

Okeechobee Soil and Water Conservation District

Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report

Board of Supervisors

Member	Seat
Mariano Corona	Seat 1
Jared Figley	Seat 2
Donald Sellers, Jr.	Seat 3
Douglas Burnham	Seat 4
Glynn Rutledge	Seat 5

Staff

Employee	Position Title
Audrey Kuipers	District Administrator
Vicki Wheeler	Program Specialist
Allyson Moore Crawford	BMP Conservation Technician
Nancy Rivera	BMP Conservation Technician
Ashley Pickett	BMP Conservation Technician

The Creation of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts

As a result of devastation caused by the 1930's Dust Bowl, U.S. Congress declared soil and water conservation a national policy and priority. Over 3,000 local districts across the U.S. were established to address conservation concerns, serving as liaisons between the federal government and local landowners.

Okeechobee Soil and Water Conservation District (OSWCD) was organized in 1951 under the provisions of the Florida Conservation Act of 1937 and amended by the Soil Conservation Act, F.S. Chapter 582 and is one of 49 districts established in Florida. Each of these districts are governed by a board of five, elected nonpartisan, unpaid supervisors, who prioritize and aid in the implementation of services offered by our government to our local landowners.

The Mission of Conservation Districts

OSWCD is responsible for developing and carrying out locally led agricultural programs for the conservation, protection, and development of soil, water, and related plant and animal resources within the district boundaries.

Services

- Provide technical assistance with conservation planning and best management practice implementation through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Provide program enrollment, verification and financial assistance for state mandated programs through the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Office of Ag Water Policy
- Conservation education and agricultural program outreach

Goals and Objectives

The 2020-2024 Strategic Plan states the five goals to carry out their mission. Resource Conservation, Special Projects, Special District Compliance, Youth Conservation and Outreach, and maintaining adequate Personnel. They are met through the following activities listed in the Year in Review.

Year in Review

2.9 million in State Cost Share

Administered over 2.9 million in state BMP (Best Management Practice) cost share projects that will help reduce nutrient run-off to Lake Okeechobee and the NEEPA (Northern Everglades and Estuary Protection Area).

56 Landowner Agreements

Entered into 56 cost share agreements with the Florida Department of Agriculture Office of Agricultural Water Policy agricultural producers in the Northern Everglades Estuary Protection Area, totaling 345,000 acres enrolled.

20,259 acres enrolled in New Contracts

Assisted the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with new federal obligations of \$4.4 million encompassing 20,259 acres in Okeechobee and Glades Counties.

Maintain 100 Existing Contracts

Assisted with managing 100 existing Farm Bill Program contracts in Okeechobee and Glades Counties with \$10.8 million in obligations covering 91,000 acres. This increase of \$8 million is due to the Inflation Reduction Act funding. Currently, there are 28 federal conservation easements totaling 25,766 acres in Okeechobee County.

OUTREACH

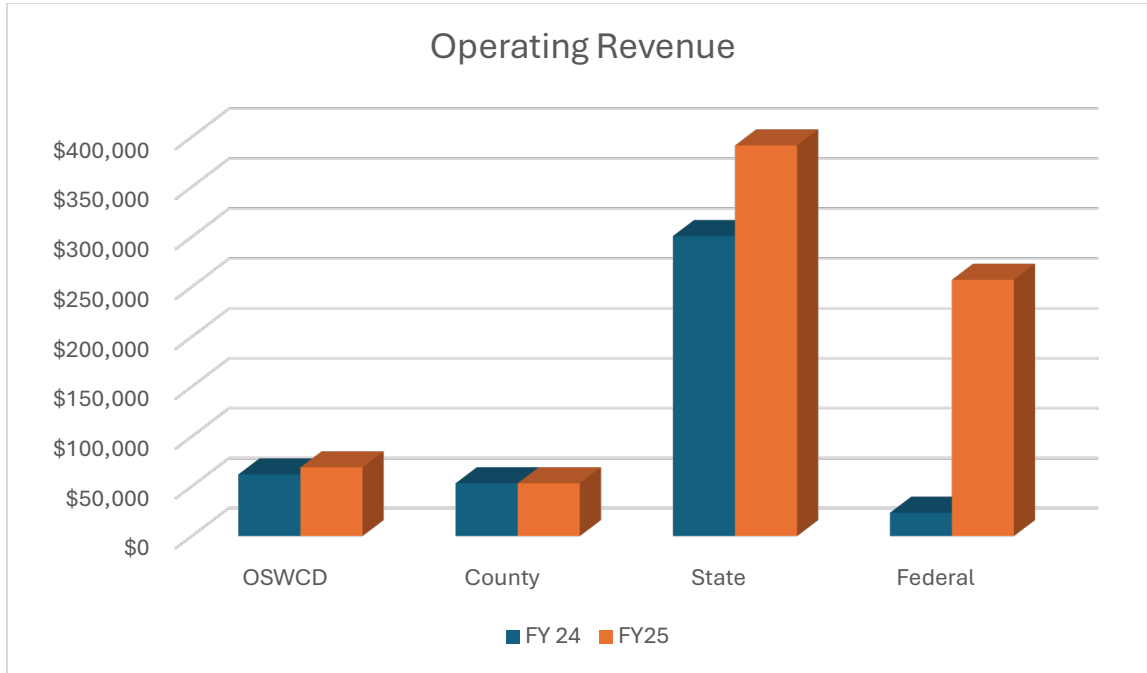
- **Educator Grants:** Fund requests totaled \$6,354. These projects provided financial assistance for seed catalog supplies at the Okeechobee County Library, supplies for Okeechobee County Ag-Venture Inc., and the state level Land Evaluation competition for FFA and 4-H students. Funding was also awarded to the Our Village Okeechobee Inc. hydroponics projects. Carry over funding for UF/IFAS Extension Service assisted 35 citizens with proper soil testing to help meet water quality compliance regulations.
- **Agri-Civic Center Nature Trail:** Continued signage maintenance.
- **Feral Swine Management Cost Share Program:** A grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts was secured to provide \$225K in financial assistance for landowners to install perimeter fence around sensitive areas and ag commodities to deter feral swine soil disturbance.
- **Monofilament Recycling:** Recycled 15 pounds of monofilament fishing line collected from local boat ramps and tackle shops.

EDUCATION

- **Soils Trailer:**
 - Agricultural conservation demonstrations were given to 580 4th grade students, as part of the 2-Day Okeechobee Ag-Venture event.
 - The trailer was utilized by Hendry/Glades and Collier SWCDs Ag-Venture events for agricultural demonstrations to over 3,500 students.
 - The trailer was used to assist the Indian River Lagoon Envirothon Soils Station in teaching over 100 students about soil and water interactions.
- **Classroom Presentations and Outreach:**
 - Engaged (16) students in critical thinking skills regarding natural resources and agriculture through local, regional, state, and national level opportunities through our annual poster contest.
 - Discussed the importance of bees as important pollinators and as a source of honey to over 580 students during the Okeechobee County Ag-Venture.

Financial Statement of Activity

Chart 1. Operating Revenue



FY 24 operating income totaled \$439,047. FY 25 is projected at \$770,322. The increase of \$331K is due to a new feral swine management grant award.

**Not included in Chart 1. Operating Income are FY 2024 Special Revenue projects which totaled \$2,943,101 in best management practice implementation incentive payments to improve water quality in the Lake Okeechobee, St. Lucie, and Caloosahatchee BMAPs (Basin Management Action Plan) and surrounding watersheds.

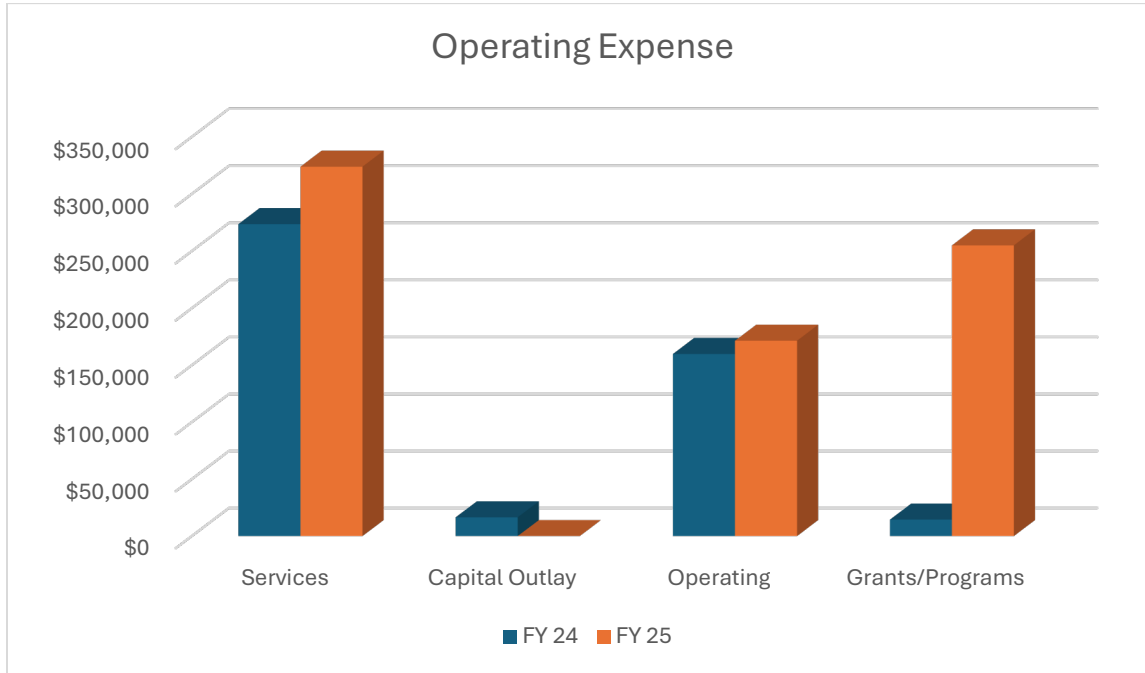
**In Fiscal Year 2025, special revenue projects are projected to total \$1,015,761 in cost share dollars, a 1.9 million dollar decrease from the prior year.

Table 1. Operating and Special Revenue

Revenue	2024	2025
OSWCD	\$61,875	\$68,947
County	\$53,000	\$53,000
State	\$300,736	\$391,375
Federal	\$23,436	\$257,000
**Special Revenue	\$2,943,101	\$1,015,761
Total	\$3,382,148	\$1,786,083

Financial Statement of Activity

Chart 2. Operating Expense



FY 24 total operating expense totaled \$446,406. FY 25 is projected at \$750,373. The \$240K increase is due to new grant funding for feral swine management.

**Not included in Chart 2. Operating Expense are FY 2024 Special Revenue projects which totaled \$2,943,101 in best management practice conservation payments to improve water quality in the Lake Okeechobee BMAP (Basin Management Plan) and surrounding watersheds.

**In Fiscal Year 2025, special revenue projects are projected to total \$1,015,761 in cost share dollars, a 1.9 million decrease from last year due to less funding from the State.

Table 2. Expense and Special Revenue Expense

Expense	2024	2025
Services	\$273,576	\$323,875
Capital Outlay	\$16,471	\$0
Operating	\$159,883	\$171,498
Other Grants/Programs	\$14,476	\$255,000
**Special Revenue	\$2,943,101	\$1,015,761
Total	\$3,407,507	\$1,766,134