

INDIANA'S CONSERVATION SHOWCASE

Helping People...

...Help the Land.



Wildlife Habitat Brings in Birdwatchers



Warm Season Grass Planting



Wetland Construction



Tree Planting

In 1940, when land for Jefferson Proving Ground in Southeastern Indiana was being sought, Robert Mulford's grandfather sold his farm to the government and purchased 160 acres in Ripley County. During the forties and fifties the farm was initially worked with horses and later, primitive tractors. Large areas of woodland were cleared to provide room for livestock and small barns. It was the true definition of a "well worn" general farm. But in the sixties things began to change on the farm. Robert was no longer just a willing worker; he was also a partner in the farming enterprise. The 160 acre farm expanded throughout the 60's to just under 400 acres, consisting of a beef cattle operation where large hayfields and small crop areas dotted the landscape, which later transformed into a row crop operation with over 250 acres planted in corn and soy beans. Although Robert enjoyed his farming experience, he fostered an abiding love and interest for wildlife and could not help notice that this habitat was diminishing after each passing year.

Because wildlife has always been something Robert and his wife Ellen have been passionate about, the decision of transforming their 394 acre farm back into wildlife habitat was an easy one. With 250 acres of their farm once devoted to crop production, the Mulfords enrolled in several federal and state conservation programs and devoted the entire 394 acres to wildlife, making it a truly unique area. The once "well worn" general farm was returned to its natural state with 250 acres of warm season grasses and forbs, 10 acres of new wetland areas, 40 acres of new tree plantings, along with shrub borders and quail buffers, and 100 acres of woodland.

The collaborative effort between the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Fish and Wildlife, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service helped make this effort possible. Conversion from cropland to wildlife habitat started by utilizing the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The Mulfords planted several

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species of cover crops on nearly 235 acres to assist in the transition of crop to wildlife habitat. After the ground was prepared, they applied General and Continuous Conservation Reserve Program practices to improve the wildlife habitat. Practices included pollinator habitat, warm season grasses, field windbreaks, shallow water areas, wetland timber, and native grass plantings. Technical assistance was provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service for the construction of the wetlands and development of the wildlife habitat.

Since turning the 250 acres of cropland into wildlife habitat, the property has served as a truly unique wildlife area. The grasslands once again echo the sounds of meadowlarks, bobwhite, sedge wrens, and several more species of grassland birds. Northern harriers swoop gracefully over the fields. The buzz of insects through summer and fall is continuous. And the wetlands harbor life of every type. A toad species, the gray treefrog, unheard of for years, suddenly lines the banks of the wetlands. The larger wetland habitats have attracted water fowl never seen on the farm, including sandhill cranes. And because of its many different types of habitat and wildlife species, several hundred youth and adults have witnessed this natural beauty through educational events and tours. With approximately 200 different species of birds documented on the farm, this wildlife area has established itself as an exceptional bird watching site and a peaceful recreational habitat for the Mulfords.

NRCS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED TO MULFORDS

District Conservationist / Soil Conservervationist

- Conservation Planning to identify client's objectives
- Discussion of available programs to assist in achieving goals
- Coordination of multi-partner efforts to accomplish landowner's goals
- Development of conservation plans and contracts
- Development of job sheets and technical guidance for the specific practices
- Discussion with the seeding contractors, foresters to discuss technical requirements
- Field layout of all of the practices so planting would take place in proper location and width
- Pre-construct meeting with wetland contractor
- Assist landowner through the multi-partner, multiple program bill collection, seed tag verification phase
- Monitor mortality rates for forestry practices as the last two droughts have had a severe impact on tree plantings

Greensburg Technical Team

- Present on site with landowners to discuss possible practice layouts, specifications
- Mapping of the land to determine feasibility of various structures
- Meetings and layout with landowners to ensure practices will meet their goals
- Present for pre construction activities and all construction check outs on wetland construction