

Twenty-five landowners within a boundary of a proposed or existing soil and water conservation district can initiate a petition to organize a district or terminate an existing district. Then the department must conduct a referendum in which all owners of lands lying within the boundaries of the district shall be eligible to vote. After the results of a referendum to organize a district, the department can determine if a district is to be created. After the results of a referendum to discontinue a district, the department is required to take action to discontinue the district if two-thirds of the voters have voted for discontinuance.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1. Increases the number of voting members on the department's Soil and Water Conservation Council from 9 to 11 and expands the qualifications which must be met to include persons with a background in water conservation, or involved with interim measures or best management practices related to soil or water conservation and who have been engaged in agriculture or the agricultural industry.

Provides for the appointment of 12 additional members who shall be nonvoting, ex officio members and who have the following backgrounds:

- 1 from the Department of Environmental Protection
- 5 from water management districts
- 1 from the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida
- 1 from the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service
- 1 from the Florida Association of Counties
- 1 from the Florida League of Cities
- 2 with environmental interests background

Provides that the ex officio members shall be appointed from recommendations by the organization or interest represented and removes the restriction that no two members shall be from the same congressional district.

Section 2. Sets at 10 percent the number of landowners within the boundaries of a proposed district required to file a petition to have a territory organized into a soil and water conservation district.

Section 3. Sets at 10 percent the number of landowners within the boundaries of an existing soil and water conservation district required to file a petition to have their district terminated and discontinued.

Establishes criteria and procedures under which the Commissioner of Agriculture has authority to dissolve or discontinue a soil and water conservation district.

Section 4. Provides that this act shall take effect July 1, 2003.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

There may be an increase in efficiency due to combining two entities that are performing basically the same task.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.