St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District

CONSERVATION KALEIDOSCOPE

Today's Visions for Tomorrow's Future

September/October 2012 | 2042 E. Ireland Rd, South Bend, IN | Telephone (574) 291-7444 Ext.3 | Alisa Wynn, Editor
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What's Going On...

Events hosted by the St. Joseph County SWCD & Our Partners in Conservation. Call for Details & to RSVP.

SEPTEMBER

TBD - St. Joseph County, Elkhart County, and Kosciusko County SWCDs co-host our ANNUAL TRI-COUNTY FORESTRY FIELD DAY in Kosciusko County *(watch for details on our **website** and our **Facebook page**)*

3 - LABOR DAY - *OFFICE CLOSED*

17 - SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 7PM @ Our Office - *PUBLIC ALWAYS WELCOME!*

OCTOBER

10 - FREE PUBLIC EVENT— Compost 101 Seminar, Main Library, South Bend, 6-7PM— RSVP Requested

15 - SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 7PM @ Our Office - *PUBLIC ALWAYS WELCOME!*

NOVEMBER

TBD - Tri-County Forestry Field Day *(watch for details on our website and our Facebook page)*

6 - ELECTION DAY - *SWCD STAFF OFF*

12 - VETERANS DAY - *OFFICE CLOSED*

19 - SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 7PM @ Our Office - *PUBLIC ALWAYS WELCOME!*

22 - THANKSGIVING DAY - *OFFICE CLOSED*

23 - DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING - *SWCD STAFF OFF*

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JANUARY

18 - St. Jos. Cty. SWCD's 53rd Annual Meeting @ Holy Family Church, South Bend
...1 WEEK EARLIER THAN USUAL, Details to Come

Have You Heard? ... 2012 - A Summer of Drought Not to be Forgotten

We all know this year has been exceptionally dry, and with that lack of rain, comes tough decisions about what will be done with **crops** and **livestock**. **MOST IMPORTANTLY, if you have crop insurance always remember to check with your agent before making a final decision! Here are a few facts that our local producers should be considering when making these hard choices**.

CORN: Yield vs. Silage/Hay vs. Environmental Benefit

To make a decision on what to do with a drought stricken corn crop, you will first need to estimate your potential grain yield and decide if it is worth the cost of harvest. If you decide not to harvest, you are left with three main options:

#1- **Silage**: In order for silage to **ferment** properly, you will need at least **65% moisture** in the corn plant. Also remember, the silage produced could have a **reduced energy value** compared to silage made in a normal year.

#2- "**Hay" it**: Corn can be cut, baled, and fed like hay; however, remember that this "corn hay" will be **harder on equipment** due to the toughness of the stalks of the corn plant.

#3- **Leave it in the field**: We all know **crop residue has environmental benefits**— including soil erosion reduction and building organic matter— **helping to improve soil health**. It is harder to put a dollar figure on this option than the others, but the benefits to your soil health will contribute to your future yields.

LIVESTOCK: Feeding vs. Herd Reduction

Many pastures have gone dormant and have no re-growth occurring. **If you decide to continue feeding your livestock**, at this point, your best option is to move the livestock to a "sacrifice" area, such as a dirt lot, and feed hay and supplements. This will decrease your pasture's recovery time later, meaning you can begin grazing again much more quickly! If you do keep your animals on the pasture, watch for possible poisonous plants. They will still be growing, and livestock looking for something green to eat may think they look tasty enough to try. **Another option is to begin reducing your herd**. Having a fewer animals may allow you to keep grazing longer and reduce the cost of feed once grazing is no longer an option.

FORAGE: Important Livestock Feed Considerations

Nitrates: No matter what feed you will be providing your livestock with, remember that **forage harvested during a drought is likely to have higher nitrate levels**. In silage, corn hay, hay, pastures, and even grazed cover crops, too many nitrates **could be fatal** to livestock. By **testing forage for nitrates** this can easily be prevented. Nitrate tests are relatively inexpensive, and you can normally get the results within a few days.

Herbicide Withdraw Times: Many herbicides have a withdraw time, meaning that you must wait a specified amount of time before allowing the plant to be fed to livestock. Always check and make sure these withdraw times have been met before allowing livestock to feed on any forage.

LEARN MORE about these Topics & Other Drought-Related Issues that Affect Producers, Land-Owners, and Land-Users (In other words ... For Everyone!)

- **Call the St. Jos. Cty. NRCS/SWCD Partnership** at 574-291-7444 ext. 3
- **Visit Purdue Extension's Drought Assistance Portal** for **anyone** concerned with the drought- www.purdue.edu/drought
- **Visit Indiana NRCS's Drought Assistance Portal** - www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/drought.html

COMING SOON! Annual Tree Sale Flyers ...
If you are interested in placing a **BID** for **AD-SPACE (a TAX-DEDUCTIBLE expense!)** in this publication that reaches **8500+ landowners & homeowners** in our community & beyond, **GIVE US A CALL TODAY to learn more about this and other limited-time marketing opportunities.**

Drought, Nitrogen, & Cover Crops

Barry Fisher, Indiana State Soil Health Specialist with USDA NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Service) writes in his 7/23/12 "Indiana Drought Fact Sheet for Indiana Cover Crops and No-Till" that there is **consensus** among Purdue University scientists and NRCS agronomists that much of the nitrogen applied to corn will go unused this year, **making this precisely the type of year farmers need a cover crop to trap the much larger residual nitrogen that will be present after a poor corn crop**. Numerous studies have shown the highest nitrogen losses occur after a dry year.

Many farmers follow sound management by applying side dress nitrogen after corn emergence; however, this year they may be paying a penalty. **Drought conditions may have a significant effect on corn's utilization of nitrogen.** In a drought, roots have little capability to go searching through dry soil for nutrients or water. Normally, nitrogen either moves to the roots in solution as nitrate or roots grow through moist soil to intercept the nitrogen.

In our 2012 conditions, most roots never had access to the applied nutrients. Additionally, the nutrients that are normally biologically cycled from soil and released to be taken up in solution had no water to form a solution.

Many corn crops will be harvested or destroyed early this year. If we begin to get some moisture, there could be an opportunity to seed a fall forage cover crop mix such as oats with turnips or brassicas that would use the surplus nitrogen and possibly fill a need for forage. This cover crop mix would hold nitrogen, keeping it available for the next crop.

It may also be a year to consider adding a winter small grain to the crop rotation. Planting wheat or barley will use surplus nitrogen after corn and could provide early summer feed for livestock.

PHOTO - Taken this July in St. Jos. Cty, IN, soybeans are coming up after being planted into an Annual Ryegrass cover crop within a no-till system, so you can see corn stalks from the prior year. Remarkably, even in drought conditions, there was plenty of moisture in the soil to a depth of at least 6 inches. *(From our 2012 Photo Archives.)*

If 2012 remains dry into the fall, it is very likely that a high percent of applied nitrogen will remain unused. If a cover crop can be established to sequester the nitrogen, and shorter than normal stalks are less of a problem, then no-tilling corn back after this year's corn may be a good use of the conserved nitrogen.

LEARN MORE

- For more benefits of planting cover crops and utilizing No-till practices after a drought year, read Mr. Fisher's Fact Sheet in its entirety at the **Indiana NRCS's Drought Assistance Portal** - www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/drought.html (Look for **Drought Fact Sheets and Information—Cover Crops and No-Till**)
- As always, feel free to **call the St. Jos. Cty. NRCS/SWCD Partnership at 574-291-7444 ext. 3**

Why all the WILDFIRES?

It seems that you cannot turn on the TV news without a story about a wildfire burning somewhere in the US. But why are we having all of these wildfires? The answer may seem simple--we are in a drought, and everything is tinder dry. While that is, indeed, a contributing factor, it is by no means the only answer. In fact, one of the other major reasons may surprise you—as a good hearted, passionate nature lover.

We all remember Smokey the Bear saying "Only YOU can Prevent Forest Fires" and we all jumped on board and worked very hard at putting out every fire that started. Here's the problem—fire is a natural component of our landscape and, especially out West, it fire an essential part of the ecology. Under natural conditions, every 5-15 years a fire will burn, which returns nutrients to the soils, reduces the dead sticks and leaves, and creates an opening in the forest for new growth. This type of fire helps keep a forest healthy. However, we've stopped the natural fire cycle. Then to make matters worse, we started believing—again as good nature lovers—that logging was bad. Logging, when done properly, imitates a natural forest fire by removing some trees, creating openings for new growth and, therefore, creating a healthy forest.

When you combine these two factors, you end up with a very crowded forest with trees that are basically all the same age. In addition, tinder builds up underneath the forest canopy. As the trees age and begin to die all it takes is one little spark to light this abundance of fuel and you have a WILDFIRE! There is no way we can stop a wildfire in its tracks, and only a change of wind direction or rainfall will slow it down enough for us to then put it out. The end result of a wildfire is loss of diversity. Yes, trees will sprout and the forest will be reborn but a healthy forest should have large trees, medium size trees, and baby trees. A healthy forest will provide homes for a wide variety of animals and plants, and this will not be the case after a wildfire.

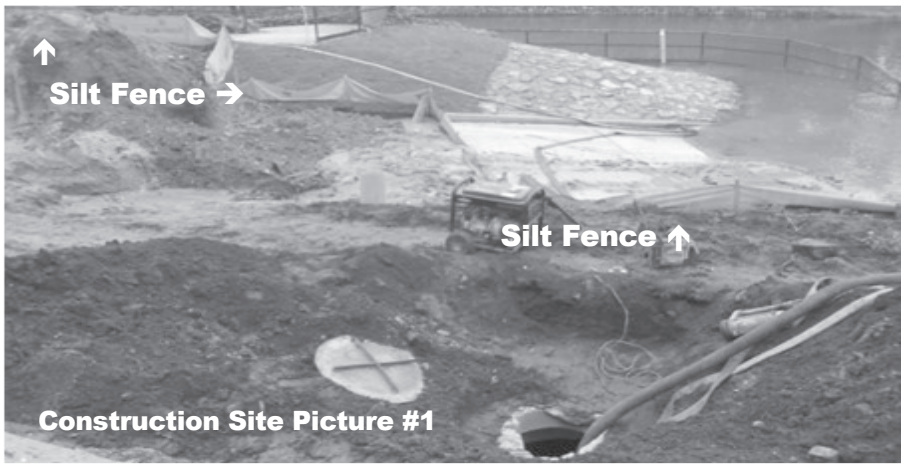
PHOTO - Taken this July in Lakeville, IN, pine needles and dead limbs have accumulated and pose a threat of wildfire during the drought conditions. *(From our 2012 Photo Archives.)*

While wildfires are not a very big issue here in Indiana during normal years, it could become an issue if our drought continues. This is where good forestry practices help prevent a catastrophe.

I remember being told when I was young that having a little knowledge can be a scary thing. We thought we were being kind and passionate about taking care of our forest, but we didn't get the whole story. Today that desire to save our forests is ultimately killing them. Yes, fire can be deadly, but it can also be necessary. It is this understanding of what it takes for a forest to be healthy that will ultimately stop the wildfires. Unfortunately, that may be quite a few years down the road, thanks to our (misinformed) love of nature.

CONSTRUCTION SITE EROSION CONTROL: BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

In the past several *Urban Meanderings* newsletter articles, I have focused on what homeowners can do to help protect and conserve the storm water that flows off of their property. For the next couple of articles, I am going to switch gears and focus on some of the **best management practices** (**BMP's**) that **construction companies and site managers** can, and are required, to utilize in order to protect storm water runoff. The best way to highlight these BMP's is to actually show you, using pictures I have take while conducting site inspections (which are one aspect of my job duties as the County Conservationist with the St. Joseph County SWCD). Some of the pictures I will show you are of people who are already excelling at using BMP's…others not so much. **Let's see if you can tell which is "good" and which is "bad"!**



Would you say this first picture (to the left) is the good use of BMP's or the bad? While it may look like the contractor meant well in this picture by putting up some **SILT FENCE** (the fabric "fence", often black or orange), the way they went about it was all wrong. Therefore, I put this site in the "bad" category. The silt fence is not supposed to be installed running down the side of a hill as it is in the top left portion of the picture. If the fence runs down the slope of a hill, it will collect and channel storm water runoff, which will increase the effect s of erosion. In addition, silt fence is to be buried 6 inches in the ground so it cannot be washed away. Buried properly, it will slow down storm water and sediment at the same time. Unfortunately in Picture #1 you can see where the contractor laid it across the concrete boat ramp, which allowed sediment-filled storm water to flow directly under the fence and into the water body. The contractor would have been better off to utilize a more effective and appropriate BMP in this section of the project.

Picture #2 depicts one of those times that a contractor used a BMP correctly. The **BIG STONE DRIVEWAY** in the center of the picture is actually the BMP. On many sites, there are often large trucks that enter and exit many times a day during the construction process. Because the construction site usually becomes muddy and sloppy with all of this traffic, these trucks have the capability of tracking that mud and sediment out onto nearby roadways. Once on the roadways, and outside of the construction site's installed BMP's, the sediment can freely run into storm drains and then into our local waterways. To help prevent this from happening contractors are supposed to install gravel driveways, such as the one in the picture, at the entrance and exit of each site. The gravel will bump and jar the sediment from the tires of the trucks as they drive across, keeping the sediment from leaving the site. The drive is supposed to be at least 50 feet in length, to allow enough space to knock all of the sediment off the truck tires. If there is not enough space left, the contractor may need to use a street cleaner to sweep up additional sediment that is tracked out of the construction zone.

Were you able to correctly guess the two pictures above? If not, there will be another opportunity to test your skills in a future edition of **The Conservation Kaleidoscope**.

LEARN MORE - In the mean time if you want to learn more you about construction site BMP's, you can visit the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's (IDEM's) website at **www.in.gov/idem/4896.htm**. If you have any other questions (or if, after visiting IDEM's website you think you've spotted a bad BMP in St. Joseph County), please let visit our website at **www.stjosephswcd.org** or give the office a call at **574-291-7444 x 3**!

ST JOSEPH COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
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PHOTO - St. Jos. Cty. SWCD Board Supervisor, Stacey Silvers (center), demonstrates a soil health (slake) test at our July 2012 Board Meeting. (Left: Chairman John Dooms, Right: Andy Fox, County Conservationist, Far Right: Rick Glassman, Environment Education Coordinator)

OUR STORY IN PICTURES

Did you know that our BOARD is made up completely of unpaid VOLUNTEERS from our community who make decisions on the work we do to fulfill our MISSION? There are 5 SUPERVISORS (3 elected at our Annual Meetings, and 2 appointed) who serve 3-year terms. Legally, we are a sub-division of state government, and we are considered a "Special District". Our Board structure—along with certain duties, ways we can spend or receive funds, our being subject to Indiana's Open Door Law, etc.—is governed by several key Indiana Statutes. Our Board of 5 Supervisors is lucky to have the support of 14 Associate Supervisors and 5 Honorary Members — also VOLUNTEERS. Additional VOLUNTEERS who make our work possible include the folks that help with our tree seedling fundraiser and other events. Our Board Meetings—open to the PUBLIC—are held at our Office on the third Monday of each month (unless there's a holiday, then it's the following Tuesday), from 7PM to about 8:30PM.

IF YOU'RE CURIOUS, COME JOIN US or GIVE US A CALL!

Office Staff:
Debbie Knepp, NRCS
Amanda Kautz, NRCS
Rick Glassman, SWCD
Andrew Fox, SWCD
Lisa Wynn, SWCD

Farm Service Agency Staff:
Doug Hovermale, District Director
Abby Curtis, Acting CED
Linda Bentele, Program Technician

St. Jos. Cty. SWCD MISSION

To provide guidance and education to the youth and adults of St. Joseph County and to administer programs to preserve, protect and improve soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources for future generations.

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