

Seminole 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

- Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors is active, meeting most months in the review period.
- Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District has no consistent funding, resulting in limited District programs and activities but includes an annual environmental contest for students and private well testing for residents.
- Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District has no inventory, facilities, vehicles, staff, or consistent revenues and expenditures. The District’s operations are all conducted in conjunction with other public entities and the District’s contributions to these events are typically volunteering Supervisor time rather than funding.
- Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District’s operations are guided by a strategic plan and list of goals for both the District’s activities and future land use. The District has not developed documented performance measures.

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 Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District (“Seminole 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 Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District is to provide the administration of programs to conserve and promote healthy soils, water, forests, and wildlife in Seminole County.”

Service Area

When the District was established in 1947, the service area included the entirety of Seminole County, and the current borders and territory remain the same. The District’s service area includes unincorporated Seminole County; the County’s seven cities;¹ and part or all of the following federal and State conservation lands:

- Charles H. Bronson State Forest
- Lake Jesup Conservation Area
- Lake Monroe Conservation Area
- Little Big Econ State Forest
- Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park
- Mills Creek Woodlands
- Wekiva River Aquatic Preserve
- Wekiva River Buffer Conservation Area
- Wekiwa Springs State Park

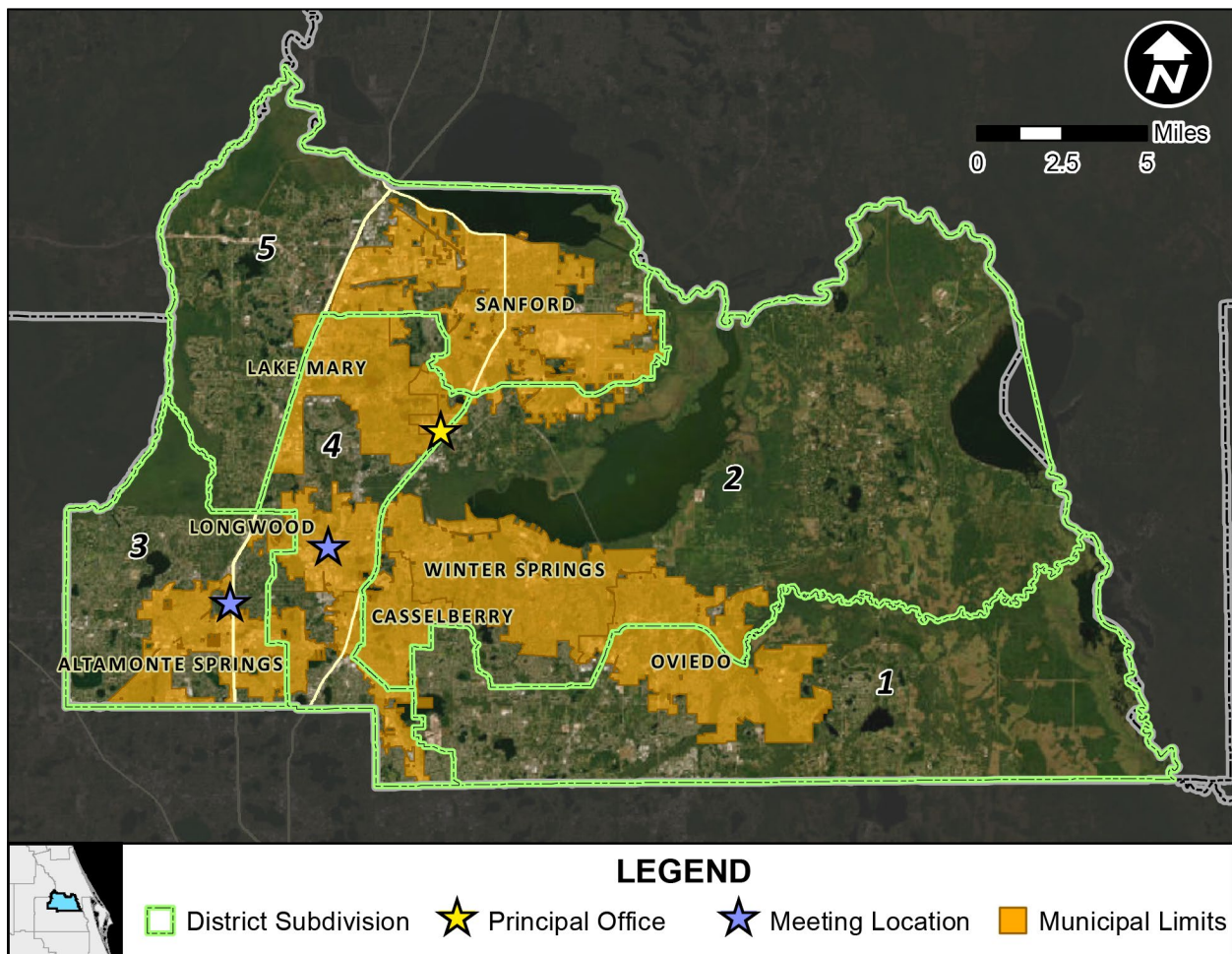
The District is bounded on the north by Volusia County, east by Brevard County, south by Orange County, and west by Lake County. The total area within the District is 345 of square miles, with 309 square miles of land and 36 square miles of water.

¹ Cities: Altamonte Springs, Casselberry, Lake Mary, Longwood, Oviedo, Sanford, Winter Springs.

The District’s primary office and meeting location is 250 County Home Road, Sanford, Florida 32773 – the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension office in Seminole County. The District previously met at Longwood City Hall for Board of Supervisors meetings and in the Community Room at the Seminole County Sheriff’s Office West Division Offices in Altamonte Springs for occasional Board work sessions.

Figure 1 is a map of the District’s service area, based on the map incorporated by reference in [Rule 5M-20.002\(3\)\(a\)41, Florida Administrative Code](#), showing the District’s boundaries, electoral subdivisions, major municipalities within the service area, the District’s principal office, and a secondary meeting location used by Supervisors for monthly workshop meetings, which are open to the public but do not usually include the conduct of regular business.

Figure 1: Map of Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District



(Source: Seminole County GIS, Florida Commerce Special District Profile, Board Meeting Minutes)²

Population

Based on the Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research population estimates, the population within the District’s service area was 486,839 as of April 1, 2023.

² Note: Yellow star represents current meeting location. Blue stars represent previous meeting locations.

District Characteristics

Seminole SWCD is located in the central part of Florida. The economy of the service area is diversified. Given its proximity to Orlando, major economic drivers include the housing industry, the hospitality industry, healthcare services, and educational institutions. The District has a mix of urban and rural areas. The rural areas are more prominent in the eastern and northwestern parts of the county, where agricultural activities are more common. Key agricultural products include nursery plants and citrus. There is also a presence of cattle ranching and other livestock operations. The service area experiences a humid subtropical climate, with hot, humid summers and mild winters. Environmental phenomena that might threaten the District include hurricanes, flooding, and occasional droughts. These weather patterns can significantly impact agriculture and water conservation efforts.³

The topography of Seminole is generally flat, with some rolling hills. The area includes several lakes, wetlands, and the St. Johns River, which influence land use and conservation practices. The region's geology primarily consists of sandy soils and clay, which affects agricultural productivity and water management.⁴ Lake Jesup, Lake Harney, Lake Monroe, the Middle St. Johns River Basin, Smith Canal, the Wekiva River, and the Econolatchee River have Basin Management Action Plans.^{5,6}

The diverse urban and rural landscape, agricultural activities, and environmental challenges create distinct community needs. Urban areas require efficient stormwater management and pollution control, while rural areas need support for sustainable agricultural practices and water resource management. Water resource management is necessary in all areas of the county. The District's education, conservation practices, and disaster preparedness efforts are crucial for addressing these needs.

I.B: Creation and Governance

Seminole SWCD was chartered on November 7, 1947, as the Seminole Soil Conservation District following a successful referendum of local landowners and subsequent petition to the Florida State Soil Conservation Board. The District was created under the authority of the State Soil Conservation Districts Act (herein referred to as "ch. 582, *Florida Statutes*").⁷ 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 Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District.⁸

³ UF/IFAS Extension Seminole County. 2024. *2024 Guide to Seminole County Farms and Farmer Markets*. January 24. Accessed May 19, 2024. <https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/seminoleco/2024/01/24/2024-guide-to-seminole-county-farms-and-farmers-markets/>.

⁴ United States Department of Agriculture. 1990. "Soil Survey of Seminole County, Florida." Soil Conservation Service, Washington.

⁵ 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."

⁶ Florida Department of Environmental Protection. 2024. *Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs)*. April 19. Accessed May 7, 2024. <https://floridadep.gov/dear/water-quality-restoration/content/basin-management-action-plans-bmaps>

⁷ s. 582, *Florida Statutes*

⁸ 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*.⁹

As of this report, the District has five Supervisors. At the time of writing this report, M&J has not been provided with documentation affirming the Supervisor’s required qualifications. M&J has also requested copies of any signed affirmation of qualification from the Seminole Supervisor of Elections, which have been provided. Therefore, M&J is able to confirm all current Supervisor’s compliance with the required qualifications. During the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024), there has been one vacancy on the Board, as illustrated in Figure 2. The District had a vacancy from June 2023 to December 2023. 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	Amy Volpe				Sarah Hall				Jennifer Webb							
2	Jennifer Webb								Karen Heriot							
3	Jason Kirby								Megan Betche							
4	Edmond Young								Gabriel Milch							
5	Karen Heriot								Pat Wilson						Peggy Green	

(Source: District meeting minutes)

During the review period, the District met 38 times¹⁰ 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 (April and September) and 2023 (January, February, and April). The District also held 12 work sessions within the review period.¹¹ M&J has determined that the District did not properly notice Board meetings and work sessions. 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.

Seminole County created a land acquisition program in 2023 named Seminole Forever, which “aims to protect and conserve lands by identifying and acquiring properties that conserve green space, provide passive recreational opportunities, and protect water resources and natural habitats.” An ordinance was passed in 2023 stating that Supervisors from Seminole SWCD can serve on the County’s Acquisition and Restoration Committee, which runs the Seminole Forever program, as nonvoting ex-officio members.¹²

⁹ Including s. 582.15, Florida Statutes, s. 582.19, Florida Statutes, Rule Rule 5M-20.002, Florida Administrative Code, and ch. 2022-191, Laws of Florida

¹⁰ Meetings occurred in January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, and December 2021; January, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, and December 2022; January, February, March, April, May, July, August, September, October, November, and December 2023; and January, February, March, and April 2024.

¹¹ Work sessions occurred in January, February, March, April, May, July, August, and October 2023; and January, February, March, and April 2024.

¹² Seminole County Code of Ordinance (Ord. No. 2023-17, § 2, 8-8-2023) s. 190.203(c)

I.C: Programs and Activities

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

- Envirothon
 - Envirothon is an outdoor competition in which students develop hands-on skills related to aquatic ecology, forestry, soil and land use, wildlife, and other current environmental issues. High school teams must compete at the regional level to qualify for the state competition.
- Land Judging Contest
 - The Land Judging Contest is a statewide competition for students who participate in Future Farmers of America. It is hosted by different counties each year to give students a variety of soils to examine.
- Wildlife Photo Contest
 - The District held a Wildlife Photo Contest, awarding prizes, and continue to display the winning photos in the County Commission Building.
- Local Working Group
 - In 2021, 2022, and 2024 the NRCS conservationist was required to hold a local working group with agricultural producers in Seminole County to determine the spending priorities for the Farm Bill programs.
- Private Well Water Testing
 - The District tests private wells to screen for bacteria and other contaminants. Private well owners who attend meetings of the Geneva Citizens Association can bring water samples to be tested. The District provides the water testing service in coordination with a Water Resource Specialist from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences Seminole Extension office.
- Community Outreach
 - The district has a table at several community events each year including: EarthFest in Casselberry, the Arbor Day tree give away in Oviedo, and the Great Day in the Country in Oviedo. Typically, the supervisors hand out information about soil health.
- Agriculture Workshops
 - The District holds a variety of workshops on topics such as pasture management and dealing with invasive or poisonous plants. Supervisors speak at some of these workshops, while external speakers are brought in for others like the pasture management workshop.
- The SERVE Program
 - District Supervisors participate in the Seminole County SERVE Program as leaders of small groups of volunteers, typically students. SERVE cleans out creek beds, restores wetlands, and removes invasive plants from lakes and waterways.

- Advocacy for Conservation and Related Infrastructure
 - District Supervisors have relationships with other elected officials, stakeholders, and civic groups. Supervisors use afforded opportunities to advocate for the protection of environmentally sensitive lands and critical infrastructure projects that serve the District’s goals of water quality and water conservation.
- Track Pollution Using DEP Data
 - While many urban areas contribute pollution in the form of fertilizer run off to the District’s waterways, one municipality additionally has sewage spills. One of the District Supervisors takes the data from the DEP website, where the location is given in latitude and longitude, and translates the location to a point on a map making it easier for residents to understand. The map and description of the spill are posted on the Districts’ Facebook Page.
- District 75th Anniversary Exhibit
 - On the 75th anniversary of Seminole SWCD’s creation, the District collaborated with the Seminole History Museum to create an exhibit using District archive materials.
- Ag Conservationist of the Year Award
 - At the request of the NRCS District conservationist, the District created an Ag Conservationist of the Year Award and presented it to a recipient chosen by the District conservationist.
- Present Information to Civic group
 - District Supervisors were the main speakers at a meeting of the South Seminole Sertoma. It consisted of a 20-minute presentation followed by 30 minutes of questions and discussion.

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.

- City of Longwood
- University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Office
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Osceola and Orange Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Seminole County Sheriff’s Office

City of Longwood

The District asserted a verbal agreement exists with the City of Longwood, allowing the Board to meet monthly at the Longwood City Hall for no cost. The District met at the Longwood City Hall through 2022.

University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Office

The District has a verbal agreement with the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences Extension office in Seminole County (“UF/IFAS Extension”) that allows the Board to meet monthly at the UF/IFAS Extension building for no cost. The District has also coordinated with UF/IFAS Extension on holding workshops and running the Private Well Water Testing program.

Natural Resource Conservation Service

The District has a Memorandum of Agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”), which allows for mutual information sharing between NRCS and the District. A Conservationist from NRCS regularly attends District Board meetings to give updates about financial assistance programs available. The District has held workshops on behalf of NRCS, teaching subjects such as pasture management and combating invasive weeds.

Osceola and Orange Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Seminole SWCD collaborates with the neighboring Osceola and Orange Soil and Water Conservation Districts to run the annual regional Envirothon.

Seminole County Sheriff’s Office

The Seminole County Sheriff’s Office has a community room that is available to be reserved at no cost for civic and community meetings. This community room was reserved for the Board’s work sessions for drafting its five-year plan.

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. Descriptions of the District’s resources and the change in resources over the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024) will be included in section II.B (Resource Management) of this report.

Figure 3: FY23 Finances

	Revenues	Expenditures	Long-term Debt
Total for Year	\$2717.29	\$458	\$0

(Source: Transaction Summary provided by District)

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: Interviews with District Supervisors)

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 University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension 1 owned by the Seminole County Sheriff's Office	1 Current Meeting Space 1 Former Meeting Space

(Source: Interviews 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

M&J has identified the following programs that the District has performed during the review period.

Envirothon

Envirothon is an outdoor competition encouraging student interest in natural resource conservation and environmental management. Students in grades 9-12 work in teams to compete at a local or regional level and develop hands-on skills related to five core environmental subjects – aquatic ecology, forestry, soil and land use, wildlife, and a current environmental issue selected by competition organizers each year. Winning teams have the opportunity to advance to the Statewide and national competitions. The District has collaborated with neighboring soil and water conservation districts to run an annual regional Envirothon. The event is primarily hosted by Seminole SWCD, with Osceola and Orange Soil and Water Conservation Districts volunteering time to help run the event. The event was canceled in FY21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in FY22 due to a lack of a facility, but the event was held in FY23.

Land Judging Contest

The Land Judging Contest is a statewide competition for students who participate in Future Farmers of America. It is hosted by different counties each year to give students a variety of soils to examine. These students are expected to know the science of healthy soil in preparation for their entry into an agricultural profession. Approximately 250 students attended the event.

Wildlife Photo Contest

As a result of the popularity of the images of wild animals captured by the five trail cameras owned by the District, the wildlife images attracted citizens to the District's Facebook page. The District held a Wildlife Photo Contest, awarding prizes, and continue to display the winning photos in the County Commission Building.

Local Working Group

In 2021, 2022, and 2024 the NRCS conservationist was required to hold a local working group with agricultural producers to determine the spending priorities for Farm Bill programs. The District hosted these events. Each year it has grown. The keys to success are renting a hall in Geneva, in the rural portion of the county. The most recent event had 23 producers as well as a county commissioner who stayed for the entire event. To defray the cost of the hall rental, a drawing was held for a rain barrel. In September of 2023, at the AFCD Annual Meeting, soil and water conservation districts were tasked with finding applicants for NRCS programs.

Private Well Water Testing

In coordination with the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension office in Seminole County (“UF/IFAS Extension”) and its Water Resource Specialist, the District supports a program to help private well owners screen their water for bacteria, salinity, and 1,4-dioxin.¹³ The project was kicked off in November 2023, with a District Supervisor making a presentation at the Geneva Citizens Association informing attendees of the project. The District attended the meeting in February 2024, where private well owners brought samples of their well water to be tested by UF/IFAS.

Community Outreach

The district has a table at several community events each year including: EarthFest in Casselberry, the Arbor Day tree give away in Oviedo, and the Great Day in the Country in Oviedo. Typically the supervisors hand out information about soil health. Children dig in a box of soil to find earthworms which they take home in a sandwich bag. No other group promotes healthy soil.

Agricultural Workshops

The District helps conduct and advertise various workshops in coordination with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”), UF/IFAS Extension, and Seminole County Public Schools. Alongside an NRCS Conservationist, the District has held workshops intended to inform local producers of opportunities to obtain funding or reimbursement through NRCS cost-share programs. In coordination with the UF/IFAS Extension, the District has supported workshops on the eradication of poisonous plants and the newest thinking on pasture management. The District also visits Seminole County Public Schools that have vegetable gardens and provides the schools with hoop structures (metal frames that can serve as a canopy or cover for a garden) for their gardens and agriculture projects. The garden projects themselves are funded by Seminole County Public Schools, with the District providing resources paid for by Supervisors themselves.

The SERVE Program

The District Supervisors participate in the Seminole County SERVE Program as leaders of small groups of volunteers, typically students. SERVE cleans out creek beds, restores wetlands, removes invasive plants from Waterways.

Advocacy Efforts

The District was successful in two major advocacy efforts. The first helped the City of Oviedo receiving a \$10 million federal appropriation to upgrade their wastewater treatment plant. For the second, District advocacy helped the Florida Forever program place in conservatorship a piece of property on a major aquifer that was in disuse. The District also helped create the Seminole Forever program, a local version of the Florida Forever program, that could be used in a similar way.

¹³ 1,4-Dioxin is a contaminant formed during the production of organic compounds, including some herbicides. 1,4-Dioxin is classified as a persistent organic pollutant, meaning it takes a long time to break down once in the environment. Consuming 1,4-Dioxin can cause cancer, immune system damage, and developmental problems.

Track Pollution Using DEP Data

While many urban areas contribute pollution in the form of fertilizer run off to the District's waterways, one municipality additionally has sewage spills. One of the District Supervisors takes the data from the DEP website, where the location is given in latitude and longitude, and translates the location to a point on a map making it easier for residents to understand. The sewage spills which affect that lake contribute to toxic algae blooms during parts of the year. The SWCD is interested in tracking this because cattle drink the water from that same lake. A large portion of the consistent pollution is from sewage being discharged into Lake Jessup. The map and description of the spill are posted on the Districts' Facebook Page.

District 75th Anniversary Exhibit

On the 75th anniversary of Seminole SWCD's creation, the District collaborated with the Seminole History Museum to create an exhibit using District archive materials. The exhibit was on display in the museum for 1 month.

Ag Conservationist of the year Award

At the request of the NRCS District conservationist, the District created an Ag Conservationist of the Year Award and presented it to a recipient chosen by the District conservationist.

Presented Information to Civic Group

District Supervisors were the main speakers at a meeting of the South Seminole Sertoma. It consisted of a 20-minute presentation followed by 30 minutes of questions and discussion.

Analysis of Service Delivery

M&J evaluated each of the District's programs or activities and assessed whether the program or activity aligns with the District's statutory purpose and authority.

All of the programs and activities identified by M&J are within the scope of the District's statutory purpose and authority. Programs and activities meant to provide or assist in providing training and education (Envirothon, workshops), activities related to conducting training events, attendance at meetings, and the provision of financial support align with the District's purpose to conduct conservation education programs. M&J has evaluated the District's service delivery and has not identified any alternate methods for the District to provide services that would reduce costs or improve performance.

Comparison to Similar Services/Potential Consolidations

The following soil and water conservation programs are provided by other public and nonprofit entities within the District's service area:

- The UF/IFAS Extension partners with the local 4-H chapter to provide agriculture and conservation educational programming for youth within the District's service area, and is a resource between agriculture scientists and the local community.
- NRCS provides technical advice and data collection assistance to landowners implementing conservation practices.

- The Seminole County Department of Environmental Services disseminates information on water conservation to residents. The Department of Environmental Services maintains a Water Conservation Demonstration Garden in partnership with the St. Johns Water Management District, which demonstrates “Florida-friendly” landscaping that conserves water and reduces the use of pesticides.

The District does not have consistent funding, and therefore, the events that the District hosts are primarily in coordination with other groups, including NRCS, UF/IFAS Extension, and other soil and water conservation districts. District Supervisors have stated that, because the entities above provide water management advocacy to the District, their focus is more on soil health to avoid duplicative efforts.

II.B: Resource Management

Program Staffing

The District does not employ or pay the salary of any full-time, part-time, or contract employees. As the District has no recorded expenditures, the District’s form of contribution to the events it participates in consists primarily of organizing and leading the event and time dedicated by the Board Supervisors as volunteers and does not include financial donations, only in-kind donations.

Equipment and Facilities

Seminole SWCD does not own or rent any equipment or facilities. The District Board, at the beginning of the review period, held its meeting in Longwood City Hall for no cost through a verbal agreement with the City. The regular meeting venue was changed in January 2023 to the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences Extension office in Seminole County (“UF/IFAS Extension”) building, which is also being used at no charge and through a verbal agreement.

Figure 6: Ownership Status of District Facilities by Type

Facility Type	Ownership Status			
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Primary Meeting Space	Meeting Space owned by Longwood City Hall and used by the District at no cost	Meeting Space owned by Longwood City Hall and used by the District at no cost	Meeting Space owned by UF/IFAS and used by the District at no cost	Meeting Space owned by UF/IFAS and used by the District at no cost
Alternative Meeting Space	N/A	N/A	Meeting space owned by Seminole County Sheriff's Office and used by the District at no cost	N/A

(Source: District Meeting Minutes)

Current and Historic Revenues and Expenditures

Seminole SWCD does not have consistent revenue sources. As such, the District has not developed an annual budget and does not have documented expenditures. In an interview with M&J, District Supervisors asserted that any money the District spent within the review period was donated by the Supervisors and not documented or recorded as a District expenditure. In its FY22 Annual Financial Report, the District reported \$168 in operating expenditures and a cash balance of \$131. In FY23, the District had \$458 in expenditures, consisting of bank fees, dues to the Association of Florida Conservation Districts (“AFCD”), and the cost of a P.O. box. The district had \$2,717.29 in revenues in FY23.

Trends and Sustainability

The District will need to obtain a consistent and reliable source of revenue to improve its long-term financial position and continue its ability to aid the community. Seminole SWCD should explore opportunities to secure funding from entities such as the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (“FDACS”), Seminole County Board of County Commissioners, or solicit donations from private donors.

Recommendation: The District should consider identifying new sources of revenue to fund District outreach and conservation programming. The District could consider identifying grant opportunities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, FDACS, the National Association of Conservation Districts, or another public or private conservation-related entity. The District could also consider proposing an agreement with the Seminole County Board of County Commissioners to allow for the District to present an annual budget request, which would be subject to approval by the Board of County Commissioners.

II.C: Performance Management

Strategic and Other Future Plans

The District, in September 2023, developed a strategic plan for five years through 2028. The plan outlines the guiding principles and perspectives that direct the District’s operations and services. The District then details how it intends to use the strategic plan to develop work plans for each program. After listing the District’s natural resource priorities, as documented in the Goals and Objectives subsection below, the District lists its action plans to address these priorities. The individual work plans consist of:

- A Water Quality Plan to address excessive nutrients and water pollution within the District
- A Conservation Plan to better perform outreach and teach best management practices to the community
- An Invasive and Poisonous Plant Species Plan to hold workshops and aid in eradication efforts within the District
- A Habitat Conservation Plan to better engage the public about the importance of rural areas to wildlife conservation
- A Flooding Education Plan to help educate citizens on flood planning
- A Fundraising Plan to help the District raise money to pay for these initiatives

Each plan includes a number of steps toward achieving the plan’s objective. This strategic plan, as it currently exists, is a detailed topline review of the District’s priorities and strategies to address them. The District has also converted the framework of this strategic plan into a template spreadsheet it has sent to the boards of other districts. In interviews with M&J personnel, District Supervisors asserted this plan could serve as a model for standardized strategic planning within soil and water conservation districts.

Goals and Objectives

Seminole SWCD developed a strategic plan in September 2023. In this plan, the District articulates its priority areas with goals and desired conditions for each area. These priority areas are:

- Water Quality: Ensuring the District maintains clean drinking water
- Soil Health: Ensuring the District maintains healthy soil and works to prevent erosion
- Water Quantity: Performing outreach regarding flood preparedness and water conservation
- Farmland Protection: Ensuring the District maintains a “critical mass” of farmland and agricultural infrastructure
- Informing/Involving the Public in Conservation Practices: Ensuring the public is aware of the District’s outreach and educational programs

Performance Measures and Standards

Seminole SWCD does not have any performance measures or standards, written or unwritten, related to program offerings that the District provides or activities that the District participates in. The District is not party to any contracts that contain required performance metrics to track.

Recommendation: The District should consider identifying performance measures and standards as part of the refinement of its strategic plan, such as number of interactions at outreach events. 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 toward the goals and objectives 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 has developed a strategic plan, and a list of conservation priorities as part of that plan. While the strategic plan will require additional refinement of its action steps and the development of performance measures to accurately track progress, the plan’s development did use the District’s statutory purpose and Supervisor insight on the needs of the community.

As stated earlier in this section of the report, M&J recommends that the District consider developing and adopting performance measures and 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

Seminole 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 (September 30).

Pursuant to [s. 218.32](#), *Florida Statutes*, the District is required to submit an Annual Financial Report every fiscal year by the compliance deadline nine months after the end of the fiscal year (June 30 of the following year). The District filed its FY21 Annual Financial Report within the compliance deadline, but its FY22 Annual Financial Report was filed after the compliance deadline. In addition, the District did not submit its FY23 Annual Financial Report by the compliance deadline of June 30, 2024.

Seminole SWCD does not meet the criteria in [s. 218.39](#), *Florida Statutes*, to require the District to submit an annual 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.

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 is meeting the requirements of [s. 218.32\(1\)\(a\)](#), *Florida Statutes*.

Performance Reviews and District Performance Feedback

During the review period, Seminole SWCD did not receive any performance reviews for District operations. The District does not have a system of feedback collection from members of the public or other stakeholders regarding its programs and activities.

Recommendation: The District should consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from partners, agricultural producers that the District serves, and other conservation stakeholders. As the District develops and implements programming, the District should consider creating a process to systematically review feedback.

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. Beginning with the November 2022 Supervisor elections, Chapter [2022-191](#), *Laws of Florida*, amended [s. 582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, and required that candidates for election to a Supervisor seat had to live in the district and have agricultural experience, as defined by the Florida Legislature. Candidates in the November 2022 election were required by [s. 582.19\(1\)\(b\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, to sign an affirmation that they met the residency and qualification requirements.

Since the start of the January 2023 term, one Supervisor has been appointed. Signed affirmations of qualification have been provided by the Seminole Supervisor of Elections for the current elected and appointed Supervisors. M&J is able to confirm that all Supervisors who have held a seat since January 2023 have signed an affirmation and submitted it to the Seminole Supervisor of Elections.

Two of the five Supervisor seats are up for election in November 2024.

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.

The District submits meeting notices to the Association of Florida Conservation Districts to be posted in the Florida Register. Notices are also posted on the District's public Facebook page. No other notices have been posted in local newspapers, confirmed by a review of local public notice archives.

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 may deny the public an opportunity to attend meetings and participate in District business. Violation of ch. [50, Florida Statutes](#), may subject District Supervisors and staff to penalties, including fees, fines, 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 its meeting notice procedures to ensure compliance with [s. 189.015](#) and ch. [50, Florida Statutes](#), that governed notice requirements at the time of each meeting date's applicable notice period. The District should retain records that document is compliance with the applicable statutes.

Retention of Records and Public Access to Documents

The District has posted some meeting minutes and agendas on its public Facebook page, but the most recent one posted was from March 2023. The District also doesn't post meeting minutes on its website, with only two agendas uploaded for the November and December 2023 meetings. Upon M&J request, the District produced meeting minutes going back to January 2019. The District was able to provide the other existing records and documentation requested by M&J for this performance review, and includes the appropriate link to the District's Annual Financial Reports on its website. M&J concludes that there are notable exceptions with the District's records retention and public access to information as required [s. 119.021, Florida Statutes](#).

Recommendation: The District should consider improving record retention procedures and access to public records in accordance with ch. [119, Florida Statutes](#), to enhance transparency and avoid loss of institutional knowledge. The District could consider duplicating records to be stored in separate locations to mitigate loss of records due to technology failures, accidental disposition of records, or natural disasters and other acts of God. The District could further consider designing or acquiring an electronic recordkeeping system, either independently or through partnership with a local government, another soil and water conservation district, or other public entity.

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 identify new sources of revenue to fund District outreach and conservation programming. The District could consider identifying grant opportunities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, FDACS, the National Association of Conservation Districts, or another public or private conservation-related entity. The District could also consider proposing an agreement with the Seminole County Board of County Commissioners to allow for the District to present an annual budget request, which would be subject to approval by the Board of County Commissioners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Benefit: Increase the District’s long-term viability and expand the District’s ability to provide services. • Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. • Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. • Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.
<p>The District should consider refining its current strategic plan to better establish actionable and measurable tasks for accomplishing the District’s plan. The strategic plan should address the needs of the community and the 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 Benefit: A more actionable roadmap to help the District achieve its plans and address the community’s needs. • Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. • Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. • Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.
<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 is meeting the requirements of <u>s. 218.32(1)(a)</u>, <i>Florida Statutes</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Benefit: Help ensure the District submits its Annual Financial Reports before the deadline, protecting the District from penalties. • Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. • Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed.

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.
<p>The District should consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from partners, agricultural producers that the District serves, and other conservation stakeholders. As the District develops and implements programming, the District should consider creating a process to systematically review feedback. The District should consider to use the findings from the review of feedback to refine the District’s future service delivery methods.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Benefit: Allow the District to refine its service offerings to better address the needs of constituents. • Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. • Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. • Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.
<p>The District should consider improving its meeting notice procedures to ensure compliance with s. 189.015 and ch. 50, Florida Statutes, that governed notice requirements at the time of each meeting date’s applicable notice period. The District should retain records that document is compliance with the applicable statutes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Benefit: Ensure better transparency, provide more public access to all meetings, and avoid the risk of penalties. • Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. • Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. • Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider improving record retention procedures and access to public records in accordance with ch. 119, <i>Florida Statutes</i>, to enhance transparency and avoid loss of institutional knowledge. The District could consider duplicating records to be stored in separate locations to mitigate loss of records due to technology failures, accidental disposition of records, or natural disasters and other acts of God. The District could further consider designing or acquiring an electronic recordkeeping system, either independently or through partnership with a local government, another soil and water conservation district, or other public entity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Benefit: Improving transparency and avoiding potential loss of important records. • Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J does not anticipate any adverse consequences as a result of implementation of the recommendation. • Costs: M&J does not anticipate any additional funding needed. • Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.

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



Seminole Soil and Water Conservation District's Response to the Performance Review conducted by M&J.

Recommendations:

New Sources of Revenue:

FDACS: The District requested the contract for the Mobile Irrigation Lab. However, FDACS jumped over Seminole and awarded it to Brevard, a Board without a strategic plan, performance measures or programs and activities. The SSWCD would like to know the criteria for obtaining contracts.

County Commission: The Seminole BOCC funded SSWCD until 20 years ago when young, political opportunists engaged in political canvassing for one of their own running for a higher office then enjoyed pizza at the taxpayers' expense. The BOCC is generous in the amount and type of in-kind services they provide. The SSWCD will not ask the BOCC for funding.

Grant Locator: We are working with a grant locator. She takes a 7% commission.

Refine Strategic Plan

Our next step in our Strategic Plan is to make sure that our plan lines up with the Comprehensive Plans from the County and the seven cities within Seminole County. Soil and Water Conservation Districts can work in all jurisdictions. We can work inside cities when the County Department of Environmental Services cannot. We will seek to collaborate with all municipalities to work towards common goals.

Timeline for Annual Financial Report

SSWCD will refine our timeline, but the problem exists on both sides of the equation.

SSWCD received an email from the CFO's office telling us that we have 45 days to correct the discrepancy between the Annual Financial Report and the audit. The email referred to a DEW.

We are not required to file an audit, so how can there be a discrepancy between the Annual Financial Report and a document that we did not file? The email does not explain the acronym DEW

Meeting Notices

Publishing meeting notices requires a website which will allow the calendar to be changed and documents uploaded. Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) contracts with the Association of Florida Conservation Districts to provide a website at no cost to the district - **Contract Total: \$534,000**

At no time during the review period did SSWCD have access to a website that would allow changes to a calendar, the upload of a document, or the electronic retention of records. We maintain a binder of agendas and minutes as well as storing them on a Google Drive. **No mention is made in this review of retention of emails as public records. This is much more complicated and expensive than agendas and minutes.**

Regulatory Compliance:

No mention is made in this review of complying with Commission of Ethics (update the dashboard) or other regulatory agency.

To be compliant, a SWCD must have:

- a) knowledge of the regulation and timeline
- b) possess the knowledge of how to accomplish the task and
- c) have the technology that makes accomplishing the task possible.

<i>From FDACS Contract</i>	<i>Seminole SWCD's Response</i>
<p>Deliverable #3: Respond to requests from districts for SWCD-related information. The Project Manager shall respond to all incoming requests to include the number of initial e-mail requests and telephone calls responded to, and the topic of concern.</p>	<p>This requirement provides the knowledge of how to accomplish the task.</p> <p>When a treasurer calls AFCD for help finding, logging into, or navigating LogerX to file the financial report, the response is, "call Dept of Finance". The staff person at the Dept of Finance replies, "Read the user manual". In contrast with the Commission of Ethics which provides assistance in complying with their regulations.</p>
<p>Deliverable #4: Provide assistance to the SWCDs, special districts, to develop, host and maintain an official website that complies with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements, minimum content, and include links to those sites on the official website of the Association of Florida Conservation Districts. The RECIPIENT may contract with a website development company to assist with the technical aspects of developing and maintaining an official website pursuant to Chapter 189.069, F.S. at no cost to the SWCDs. The website must comply with and include at a minimum the following information:</p>	<p>This requirement provides the technology that makes accomplishing the task possible.</p> <p>The FDACS contract requires that SWCD's be able to upload documents and schedule meetings on the website calendar.</p> <p>Seminole SWCD had three tech-savy Supervisors attempt to upload documents. When they could not – the little "wheel" just went around indefinitely. AFCD responded to requests for help by saying that technical support costs \$125/hour. When the chairman asked for login and password information explaining that if unsuccessful at uploading documents, she would personally visit the FDACS contract manager, the website was miraculously healed. AFCD controls which websites are able to upload documents and when. This is not a deficiency on the part of SWCD's</p>
<p>Deliverable #5: Assist SWCDs with meeting and reporting requirements. The RECIPIENT shall monitor meeting, recordkeeping, annual auditing and financial reporting requirements of the UNIFORM SPECIAL DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, Chapter 189, F.S.</p>	<p>This requirement speaks directly to the knowledge of the regulation and the timeline</p> <p>Historically this was accomplished by publishing a Supervisor's Handbook containing a calendar of regulatory requirements and the specifics of each requirement. The handbook was last published in 2018 even though FDACS is paying AFCD to update it each year.</p>

The SSWCD has corrected the following for the third time.

Agriculture

Cattle ranching is by far the most prevalent form of agriculture, followed by ornamentals. Cropland, orchards and timber are tied for third. Seminole County has a growing presence of Urban Ag.