

Hamilton County 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

- Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors was inactive for the majority of the review period (October 1, 2020 through April 30, 2024), not meeting from the beginning of the review period until December 2023.
- Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District does not conduct any organized activities. The District’s Supervisors promote soil and water conservation-related programs through their connections within the local community.
- Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District does not maintain its own finances and is supported entirely by an allocation from the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners. The District recorded one expenditure during the review period.
- Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District’s operations are not currently guided by a strategic plan or other goals and objectives, and the District does not evaluate its performance using 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 Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District (“Hamilton County 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; 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 provides a definition of its purpose on its website, which states that “The Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District’s purpose is to promote natural resource conservation practices over a long-term sustainability initiative promoting Agricultural Best Management Practices (“BMP”) and other tools to equip landowners to protect our most vital organic assets – soil and water.”

Service Area

When the District was established in 1946, the service area included the entirety of Hamilton County and the current borders and territory remain the same. The District’s service area includes unincorporated Hamilton County, the County’s one city and two towns,¹ and part or all of the following federal and State conservation lands:

- Belmont Conservation Area
- Big Shoals Conservation Area
- Big Shoals State Forest
- Big Shoals State Park
- Camp Branch Conservation Area
- Cypress Creek Conservation Area
- Holton Creek Conservation Area
- Lower Alapaha Conservation Area
- Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park
- Suwannee Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area
- Suwannee River State Park
- Suwannee River State Park Conservation Area
- Swift Creek Conservation Area
- Twin Rivers State Forest
- Upper Alapaha Conservation Area
- Withlacoochee East Conservation Area

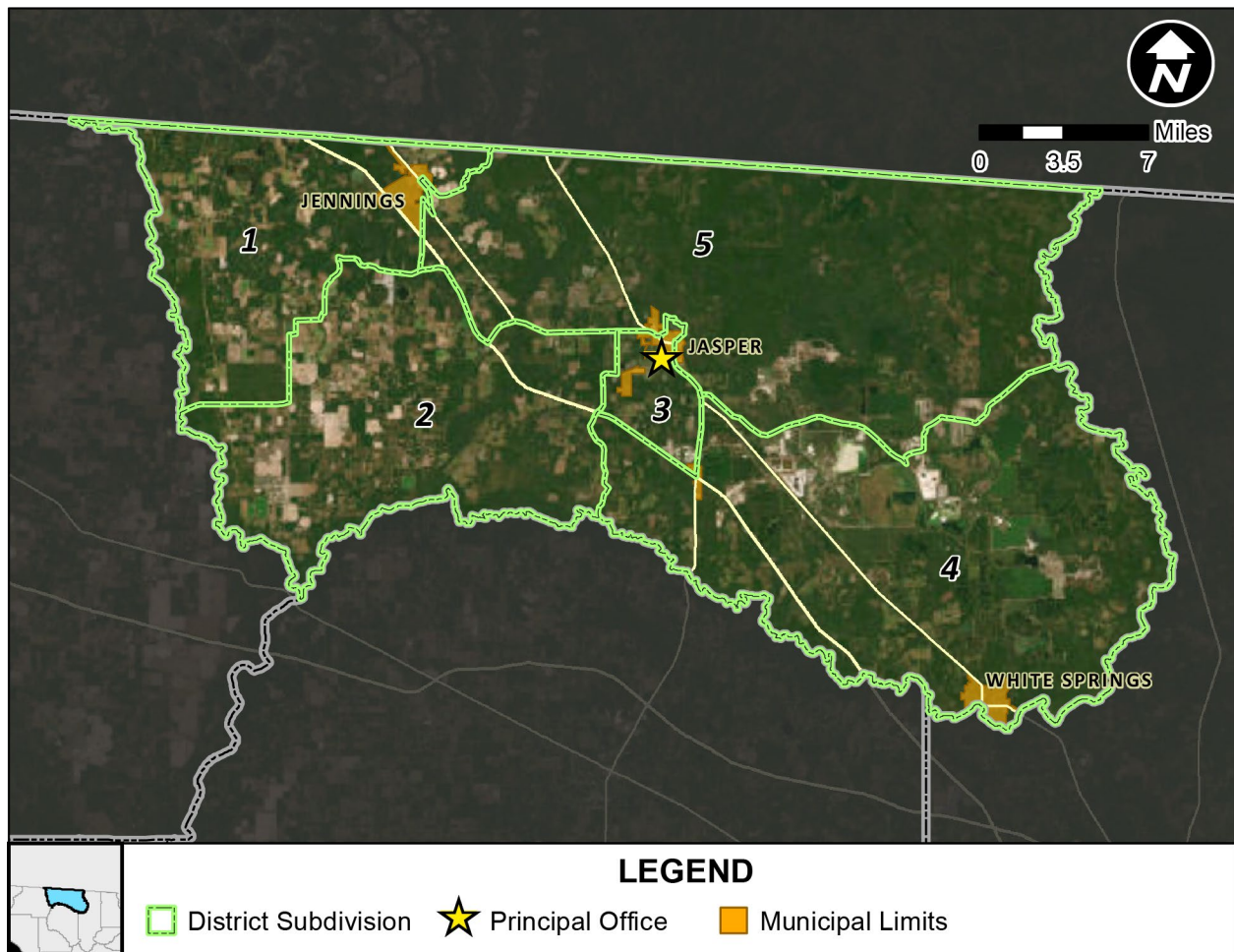
¹ City: Jasper; Towns: Jennings, and White Springs

The District is bounded on the north by the State of Georgia, east by Columbia County, south by Suwannee County, and west by Madison County. The District’s total area is 519 square miles, including 514 square miles of land and five square miles of water.

The District’s primary office is in the University of Florida’s Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Service’s office located at 1143 NW US Highway 41, Jasper, FL 32052.

Figure 1 is a map of the District’s service area, based on the map incorporated by reference in Rule [5M-20.002\(4\)\(a\)15.](#), *Florida Administrative Code*, showing the District’s boundaries, electoral subdivisions, major municipalities within the service area, and the District’s principal office.

Figure 1: Map of Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District



(Source: Hamilton 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 13,671 as of April 1, 2023.

District Characteristics

Hamilton County SWCD is located in north central Florida. The District's service area has a specialized economy, focused largely on agriculture and silviculture.² The United States Census Bureau reports that the entirety of the District's service area is rural. Per the United States Department of Agriculture's 2022 Census of Agriculture, the primary products of the District's agricultural sector are poultry and vegetables. Phosphate mining operations are also conducted in the District's service area.³ The District's agricultural production is primarily concentrated in the western half of the District, with the District's eastern half primarily taken up by phosphate mining operations, silviculture, and conservation areas. Phosphate mining and highly extractive lumber operations may promote erosion. Portions of the District are included within the Basin Management Action Plan ("BMAP")⁴ area for the Middle and Lower Suwannee River Basin.⁵

The District is divided between two geomorphological zones: the Gulf Coastal Lowlands in the District's southwestern corner and the Northern Highlands in the remainder of the District. The Cody Scarp, a southwestern-facing escarpment, serves as the boundary between these regions. The Gulf Coastal Lowlands are generally flat, occasionally broken up by topographical changes caused by the dissolution of the limestone that underlies the District's sandy soils or by the Withlacoochee, Alapaha, and Suwannee River valleys. The Northern Highlands province is composed of gently rolling clay/sand hills and flat wetlands caused by the dissolution of the limestone that underlies the region.⁶ The limestone that runs beneath both of the District's geomorphological zones holds the Floridian Aquifer, which feeds the numerous springs located near the District's southern and eastern borders, including the Madison Blue Spring, Alapaha River Rise, and Holton Creek Rise.⁷ Waste from the District's poultry operations is a threat to the District's freshwater resources due to the risk of both nutrient and pathogen runoff. Leaking tailings from the District's phosphate mining operations can also threaten the District's surface water and groundwater health.

² Hamilton County Development Authority. n.d. *Key Industries*. Accessed June 3, 2024. <https://www.hamiltoncda.org/industries/>.

³ Florida Department of Environmental Protection. n.d. *Phosphate*. Accessed May 3, 2024. <https://floridadep.gov/water/mining-mitigation/content/phosphate>.

⁴ The Florida Department of Environmental Protection defines a Basin Management Action Plan as "a framework for water quality restoration that contains local and state commitments to reduce pollutant loading through current and future projects and strategies."

⁵ Florida Department of Environmental Protection. n.d. *Impaired Waters, TMDLs, and Basin Management Action Plans Interactive Map*. Accessed May 7, 2024. <https://floridadep.gov/dear/water-quality-restoration/content/impaired-waters-tmdls-and-basin-management-action-plans>.

⁶ Rupert, Frank R. 1989. *The Geology of Hamilton County, Florida*. Open File Report, Tallahassee: Florida Geological Survey. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00001026/00001>.

⁷ Florida Department of Environmental Protection. n.d. "Map of Florida's Springs Categorized by Magnitude." *Florida Department of Environmental Protection*. Accessed May 7, 2024.

I.B: Creation and Governance

Hamilton County SWCD was chartered on August 7, 1946, as the Hamilton Soil Conservation District, following a successful referendum of local landowners and subsequent petition to the Florida State Soil Conservation Board.⁸ The District was created under the authority of the State Soil Conservation Districts Act (herein referred to as “ch. [582, Florida Statutes](#)”).⁹ The Florida Legislature amended ch. [582, Florida Statutes](#), in 1965, to expand the scope of all soil conservation districts to include water conservation, which renamed the District to the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District.¹⁰

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*.¹¹

As of this report, the District has five Supervisors. The District Chair and Secretary/Treasurer report that all five Supervisors meet the requirement, as all are currently engaged in agriculture. M&J submitted a request for records from the Hamilton County Supervisor of Elections to confirm completion of qualifications affidavits for all Supervisors; there has been no response. During the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024), there have been two vacancies on the Board, as illustrated in Figure 2.

The District has only had five Supervisors once during the review period: from December 2023 through the end of the review period in April 2024. 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	Jon Westley Deas															
2	Terry Knighton															
3	Thomas Charles Warfel													Hugh Hunter		
4	Scott Wynn															
5										Richard McCulley						

(Source: Interview with District Supervisors, District-prepared Supervisor history document)

⁸ Florida State Soil Conservation Board. 1947. *Biennial Report of the State Soil Conservation Board: January 1, 1945 - June 30, 1947*. Biennial Report, Tallahassee: Florida State Soil Conservation Board. <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00075937/00002/images>.

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

¹⁰ Ch. [65-334, Laws of Florida](#)

¹¹ Including s. [582.15, Florida Statutes](#), s. [582.18, Florida Statutes](#), s. [582.19, Florida Statutes](#), Rule [5M-20.002, Florida Administrative Code](#), and Ch. [2022-191, Laws of Florida](#).

During the review period, the District met two times¹² and 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, failing to meet at all in 2022. The District met once in December 2023. Once the Board appointed a Supervisor to fill the seat 3 vacancy, effective immediately, the December 2023 meeting continued with all five Supervisors present. M&J has determined that the District did not properly notice each meeting. 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.

Neither Hamilton 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.

- Promotion of Available Resources
 - The District’s Supervisors promote the funding and other resources available to producers from other public entities operating within the District.

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

The United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”) primarily interacts with the District through the NRCS District Conservationist Report during regularly scheduled Board of Supervisors (“Board”) meetings. The District does not regularly work directly with NRCS and the NRCS District Conservationist Reports do not support any specific District projects. Instead, the NRCS District Conservationist Reports help to ensure that the Board is aware of the work being performed by NRCS that may be relevant to future District activities or to producers within the District.

¹² Meetings occurred in December 2023 and February 2024.

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

The District is included in the service area for a Conservation Technician employed through the Suwannee County Conservation District’s contract with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (“FDACS”). This Conservation Technician shares information about Agricultural Best Management Practices (“BMP”)¹³ and the availability of Cost-Share funding for the purchase of agricultural equipment.

District meeting minutes reflect that FDACS staff attended both Board meetings during the review period and presented reports on FDACS activity relevant to the District’s mission or on news related to the BMP Cost Share and BMP Implementation Assistance programs.

UF/IFAS Extension

Employees of the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Service in Hamilton County (“UF/IFAS Extension”) attended the most recent Board meeting to promote their work in the District. The Extension’s BMP Outreach Coordinator updated the Supervisors about fertilizer applications, and another UF/IFAS Extension employee provided an update about Extension meetings that may be applicable to the District as well as producers so that Supervisors can assist in promoting attendance at these meetings.

Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners

The Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners (“HBoCC”) provides some financial support to the District, allocating funds to assist with paying for the meal associated with the annual District meeting and paying the annual Association of Florida Conservation Districts dues. The District does not have any agreements with HBoCC. The District’s lack of agreements with HBoCC does not appear to be an issue at this time.

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	\$0	\$0	\$0

(Source: Interview with District Supervisors)

¹³ Defined by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as “a framework for water quality restoration that contains local and state commitments to reduce pollutant loading through current and future projects and strategies”

Figure 4: FY23 Program Staffing

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

(Source: Interview with District Supervisors)

Figure 5: FY23 Equipment and Facilities

	Number	Ownership Status	Type(s)
Vehicles	0		
Major Equipment	0		
Facilities	1	1 owned by the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences in Hamilton County	1 primary office/meeting location

(Source: Interview with District Supervisors)

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):

Outreach

The District Chair and Secretary/Treasurer, in an interview, asserted the Board's primary role as helping link the District's farming community with the programs and activities available through other public entities. The District's Supervisors use their connections and relationships within the local farming community to promote various public programs that support conservation-minded farming practices, including programs managed by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services ("FDACS"), the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service ("NRCS"), and the Suwannee River Water Management District. The District does not have an organized method or process for promoting these programs and relies on word of mouth and existing relationships between the Supervisors and other producers in the District's service area.

Analysis of Service Delivery

The District's outreach efforts are aligned with the soil and water conservation district purpose statement given in s. [582.02\(4\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, and did not incur any costs to the District during the review period. The District did not conduct any other programs that exercise the powers granted to soil and water conservation districts by s. [582.20](#), *Florida Statutes*. Prior to the review period, the District offered educational programs, such as the National Association of Conservation Districts poster contest and the Association of Florida Conservation Districts/Florida Conservation District Employees Association speech contest, but stopped hosting those programs, citing a lack of participation from schools in the District's service area. The District is not engaged in other agricultural, environmental, or conservation-related educational programs offered by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Service in Hamilton County ("UF/IFAS Extension"), such as 4-H.

Comparison to Similar Services/Potential Consolidations

The District's primary efforts are outreach and promotion of programs and activities implemented by other public entities, such as NRCS, FDACS, and the UF/IFAS Extension. All three of these public entities also have staff active in the farming community to promote their programs and activities and assist agricultural producers with the implementation of Best Management Practices. The District's efforts are similar to those provided by these public entities, but the Supervisors have existing relationships with many of the District's farmers, which may assist in building trust and encouraging farmers to reach out to the public entities that provide the programs and activities. The outreach and promotion efforts of the Supervisors do not incur any costs for the District, so there are no cost efficiencies to be considered in evaluating this provision of similar services.

II.B: Resource Management

Program Staffing

The District did not use the services of any full-time, part-time, contract, or volunteer staff during the review period.

Equipment and Facilities

Vehicles

The District did not own or operate any vehicles during the review period.

Facilities

During the review period, the District held meetings in the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Service facility in Jasper and stored files at the residence of the current Secretary/Treasurer.

Recommendation: The District should consider identifying an alternate location for the storage of District files so that access to and maintenance of the District's records does not depend on a Supervisor's cooperation and ability.

Major Equipment

The District did not own or operate any major equipment during the review period.

Current and Historic Revenues and Expenditures

The District does not have a bank account or maintain its finances. The Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners ("HBoCC") annual budget allocation for the District has been the District's only source of funding during the review period. HBoCC's allocation for the District has been \$1,500 for each fiscal year of the review period and does not specify the types of expenditures that the District can make with the allocation.

HBoCC recorded one expenditure on the District's behalf during the review period: paying the District's \$350 Association of Florida Conservation Districts dues in January 2023.

Trends and Sustainability

The District has not had any direct revenues or directly made any expenditures during the review period. The District's allocation in HBoCC's annual budget remained \$1,500 during each year of the review period. The District did not make any expenditures from its budget allocation in FY21 and FY22 and only made a single expenditure of \$350 in FY23. The District does not offer any programs or services and the District's annual HBoCC budget allocation is more than sufficient to fund the District's minimal operating costs.

II.C: Performance Management

Strategic and Other Future Plans

Per the District's Board of Supervisors ("Board") meeting minutes from the review period and interviews with District Supervisors, the District does not currently have a strategic plan.

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.

Goals and Objectives

Per the District's Board meeting minutes from the review period and interviews with District Supervisors, the District does not currently maintain written or unwritten goals and objectives.

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

Per the District's Board meeting minutes from the review period and interviews with District Supervisors, the District does not currently track performance measures or evaluate the District's performance against standards.

Recommendation: The District should consider identifying performance measures and standards as part of the development of a new strategic plan. The District should then track the identified performance measures against established standards and use the collected data to monitor the District's performance, evaluate progress towards the goals and objectives that the District adopts, and support future improvements to the District's service delivery methods.

Analysis of Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures and Standards

The District does not have any goals or objectives and does not track any performance measures or standards. The District's lack of goals and objectives inhibits the Supervisors' ability to develop District policy based on a clear, agreed-upon future state. The District's lack of performance measures and standards limits the District's ability to analyze its performance in an objective fashion and prevents outside individuals or organizations from adequately evaluating District activities. As stated earlier in this section of the report, M&J recommends that the District consider writing and adopting a set of goals and objectives and identifying and tracking performance measures and standards.

Annual Financial Reports and Audits

The District is required by 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 each fiscal year (*i.e.*, June 30, or nine months after September 30). The District submitted its FY21 Annual Financial Report to the Florida Department of Financial Services within the compliance timeframe. The District submitted its FY22 Annual Financial Report to the Florida Department of Financial Services on December 13, 2023, over five months after the deadline established by s. [218.32](#), *Florida Statutes*.

The District has not yet submitted its FY23 Annual Financial Report to the Florida Department of Financial Services. The deadline for the District to submit its FY23 Annual Financial Report to the Florida Department of Financial Services is nine months after the close of the fiscal year, or June 30, 2024.

Per s. [218.39](#), *Florida Statutes*, the District is not required to submit an annual financial audit report, as its annual revenues and combined expenditures and expenses are below the \$50,000 threshold for each year of the review.

Recommendation: The District should consider refining its timeline for preparing and submitting the Annual Financial Report to the Florida Department of Financial Services to ensure that the District meets the requirements of s. [218.32\(1\)\(a\)](#), *Florida Statutes*.

Performance Reviews and District Performance Feedback

Per the District's Board meeting minutes from the review period and interviews with District Supervisors, the District has not conducted any performance reviews or collected any feedback from District stakeholders during the review period.

Recommendation: The District should consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from agricultural producers that work with 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 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. M&J used election records available on the Hamilton County Supervisor of Elections' website, a District-created Supervisor history document, and information gleaned from interviews with District Supervisors to assess the District's Supervisor history and compliance with Supervisor eligibility rules.

Supervisors were elected into seats 1, 2, 4, and 5 in the 2022 general election. No candidates qualified for seat 3 in the 2022 general election, so that seat became vacant in January 2023. A new Supervisor was appointed to fill the vacancy in seat 3 in December 2023.

M&J requested election records from the Hamilton County Supervisor of Elections, including affidavits from each Supervisor affirming that the Supervisors meet the qualifications for office established in s. [582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, but the Hamilton County Supervisor of Elections has not acknowledged the request. The Chair of the District's Board of Supervisors ("Board") and the Supervisor serving as Secretary/Treasurer report that all five of the current Supervisors are currently engaged in agriculture and meet the qualifications for office established in s. [582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, although M&J cannot independently confirm this assertion.

Recommendation: The District should consider collaborating with the Hamilton County Supervisor of Elections to ensure that all elected and appointed Supervisors 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 meetings 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.

In interviews, the District's Secretary/Treasurer stated that the District did not provide notice for the two meetings that it held during the review period. M&J searched [floridapublicnotices.com](#), the State of Florida's designated repository of public notice publications, and did not identify notices posted for any Board meetings held during the review period. The District's Secretary/Treasurer stated that they provided a copy of the District's meeting schedule for calendar year 2024 to the Association of Florida Conservation Districts, which works with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Office of Agricultural Water Policy to post meeting notices in the *Florida Administrative Register*. M&J searched the *Florida Administrative Register* and identified notices for three Board meetings scheduled during the review period, none of which were held.

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 hold any meetings 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 adequate 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 improperly noticed meetings may be invalidated.

Recommendation: The District should consider reviewing its meeting notice procedures to verify compliance with s. [189.015](#) and ch. [50](#), *Florida Statutes*. The District should retain records that document its compliance with relevant statutes.

Retention of Records and Public Access to Documents

The District was able to provide all records requested in accordance with s. 119.021, *Florida Statutes*. The District's website does not provide access to any District records, Board meeting minutes, agendas, and notices. Additionally, some pages on the District's website, such as the page listing the District's Supervisors, are out of date.

Recommendation: The District should consider updating its procedures for maintaining the District's website to help ensure that meeting minutes and agendas are regularly posted, financial records are kept up-to-date, and other pages are updated as needed.

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 identifying an alternate location for the storage of District files so that access to and maintenance of the District’s records does not depend on a Supervisor’s cooperation and ability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential Benefit: Storing files at a location other than a Supervisor’s private residence will greatly reduce the risk that the District is unable to access files because a single Supervisor is unavailable and greatly reduces the risk of the District’s records being lost when a Supervisor leaves office. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant ● Costs: Depending on the storage location selected by the District, the District may incur minor storage space rental costs. ● Statutory Considerations: None
<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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential Benefit: Developing and adopting a strategic plan will require the District to consider and define an organized, cohesive set of plans for the coming years and will provide a document that the District’s current and potential future Supervisors and staff can reference to guide the District’s operations over the coming years. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant ● Costs: None ● Statutory Considerations: Supervisors will need to adopt any strategic plan
<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. 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential Benefit: Developing, writing, and adopting a set of comprehensive goals and objectives will help the District’s current and future Supervisors and staff to better understand the District’s intentions and will help to prioritize projects. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant ● Costs: None ● Statutory Considerations: Supervisors will need to adopt any goals and objectives.

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider identifying performance measures and standards as part of the development of a new strategic plan. The District should then track the identified performance measures against established standards and use the collected data to monitor the District’s performance, evaluate progress towards the goals and objectives that the District adopts, and support future improvements to the District’s service delivery methods.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential Benefit: Identifying performance measures and establishing performance standards will enable the District to objectively evaluate the performance of its various programs, enhancing the Supervisors’ ability to oversee and manage the District’s service delivery. The District can also use collected performance measures to refine its service delivery models to improve the level of service that it is able to provide or reduce costs. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant ● Costs: Implementing this recommendation may cause the District to incur minor data collection and storage fees. ● Statutory Considerations: None
<p>The District should consider refining its timeline for preparing and submitting the Annual Financial Report to the Florida Department of Financial Services to ensure that the District meets the requirements of s. 218.32(1)(a), <i>Florida Statutes</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential Benefit: Refining the District’s timeline for preparing its Annual Financial Report guidelines will help the District to ensure compliance with statutory reporting deadlines and avoid potential negative consequences of late Annual Financial Report submission, including those specified in s. 218.32(1)(f), <i>Florida Statutes</i>. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: None Significant ● Costs: None ● Statutory Considerations: None
<p>The District should consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from agricultural producers that work with 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 service delivery methods.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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 performance of the District’s programs and may help the District to identify and/or evaluate potential improvements to the District’s service delivery methods. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant ● Costs: Implementing this recommendation may cause the District to incur minor data collection and storage fees. ● Statutory Considerations: None
<p>The District should consider collaborating with the Hamilton County Supervisor of Elections to ensure that all elected and appointed Supervisors complete the affidavits 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 Benefit: Working with the Hamilton County Supervisor of Elections to collect eligibility affidavits from all elected and appointed Supervisors will help ensure that the Supervisors are in compliance and have documented their compliance with the eligibility criteria set in s. 582.19(1), <i>Florida Statutes</i>. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: None ● Costs: None ● Statutory Considerations: None

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider reviewing its meeting notice procedures to verify compliance with s. 189.015 and ch. 50, <i>Florida Statutes</i>. The District should retain records that document its compliance with applicable statutes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential Benefit: Implementing proper meeting notice policies will help ensure that the District is compliant with s. 189.015 and ch. 50, <i>Florida Statutes</i>, which protects Supervisors and staff from potential consequences of violating notice requirements established in s. 286.011, <i>Florida Statutes</i>, and protects actions taken during meetings from being invalidated on procedural grounds related to meeting notice. Properly noticing meetings also promotes increased public engagement with District operations. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant ● Costs: Properly noticing the District’s meetings will require the District to pay to run public notice statements in the local newspaper ● Statutory Considerations: None
<p>The District should consider updating its procedures for maintaining the District’s website to help ensure that meeting minutes and agendas are regularly posted, financial records are kept up-to-date, and other pages are updated as needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential Benefit: Ensuring that meeting minutes, meeting agendas, financial records, and other relevant information on the District’s website are kept up-to-date will ensure that members of the public have easy access to District records and can participate in the District’s activities and decision-making process. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant ● Costs: None ● Statutory Considerations: None

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. Hamilton SWCD's response letter is provided on the following pages.



**HAMILTON COUNTY SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT
Jasper, Florida**



July 30, 2024

RESPONSE LETTER for the OPPAGA Performance Review (June 17, 2024)

To Whom It May Concern:

Hamilton County SWCD greatly appreciates the recommendations provided by *Mauldin & Jenkins, CPA & Advisors*. The findings will help us improve our District's ability to better serve the landowners in Hamilton County.

Please see the responses below.

II.B: Resource Management

Facilities

The District plans to relocate the District files and records at the Suwannee/Hamilton/Lafayette County NRCS office in Live Oak for storage. Therefore, this will be the alternate location for District files.

II.C: Performance Management

Strategic and Other Future Plans

The District is in the process of developing a strategic plan for the District's priorities. Once developed, the plan will be adopted and used in the District's future operations.

Goals and Objectives

The goals of the District are to work in conjunction with FDACS and NRCS with educating landowners of the importance of conserving water and land resources with the programs available to them.

Performance Measures and Standards

The District will consider performance measures and standards as part of the strategic plan as it develops.

Annual Financial Reports and Audits

The District plans to submit the Annual Financial Report and other reports in a timely matter.



**HAMILTON COUNTY SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT
Jasper, Florida**



Continued....

Performance Reviews and District Performance Feedback

The District will consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from producers and landowners and work in conjunction with UF/IFAS extension office participating in their annual production meetings.

II.D: Organization and Governance

Election and Appointment of Supervisors

The District currently works closely with the Hamilton County Supervisor of Elections. The Supervisor of Elections notifies the board members when and what documents are necessary to remain in compliance with state requirements.

Notices of Public Meetings

The District plans to provide public meeting notices and retain all records showing compliance.

Retention of Records and Public Access to Documents

The District will reach out to the local county government for assistance with maintaining the District's website to ensure public access.

If additional information is needed, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Scott Wynn, Secretary/Treasurer
5559 NW County Road 141
Jennings, FL 32053
850-464-1206