

Indiana NRCS 2018 Annual Report

THE USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS) PROVIDES INNOVATIVE CONSERVATION SOLUTIONS TO RESTORE, ENHANCE AND PROTECT INDIANA'S LANDS.



The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has a long history of helping people help the land. For more than 80 years, we have worked with farmers and landowners to help them manage natural resource concerns on their land and improve the health of their communities. Whether it's on one acre or thousands of acres, our technical and financial assistance programs are designed to protect and improve our soil, water, forestry, energy and wildlife resources without sacrificing productivity, profitability or sustainability. We are proud of the work we do in partnership with local and state governments, like-minded organizations and other federal agencies to provide healthy and productive working landscapes for Indiana's residents. I am pleased to provide this report of Indiana NRCS investments and successes in fiscal year 2018.

- Jerry Raynor, State Conservationist



AT A GLANCE: Investments on Private Lands

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Agricultural Land Easements

Contracts 1
Acres 177
Dollars \$172,000



Wetland Reserve Easements

Contracts 18
Acres 1,759
Dollars \$8,500,000



Conservation Stewardship Program

Contracts 177
Acres 127,126
Dollars \$1,443,465



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Contracts 1,023
Acres 135,509
Dollars \$20,935,351



Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Contracts 35
Acres 7,501
Dollars \$770,629

Voluntary Conservation Works
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Dream Becomes Reality

Five years ago, the Richer farm located in Daviess County, Indiana looked drastically different than it does today. Riddled with old, dilapidated buildings, overgrown pastures and crop fields in poor health, the land really didn't offer a whole lot of promise for a working farm. But all that changed when brothers Jon and Caleb Richer took over in 2013.

Shortly after returning home from his tour of duty with the Marine Corps, Jon got together with his brother Caleb, a recent Rose-Hulman graduate, and decided to build their 160-acre family farm back to what it was when their grandfather was living. They started by planting a corn and soybean rotation and soon added a small herd of beef cows and a freezer beef operation. But as young, beginning farmers, they knew they were at a disadvantage.

The brothers enlisted the help of their Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) district conservationist to discuss several resource concerns that needed to be addressed on their farm such as manure storage issues, nutrient runoff, soil erosion, and muddy livestock areas. As a result, they learned about the technical and financial assistance programs that were available to them and were able to take advantage of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program's (EQIP) beginning farmer and military veteran initiatives, both which offer a reduced competition advantage for those that qualify.

With help from NRCS, the Richers were able to install a heavy use area protection (HUAP) pad, a waste storage facility and a waste transfer lane to properly move the manure from the HUAP to the storage facility. With these new conservation practices installed, the Richers are able to effectively increase their herd size and grow their beef operation. In addition to their waste management practices, they are working with both the NRCS and the Daviess and Martin County Soil and Water Conservation Districts to incorporate cover crops onto their fields.

The Richers are already seeing the effects of these conservation practices firsthand on their land. Not only are they noticing a reduction in sediment and nutrient runoff from farm fields to their pond but something else incredible is happening just below the surface. Their soil is becoming healthier.

Because of their new waste management system, the Richers are utilizing their cow manure more efficiently. They are applying one hundred percent of the manure that is produced on their farm, decreasing their commercial fertilizer drastically. Add cover crops into the equation and they are significantly increasing their soil's organic matter and improving its health.

The Richers admit that being beginning farmers is a tough job and would encourage anyone that is willing to get into farming to begin by shadowing an experienced farmer. They would also encourage new farmers to visit their local USDA service center and learn about the technical and financial programs available.

"We had a serious issue with nutrient management and NRCS took a project we would never have been able to afford as beginning farmers and made it very feasible for us to do," said Jon. "It came down to filling out the paperwork and putting in a lot of hard work and if you're willing to do those two things, you can make it happen."

National Landscape Conservation Initiatives

NRCS uses Landscape Conservation Initiatives and National Program Initiatives to accelerate the benefits of voluntary conservation programs. These Initiatives are funded with EQIP and CSP dollars.



Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Contracts 27
Acres 7,834
Dollars \$587,427



Joint Chief's Landscape Restoration Project

Contracts 38
Acres 3,315
Dollars \$529,164



Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

Contracts 19
Acres 2,787
Dollars \$438,015



Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project

Contracts 1
Acres 2.3
Dollars \$3,334



Western Lake Erie Basin Initiative

Contracts 30
Acres 9,731
Dollars \$999,231



Wildlife Initiative

Contracts 67
Acres 1370
Dollars \$755,404

National Program Initiatives



On-Farm Energy

Contracts 5
Acres 89
Dollars \$30,164



Organic Initiative

<i>Certified Organic</i>	<i>Organic Transition</i>
Contracts 1	6
Acres 5	342
Dollars \$20,466	\$41,984



Specialty Crop Initiative

Contracts 18
Acres 82
Dollars \$28,792.3

Emergency Watershed Protection Program



Financial Assistance...\$187,500
Technical Assistance....\$37,500
Sponsor Contribution....\$62,500
Completed Projects.....2 in Jefferson County

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

RCPP promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners. NRCS provides assistance to producers through partnership agreements and through program contracts or easement agreements.



Big Pine Watershed Partnership

Contracts 6
Acres 2,450
Dollars \$125,581



Western Lake Erie Phosphorus Reduction

Contracts 9
Acres 1,678
Dollars \$154,024



Indiana Watershed Initiative

Contracts 1
Acres 776.2
Dollars \$27,998



Soil Health on Reclaimed Mines

Contracts 10
Acres 1,977
Dollars \$192,272



Southern Indiana Young Forest Initiative

Contracts 9
Acres 620
Dollars \$270,754

Special Audiences



Beginning Farmers

Contracts 76
Acres 10,939
Dollars \$2,183,371



Limited Resource Farmers

Contracts 1
Acres 1
Dollars \$855



Socially Disadvantaged Farmers

Contracts 3
Acres 165
Dollars \$71,893

Technical Assistance Programs



Conservation Reserve Program

	Planned	Applied
Plans Written.....	431	1,328
Acres	9,107	32,328

TOP FIVE OBLIGATED CONSERVATION PRACTICES

1. Cover Crops
2. Brush Management
3. Nutrient Management
4. Waste Storage Facility
5. Water and Sediment Control Basin

TOP FIVE APPLIED CONSERVATION PRACTICES

1. Cover Crops
2. No-Till
3. Nutrient Management
4. Integrated Pest Management
5. Brush Management

Earth Team Volunteer Program

NRCS is proud of the dedicated Earth Team volunteers and staff who have committed their time and talents to conserving and protecting our natural resources.

During Fiscal Year 2018, more than 1,700 Indiana Earth Team volunteers donated 10,171 hours. Time dedicated by these volunteers to educational efforts, conservation planning and clerical services saved NRCS approximate \$251,122 and supported conservation in every single field office in Indiana.

This year's Indiana Earth Team Volunteer award goes to JoEllen Witt, a retired NRCS employee who has been assisting the

Southwest Area Office with critical day-to-day tasks. JoEllen logged 223 hours in FY18 saving NRCS over \$5,500. In total, JoEllen has volunteered more than 700 hours since 2016 - making her one of Indiana's leading Earth Team Volunteers.



INTERIOR LEAST TERNS MAKING A COMEBACK IN INDIANA

There is something special going on in southwestern Indiana and people are starting to take notice.

Located along the path of the Mississippi flyway lies the Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife area – an area that has significantly improved the flyway’s terrain. This region, once landscaped by tiled cropland and homesteads, is now reestablished as 9,018 acres of prairie and marsh habitat. Featuring more than 7,000 acres of wetlands restored through the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), Goose Pond is one of the largest wetland restoration projects in the nation and provides crucial habitat for migratory birds traveling from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. And atop a 2.7-acre man-made island located in Goose Pond, the interior least tern, a federal and state listed endangered species, is making its comeback.

Interior least terns, the smallest tern in North America characterized by the black crown on its head, can typically be found nesting on gravel sandbars along rivers, lakes and gravel pits, but changes to river systems including dams, reservoirs, water diversions and recreation have disturbed or eliminated most least tern nesting habitats in the Midwest. As a result, they were listed as a federally endangered species in 1985.

But their story in Indiana doesn’t end there. Not long after the federal listing, a pair of breeding birds were identified



Incubating Least Tern Photo Credit: Steve Gifford

on a dike along Gibson Lake. Because of the location of the nest, measures were taken through a habitat conservation plan which called for efforts to conserve or create more habitat for the nesting birds. As a result of these efforts, two WRP easement areas were acquired and restored by IDNR in Gibson County – Cane Ridge Wildlife Management Area and Tern Bar Slough Diversity Conservation Area.

The success of these two wetland areas didn’t go unnoticed. In 2008, almost 70 miles north of Cane Ridge and Tern Bar Slough, NRCS expanded efforts at the Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife area by building an island dedicated specifically for the interior least terns using WRP funds.

During construction of the island, IDNR was already seeing success; the least terns made their first appearance at the Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife area in 2009.

Management of least tern habitat can be a challenging endeavor and consists of

maintaining nesting sites free of dense vegetation, using an electrified fence to keep predators out, manipulating water levels to establish wetland habitat during specific times of the year and employing least tern decoys to attract birds to suitable sites. Throughout the years, the least tern population has slowly but steadily increased. This summer, there were seventeen individuals on the island.

And the least terns’ arrival isn’t the only significant visitor the island has seen. Gillet says that in general, the bird response to the island and Goose Pond has been magnificent. Rare and endangered birds like the fulvous whistling duck, American golden plover, black-neck stilt, whooping crane, and roseate spoonbill, the first ever spotted in Indiana, have all made Least Tern Island their home.

The cumulative conservation benefits of the wetlands restored and protected through WRP, like Goose Pond, Cane Ridge, Tern Bar Slough, and Tern Island, are many and reach well beyond their boundaries. What these areas provide in flood control, wildlife habitat, scenic beauty and outdoor recreation is invaluable to the surrounding communities. These areas have been essential to increasing and stabilizing the population of the interior least terns, as well as other important species in Indiana. So much so, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service is reviewing the possibility of delisting the interior least tern due to an increase in tern numbers.



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