

Conservation Showcase

United States Department of Agriculture



Helping People Help the Land

New Initiative Helps Indiana Wildlife

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In June 2010, Governor Mitch Daniels announced the groundbreaking Healthy Rivers Initiative, the largest conservation initiative to be undertaken in Indiana. The program involves a partnership among the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Nature Conservancy, and other agencies and organizations who are working with willing landowners to permanently protect 43,000 acres located in the floodplain of the Wabash River and Sugar Creek in west-central Indiana and another 26,000 acres of the Muscatatuck River bottomlands in southeast Indiana.



These projects involve the protection, restoration and enhancement of riparian and aquatic habitats and the species that use them, particularly threatened, endangered, migratory birds and waterfowl. This initiative will also be beneficial to the public and surrounding communities by providing flood protection to riparian landowners, increasing public access to recreational opportunities, such as hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, boating, and bird watching and leaving a legacy for future generations by providing a major conservation destination for tourists.

This project is gaining momentum, especially in the Muscatatuck area. So far, over 46 million dollars has been pledged toward the project. NRCS is excited to be a part of this exciting project. NRCS is providing assistance through the Wetland Reserve Program – both financial assistance and technical assistance. So far there are 1,652 acres of WRP in the Muscatatuck and 3,469 acres of WRP in the Wabash River/Sugar Creek Corridor. NRCS also serves on the Healthy Rivers Initiative steering committee and help with outreach, promotion, and training.

Wabash River and Sugar Creek Corridor



The 43,000 acres project area for the Wabash River and Sugar Creek corridors contain many of Indiana's rarest fish, mussels, birds and plants. Bald eagles and great blue herons nest along the land adjacent to the river and the wooded valleys are home to rare forest bird species, such as the Cerulean warbler. The Canada yew, Eastern hemlock and white pine are all ice age remnants that are now rare in Indiana; however they are abundant along Sugar Creek.

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Muscatatuck Bottoms

The 26, 000 acre project area along the Muscatatuck River, known as Muscatatuck Bottom provides habitat for a number of species of conservation concern, including such birds as the least bittern, yellow-crowned night heron, red-shouldered hawk and Cerulean warbler. Two state endangered reptiles, the Kirtland's snake and copperbelly watersnake, also are found here. The state-endangered plant, the featherfoil can also be found here. Muscatatuck Bottoms contains the largest least-fragmented complex of bottomland forest remaining in Indiana. This bottomland forest is made up of several species of oak, hickory and sweet gum.



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