

Conservation Kaleidoscope

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High Winds Bring Illinois Dust to St. Joseph County

On May 16, 2025, storms began to develop near Bloomington, IL, some 200 miles from South Bend. Because of the extremely dry conditions in the region, wind gusts of 40 to 70 mph picked up soil from freshly tilled agricultural fields and carried it throughout northern Illinois, including downtown Chicago, and northern Indiana. That evening, St. Joseph County experienced the worst dust storm the region has seen since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

In the 1930s, the Great Plains saw an extensive, multi-year drought. This combined with overly worked farmland led to massive dust storms that spread across the eastern US, all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. Sometimes the dust would linger in the air for days. This was the Dust Bowl, which, in fact, led to the development of the Soil Conservation Service, now the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts.



1930s Dust Bowl blows dust to Washington, DC.

Today, dust storms are not uncommon but are usually on a much smaller scale. Two key factors contribute to the likelihood of dust storms: rainfall and vegetation cover. In areas with bare, disturbed soil, like the tilled farmland in Illinois, little rainfall, and windy conditions, dust storms are more likely to occur.



Dust Storm photos taken by SWCD Supervisor, Marty Lappin.



With the current trends toward high temperatures and little rainfall, dust storms like that on May 16th may become more common, but practices can be put into place to help. Soil, from agricultural land to backyards, is not meant to be naked. Keeping it covered with practices like no-till on farmland or mulch in urban yards, minimizes how much soil can be picked up by strong winds. Building soil health helps protect it from erosion and retains moisture.

To learn more about soil health, join us at our second annual Meet Your Farmer. We will gather around the table to talk about conservation practices, how we all benefit, and how we all can contribute. www.stjosephswcd.org/myfgathering



Today's Visions for Tomorrow's Future

2903 Gary Drive
Plymouth, IN 46563

www.stjosephswcd.org

info@stjosephswcd.org

(574)936-2024 ext. 4

CONSERVE St. Joseph County

You Can't Control the Weather, but You Can Control Your Water

Water can be tricky, especially in the farming community. There always seems to be either too much or not enough. But what if you had the ability to actively control the water on your farm?

Drainage Water Management (DWM) may be your answer. DWM is a conservation practice that allows farmers to manage the timing and amount of water leaving their fields through a subsurface drainage system. Instead of allowing water to flow freely through the drainage system, farmers can strategically manage it using water control structures, which slows or stops the outflow of water when drainage is not needed. This can have far-reaching benefits for both the farm's productivity and the community's environmental wellbeing.



At its core, DWM involves placing a water control structure, typically a series of adjustable boards or gates, at the outlet of a drainage system. By strategically raising or lowering these boards, farmers can manage the water table in their fields. During the growing season or periods of heavy precipitation, boards can be removed to promote proper drainage for planting and field access. In contrast, during the non-growing season or drought, boards can be installed to hold water in the soil profile. This stored water can reduce nutrient loss,

especially nitrates, by slowing the movement of water through the soil and keeping valuable nutrients in place for future crops.

The NRCS offers support to farmers interested in implementing DWM. Through technical planning and financial assistance programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), NRCS can help landowners design and install appropriate water control structures tailored to their fields. NRCS staff work directly with producers to evaluate the landscape, determine the feasibility of the practice and develop a site-specific drainage water management plan, where appropriate. Contact the office if you are curious about DWM!

July is National Ice Cream Month!

Pollinators are essential for food production. In fact, about 90% of all flowering plants and 75% of crops worldwide depend on pollinators.

In honor of National Ice Cream Month, we thought we'd share a couple of fun facts about ingredients in your sundae that are dependent on pollinators. Check out this infographic from **Clear Choices Clean Water** for more info here - www.stjosephswcd.org/ice-cream.

Chocolate - comes from the cacao tree which is only pollinated by two types of midge.

Sugar - comes from either the sugar beet or sugar cane, both of which require pollinators.

Vanilla - flavoring is derived from vanilla orchids that are pollinated by one species of bee and hummingbirds.

Visit Indiana.ClearChoicesCleanWater.org to learn about the connection of pollinators to clean water, and to take the pledge to protect them!



We need your help protecting pollinators!
Learn more and take an action pledge at
Indiana.ClearChoicesCleanWater.org

CLEAR CHOICES
CLEAN WATER
new solutions

An Up-Close Look at Soil and Water Health



We offer educational programs for kids to adults on a wide variety of environmental science and conservation topics. Some of the most fun, and eye-opening, lessons are the ones involving soil and water biology.

The life living in our soils is literally making the glue that helps hold the soil together. Those little critters are also critical for cycling nutrients through the system and making them available for plants to use. Healthy soil supports the tiny creatures living there, which supports the plants, and ultimately us humans.

The life in our waterways can tell us a lot about the quality of our surface water. The insect larvae, nymphs, crustaceans, mollusks and worms are the bottom of the aquatic food chain, and their diversity is key to healthy life in the water. Many insects start their life in the water and then spend their adult life on land. Some dragonfly nymphs spend several years living in the water before they grow wings and fly away!

We love using magnifiers and digital microscopes to give people an up-close look at all the life in our soil and water. If you are interested in scheduling a program for your school or group please email Education@StJosephSWCD.org.



Meet the Newest Member of the Indiana Conservation Partnership!

Amanda Heltzel grew up in Fulton County, Indiana on a row crop farm and spent many weekends on camping trips with her family. In middle school, a trip to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park inspired Amanda to pursue a career in the outdoors when she went on a hike led by a female park ranger.

Amanda attended Purdue University and studied Wildlife in the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources. She has worked for the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, University of Missouri, and Missouri Department of Conservation on projects related to bird conservation and monitoring. Most recently, Amanda served as the Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District where she worked with the public to improve conservation literacy and inspire people to take conservation action. She also serves on the board of the Tippecanoe Audubon Society as program chair.

Amanda is excited to join the team at Pheasants Forever and work with landowners to meet their wildlife habitat goals. Amanda currently lives in Warsaw with her husband and two cats. They will be welcoming their first child in September and they look forward to spending time together as a family in the outdoors!





St. Joseph County
Soil & Water
Conservation District

2903 Gary Drive
Plymouth, IN 46563

www.StJosephSWCD.org

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Mike Burkholder
Scott Laidig

SWCD Honorary Members:

Keith Lineback

Farm Service Agency Staff

Gideon Nobbe, CED
Devan Harrell
Diane Stichter
Michael Cuff

Calendar

July

1st - Natural Resources Day at
the Fair

4th - 4th of July - Office Closed

10th - Meet Your Farmer

15th - Board Meeting

August

19th - Board Meeting

**Register for
Meet your Farmer 2025
By July 3rd!**



[www.stjosephswcd.org/
myfgathering](http://www.stjosephswcd.org/myfgathering)

Visit our website & watch Facebook for info on events and more!



Contact us to choose to get your
newsletter by email!

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