

# Chipola River Soil and Water Conservation District Performance Review

Prepared for:  
The Florida Legislature's  
Office of Program Policy Analysis  
and Government Accountability  
(OPPAGA)

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## Key Takeaways

- Chipola River Soil and Water Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors did not have all five Supervisor seats filled for the majority of the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024). The Board meets quarterly to oversee District operations.
- Chipola River Soil and Water Conservation District hosts, on average, one conservation event per year, and sponsors various agriculture education programs in the District’s service area.
- Chipola River Soil and Water Conservation District does not have a source of revenue and uses cash reserves to fund events and sponsorships. The District is a part of a multi-county agreement which provides the District office space and a staff member.
- Chipola River Soil and Water Conservation District’s operations are not currently guided by a strategic plan, written goals and objectives, or performance measures and standards.

# I. Background

Pursuant to s. [189.0695\(3\)\(b\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, Mauldin & Jenkins (“M&J”) was engaged by the Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to conduct performance reviews of the State’s 49 independent soil and water conservation districts. This report details the results of M&J’s performance review of Chipola River Soil and Water Conservation District (“Chipola River SWCD” or “District”).

## I.A: District Description

### Purpose

Chapter [582](#) of the *Florida Statutes* concerns soil and water conservation within the State of Florida. The chapter establishes the processes for creation, dissolution, and change of boundaries of districts; the qualifications, election, tenure, and mandatory meetings of District Supervisors; the oversight powers and duties of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (“FDACS”); and the powers and purpose of the districts. The District’s statutory purpose, per s. [582.02](#), *Florida Statutes*, 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. 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](#), *Florida Statutes*].”

The District website further states that “it is our hope that Calhoun & Liberty County [sic] becomes a strong ‘Conservation Community’ a group of informed citizens and agencies who work together to protect our natural resource base by providing education and information about critical local natural resource issues. It is a pleasure and an honor to serve you and to help raise conservation awareness within Calhoun and Liberty County, Florida [sic].”

### Service Area

When the District was established in 1940, the service area included the southern and eastern parts of Jackson County and the northern part of Calhoun County.<sup>1</sup> On April 22, 1950, the District’s territory expanded to include the southern part of Calhoun County, and on December 14, 1951, the District’s territory expanded again to include Liberty County.<sup>2</sup> In 1987, the District ceded its Jackson County territory to the newly chartered Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District. Chipola River SWCD’s territory and borders have remained the same as Calhoun and Liberty Counties combined since 1987.

The District is bounded on the north by Jackson County, northeast by Gadsden County, east by Leon and Wakulla Counties, south by Gulf and Franklin Counties, and west by Bay County. The total area within the District is 1,417 square miles, with 1,403 square miles of land and 14 square miles of water.

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<sup>1</sup> McMullen, K. S., and A. P. Spencer. 1945. *Biennial Report of the State Soil Conservation Board: January 1, 1943 - December 31, 1944*. Biennial Report, Tallahassee: Florida State Soil Conservation Board.

<sup>2</sup> McLendon, H. S. 1952. *Biennial Report of the State Soil Conservation Board: January 1, 1951 - December 31, 1952*. Biennial Report, Tallahassee: Florida State Soil Conservation Board.

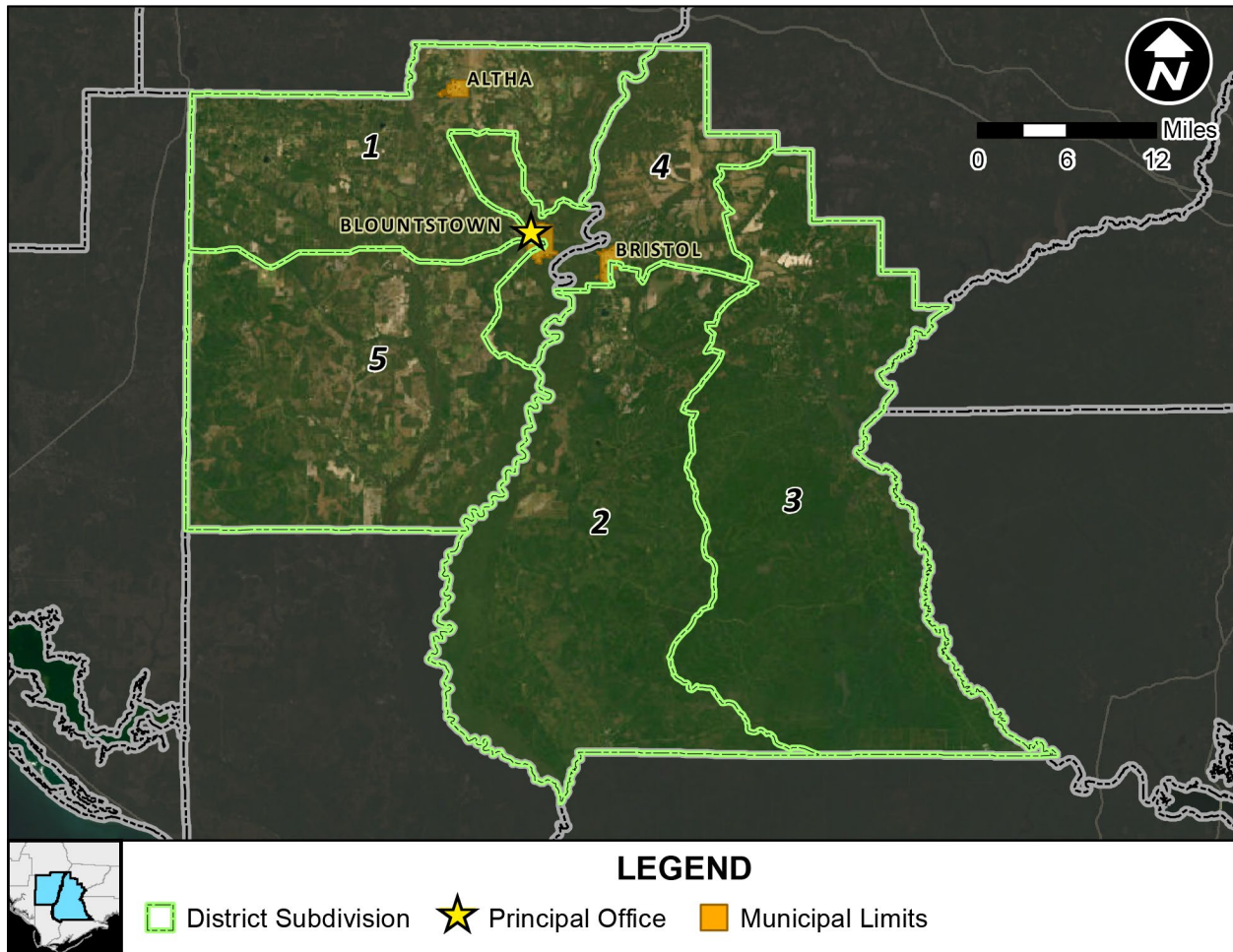


The District’s service area includes unincorporated Calhoun County, the County’s one city, and one town; unincorporated Liberty County and the County’s one city;<sup>3</sup> and part or all of the following federal and State conservation lands:

- Apalachicola National Forest
- Apalachicola River Water Management Area
- Apalachicola Savannah Research Natural Area
- Beaverdam Creek Water Management Area
- Chipola Experimental Forest
- Tate’s Hell State Forest
- Telogia Creek Wildlife Management Area
- Torreya State Park
- Upper Chipola River Water Management Area

The District’s principal office is located at 17413 Northwest Leonard Street, Blountstown, Florida 32424 – the United States Department of Agriculture service center. Figure 1 is a map of the District’s service area, based on the map incorporated by reference in Rule [5M-20.002\(3\)\(b\)2.](#), *Florida Administrative Code*, showing the District’s boundaries, electoral subdivisions, major municipalities, and principal office.

**Figure 1: Map of Chipola River Soil and Water Conservation District**



(Source: Calhoun County GIS, Liberty County GIS Florida Commerce Special District Profile)

<sup>3</sup> Calhoun County city: Blountstown; town: Altha. Liberty County city: Bristol.

## Population

Based on the Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research population estimates, the population within the District’s service area was 21,793 as of April 1, 2023. The Calhoun County population was estimated to be 13,816 and the Liberty County population was estimated to be 7,977 as of April 1, 2023.

## District Characteristics

Chipola River SWCD is located in northwestern Florida. The economy of the service area is specialized and is supported by large timber and farming industries. A majority of the District is rural farm and timber land. The District’s agriculture production includes cotton, soybeans, small grains, peanuts, vegetables, and timber. The District’s service area in Calhoun County sits in three different geomorphic zones: the Gulf Coastal Lowlands in the southern part of Calhoun County, which is characterized by flat, swampy, seaward sloping sandy plains, and the New Hope Ridge and Grand Ridge, which are both characterized by the ridges’ resistant clayey sands overlaying limestone.<sup>4</sup> The District’s service area in Liberty County sits in the Gulf Coastal Lowlands; Beacon Slope, which includes swampy areas and sloping ramp-like features; the Tallahassee Hills, which is known by its hilly topography that is caused by erosion by running water; and the River Valley Lowlands, which is characterized by a series of deep ravines containing small creeks which drain into the Apalachicola River.<sup>5</sup>

The District is split between Calhoun County and Liberty County, which are two counties with varying needs in agriculture conservation programs and services. Both counties experience an average annual rainfall of up to 60 inches and experience crop-threatening erosion. The District’s service area in Calhoun County is primarily farmland and cattle land, which requires programs and services that relate to agricultural soil erosion management and control.<sup>6</sup> The District’s service area in Liberty County is primarily timberland and requires an emphasis on silviculture and forestry conservation programs.<sup>7</sup>

## I.B: Creation and Governance

Chipola River SWCD was chartered on May 4, 1940, as the Chipola River Soil Conservation District, following a successful referendum of local landowners and subsequent petition to the Florida State Soil Conservation Board.<sup>8</sup> The District was created under the authority of the State Soil Conservation Districts Act (herein referred to as “ch. [582](#), *Florida Statutes*”).<sup>9</sup> The Florida Legislature amended ch. [582](#), *Florida Statutes*, in 1965 to expand the scope of all soil conservation districts to include water conservation and rename the District the Chipola River Soil and Water Conservation District.

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<sup>4</sup> Rupert, Frank. 1990. “The Geomorphology and Geology of Calhoun County, Florida.” Florida Geological Survey, Division of Resource Management, Florida Department of Natural Resources, Tallahassee.

<sup>5</sup>Rupert, Frank. 1991. “The Geomorphology and Geology of Liberty County, Florida.” Florida Geological Survey, Division of Resource Management, Florida Department of Natural Resources, Tallahassee.

<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. 2007. “Soil Survey of Liberty County, Florida.” Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington.

<sup>7</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. 2004. “Soil Survey of Calhoun County, Florida.” Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington.

<sup>8</sup> McMullen, K. S., and A. P. Spencer. 1945. *Biennial Report of the State Soil Conservation Board: January 1, 1943 - December 31, 1944*. Biennial Report, Tallahassee: Florida State Soil Conservation Board.

<sup>9</sup> ch. 582 (1939), *Florida Statutes*, available online as ch. [19473](#), *Laws of Florida*

The District is governed by a Board of Supervisors. Supervisors are unpaid, nonpartisan public officials elected by the voters within the service district. M&J analyzed the Supervisors’ elections, appointments, and qualifications within the in-scope period pursuant to applicable *Florida Statutes*.<sup>10</sup>

As of this report, the District has five Supervisors. Section [582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, requires Supervisors to sign an affirmation that they met the residency and qualification requirements. Because the District’s service area covers two counties, candidates for Supervisors are required to qualify with the Florida Department of State’s Division of Elections. M&J requested the affirmations as part of a public records request to the Department of State, but did not receive any documentation in response to this request. According to the Florida Department of State website, Supervisors in seats 1 through 4 qualified and won in the November 2022 election. The District Supervisor in seat 5 was appointed in October 2023. District staff provided a written statement detailing the current Supervisors’ qualifications, which are consistent with the residency and agricultural experience requirements of [s. 582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*.

During the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024), there has been one vacancy on the Board, as illustrated in Figure 2. The District has only had five Supervisors one time during the review period: from October 2023 to the date of this report. Additional assessment of the District’s electoral patterns is detailed in section II.D (Organization and Governance) of this report.

**Figure 2: Supervisor Terms**

Seat	FY21				FY22				FY23				FY24		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
1	Gary Purvis														
2	Steve Johnson														
3	Terry Eubanks														
4	Johnny Eubanks														
5															Jimmy Cox

During the review period, the District met nine times.<sup>11</sup> The District did not meet the mandatory meeting requirement of [s. 582.195](#), *Florida Statutes*, to meet at least once per calendar year with all five Supervisors for both 2022 and 2023, as the District did not have a Supervisor in seat 5 until October 2023. The District did meet with all four seated Supervisors in both 2022 (June, September) and 2023 (February, May) prior to the appointment to seat 5. M&J has determined that the District did not properly notice Board meetings. Additional assessment of the District’s pattern of providing meeting notices and adherence to relevant statutes is detailed in section II.D (Organization and Governance) of this report.

<sup>10</sup> Including ss. [582.15](#), [582.18](#), and [582.19](#), *Florida Statutes*, Rule [5M-20.002](#), *Florida Administrative Code*; and ch. [2022-191](#), *Laws of Florida*

<sup>11</sup> Meetings occurred in November 2020; March, June, September, and December 2022; February, May, and October 2023; and February 2024.

## I.C: Programs and Activities

The following is a list of programs and activities conducted by the District within the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024), along with a brief description of each program or activity. The District's programs and activities will be described in detail in section II.A (Service Delivery) of this report.

- Soil and Water Conservation Education
  - Land Judging Contest
    - The District sponsors the Blountstown FFA Land Judging team to compete in the regional contest held in Jackson County. The FFA Land Judging Contest provides middle and high school students the opportunity to compete by observing and interpreting the soil in order to make wise land use decisions.
  - Soil Health Field Day
    - The District worked with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agriculture Science Extension office in Calhoun County ("Calhoun County Extension") to host a Soil Health Field Day event in March 2022. The event provided landowners and agriculture producers the opportunity to learn about soil conservation best practices with plots of different plantings on a local farmer's property.
  - Conservation Breakfast
    - The District held a conservation breakfast alongside conservation partners, including the Florida Forest Service, Calhoun County Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service ("NRCS"), Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and the Northwest Florida Water Management District. The breakfast promoted conservation programs to farmers, cattlemen/women, timber owners, and nursery owners in the District's service area.
- Local Working Group meetings
  - The District hosts Local Working Group meetings each year in conjunction with NRCS. The Local Working Group is an annual opportunity for the District and NRCS to receive feedback on community priorities and needs from local agricultural stakeholders.

## I.D: Intergovernmental Interactions

The following is a summary of federal agencies, State agencies, and/or public entities with which the District interacts, including the means, methods, frequency, and purpose of coordination and communication.

### Natural Resources Conservation Service

In FY22, the Natural Resources Conservation Service ("NRCS") and the District signed a memorandum of agreement that established objectives for the District and NRCS to follow while promoting NRCS' financial and technical assistance programs to local landowners.

The District’s principal office is located at the United States Department of Agriculture (“USDA”) Blountstown Service Center. The District’s Administrative Assistant position, who the District shares with the Franklin and Tupelo Soil and Water Conservation Districts, works out of the USDA Blountstown service center and provides administrative support to NRCS.

### I.E: Resources for Fiscal Year 2022 – 2023

The following figures quantify and describe the District’s resources for Fiscal Year 2022 – 2023 (October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023, herein referred to as “FY23”). Figure 3 shows the total amount of revenues, expenditures, and long-term debt maintained by the District in FY23. Figure 4 shows the number of paid full-time and part-time staff, contracted staff, and volunteers by employer. Figure 5 shows the number and type of vehicles, number and type of major equipment, and number and type of facilities owned, leased, and used by the District.

**Figure 3: FY23 Finances**

	Revenues	Expenditures	Long-term Debt
<b>Total for Year</b>	\$0	\$100	\$0

(Source: District Bank Statements)

**Figure 4: FY23 Program Staffing**

	Full-time Staff	Part-time Staff	Contracted Staff	Volunteers
<b>District-employed Staff</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Board of County Commissioners-employed staff</b>	0	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

(Source: Statement provided by the District)

**Figure 5: FY23 Equipment and Facilities**

	Number	Ownership Status	Type(s)
<b>Vehicles</b>	0	N/A	N/A
<b>Major Equipment</b>	0	N/A	N/A
<b>Facilities</b>	1	1 owned by the United States Department of Agriculture	1 primary office and meeting space

(Source: District Website)



## II. Findings

The Findings sections summarize the analyses performed, and the associated conclusions derived from M&J's analysis. The analysis and findings are divided into the following four subject categories:

- Service Delivery
- Resource Management
- Performance Management
- Organization and Governance

### II.A: Service Delivery

#### Overview of Services

The following section describes the District's programs and activities during the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024).

#### *Soil and Water Conservation Education*

During the review period, the District was involved with conservation education programs including the District's Conservation Breakfast, Soil Health Field Day, and the FFA Land Judging Contest.

In March 2022, the District partnered with the Calhoun County Extension to host a Soil Health Field Day, which gave agriculture producers and cattlemen/women the opportunity to learn about soil conservation practices while touring plots of different plantings on a local farmer's property. The landowner dug up plots of land to demonstrate different soil types and how different plantings can aerate and add nutrients back into the soil.

The District held the Conservation Breakfast in May 2023 in partnership with NRCS, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension office in Calhoun County ("Calhoun County Extension"), the Florida Forest Service, and the Northwest Florida Water Management District ("NFWFMD"). The District invited agriculture producers from the District's service area to have breakfast and discuss the conservation program opportunities offered by the aforementioned conservation entities. At the May 2023 Board of Supervisors ("Board") meeting, the District reported that the event had approximately 60 individuals in attendance, as noted in the Board meeting minutes.

The FFA Land Judging Contest is a national contest with local and regional rounds. The contest consists of middle and high school students competing to observe and interpret soil in order to make wise land use decisions.<sup>12</sup> In March 2022 and February 2023 Board meetings, the Supervisors voted to help pay Blountstown FFA teams' expenses related to traveling to the local contest held in Jackson County. The District's Administrative Assistant also assists with contest set-up and judging.

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<sup>12</sup> Florida FFA. 2020. Florida Land Judging. Accessed May 23, 2024. <https://landjudging.org/>.

### *Natural Resources Conservation Service Activities*

The District has a memorandum of agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”) that establishes objectives with the goal of providing mutual benefits to NRCS and the District. The local NRCS District Conservationist attends Board meetings, gives periodic updates on the number of new NRCS program contract applications. NRCS allows the District Administrative Assistant to use office space at the Blountstown service center and, in return, the District’s Administrative Assistant provides administrative support to NRCS.

Additionally, the District, in conjunction with NRCS, holds an annual Local Working Group meeting. The District and NRCS invites landowners and agriculture producers from the District’s service area to discuss and give their agriculture and conservation priorities for the upcoming year. District Supervisors and NRCS use the feedback on priorities and needs gained during the meetings to identify gaps in NRCS funding that can be addressed through targeted allocations of the funds NRCS provides to local service center to use at its discretion. For example, District Supervisors recognized that row crop and livestock farmers in the service area were not eligible for the NRCS programs offered to local landowners, so the Supervisors worked with local NRCS staff to allocate a percentage of the Blountstown service center’s undesignated funding to those row crop and livestock farmers. The Local Working Group meeting also gives the District and NRCS to opportunity to promote the NRCS programs that are locally available to the agriculture producers who attend.

### *Analysis of Service Delivery*

As previously mentioned, the District held events, including the Conservation Breakfast and the Soil Health Field Day, for the purpose of educating agriculture producers within the District’s service area on soil and water conservation practices. The events also served as an opportunity to connect agriculture producers with agriculture entities and promote programs and services that the agriculture producers could take advantage of. Activities such as hosting agriculture education events and providing support to the Blountstown FFA Land Judging teams align with the District’s purpose to provide soil and water conservation education and support as stated in s. [582.20\(7\)](#) *Florida Statutes*.

Chipola River SWCD did not receive any revenue during the review period. The extent of the District’s activities includes holding events with support from other entities and paying the Blountstown FFA teams’ travel expenses to participate in the FFA Land Judging Contest. The District used funds accumulated before the review period for these activities, and does not have a source of revenue, which limits opportunities for the District to implement cost-saving measures.

The District’s single staff position is based in the NRCS office in Calhoun County, and is shared between three soil and water conservation districts: Franklin, Chipola River, and Tupelo. The position additionally provides administrative support to NRCS in return for District access to space and equipment. As a result, the position’s responsibilities are spread across four entities, limiting the amount of time spent supporting each entity. This limited support, in turn, results in few opportunities to increase programming without increasing the number of staff. Sharing one staff person is more economical for the three districts, each of which has few assets, and each District hiring its own staff person would not be feasible. As such, M&J does not have any recommendations regarding revisions to the District’s organization and administration.

## Comparison to Similar Services/Potential Consolidations

The extent of the District's activities included holding one large-scale event annually (Conservation Breakfast and Soil Health Field Day), annually donating to the Blountstown FFA Land Judging teams, and working with NRCS to promote NRCS programs.

The District's service area receives Best Management Practices ("BMP") Cost-Share Program and Implementation Assistance Program through contracts that the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services ("FDACS") has with other soil and water conservation districts. The BMP Cost-Share and Implementation Assistance programs provide FDACS funding to districts to administer reimbursement agreements with local agricultural producers and provide landowners with technical assistance related to implementing practices to improve water quality in agricultural and urban discharges. These programs are currently being provided within Chipola SWCD by surrounding districts. According to service offering maps provided to M&J by FDACS, Calhoun County is provided BMP service by the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District, Liberty County is provided BMP service by the Gadsden Soil and Water Conservation District. Chipola River SWCD is only responsible for helping promote NRCS cost-share programs, which limits overlap with the other districts that focus on State programs. Additionally, because Chipola River SWCD is not responsible for administering cost-share contracts on NRCS' behalf, the District does not need to consider the potential overlap between NRCS and FDACS cost-share programs to ensure agricultural producers are receiving a duplication of benefit. If the expectations for the District change in the future, Chipola River SWCD may need to be more aware of the other districts' activities in Calhoun and Liberty Counties regarding cost-share program promotion and implementation, however, currently, there is no overlap between the three soil and water conservation districts.

NFWFMD manages several conservation-related programs in the 16 counties comprising the Florida Panhandle, including the Jackson-Blue Cost-Share Program, which includes parts of northwest Calhoun County. NFWFMD programs include regulating surface water project permits, and providing technical assistance and cost-share opportunities for the implementation of agricultural Best Management Practices by landowners. Similar to the situation with the FDACS cost-share programs, while the District promotes NRCS programs, the District does not administer the NRCS contracts or provide implementation assistance for these federal programs. If the District engaged to administer NRCS programs, there could be potential for overlap. Currently, though, there is no overlap.

## II.B: Resource Management

### Program Staffing

The District's only staff position is an Administrative Assistant position that is shared equally between Chipola River SWCD, Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District, and Tupelo Soil and Water Conservation District. The Administrative Assistant position is responsible for performing administrative duties for and supporting the three districts, as well as the Natural Resources Conservation Service ("NRCS"), at the United States Department of Agriculture ("USDA") service center in Blountstown.

The Administrative Assistant is compensated by the boards of county commissioners from Franklin County, Calhoun County, Liberty County, and Gulf County. The position is recorded as an employee of the Calhoun County Board of County Commissioners; the other three counties pay a proportional share of the position’s salary to Calhoun County and Calhoun County pays the full salary of the position with funds from all four counties. However, the current arrangement is not documented in writing.

The Administrative Assistant position was filled during the entire review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024).

**Recommendation:** The District should consider proposing a written agreement to the counties involved in the current unwritten agreement to pay for the Administrative Assistant. The District should consider proposing the agreement include defined roles and responsibilities for the Administrative Assistant position and codify the position’s employment status in relation to the three districts that the position serves.

**Equipment and Facilities**

Chipola River SWCD does not own any major equipment, vehicles, or facilities. The Administrative Assistant works in the USDA service center in Blountstown, which is listed as the District’s registered address and is the location of Board of Supervisors meetings.

The District is permitted use of USDA office space, equipment, and supplies at no cost through an unwritten agreement among NRCS and the District, Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District, and Tupelo Soil and Water Conservation District.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider proposing a written agreement between the District and NRCS codifying mutual support by the Administrative Assistant position and use office space and equipment.

**Current and Historic Revenues and Expenditures**

Chipola River SWCD did not generate any revenues during the review period. As shown in Figure 6, the District had a total of \$250 dollars in expenditures during the review period. The District’s expenditures were donations to the Blountstown FFA Land Judging teams (\$150 in FY22 and \$100 in FY23).

**Figure 6: District Total Expenditures<sup>13</sup>**

Program or Activity	Total Expenditures			
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 (through 12/31/2023)
FFA Land Judging Contest	\$0	\$150	\$100	\$0

(Source: District Bank Statements)

The District does not maintain any long-term debt or contract with any third-party services.

<sup>13</sup> Tables in this report are through December 31, 2023, for FY24 to maintain consistency across all district reports.

## Trends and Sustainability

Chipola River SWCD does not have a source of revenue. The District used funds accrued prior to the review period in a savings account to pay for the donations to the Blountstown FFA Land Judging teams. According to District bank statements, the District's financial assets were \$2,794 on December 31, 2023.

If the District's expenditures continue to only include annual support for Blountstown FFA, the District's current assets will allow them to do so for approximately 30 years, barring large increases in cost. However, if the District decides to expand program offerings, the District will need to find a source of revenue to cover the increase in expenditures.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider developing a plan to increase revenue sources in an effort to diversify the types of revenue relied on by the District.

## II.C: Performance Management

### Strategic and Other Future Plans

Chipola River SWCD did not have a strategic plan during the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024). The District's mission statement, as posted on the District's website, "is to provide the administration of programs to conserve soil and improve water quality and quantity on private lands in Chipola [sic] County."

M&J reviewed the Board of Supervisors meeting minutes for any instance of strategic discussion, and did not identify instances of program strategies or planning.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider developing and then adopting a strategic plan that builds on the District's purpose and vision. The strategic plan should not simply describe the District's current programs, but rather reflect the District's long-term and short-term priorities based on the needs of the community and in response to changing land use patterns within the District's service area. A strategic plan does not need to be extensive as long as the document provides the District with direction for addressing the community's needs.

### Goals and Objectives

Chipola River SWCD does not have written or unwritten goals and objectives. M&J reviewed Board minutes for meetings that occurred during the review period, which indicated that District Supervisors did not discuss goals and objectives for the District. The District's memorandum of agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service ("NRCS") includes objectives for the District and NRCS to accomplish. Objectives include the following:

- Continuing to support the delivery of excellent and innovative customer service;
- Recognizing conservation planning as foundational to [the two entities'] work, and working together to meet the conservation planning assistance needs of [their] cooperators/customers;
- Strengthening and modernizing conservation delivery to optimize efficiency and effectiveness;
- Broadening [the two entities'] outreach to existing and new customers and partners;
- Supporting science-based decision-making as close to the resource issue/opportunity as possible;



- Encouraging a voluntary approach as the primary means of accomplishing conservation goals; and
- Using sound approaches to strengthen each Party and its role in the delivery of soil, water, and related natural resource conservation across the nation.

The defined objectives do not include quantifiable performance measures that the District can use to measure success related to promoting NRCS programs or expanding the District’s network within the community.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider writing and then adopting a set of goals and objectives that align with the District’s statutory purpose, as defined in s. [582.02\(4\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, and the Board’s vision and priorities as established in the District’s strategic plan. The goals and objectives should contemplate measurable progress, capturing the results of the District’s efforts and ensuring a consistent direction forward for the District’s future prioritization of programs and activities.

### Performance Measures and Standards

Chipola River SWCD does not have performance measures or standards for programs and activities.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider beginning to track performance measures and establishing standards that may be useful in evaluating the benefits of the programs sponsored and managed by the District, such as the number of attendees at the Soil Health Field Day, Conservation Breakfast, and similar events. The District should additionally consider tracking activities and services related to meeting the objectives set in the memorandum of agreement between the District and NRCS. If the District introduces new programs as a result of a strategic planning process, the District should consider identifying performance measures and standards that address the new programming.

### Analysis of Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures and Standards

Chipola River SWCD has not adopted a strategic plan, or any written or unwritten goals and objectives. The District’s website states that its mission is to provide the administration of programs to conserve soil and improve water quality and quantity on private lands. The District has taken steps towards meeting this mission by organizing conservation-related events with agriculture partners and financially supporting the Blountstown FFA as referenced in section II.A (Service Delivery).

As stated earlier in this section of the report, M&J recommends that the District consider developing and adopting a strategic plan, and subsequently goals, objectives, performance measures, and performance standards to provide the District direction and ensure that current and future programs and activities align with its intended statutory purpose, as defined in s. [582.02\(4\)](#), *Florida Statutes*.

### Annual Financial Reports and Audits

Chipola River SWCD is required per s. [218.32](#), *Florida Statutes*, to submit an annual financial report to the Florida Department of Financial Services within nine months of the District’s fiscal year end (September 30). According to Annual Financial Reports sourced from the Florida Department of Financial Services’ online database, Chipola River SWCD submitted the FY21, FY22, and FY23 Annual Financial Reports within the nine-month compliance timeframe. The District has until June 30, 2025, to submit the FY24 Annual Financial Report (after FY24 closes out in September 2024).

Chipola River SWCD does not meet the criteria in s. [218.39, Florida Statutes](#), to require the District to submit a financial audit report, as the District's annual revenues and combined expenditures and expenses are below the \$50,000 threshold, the lowest requirement threshold for special districts.

### Performance Reviews and District Performance Feedback

Chipola River SWCD has not had any performance reviews during the review period. The District partners with NRCS to host a Local Working Group, which is an opportunity for local agricultural stakeholders and producers to collaboratively identify community priorities and needs. The District Supervisors discuss the feedback from agriculture producers in Board of Supervisor meetings, and use the feedback to identify gaps in NRCS funding that can be addressed through targeted allocations of the funds NRCS provides to local service center to use at its discretion.

The District provided a statement that Local Working Group meetings used to be a collaborative effort from Chipola River SWCD, Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District, and Tupelo Soil and Water Conservation District. Because each District's service area is different and has specialized needs, the districts decided to no longer hold conjoined Local Working Group meetings, and hold separate Local Working Group meetings with agriculture producers specific to the Districts' service area.

Chipola River SWCD does not solicit feedback from participants and attendees of the events the District manages, including the Conservation Breakfast and the Soil Health Field Day.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from community partners and agriculture stakeholders served by the District and creating a process to systematically review feedback. The District should consider using the findings from the review of feedback to refine the District's program offerings and service delivery methods.

## II.D: Organization and Governance

### Election and Appointment of Supervisors

Supervisors are required by s. [582.19\(1\)\(b\), Florida Statutes](#), to sign an affirmation that they meet certain residency and agricultural experience requirements. These signed affirmations are required of both elected and appointed Supervisors.

According to M&J's review of Board of Supervisors meeting minutes, the District Supervisors in seats 1 through 4 were all reappointed to their same seats in November 2020. According to the Florida Department of State's Division of Elections website these Supervisors then qualified for the November 2022 general election, during which all five seats were up for election. Meeting minutes indicate that the District Supervisor in seat 5 was appointed in October 2023. In response to M&J's information request, the Administrative Assistant provided a written statement detailing the current Supervisors' qualifications, which are consistent with the residency and agricultural experience requirements in s. [582.19\(1\), Florida Statutes](#). To confirm this assertion, M&J requested the affirmations as part of a public records request to the Florida Department of State's Division of Elections, but did not receive any documentation in response to this request. As a result, M&J cannot verify whether the Supervisors signed the required affirmation of qualifications.

District Supervisor seats 2, 4, and 5 are up for election in November 2024.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider collaborating with the Florida Department of State Division of Elections and/or the county supervisors of elections to ensure that all supervisors, whether elected or appointed, complete the affidavits necessary to document each supervisor’s compliance with the requirements of s. [582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*.

### Notices of Public Meetings

Section [189.015](#), *Florida Statutes*, requires that all Board meeting minutes be publicly noticed in accordance with the procedures listed in ch. [50](#), *Florida Statutes*. This chapter has been amended twice during the review period, and M&J reviewed for compliance with the governing statute in effect at the time of each meeting date and applicable notice period.

The District has the regularly scheduled time and location for Board meetings posted on the District’s website. District staff stated that at the beginning of each year, the District sends meeting notices to the Association of Florida Conservation Districts (“AFCD”). AFCD then sends the meeting notices to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to post to the *Florida Administrative Register*. District staff provided a statement that the District was informed by AFCD that posting meeting notices to the *Florida Administrative Register* would be sufficient for compliance. M&J reviewed the *Florida Administrative Register* for Chipola River SWCD meeting notices, and found that meeting notices existed for 2021 meetings, 2023 meetings, and 2024 meetings. M&J could not find notice of meetings for the 2022 Board meetings.

M&J’s review concluded that the District notices did not meet the requirements of the version of ch. [50](#), *Florida Statutes*, in effect at the time of each meeting date and applicable notice period. Prior to January 2023, ch. [50](#), *Florida Statutes*, required any board located in a county with a county-wide newspaper to publish meeting notices in that newspaper. The District did not meet this requirement for meetings held in 2021 and 2022. Since January 2023, ch. [50](#), *Florida Statutes*, has permitted publication of meeting notices on a publicly accessible website (such as the *Florida Administrative Register*) as long as the board publishes a notice once a year in the local newspaper identifying the location of meeting notices and stating that any resident who wishes to receive notices by mail or e-mail may contact the board with that request. The District did not meet this requirement for meetings held in 2023 and 2024.

Failure to provide appropriate notice in full accordance with ch. [50](#), *Florida Statutes*, may deny the public an opportunity to attend meetings and participate in District business. Violation of this chapter of the Florida Statutes may subject District Supervisors and staff to penalties, including fines, fees, and misdemeanor charges, as outlined in s. [286.011](#), *Florida Statutes*. Additionally, business conducted at such meetings may be invalidated.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider improving Board of Supervisor meeting notice procedures to ensure compliance with s. [189.015](#) and ch. [50](#), *Florida Statutes*. The District should retain records that document its compliance with the applicable statutes.

### Retention of Records and Public Access to Documents

The District’s website provides meeting agendas and minutes for each Board of Supervisors (“Board”) meeting scheduled between November 2, 2020, and the culmination of M&J’s review period (April 30, 2024). The District was able to provide additional documentation to M&J for the performance review on request. M&J concludes that there are no notable issues with the District’s records retention and public access to information as required s. [119.021](#), *Florida Statutes*.

### III. Recommendations

The following table presents M&J’s recommendations based on the analyses and conclusions in the Findings sections, along with considerations for each recommendation.

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider proposing a written agreement to the counties involved in the current unwritten agreement to pay for the Administrative Assistant. The District should consider proposing the agreement include defined roles and responsibilities for the Administrative Assistant position and codify the position’s employment status in relation to the three District’s that the position serves.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential benefits: Establishing a written agreement for the Administrative Assistant position can provide assurances to the districts that the position serves, and define the position’s role and responsibilities</li> <li>● Potential adverse consequences: If an agreement is discussed, there is potential for the entities involved to discuss changes to the position’s responsibilities, pay structure, and/or employment model</li> <li>● Costs: None significant</li> <li>● Statutory considerations: None</li> </ul>
<p>The District should consider proposing a written agreement between the District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”) codifying mutual support by the Administrative Assistant and use of office space and use of equipment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential benefits: Establishing a written agreement with NRCS defines the responsibilities that the Administrative Assistant conducts for NRCS versus for each district. Additionally, the agreement would help ensure the District maintains access to office space and equipment.</li> <li>● Potential adverse consequences: Based on similar agreements between NRCS and other districts, a written agreement could require additional administrative services and establish performance standards that the District has to meet.</li> <li>● Costs: None</li> <li>● Statutory considerations: None</li> </ul>
<p>The District should consider developing a plan to increase revenue sources in an effort to diversify the types of revenue relied on by the District.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential benefits: If the District decides to fund more programs and/or services, the District will have consistent revenue to ensure that the District is not spending more than it is receiving in revenue</li> <li>● Potential adverse consequences: None</li> <li>● Costs: Any costs associated with managing a fundraising event</li> <li>● Statutory considerations: None significant</li> </ul>

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider developing and then adopting a strategic plan that builds on the District’s purpose and vision. The strategic plan should not simply describe the District’s current programs, but rather reflect the District’s long-term and short-term priorities based on the needs of the community and in response to changing land use patterns within the District’s service area. A strategic plan does not need to be extensive as long as the document provides the District with direction for addressing the community’s needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential Benefits: A strategic plan can provide a better understanding of the community’s needs and more guidance for decision making related to program funding.</li> <li>● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant.</li> <li>● Costs: Possible costs if the District uses a third-party vendor for assistance.</li> <li>● Statutory Considerations: Ensure identified strategies align with the District’s statutory purpose and authority.</li> </ul>
<p>The District should consider writing and then adopting a set of goals and objectives that align with the District’s statutory purpose, as defined in s. <a href="#">582.02(4)</a>, <i>Florida Statutes</i>, and the Board’s vision and priorities as established in the District’s strategic plan. The goals and objectives should contemplate measurable progress, capturing the results of the District’s efforts and ensuring a consistent direction forward for the District’s future prioritization of programs and activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential Benefits: Goals and objectives can help with the development of specific actions the District can take to address the community’s needs as described in the strategic plan.</li> <li>● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant.</li> <li>● Costs: Possible costs if the District uses a third-party vendor for assistance.</li> <li>● Statutory Considerations: Ensure goals and objectives align with the District’s statutory purpose and authority.</li> </ul>



Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider beginning to track performance measures and establishing standards that may be useful in evaluating the benefits of the programs sponsored and managed by the District, such as the number of attendees at the Soil Health Field Day, Conservation Breakfast, and similar events. The District should additionally consider tracking activities and services related to meeting the objectives set in the memorandum of agreement between the District and NRCS. If the District introduces new programs as a result of a strategic planning process, the District should consider identifying performance measures and standards that address the new programming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential Benefits: Establishing performance measures and standards will allow the District to measure program successes and assist the District in creating more educated decisions regarding future programming, as well as improve transparency.</li> <li>● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant.</li> <li>● Costs: Any time costs related to data gathering or measurements necessary in monitoring the District’s performance.</li> <li>● Statutory Considerations: None significant.</li> </ul>
<p>The District should consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from community partners served by the District and creating a process to systematically review feedback. The District should consider using the findings from the review of feedback to refine the District’s program offerings and service delivery methods.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential benefit: Implementing a system to collect feedback from agricultural producers will give the District an additional source of information to use in evaluating the District’s program offerings and service delivery.</li> <li>● Potential adverse consequences: None significant</li> <li>● Costs: Potential data collection or storage fees.</li> <li>● Statutory considerations: None</li> </ul>
<p>The District should consider collaborating with the Florida Department of State Division of Elections and/or the county supervisors of elections to ensure that all supervisors, whether elected or appointed, complete the affidavits necessary to document each supervisor’s compliance with the requirements of s. <a href="#">582.19(1)</a>, <i>Florida Statutes</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential benefits: The District ensures increased transparency into Supervisors’ qualification and ensures compliance with s. <a href="#">582.19(1)</a>, <i>Florida Statutes</i>.</li> <li>● Potential adverse consequences: None.</li> <li>● Costs: None.</li> <li>● Statutory considerations: The affirmation should match the language in s. <a href="#">582.19(1)(b)</a>, <i>Florida Statutes</i>.</li> </ul>

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider improving Board of Supervisor meeting notice procedures to ensure compliance with s. <a href="#">189.015</a> and ch. <a href="#">50</a>, <i>Florida Statutes</i>. The District should retain records that document its compliance with the applicable statutes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential Benefits: The District ensures better transparency, provides more public access to all meetings, and avoids the risk of penalties.</li> <li>• Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant.</li> <li>• Cost: Any publication costs charged by publishers.</li> <li>• Statutory Considerations: If the District wishes to post Board meetings online only, the District should meet the requirement of s. <a href="#">50.0311(6)</a>, <i>Florida Statutes</i>.</li> </ul>

## IV. District Response

Each soil and water conservation district under review by M&J was provided the opportunity to submit a response letter for inclusion in the final published report. Chipola River SWCD did not provide M&J with a response letter for inclusion in the final report.