

Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District Performance Review

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

August 19, 2024



Table of Contents

Key Takeaways	2
I. Background	3
I.A: District Description	3
I.B: Creation and Governance	5
I.C: Programs and Activities	6
I.D: Intergovernmental Interactions	7
I.E: Resources for Fiscal Year 2022 – 2023.....	8
II. Findings	9
II.A: Service Delivery	9
II.B: Resource Management.....	11
II.C: Performance Management.....	12
II.D: Organization and Governance.....	15
III. Recommendations	17
IV. District Response	20

Key Takeaways

- Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District’s Supervisors have maintained a full Board throughout the review period. The Board meets three to four times a year with Supervisors involved in community events between meetings.
- Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District offers limited programming. The District’s primary activities include serving as a fund for agriculture and conservation programs.
- Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District receives annual revenue from the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners, though District Supervisors are using personal time, resources, and funds to sponsor certain conservation education programs. The District is a part of a multi-county agreement which provides the District assistance from one staff member.
- Franklin 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 Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District (“Franklin SWCD” or “District”), conducted with a review period of October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024.

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’s website states that “the mission of the Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District is to provide the administration of programs to conserve soil and improve water quality and quantity on private lands in Franklin County.”

The District’s website further states that “it is our hope that Franklin County 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 Franklin County, Florida.”

Service Area

When the District was established in 1953,¹ the service area included the entirety of Franklin County, and the current borders and territory remain the same. The District’s service area includes unincorporated Franklin County; the County’s two cities;² and part or all of the following federal and State conservation lands:

- Alligator Harbor Aquatic Preserve
- Apalachicola Bay Aquatic Preserve
- Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve
- Apalachicola National Forest
- Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area
- Bald Point State Park

¹ Hollingsworth, L.M. 1954. *Biennial Report of the State Soil Conservation Board: January 1, 1953 - December 31, 1954*. Biennial Report, Tallahassee: Florida State Soil Conservation Board.

² Cities: Apalachicola, Carrabelle.

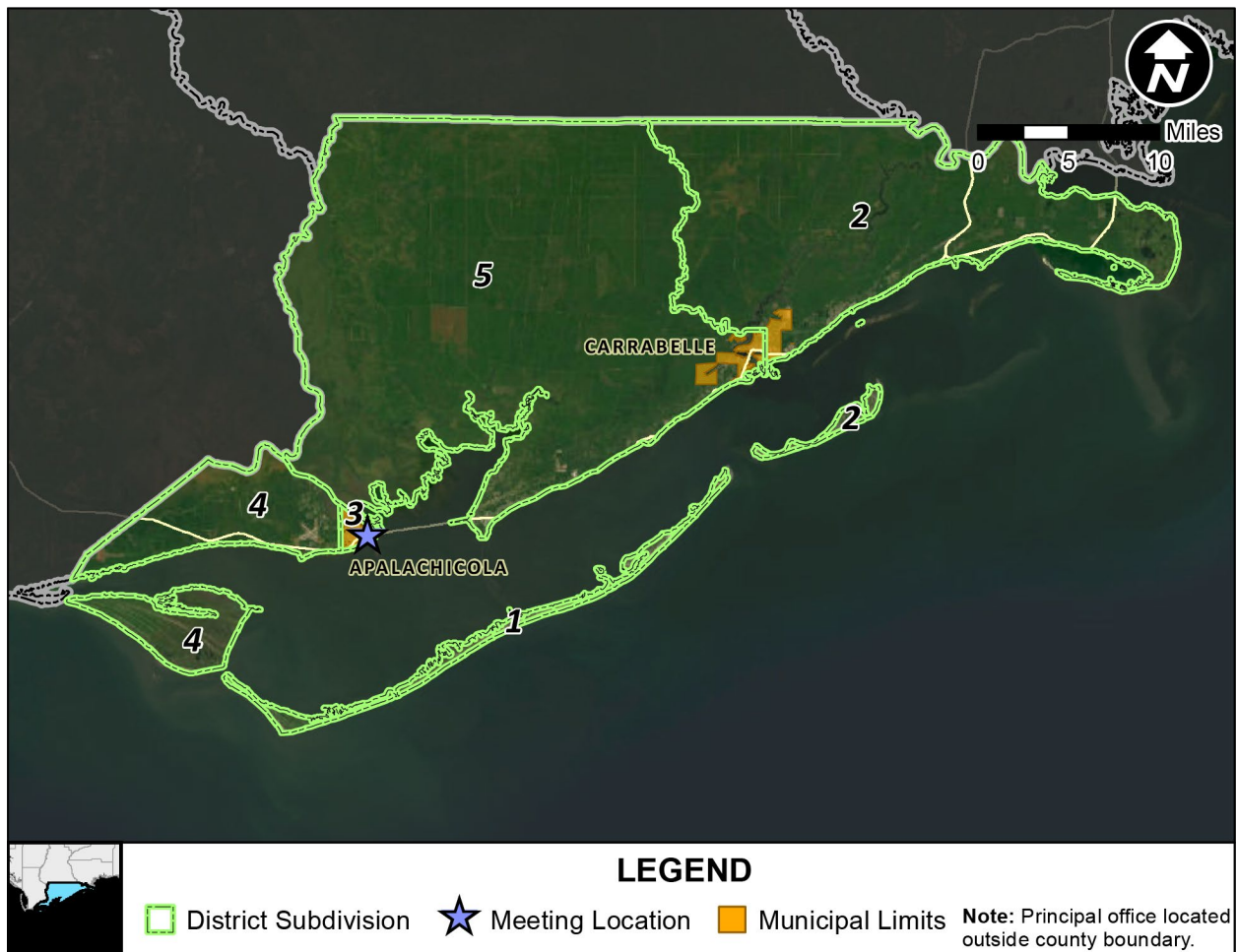
- Box-R Wildlife Management Area
- Cape St. George State Reserve
- Dr. Julian G. Bruce St. George Island State Park
- St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge
- Tate’s Hell State Forest

The District is bounded on the north by Liberty County, northeast by Wakulla County, south by the Gulf of Mexico, and west by Gulf County. The total area within the District is 1,027 square miles, with 535 square miles of land and 492 square miles of water.

The District’s primary office is located at 17413 Northwest Leonard Street, Blountstown, Florida 32424 – the United States Department of Agriculture service center in Calhoun County. The District meets at 34 Forbes Street, Apalachicola, Florida 32320 – the Franklin County Courthouse Annex.

Figure 1 is a map of the District’s service area, based on the map incorporated by reference in Rule [5M-20.002\(3\)\(a\)11.](#), *Florida Administrative Code*, showing the District’s boundaries, electoral subdivisions, major municipalities within the service area, and meeting location used for Board of Supervisors meetings. Because the principal office is located outside District boundaries, it is not shown on the map.

Figure 1: Map of Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District



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

Population

Based on the Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research population estimates, the population within the District's service area was 12,971 as of April 1, 2023.

District Characteristics

Franklin SWCD is located in the northwestern part of Florida. The economy of the service area is specialized and is supported by a large tourism industry stemming from the District's beach areas, a large timber industry, and a commercial fishing industry. The majority of the District is swampy land that includes rural timberland and forest. The District's urban areas include the municipalities along the Gulf of Mexico. The majority of the District is rural timberland and swamp land in the northern area of the District. The District's swampy areas are the result of sediment flow from the Apalachicola River which enters the Apalachicola Bay delta and blocks the river channel. The climate of the District includes long warm, and humid summers with mild winters. The District has thunderstorms that occur 70 days out of the year and is affected regularly by hurricanes and tropical storms from the Gulf of Mexico. The District's service area is a part of the Apalachicola Delta complex and is located in the Terraced Coastal Lowland. The Terraced Coastal Lowland includes various lagoons, coastal swamps, and barrier islands, including the Gulf Barrier Chain, which is a series of elongated islands composed of quartz sand that formed on the northeastern side of the Gulf of Mexico.³

The District's large presence of timberlands requires best-practice conservation programs that relate to the timber and forestry industry. If not properly managed, the logging and timber industry can lead to deforestation, which may lead to mass erosion and nutrient loss in soils. Consequently, the District requires initiatives aimed at supporting resilient farming practices, soil conservation efforts, and reforestation strategies to address the unique needs of the community. Additionally, because of the presence of large swamp areas within the District and the Apalachicola River, the prominence of rainfall and thunderstorms, and the District's humid temperate climate, row crops within the District are prone to damage due to soil erosion. The District requires conservation programs which assist in erosion control and management to protect crops from the weather conditions created by thunderstorms and hurricanes coming from the Gulf of Mexico.

I.B: Creation and Governance

Franklin SWCD was chartered on January 27, 1953, as the Franklin Soil Conservation District, following a successful referendum of local landowners and subsequent petition to the Florida State Soil Conservation Board.⁴ The District was created under the authority of the State Soil Conservation Districts Act (herein referred to as "ch. [582](#), *Florida Statutes*").⁵ 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 Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District.⁶

³ United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service. 1994. "Soil Survey of Franklin County, Florida." Soil Survey.

⁴ Hollingsworth, L.M. 1954. *Biennial Report of the State Soil Conservation Board: January 1, 1953 - December 31, 1954*. Biennial Report, Tallahassee: Florida State Soil Conservation Board.

⁵ ch. [582](#) (1939), *Florida Statutes*, available online as ch. [19473](#), *Laws of Florida*

⁶ ch. [65-334](#), *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*.⁷

As of this report, the District has five Supervisors. M&J has requested District Supervisor affirmations of qualification eligibility from the Franklin County Supervisor of Elections as is required per s. [582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*. M&J has received affirmations for District Supervisors in seat 1, 2, and 5. M&J has not received affirmations for District Supervisors for seats 3 and 4. District staff provided written bios for the Supervisors which indicate that the current Supervisors meet the residency and qualification requirements of s. [582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, which went into effect in the November 2022 election of all five seats. During the review period (October 2, 2020, through April 30, 2024), there were no vacancies on the Board, as illustrated in Figure 2. Additional assessment of the District’s electoral and appointment 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	Charles A. Marks III														
2	Walter Armistead														
3	Alan Pierce														
4	Mark Curenton														
5	Krystal Shuler Hernandez														

(Source: Election, appointment, and change of Supervisor forms provided by the County Supervisor of Elections)

During the review period, the District met 15 times⁸ and met 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 (May) and 2023 (July). The District additionally met zero times without a quorum. M&J has determined that the District did not properly notice each meeting and workshop. Additional assessment of the District’s pattern of providing meeting notices and adherence to relevant statutes is included in section II.D (Organization and Governance) of this report.

Neither Franklin County nor the in-district municipalities have adopted any local regulations for the District.

I.C: Programs and Activities

The following is a list of programs and activities conducted by the District during 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.

⁷ 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*

⁸ Meetings occurred in November 2020; May, July, September, and November 2021; March, May, September, and November 2022; January, May, July, and November 2023; and February and April 2024.

- Soil and Water Conservation Education
 - Ag in the Classroom
 - Ag in the Classroom is the incorporation of agriculture into regular curricula and hands-on learning to increase students’ understanding of how agriculture affects quality of life. The District has donated conservation education tools, including containerized gardening materials and sabal palms, to schools in the community to provide educational experiences to youth regarding soil and water conservation.
 - Poster Contest
 - The Poster Contest is an opportunity for youth in the community to produce educational posters related to conservation topics. Winners at the regional level can advance to compete at the regional, State, and national levels. The District sponsors local schools within the District to participate in the regional contest held in Jackson County.
- Eastpoint Breakwater Site Perimeter Plants Plan
 - The District donated \$5,500 to the Eastpoint Breakwater Site Perimeter Plants Plan to plant vegetation around a soil disposal site in order to create perimeter stabilization.
- 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 FY21, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”) and the District Supervisors signed a memorandum of agreement that established mutual objectives for the parties to follow while promoting NRCS programs.

Association Meetings

District staff attend regional and annual conservation association meetings and the District reimburses staff members for expenses related to travel.

Franklin County Board of County Commissioners

The District has an unwritten agreement with the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners which provides the District with \$799 annually to spend on soil and water conservation programs and activities. In return, the District donated funds to a soil conservation project the Board of County Commissioners managed with Friends of the Reserve, a nonprofit organization that supports the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Soil and Water Conservation District Interactions

Franklin SWCD receives administrative assistance from a part-time Administrative Assistant. The Administrative Assistant works part-time for the District, Tupelo Soil and Water Conservation District, and Chipola River Soil and Water Conservation District. NRCS provides office space and equipment to the Administrative Assistant. The Administrative Assistant’s salary is paid for by the Board of County Commissioners in Franklin County, Calhoun County, Liberty County, and Gulf County.

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
Total for Year	\$799	\$0	\$0

(Source: District Ledger)

Figure 4: FY23 Program Staffing

	Full-time Staff	Part-time Staff	Contracted Staff	Volunteers
Board of County Commissioners-employed staff	0	1	0	0
Total	0	1	0	0

(Source: Written and verbal statements from the District)

Figure 5: FY23 Equipment and Facilities

	Number	Ownership Status	Type(s)
Vehicles	0	N/A	N/A
Major Equipment	0	N/A	N/A
Facilities	2	1 owned by the United States Department of Agriculture; 1 owned by the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners	1 principal office; 1 meeting space

(Source: Written and verbal statements provided by the District; Florida Commerce Special District Profile)

II. Findings

The Findings sections summarizes 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 programs and activities conducted by the District during the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024).

Conservation Education Programs

The District provided a statement that District Supervisors are paying for conservation education programs out of their own funds, and that those expenses are not paid from the District's bank account.

The District is involved with agriculture education programs such as the local rounds of the National Association of Conservation Districts ("NACD") Poster Contest. The District Supervisors use their own time and funds to sponsor local schools within the District to send students to compete in the regional contest in Jackson County. The District Supervisors also provide personal funds for agricultural education programs in local schools (known as "Ag in the Classroom"), such as the purchase of sabal palms for a Franklin County School fourth-grade program involving trees and silviculture, and donating water troughs for the Franklin County School Containerized Gardening program, which gave students the opportunity to learn about agriculture while also growing their own foods in the provided containers. Expenses related to the sabal palm and water trough donations are not included on the District's ledger as provided to M&J.

Sponsorship and Promotion of Conservation Programs

The District provided \$5,500 to the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners ("BoCC") for native foliage to be planted as a part of the Perimeter Plants Plan for the Eastpoint Dredging Spoil Site. The plan uses a vegetative fringe, primarily marsh grass, in order to create perimeter stabilization at the spoil disposal site created by the Eastpoint breakwater construction. Spoil disposal is the removal of soil and materials that have been affected by an excavation site. The Perimeter Plants Plan for the Eastpoint Dredging Spoil Site is a project managed by the BoCC and Friends of the Reserve.⁹

⁹ Friends of the Reserve is a nonprofit citizen organization that supports program funding, environmental education, and scientific research of the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve.

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. An NRCS District Conservationist attends the Board of Supervisors meetings and gives periodic updates on the number of new NRCS program contract applications. The District additionally holds annual Local Working Group meetings 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.

Analysis of Service Delivery

As previously mentioned, Franklin SWCD provides funding and volunteer hours for conservation programs and services focused on youth agriculture education and the implementation of soil conservation, which aligns with the District’s purpose to provide soil and water conservation education as stated in s. [582.20\(7\) Florida Statutes](#).

The District receives annual revenue from the BoCC. Instead of using the District’s accrued funds to pay for programs, the District Supervisors donate their own time, money, and resources to help develop programs and activities for conservation education at the Franklin County School. The District used accrued funds in the bank account for the donation to the BoCC and Friends of the Reserve for the Eastpoint Breakwater Perimeter Plan. As the District Supervisors used their own funds to pay for the Ag in the Classroom donations, and the donation to the BoCC occurred only once within the review period, there were limited 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 District did not manage any programs or services related to agriculture conservation, instead serving as a sponsor for other entities within the District’s service area that manage agriculture conservation programs and projects, using both District funds and Supervisors’ personal funds.

The District does not provide programs or services that overlap with public entities that operate wholly or partially within the District’s service area.¹⁰ The District provides Ag in the Classroom educational materials to schools within the District, which is comparable to the agriculture education programs that the Franklin County Extension manages. As the District is not managing the agriculture education programs hosted by education partners, such as the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension office in Franklin County, there is no duplication among the District and its agriculture and education partners.

¹⁰ “Public entity” is defined as “a county or municipal government; a water management district and other special district; a public K-12 school, including a charter school; a public college; and a public university.”

II.B: Resource Management

Program Staffing

The District’s only staff position is an Administrative Assistant position, which is shared equally between Franklin SWCD, Tupelo Soil and Water Conservation District, and Chipola River 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

Franklin SWCD does not own any major equipment, vehicles, or facilities. The District holds Board of Supervisors meetings at the Franklin County Courthouse Annex for no cost. The Administrative Assistant works in the USDA service center in Blountstown, which is listed as the District’s principal office.

The District is permitted use of USDA office space, equipment, and supplies at no cost through an unwritten agreement among NRCS, Franklin SWCD, Chipola River 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 and use of office space and equipment.

Current and Historic Revenues and Expenditures

Franklin SWCD’s only revenue source is an annual allocation of \$799 from the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners (“BoCC”), provided through an unwritten agreement. As shown in Figure 6, the District received this allocation each year of the review period.

Figure 6: District Total Revenues

Revenue Source	Total Revenues			
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 (through 12/31/2023)
Board of County Commissioners	\$799	\$799	\$799	\$799

(Source: District ledger; Board of Supervisors meeting minutes)

According to the District’s ledger, as of November 14, 2023, Franklin SWCD has \$5,513 in total assets. As shown in Figure 7, the District only had one expenditure during the review period – the \$5,500 donated to the BoCC to purchase plants as a part of the Perimeter Plants Plan for the Eastpoint Dredging Spoil Site, as previously described in section II.A (Service Delivery) of this report. According to the Franklin SWCD ledger provided to M&J, the District has not incurred any expenses since May 26, 2021.

Figure 7: District Total Expenditures

Program or Activity	Total Expenditures			
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 (through 12/31/2023)
Sponsorship of Conservation Programs	\$5,500	\$0	\$0	\$0

(Source: District ledger; Board of Supervisors meeting minutes)

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

Recommendation: The District should consider proposing a written intergovernmental agreement with the Franklin County BoCC that guarantees annual funding for the District, as long as the District meets any requirements mutually established by the District and BoCC.

Trends and Sustainability

The District’s revenues remain consistent year over year, with no notable shifts or upward/downward trends. The only notable change in expenditures was the \$5,500 payment made to the BoCC in FY21 to purchase plants as part of the Perimeter Plants Plan. Franklin SWCD has not incurred any regular expenses within the review period, so it has limited opportunities to introduce cost-reduction efforts.

The revenue that the District receives each year from the BoCC was consistent for each year in the review period. According to the District’s ledger, the District’s total bank account balance as of November 2023 was \$5,513. The District has the funds to pay for programming, though if the District decides to make another donation similar to the \$5,500 donation to the BoCC, it could further limit the District’s already limited asset balance. Based on the limited program and services that the District sponsors, the District’s current financial model is sustainable so long as the BoCC continues to provide the District with annual revenue and the District does not increase its programs and services.

II.C: Performance Management

Strategic and Other Future Plans

Franklin 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 Franklin County.”

According to the April 2024 Board of Supervisor (“Board”) meeting minutes, the District Supervisors discussed a potential community environmental concern at that month’s Board meeting and provided a plan for gathering more information regarding the concern. While this provides an example of the District Supervisors thinking proactively about a community conservation concern, this is the only example of the District Supervisors discussing an item of this nature. The District Supervisors did not regularly discuss plans or program strategies at Board meetings during the review period.

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

Franklin 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 locally developed 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

Franklin SWCD does not have performance measures or standards for sponsored programs or 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 participants in Ag in the Classroom activities. 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

Franklin 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 providing funding for the activities referenced in II.A (Service Delivery), and working with NRCS to promote NRCS programs at the annual Local Working Group meetings and through District Supervisors' interpersonal connections.

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

Franklin 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 end of the District's fiscal year on September 30. According to Annual Financial Reports sourced from the Florida Department of Financial Services' online database, Franklin 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).

Franklin 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

Franklin 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 uses the priorities to set program sponsorship emphasis. NRCS representatives bring the feedback to the State and national offices in order to direct the funding opportunities and programs provided within the District's service area.

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

Franklin SWCD does not solicit feedback from the agriculture partners that the District works with when sponsoring programs. District sponsorship decisions are based on requests from the community, and are decided by District Supervisors to ensure that sponsorships adhere to the District's statutory purpose.

Recommendation: 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.

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 met certain residency and agricultural experience requirements. These signed affirmations are required of both elected and appointed Supervisors.

The current District Supervisors were all originally appointed to their respective seats, and then qualified for candidacy at the next election – all of which were prior to the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024). The Supervisors in seats 1, 2, and 5 were reelected to their seats in the November 2022 election, when all five seats were up for election. In January 2023, the Supervisors in seats 3 and 4 were reappointed to their same seats.

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 Supervisors' affirmations as part of a public records request to the Franklin County Supervisor of Elections. M&J received the affirmations for the three elected Supervisors (seats 1, 2, and 5) but did not receive affirmations for the two appointed Supervisors (seats 3 and 4). As a result, M&J cannot verify whether the appointed Supervisors signed the required affirmation of qualifications.

Recommendation: The District should consider collaborating with the Franklin County Supervisor of Elections to ensure that appointed Supervisors complete the affirmations 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”) for publication to the *Florida Administrative Register*, per AFCD guidance. M&J reviewed the *Florida Administrative Register* for Franklin 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 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 end of the review period (April 30, 2024). The District was able to provide additional documentation requested by M&J for the performance review. The District’s website additionally includes the District’s revenue amount, ledger, and links to its Annual Financial Reports on the Florida Department of Financial Services’ website. 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"> ● 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 ● 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 ● Costs: None significant ● Statutory considerations: None
<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 equipment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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. ● 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. ● Costs: None ● Statutory considerations: None
<p>The District should consider proposing a written intergovernmental agreement with the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners (“BoCC”) that guarantees annual funding for the District, as long as the District meets any requirements mutually established by the District and BoCC.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential benefits: A written agreement can provide the District guarantees for funding, limiting the possibility of a loss of funding without adequate cause ● Potential adverse consequences: Development of a written memorandum of understanding could allow the BoCC to develop more stringent requirements for the District to meet before funding is disbursed ● Costs: None significant ● Statutory considerations: None

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"> • 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. • Potential adverse consequences: None significant. • Costs: Possible costs if the District uses a third-party vendor for assistance. • Statutory considerations: Ensure identified strategies align with the District’s statutory purpose and authority.
<p>The District should consider writing and then adopting a set of locally developed goals and objectives that align with the District’s statutory purpose, as defined in s. 582.02(4), <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"> • 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. • Potential adverse consequences: None significant. • Costs: Possible costs if the District uses a third-party vendor for assistance. • Statutory considerations: Ensure goals and objectives align with the District’s statutory purpose and authority.

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider beginning to track performance measures that may be useful in evaluating the benefits of the programs sponsored and managed by the District, such as the number of participants in Ag in the Classroom and similar agriculture education events and programs, such as local rounds of the National Association of Conservation District’s Poster Contest. 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Potential adverse consequences: None significant. • Costs: Any time costs related to data gathering or measurements necessary in monitoring the District’s performance. • Statutory considerations: None significant.
<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"> • Potential benefits: 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. • Potential adverse consequences: None significant • Costs: Potential data collection or storage fees. • Statutory considerations: None
<p>The District should consider collaborating with the Franklin County Supervisor of Elections to ensure that appointed Supervisors complete the affirmations necessary to document each Supervisor’s compliance with the requirements of s. 582.19(1), <i>Florida Statutes</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential benefits: The District ensures increased transparency into Supervisors’ qualification and ensures compliance with s. 582.19(1), <i>Florida Statutes</i>. • Potential adverse consequences: None. • Costs: None. • Statutory considerations: The affirmation should match the language in s. 582.19(1)(b), <i>Florida Statutes</i>.
<p>The District should consider improving Board of Supervisor meeting notice procedures to ensure compliance with s. 189.015 and ch. 50, <i>Florida Statutes</i>. The District should retain records that document its compliance with the applicable statutes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential benefits: The District ensures better transparency, provides more public access to all meetings, and avoids the risk of penalties. • Potential adverse consequences: None significant. • Costs: Any publication costs charged by publishers. • Statutory considerations: If the District wishes to post Board meetings online only, the District should meet the requirement of s. 50.0311(6), <i>Florida Statutes</i>.

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. Franklin SWCD did not provide M&J with a response letter for inclusion in the final report.