

# County Land & Water Conservation Departments: Statewide Perspective and Emerging Issues

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# Origins of Conservation Districts



- April 27, 1935, Congress established the Soil Conservation Service, formerly the Soil Erosion Service (16 U.S.C. 590a).
- Made part of the US Department of Agriculture
- The name was again changed, in October of 1994, to the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

# Origins of County Conservation



In 1982 Wisconsin revised Chapter 92 of the Wisconsin Statutes to eliminate Conservation Districts.

- Required each county to appoint a Land Conservation Committee.
- Established the Allocation Plan
- “Shall attempt” 100% funding for the first staff person, 70% funding for the 2nd staff person and 50% funding for any additional staff persons
- \$100,000 per county for cost-sharing grants.

# Function of County Departments

- Write and Implement Soil and Water Resource Management Plans
  - Administer Federal Programs like CSP, EQIP, WRP, WHIP, etc
  - Assure compliance with State Regulations like NR 151 runoff rules and NR 115 Shore land Protection

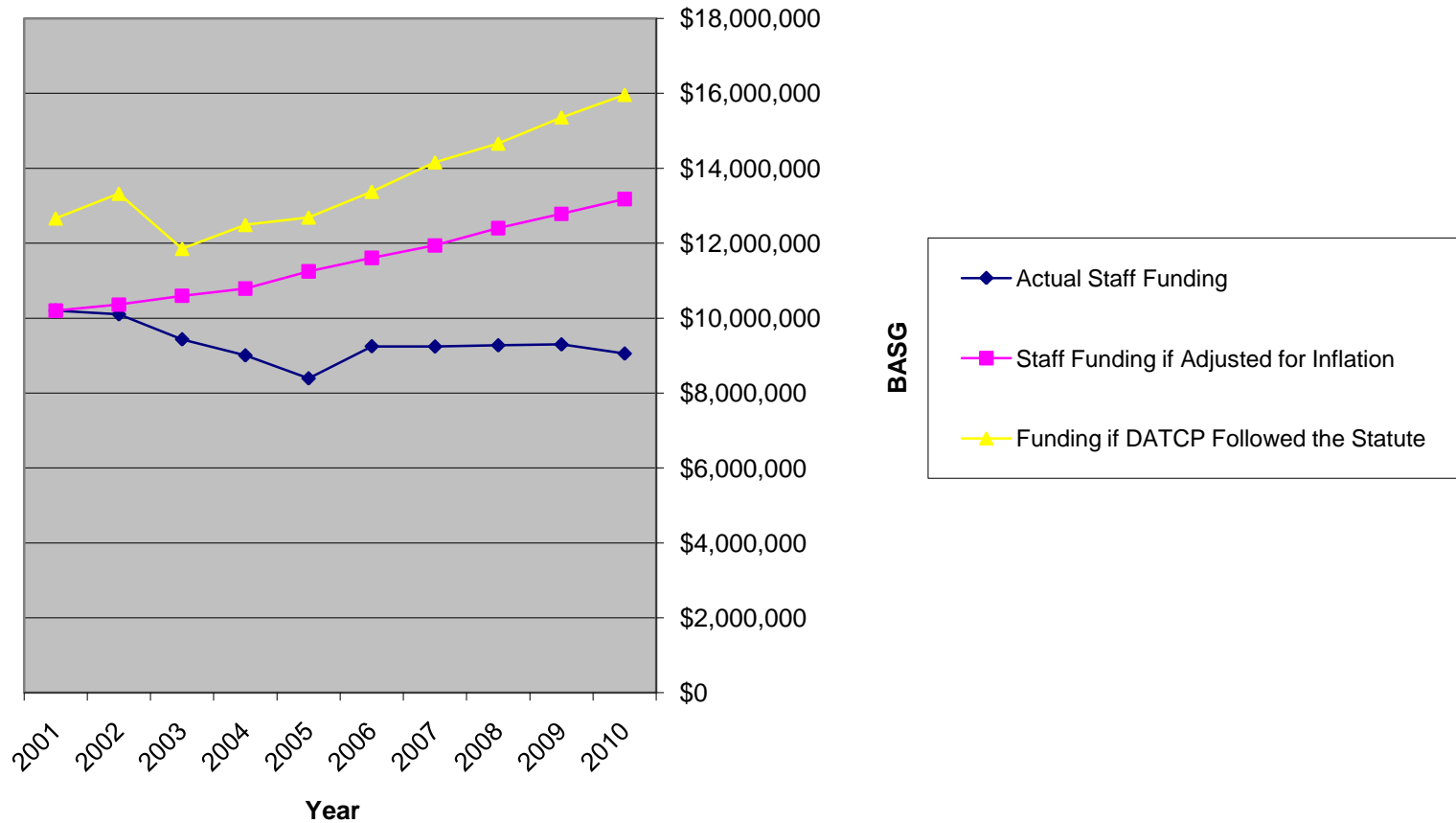


# Function of County Departments

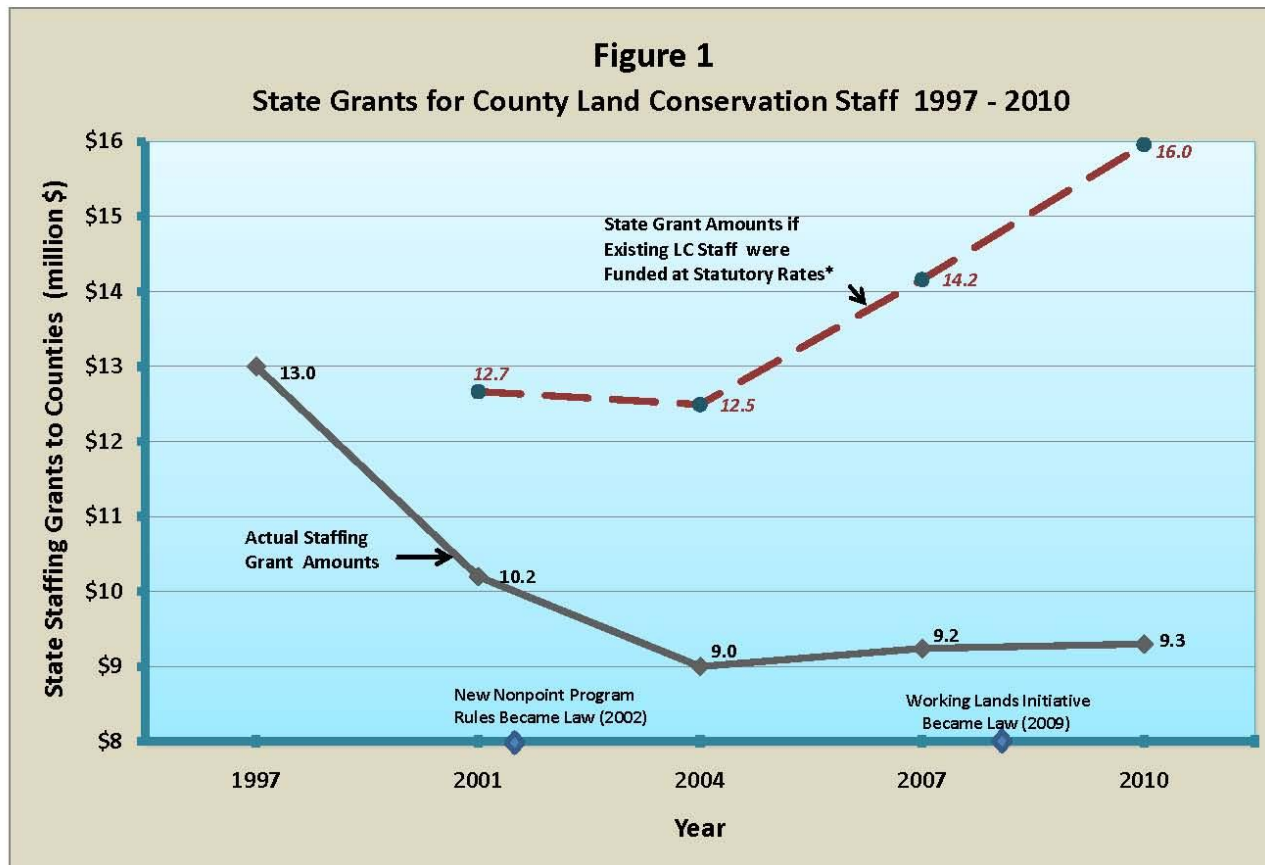


- Assist Landowners with Nutrient Management Planning and Forest Management Planning
- Secure funding and perform stream bank restoration, invasive species eradication and control, youth education programs and public outreach.

# State Staffing Grants for County Conservation

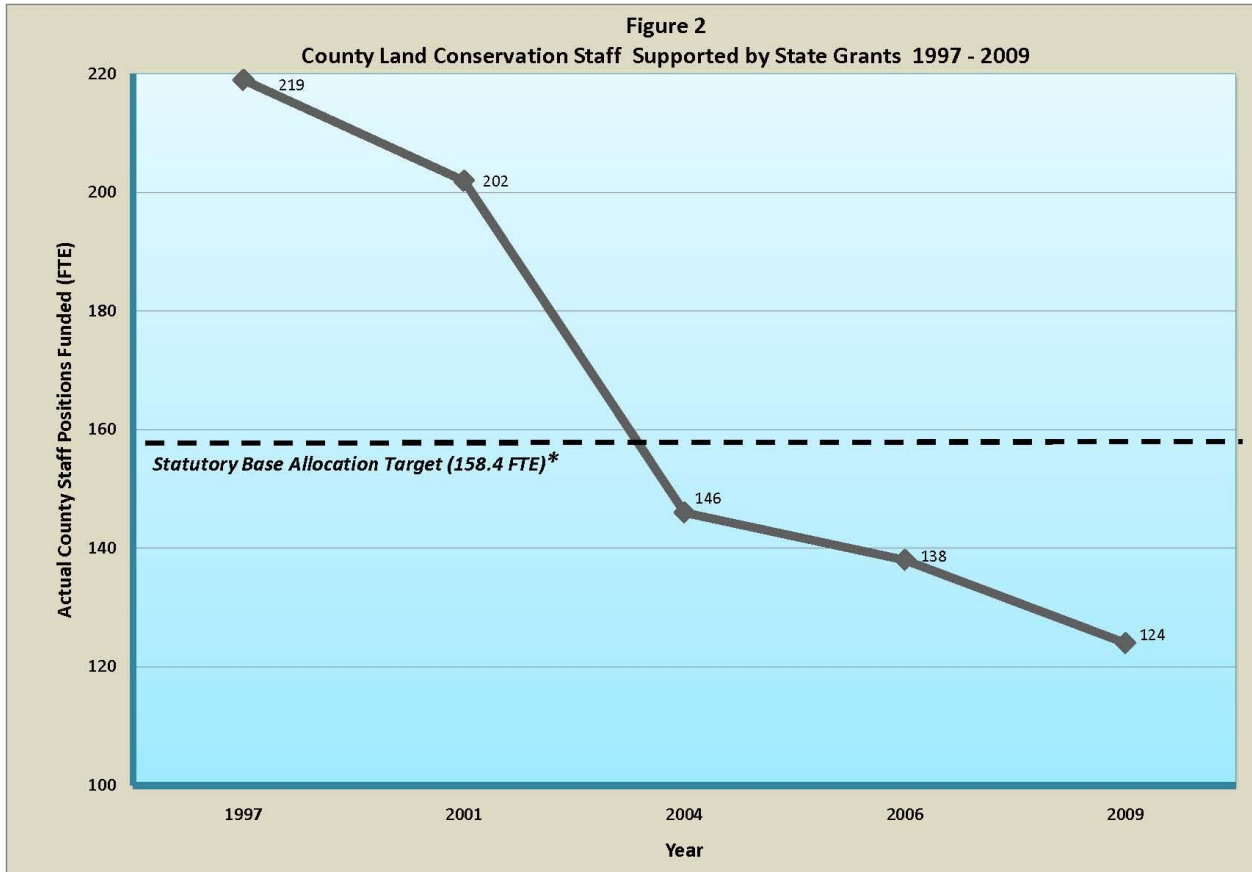


# Staffing Grants, Continued



\*Section 92.14(6)(b) Wis. Statutes (created in 1999) specifies "... full funding for the first staff person, 70% funding for the second staff person and 50% funding for any additional staff person...".

# Staffing Grants, Continued



\*FTE number is based on s.92.14(6)(b) Wis. Stats, which reads: "...the department shall attempt to provide funding under this section for an average of 3 staff persons per county ...". For three staff, this adds up to 2.2 FTE per county X 72 counties = 158.4 FTE.



# Consequences of Diminishing State Funding

- Counties run into legislatively imposed levy caps.
- Loss of staff
  - Decreased capacity for compliance assurance
  - Less conservation on the ground
  - Lose institutional memory
  - Priorities dictated by available funding sources
  - Inadequate support for worthy state programs (Working Lands Initiative)
- Lose ground to environmental degradation.

# Broke? What Next?



- Organize
  - Form Large Coalitions
  - Partner with Traditional Foes
  - Build Bi-Partisan Message
  - Use Direct Professional Lobbying
  - Use Grassroots Lobbying

# Emerging Trends

- Counties are downsizing the Board of Supervisors
- Counties are merging departments and committees
- County Executive governance is de-emphasizing LCC roles and responsibilities
- Responsibility for state programs falls to counties, but without additional funding

# Emerging Trends

- Wisconsin is becoming increasingly urbanized, changing the traditional role of conservation departments
- Farms are becoming larger and fewer
  - DNR is overwhelmed by applications from ever more CAFOs
  - Very large farms present new problems, such as decommissioning

# The Bottom Line

- In the end, meeting the challenges of the future depends upon funding.

No, not that much money...



...just enough to keep our  
landscape looking like this.



Remember to VOTE  
for conservation on  
November 2



# Contact Information



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