Funding Crisis for Soil and Water Conservation Districts

- $2.8 million – or 37.3% - of the total $7.5 million appropriation for soil and water conservation in the Dept. of Agriculture’s FY 15 Budget is “suspended” by GOMB/IDOA. If this suspension is not lifted, soil and water conservation districts around the state will be forced to dismantle their work force.

- About $4.7 million has been released to fund the operation of the soil and water conservation districts so far this year. That constitutes about $33,900 to each of the 97 districts, plus $1.4 million for health insurance premiums.

- $1.75 million – or about $18,800 per district - is needed to fund the districts through the remainder of this fiscal year.

- These funds are for the salaries of the employees of the 97 districts. Soil and water conservation districts are now operating with about 149 employees – or about 30% fewer than 8 years ago.

- Due to the reduction in force, soil and water conservation districts have had to curtail some services and many are “borrowing” employees from nearby counties to accomplish what they can. So de facto “consolidation” of soil and water conservation districts has occurred in practice as a result of budget cuts.

- Funding for Soil and Water Conservation has been cut by 70% since fiscal year 2002.

- The further de-funding of soil and water conservation districts will curb conservation practices that landowners use to keep soil and chemicals from blowing into the air and running-off into rivers, lakes, and streams. Farmers and urban developers will not have to them the technical expertise of the Resource Coordinators at the SWCDs to help them build the ground structures necessary to contain fertile soil and prevent run-off.

- Further de-funding of SWCDs will impair the delivery of over $400 million in contracts that the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture executes each year with Illinois landowners to facilitate conservation practices.

- Further de-funding of SWCDs will impair the execution of the IEPA’s Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, Illinois’ response to the U.S. EPA’s mandated reduction in run-off of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus from farm fields, city streets, and wastewater treatment plants. Unless Illinois meets the targeted reduction, Illinois could see enforcement action from the U.S. EPA in the future.