

1 AN ACT concerning local government.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 5. The State Finance Act is amended by changing
5 Section 6z-32 as follows:

6 (30 ILCS 105/6z-32)

7 Sec. 6z-32. Partners for Planning and Conservation.

8 (a) The Partners for Conservation Fund (formerly known as
9 the Conservation 2000 Fund) and the Partners for Conservation
10 Projects Fund (formerly known as the Conservation 2000
11 Projects Fund) are created as special funds in the State
12 Treasury. These funds shall be used to establish a
13 comprehensive program to protect Illinois' natural resources
14 through cooperative partnerships between State government and
15 public and private landowners. Moneys in these Funds may be
16 used, subject to appropriation, by the Department of Natural
17 Resources, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department
18 of Agriculture for purposes relating to natural resource
19 protection, planning, recreation, tourism, climate resilience,
20 and compatible agricultural and economic development
21 activities. Without limiting these general purposes, moneys in
22 these Funds may be used, subject to appropriation, for the
23 following specific purposes:

1 (1) To foster sustainable agriculture practices and
2 control soil erosion, sedimentation, and nutrient loss
3 from farmland, including grants to Soil and Water
4 Conservation Districts for conservation practice
5 cost-share grants and for personnel, educational, and
6 administrative expenses.

7 (2) To establish and protect a system of ecosystems in
8 public and private ownership through conservation
9 easements, incentives to public and private landowners,
10 natural resource restoration and preservation, water
11 quality protection and improvement, land use and watershed
12 planning, technical assistance and grants, and land
13 acquisition provided these mechanisms are all voluntary on
14 the part of the landowner and do not involve the use of
15 eminent domain.

16 (3) To develop a systematic and long-term program to
17 effectively measure and monitor natural resources and
18 ecological conditions through investments in technology
19 and involvement of scientific experts.

20 (4) To initiate strategies to enhance, use, and
21 maintain Illinois' inland lakes through education,
22 technical assistance, research, and financial incentives.

23 (5) To partner with private landowners and with units
24 of State, federal, and local government and with
25 not-for-profit organizations in order to integrate State
26 and federal programs with Illinois' natural resource

1 protection and restoration efforts and to meet
2 requirements to obtain federal and other funds for
3 conservation or protection of natural resources.

4 (6) To support ~~implement~~ the State's Nutrient Loss
5 Reduction Strategy, including, but not limited to, funding
6 the resources needed to support the Strategy's Policy
7 Working Group, cover water quality monitoring in support
8 of Strategy implementation, prepare a biennial report on
9 the progress made on the Strategy every 2 years, and
10 provide cost share funding for nutrient capture projects.

11 (7) To provide capacity grants to support soil and
12 water conservation districts, including, but not limited
13 to, developing soil health plans, conducting soil health
14 assessments, peer-to-peer training, convening
15 producer-led dialogues, professional memberships, lab
16 analysis, development and travel stipends for meetings and
17 educational events.

18 (8) To develop guidelines and local soil health
19 assessments for advancing soil health.

20 (9) To implement a crop insurance premium discount
21 program at the State level.

22 (b) The State Comptroller and State Treasurer shall
23 automatically transfer on the last day of each month,
24 beginning on September 30, 1995 and ending on June 30, 2023,
25 from the General Revenue Fund to the Partners for Conservation
26 Fund, an amount equal to 1/10 of the amount set forth below in

1 fiscal year 1996 and an amount equal to 1/12 of the amount set
2 forth below in each of the other specified fiscal years:

3 Fiscal Year	Amount
4 1996	\$ 3,500,000
5 1997	\$ 9,000,000
6 1998	\$10,000,000
7 1999	\$11,000,000
8 2000	\$12,500,000
9 2001 through 2004	\$14,000,000
10 2005	\$7,000,000
11 2006	\$11,000,000
12 2007	\$0
13 2008 through 2011	\$14,000,000
14 2012	\$12,200,000
15 2013 through 2017	\$14,000,000
16 2018	\$1,500,000
17 2019	\$14,000,000
18 2020	\$7,500,000
19 2021 through 2023	\$14,000,000

20 (c) The State Comptroller and State Treasurer shall
21 automatically transfer on the last day of each month beginning
22 on July 31, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022, from the
23 Environmental Protection Permit and Inspection Fund to the
24 Partners for Conservation Fund, an amount equal to 1/12 of
25 \$4,135,000.

26 (c-1) The State Comptroller and State Treasurer shall

1 automatically transfer on the last day of each month beginning
2 on July 31, 2022 and ending June 30, 2023, from the
3 Environmental Protection Permit and Inspection Fund to the
4 Partners for Conservation Fund, an amount equal to 1/12 of
5 \$5,900,000.

6 (d) There shall be deposited into the Partners for
7 Conservation Projects Fund such bond proceeds and other moneys
8 as may, from time to time, be provided by law.

9 (Source: P.A. 101-10, eff. 6-5-19; 102-16, eff. 6-17-21;
10 102-699, eff. 4-19-22.)

11 Section 15. The Soil and Water Conservation Districts Act
12 is amended by adding Sections 3.24, 3.25, 3.26, 3.27, 22.03a,
13 22.03b, 22.03c, and 22.03d as follows:

14 (70 ILCS 405/3.24 new)

15 Sec. 3.24. "Healthy soils practices" means systems of
16 agricultural, forestry, and land management practices that:

17 (1) improve the health of soils, including, but not
18 limited to, consideration of depth of topsoil horizons,
19 water infiltration rate, water-holding capacity, organic
20 matter content, biologically accessible nutrient content,
21 bulk density, biological activity, and biological and
22 microbiological diversity;

23 (2) follow the principles of: minimizing soil
24 disturbance and external inputs; keeping soil covered;

1 maximizing biodiversity; diversifying crop rotations;
2 maximizing presence of living roots; integrating animals
3 and insects into land management, including grazing
4 animals, birds, beneficial insects, or keystone species,
5 such as earthworms; and incorporating the context of local
6 conditions in decision-making, including, for example,
7 soil type, topography, and time of year; and

8 (3) include practices such as tillage or no-till,
9 cover-cropping, perennialization of highly erodible land,
10 precision nitrogen and phosphorus application, managed
11 grazing, integrated crop-livestock systems, silvopasture,
12 agroforestry, perennial crops, integrated pest management,
13 nutrient best management practices, invasive species
14 removal and the planting of native species and those
15 practices recommended by the United States Department of
16 Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service -
17 Field Office Technical Guide.

18 (70 ILCS 405/3.25 new)

19 Sec. 3.25. "Soil health assessment" means soil health
20 indicator measures, including, but not limited to, soil
21 organic matter, soil structure, infiltration and bulk density,
22 water-holding capacity, microbial biomass, and soil
23 respiration.

24 (70 ILCS 405/3.26 new)

1 Sec. 3.26. "Initiative" means the Illinois Healthy Soils
2 Initiative.

3 (70 ILCS 405/3.27 new)

4 Sec. 3.27. "Healthy soil" means the continuing capacity of
5 a soil to function as a vital, living biological system that
6 sustains plants, animals, and humans, increases soil organic
7 matter, improves soil structure and water-holding and
8 nutrient-holding capacity and nutrient cycling, enhances water
9 infiltration and filtration capability, promotes water
10 quality, and results in net long-term ecological benefits.
11 "Healthy soil" includes soil that hosts a diversity of
12 beneficial organisms, grow vigorous crops, enhance
13 agricultural resilience, including the ability of crops and
14 livestock to tolerate and recover from drought, temperature
15 extremes, extreme precipitation events, pests, diseases, and
16 other stresses, break down harmful chemicals, and help convert
17 organic residues into stable soil organic matter and retaining
18 nutrients, especially nitrogen and phosphorus.

19 (70 ILCS 405/22.03a new)

20 Sec. 22.03a. Illinois Healthy Soils Initiative.

21 (a) The Illinois Healthy Soils Initiative is created. It
22 is the purpose of the Initiative to improve the health of soils
23 through efforts that improve soil and water quality, increase
24 the resilience of ecosystems to extreme weather events,

1 protect and improve agricultural productivity, and support
2 aquatic and wildlife habitat.

3 The Initiative shall be administered by the Director of
4 Agriculture with consultation from soil and water conservation
5 districts, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, the
6 Department of Natural Resources, and the University of
7 Illinois Extension Program. The Department shall create
8 guidelines and guidance to assist soil and water conservation
9 districts in developing soil health assessments in order to
10 identify desired capacity and funding levels and establish
11 regular, measurable, cost-effective, and technically
12 achievable goals to advance voluntary and incentive-based
13 strategies that improve healthy soils. These assessments shall
14 be used to identify opportunities to access financial and
15 technical assistance from local, State, and federal sources to
16 guide resources to their best potential use.

17 The Initiative shall complement and improve coordination
18 of existing resources and processes and shall not replace
19 existing, local, State, or federal funding or technical
20 assistance programs. The Department shall report on progress
21 of the Initiative annually.

22 The Initiative shall promote voluntary and incentive-based
23 soil health efforts. No part of this Section shall be used to
24 impose mandates or require practice adoption.

1 Sec. 22.03b. Guidelines for soil health assessments. The
2 Department shall adopt and revise guidelines to assist soil
3 and water conservation districts in determining local goals
4 and needs for implementing soil health assessments.

5 In developing its guidelines to assist soil and water
6 conservation districts in determining local goals and needs
7 for soil health assessments, the Department shall consider:

8 (1) county and State levels of conservation practice
9 adoption. Guidance should also be provided to districts to
10 meet USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service determined
11 conservation practice standards or Illinois Urban Manual
12 Practice Standards;

13 (2) information regarding beginning, socially
14 disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers, as well
15 as disadvantaged communities;

16 (3) availability of State, federal, and private
17 financial and technical assistance programs to soil and
18 water conservation districts, local governments, and
19 conservation partners; and

20 (4) opportunities for evaluating results-based
21 practices utilizing tools, such as the U.S. Department of
22 Agriculture's revised universal soil loss equation, that
23 model environmental outcomes at the field, county,
24 watershed, or State level.

25 The information collected through the development of the
26 guidelines shall be compiled and provided to the soil and

1 water conservation districts to inform the development of
2 local soil health assessments.

3 Initial guidelines shall be completed and provided to soil
4 and water conservation districts annually and shall include
5 the grant agreement for the Soil and Water Conservation
6 District Grants Program as well as outlining the funding
7 resource support contained within the grant agreement to
8 better inform the development of local soil health
9 assessments.

10 (70 ILCS 405/22.03c new)

11 Sec. 22.03c. Local soil health assessments. Upon the
12 adoption of guidelines described in Section 22.03b, each soil
13 and water conservation district shall develop annually its own
14 soil health assessment to guide voluntary and incentive-based
15 strategies to improve soil health. The soil health assessment
16 shall be technically feasible and economically reasonable.

17 The Department shall provide a template to the districts
18 for the local soil health assessment, including the required
19 information listed in this Section as well as information
20 regarding available data and support materials collected as
21 the guidance information listed in Section 25.

22 Each district is encouraged to collaborate with other
23 local governmental entities and local stakeholders in
24 developing and implementing its soil health assessment. Each
25 district shall use the guidelines provided by the Department

1 in developing its soil health assessment.

2 Upon the request of a district, the Department may assist
3 in the preparation of the district's soil health assessment.
4 Districts may also work collaboratively to establish joint
5 plans to leverage existing capacity and resources most
6 effectively.

7 To carry out its assessment, a district shall identify
8 soil health practices. The soil health assessment must
9 consider opportunities to access, leverage, and use State and
10 federal resources within a specific soil and water
11 conservation district service area.

12 Soil and water conservation districts may also convene
13 producer-led dialogues to identify special initiatives or
14 pilot projects to leverage additional resources and implement
15 soil health practices at scale across multiple operations and
16 land ownerships.

17 In developing a soil health assessment, the soil and water
18 conservation district shall:

19 (1) evaluate existing assets, such as current
20 practices, current cropping systems, crop processing and
21 market infrastructure, riparian buffers, wetlands, public
22 lands, funding, education, research and peer-to-peer
23 training opportunities, and existing partnerships;

24 (2) consider the eligible funding categories available
25 through the Partners for Conservation Fund and the
26 district's ability to advance healthy soils practices

1 consistent with Natural Resource Conservation Service soil
2 health principles within a soil and water conservation
3 district service area;

4 (3) determine vulnerabilities, such as runoff risk,
5 riparian function, stormwater, floodplains and stream
6 impairments, and observed and predicted impacts from
7 climate change, especially to socially disadvantaged
8 farmers, ranchers, and communities;

9 (4) identify opportunities to conduct outreach to
10 agricultural producers and landowners and to develop
11 individual soil health plans;

12 (5) establish goals for achieving measurable outcomes
13 for soil health and farmer viability through voluntary and
14 incentive-based activities. This includes identifying
15 opportunities to support beginning, socially
16 disadvantaged, and veteran farmers as well as small and
17 mid-scale farmers;

18 (6) estimate 2-year funding levels needed from State,
19 federal and private sources in order to achieve goals; and

20 (7) identify opportunities to develop partnerships and
21 leverage resources from local governments, utilities, and
22 State and federal agencies.

23 The Department shall identify shared goals and priorities
24 between districts and shall assist in developing partnerships
25 and shared funding approaches to maximize capacity and
26 resources. Initial soil health assessments shall be submitted

1 to the Department by September 1, 2024.

2 (70 ILCS 405/22.03d new)

3 Sec. 22.03d. Compliance and standards; cost sharing. To be
4 eligible to receive State cost-share support after September
5 1, 2024, soil and water conservation districts shall have an
6 updated soil health assessment.

7 The Department shall update its rules and procedures for
8 cost-share funding to be inclusive of all relevant soil health
9 practices promoting the rapid adoption of cost-effective and
10 technically feasible projects. Updates to the rules and
11 procedures for State cost-share programs shall also address
12 barriers to access experienced by beginning, socially
13 disadvantaged, and veteran farmers.

14 The Department may require results-based practices or the
15 assessments of the environmental outcomes of projects, at the
16 field or county level, as a condition of cost-share funding.

17 Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon
18 becoming law.