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United States
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Natural Resources Conservation Service

2903 Gary Drive, Plymouth, IN 46563

www.stjosephswcd.org

(574) 936-2024 Ext. 4

info@stjosephswcd.org

2022 Annual Report

SWCD's, or districts, are local units of government that manage and direct natural resource programs at the local level. We work closely with other forms of local, regional, state, and federal government, private nonprofits, and educational institutions to provide a high level of conservation service to private landowners. We work to promote the wise use, development, and conservation of our state's soil, water, and related resources in ways that are relevant to our county. The Indiana Conservation Partnership fills a unique and crucial role in conservation and land or natural resource stewardships: that of providing soil and water conservation expertise and services to landowners and operators.

Over the past year we have helped many private landowners with a variety of different services. We hope that in giving an overview of what we have accomplished the past year that the community can see how much we care about our roles. Our hope is to spread the word so our services are talked about and our practices become more well-known, and we are able to help a larger scale in our community. If you feel inclined, please tell others about the services that we can provide as they might end up being a perfect candidate for one of our programs of assistance.



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Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever

Article courtesy of Northwest Wildlife Biologist, Jacob Frame



Pheasants Forever / Quail Forever is a grassroots organization that started in 1982. A group of pheasant hunters saw the connection between habitat loss and a declining pheasant population. They knew there was a need for an organization that was dedicated to preserving and enhancing wildlife habitat. This motivated them to form Pheasants Forever / Quail Forever. Our mission is to conserve pheasant, quail, and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public access, education, and conservation advocacy. We are a nation-wide organization with over 130,000 members and more than 175 wildlife biologists.

In Indiana we currently have 5 Farm Bill Wildlife Biologists stationed around the state. We are employed through Pheasant Forever; however, we are in close partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). Our focus is on early successional habitat such as native wildflower and grass plantings. We work with landowners who are interested in installing and improving wildlife habitat on their properties. The process starts with a site visit where we walk around the property and discuss the landowner’s vision. We then work with them to develop a management plan to enhance the wildlife value of their land. Often there are programs available to help landowners cover the cost of establishing these habitats.

Native wildflower and grass plantings not only provide habitat for pheasant and quail. They are also highly beneficial for deer, turkey, songbirds, and a variety of pollinator species. In recent years there has been an increased interest in pollinators, especially the monarch butterfly. We design these wildflower plantings to provide high quality food sources for monarchs and other pollinators throughout the growing season. These habitat plantings can also do an incredible job at reducing runoff and erosion in agricultural landscapes. Farmers can install these wildlife friendly practices on the edges of fields and other unproductive areas. This can decrease input costs and increase the average yield of a field. When paired with the financial incentives of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) it can boost profit margins of a farm’s operation.

In addition to our staff, we have local chapters throughout the state full of dedicated volunteers. Our members work hard every year installing wildlife habitat, raising money for conservation, and introducing youth to the outdoors. These volunteers are helping to

fulfill our vision, “that current and future generations of hunters and conservationists are able to enjoy abundant populations of wild pheasant, quail, and other wildlife.”

If you are interested in improving wildlife habitat on your property or have an interest in joining like minded conservationists through a local Pheasants Forever / Quail Forever chapter, reach out to the Northwest Wildlife Biologist, Jacob Frame at 574-276-2034 or jframe@pheasantsforever.org.



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The Division of Fish and Wildlife in St. Joe County

Article Courtesy of The Indiana Division of Fish & Wildlife

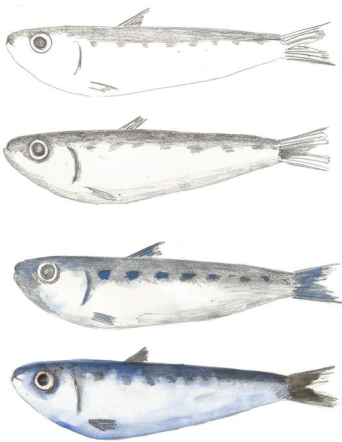
The Department of Natural Resources has many different facets to protecting, enhancing, and preserving the state’s natural, cultural, and recreational resources. The Division of Fish & Wildlife (DFW) is one of these facets heavily focused on fish, wildlife, and their habitats. As such, what’s below highlights some of the St. Joseph County-specific activities in which the DFW participated in 2022.

in St. Joseph County. She presented and met with the South Bend-Elkhart Audubon Society, Green Drinks South Bend, South Bend Wild Ones, St. Joseph/ Marshall Counties Invasive Plant Partnership (SMIPP), and St. Joseph County SWCD. Topics discussed included urban bird treaty cities, pollinators, invasive species, and the urban program. Any interested person is highly encouraged to check out these conservation groups.

Currently, urban biologists can assist in Allen, Elkhart, and St. Joseph counties. The district fisheries biologist covers DeKalb, Elkhart, LaGrange, St. Joseph, and Steuben counties. For more information about habitat assistance, visit dnr.IN.gov/fish-and-wildlife/landowner-and-wildlife-habitat-assistance or find your district biologist at on.IN.gov/wildlifebiologist or on.IN.gov/fisheriesbiologist. The two pictures to the left and right are courtesy of Matt Horsley.



District fisheries biologist Matt Horsley and his team completed an extensive bass survey on the entirety of the St. Joseph River from Bristol downstream to St. Patrick’s County Park. Just over 16 miles of the St. Joseph River was sampled for about 12 hours. During sampling, the unit collected 426 smallmouth bass, 54 largemouth bass, and 11 walleye. All fish were returned to the water after being measured. Analyses are still being completed at this time. Fishing reports can be found at on.IN.gov/fishing-reports. Urban Wildlife Biologist Jessica Merkle focused on education and outreach and making connections



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Urban Soil Health in NE Indiana Area

Article curtsey of Jamie Perry: Urban Soil Health Specialist

What a year this has been. I started the year as a new Urban Soil Health Specialist with zero knowledge of SWCD’s or ICP’s. After a steep learning curve, I feel this year has been a great success. The cornerstone of this success has been the forming of not one but two soil health working groups with one being St. Joseph County. These working groups advise on issues and promote opportunities that relate to urban and small farm soil health. They also provide technical assistance, host workshops, and establish educational initiatives in their area. With the creation of this working group St Joseph County’s SWCD /NRCS show their commitment to soil health. Another display of success with the Urban Soil Health Program is number of trainings and site visit my team has accomplished.

Overall Indiana numbers are as follows:

Urban Soil Health Team

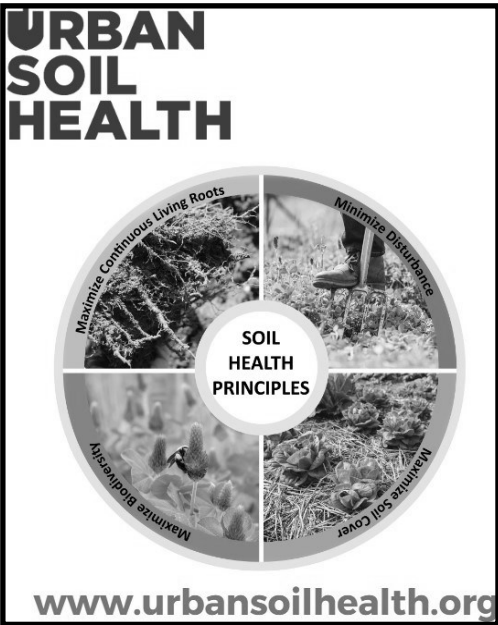
- Over 4,000 people attended our trainings
- Conducted over 120 events

- 40 Site visits to local growers
- 20 growers received technical assistance

Working Groups

- 100 Site visits to local growers
- 100 growers received technical assistance
- Conducted 17 events

Again, these successes would not have been possible without you. Thank you for your support.



Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) are local groups or partnerships of people who collectively manage the problem of invasive species across the landscape. There are currently 41 CISMAs that are organizing or active across the state of Indiana, including one for St. Joseph and Marshall counties. The St. Joseph and Marshall Counties Invasive Plant Partnership (SMIPP) started forming in 2021 with the goal of educating landowners in Northern Indiana about invasive species. Over the past year, SMIPP formed a steering committee, created their mission statement and logo, and held a couple of outreach events across St. Joseph and Marshall Counties. SMIPP

held 2 Weed Wrangles®, a spring one at Marshall County Memorial Forest that focused on Garlic Mustard and a fall one at Potato Creek State Park that focused on Multiflora Rose, Asian Bush Honeysuckle, and more! SMIPP’s mission statement is to build partnerships to promote native plants and wildlife through education and management of invasive species in St. Joseph and Marshall Counties. We hope to continue fulfilling our mission in 2023.

If you are interested in a free landowner survey, please contact the State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management (SICIM) Northwest Regional Specialist, Mandi Glanz, at mandi@sicim.info. To learn more about SMIPP, invasive species and/or how you can get involved, please contact SMIPP co-leader, Ally Pudlo, at Allison.pudlo@in.nacdnet.net or SMIPP co-leader, Jodie Overmyer, at Jodie.Overmyer@in.nacdnet.net.



Environmental Education

Over 6200 people reached

Over 60 programs with community organizations and 13 schools

School Programs, Field Trips, Outreach, Workshops, Day Camps

Highlights from 2022:

- Science Alive!
- 2022 Ag Days
- Family STEM Night at Beiger Elementary
- Girls Ambitious about Learning Science (GALS)

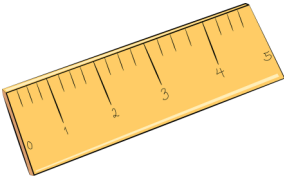
An Overview of our Education Programs in 2022

The St. Joseph County Soil and Water Conservation District had an exciting year full of educational programs and outreach events! Through our programs, we were able to reach 6,298 people in 2022. Some of our most popular programs covered topics, like watersheds and water quality, Indiana wildlife, and backyard conservation. With our programs, we were able to partner with multiple community and government organizations and participate in outreach events, such as Annie’s

Project, Science Alive!, 2022 Ag Days, Family STEM Night at Beiger Elementary, Girls Ambitious about Learning Science (GALS), Arbor Day at Pinhook Park, Indiana State Fair’s Pathway to Water Quality, Forestry Field Day and more!

Contact Environmental Education Coordinator, Ally Pudlo, at:

Allison.pudlo@in.nacdnet.net to book your program today!



A Day in the Watershed Field Trip with Marian High School and LaVille Jr/Sr High School.



Girls Ambitious about Learning Science (GALS) Event at St. Patrick’s County Park.



Science Alive!



Family STEM Night at Beiger Elementary

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Why Are Conservation

Listed below are the acres and/or number of conservation practices installed in St Joseph County during the 2022 fiscal year and why they are important for conservation.

Crop Production


1,049 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.




215 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.




Nutrient Management

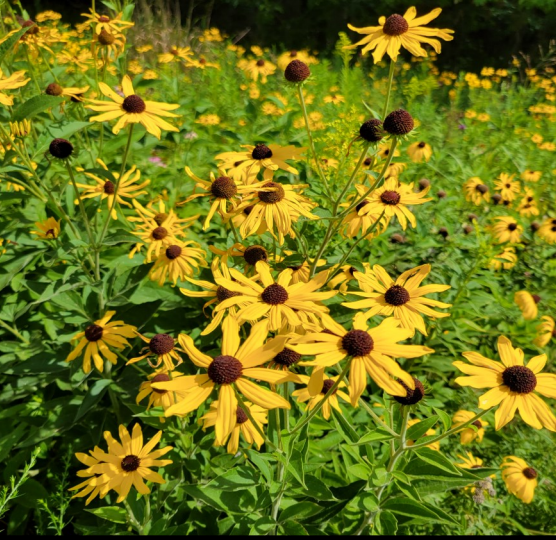
- ◆ To budget, supply and conserve nutrients for plant production.
- ◆ To minimize agricultural non-point source pollution of surface and groundwater.
- ◆ To properly utilize manure or organic byproducts as a plant nutrient source.
- ◆ To maintain or improve the physical, chemical and biological condition of the soil.



1,287 Acres of Irrigation Water Management

- ◆ Improve irrigation water use efficiency.
- ◆ Minimize irrigation induced soil erosion.
- ◆ Reduce energy use.





Wildlife Habitat

84 Acres Conservation Cover (pollinator/monarch habitat) and 33 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.


Early Successional Habitat Development

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

1,580 Feet Firebreaks

- ◆ Contain prescribed burns.
- ◆ Reduce the spread of wildfires.






Plymouth Location: 10209 Iris Road
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Phone: (574) 935-5500

Mishawaka Location: 60001 Elm Road
Mishawaka, IN 46544
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Practices Important?

Forestry
4,130 Feet Windbreak Establishment

- ◆ Provides wildlife habitat.
- ◆ Provides long term erosion control and improvement of water quality.
- ◆ Stores carbon in biomass.
- ◆ Reduce energy usage.
- ◆ Improving or restoring natural diversity.
- ◆ Enhancing aesthetics.

16 Acres 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.

110 Acres Brush Management Invasive Species Control

- ◆ 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.

15 Forest Management Plan

- ◆ Develop a site-specific forestry plan which identifies resource concerns where forestry-related conservation activities or practices will be planned and applied.



Urban/Small Farm
Seasonal High Tunnels

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

Wetlands
79 Acres Wetland Restoration, 4 Acres Wetland Enhancement and Shallow Water Development and Management

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



Livestock
Acres 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 .



2,435 Acres Planned

Area farmers & landowners in St. Joseph County received \$728,756 through federal programs in 2022.

4,756 Acres Applied



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Restored Wetland: Build it and they *will* come!

Courtesy of Eugene Matzat

Linda and Eugene Matzat live on 158 acres in southern St. Joseph County in Liberty Township just south of Potato Creek State Park. The acreage includes cropland, woodland, ponds and a drained wetland. The Matzats talked to resource experts about what could be done with the low ground that was covered with reed canarygrass, a mat-forming grass that doesn't provide much benefit to wildlife. Linda proposed, "We can do better than a field of reed canarygrass." In 2019, the Matzats applied for a USDA EQIP grant to restore the wetland. The grant was approved. The project involved plugging an existing ditch to create a 4-acre wetland. It was suggested that restoring the wetland might drown out the reed canarygrass to improve the habitat for aquatic and amphibious wildlife.

The Matzats received technical assistance from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and St. Joseph County SWCD. Surveys were done to locate the areas to place the ditch plug and create a spillway and rock chute for the surplus water to flow. A design for an emergency spillway (should there be too much water) was made. It was also important to make sure that the wetland area was only on their property and didn't affect the neighbors. A local contractor was hired and the work was completed by the end of September 2019. Shortly thereafter, a 5-inch rain helped fill the wetland with water and demonstrated that the spillway was functioning properly.

The very next spring (2020), the project was deemed a success! Sandhill cranes nested in the wetland! Another positive result is that after two growing seasons, the wetland has done its job of killing the reed canarygrass. The Matzats have treated an adjacent area with herbicide and planted that to native grasses, forbs, rushes, and sedges.

Additional benefits from the wetland restoration have been the positive impacts on wildlife! The Matzats have enjoyed hearing and seeing all kinds of frogs, turtles, ducks, geese, mergansers, teal and green herons. Images from a trail camera placed next to the wetland have revealed squirrels, coyote, deer, turkey, rabbit, opossum, woodchuck, raccoon, great blue heron, and even a red-tailed hawk near the wetland spillway (probably trying to catch a squirrel).

This spring (2022) the Matzats observed a pair of sandhill cranes build a nest and successfully hatch a pair of chicks. Gene and Linda had to intervene about halfway through the incubation period as beavers also decided the wetland was a good place for a home. They built a dam at the mouth of the spillway, which increased the water level by about 12 inches. The Matzats went out daily to break up the dam so the rising water wouldn't flood the sandhill crane nest.

The Matzats were thrilled by the success of the wetland project. They were not prepared for this spring's additional surprise. One day, on a walk to the wetland they observed a pair of great blue herons building a nest in a tree adjacent to the wetland. Linda made frequent visits to a hiding spot (safely away from the nest) to watch the three young herons grow. She learned a lot about the behavior of the herons through these observations. She was privileged to see two of the three young herons take their first awkward flights out of the nest! The Matzats are hoping this could be the start of a new rookery, as herons tend to build multiple nests over time in the same area and even the same tree.

The wetland restoration was a project well worth the effort! As evidenced by the results, the statement, "build it and they will come," is true. Linda and Gene are looking forward to future surprises in the wetland.



Before



After



After

SWCD Board of Supervisors

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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!

ASSOCIATE SUPERVISORS

Mike Burkholder *10 years*
Dave Craft *22 years*
Chuck Lehman *42 years*
Randy Matthys *35 years*
Richard Schmidt *37 years*
Dru Wrasse *15 years*
Dave Straughn *5 years*

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Jerry Knepp
Keith Lineback
William Millar

SWCD/NRCS Partnership Staff

 <p>Sarah Longenecker, SWCD County Conservationist 9 Years of Service</p>	 <p>Ally Pudlo, SWCD Environmental Education Coordinator 1 Year of Service</p>	 <p>Rylee Stout, SWCD Administrative Assistant Hired in October 2022</p>
 <p>Debbie Knepp, USDA NRCS District Conservationist 39 Years of Service</p>	 <p>Jorge Lozoya, USDA NRCS Natural Resources Specialist 1 Year of Service</p>	 <p>Jacob Frame, Pheasants Forever Biologist 1 Year of Service</p>

Have you seen this video?


The Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi Indians is a federally recognized tribe with a long history on the land of southwest Michigan and Northern Indiana. The Grand Kankakee Marsh area of northwestern Indiana was once the largest inland wetland in the United States. The Natural Resources Conservation Service has partnered with the Pokagon Band to restore 1,147 acres of this area to functioning wetland.

<http://bit.ly/NRCSwetlandVideo> 



St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District

Helping St. Joseph County residents improve their natural resources through conservation and education.




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Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator: Emily Evers

Administrative Assistant, 4-H Youth Development: Julyenne Freeland

Administrative Assistant, Agriculture & Natural Resources: Raven Miller



FARM SERVICE AGENCY (USDA)

County Executive Director:

Gideon Nobbe

Program Technicians:

Devan Harrell
Aldona Martin
Diane Stichter
Michael Cuff (not pictured)

Purdue Extension: What’s That?

Courtesy of Emily Evers

You may or may not have heard of Purdue Extension of St. Joseph County. If you haven’t, have no fear! An easy way to describe our department is simply in its name; we are an extension of Purdue University dedicated to the education and support of our county community! We have four different departments we utilize to deliver practical, research-based information that enhances lives and livelihoods. These departments include 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Health and Human Sciences, and a Nutrition Education Program.

Each department has its own purpose to serve. 4-H Youth Development strives to prepare young people to be leaders in their community and around the world through hands-on experiences alongside their peers and caring adults. Agriculture and Natural Resources Educators serve as research based, unbiased information sources for county and state constituents on a variety of topics including crops, agricultural business, livestock, natural resources, horticulture, small farms, urban agriculture, pesticide use, and land conservation. Health and Human Sciences provides education related to financial resource management, human development, nutrition, and healthy living. The community is their classroom — where we bring university information to the local level and help people strengthen families, spend smart, eat right, and live well. Finally, our Nutrition Education Program provides research-based programming that helps

participants plan nutritious meals, be active, handle food safely, spend food dollars wisely, and improve food purchasing and preparation.

Hopefully this provides a better understanding of Purdue Extension and how it plays a role in community development! If you have any questions or would like to find a way to be more involved with Purdue Extension, give us a call at 574-235-9605, anytime from 8 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday. You can also reach us via email:

4-H Youth Development: Brittni Gendron bgendron@purdue.edu

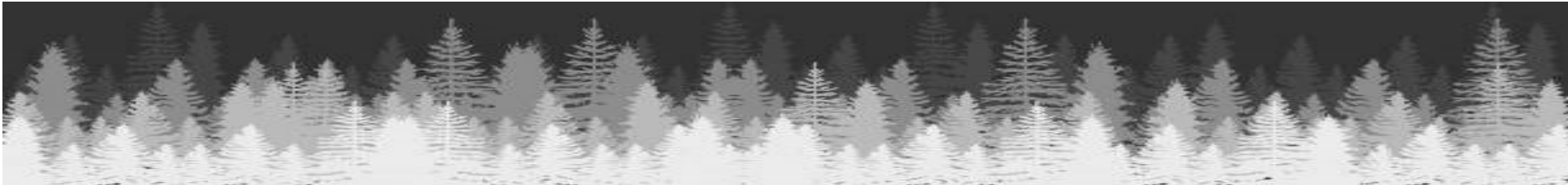
Ag and Natural Resources:
Emily Evers
everse@purdue.edu

Health and Human Sciences:
Asa Reid
asa.c.reid.1@purdue.edu



St. Joseph and Elkhart Counties Forestry Field Day

St. Joseph County SWCD and Elkhart County SWCD held a forestry field day on October 22nd. Participants gathered at the Elkhart Community Schools ACCELL Farm for a morning of learning. Philip Robertson, Ph.D., MSU Professor of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences captivated the audience with his discussion on the unique properties of woodland soils and how diverse landscapes benefit each other in agriculture. Jacob Frame, Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist, presented information on the environmental and economical benefits of field borders and forest edge feathering. He also discussed the potential for financial assistance for these practices through USDA conservation programs. The group also got to see native pollinator habitat in different stages of establishment. Last, but definitely not least, were Munchers on Hooves. Owners Garrett and Gina Fickle brought five goats and fenced them up in an area of the woods to demonstrate how they use goats to clear out overgrown areas in order to more effectively treat and eradicate invasive species. The group learned that there is a lot more that goes into the process than just putting up fence and letting the goats eat. If you would like more information on Munchers on Hooves or these other topics please contact our office!



Urban and Small Farm Soil Health Working Group

The St. Joseph County Soil and Water Conservation District helped spearhead the creation of a working group to provide soil health resources for small and urban farms. In conjunction with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD) Urban Soil Health Program, Purdue Extension, and other local small farm organizations and local farmers, we have formed a working group to provide soil health education and address the needs of small-scale producers. While newly formed, this enthusiastic group is ready to hit the ground running in 2023 by holding a “Soil Summit” on January 21st, on the ground trainings on specific topics as the growing season proceeds, and provide one on one site visits to assess grower’s operations and provide technical assistance to improve soil health. If you are interested in more information on this newly formed working group, please contact our office at 574-936-2024 ext. 4.



Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Kankakee Watershed, Indiana State Dept. of Agriculture

Through this multistate project Illinois and Indiana will work together to improve the overall health of the iconic Kankakee and Iroquois watersheds. In total, \$7.9M will be leveraged from partners. The diversity of partners will be critical to the overall success of this project.

The project aims to work with all types of landowners including from forest ground, urban or specialty crop and traditional farmers to municipalities, to install conservation practices and engage in education and outreach efforts. The primary goal of this multi-state initiative is to address excess water as a resource concern by developing working lands type conservation practices and voluntarily establishing wetland easements.

These conservation efforts facilitate water storage, build community involvement, and improve water quality within the initiative focal region. In the first year, a steering committee will be formed that will use the existing Kankakee Work Plan to create an annual work plan with

action items that the partnership can work towards. This initiative will seek to accomplish nutrient reduction goals in both participating states.

These goals outline efforts to reduce nutrient runoff from point and non-point sources alike, toward improving water bodies and downstream to the Mississippi River and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico. This initiative will further efforts of conservation, restoration and sustainable use of soil, water and wildlife on a watershed scale while encouraging partner groups to work with producers to meet or avoid the need for national, state, and local natural resource regulatory requirements.

The initiative goal is to install 3,000 acres of new conservation cover, two miles of two-stage ditches, 800 acres of wetland easements, and 2500+ conservation practices to achieve nutrient reduction goals.



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