations to promote sustainable forestry and forestland conservation
  - ❖ Encourage stewardship & adoption of conservation practices in timber management resource extraction, oil & Gas development, & transportation

- 3.) Support & Promote Sustainable Agriculture
  - ❖ Continue to promote pasture management & support Project Grass
  - ❖ Provide education to consumers, landowners, & elected officials about farmland preservation
  - ❖ Promote value added agriculture & local products. Provide technical assistance in the distribution of locally produced products to farm markets, wholesale markets, and distribution centers
  - ❖ Find additional resources to help producers adopt best management practices and expand utilization of pasture resources on farms
  - ❖ Foster better communication of agencies dealing with producers & the community and increased educational opportunities & interaction between farmers & consumers
- 4.) Promote & Support Water Quality/Quantity
  - ❖ Provide assistance in stormwater management education and provide more educational opportunities to the public
  - ❖ Educate landowners, elected officials, timber industry, and the oil and gas industry about the effects & impacts of timber harvesting and oil and gas activities on stormwater management, water quality, & water quantity
  - ❖ Promote the adoption of Best Management Practices
  - ❖ Reduce and remediate impacts of acid mine drainage
  - ❖ Facilitate the education of water quality monitoring and testing
  - ❖ Provide technical assistance and education to landowners in the value of wetlands
  - ❖ Promote and provide assistance in installing dry hydrants to improve rural fire protection services to the community
- 5.) Support Community Development
  - ❖ Promote the family farm as an important segment of the local community
  - ❖ Work with townships, boroughs, counties, and other non-profit organizations to facilitate and improve recreational opportunities and provide resources for the development & improvement of picnic areas, beaches, parks, trails, etc.
  - ❖ Continue to assist local sponsors find resources to help carry out projects
  - ❖ Provide grant administration services
  - ❖ Assist local sponsors develop grant proposals
  - ❖ Develop partnerships & training & education resources to assist in community beautification by promoting heritage protection and community gardens
  - ❖ Promote open space and recreation
  - ❖ Promote invasive species control & education
- 6.) Support Resource/Development Opportunities
  - ❖ Preserve key historic sites, locations, project sites
  - ❖ Restore abandoned mine land and reduce & remediate impacts of acid mine drainage
  - ❖ Provide education to consumers & elected officials about Bio-fuels
  - ❖ Create a demand for bio-fuels and their waste products as well as creating economic opportunities for producers
  - ❖ Promote carbon sequestration through reforestation & natural regeneration
  - ❖ Increase and advocate for sustainable harvest practices on private lands.

- ❖ Provide educational opportunities for private landowners
- ❖ Support maintaining a sustainable saw timber industry and reduce the transformation of forest land to other uses
- ❖ Utilize trees in common areas and revitalize community and recreational needs
- ❖ Promote Recycling, reuse & disposal of tires
- ❖ Support sewage issues by educating municipalities & landowners
- ❖ Assist in finding options for treatment of sewage other than centralized treatment systems
- ❖ Address the lack of engineering assistance with urban & rural water quality improvement projects
- ❖ Provide technical assistance in the distribution of locally produced products to farm markets, wholesale markets, distribution centers and support the development of marketing cooperatives
- ❖ Assist in the development of value added incubator facilities
- ❖ Assist local producers by developing additional resources for agricultural infrastructure; ie farmstead creameries, grain dryers, processing centers
- ❖ Provide educational opportunities & resources for whole farm management
- ❖ Foster better communication among agencies dealing with producers & the community
- ❖ Increase educational opportunities & interaction between farmers & consumers
- ❖ Promote partnerships for recycling of Agricultural plastics
- ❖ Promote Partnerships for recycling newspapers into animal bedding
- ❖ Promote recycling education
- ❖ Encourage and provide technical assistance for best practices in historic preservation of cultural resources

## **Goal 2: Implement plan for sustainable funding**

- 1.) Develop a plan for diversified funding
  - ❖ Form an ad hoc committee to explore and evaluate fund-raising concepts
  - ❖ Diversify the types of funding entities supporting Penn Soil RC&D
- 2.) Increase staff and other resources
  - ❖ Consider strategies to increase staffing and/or make use of contractors/consultants as needed to generate unrestricted funds

## **Goal 3: Strengthen relationships with external partners**

- 1.) Increase Collaboration and decrease competition
  - ❖ Develop a list of potential external partners that would highlight the benefits of partnering with Penn Soil RC&D
  - ❖ Reach out to organizations, including those that may be perceived as competitors, to identify areas of collaboration.
  - ❖ Identify and develop unique skills and services Penn Soil RC&D can bring to other organization's programs e.g. fiscal agent capacity

- 2.) Build Awareness of Penn Soil RC&D to support regional projects with partners
  - ❖ Out-reach to partners to communicate Penn Soil's capacity to champion new projects
  - ❖ Directly communicate with past project partners including offering options to participate in the Council.
  - ❖ Inform the host County Commissioners of Council meetings in their county and present Penn Soil's value to the county.
  - ❖ Select one target audience group per year and hold a panel discussion as part of a board meeting to explore a potential role for Penn Soil RC&D
  - ❖ Identify one success story per year that is collaborative and could be taken to other counties as an RC&D initiative
  - ❖ Educate members of the community in all age groups of the value of RC&D projects through appropriate outreach channels and get people involved

#### **Goal 4: Develop Clear and Targeted Communications**

- 1.) Promote RC&D Council & its value to the region
  - ❖ Develop Social Media through Facebook and Website, also develop printed material to describe Penn Soil's capacity
  - ❖ RC&D Board members should actively update County Commissioners, district boards, and other organizational boards about RC&D activities
  - ❖ Develop board elevator speech & train all board members
  - ❖ Develop a list of targeted groups for communication
  - ❖ Develop RC&D presentation for board members to promote in their county

#### **Goal 5: Develop program and policy efficiency**

- 1.) Ensure organizational policies reflect current organizational needs
  - ❖ Systematically review current Penn Soil RC&D policies making use of organizational support materials from PANO, national RC&D
  - ❖ Develop a timetable for review and update of Penn Soil RC&D policies and implement the time table
- 2.) Implement funded programs in a manner that ensures a positive impact
  - ❖ Develop realistic and ambitious project plans making use of project partners and contractors with appropriate skills and proven track record
  - ❖ Explore technological approaches to organizational and program management that will maximize staff resources
  - ❖ Survey and evaluate project management programs, file sharing and meeting technologies to support greater efficiency in project implementation



### **Current and Potential Partnerships:**

Penn Soil RC&D could not accomplish its goals and objectives without the many partnerships with other agencies and organizations:

- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Farm Service Agency
- US Forest Service
- Rural Development
- Agriculture Research Service
- Cooperative Research and Extension Service
- Agriculture Marketing Service
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US Geologic Survey
- USDI Office of Surface Mining
- US Small Business Administration
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- PA Department of Environmental Protection
- PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- PA Department of Agriculture
- PA Fish and Boat Commission
- PA Game Commission
- PA Department of Transportation
- PA Project Grass
- Pennsylvania Association of Sustainable Agriculture
- The Northwest PA. Regional Planning & Development Commission
- Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry, & Tourism
- Erie to Pittsburgh Trail Alliance
- Council on Greenways and Trails

and a variety of other non-profit groups are also Penn Soil RC&D partners.

## Signature Page

“The Penn Soil RC&D Council agrees that the all Programs and Policies will be in compliance with the non-discrimination provisions as contained in Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Public Law (100-259) and other nondiscrimination statutes; namely, Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age of Discrimination Act of 1975 and in accordance with the regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7CFR-15, Subparts A and B) that provide that no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or handicap/disability be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial (or technical) assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture or any agency there of”.

The Penn Soil RC&D Council agrees that the signing of this document constitutes agreement to comply with the Federal laws concerning restrictions on lobbying, a drug-free work place, and responsibilities for non-procurement, suspension, and debarment.

The Penn Soil RC&D Council hereby adopts this RC&D Area Plan and agrees to use effectively the assistance provided by contributing partners to realize the goals and objectives outlined herein.

### Penn Soil RC&D Council, Pennsylvania

By: Jack M. Preston  
Chair

Date: 11/19/18

Attest: Marilyn A. W. Black  
Council/Secretary

This action authorized at an official meeting of the Penn Soil RC&D Council on 11/19/18