

A Year In Review

2025-2026



**Marion Soil and Water
Conservation District**

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2024-2025 Year in Review



Marion
Soil & Water Conservation District

Conservation

Districts:

A History

The Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD) is a governmental subdivision of the State of Florida funded by Marion County. The creation of soil and water conservation districts was authorized by the Soil and Water Conservation Law, Chapter 582, Florida Statutes, enacted by the Florida Legislature in 1937.

MSWCD was organized and enacted in 1941 by a landowner petition for developing and implementing a locally-led conservation program for our water, soil and natural resources.

CONTACT US

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PROTECTING OUR RESOURCES AND OUR FUTURE

Over the years, conservation districts have built a legacy of impact through their collaboration with community stakeholders. Each district, including Marion Soil and Water, is a unique entity, working alongside partners to solve unique local resource concerns.

The goal of this collaboration is to face the environmental issues of today, head-on, and plant the seed for a brighter future. Through our continued mission, we hope to inspire future generations to do the same.

OUR GOALS

- **Promote Sustainable Land-use Practices:** Encourage methods of using land that protect our natural resources while supporting productivity and growth.
- **Promote participation in the Farms of Environmental Distinction (FED) Program:** Encourage and recognize agricultural operations with exceptional contributions to best management practices.
- **Strengthen and Develop Relationships With Local Organizations, Agencies, and Stakeholders:** Maintain existing partnerships that enhance collaboration and impact within the community while creating new ones.
- **Expand Educational Outreach Efforts:** Increase opportunities for learning by participating in new festivals and events, creating new workshops, and adding a new contest.
- **Encourage a Culture of Stewardship and Environmental Responsibility:** Inspire communities to take a more active role in protecting and carrying for all of our natural resources.
- **Offer Guidance and Technical Assistance to Landowners:** Provide expertise, support, and technical assistance to help landowners access financial assistance that supports conservation efforts.



- **Grow Conservation Programs to Reach New Areas:** Expand the District's programs into underserved areas of the County to ensure more stakeholders have access to resources and support.
- **Increase Participation in District Programs and Contests:** Boost involvement in our District-led events. Making participation more accessible and engaging, thus allowing an interest in conservation involvement and stewardship.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM THIS YEAR

- **Central Florida Envirothon Expanded Participation:** This year the MSWCD hosted the Central Florida Envirothon for three counties; including Marion, Alachua, and Lake County. The Envirothon is a hands-on environmental education competition where students explore topics in conservation.
- **Conservation Landscape Trays Increased Entries:** The Conservation Landscape Tray is an annual event the District sponsors at the Southeastern Youth Fair. This year, we saw much higher participants than the previous years.
- **Expanded the Acciona Partnership:** Connected an international biochar company, Acciona, with local contacts and community partners to create collaboration opportunities.
- **Second Annual Buzz & Bloom Held:** The District partnered with Rainbow Springs State Park, Marion County Public Library, and Master Gardeners to hold the second annual Buzz & Bloom, highlighting the importance of pollinators in a family-friendly learning environment.
- **Collaboration with College of Central Florida (CF):** Through the National Science Foundation (NSF) Aquatics Workforce and Research Project, CF is partnering with MSWCD to introduce college students to careers in water conservation. With collaboration from the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension, the District will continue to host interns until 2028.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR NEXT YEAR

- **Public Service Announcement (PSA) Contest:** The District is developing a new contest available to Marion County students. The contest involves creating a PSA on a conservation topic chosen by our District.
- **Resuming the Grace Force Scholarship:** The Grace Force scholarship is open to all seniors in Marion County.
- **Continuing our Partnership with Horse Farms Forever (HFF):** In 2024 the District entered a partnership with HFF where we assisted in organizing and managing their contest process. These contests were suspended in 2025 by HFF, but will resume in the fall of 2026.
- **Expanding Partnership with UF/IFAS:** The District partnered with UF/IFAS for a series of well workshops that will continue into the next fiscal year. This partnership will improve program effectiveness and increase community engagement within Marion County.

Annual Contest Showcase

The Districts annual contests highlight the achievements and creativity of students in a variety of mediums from academic to artistic. Contests provide students with an opportunity to showcase their work at a local level, with the possibility of going onto state and/or national level competition. This year, the District held a new photo contest, allowing adults to compete as well. Entering into our contests provides a foundation for environmental stewardship and strengthens connections to conservation within our community.

Partnerships within the community are integral to the continued success of our contests. Our District thanks all those who support our contests, especially those who dedicate their time and expertise.

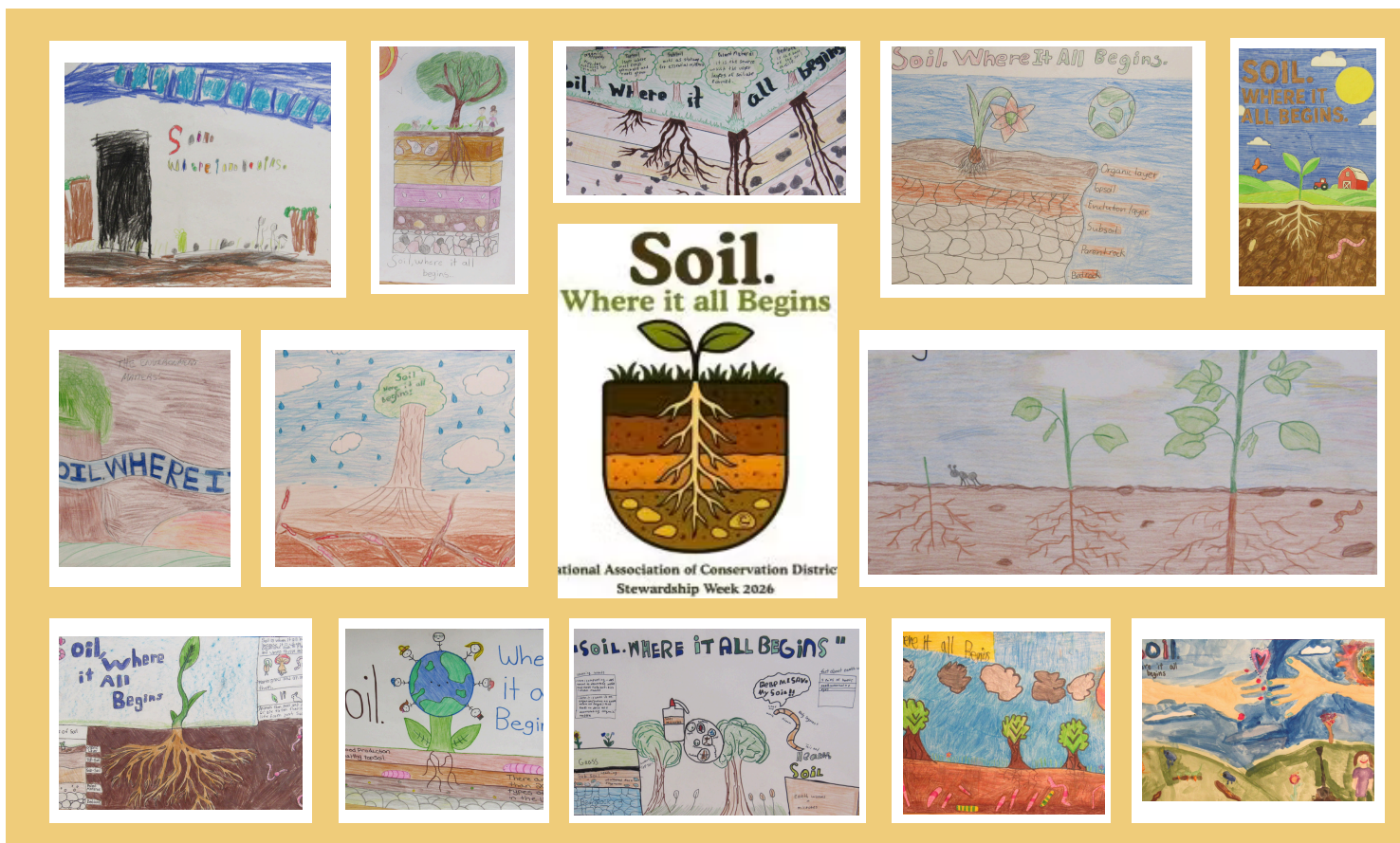
MARION SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Contests



Our Conservation Superstars!

This year's contest theme was "Soil. Where It All Begins," highlighting the importance of soil in supporting all life on Earth, beginning with the food we eat and expanding far beyond that. By conserving soil, we support the land around us and all that it gives us.



Congratulations to the Tardigrades!

The Tardigrades team from Alachua County made an incredible run at the Envirothon, earning the honor of representing Florida on the National Stage in Alberta, Canada! Competing against the top teams in the country, including teams from Canada and China, they delivered an excellent performance and finished 20th overall.



Educator of the Year

Tara Kline from Forest High School was honored as the Educator of the Year!

A repeat winner, Tara Kline has shown an outstanding dedication to getting her students involved in conservation. Educators are incredibly important in building environmental stewardship amongst the next generation, and she has risen to the occasion.

Expression of Gratitude from Students

THANK
YOU

To Whom This may Concern,
ON Behalf of myself, I want to
Express my heartfelt gratitude
For your generous Sponsorship.
Your Support Plays a vital role in our
Ability to provide meaningful opportunities
for our youth to learn, grow, and lead in the
field of agriculture.

Thank you.

Alyssa Skinner

Dear Marion Soil and Water conservation district,

Thank you so much for giving us third place! We were very proud of ourselves for placing third. We have learned so much from this project. We learned how each thing on the tray contributes to the community and how it helps the environment. Throughout this project we had some step backs. We had many things that needed to be fixed or critiqued before it got turned into the fair. It was a very stressful project for some of us, but we pushed through.

We started by getting the tray from our teacher. The first thing we did was paint the bottom of the tray with green paint and dug the hole where the water was going to go. We then started putting trees for prescribed burning/ tree planting. We then started putting our wildlife on the tray and our fencing. After we put the fencing and the wildlife, we then put the irrigation system in which we used real soil, and we used straws to make the actual irrigation system and we bought fake plants to go in the dirt and for the hedge grow around the irrigation system. After we finished all of that we made the water out of slime and put it in the hole, we also used glitter glue. This took us a very long time to do, and it came out very good. We are very proud of how it came out and how nice it looked.

We have all put so much work and effort into this project, and we were all very pleased we got third place. Thank you so much again for picking us to be third. Doing this project made us want to do another conservation tray when we get into high school. This was a very fun project to do and taught us so much while doing it!

Sincerely,

Bellevue Middle FFA

Bellevue Middle FFA Chapter

Dear MSWCD board,

I wanted to thank you for awarding me 1st place in my division at the Conservation Landscape Tray. I had so much fun making my tray to add little details but picking out what I was going to use was hard. There was so much to choose from. I am grateful I had the opportunity to participate & I feel like I learned a lot about landscapes.

Sincerely,

Tris Moore

1000 East Silver Springs Blvd.

Ocala, Florida 34470

February 28, 2026.

Dear Board Members,

On behalf of the Florida Riverside 4-H Club, I would like to extend our sincere appreciation for sponsoring the Conservation Tray Landscape Contest at the Southeastern Youth Fair.

This year marked a very special milestone for our club. It was our first time participating as a 4-H club in the Conservation Tray Landscape Contest, and for many of our members, it was their very first time entering this event. We are incredibly proud to share that our group placed 2nd in the Group Division. This accomplishment meant so much to our members and served as an encouraging reminder that hard work, teamwork, and dedication truly pay off.

The opportunity to participate in this contest allowed our youth to deepen their understanding of conservation practices, environmental responsibility, and landscape design. Beyond the competition itself, the experience fostered collaboration, creativity, and confidence among our members. Your support of agricultural and environmental education makes a lasting impact on young people in our community.

Thank you for providing such a meaningful and well-organized event for local youth. We are already looking forward to participating again next year and continuing to grow through this wonderful opportunity.

Dear Marion Soil and Water,

Thank you for sponsoring the conservation tray competition. We competed in this contest as a small group from Lake Weir High School FFA.

My friends and I had to research the different conservation practices. We had to work together to make sure all of our models were the same size. This was the biggest challenge for our group. We had to rebuild some of our models to get our project to scale.

Thank you for sponsoring this contest. Our trophy is beautiful. Through this contest we learned a great deal about conservation practices and team work.

February 28, 2026

Dear Marion Soil and Water Conservation District,

It is not about the blue ribbons and trophies. It's about expanding agriculture in youth like me. Howdy, my name is Dakota James Anneshensley. I am a member of Happy Trails 4-H club. I am a junior at Lake Weir high school. In my free time I love to play baseball and work my steer. I would like to thank you for your support in the Southeastern Youth Fair conservation tray contest. This is my second year entering the competition and placing. I hope to keep competing next year for my senior year. My aspiration upon graduation is to be entering a branch of the service and pursue a career as a fish and wildlife officer. I love the woods so by becoming a fish and wildlife officer I can be in the woods and have a great paying job.

Sincerely,

My name is Will Love, and I attend the Villages charter school. I am 11 years old this is my 3rd year Showing in the SEYF. I have shown Steers, goats, chickens and a woodworking project. One of my favorite things to do is a landscape tray

My granddad helps me research the different plots of land that are involved in farming and we plan it out. He gives me the materials and I put them together. I really enjoy learning about different areas of land. My tray received second place.

Thank you for allowing this project to be part of the fair and thank you for supporting our projects. I have learned things doing this land conservation tray. My hope for the future is to be a farmer.

TAYLOR HOLLAND
Dear Marion Soil and Water Conservation District Board,

Thank you for selecting my project for the Conservation Landscape Tray Contest. I'm thankful for the opportunity to participate and learn more about conservation methods. It was a great experience to be on the project, and I am grateful for the recognition and prize. Thank you for providing opportunities for students like this one.

Sincerely,
Taylor Holland

Thank you

Team Outreach Adventures: Capturing Moments of Impact and Connection



Envirothon



**Springs Awareness
Month**



Career Fair



Marion County Day



**Conservation
Landscape Tray**



Envirothon



RLE Well Workshop



Buzz & Bloom



**Bellevue
Well Workshop**



Cross Fencing to Subdivide Pastures

Cost-Share Funding

Through our FDACS-sponsored program, we have allocated **\$429,058** for this fiscal year, helping farmers to implement Agricultural Best Management Practices to further conservation goals.

Requirements to Apply for FDACS Funding

To apply for funding, producers must be enrolled in the Agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) program by submitting a Notice of Intent (NOI). Eligible BMPs must address a nutrient management, water quality or water quantity issue.



Composting Bins

BMP projects are subject to approval and program changes. The following projects are examples of BMP projects that have been accepted during previous years.

- **Cross Fencing**
- **Compost Facilities**
- **Weather Stations**
- **No-Tillage Drills**
- **Nutrient Applicators**
- **Solar Wells**

Benefits of Partnerships

The protection of our natural resources for future generations requires strong collaboration and shared commitment. By forming partnerships and working together toward a common goal, we can better serve the public and make meaningful progress towards environmental stewardship.

Marion County has been an important partner, offering financial support and demonstrating a dedication to conservation. In addition, FDACS and USDA/NRCS have played key roles in advancing these efforts.

Through these collaborations, we are able to better assist producers adopt BMPs, promote sustainable practices, and encourage environmental stewardship throughout the State.

Team Spotlight:

Collaborative Efforts and Achievements



Ann Bishop, CAP-OM
Executive Administrator

Ann is a cornerstone of the District's success. For more than ten years, she contributed her expertise and enthusiasm to supporting the District's mission and strengthening its connection to other agencies and the community at large.

In her position, she skillfully balances a wide range of responsibilities, from coordinating programs and logistics to overseeing administrative operations. Beyond her day-to-day duties, Ann fosters strong collaboration with board members and staff, creating a productive environment.



Rachael Tuck
Program Assistant

Rachael is a new addition to the District, bringing in fresh energy and commitment to the District's mission. She assists with coordinating events such as the Buzz & Bloom, managing communication with the general public and our partner agencies, and supporting the development of programs that connect our community with educational opportunities.

She is an important part of the team, making sure projects run efficiently and contributing to the growth of the District's outreach efforts.



Jordan Brantley
Intern

Jordan is a temporary addition to the team, but her impact is no less important because of it.

During her time at the District she worked with UF/IFAS to coordinate and execute a series of well workshops for Marion County residents, providing much needed education on well testing and maintenance. Beyond her primary project, she spent time shadowing experts across various agencies and gaining first hand experience in environmental conservation.

Introducing Our District Board: Champions of Environmental Conservation



From left to right: Conor Thorton-Fraser, Leonora Deonath, Vivi Serena, Amy Davis, Justin Albright

The MSWCD Board Members are dedicated to environmental stewardship, bringing valuable knowledge and experience to our District's community. Committed to promoting conservation through stewardship, they work together to foster a healthier environment for Marion County and throughout Florida.