

St. Lucie 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

- St. Lucie Soil and Water Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors met on a quarterly basis in 2022. M&J was not provided with meeting minutes or agendas for FY21, FY23, or FY24 meetings.
- St. Lucie Soil and Water Conservation District conducts a Local Working Group to solicit feedback from producers and serves as a conduit of information to the public.
- St. Lucie Soil and Water Conservation District employs a District Administrator whose salary and benefits are paid by the St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners.
- St. Lucie Soil and Water Conservation District does not have a strategic plan, goals or objectives, or 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 St. Lucie Soil and Water Conservation District (“St. Lucie SWCD” or “District”).

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 identifies a mission statement on its website, which states “to take leadership in St. Lucie County for Best Management Practices (“BMP”) in Soil and Water Conservation, while maintaining a sustainable agriculture.”

Service Area

When the District was established in 1950, the service area included St. Lucie County. The current borders and territory are identical to those of St. Lucie County. The District’s service area includes unincorporated St. Lucie County; the County’s two cities and one town, seven census-designated places,¹ and part or all of the following Federal and State Conservation Lands:

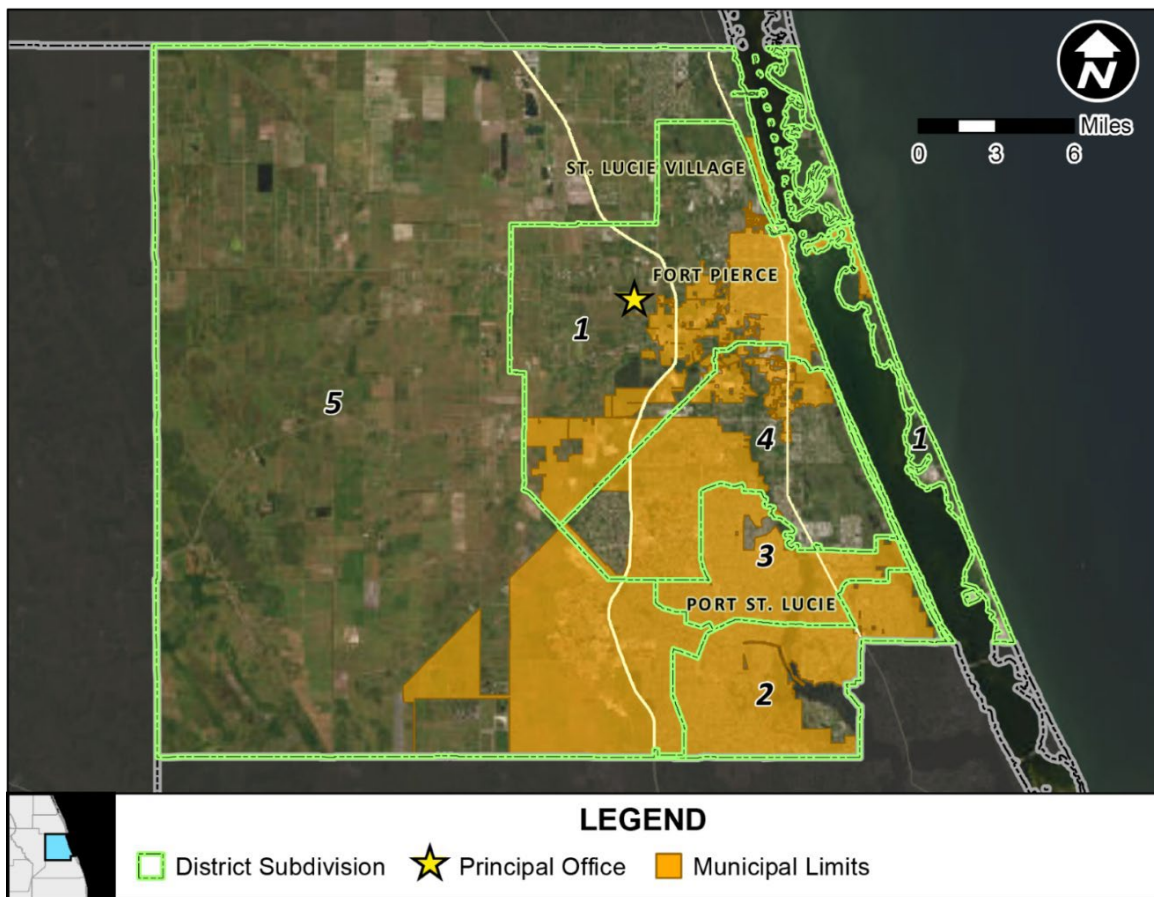
- Avalon State Park
- C-23/C-24 Stormwater Treatment
- C-23/C-24 North & South Reservoir
- Cow Creek Ranch Agricultural and Conservation
- Fort Pierce Inlet State Park
- Indian River - Vero Beach to Ft. Pierce Aquatic Preserve
- Jensen Beach to Jupiter Inlet Aquatic Preserve
- North Fork St. Lucie Aquatic Preserve
- Ru-Mar Conservation
- Savannas Preserve State Park
- Ten Mile Creek
- Treasure Coast Conservation
- Walpole Ranch Agricultural and Conservation

¹Fort Pierce North, Fort Pierce South, Indian River Estates, River Park, Hutchinson Island, Lakewood Park, White City.

The District is bounded on the north by Indian River County, east by the Atlantic Ocean, south by Martin County, and west by Okeechobee County. The total area within the District is 688 square miles, with 572 square miles of land and 116 square miles of water. The District’s primary office is located at 8400 Picos Road, Ste. 202, Fort Pierce, FL 34945. The District’s primary office is located in the local UF/IFAS Extension building.

Figure 1 is a map of the District’s service area, based on the map incorporated by reference in Rule [5M-20.002\(3\)\(a\)39](#), *Florida Administrative Code*, showing the District’s boundaries, electoral subdivisions, major municipalities within the service area, and the District’s principal office and meeting location.

Figure 1: Map of St. Lucie Soil and Water Conservation District



(Source: St. Lucie 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 368,628 as of April 1, 2023.

District Characteristics

St. Lucie SWCD is located in the southeastern part of Florida. The economy of the service area is diversified. It is supported by healthcare, social assistance, retail trade, and construction. Rural areas are located in the western part of the District, while the eastern part includes urban areas with large cities such as Port St. Lucie and Fort Pierce. The District encompasses 165,667 acres of farms, and its most popular crops include fruits, tree nuts, and berries.² As the District encompasses part of the eastern coastline, tropical disturbances are a threat to the District's residents and agriculture. The District's topography is relatively flat, with an average elevation of 26 feet.³

The service area encompasses beaches that are critically eroded due to rising sea levels and more frequent storm events. Beach erosion also has a negative impact on the sea turtle and shorebird nesting habitats. The St. Lucie County Erosion District implements shore restoration projects to distribute sand to help combat erosion and restore wildlife habitats.⁴ Furthermore, Port St. Lucie's metropolitan area is rapidly growing due to increased development and businesses moving to the District. As such, urban parts of the District and the large construction industry require responses to the impact of industrial discharges and urban sprawl on soil and water, as well as the provision of resources and best management practices education for urban agriculture. Along the Atlantic Coast, tropical disturbances and the impact of tourism and development result in the erosion of the coastline, which presents a need for the District to address coastline erosion.

I.B: Creation and Governance

St. Lucie SWCD was chartered on September 21, 1950, as the St. Lucie Soil Conservation District, following a successful referendum of local landowners and subsequent petition to the Florida State Soil Conservation Board.⁵ The District was created under the authority of the State Soil Conservation Districts Act (herein referred to as "ch. [582](#), *Florida Statutes*").⁶ The Florida Legislature amended ch. [582](#), *Florida Statutes*, in 1965, to expand the scope of all soil conservation districts to include water conservation, and renamed the District to the St. Lucie Soil and Water Conservation District.⁷

² United States Census Bureau. 2022. "Census of Agriculture County Profile."

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Florida/cp12111.pdf.

³ Topographic-map.com. N.d. "St. Lucie County Topographic Map." Accessed May 30, 2024. <https://en-us.topographic-map.com/map-z6p3q/Saint-Lucie-County/>.

⁴ St. Lucie County, Florida. N.d. "2023 Fort Pierce Shore Protection Project." Accessed May 30, 2024. <https://www.stlucieco.gov/departments-and-services/public-works/erosion-district/2023-fort-pierce-shore-protection-project>.

⁵ McMullen, K. S., and A. P. Spencer. 1952. Biennial Report of the State Soil Conservation Board: January 1, 1951 - December 31, 1952. Biennial Report, Tallahassee: Florida State Soil Conservation Board.

⁶ Ch. [582](#), *Florida Statutes* (2023), available online as ch. 19473, *Laws of Florida*.

⁷ 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*.⁸ As of this report, the District has five Supervisors. The current Supervisors meet qualifications due to affirmations for all five Supervisors requested by M&J and received from the St. Lucie County Supervisor of Elections. M&J requested and was not provided the information necessary to determine how many vacancies there have been on the Board during the review period. 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	Philip C. Gates Jr.														
2	Michael L. Adams														
3	Robert Johnson														
4	Stephen Koppelman														
5	Matthew Hamilton														

(Source: 2022 Board meeting minutes, St. Lucie Board of Supervisors 2020 and 2022 election information)

The District provided M&J with Board meeting minutes from calendar year 2022 and for one meeting in December 2023. M&J utilized documentation and information provided by the St. Lucie County Supervisor of Elections to complete Figure 2. M&J was not provided with sufficient information to determine the Supervisors who occupied seats 4 and 5 prior to the 2020 and 2022 elections, respectively. M&J did conduct a search of election results from the St. Lucie County Supervisor of Elections website and was unable to locate additional information regarding District seats 4 and 5 prior to the 2020 and 2022 elections, respectively.

M&J was not provided with the data to verify the number of times the District met during the entire review period. During calendar year 2022, the District met four times⁹ 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 (January) and 2023 (December). 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. Lucie 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 within the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024), along with a brief description of each program or activity.

⁸ Including s. [582.15](#), *Florida Statutes*, s. [582.18](#), *Florida Statutes*, s. [582.19](#), Rule [5M-20.002](#), *Florida Administrative Code*, and ch. [2022-191](#), *Laws of Florida*.

⁹ Meetings occurred in January, February, March, and September 2022; and December 2023.

- Local Working Group
 - The Local Working Group is an annual opportunity for the District and the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service to receive feedback on community priorities and needs from local agricultural stakeholders.
- 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.
- Florida Citrus Show
 - The Florida Citrus Show is an event that is hosted by various local agricultural organizations with the purpose of gathering producers and agricultural stakeholders in the community together to share information.
- Advocacy and Information
 - In 2022, the District advocated against a bill proposed in the Florida Legislature that would affect the District. The District also serves as a conduit of information for the public to refer producers to local organizations to serve agricultural needs.

I.D: Intergovernmental Interactions

The following is a summary of federal agencies, State agencies, and/or public entities with which the District interacts, including the means, methods, frequency, and purpose of coordination and communication.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

The District maintains an Unfunded Cooperative Agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”), which establishes a partnership between the two organizations to accelerate the delivery of programs. The District hosts a Local Working Group which meets annually on behalf of NRCS to solicit feedback from producers. The District also shares an office building with NRCS owned by the St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners (“BoCC”), whereby District staff frequently interact with NRCS staff. Additionally, an NRCS District Conservationist attends District Board meetings to provide an update on NRCS initiatives.

St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners

Based on interviews, the District asserted that it maintains a non-written agreement with BoCC to provide the salary and benefits for the District Administrator position. Also, the BoCC provides office space for the District Administrator to work and for holding District Board meetings. As such, the District frequently interacts with the BoCC.

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”). M&J requested and was not provided with data relating to the District’s FY23 revenues and expenditures. Therefore M&J could not analyze and provide feedback regarding the District’s FY23 revenues and expenditures. Figure 3 shows the number of paid full-time and part-time staff, contracted staff, and volunteers by employer. Figure 4 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 Program Staffing

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

(Source: Interviews with District Administrator and a Supervisor)

Figure 4: FY23 Equipment and Facilities

	Number	Ownership Status	Type(s)
Vehicles	0	N/A	N/A
Major Equipment	0	N/A	N/A
Facilities	1	1 owned by the Board of County Commissioners	1 Primary Office and Meeting Space

(Source: Email Correspondence with the District Administrator)

II. Findings

The Findings sections summarize the analyses performed, and the associated conclusions derived from M&J's analysis. The analysis and findings are divided into the following four subject categories:

- Service Delivery
- Resource Management
- Performance Management
- Organization and Governance

II.A: Service Delivery

Overview of Services

The following list identifies and describes programs and activities the District participated in during the review period (October 1, 2020, through April 30, 2024).

Local Working Group

The District partners with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service to host a Local Working Group, which is an opportunity for local agricultural stakeholders and producers to collaboratively identify community priorities and needs. The District uses the feedback provided to strategically make decisions regarding program funding and service offerings.

Envirothon

During interviews, District administrators reported that the District participates in 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.

Florida Citrus Show

The District participates in the Florida Citrus Show, which is hosted by various local agricultural organizations and includes seminars to disseminate information to growers in addition to a tailgate which features various agricultural companies to exhibit their services offered to growers.

Advocacy and Information

The District wrote letters to its State representatives to advocate against legislation requiring Supervisors to be elected from each of its subdivisions. The District also serves as a conduit of information for the public to refer producers to local organizations to serve their agricultural needs when producers contact the District office.

Analysis of Service Delivery

The District's Local Working Group aligns with the District's statutory purpose and authority. The District's participation in Envirothon and the Florida Citrus Show align with the District's statutory purpose and authority described in s. [582.20\(7\)](#), *Florida Statutes*. The advocacy and information activity align with the District's statutory purpose and authority described in s. [582.20\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes* and s. [582.20\(2\)](#), *Florida Statutes*. M&J did not identify alternative methods for the District to provide services that would reduce costs due to a lack of information relating to the District's current services, programs, and activities. To improve performance and increase the District's programs or services, the District should research opportunities to increase revenues that may be used to administer services/programs and to employ staff.

Recommendation: The District should consider developing a plan to increase revenue sources in an effort to diversify the types of revenue relied on by the District. The District could consider proposing an agreement with the St. Lucie 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. The District could also consider identifying grant opportunities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the National Association of Conservation Districts, or another public or private conservation-related entity.

Comparison to Similar Services/Potential Consolidations

The District did not provide M&J with sufficient information related to its services, programs, and activities offered to compare the District's services to other local public entities.

II.B: Resource Management

Program Staffing

The District is staffed by a District Administrator who is classified a full-time St. Lucie Board of County Commissioners ("BoCC") employee whose responsibilities include overseeing the daily operations and administration of the District. In interviews, the District asserted there has been turnover within the District Administrator position. In FY22, the previous District Administrator retired, and the position was vacant for approximately a year until September 2023. Due to the vacancy, the District's operations were reduced, and the Board did not meet for an extended period of time. The vacancy also affected the District's ability to provide information to M&J, as the District did not have a succession plan in place, and the new District Administrator was not able to locate key documentation to provide to M&J.

Recommendation: The District should consider documenting program processes and procedures to ensure consistent understanding and operations of programs. The District should consider identifying what resources will be required to adequately plan for the transition of the District Administrator and ensure the continuation of programs once a new District Administrator is hired. The District should consider improving record retention procedures to enhance transparency, avoid loss of institutional knowledge, and ensure that the District is complying with ss. [119.021\(2\)\(a\)](#), [119.021\(2\)\(b\)](#), and [119.021\(4\)\(a\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, and General Records Schedule GS1-SL for State and Local Government agencies, as referenced by Rule [1B-24.003\(1\)\(a\)](#), *Florida Administrative Code*.

Equipment and Facilities

Based on correspondence with the District Administrator, the District did not own or lease any major equipment or vehicles. The District asserted that the office building utilized by the District is owned by BoCC. The District’s Board meetings are also held within an office building owned by BoCC.

Current and Historic Revenues and Expenditures

M&J is unable to report the District’s revenues and expenditures for the entire review period as the District did not provide M&J with financial documentation. M&J utilized the District’s Annual Financial Reports submitted to the Florida Department of Financial Services for FY21 and FY22 to report revenues and expenditures. Due to the lack of financial documentation, M&J could not validate reported revenues and expenditures in the District’s Annual Financial Reports. The District did not receive revenues in FY21. The District received miscellaneous revenues in FY22 totaling \$400. M&J did not receive sufficient information to determine the source of the miscellaneous revenues. Figure 5 shows the District’s revenues reported in its publicly available Annual Financial Reports.

Figure 5: Total Revenues

Revenue Source	Total Revenues			
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 (through 12/31/2023)
Other Miscellaneous Revenues	\$0	\$400	Not Provided	Not Provided
Total	\$0	\$400	Not Provided	Not Provided

(Source: FY21 and FY22 Annual Financial Reports)

The District incurred expenditures related to two program categories in FY21 and FY22. In FY21, the District incurred \$699 related to operating expenditures. In FY22, operating expenditures increased. In FY21, the District incurred \$350 of expenditures related to grants and aids. M&J was not provided with sufficient information to determine the types of programs or activities for which the funds were expended. Figure 6 shows the District’s total expenditures reported in its publicly available Annual Financial Reports.

Figure 6: Total Expenditures

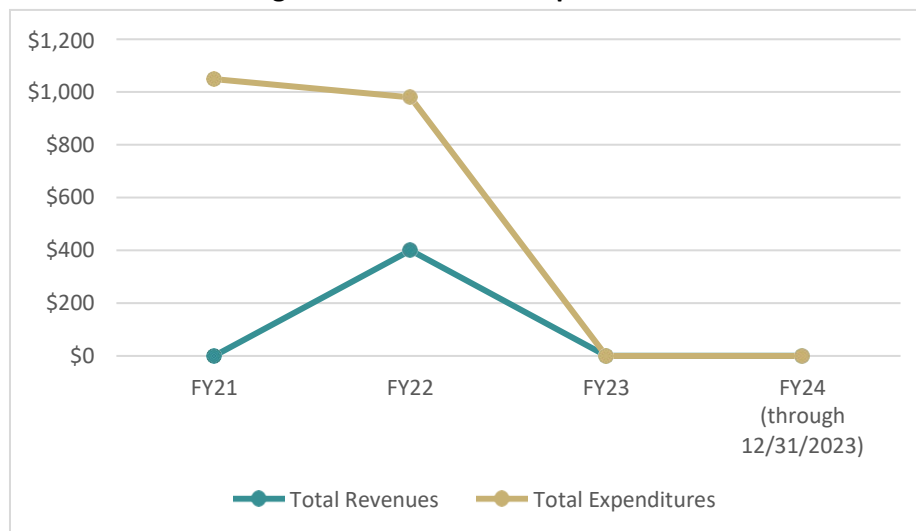
Program or Activity	Total Expenditures			
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 (through 12/31/2023)
Operating Expenditures	\$699	\$980	Not Provided	Not Provided
Grants and Aids	\$350	\$0	Not Provided	Not Provided
Total	\$1049	\$980	Not Provided	Not Provided

(Source: FY21 and FY22 Annual Financial Reports)

Trends and Sustainability

From FY21 to FY22, District revenues increased by \$400. From FY21 to FY22, District expenditures decreased by \$69. M&J cannot make findings related to the reason for the increase due to a lack of sufficient financial information to validate revenues reported in the FY21 and FY22 Annual Financial Reports.

Figure 7: Revenues vs. Expenditures



(Source: FY21 and FY22 Annual Financial Reports)

Based on FY21 and FY22 revenues and expenditures reported in Annual Financial Reports, the District is not maintaining a balanced budget. Also, if the District wishes to expand its operations and services offered, the District does not have reliable, or consistent revenue sources to do so.

Recommendation: The District should consider evaluating the sustainability of the relevant expenditures compared to the District’s annual revenues. The District could consider identifying revenue sources and/or developing an annual budget that meets the requirements of s. [189.016\(3\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, in order to determine the level of programs and activities the District can fund with current revenue sources.

II.C: Performance Management

Strategic and Other Future Plans

Based on interviews, the District asserted it does not have a strategic plan in place.

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 or contracts, 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

Based on interviews, the District asserted it does not have goals or objectives in place.

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

Based on interviews, the District asserted it does not have performance measures or standards in place.

Recommendation: The District should consider identifying performance measures and standards as part of the development of a 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 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 does not have goals, objectives, or performance measures/standards in place. As stated in the Goals and Objectives section, the District should consider writing and then adopting a set of goals and objectives that align with the District’s statutory purpose and the new strategic plan.

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 the District's fiscal year (September 30). According to Annual Financial Reports sourced from the Florida Department of Financial Services' online database, the District submitted the FY21 Annual Financial Report by the required deadline. However, the District submitted its FY22 Annual Financial Report approximately three and a half months past the required deadline and did not submit its FY23 Annual Financial Report by the required deadline of June 30, 2024.

The District has until June 30, 2025 to submit the FY24 Annual Financial Report. The District is not required to submit an annual financial audit report as its revenues or combined expenses and expenditures did not exceed \$100,000 during the review period, as per s. [218.39](#), *Florida Statutes*. Based on interviews, the District asserted that it did not receive annual audits during the review period.

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

The District solicits feedback on community needs and priorities through the Local Working Group meeting. M&J cannot provide details on the District's process for conducting the Local Working Group meeting or the feedback received from the meeting as the District has not provided information related to its programs or activities.

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. Furthermore, starting with the November 2022 Supervisor elections, Chapter [2022-191](#), *Laws of Florida*, amended s. [582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes* 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.

M&J requested the elected Supervisors' affirmations as part of a public records request to the St. Lucie County Supervisor of Elections and received affirmations for all Supervisors who ran in the November 2022 election. Based on a list of current Supervisors provided to M&J by the District, candidates who ran in the November 2022 election are still the District's current Supervisors. As a result, M&J concludes that the five Supervisors elected in November 2022 complied with the filing requirements regarding residency and agricultural experience qualifications in s. [582.19\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*. Based on public information from the St. Lucie Supervisor of Elections, Supervisor seats two and four are up for election in November 2024.

Notices of Public Meetings

Section [189.015](#), *Florida Statutes*, requires that all Board meeting minutes be publicly noticed in accordance with the procedures listed in ch. [50](#), *Florida Statutes*. This chapter has been amended twice during the review period, and M&J reviewed for compliance with the governing statute in effect at the time of each meeting date and applicable notice period. Based on correspondence with the District Administrator, the District Administrator emails notices to a St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners (“BoCC”) employee who posts meeting notices to a press board, uploads the notice to an event software Laserfiche, and then adds the meeting to a web calendar maintained by BoCC. M&J attempted to find the press board but was unable to find a press board on the BoCC website. M&J reviewed the event software Laserfiche in addition to the web calendar maintained by BoCC. M&J found zero notices on the Laserfiche software and two notices for meetings (December 2023 and March 2024) on the web calendar. As such, M&J did not find notices for four out of five meetings that M&J confirmed were held. M&J also reviewed the *Florida Administrative Register* for meeting notices and found that meeting notices existed for 2021 meetings.

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 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*. The District should retain records that document its compliance with the applicable statutes.

Retention of Records and Public Access to Documents

The District was able to provide the following documentation to M&J: a map of the District’s service area, meeting minutes for calendar year 2022 and December 2023, meeting agendas for December 2020 and calendar year 2021, a list of current District Supervisors, and an Unfunded Cooperative Agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. The District’s website includes the appropriate link to its Annual Financial Reports.

The District did not provide M&J with sufficient information to perform our analysis related to records retention and access to public records. Furthermore, the District's website does not provide Board meeting dates, agendas, or minutes. As such, the District did not comply with records retention requirements in accordance with s. [119.021](#), *Florida Statutes*. Failure to retain records may limit transparency into District activities, negatively impact Supervisor and staff transitions, and violate the requirement to provide access to public records for personal inspection and copying by any person, as required by s. [119.07](#), *Florida Statutes*. Violation of these sections may subject District Supervisors and staff to penalties, including fines, suspension and removal or impeachment, and misdemeanor charges, as outlined in s. [119.10](#), *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 the loss of records due to technology failures, accidental disposition of records, or natural disasters. The District could further consider designing or acquiring an electronic recordkeeping system, either independently or through a partnership with a local government, another soil and water conservation district, or another 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 consider developing a plan to increase revenue sources in an effort to diversify the types of revenue relied on by the District. The District could consider proposing an agreement with the St. Lucie 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. The District could also consider identifying grant opportunities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the National Association of Conservation Districts, or another public or private conservation-related entity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Benefit: Benefits include receiving revenues to help expand the operations and footprint of the District. • Potential Adverse Consequences: Adverse consequences of the recommendation include the increased time and effort to search/apply for different funding sources. • Costs: M&J has not identified any additional funding needed to implement this recommendation. • Statutory Considerations: M&J has not identified any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider documenting all program processes, procedures, and organizational information to ensure consistent understanding and operations of programs. The District should consider identifying what resources will be required to adequately plan for the transition of Supervisors and ensure the continuation of programs after the current Supervisors’ tenures on the Board conclude. The District should consider improving record retention procedures to enhance transparency, avoid loss of institutional knowledge, and ensure that the District is complying with ss. 119.021(2)(a), 119.021(2)(b), and 119.021(4)(a), <i>Florida Statutes</i>, and General Records Schedule GS1-SL for State and Local Government agencies, as referenced by Rule 1B-24.003(1)(a), <i>Florida Administrative Code</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Benefit: Benefits of succession and record retention planning includes minimizing organization disruption, ensuring continuity in procedures, and retaining institutional knowledge. • Potential Adverse Consequences: Adverse consequences of succession planning and record retention include the time and effort on behalf of staff and Board Supervisors to develop such procedures. • Costs: M&J does not anticipate a fiscal change as a result of the recommendation. • Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal or operational issue that may arise from this recommendation.
<p>The District should consider evaluating the sustainability of the relevant expenditures compared to the District’s annual revenues. The District could consider identifying revenue sources and/or developing an annual budget that meets the requirements of s. 189.016(3), <i>Florida Statutes</i>, in order to determine the level of programs and activities the District can fund with current revenue sources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Benefit: Benefits of the change include identifying future revenue sources and a funding strategy to expand District operations in the future. • Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J has not identified any adverse consequences associated with the recommendation. • Costs: M&J does not anticipate a fiscal change as a result of the recommendation. • Statutory Considerations: M&J does not anticipate any legal or operational issue that may arise from this recommendation.

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider developing and then adopting a strategic plan that builds on the District’s purpose and vision. The strategic plan should not simply describe the District’s current programs or contracts, but rather reflect the District’s long-term and short-term priorities based on the needs of the community and in response to changing land use patterns within the District’s service area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential Benefit: Benefits of the change include planning the expansion of the District and the District’s programs to ensure success. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: Adverse consequences of the recommendation include the increased time and effort to develop a strategic plan. ● Costs: M&J has not identified any additional funding needed to implement this recommendation. ● Statutory Considerations: M&J has not identified any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.
<p>The District should consider writing and then adopting a set of goals and objectives that align with the District’s statutory purpose, as defined in s. 582.02(4), Florida Statutes, and the Board’s vision and priorities as established in the District’s strategic plan. The goals and objectives should contemplate measurable progress, capturing the results of the District’s efforts and ensuring a consistent direction forward for the District’s future prioritization of programs and activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential Benefit: Benefits of the change include providing direction for the District’s future operations and activities. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: Adverse consequences of the recommendation include the increased time and effort to develop goals. ● Costs: M&J has not identified any additional funding needed to implement this recommendation. ● Statutory Considerations: M&J has not identified any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.
<p>The District should consider identifying performance measures and standards as part of the development of a 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 toward the goals and objectives the District adopts, and support future improvements to the District’s service delivery methods.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential Benefit: Benefits include the implementation of a method for the District to measure progress towards goals and performance to ensure accountability. ● Potential Adverse Consequences: Adverse consequences of the recommendation include the increased time and effort to develop performance measures. ● Costs: M&J has not identified any additional funding needed to implement this recommendation. ● Statutory Considerations: M&J has not identified any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.

Recommendation Text	Associated Considerations
<p>The District should consider refining its timeline for preparing and submitting the Annual Financial Report to the Florida Department of Financial Services to ensure that the District is meeting the requirements of s. 218.32(1)(a), <i>Florida Statutes</i>.²²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Benefit: Benefits of the change include compliance with s. 218.32(1)(a), <i>Florida Statutes</i>. • Potential Adverse Consequences: Adverse consequences of the recommendation include the increased time and effort to develop performance measures. • Costs: M&J has not identified any additional funding needed to implement this recommendation. • Statutory Considerations: M&J has not identified 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, <i>Florida Statutes</i>. The District should retain records that document its compliance with the applicable statutes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Benefit: Benefits of the change include compliance with s. 189.015 and ch. 50, <i>Florida Statutes</i>. • Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J has not identified any adverse consequences. • Costs: M&J has not identified any additional funding needed to implement this recommendation. • Statutory Considerations: M&J has not identified any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise from the proposed change.
<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. 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: Benefits of the change include compliance with ch. 119, <i>Florida Statutes</i>. • Potential Adverse Consequences: M&J has not identified any adverse consequences as a result of the recommendation. • Costs: M&J has not identified any adverse consequences, fiscal changes as a result of the recommendation. • Statutory Considerations: M&J has not identified any legal, operational, or other issues that may arise as a result of the recommendation.

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. Lucie SWCD's response letter is provided on the following page. Upon receiving the District's response letter, M&J verified that it had received all meeting minutes available, and no changes were necessary to the report findings.

St Lucie County Soil and Water Conservation District

7/31/2024

To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of the St Lucie County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors to address several points outlined in the performance review conducted by Mauldin & Jenkins. We value the insights provided and are committed to addressing the findings. However, there are a few clarifications and corrections I would like to present regarding specific points in the report.

Page 2, Key Takeaways, Bullet 1: It is noted that there were issues related to meeting minutes. I would like to clarify that I did provide Mauldin & Jenkins with minutes from the meetings we have had in FY 24. If there are any discrepancies or if additional documentation is needed, please let me know, and I will ensure you receive the necessary information.

Page 6, Paragraph 3, Lines 3 and 4: The statement "M&J determined that the District did not properly notice each meeting and workshop" needs further clarification. Since my tenure began, I have ensured that all meetings are properly noticed as directed by the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC).

Page 15, Paragraph 1, Lines 7 and 9: Regarding the reference to no press board being located and nothing found on Laserfiche, I want to clarify that these are part of the process of noticing meetings that is managed by a BoCC employee, not myself. The responsibility for these tasks lies outside my direct control, but I will work with the relevant parties to ensure compliance and proper documentation moving forward.

Page 15, Paragraph 2, Line 5 (beginning with "Since January 2023" and ending with the completion of the paragraph): I was unaware that this specific process was part of my responsibilities. I appreciate the feedback and will incorporate this into our procedures to ensure all aspects of meeting notifications and documentation are adequately covered.

Chairman Johnson, the Board and I are committed to improving our practices. Your detailed observations are invaluable in helping us achieve greater efficiency and compliance.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. If there are any further questions or if additional information is required, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle Clark
District Administrator
clarkg@stlucieco.gov

Address

8400 Picos Road Ste 202
Fort Pierce FL 34945

Contact

772-461-4546
clarkg@stlucieco.gov