

Lafayette 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..... 6
 - I.C: Programs and Activities 7
 - 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.....10
 - II.C: Performance Management.....12
 - II.D: Organization and Governance.....14
- III. Recommendations.....16**
- IV. District Response.....19**
- Appendix A.....20**

Key Takeaways

- Lafayette Soil and Water Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors is minimally active and met once per year during the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024).
- Lafayette Soil and Water Conservation District does not conduct any organized activities. The District sponsors conservation-related events in the District’s service area and the District’s Supervisors promote soil and water conservation-related programs through their connections within the local community.
- Lafayette Soil and Water Conservation District does not employ or contract with any staff and is inconsistently funded by the Lafayette County Board of County Commissioners
- Lafayette 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.
- After the culmination of the review period (April 30, 2024), Lafayette Soil and Water Conservation District voted to request that the Commissioner of Agriculture dissolve the District. The resolution of the Board of Supervisors from July 30, 2024, is included as Appendix A.

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 Lafayette Soil and Water Conservation District (“Lafayette SWCD” or “District”), conducted with a review period of October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024.

Status Change

A status change occurred after fieldwork was completed on April 30, 2024. On July 30, 2024, the Lafayette County Soil and Water Conservation District adopted a resolution requesting that the Florida Commissioner of Agriculture issue a certificate determining that the continued operation of the District is not administratively practicable and feasible, which would result in the District’s dissolution. This report’s findings and recommendations are based on the 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*].”

Service Area

When the District was established in 1948, the service area included the entirety of Lafayette County and the current borders and territory remain the same.

The District’s service area includes unincorporated Lafayette County, the County’s one town,¹ and part or all of the following federal and State conservation lands:

- Allen Mill Pond Conservation Area
- Grady Conservation Area
- Hatchbend Conservation Area
- Lafayette Blue Springs State Park
- Lafayette Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area
- Madison County Conservation Area²
- Mallory Swamp Restoration Area

¹ Town: Mayo

² Primarily located in Madison County

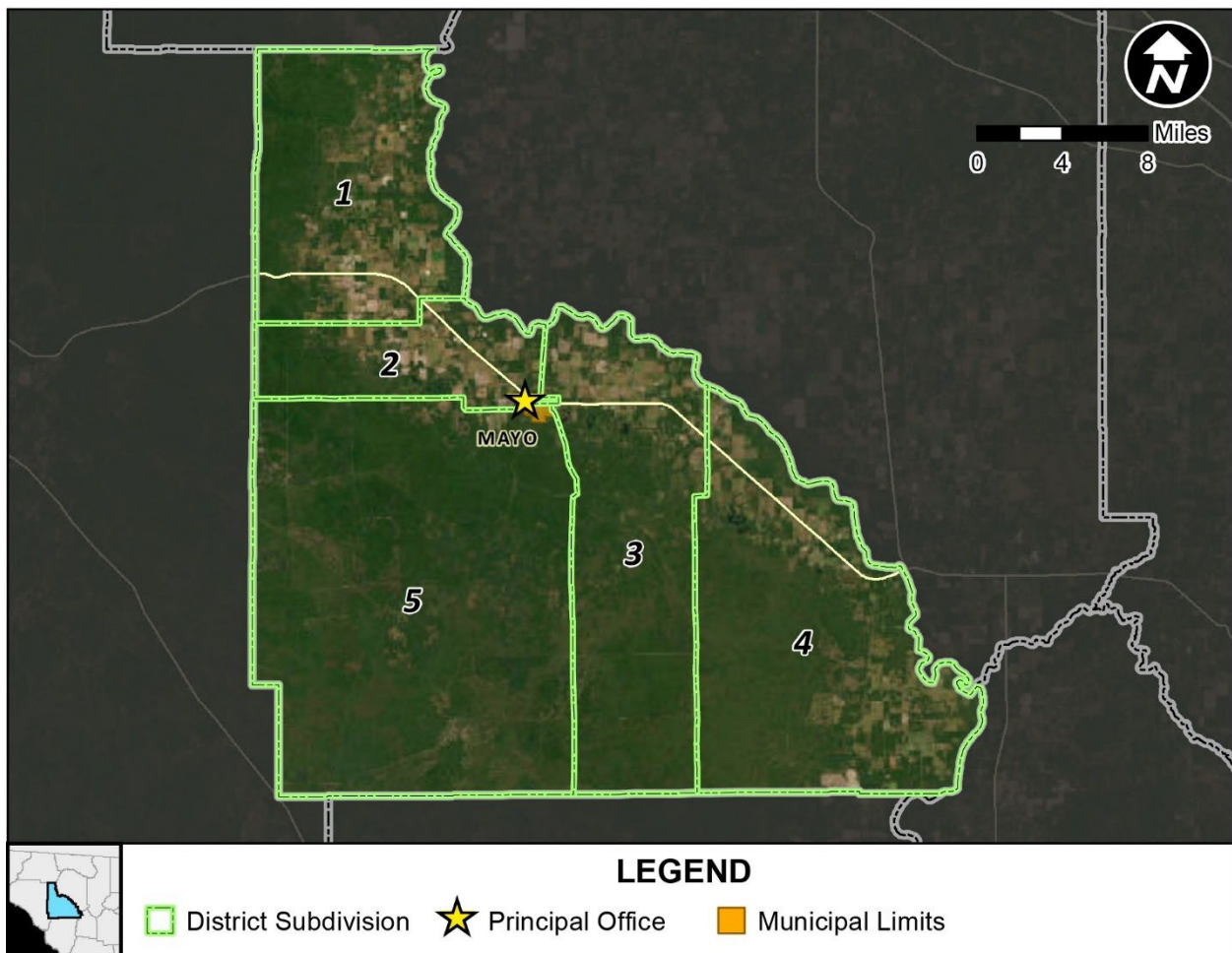
- Stuarts Landing Conservation Area
- Suwannee River Wilderness State Trail
- Troy Spring Conservation Area
- Troy Spring State Park
- Upper Steinhatchee Conservation Area

The District is bounded on the north by Madison County, northeast by Suwannee County, east by Gilchrist County, south by Dixie County, and west by Taylor County. The District’s total area is 548 square miles, including 543 square miles of land and five square miles of water.

The District’s primary office is the University of Florida’s Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Service’s office located at 176 SW Community Circle, Mayo, Florida 32066.

Figure 1 is a map of the District’s service area, based on the map incorporated by reference in Rule [5M-20.002\(4\)\(a\)24.](#), *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 Lafayette Soil and Water Conservation District



(Source: Lafayette 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 8,074 as of April 1, 2023.

District Characteristics

Lafayette SWCD is located in north central Florida. The economy of the service area is specialized and primarily focused on the agriculture and silviculture industries.³ 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 agriculture sector are poultry, dairy, and vegetables. The District's agricultural activity is almost entirely concentrated in a thin strip of land running that parallels the Suwannee River, which forms the District's northeastern and eastern borders with Suwannee and Gilchrist Counties. The District's central, southern, and western portions primarily consist of forests and conservation lands. Highly extractive lumber operations can lead to deforestation, which may lead to erosion and nutrient loss in soils, although the District's flat profile somewhat mitigates the risk of erosion. Portions of the District are included in the Basin Management Action Plan ("BMAP")⁴ area for the Middle and Lower Suwannee River Basin.⁵

The District is largely flat and has the sandy soils characteristic of the Gulf Coastal Lowlands geomorphic province. Due to the District's predominantly flat and low-lying characteristics, wetlands, including Mallory Swamp and San Pedro Bay, comprise roughly half of the District's area. The District's sizeable wetlands present challenges when it comes to managing stormwater and balancing development and drainage against preservation. The District's sandy soils lie on top of a bed of limestone that holds the Floridian Aquifer.⁶ The Floridian Aquifer and the District's other groundwater resources feed dozens of springs along the Suwannee and Steinhatchee Rivers, the most prominent of which is Lafayette Blue Spring.⁷ The waste produced by the District's significant poultry and dairy production operations poses a risk of contaminating the District's surface water and groundwater resources with excess nutrients and pathogens.

³ North Florida Economic Development Partnership. n.d. "Major Employers in Lafayette County." *North Florida Economic Development Partnership*. Accessed June 2, 2024.

https://nflp.org/images/uploads/Lafayette_County_Major_Employers.pdf.

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 Arthur, Jonathan D. 1991. *The Geomorphology, Geology, and Hydrogeology of Lafayette County, Florida*. Open File Report, Tallahassee: Florida Geological Survey. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/pst.000023212114>.

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

Lafayette SWCD was chartered on September 7, 1948, as the Lafayette 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, and rename the District to the Lafayette 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 Lafayette County Supervisor of Elections provided M&J with affidavits completed by four of the current Supervisors affirming that they meet the qualifications to serve as a Supervisor but was not able to provide an affidavit for the fifth Supervisor. During the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024), there have been no vacancies on the Board, as illustrated in Figure 2.

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	Hugh Edwards														
2	Steve Walker							Kevin Barrington							
3	Ryan Sullivan														
4	Maurice Earl Byrd														
5	Kevin Jackson							Dustin Hart							

(Source: Lafayette County Supervisor of Elections records, District Board meeting minutes, District Supervisor history)

During the review period the District met 3 times¹² 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 (June) and 2023 (June). 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 detailed in section II.D: Organization and Governance) of this report.

Neither Lafayette County nor the in-district municipality have adopted any local regulations for the District.

⁸ McLendon, H. S., and H. G. Clayton. 1949. *Biennial Report of the State Soil and Water Conservation Board: January 1, 1947- December 31, 1948*. Biennial Report, Tallahassee: Florida State Soil Conservation Board. <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00075937/00003/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*.

¹² Meetings occurred in June 2021, June 2022, and June 2023

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 Supervisors promote the funding and other resources available to producers from other public entities operating within the District.
- Outreach Events
 - The District uses community events as an opportunity to provide outreach to local landowners and agricultural stakeholders by explaining the programs and services offered by the Suwannee County Conservation District, the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, Suwannee River Water Management District, and other organizations that fund conservation practices.

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.

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. The Conservation Technician is housed at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension office in Lafayette County ("UF/IFAS Extension") and volunteers personal time to assist the District. This Conservation Technician promotes the Best Management Practices Program and assists producers in applying for Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program funding for the purchase of agricultural equipment. The Conservation Technician provides updates on this work at each of the District's Board of Supervisors ("Board") meetings.

UF/IFAS Extension

The District's principal office and meeting location is housed in the UF/IFAS Extension office in Mayo. The District does not regularly collaborate with UF/IFAS Extension staff on outreach events and UF/IFAS staff have not attended any Board meetings during the review period.

Lafayette County Board of County Commissioners

The Lafayette County Board of County Commissioners ("LBoCC") provides some financial support to the District, allocating funds that, during the review period, have been used to assist with paying for the meals associated with the annual District meeting, paying for website costs, and paying the annual Association of Florida Conservation Districts dues. The District does not have any agreements with LBoCC for this funding. The District's lack of funding agreements with LBoCC does not appear to be an issue at this time.

Suwannee River Water Management District

The District is involved with outreach events to promote Suwannee River Water Management District (“SRWMD”) programs that promote SRWMD conservation cost-sharing programs and other programs to fund agricultural conservation improvements in the District’s service area. The Suwannee County Conservation District Conservation Technician who is assigned to Lafayette County provides updates at each Board meeting about SRWMD Cost-Share Programs.

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	\$2,356	\$1,326	\$0

(Source: District financial records)

Figure 4: FY23 Program Staffing

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

(Source: Interviews with the District volunteer)

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	1	1 owned by the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension	1 meeting space/record storage space

(Source: Interviews with the District volunteer)

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

In an interview, the District's volunteer identified the Board of Supervisors' 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. 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 producers in the District's service area.

Outreach Events

The District uses community events as an opportunity to provide outreach to local landowners and agricultural stakeholders by explaining the programs and services offered in the District. During the review period, the District participated in one outreach event, the Florida Farm Bureau "This Farm CARES" dinner.

Analysis of Service Delivery

The District's outreach efforts and participation in organized outreach events are aligned with the soil and water conservation district purpose statement established in s. [582.02\(4\)](#), *Florida Statutes*. These efforts have incurred minimal costs over the review period.

Some activities that are provided by other soil and water conservation districts are not provided by Lafayette SWCD, such as the National Association of Conservation Districts poster and photo contests and the Association of Florida Conservation Districts/Florida Conservation District Employees Association speech contest. This means that youth within the District may not have the same opportunities to learn about conservation-minded practices as youth within other districts.

Some programs and activities may be offered by other districts and allow participation by Lafayette District residents. The Suwannee County Conservation District hosts the Suwannee Regional Envirothon, which is open to participants from a number of surrounding counties, including Lafayette County.

The District does not collect any data related to its outreach efforts and event participation to allow for effective evaluation of these services' impact. The District's outreach programs have minimal costs.

M&J evaluated potential adjustments to the District’s organization and administration, including adding in a staff position or additional volunteers. These revisions would not be feasible within the current District budget, and likely would not result in improvements to the District’s operations.

Comparison to Similar Services/Potential Consolidations

The District’s primary services are outreach to individual members of the agricultural community, as well as sponsoring the Florida Farm Bureau “This Farm CARES” dinner outreach event. This outreach focuses on promoting the services and programs offered by other public entities who may operate within the District’s service area.

While the outreach of the Supervisors may be similar to outreach provided by other public entities, the District’s outreach model benefits from the individual relationships and networks of the Supervisors, which may allow opportunities to reach producers not yet reached through other public entities, or allow for increased outreach opportunities in addition to those provided by other public entities.

II.B: Resource Management

Program Staffing

Lafayette SWCD did not employ or contract with any staff during the review period.

The District utilized the services of one regular volunteer during the review period. The District’s volunteer was a Conservation Technician employed by the Lafayette County Board of County Commissioners (“LBoCC”) to provide Best Management Practices (“BMP”)¹³ assistance to agricultural producers in Lafayette County and the surrounding area through the Suwannee County Conservation District’s (“SCCD”) contract with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (“FDACS”). The volunteer’s work with the District was not required as a part of their work as a Conservation Technician and the volunteer did not receive any compensation for the time that they spent working on behalf of the District. The volunteer primarily assisted with administrative tasks, such as preparing meeting minutes and administering the District’s finances.

Equipment and Facilities

Vehicles

Lafayette SWCD has not owned or operated any vehicles during the review period.

Facilities

The District held meetings and stored files out of the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension office in Mayo during the review period.

Major Equipment

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

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”

Current and Historic Revenues and Expenditures

The District’s primary source of program funding during the review period consisted of intermittent contributions from LBoCC. The District used its LBoCC funding to sponsor local conservation-related events, provide meals for Board meetings, and pay administrative expenses, such as Association of Florida Conservation Districts dues and website hosting fees. Figure 6 shows the District’s recorded revenues during the review period.

Figure 6: Revenues by Source and Fiscal Year

Revenue Source	Total Revenues			
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 (through 12/31/2023)
LBoCC	\$0	\$0	\$1,500	\$0
SCCD	\$225	\$562	\$856	\$0
Soil Samples	\$100	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$325	\$562	\$2,356	\$0

(Source: District financial records)

The District also purchased office supplies for the LBoCC-employed Conservation Technician. SCCD used the funds from its contract with FDACS to reimburse the District for all expenses related to supplying the LBoCC-employed Conservation Technician. Early in the review period, an agricultural producer in the area paid the District for soil sample testing. Figure 7 details the District’s expenditures by program and fiscal year.

Figure 7: Expenditures by Program and Fiscal Year

Program or Activity	Total Expenditures			
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 (through 12/31/2023)
Operating Expenses	\$0	\$122	\$470	\$0
Conservation Technician Supplies	\$225	\$562	\$856	\$0
Soil Samples	\$90	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$315	\$684	\$1,326	\$0

(Source: District financial records)

The District did not have any long-term debt or contract out any services during the review period.

Trends and Sustainability

The District has received intermittent financial support from LBoCC during the review period and provided limited programs and activities. The District can maintain its current expenditure levels using only the funding received from LBoCC.

The District service area is served by a Conservation Technician employed through SCCD's contract with FDACS and this employee has chosen to volunteer personal time assisting with recordkeeping and financial management for the District. If this employee separates from this position or if SCCD chooses another method for service delivery within Lafayette District's boundaries, the District's Supervisors would themselves be required to complete all the recordkeeping and financial management activities currently performed by the volunteer.

II.C: Performance Management

Strategic and Other Future Plans

Per the District's Board of Supervisors ("Board") minutes from the review period and interviews with the District volunteer, 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 the District volunteer, 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 and interviews with the District volunteer, 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 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 each fiscal year (*i.e.*, June 30, or nine months after September 30). The District submitted its FY21 and FY22 Annual Financial Reports to the Florida Department of Financial Services within the compliance timeframe. The District submitted its FY23 Annual Financial Report to the Florida Department of Financial Services on July 3, 2024, several days after the deadline established by s. [218.32](#), *Florida Statutes*.

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 and interviews with the District's volunteer, the District has not conducted performance reviews or collected feedback from stakeholders during the review period.

Recommendation: The District should consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from local partner agencies and residents of the District's service area with whom the District has worked, 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 reviewed election records provided by the Lafayette County Supervisor of Elections and a District-created Supervisor list to assess the District's Supervisor history and compliance with Supervisor eligibility rules. All five Supervisors were re-elected in the 2022 general election and are still in office today. M&J reviewed affidavits filed with the Lafayette County Supervisor of Elections by four of the five Supervisors elected in the 2022 general election that affirm that the Supervisors meet the qualifications for office established in s. [582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, but was not provided with an affidavit for the fifth Supervisor. The District's volunteer provided a summary of all five Supervisors' current engagement in agriculture, but M&J cannot independently verify compliance with the qualifications established in s. [582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*.

Recommendation: The District should consider collaborating with the Lafayette County Supervisor of Elections to ensure that 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 of Supervisors ("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.

The District provides a list of Board meeting dates 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 notices for those meetings in the *Florida Administrative Register*. In interviews, the District's volunteer indicated that the District does not have any processes for noticing public meetings other than by providing meeting dates to the Association of Florida Conservation Districts. 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 of Supervisors meetings held during the review period. M&J also searched the *Florida Administrative Register* and did not identify notices posted for any Board meetings held during the review period.

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

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

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 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.
<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

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<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 local partner agencies and residents of the District’s service area with whom the District has worked, 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 partner agencies and residents 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 Lafayette County Supervisor of Elections to ensure that 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 Lafayette 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 significant ● Costs: None ● Statutory Considerations: None
<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

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<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. Lafayette SWCD voted to request dissolution and therefore provided no response.

Appendix A



Lafayette Soil and Water Conservation District
176 SW Community Circle, Suite – C • Mayo, FL 32066 • (386) 294-1735, Ext. 3

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Lafayette County Soil & Water Conservation District is a governmental subdivision of the State of Florida, and was established September 7, 1948, under Florida Statutes 582; and

WHEREAS, the Lafayette County Soil & Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors met on July 30, 2024, and deliberated on whether the District was administratively practicable and feasible under F.S. Chapter 582; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors found that it is not.

NOW THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Board of Supervisors of the Lafayette County Soil & Water Conservation District has determined that the Lafayette County Soil & Water Conservation District is NOT administratively practicable and feasible under the provisions of F.S. Chapter 582, and requests that the Florida Commissioner of Agriculture issue a certificate thus finding.

Resolution Adopted on this 30th day of July 2024.



Ryan W. Sullivan, Board Chairman

ATTEST:



Dustin C.F. Hart, Board Secretary

CONSERVATION • DEVELOPMENT • SELF-GOVERNMENT