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2023 Annual Report

Celebrating 64 Years of Conservation in St. Joseph County!

Following the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, a nationwide movement Over the years, while practices began to encourage farmers to adopt agricultural practices that have evolved with the needs of protect our natural resources with the creation of the Soil the county, the focus of the St. Conservation Service (now known as the Natural Resources Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation Service). The St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District has Conservation District was established in 1959 to implement remained the same: to educate. conservation programs at a local level, addressing the unique needs In 1977, the District moved to of St. Joseph County.

From the beginning, supervisors and staff have worked together to people a deeper understanding encourage farmers to use practices to protect soil and water. The of the need for protecting our District has worked with federal agencies to educate farmers and natural resources. The goal for our staff and board is to teach



funding for conservation practices. conservationists. Since then, programs available to our property owners have 2023 saw many outreach events

able to help residents with many services, including more cover St. Joseph County resident about crops, high tunnels, and wildlife habitats.

make education a higher priority with the intent of giving



provide them with access to federal funds to install conservation residents of all ages and all backgrounds that their choices impact the practices. With the 1985 Farm Bill came many new programs such quality of our soil and water. We provide technical support and as the Conservation Reserve education to local farmers, large and small, rural and urban. We Program, Environmental Quality teach about the impact of invasive species and the benefits of Incentive Program, and Wetland composting and rain barrels. We talk to students about soil, water, Reserve Program, bringing more wildlife and more, to encourage the next generation of

> increased and evolved. We have and educational opportunities, grown from thousands to billions from workshops and field days, to of dollars in federal and state expos, to school field trips, as you funding available to property will see in the following pages. owners throughout Indiana, and And 2024 is looking to be even over the past year we have been busier as we strive to reach every soil and water conservation.





Natural Resources Conservation Service U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Today's Visions for Tomorrow's Future

www.StJosephSWCD.org

2903 Gary Drive Plymouth, IN 46563 (574) 936-2024 Ext. 4 info@stjosephswcd.org



Our Mission

To help St. Joseph County Residents improve their natural resources through conservation and education.



A Year of
Conservation Education All Over
St. Joseph County!

Education and outreach are key components of the St. Joseph County SWCD Mission. We believe in extending conservation education to all ages. In 2023, we hosted educational opportunities for adults, visited many classrooms with our school programs, and attended community events, all to bring awareness and appreciation for our natural resources. Each of us plays a pivotal role in the health of our soil and the quality of our water.

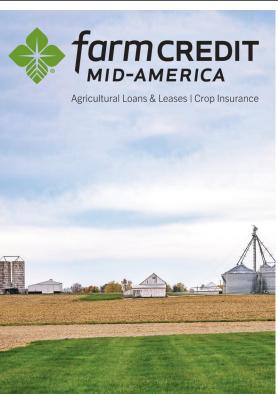


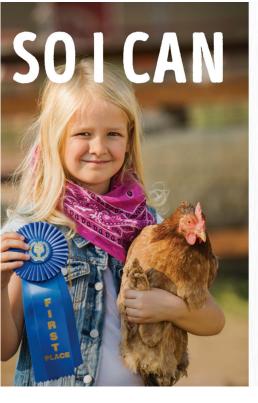
Watch for more programs, workshops, field days and community events throughout 2024!

Save the Date!

64th Annual Meeting ~ February 16, 2024 Contact us for more info and tickets!







BE SURE SHE'S READY TO LEAD. ON THE FARM AND IN THE COMMUNITY.

From county fairs all the way to
the Statehouse, Indiana Farm Bureau
helps our youth learn how to
be visionary leaders and successful
community members. We are advocates,
advisers and experts.
And we help you find your voice.



5032 Miami Road South Bend, IN 46614

St. Joseph County SWCD **Board of Supervisors**



Chris Matthys Chairman 3 Years of Service



Marty Lappin, Vice-Chairman 2 Years of Service



Dave Vandewalle Supervisor 14 Years of Service



Sam James Supervisor 3 Years of Service



Joe Gregory Supervisor 1 Year of Service

Associate Supervisors

John Dooms - 42 Years Chuck Lehman - 43 Years Richard Schmidt - 38 Years Randy Matthys - 36 Years Dave Craft - 22 Years Dru Wrasse - 16 Years Mike Borkholder - 11 Years Dave Straughn - 6 Years Ryan Lee

Honorary Board Members Keith Lineback William Millar

A big heartfelt thank you to all of our Supervisors & Associate Supervisors, as well as our partnership staff. Without all of you we would not be able to accomplish all that we have this year and in the years to come!

St. Joseph County Soil And Water Conservation Partnership







Natural Resources Conservation Service U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SWCD/NRCS Partnership Staff



Sarah Longenecker **SWCD County** Conservationist 10 Years of Service



Debbie Knepp **USDA NRCS District** Conservationist 40 Years of Service



Ally Pudlo SWCD Environmental **Education Coordinator** 2 Years of Service



Jacob Frame Pheasants Forever **Biologist** 2 Years of Service



Jorge Lozoya USDA NRCS Natural Resources Specialist 2 Years of Service



Misty Sorchevich **SWCD** Administrative Assistant 1 Year of Service

In Memory of Jerry Knepp

December 28, 1945 - September 29, 2023

Jerry was a long-time member of the St. Joseph County SWCD. He was selected as an Associate Supervisor in 1980 and became a Supervisor in 1982. Over his years on the Board he served as Chairman and Vice-Chairman, and remained an honorary Board Member upon stepping down. Jerry is survived by his wife, Deb. He was a retired carpenter, school bus driver, and farmer, and served as a volunteer firefighter for Liberty Township for 53 years. He was a great support to the District and will be missed.



Purdue Extension Service (USDA) County Extension Director: Brittni Gendron 4-H/Youth Development Educator: **Emma Rouch**

Ag & Natural Resources Educator: Emily Evers Admin Assistant, 4-H Youth: Julynne Freeland Office Manager, Ag & NR: Karla Valenzuela

Farm Service Agency (USDA) County Executive Director: Gideon Nobbe **Program Technicians:**

Devan Harrell Aldona Martin **Diane Stichter** Michael Cuff

Soil Health for Everyone!

By Terri Theisen, Urban Soil Health

adventures: soil.

If you own or manage any amount of land, I invite you to consider soil health and what you can do to support the soil where you are Getting down to brass tacks, there are a and with what you have. Whether you grow corn, cattle, cucumbers, few things you can implement today to or cosmos. Or you are in rural Indiana with 100s of acres or on a get you on your way toward soil health small urban lot. Soil health has many benefits to you, your business, rockstar status. First and foremost, test our community, and our ecosystem.

First, when we talk about soil health, four key principles help guide results tell you what you need more of the practices recommended for soil health:



- Minimize disturbance
- Maximize soil cover
- Maximize continuous living roots
- Maximize biodiversity

Let's take a step back and look at the big-picture benefits of having healthy • soils. As outlined by the USDA, • managing soil health reduces erosion. • maximizes water infiltration, improves • nutrient cycling, saves money by •

reducing inputs, and improves the resiliency of your land. Wow! Do you want to bring more of these to your farm or garden and are Those are all great benefits, so why isn't everyone doing all the not sure how to start? I can help; let's talk! Do you own or operate a practices already? Great question! Sadly, some people just haven't small-scale, diversified farm? Let's meet! I would love to learn more heard about them yet. Maybe these practices are different from the about what you are doing and how you are doing it. We provide ones that have been used for generations on their land. Or other folks many services including soil testing and technical assistance on a may not understand how to use the practices or why they are variety of topics that support soil health on your diversified farm or important.

These reasons are completely valid and that's where we come in! By Stay connected with the Urban Soil Health team and upcoming the way, hello! I would like to introduce myself: My name is Terri events: Theisen and I am the newest addition to the Urban Soil Health team as part of the IASWCD. I started in Oct 2023, but I am no stranger to diversified farming and soil health. I have worked on and managed diversified farms, and I've been dabbling in farming and food systems for almost 15 years.

A little bit about our team, we are a small but mighty group of regional soil health specialists who strive to improve soil health on

In the grand view of life on this little blue planet, it is humbling to Indiana's urban and small-scale, diversified agricultural land. How acknowledge that much of our existence hinges on just a few inches do we do it? We increase the use of soil health practices by providing of minerals, air, water, and organic matter. Let's grab our shovels education to farmers and gardeners and enhancing local conservation and explore the often unsung hero in our farming and gardening partnerships. Soil health is for everyone and there are steps that all of

us can take to better support the precious resource under our feet.

your soil. Soil testing is like a health checkup for your farm or garden. The and if you are overindulging in others. If



you want some help with testing, drop me a line and I can help!

But wait, there is more! Beyond testing your soil, there are a few practices you can start planning for today:

- practice no-till or reduced till
- plant cover crops
- integrate livestock with rotational grazing
- use diverse crop rotations
- apply natural mulch
- nutrient management
- integrated pest management (IPM)

garden.

Sign up for emails: https://www.urbansoilhealth.org/contact Follow our socials (IG and FB): @urbansoilhealth

Are you looking for more information? We have lots of resources for farmers and conservation partners here: www.urbansoilhealth.org/resources

Contact me via email (ttheisen@urbansoilhealth.org) or call/text (262-853-4978).



Local Urban Working Group

Calling all small, urban, and backyard farmers!

The St. Joseph County SWCD has helped spearhead the creation of an urban and small farm work group here in St. Joseph County. The St. Joseph County Regenerative Ag Partnership (SCRAP) serves as a resource for other small/urban farmers (or wannabe/future farmers) providing peer based and professional conservation ag training and learning opportunities. We hit the ground running in 2023 holding an all day educational "Soil Summit" in January, onfarm trainings, site visit training and more. We plan to keep this momentum going for 2024! Regardless of skill level or experience, the doors are open for all to learn from each other. If you are interested in more information or getting involved please reach out to us at info@stjosephswcd.org or 574-936-2024 x4!

Why Are Conservation

Here are many of the conservation practices installed in St. Joseph County during the 2023 fiscal year, and why they are beneficial!

Crop Production

552 Acres of Cover Crops

- Reduce erosion from wind and water.
- Maintain or increase soil health and organic matter content.
- Reduce water quality degradation by utilizing excessive soil nutrients.
- Suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles.
- Improve soil moisture use efficiency.



- Minimize soil compaction.
- Provide food and escape cover for wildlife.

335 Acres of No-Till

- Reduce sheet, rill and wind erosion.
- Maintain or increase soil health and organic matter content.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- ◆ Reduce energy use.
- ◆ Increase plant available moisture.
- Provide food and escape cover for wildlife.

470 Acres Conservation Crop Rotation

- Reduce sheet, rill and wind erosion.
- Maintain or increases soil health and organic matter content.
- Reduce water quality degradation due to excess nutrients.
- Improve soil moisture.

- Reduce the concentration of salts and other chemicals from saline seeps.
- Reduce plant pest pressures.
- Provide feed and forage for domestic livestock.



Livestock

Forage and Biomass Planting

- Reduce soil erosion.
- Improve soil and water quality.
- ◆ Improve and maintain livestock nutrition and health.
- ◆ Provide or increase forage supply during periods of low forage production.
- Produce feedstock for biofuel or energy production .

Prescribed Grazing

- Improve or maintain quantity or quality of forage for grazing and browsing animals health and productivity.
- Improve and maintain water quality, soil health, and watershed function.

Urban and Small Farm

19,514 Square Feet of Seasonal High Tunnels

- Improve plant health and vigor.
- Extend growing season.



2,252 Acres Planned in 2023

3,022 Acres Applied in 2023



57754 Crumstown Hwy South Bend, IN 46619 Phone (574) 287-1935

Practices Important?

All of the statistics below are new installations in St. Joseph County for 2023.

Forestry

3807 Feet of Windbreak Establishment

- Reduce soil erosion from wind.
- Protect plants from wind-related damage.
- Manage snow deposition.
- Provide shelter for structures, animals, and people.
- Provide noise and visual screen.
- Reduce energy use.

19 Acres of Forest Stand Improvement

- Improve and sustain forest health and production.
- Reduce damage from pests and moisture stress.
- ◆ Initiate forest stand regeneration.
- Restore and maintain natural plant communities.
- Improve wildlife and pollinator habitat.

156 Acres of Brush Management Invasive Species

- Restore or release desired vegetative cover to protect soils, control erosion, reduce sediment, improve water quality, or enhance hydrology.
- Maintain or enhance fish and wildlife habitat.

- Pervasive plant species are controlled to a desired level of treatment that will ultimately contribute to the maintenance of the natural area
- Create the desired plant community consistent with the ecology of the site.

23 Acres of Tree and Shrub Establishment

- ◆ Provide forest products such as timber and pulpwood.
- Provide wildlife habitat.
- ◆ Provide long-term erosion control and improvement of water quality.
- Store carbon in biomass.
- Reduce energy usage.
- Improve and restore natural diversity.



Wildlife Habitat

101 Acres of Conservation Cover (pollinator/monarch habitat) and 51 Acres of Monitoring of Habitat

- Native Grasses and Forbs.
- Reduce sheet, rill, and wind erosion and sedimentation.
- Reduce ground and surface water quality degradation by nutrients and surface water quality degradation by sediment.
- Reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.
- ◆ Improve soil health.
- Enhance wildlife, pollinator and beneficial organism habitat.

72 Acres Early Successional Habitat Development

• To provide habitat for species requiring early successional habitat for all or part of their life cycle.



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Wetlands

5 Acres of Wetland Restoration and 4 Acres of Wetland Enhancement

- Increases the capacity of specific wetland functions by enhancing hydric soil functions, hydrology and vegetation.
- Enhances plant and animal habitats.



Indiana Invasive Species Management

By Ronda Spaulding, Regional Specialist, State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management

In both my personal and professional life, I spend much of my time insects, more healthy activity. Years ago, what I thought I wanted looking for, learning about, identifying, and observing invasive my garden to be was constantly colorful, lush, and tidy. Great, but plants at my home and in the areas I work. Honestly, it can be all of that served only my desires and contributed very little to the quite discouraging as they are EVERYWHERE and spreading. ecosystem I inhabit, and sadly, in some cases was harmful. around your neighborhood, on hikes in 'natural' areas, moving Management Plan from the State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives throw our hands into the air and declare the cause lost. But...

Here's my story. A few years ago, I heard for the first time the coordinating efforts to identify, prevent, and control invasive biological word "REFUGIA" and I was captivated. "In biology, a species. SICIM directs the *Indiana Invasives Initiative* – a project that refugium (plural: refugia) is a location which supports an isolated or addresses the detrimental causes of invasive species. As part of this relict population of a once more widespread species." (Wikipedia) initiative, SICIM employees and partners conduct invasive species idea of fostering, preserving, and protecting an area I have set apart plans and information on local resources. as a refugium is so beautiful and exhilarating to me. I started out The more you learn about the things you can do in your own space declaring a defined space at the entrance to our woodland and took regardless of size, the more action (with help from my family) to remove invasives one by one, energized and empowered you season by season, year by year. And I called it The Refugium. will feel! There are solutions There, I witnessed first-hand that with planned effort - thoughtful, and there are resources for timed, strategic and consistent, CHANGE happens! Wonderful you to begin restoring a place changes in the landscape occur where effort is made. Not instant where natives can grow and success, not once and done, but a steady transformation. I see thrive where you live. If you native plants reappearing in a woodland previously crowded, are interested in learning what shaded and totally dominated by invasive plants. I did not plant, I invasive plants may be in your only removed what was displacing the native plants. When the yard or property, contact your invasive plants were removed, the natives were able to grow once Regional Specialist at SICIM. more – a refuge, a protected remnant.

Changes in the landscaping around your home can have an equally me! visible outcome. It means removing the plants we purchased or Regional Specialist, State of were gifted (wince!) and learning what plants belong in our soil and Indiana Cooperative Invasives benefit our local ecosystem. As I have begun this process in our M a n a g e m e n t yard and garden, I see a home garden buzzing with activity, both Ronda@sicim.info the bee kind and the busy kind. More birds, more bees, more

Once you know them, you cannot help but see them on walks My journey started with a free Landowner Survey and Invasive through our cities, or driving down the highway! It is tempting to Management (SICIM). SICIM is a statewide nonprofit that is working to protect, restore, and enhance Indiana's landscapes by Typically this term refers to those areas that occur naturally, but the surveys at no cost for private landowners and provide management

In St. Joseph County, that's Ronda Spaulding,







Plymouth Location:

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60001 Elm Road Mishawaka, IN 46544 Phone: (574) 255-3337

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St. Joseph/Marshall Counties Invasive Plant Partnership

The St. Joseph and Marshall Counties Invasive Plant SMIPP wants to thank Partnership (SMIPP) has continued to grow and help spread information about invasive species throughout 2023!

SMIPP held two Weed Wrangles® this year, finishing up their third consecutive year at Marshall County Memorial Forest and completing their second consecutive year at Potato Creek State Park. Additionally, SMIPP had educational booths at some local outreach events, including South Bend Wild Ones' Native Plant Sales in May and October and South Bend VPA's Arbor Day Tree Giveaway. Some changes have occurred in leadership this past year. SMIPP is excited to welcome Ronda Spaulding, regional specialist with the State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management (SICIM), as one of their newest partners! Mandi Glanz for all the work that she has done to help SMIPP get started!

many st joseph marshall counties invasive plant partnership There

upcoming opportunities that SMIPP is planning, so keep an eye out to see what's in store for 2024!

To learn more about SMIPP and how you can get involved, SMIPP co-leader, Ally Pudlo, Allison.pudlo@in.nacdnet.net or SMIPP co-leader, Jodie Overmyer, at Jodie.Overmyer@in.nacdnet.net.



Partners for Fish & Wildlife

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The Partners for Fish & Wildlife (PFW) program offers technical and financial assistance to private landowners interested in restoring, managing, or enhancing high-quality wildlife habitat. Private Lands Biologists work closely with landowners in designing on-the-ground habitat restoration projects that will provide benefits to federal trust species and work towards the goals outlined in the Indiana PFW Strategic Plan.

Project habitat types include wetland restorations, native prairie and grassland plantings, reforestation, and educational/outreach projects. By working together, biologists can help landowners realize their vision for their property while providing valuable wildlife habitat in Indiana.

Apart from the vital habitat benefits for wildlife species, healthy ecosystems also provide many ecological services to all of us. Wetlands help to filter pollutants and provide flood storage. Deep rooted native vegetation can build healthy soil structure, sequester carbon, and improve infiltration. Wildlife habitat projects can result in positive impacts to overall water quality as well as offer fantastic recreational opportunities.





Jared O'Brien Private Lands Biologist U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (812) 272-3164 jared_obrien@fws.gov



Spring Weed Wrangle, Marshal l County Forest



Conservation Stewardship Program A Good Option for Good Woodland Owners

By Dan Shaver, The Woodland Steward

There are multiple conservation programs offered through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) as part of the Farm Bill that is approved every five years to impact farming livelihoods, how food is grown, and how timber is managed. The variety of programs can often be confusing, but there is a strong network of conservation planners working in every county in Indiana to help landowners understand the programs and navigate the enrollment and application process. To find your local NRCS Service Center, follow this link – https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center) and enter your state and county or just stop but your local county office.

Some conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) are aimed at fixing problems on the farm or the forest. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a program designed for woodland owners and farmers that are practicing good conservation but want to build on existing conservation efforts and strengthen their operations.

For woodland owners that have a forest management plan and have done some forest management in the past, CSP may be a program that will help you manage your forest and provide some financial assistance to improve your property.

A Commitment to Conservation – How CSP Works

CSP represents a genuine commitment to conservation and requires a landowner to enroll all of their forested acres In the programs as part of a 5-year contract with opportunities to compete for contract renewal at the end of five years.

The 5-year contract includes two parts. The annual payment based on the acres enrolled and land use included in the contract and the current level of existing stewardship (minimum \$1500 per year), and payments to implement additional conservation activities on all or part of the landowner's property.

What additional conservation activities are available to woodland owners? In CSP, additional conservation activities are called enhancements. For woodland owners there are enhancement related to tree planting, brush management, and forest stand improvement. A complete list of CSP enhancements for Indiana can be found at https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/csp-conservation-stewardship-program.indiana/conservation-stewardship-program.

Example of some Enhancements for Woodland Owners:

Brush Management to Improve Wildlife Habitat: Controlling low levels of woody invasive plants to improve understory composition and wildlife habitat (\$20.86 per acre*).

Sugarbush Management: Establish or maintain a diversity of trees

and shrubs in an active sugarbush operation to enhance pollinators and wildlife habitat (\$874.50 per acre*).

Adding food producing trees and shrubs to existing plantings: Plant additional food producing trees and shrubs in existing tree planting for human consumption and wildlife food (\$212.24 per acre*).

Crop Tree Management for Mast Production: 3-4-sided release of crop trees to increase mast production and improve growth and quality (\$386.29 per acre*).

Summer Roosting Habitat for Native Forest-dwelling Bats: Create new and potential roost trees for bats by deadening trees in various size classes to create dead and dying snags (\$222.46 per acre*).

There are many more enhancements to help meet landowner objectives and fulfill your conservation goals. All enhancements require the landowner to update their forest management plan and fulfill all the national requirements. The enhancement payment includes the cost to update the plan and implement the land management practices. Indiana CSP practice rates can be found at https://wwwnnrcs.usda.gtov/conservation-basiscs/conservation-by-state/Indiana/payment-schedule. Your local NRCS Conservation Planner can assist you with the application and enrollment process and work with you and your forester to understand which enhancement may be right for you and your woodland.

*Rate listed in this article are based on FY2023 rates for CSP in Indiana.

Dan Shaver is the Indiana NRCS State Forester and works to develop technical guidance tailored to woodlands in Indiana for USDA Conservation Programs.



Food Access: A Path to Home Horticulture

Article Courtesy of Emily Evers, Agriculture & Natural Resources Educator, Purdue Extension St. Joseph County

As an office, our staff are all relatively new to the county and Extension. As such, we have spent the past year establishing relationships and conducting a needs assessment in the county. What we found was a noticeable disconnect from agriculture within city limits. Understanding where our food comes from and the importance of agriculture is crucial to continued legislative support of agriculture in our community. Additionally, more and more families are struggling with access to fresh, local produce. St. Joseph County has approximately 34,870 residents who are food insecure, meaning they lack access to fresh and local foods. There are 11 areas in St. Joseph County where people live more than a mile from the nearest source of fresh and affordable food. Additionally, sometimes the nearest grocer may not have the quality of produce needed to sustain healthy access.

To target these disparities, Purdue Extension is looking forward to offering a number of programs to help provide education on home horticulture. A Purdue Extension Master Gardeners program will be offered this spring. Individuals in the course learn the science behind growing and become sources of educational support in the county. As part of their certification, they are required to donate 12 hours of education to the community annually. Additionally, we will offer a

vegetable workshop and virtual series on fruit to expand the understanding of produce production.

In the spirit of 4-H, we are looking to offer a project to address food waste in our school systems. 4-H was initially implemented to help bring education to agricultural communities on safety and production best practices. Since it's start, it has grown into a positive youth development program aimed at supporting youth to be stewards in the community. We are looking to offer Juntos, a college and career readiness program that predominantly supports Hispanic youth. Oftentimes, these youth are the children of migrant farm workers. Additionally, we hope to support food waste elimination education to youth in schools via a national 4-H grant. More to come on that!

Purdue Extension strives to support the needs of the community used evidence-based research and best practices. From farm to home, we truly exist to support

our local community. Be sure to keep up to date with our program offerings and sign up for our monthly newsletter: http://tinyurl.com/



Purdue Extension St. Joseph County



Thank you

St Joseph County SWCD

for your service to our community!

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See us at our new location on State Road 23 North in Walkerton!



Thank You to all of our 2024 Donors!

We are able to continue with educational opportunities, community outreach, and technical services because of the generosity of our donors. Thank you for your continued commitment to our mission of helping St. Joseph County residents improve their natural resources!

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