

2018-2022 Business Plan

ORGANIZATION:

The **St. Joseph County SWCD** was organized by public referendum on April 9, 1959 as a legal subdivision of the state of Indiana. We receive our statutory authority from the Indiana Soil and Water Conservation District Law (Indiana Code I.C. 14-32-5-1). We are a public body which exercises public authority. We are governed by a Board of five Supervisors, each a resident of St. Joseph County, Indiana (three elected and two appointed). We also have a number of volunteer Associate Supervisors who assist the Board in carrying out our vision, mission and values.

VISION: The VISION of the St. Joseph County SWCD is to:

- be viewed as a leader in soil and water conservation efforts
- be known in urban and rural areas
- demonstrate accountability with the funds it receives
- have an active and informed Board and a well-managed staff
- have a track record of measurable and demonstrated results

MISSION: Helping St Joseph county residents improve their natural resources through conservation and education.

In carrying out the SWCD's MISSION, we work, coordinate and cooperate with:

- Property owners and operators
- Public and private conservation organizations
- Public agencies
- Agricultural groups
- Citizens
- Legislators
- Tribal Government

VALUES: The following VALUES will guide the daily activities and development of St. Joseph County SWCD:

- We believe in a voluntary approach to addressing soil, water and related natural resource concerns rather than regulation whenever possible.
- We believe that education, outreach, and technical assistance are vital tools for addressing resource concerns.
- We will strive to provide high quality service and promote strong partnerships.
- We will embrace learning and change in order to meet the challenges of the future, and will develop a diverse, innovative, and well-trained Board and Staff Team to achieve our goals.
- We value our role in providing locally-led public outreach, education, and technical assistance to the community, focusing on environmental concerns in a manner that encourages appreciation and stewardship of natural resources for the benefit of future generations.

Critical Natural Resource Issues

St. Joseph County SWCD's goals provide a long-term visioning platform which includes current and future-looking statements to develop our SWCD annual work plans and staff managed programs.

Agricultural Natural Resource Issues

Agriculture is a significant land use in St. Joseph County. Our goals are to see an increase the number of farms implementing soil health practices by 20 %, the number of conservation plans with practices addressing soil health and soil erosion by 20 %, and the number of citizens informed about the importance of maintaining soil health and decreasing soil erosion. These goals will be based on the conservation needs of the producer to increase soil health and water quality which is created through the promotion of conservation planning. Areas of focus will be but not limited to:

- a. Excessive Sediment
 - i. Increase conservation tillage.
 - ii. Increase cover crop acres planted.

- b. Improve livestock management (e.g. pasturing)
 - i. Work with producers to implement livestock management practices at access sites.
 - ii. Work with producers to implement rotational grazing practices
 - iii. Work with producers to implement vegetative buffering practices and manure management planning and implementation.
 - iv. Increase more efficient storage and use of manure by promoting information about manure and soil sampling. Continue to promote Farm Bill programs for manure storage buildings.
 - v. Continue to identify sites where water quality is impacted by livestock and offer assistance by making direct contact.

- c. Improve nutrient and pesticide management
 - i. Continue to promote Nutrient Management Plans
 - ii. Explore the option of organizing an IN Field Advantage (INFA) group for our producers. Could partner with Marshall.
 - iii. Work with the non-traditional landowners in the North and South regions of county.

- d. Improve Irrigation Management
 - i. Encourage water conservation by emphasizing low volume emitter irrigation systems for our producers.
 - ii. Encourage producers to have a uniform test done on their irrigation system.
 - iii. Partner with our neighboring SWCD's on an irrigation workshop. Seek assistance from ISDA.

Urban Natural Resource Issues

The need is growing for urban conservation education and technical assistance in St. Joseph County. The concentration of human population and the development that accompanies it have an impact on natural areas. This impact affects natural resources within the urban growth boundary just as other activities affect resource concerns in rural, agriculture and forested areas. Areas of focus will be but not limited to:

- a. Pollutants from hard surfaces (e.g. lawn fertilizer, pet waste, oil, grease, litter from parking lots, sidewalks, streets, etc.) running into local waterways
 - i. Develop and carry out strategies to minimize pollutants into surface and ground water. Work with our partners to develop education programs for our residents.
- b. Excessive stormwater runoff
 - i. Identify and develop and implement alternative stormwater management projects such as rain gardens and bio swales.
 - ii. Provide information and assistance to municipalities and local government concerning storm water runoff.
 - iii. Educate residents, homeowners, youth, business owners, and teachers about urban conservation practices.
 - iv. Promote landscaping with native plants and enhancing residential wildlife habitat.
 - v. Work with landowners to improve wetland habitat, upland habitat such as oak woodlands and forests, and pollinator habitat.
 - vi. Encourage the development of community gardens and/or urban agriculture in St. Joseph County.
- c. Continue to review of Rule 5 site plans and site inspections.
- d. Continue to review SWPP for MS4 municipalities
 - i. Work with County Planning and Building department to hold a contractor meeting to inform contractors of rules regarding pre-construction meeting, site inspections and follow-up.

Land Use/Sustainability Resource Issue

The land farmers use to grow products is under constant pressure to be converted to residential or commercial uses. Once this land is converted to non-farm use, it will likely never return to farm production again. The loss of farmland is an extremely important issue globally, but at the local level as well. Our goal is below.

- a. The loss of Prime Farmland:
 - i. Continue to support the county with the prime farmland ordinance.

Forestry and Wildlife Resource Issue

Forests contribute to recreational and aesthetic values, enhance the appearance of developed areas, provide shade and valuable wildlife habitat, reduce soil erosion, cleanse the air, and help preserve valuable watersheds.

- a. The decrease in the number of wooded areas:
 - i. Educate private woodland owners about the economic and environmental value of forests and promote the various incentive programs through NRCS and IDNR.
 - ii. Continue to partner with neighboring SWCD's with forestry related education such as workshops, field days and/or breakfast with a forester.
 - iii. Assist NRCS with implementation of EQIP funding pools available to private forestland owners, which may include developing conservation plans for individual forest properties

Key Strategies:

1. Information and Outreach

- Customer Service – promoting various conservation programs.
- Newsletters and other publications
- Website/Social Media
- 1 on 1 office contact with public
- Annual Meeting
- Partnership Contacts
- Public Presentations
- News Releases to local Media
- Website
- Legislative Leveraging Bulletin
- Offsite displays

2. Education

- Workshops
- Field Days
- Youth Education Events
- Presentations / Displays
- Office contacts (providing soil surveys, planning specs, tree planting info, etc.)

3. Technical Assistance

- One on one conservation planning and application assistance by field office staff
- Biannual landfill inspections
- Survey, design and installation assistance by regional tech team
- Assistance to county & tribal government

4. Financial Assistance

- Federal Conservation Programs (Farm Bill)
- State Conservation cost share/incentive programs (IDNR Lake and River Enhancement)
- Partnership Programs
- State Grants (Clean Water IN)
- IDEM 319 grants
- Other grants, foundations, etc.
- Affiliate Memberships
- NRCS (PSS/CRP Contribution Agreement, phones, computer, copier, printers, and networking)

5. Accountability – Measuring success

- Tally Sheet – Customer Service
- Annual Report
- NRCS progress report
- Reports to County Officials
- Annual meeting questionnaire
- Spring and Fall Cropland Transect
- Evaluations – annual review of Staff and Supervisors

Note: A yearly Annual Plan of Work which further defines the Business Plan is developed each year and identifies key action items from the goals and key strategies listed in the Business Plan.