

# St. Johns 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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# Table of Contents

<b>Key Takeaways</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>I. Background</b> .....	<b>3</b>
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
<b>II. Findings</b> .....	<b>10</b>
II.A: Service Delivery.....	10
II.B: Resource Management.....	13
II.C: Performance Management.....	16
II.D: Organization and Governance.....	19
<b>III. Recommendations</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>IV. District Response</b> .....	<b>24</b>

## Key Takeaways

- St. Johns Soil and Water Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors was highly active at the beginning of the review period, meeting nearly every month during calendar years 2021 and 2022, but became less active following the election of new Supervisors in the 2022 general election.
- St. Johns Soil and Water Conservation District managed conservation educational programs and was active in conservation advocacy efforts for the first half of the review period but has not carried out any programs since the election of new Supervisors in the 2022 general election.
- St. Johns Soil and Water Conservation District’s operations are supported by a St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners employee. The St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners reimburses the St. Johns Soil and Water Conservation District for dues and fees but the St. Johns Soil and Water Conservation District does not maintain any current revenue sources to fund programming and activities.
- St. Johns Soil and Water Conservation District’s operations are not currently guided by a strategic plan or other goals and objectives, and the District does not evaluate its performance using performance measures and standards.

# I. Background

Pursuant to s. [189.0695\(3\)\(b\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, Mauldin & Jenkins (“M&J”) was engaged by the Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to conduct performance reviews of the State’s 49 independent soil and water conservation districts. This report details the results of M&J’s performance review of St. Johns Soil and Water Conservation District (“St. Johns SWCD” or “District”), conducted with a review period of October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024.

## I.A: District Description

### Purpose

Chapter [582](#) of the *Florida Statutes* concerns soil and water conservation within the State of Florida. The chapter establishes the processes for creation, dissolution, and change of boundaries of districts; the qualifications, election, tenure, and mandatory meetings of District Supervisors; the oversight powers and duties of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; and the powers and purpose of the districts. The District’s statutory purpose, per s. [582.02](#), *Florida Statutes*, is “to provide assistance, guidance, and education to landowners, land occupiers, the agricultural industry, and the general public in implementing land and water resource protection practices. The Legislature intends for soil and water conservation districts to work in conjunction with federal, state, and local agencies in all matters that implement the provisions of [ch. [582](#), *Florida Statutes*].”

The District defines its purpose on the website, which states, “The mission of the St. Johns Soil and Water Conservation District is to provide the administration of programs to conserve soil and improve water quality and quantity on private lands in the county.”

### Service Area

When the District was established in 1955, the service area included the entirety of St. Johns County, and the current borders and territory remain the same.

The District’s service area includes unincorporated St. Johns County, the County’s two cities and one town,<sup>1</sup> and part or all of the following federal and State conservation lands:

- 12 Mile Swamp Conservation Area
- Anastasia State Park
- Deep Creek Conservation Area
- Deep Creek State Forest
- Faver-Dykes State Park
- Gourd Island Conservation Area
- Guana River Marsh Aquatic Preserve
- Guana River Wildlife Management Area
- Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve
- Julington-Durbin Preserve
- Matanzas State Forest
- Moses Creek Conservation Area
- Pellicer Creek Aquatic Preserve
- Stokes Landing Conservation Area
- Watson Island State Forest

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<sup>1</sup> Cities: St. Augustine, St. Augustine Beach; Town: Marineland (partial)



The District is bounded on the north by Duval County, east by the Atlantic Ocean, south by Flagler County, and west by Putnam and Clay Counties. The District’s total area is 822 square miles, including 601 square miles of land and 221 square miles of water.

The District’s primary office is in the University of Florida’s Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Service’s office located at 111 Yelvington Road, Suite 4, East Palatka, FL 32131. East Palatka is located in Putnam County.

Figure 1 is a map of the District’s service area, based on the map incorporated by reference in Rule [5M-20.002\(4\)\(a\)38](#), *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 St. Johns Soil and Water Conservation District**



*(Source: St. Johns 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 315,317 as of April 1, 2023.

## District Characteristics

St. Johns SWCD is located in northeastern Florida. The District has a diversified economy that is supported by significant tourism and hospitality, manufacturing, food processing, transportation and logistics, and biomedical industries.<sup>2</sup> Golf is a major driver of the District's tourism and hospitality industry as the District contains over a dozen golf courses. The United States Census Bureau reports that approximately one-quarter of the District's land area is urban, centered around the St. Augustine and St. Augustine Beach areas. Per the United States Department of Agriculture's 2022 Census of Agriculture, the primary products of the District's moderately sized agricultural industry are vegetables, potatoes, nursery plants, greenhouse plants, floriculture, and sod. Portions of the District are included in the Basin Management Action Plan ("BMAP")<sup>3</sup> area for the Lower St. Johns River Basin Main Stem.<sup>4</sup>

The District is situated within the Atlantic Coastal Plain, which includes four terraces of marine origin composed of sandy and loamy sediments. The District's land area is divided into four physiographical regions: the Atlantic Beach Ridge, the Atlantic Coastal Lagoons, the Atlantic Coastal Ridge, and the Eastern Valley. The Atlantic Beach Ridge includes the chain of barrier islands that makes up the District's eastern border with the Atlantic Ocean and separates the ocean from the Atlantic Coastal Lagoons. The Atlantic Coastal Lagoons consist of open water and flat, marshy areas flooded by daily tides located across portions of the Matanzas, San Sebastian, North, and Tolomato Rivers, and Guana Lake. The Atlantic Coastal Ridge is a narrow ridge that runs on a north-south axis immediately to the west of the Atlantic Coastal Lagoons and primarily consists of relatively well-drained, gently sloping soils, although some soils near the base of the ridge are less well drained and may be more prone to flooding. Most of the District's land area is located in the Eastern Valley, which slopes gently down to the St. Johns River on the District's western border. Most soils in the Eastern Valley are poorly drained and are prone to flooding during heavy rain or hurricane events. The District's soils are underlain by limestone deposits that hold the Floridian Aquifer,<sup>5</sup> which feeds several minor springs on the St. Johns River along the District's western border.<sup>6</sup> Cropland only takes up slightly more than 3% of the District's land area, which means that non-agricultural sources of nutrient runoff, such as lawns and the District's plentiful golf courses, are notable threats to the District's freshwater resources.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Johns County Economic Development Department. n.d. "St. Johns County Profile." *St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners Website*. Accessed May 26, 2024. <https://www.sjcfcl.us/county-profile/>.

<sup>3</sup> 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."

<sup>4</sup> 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>.

<sup>5</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. 1983. *Soil Survey of St. Johns County, Florida*. Soil Conservation Service, Washington.

<sup>6</sup> Florida Department of Environmental Protection. n.d. "Map of Florida's Springs Categorized by Magnitude." *Florida Department of Environmental Protection*. Accessed May 7, 2024. <https://floridadep.gov/fgs/fgs/media/map-floridas-springs-categorized-magnitude>.

Hurricanes rarely make landfall along the District’s shoreline, with Hurricane Dora being the last to do so in 1964, but the District is regularly impacted by hurricanes that make landfall elsewhere on Florida’s Atlantic coast or that travel across the Florida Peninsula from the Gulf of Mexico. Hurricanes often impact the District through a combination of rainfall-induced flooding, storm surge, and beach erosion.<sup>7</sup>

### I.B: Creation and Governance

St. Johns SWCD was chartered on September 14, 1955, as the St. Johns 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”).<sup>8</sup> The Florida Legislature amended ch. 582, Florida Statutes, in 1965, to expand the scope of all soil conservation districts to include water conservation, and rename the District to the St. Johns Soil and Water Conservation District.<sup>9</sup>

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

As of April 30, 2024, the District had five Supervisors. M&J has reviewed affidavits completed by all five of the District’s current Supervisors on file with the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections affirming that the Supervisors meet all eligibility requirements. During the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024), there have been two vacancies on the Board, as illustrated in Figure 2, including one vacancy from the start of the review period to January 2021 and a second vacancy from September 2022 to January 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	C.L.	Bill Snow			Joe Parker										
2	E.C.	Joe McAnarney			Paul Leblanc			Evan Wilson							
3	J.S.	Nicole Crosby						Dale Barnes Jr.							
4	R.H.	Charles “Chuck” Owen													
5		Mary Lawrence						John William “Bucky” Sykes							

**Legend for FY21**

Chaddon Levrini (C.L.)	Erica Connor (E.C.)
John William “Bucky” Sykes (J.S.)	Robert Craig Hartwig (R.H.)

(Source: St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections records, Supervisor appointment and resignation letters)

<sup>7</sup> St. Johns County Emergency Management. n.d. Hurricane Preparedness Guide. St. Augustine: St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners.

<sup>8</sup> s. 582, Florida Statutes (1939), available online as ch. 19473, Laws of Florida

<sup>9</sup> Ch. 65-334, Laws of Florida

<sup>10</sup> Including s. 582.15, Florida Statutes, s. 582.18, Florida Statutes, s. 582.19, Florida Statutes, Rule 5M-20.002, Florida Administrative Code, and Ch. 2022-191, Laws of Florida.

During the review period, the District met 24 times<sup>11</sup> 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 (January). 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 St. Johns County nor the in-district municipalities have adopted any local regulations for the District.

### **I.C: Programs and Activities**

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

- Conservation Educational Programs
  - Conservation Educational Programs provide natural resources conservation-related elementary, secondary, and adult education within the community.
- 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 United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Conservation Advocacy and Support
  - The District interacts with relevant local, state, and national organizations to advocate for increased funding for conservation programs and greater support for conservation efforts.

### **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.

#### **United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”)**

The District partners with NRCS to provide conservation education and outreach programs. The District also works to promote various NRCS conservation cost-sharing programs. A representative from NRCS attended 17 of the 24 Board of Supervisors (“Board”) meetings that the District held during the review period, at which they presented a report detailing NRCS’s activities since the last report and kept the District informed of upcoming events and opportunities.

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<sup>11</sup> Meetings occurred in January, February, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, and November 2021; January, February, March, May, June, July, August, November, and December 2022; January and March 2023; and January and February 2024.

The District operates out of the NRCS office in East Palatka and has entered into a memorandum of agreement with NRCS that establishes that the District and NRCS share the same aims and will cooperate and collaborate to achieve their conservation goals. The District’s Memorandum of Agreement with NRCS does not place any obligations on the District or NRCS, other than compliance with relevant federal privacy, nondiscrimination, and drug-free workplace statutes. The District has also entered into an Unfunded Cooperative Agreement with NRCS, which codifies more detailed terms of the District’s working relationship with NRCS, including specific terms regarding the District’s use of NRCS facilities and equipment.

#### St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners (“SJBoCC”)

SJBoCC’s annual budget allocation for the District funds the District’s SJBoCC-employed staff and reimburses the District for various operational and administrative expenditures. During the review period, the District has only used their SJBoCC allocation to get reimbursed for annual dues and State fees. The District has hosted representatives from the St. Johns County Utilities Department to discuss the District’s water resources and has toured the St. Johns County Utilities Department’s water treatment, wastewater treatment, and stormwater management facilities. The District has involved itself in the SJBoCC development planning process and has advocated for SJBoCC to implement conservation-related ordinances, including an ordinance to prohibit the release of helium balloons.

#### University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Services Extension Service in St. Johns County (“UF/IFAS Extension”)

The UF/IFAS Extension works with the District to promote conservation educational and outreach programs. UF/IFAS Extension representatives attended 10 of the 24 Board meetings held during the review period, where they updated the Supervisors on the UF/IFAS Extension’s activities and informed the Supervisors about upcoming events and opportunities.

#### St. Johns River Water Management District (“SJRWMD”)

The District regularly engages in discussions with SJRWMD regarding water management issues, including water quality concerns and stormwater management concerns, throughout the District’s service area. SJRWMD representatives have attended 13 of the 24 Board meetings held during the review period to respond to concerns and questions from the Supervisors and discuss SJRWMD’s water management activities and plans.

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

The following figures quantify and describe the District’s resources for Fiscal Year 2022 – 2023 (October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023, herein referred to as “FY23”).



Figure 3 shows the total amount of revenues, expenditures, and long-term debt maintained by the District in FY23. Figure 4 shows the number of paid full-time and part-time staff, contracted staff, and volunteers by employer. Figure 5 shows the number and type of vehicles, number and type of major equipment, and number and type of facilities owned, leased, and used by the District.

**Figure 3: FY23 Finances**

	Revenues	Expenditures	Long-term Debt
<b>Total for Year</b>	\$775	\$775	\$0

*(Source: District financial records)*

**Figure 4: FY23 Program Staffing**

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

*(Source: Interviews with District Board Chair and staff)*

**Figure 5: FY23 Equipment and Facilities**

	Number	Ownership Status	Type(s)
<b>Vehicles</b>	0		
<b>Major Equipment</b>	0		
<b>Facilities</b>	1	1 owned by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service	1 primary office

*(Source: Interviews with District Board Chair and staff)*

## 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 and activities that the District performed during the review period (October 1, 2020 through April 30, 2024):

#### *Conservation Educational Programs*

Conservation Educational Programs are designed to provide natural resources conservation-related early childhood education, elementary and secondary education, postsecondary education, special education, job training, career and technical education, and/or adult education. M&J has identified the following Conservation Educational Programs carried out by the District during the review period:

#### **National Association of Conservation Districts (“NACD”) Poster Contest**

The District hosts and promotes the NACD Poster Contest for their service area. The NACD Poster Contest provides students with a chance to compete and have their art displayed nationally. The contests are open to kindergarten through 12th grade students from the District's service area, separated into two- or three-grade divisions. These contests use a common conservation-related prompt set by NACD. The winners of the District-level contests advance to compete at the regional, State, and national levels.

#### **Association of Florida Conservation Districts (“AFCD”) and Florida Conservation District Employees Association (“FCDEA”) Speech Contest**

The District hosts a Speech Contest, which is jointly sponsored by AFCD and FCDEA. The contest is open to 6th through 12th grade students from the District's service area. Students create and deliver an original speech based on a conservation-related prompt set by AFCD, usually based on the NACD Poster Contest topic. The winner of the District-level Public Speaking Contest advances to compete at the regional and State levels.

## **Fred B. Miller Jr. Regional 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 Fred B. Miller Jr. Regional Envirothon is hosted by the Duval Soil and Water Conservation District. The District donates funds from its reserves to the Duval Soil and Water Conservation District to support the Fred B. Miller Jr. Regional Envirothon.

### *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 United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”). During the review period, outreach events sponsored by and/or participated in by the District are:

- Hastings Spud Run
- Tours of conservation-related facilities, including:
  - St. Johns County wastewater treatment facility
  - St. Johns County water treatment plant
  - Masters Tract stormwater treatment facility
  - Hastings sewage treatment plant
  - Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience
  - A Supervisor’s farm

### *Conservation Advocacy and Support*

The District interacts with relevant local, state, and national organizations to advocate for increased funding for conservation programs and greater support for conservation efforts. The District’s advocacy and support includes passing resolutions voicing the District’s support of conservation causes, hosting presentations from staff at conservation-related governmental and non-governmental organizations in the District’s service area to better understand ongoing conservation projects and ask questions, and engaging with the permitting process for new developments. The District’s most significant conservation advocacy effort during the review period was promoting a local and Statewide ban on the release of helium-filled balloons.

### *Analysis of Service Delivery*

The District’s conservation educational programs align with s. [582.20\(7\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, which permits soil and water conservation districts to “provide, or assist in providing, training and education programs” that support the District’s conservation efforts. The District’s outreach programs align with the soil and water conservation district purpose statement established in s. [582.02\(4\)](#), *Florida Statutes*. The District’s conservation advocacy and support activities align with the soil and water conservation district purpose statement established in s. [582.02\(4\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, although some advocacy activities carried out by the District, such as its involvement in the development permitting process, may have approached the boundaries of the authority granted to the District by s. [582.20](#), *Florida Statutes*.

The District incurred minimal costs associated with providing its conservation educational programs other than cash prizes and funding support provided to the Duval Soil and Water Conservation District for the Fred B. Miller Jr. Regional Envirothon, so alternative service delivery methods cannot result in savings to the District without reducing prize support or providing less funding. The District stopped hosting the NACD Poster Contest and AFCD/FCDEA Speech Contest when a new group of Supervisors came into office following the 2022 general election.

The District does not maintain adequate program design documentation regarding and does not collect sufficient performance data related to its outreach programs to effectively evaluate the performance of alternative service delivery methods. The District's outreach programs have minimal costs other than sponsorship costs, so alternate service delivery methods will not result in savings to the District.

As the District's conservation advocacy and support efforts are impactful largely because of the District's status as a governmental organization and the Supervisors' status as elected officials, alternate service delivery methods that substitute the efforts of other non-governmental organizations or unelected individuals for the District and its Supervisors will not be as effective as the District's current service delivery method.

The District is not currently able to provide significant soil and water conservation support to agricultural producers located in the District's service area due to its limited funding. Agricultural producers in the District's service area may have received assistance from other soil and water conservation districts that hold contracts with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, including Best Management Practices Cost-Share<sup>12</sup> support provided by the Putnam Soil and Water Conservation District, Hardee Soil and Water Conservation District, and Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District and Mobile Irrigation Laboratory<sup>13</sup> support from the Lake Soil and Water Conservation District. NRCS provides additional technical advice, cost-share, and data collection assistance to landowners in the District's service area.

#### [Comparison to Similar Services/Potential Consolidations](#)

The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Service in St. Johns County ("UF/IFAS Extension") manages the St. Johns County 4-H program and provides other youth and adult agricultural programs throughout the District's service area. The education programs provided by the UF/IFAS Extension cover a wide variety of agricultural and non-agricultural topics and do not have the focus on conservation-related causes characteristic of District educational programs. Additionally, the UF/IFAS Extension cannot join NACD or AFCD and would not be able to host the NACD poster contest or AFCD/FCDEA speech contest. Consolidating the District's conservation educational programs with the UF/IFAS Extension's educational programs may reduce the amount of dedicated conservation educational resources available to youth in the District's service area.

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<sup>12</sup> The Best Management Practices Cost-Share program offers reimbursement agreements with agricultural producers related to implementing practices to improve water quality in agricultural discharges.

<sup>13</sup> The Mobile Irrigation Laboratory program provides technical assistance to agricultural producers related to the improvement of irrigation systems and related equipment.

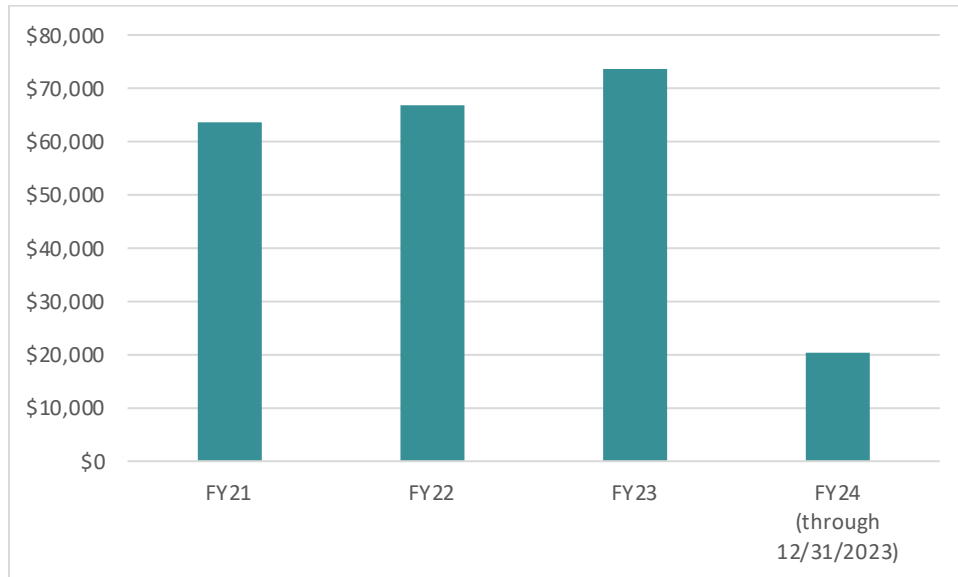
## II.B: Resource Management

### Program Staffing

The District had one employee, a full-time District Secretary, for the entirety of the review period. The District Secretary was employed by the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners (“SJBoCC”) and assigned to serve the District. The District Secretary also served in a similar part-time role for the Putnam Soil and Water Conservation District for the entirety of the review period. The District Secretary managed the District’s finances, managed the District’s communications with agricultural producers and partner organizations, organized the District’s outreach and educational programs, and handled general District administrative tasks. SJBoCC made an annual budget allocation to pay for all salary and benefit costs associated with the employment of the District Secretary; the District did not reimburse SJBoCC for any expenses related to the employment of the District Secretary.

Figure 6 shows the total salary and benefit paid by SJBoCC to employ the District Secretary each year of the review period. The District Secretary’s compensation increased each year due to SJBoCC-issued salary increases and increases to benefit costs.

**Figure 6: Total Employee Compensation by Year**



(Source: SJBoCC Budget Details)

### Equipment and Facilities

#### Vehicles

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

#### Facilities

The District operated out of the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”) office in East Palatka for the entirety of the review period. The East Palatka office is located approximately four miles outside of the District’s service area in neighboring Putnam County. The District’s Unfunded Cooperative Agreement with NRCS governs the District’s use of NRCS office space and equipment and requires that NRCS provide the District with notice at least 60 days in advance of terminating the agreement.



### Major Equipment

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

### Current and Historic Revenues and Expenditures

SJBoCC’s annual budget allocation for the District includes both funding for the District Secretary position and an allocation to reimburse the District for various operational and administrative expenditures, including workers compensation and liability insurance, dues and memberships, and travel expenditures. The total amount of reimbursements included in the District’s SJBoCC budget allocation was approximately \$1,330 for each year of the review period. During the review period, the District has only used the operational and administrative expenditure portion of its SJBoCC allocation to seek reimbursement for required State fees and dues for National Association of Conservation Districts (“NACD”) and Association of Florida Conservation Districts (“AFCD”) membership. The SJBoCC reimbursement was the District’s only revenue source during the review period, as shown in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: Revenues by Source and Fiscal Year**

Revenue Source	Total Revenues			
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 (through 12/31/2023)
SJBoCC	\$775	\$775	\$775	\$0

*(Source: District financial records)*

The District built up its reserves prior to the review period through fundraiser events and administrative fees for managing the local implementation of State programs. The District does not have plans to begin new revenue generating operations. The District used its reserves to pay for all expenditures other than the reimbursable fees and dues during the review period, including prizes for the NACD poster contest, prizes for the AFCD speech contest, reimbursements to Supervisors for expenses related to AFCD events, and expenses related to developing a new District logo. Figure 8 shows the District’s expenditures by program and fiscal year.

**Figure 8: Expenditures by Program and Fiscal Year**

Program or Activity	Total Expenditures			
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 (through 12/31/2023)
Operating Expenses	\$940	\$975	\$775	\$0
Travel/Events	\$60	\$0	\$0	\$0
Education Programs	\$175	\$275	\$0	\$0
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$1,175</b>	<b>\$1,250</b>	<b>\$775</b>	<b>\$0</b>

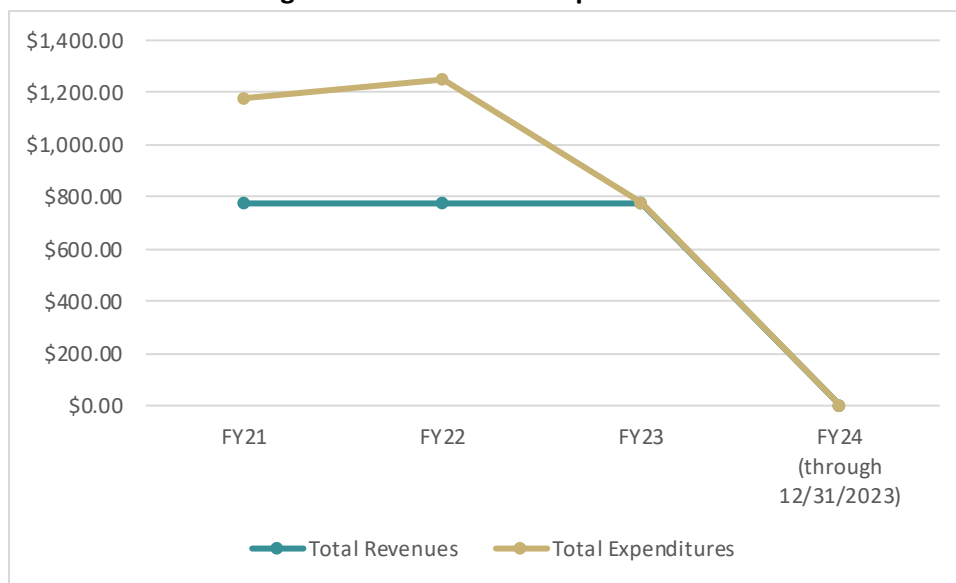
*(Source: District financial records)*

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

### Trends and Sustainability

The District's fees and dues did not change during the review period, so its SBoCC-provided reimbursement for fees and dues remained the same (\$775) for each full fiscal year of the review period. The District did not pay its dues during the first quarter of FY24, so it did not collect any reimbursements during that period. The District's expenditures increased slightly from FY21 to FY22 due to increased contest prizes and the District's decision to donate to an AFCD-administered charitable fund. The District stopped providing services and hosting events in FY23, which caused a corresponding decline in expenditures. The District's only expenditures in FY23 were its dues and fees. The District did not have any expenditures during the first quarter of FY24 and M&J anticipates that the District's year-end FY24 expenditures will be unchanged from FY23. Figure 9 shows the District's total revenues and expenditures across the review period.

**Figure 9: Revenues vs. Expenditures**



*(Source: District financial records)*

The District does not have sufficient revenues to support any activities other than paying required fees and dues without drawing down the District's reserves, which totaled \$6,488 on December 31, 2023. The District is entirely reliant on SBoCC for both funding and staffing support and could not operate at its current staffing level for any significant length of time if SBoCC were to terminate or significantly reduce its support for the District. The District's current revenues are sufficient to fund the minimal level of service that it currently provides but does not allow for the District to support any programming expenditures without spending down its reserves.

**Recommendation:** The District should consider identifying and pursuing funding opportunities from additional funding sources to reduce its reliance on its SBoCC allocation and allow for the funding of additional conservation programming. Additional funding sources may include grants from the United States Department of Agriculture, NACD, or other public or private conservation-related entities.

## II.C: Performance Management

### Strategic and Other Future Plans

The District's Board of Supervisors ("Board") drafted a Plan of Operations for 2022 and adopted the plan by vote during its meeting on July 27, 2022. The 2022 Plan of Operations restates the legislative policy for soil and water conservation districts established in s. [582.02\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, lists the partner organizations that the District intended to work with during the near future, lists general program activities that the District intended to perform, and lists areas of focus for the District to pursue.

The programs and activities listed in the 2022 Plan of Operations are:

- Hold monthly Board meetings and notice meetings on the District's social media pages.
- Act in accordance with the criteria and standards set forth in the Florida Soil and Water Conservation Districts Supervisor Handbook published by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services ("FDACS").
- Update the District's website as needed to keep the public informed of District activities.
- Partner with soil and water conservation districts in surrounding counties to conduct meetings and workshops addressing natural resources concerns in the region.
- Attend and support county, area, State, regional, and national meetings of soil and water conservation district-related groups as feasible.

The major areas of focus listed in the 2022 Plan of Operations are:

- Improve soil and prevent erosion
- Conserve water
- Improve water quality
- Reduce/prevent flooding
- Conservation education
- Protect wildlife
- Community Concerns
- Monitor/gain understanding of water/waste infrastructure
- Promote [NRCS] cost-share programs available under Farm Bill
- Other partnerships

The 2022 Plan of Operations states that the District plans to continue performing basic organizational, administrative, and operational tasks, such as holding meetings, following FDACS guidance on District operations, and keeping the District’s website updated. The 2022 Plan of Operations does state that the District plans to perform one specific task — partnering with other nearby soil and water conservation districts to conduct joint programs — but does not provide guidance on how the District should go about planning and holding meetings or specify the types of meetings that the District will hold or what sort of natural resources concerns these joint meetings will address. The major areas of focus listed in the 2022 Plan of Operations are broad subjects and do not contain details on how the District intends to address any of the listed areas. The Supervisors did not explicitly reference the 2022 Plan of Operations in any meetings after the July 27, 2022, meeting where they voted to adopt the 2022 Plan of Operations, per Board meeting minutes, although Board meeting minutes from later in calendar year 2022 reference numerous discussions about potential projects and activities that the District could organize. The District did not carry out any activities discussed during these meetings other than tours of conservation-related facilities.

The District has not drafted similar Plans of Operations for 2023 or 2024. Per M&J’s review of Board meeting minutes and discussions with the District Board Chair and staff, the District’s current Supervisors have not indicated an interest in creating new Plans of Operations or in actively pursuing some of the areas of focus established in the 2022 Plan of Operations.

**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’s Board Chair and staff, the District did not maintain any written or unwritten goals and objectives at the end of the review period. Board meeting minutes indicate that the Supervisors did periodically discuss their goals for the District during the calendar year 2022, but these goals and objectives were not written (outside of discussion summaries in the Board meeting minutes), and the Board did not vote to adopt these goals. The discussion summaries in Board meeting minutes indicate that the goals discussed by Supervisors in the calendar year 2022 were specific activities that the Supervisors wanted the District to perform, such as taking part in conservation-related facility tours, not outcomes that the District wished to achieve.

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

### Performance Measures and Standards

Per the District’s Board meeting minutes from the review period and interviews with the District Board Chair and staff, the District did not track any performance measures or evaluate the District’s performance against standards during the review period.

**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 did not have any written goals and objectives during the review period. The District’s Board meeting minutes for the second half of calendar year 2022 indicate that the District did conduct tours of two of the conservation-related facilities included in the Supervisors’ unadopted goals and objectives but M&J did not locate any documents indicating that the District toured the third conservation site included in the summaries of the Board’s goals discussions. The District’s lack of clear, established goals and objectives limited the Supervisors’ ability to develop District policy based on a clear, agreed-upon desired future state.

The District did not track any performance measures or use any performance standards during the review period. The District’s lack of performance measures and standards limited the District’s ability to analyze its performance in an objective fashion and prevented outside individuals or organizations from adequately evaluating the performance of the District’s activities during the review period.

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, FY22, and FY23 Annual Financial Reports to the Florida Department of Financial Services within the compliance timeframe.

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.

#### Performance Reviews and District Performance Feedback

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

**Recommendation:** The District should consider implementing a system for collecting feedback from 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 and candidate records available on the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections website and provided by the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections in response to a public records request as well as a District-created Supervisor list to assess the District's Supervisor history and compliance with Supervisor eligibility rules. Five Supervisors were elected in the 2022 general election, and all five Supervisors are still in office. M&J reviewed affidavits filed with the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections by 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*.

### 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.

In interviews, District staff stated that they provide notice of Board meetings by posting notices on the District's website, on a notice board at the District's primary office, and on a notice board at the St. Johns County Ag Center. District staff report that they also posted Board meeting notices on the District's social media channels prior to 2023. M&J searched [floridapublicnotices.com](#), the State of Florida's designated repository of public notice publications, and did not identify notices posted for any Board meetings held during the review period. The District also provides a list of Board meeting dates to the Association of Florida Conservation Districts, who works with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Office of Agricultural Water Policy to post meeting notices in the *Florida Administrative Register*. M&J identified notices posted in the *Florida Administrative Register* for 31 meetings scheduled during the review period, including 14 meetings that M&J can confirm were held and 17 meetings that M&J can confirm were not held. M&J did not identify notices posted in the *Florida Administrative Register* for 10 meetings that M&J confirmed took place 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 provides access to minutes and agendas from the District's two most recent Board meetings, but these minutes are organized under the wrong dates. The website provides a link to access District financial reports on the Florida Department of Financial Services' website, but the link directs users to the older version of the website that only includes reports through FY21.

**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 and correctly organized, links to financial records are kept up-to-date, and other pages are updated as needed.

### III. Recommendations

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

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider identifying and pursuing funding opportunities from additional funding sources to reduce its reliance on its St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners (“SJBoCC”) allocation and allow for the funding of additional conservation programming. Additional funding sources may include grants from the United States Department of Agriculture, National Association of Conservation Districts (“NACD”), or other public or private conservation-related entities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential Benefit: Pursuing additional funding sources will reduce the District’s reliance on its SJBoCC allocation and allow the District to continue to function in the event that SJBoCC decides to reduce the District’s allocation. Additionally, acquiring additional funding will allow the District to reintroduce programs that the District previously supported, such as the NACD poster contest or Association of Florida Conservation Districts speech contest, and start providing new programs.</li> <li>• Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant</li> <li>• Costs: None</li> <li>• Statutory Considerations: None</li> </ul>
<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"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant</li> <li>• Costs: None</li> <li>• Statutory Considerations: Supervisors will need to adopt any strategic plan.</li> </ul>

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider writing and then adopting a set of goals and objectives that align with the District’s statutory purpose, as defined in s. <a href="#">582.02(4), Florida Statutes</a>, and the Board’s vision and priorities as established in the District’s strategic plan. The goals and objectives should contemplate measurable progress, capturing the results of the District’s efforts and ensuring a consistent direction forward for the District’s future prioritization of programs and activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential 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.</li> <li>● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant</li> <li>● Costs: None</li> <li>● Statutory Considerations: Supervisors will need to adopt any goals and objectives.</li> </ul>
<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"> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant</li> <li>● Costs: Implementing this recommendation may cause the District to incur minor data collection and storage fees.</li> <li>● Statutory Considerations: None</li> </ul>
<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"> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant</li> <li>● Costs: Implementing this recommendation may cause the District to incur minor data collection and storage fees.</li> <li>● Statutory Considerations: None</li> </ul>

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider reviewing its meeting notice procedures to verify compliance with s. <a href="#">189.015</a> and ch. <a href="#">50</a>, <i>Florida Statutes</i>. The District should retain records that document its compliance with applicable statutes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential Benefit: Implementing proper meeting notice policies will help ensure that the District is compliant with s. <a href="#">189.015</a> and ch. <a href="#">50</a>, <i>Florida Statutes</i>, which protects Supervisors and staff from potential consequences of violating notice requirements established in s. <a href="#">286.011</a>, <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.</li> <li>● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant</li> <li>● Costs: Properly noticing the District’s meetings will require the District to pay to run public notice statements in the local newspaper</li> <li>● Statutory Considerations: None</li> </ul>
<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 and correctly organized, links to financial records are kept up-to-date, and other pages are updated as needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● Potential Adverse Consequences: None significant</li> <li>● Costs: None</li> <li>● Statutory Considerations: None</li> </ul>



## IV. District Response

Each soil and water conservation district under review by M&J was provided the opportunity to submit a response letter for inclusion in the final published report. St Johns SWCD's response letter is provided on the following page.



**ST. JOHNS SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT**

**111 Yelvington Road, Suite 4, East Palatka, FL  
32131 Telephone: (386) 328-5051 (ext: 3)**

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**Date:** July 22, 2024

**To:** Mauldin & Jenkins

**Subject:** Final Performance Review Submission

Mauldin & Jenkins:

The final performance review has been reviewed and excepted by the St. Johns Soil & Water Conservation District Board. No edits are needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Owen".

Charles C. Owen  
District Chairman