

APPENDIX C (1999)

CONSERVATION DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL CODE OF ETHICS

PREFACE

This code is intended to serve as a guide to the everyday conduct of members of the Conservation District profession and as a basis for the determination of issues in ethics when the conduct of conservation district professionals is alleged to deviate from the standards expressed or implied in this code. It represents standards of ethical behavior for conservation district professionals in their relationships with their Boards, colleagues, agencies and organizations they work with, clients, other individuals and professionals, and the community and society as a whole. It also embodies standards of ethical behavior governing individual conduct to the extent that such conduct is associated with an individual's status and identity as a conservation district professional.

This code is based on the fundamental values of the conservation district professional that include the worth, dignity, and uniqueness of all persons as well as their rights and opportunities. It is also based on the nature of conservation district work, which involve these values.

In subscribing to and abiding by this code, the conservation district professional is expected to view ethical responsibility in as inclusive a context as each situation demands and within which ethical judgement is required. The conservation district professional is expected to take into consideration all the principles in this code that have a bearing upon any situation in which ethical judgement is to be exercised and professional intervention or conduct is planned. The course of action that the conservation district professional chooses is expected to be consistent with the spirit as well as the letter of this code.

In itself, this code does not represent a set of rules that will prescribe as the behaviors of conservation district professionals in all the complexities of professional life. Rather, it offers general principles to guide conduct, and the judicious appraisal of conduct, in situations that have ethical implications. It provides the basis for making judgements about ethical actions before they occur. Frequently, the particular situation determines the ethical principles that apply and the manner of their application. In such cases, not only the particular ethical principles are taken into immediate consideration, but also the entire code and its spirit. Specific applications of ethical principles must be judged within the context in which they are being considered. Ethical behavior in a given situation must satisfy not only the judgement of the individual conservation district professional, but also the judgement of an unbiased jury of Professional Peers.

This code should not be used as an instrument to deprive any conservation district professional of the opportunity to practice with complete professional integrity; nor should any disciplinary action be taken on the basis of this code without maximum provision for safeguarding the rights of the conservation district professional involved.

The ethical behavior of conservation district professionals results not from edict, but from a personal commitment of the individual. This code is offered to affirm the will and zeal of all conservation district professionals to be ethical and to act ethically in all that they do as conservation district professionals.

The following codified ethical principles should guide conservation district employees in the various roles and relationships and at the various levels of responsibility in which they function professionally. These principles also serve as a basis for the determination by a Board of Peers of issues in ethics.

I – BOARD / COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP

- The Conservation District Professional is ultimately responsible to the governing Board of the Conservation District, and as such will faithfully prescribe, represent, follow and implement all policies of that Board that do not conflict with the professional and ethical principles put forth in this document.
- The District Board is the duly elected/appointed representative of the community in which it serves and directs the District staff as such. The District Professional will assess the Board of the needs of the community and will advise the Board of any actions or decisions that may ultimately adversely impact on that community that the Board may take.
- The Conservation District Professional will strive to present information, issues, policies and other pertinent data in a valid and unbiased format for the decision of the Board for future action.
- Conservation District Professionals will not willfully and/or intentionally withhold information, issues, policies and other pertinent data from their Board and Community.
- The Conservation District Professional recognizes that they are program implementers and facilitators and not policy makers.

II – PROFESSIONAL COMPETANCE

- Conservation District Professionals will only practice within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, state and national professional credentials, and appropriate professional experience.
- Conservation District Professionals will demonstrate a commitment to gain knowledge, personal awareness, sensitivity, and skills pertinent to working with a diverse scope of work.
- Conservation District Professionals will practice in specialty areas new to them only after appropriate education, training, and/or supervised experience. While developing skills in new specialty areas, Conservation District Professionals will take steps to ensure the competency of their work and protect others from possible harm.
- Conservation District Professionals accept employment only for positions for which they are qualified by education, training, supervised experience, state and national credentials, and appropriate professional experience.
- Conservation District Professionals continually monitor their effectiveness as professionals and take steps to improve when necessary.
- Conservation District Professionals take reasonable steps to consult with other professionals when they have questions regarding their ethical obligations or professional practice.
- Conservation District Professionals recognize the need for continuing education and training to maintain a reasonable level of awareness of current scientific and professional information in their fields of activity.

III – AGENCY / ORGANIZATION RELATIONSHIPS

- Conservation District Professionals remain cognizant that they represent the interests and policies of the community and Board they are employed by, and faithfully do so in all interaction with agencies and organizations.
- Conservation District Professionals respect the protocol for communications within the various agencies and organization they communicate with on behalf of their Community and Boards.
- Conservation District Professionals will work with all agency and/or organization personnel assigned to provide direction or supervision in technical or specialty areas as assigned by their Board.
- Conservation District Professionals will nurture relationships with all agencies and/or organizations assigned by their Board and will strive to work through conflict that would threaten effectiveness of short term and long term working relations.

IV – PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITIES

- Conservation District Professionals do not discriminate against individual clients, groups, or organizations based on their age, color, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status, or for any other reason through any direct or indirect actions or collaboration.
- Conservation District Professionals are accurate, honest, and unbiased in reporting their professional activities and judgments to appropriate third parties including their Boards, cooperating agencies, courts, and those who are the recipients of reports.
- Conservation District Professionals will respect the privacy of clients and hold in confidence all information obtained in the course of professional service. Information and records regarding those clients and the services provided will be released based on established guidelines and policy which has been made known to the clients prior to service.
- Conservation District Professionals will strive to be sensitive to the social, economic, and cultural issues relative to the various communities that are served by the Conservation District, and will consider such issues when developing and implementing local programs and services.

V – RESPONSIBILITY TO PEERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

- Conservation District Professionals have an obligation to provide guidance and information to Peers that would benefit the realization of the history and mission of Conservation Districts.
- Conservation District Professionals are respectful of approaches to natural resource management that differ from their own.
- When making personal statements in a public context, Conservation District Professionals clarify that they are speaking from their personal perspectives and that they are not speaking on behalf of all Conservation District Professionals, other Conservation Professionals or the Conservation District Board.
- Conservation District Professionals do not engage in exploitive relationships with individuals over whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or instructional control or authority.
- Conservation District Professionals should cooperate and resolve conflict with colleagues to promote and strengthen professional interests and concerns.

- Conservation District Professionals should treat with respect, and represent accurately and fairly, the qualifications, views, and findings of colleagues and use appropriate channels to express judgements on these matters.
- The Conservation District Professional should seek arbitration or mediation when conflicts with colleagues require resolution for compelling professional reasons.
- Conservation District Professionals will support, nurture and maintain communication with other Conservation District Professionals in order to strengthen their own effectiveness and the local conservation district program.

VI – FINANCIAL / POSITION GAIN

- Conservation District Professionals shall avoid conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflict of interest.
- Conservation District Professionals shall not participate in any matter in which they or their spouse or dependents have a private interest which may directly or indirectly affect or influence the performance of their duties in an ethical manner.
- Conservation District Professionals shall not use their positions to secure privileges or advantages, personal benefit or financial gain, which are not generally available to the public or other Conservation Professionals.
- Conservation District Professionals shall not give, solicit, accept or agree to accept a gift from a person who is subject to or likely to become subject to or interested in, any matter or action pending before or contemplated by the Conservation District or associated Agency or Program.

VII – RESOLVING ETHICAL ISSUES

- Conservation District Professionals have a responsibility to read, understand, follow and advocate the Code of Ethics.
- Conservation District Professionals have a responsibility to consult fellow Conservation District Professionals when faced with a dilemma in interpreting proper ethical behavior.
- Conservation District Professionals will report serious violations to ethical behavior through the proper forum that they become aware of.

VIII – USE OF CONSERVATION DISTRICT PROPERTY

- Conservation District Professionals shall use the property and funds under his/her official control in strict accordance with prescribed procedures in meeting program goals and guidelines. Conservation District property, equipment, funds, or other assets shall be used only for Conservation District business, and not for personal use.

IX – STATE, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PARTICIPATION

- Conservation District Professionals shall endeavor to further the cause and principles of conservation and conservation districts through participation at the appropriate state, regional and/or national levels.
- Conservation District Professionals participate at the appropriate state, regional and/or national levels at the discretion and permission of their Board.

- Conservation District Professionals shall represent the views, opinions and policies in the state, regional or national public arenas consistent with those of the conservation district Board.

X – OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT AND ACTIVITIES

- No Conservation District Professional shall accept employment or render services for any private or public interest, whether compensated or not, when that employment or service is incompatible with or in conflict with the discharge of his/her official duties; or when that employment or service may impair his/her objectivity or independence of judgement in the performance of such duties.
- All outside employment and/or business interest by a Conservation District Professional that presents the potential for a conflict, whether compensated or not, will be submitted to and approved by the district Board prior to its undertaking.
- Conservation District Professionals shall not directly or indirectly use or seek to use his/her authority or the influence of his/her position to control, modify or influence the political action of another person for personal gain.

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is further recommended that a Conservation District Professional Board of Peers be established for the review of Ethical Principles and Behavior. It is recommended that such a Board be established at the National, Regional and State levels. These Boards would serve at the request of Conservation Districts, Conservation District Professionals and State and Federal partners.