



2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Indiana Natural Resources Conservation Service

Indiana's USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Provides Innovative Conservation Solutions to Restore, Enhance and Protect Indiana's Lands.



For more than 80 years, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has worked with farmers and landowners to help them manage natural resource concerns on their land and improve the health of their communities. Indiana NRCS continues to be one of the nation's leaders in helping people help the land by getting conservation on the ground and

positively impacting acres in every corner of the state. In 2022, Indiana NRCS staff throughout the state worked with producers to fund more than \$45 million worth of conservation practices on more than 219,000 acres of farm and privately owned forest land. The more than 1,000 contracts with producers will have a lasting positive impact on Indiana's soil, water, forestry, energy and wildlife resources while also helping to combat climate change. I am pleased to provide this report of Indiana NRCS' investments and successes in fiscal year 2022.

- Jerry Raynor, State Conservationist

AT A GLANCE: Investments on Private Lands



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Wetland Reserve Easements

Contracts 25
Acres 1,725
Dollars \$4,219,676



Conservation Stewardship Program

Contracts 211
Acres 105,563
Dollars \$14,104,661



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Contracts 854
Acres 112,177
Dollars \$27,149,067



Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Contracts 3
Acres 1,905
Dollars \$94,753

FINANCIAL & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS PROGRAM (ACEP)

Wetland Reserve Easements

<i>New Applications</i>	25 applications for 1,725 acres
<i>Closed Easements</i>	29 closed easements for 1,824 acres
<i>Restoration Completed</i>	17 easements
<i>Compatible Use Authorizations</i>	62 approved
<i>Onsite Monitoring Reviews</i>	273 easements
<i>Offsite Monitoring Reviews</i>	655 easements

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

Ag Land BFR*	\$165,871	2,630 acres	4 contracts
Ag Land General	\$9 million	70,716 acres	66 contracts
NIPF** General	\$894,381	2,028 acres	31 contracts
NIPF** BFR*	\$65,829	140 acres	3 contracts
Renewal Ag Land Gen	\$2.86 million	24,613 acres	30 contracts
Renewal NIPF BFR	\$20,566	76.6 acres	2 contract
Renewal NIPF General	\$1.09 million	5,332 acres	71 contract
Grassland Conservation	\$2,615	29 acres	4 contracts
TOTAL	\$14.1 million	105,563 acres	211 contracts

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

Beginning Farmer	\$4.563 million	10,668 acres	171 contracts
Climate Smart	\$650,069	5,873 acres	16 contracts
Cropland	\$3.57 million	16,386 acres	57 contracts
Confined Livestock	\$6.5 million	6,932 acres	55 contracts
Conservation Incentive	\$1.54 million	9,152 acres	16 contracts
Forestland	\$1.02 million	2,267 acres	45 contracts
Great Lakes Restoration	\$1.42 million	8,761 acres	28 contracts
Limited Resource	\$172,217	222 acres	7 contacts
Locally Led/Planning	\$1.06 million	31,487 acres	173 contacts
Mississippi River Basin	\$815,898	3,338 acres	14 contracts
Monarch Butterfly	\$3,265	3 acres	1 contracts
Northern Bobwhite	\$48,444	88 acres	2 contracts
National Water Quality	\$336,897	1,492 acres	12 contracts
On-Farm Energy	\$51,711	96 acres	10 contracts
Organic	\$26,457	67.4 acres	4 contracts
Pastureland	\$1.6 million	4,470 acres	68 contracts
Socially Disadvantaged	\$370,034	517 acres	15 contracts
Specialty Crop	\$366,490	371 acres	40 contracts
Western Lake Erie Basin	\$1.06 million	6,089 acres	26 contracts
Wildlife	\$1.92 million	3,891 acres	94 contacts
TOTAL	\$27.15 million	112,177 acres	854 contracts

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (RCPP)

Big Pine Watershed	\$94,753	1,905 acres	3 contracts
TOTAL	\$94,753	1,905 acres	3 contracts

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

CRP Plans Written	Over 2,500
Engineering Designs Completed	Over 1,000
Practices Planned	Over 5,500
Practice Status Reviews Completed	Over 12,000 practices/35,000 acres
Practice Certifications/Checkouts Completed	Over 5,000 practice/13,500 acres

*BFR = Beginning Farmer/Rancher
**NIPF - Nonindustrial Private Forest



CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Top Five Practices: Applied

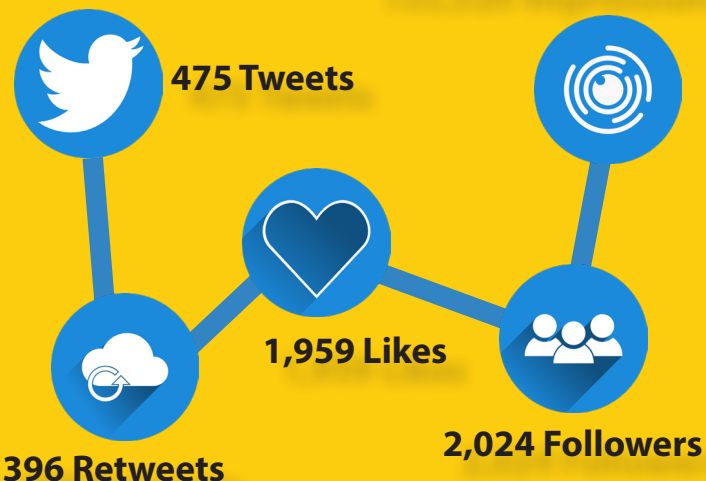
1. Nutrient Management
2. Pest Management
3. Cover Crops
4. No-till/Strip-till
5. Invasive species control

Top Five Practices: Obligated Dollars

1. Cover Crops
2. Brush Management
3. Roofs and Covers
4. Waste Storage Facility
5. Nutrient Management

SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

155,520 Impressions



Southern Indiana landowner transforms forestland with help from EQIP, CSP

Fifteen hours a week David Ray walks through his forest in southern Indiana with a chainsaw in hand and cuts down trees. Acre by acre he is making his way through each of the 310 acres of forestland he has owned in Jackson County, Indiana since 1995.

The goal is to remove unwanted trees and invasive species while creating space for desired species such as oaks and hickories to survive and thrive.

Ray's property is historically an oak/hickory forest, but years of neglect and a high-grade harvest by the timber company that owned it before him had stripped it of many of its most valuable trees, he said. Oaks and hickories still dot the property, but they have been encroached upon by maples, poplars and invasive species such as the tree of heaven. The degradation of the forest has impacted not only the quality of the trees themselves, but also the diversity of wildlife that can thrive within its borders. So, Ray set out to correct it.

He has worked with both Indiana Department of Natural Resource (IDNR) and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to build habitat and take steps to restore his forest to a healthy state.

Ray applied for and received assistance through NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in 2017. The assistance helped him to combat invasive species through EQIP's brush management practice. He also received assistance to develop and implement a forest stand improvement plan aimed at oak regeneration on his property.

"The oaks in the Midwest are just getting out competed. Every time you harvest and you don't do any follow up, it's just turning into maple and beech woods," Ray said.

Forest stand improvement plans help landowners such as Ray address the composition of their forests in terms of species and the structure of how they are growing. The first step of the process is to

determine what type of forest should be on the site.

Forest stand improvement includes creating openings in the canopy and understory to allow more light to reach the forest floor. Shaver said they start by taking an inventory of the forest to assess its current condition and then a professional forester will make recommendations on needed changes such as removing a certain number of trees per acre to create openings and wildlife habitat. EQIP assistance helps to pay for the forester and recommended work. NRCS also provides free technical assistance throughout the process.

After the completion of his initial EQIP contract, Ray continued his relationship with NRCS by applying for CSP, which provides an annual payment to landowners to enhance already ongoing conservation practices on their land such as continued oak regeneration and combating invasive species.



David Ray (left) and Daniel Shaver, Indiana NRCS state forester, talk about ways to improve Ray's forestland in Jackson County, IN during a tour May 24, 2022.

Landowner Works to Address Flooding Issue on Indiana Wetland Site

Tom Dykstra purchased his 120-acre property that includes 110 acres of wetlands and a 10-acre homestead site in December 2015.

The wetland portion of the property was historically managed as a row crop field but was turned into a permanent wetland easement and restored back to its natural state with assistance from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2010 through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program's Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) component.

By the time Dykstra purchased the property in 2015 the transformation had blossomed, and a wide variety of wildlife called the former cropland home including deer, blue herons and migratory ducks. The site was not without issues though. Wetlands are designed to hold water, but on parts of the property controlling the water and keeping it from getting too high had become a problem.

The area beyond the far western bank of the main pond was impassible during periods of high water and one of the smaller ponds had the tendency to flood onto the neighbor's property. Throughout the springs of 2018 and 2019 those challenges turned from manageable issues to potential disasters as above average rainfalls caused the level of water throughout the property to rise dramatically.

The back-to-back above average spring rainfall totals caused the water that used to creep onto the edges of neighbor's property to rise high enough to threaten their house and the adjacent church. On other parts of the property the water rose high enough to disrupt habitat for the blue herons and the woods planted as part of the initial restoration started to suffer.

As the water rose and caused issues both on the easement and off, Art Franke, the Indiana NRCS district conservationist for Steuben County, received calls from both Dykstra and his neighbor looking for solutions.

Franke immediately reached out to Bill Lambert, the northeast area easement specialist who coordinated the original restoration team for the wetland, and Andrew Pursifull, the northeast area engineer, and worked with them to devise a plan to address the flooding issues.

Pursifull then began working on a design that would allow water to drain from the small pond, which was impacting the neighbor, through a water level control system and into the main pond.

"There was no chance I would ever have the means to be able to do it or the engineering possibilities," Dykstra said. "What you're



seeing today could not have happened without what NRCS has done and they just made it easy."

Pursifull said the first part of the plan was to decide where to take the excess water. They considered multiple options including running it directly off the property into a county ditch, but ultimately, they decided to drain it into the main pond on the easement instead.

The decision was made, in part, because it kept the entire project on the easement allowing WRE stewardship funding to cover the full cost and it allowed for greater control by Dykstra or a future landowner.

Pursifull then designed a modified blind inlet to install on the small pond which would allow water to drain into a water level control system while remaining beaver proof.

The blind inlet consisted of leach field pipes, which are PVC pipes with holes in them typically used as part of a septic system, to be buried in the bank under rocks. The rocks were then covered with geotextile fabric to keep debris and sediment from plugging the system while simultaneously allowing water to drain through the fabric and rocks into the pipes and out through the water level control system.

The water level control system is a box buried in the ground with an inlet pipe from the pond on one side and an outlet pipe that runs into a 700-foot tile leading to the main pond on the other. Inside the box, Dykstra can adjust boards to either raise or lower the level of water in the controlled pond as necessary.

A similar structure with a beaver proof drain was installed along with a levee at the western bank of the main pond which enables Dykstra to control the overall water level on the property.

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 FY22, Indiana NRCS accomplished the following:

624 volunteers as individuals or in groups

3,223 hours logged

100% of offices reported Earth Team contributions

Time dedicated by these volunteers to educational efforts, conservation planning and clerical services saved Indiana NRCS approximate \$96,529 according to the Independent Sector's value of volunteer time and supported conservation in every single USDA Service Center in Indiana.



Urban Soil Health Program

NRCS serves all agriculture – large to small, conventional to organic, rural to urban. As American agriculture continues to grow in new directions, NRCS conservation assistance is growing along with it. By bringing cultivation and opportunity to both rural and urban areas, NRCS addresses many needs - restoring the health of the environment and people.

As part of this effort, Indiana NRCS partnered with the Indiana Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts to develop the Urban Soil Health program. The program staff consists of program director Eli Blaine and a soil health specialist working out each of Indiana NRCS' four area offices.

The Urban Soil Health Program team works with conservation partners and farmers across Indiana to form local Soil Health Working Groups that provide soil health education and address the needs of small-scale vegetable growers. Their Urban Soil Health Specialists and working group members train local conservation staff, growers and the general public at field days, workshops, one-on-one meetings, and via site visits and technical assistance.



Soil Health Team



4,000+
People
Reached



120
Events
Held



40
Site
Visits



20
Tech
Assists

Agreement benefits urban farmers, entire Indiana watershed

Marissa Renz's farm, Plant Happiness, pops up out of nowhere.

Driving down a residential road in Fort Wayne, Indiana, house after house with green lawns just starting to regain their color after a long winter suddenly give way to Renz's front yard where during the summer rows of vegetables and greens have replaced the grass.

As she started the farm, Renz asked the Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) for help understanding her soil.

Through a contribution agreement with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Allen County SWCD was able to provide free soil testing to small and urban farmers throughout the Western Lake Erie Basin, like Renz.

Allen County is unique within Indiana as its home to the second largest municipality in the state, Fort Wayne, and also more than 200,000 acres of cropland. The impact of those farms has left its mark on Lake Erie where runoff, excess nutrients and eroded soils may eventually end up.

To help combat the harmful impact to Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes due to agriculture, NRCS offers assistance through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and Western Lake Erie Basin Initiative (WLEB), both of which provide targeted funds to farmers in watersheds surrounding the lakes to establish conservation practices into their operations.

In addition to the direct-to-producer funding made available through GLRI and WLEB, Indiana NRCS has provided funding to the Allen County SWCD through a contribution agreement. The agreement

enables them to work directly with small and urban farmers who tend to have less familiarity with the assistance available to them as well as their operations' impact on the water quality in Lake Erie.

Free soil testing has served as Allen County SWCD's introduction to many of the small and urban farms in the Western Lake Erie Basin, Joelle Neff, a watershed coordinator with Allen County SWCD said, but through the contribution agreement they also have the ability to host trainings, offer technical assistance, set up demonstration plots and more. Renz's is one of 23 farms that have benefited from the tests as of March 2022.

Allen County SWCD holds webinars and has sponsored field trips for farmers to learn more about conservation, how to increase production and be better stewards of the land.

One beneficiary were the farmers of Rose Avenue Education Farm who took a trip in June 2021 to Clay Bottom Farms, a micro

farm in Goshen, Indiana.

Rose Avenue Farm started building the farm on an eight-acre plot in New Haven, Indiana.

As far back as records exist, the farm was subdivided into roughly half acre plots and contracted out to Burmese refugees who live in the area and were looking for a way to return to their agricultural roots.

Jain Young, who manages Rose Avenue Farm through the non-profit Heartland Communities, has utilized Allen County SWCD's urban farming resources since the first day the farm existed both through soil testing and education.

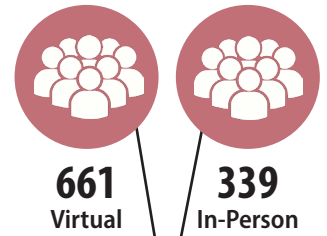
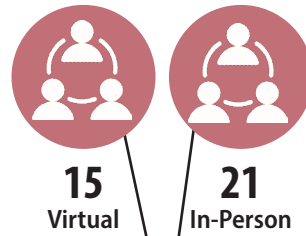
Working with Allen County SWCD has also led Young and Rose Avenue Farm to apply for NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) with hopes of building a season high tunnel to lengthen the growing season, plant a pollinator habitat and remove invasive species from the surrounding forestland.



Marissa Renz

WOMEN4THELAND

Most women farmers and landowners share strong conservation values and want their land farmed sustainability into the future. Women4theLand (W4L) is a partnership of conservation and natural resource agencies and organizations working together to provide education and resources to Indiana women landowners, farmers and natural resource professionals. W4L uses the learning circle model to provide information in a comfortable, informal setting where women learn from professional conservationists as well as from each other. W4L provides education and information about conservation management practices, new technology, communicating effectively with tenants, financial assistance programs, where to find assistance and more.



36
Circles Held



1,000
Attendees

The primary topic for this year's circles was soil health but circle topics also included invasive species, forestry management, pond ecosystems, managing for pollinators and wildlife, conservation planning, and working with your farmer on leases.

For more information on Women4theLand, visit: www.women4theland.org

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

fax: (202) 690-7442; or

email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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