



Credit: Ashley Pine



Credit: Sue Fisher



Credit: Kent Ozment



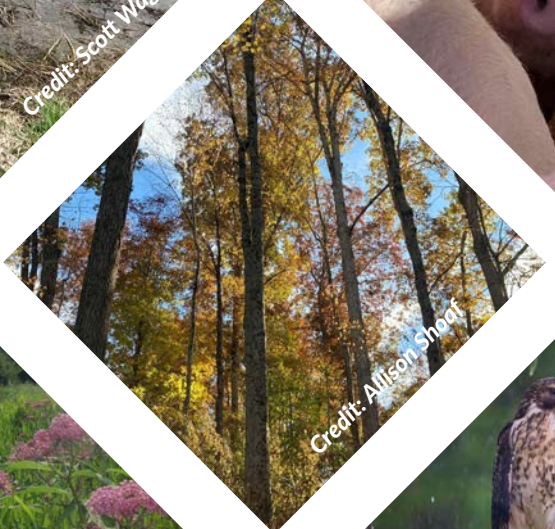
Credit: Kevin Kreuzman



Credit: Scott Wagner



Credit: Wes Todd



Credit: Allison Shoaf



Credit: Stephen Miller



Credit: Conrad Stenfenogel



Credit: Peter Bednarski

At the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we have a proud history of supporting America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. For more than 80 years, we have helped people make investments in their operations and local communities to keep working lands working, boost rural economies, increase the competitiveness of American agriculture, and improve the quality of our air, water, soil and habitat.

INDIANA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Thank you to the Indiana NRCS employees who have submitted photos to the statewide photo contest. You can see many of the photos submitted over the past three years in this document.



A NOTE FROM THE STATE CONSERVATIONIST

As we reflect on fiscal year 2024, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the incredible strides Indiana has made in conservation and the dedication of our team at Indiana NRCS. Together, we have achieved significant milestones in preserving and enhancing the natural resources that sustain our agricultural legacy and rural communities.

Indiana's agricultural producers have once again demonstrated their commitment to stewardship by adopting innovative practices that protect soil health, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitats. Thanks to these efforts, we have seen record participation in conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Producers are embracing cover crops, no-till systems and precision nutrient management, proving that sustainable agriculture is not only possible, but profitable. The impact of these efforts resonates far beyond the farm, contributing to cleaner streams, healthier ecosystems and a more resilient agricultural landscape for future generations.

Behind every successful conservation story is a team of dedicated professionals who make it happen. This year brought its share of challenges, from unpredictable weather to evolving program demands. Yet, our employees rose to the occasion with creativity, perseverance and a steadfast commitment to service. Whether it was delivering technical assistance to producers in the field, navigating program complexities or fostering partnerships, our team went above and beyond to ensure the success of our mission.

Looking ahead, I am excited about the opportunities that lie before us. Together, with our partners and the producers we serve, we will continue to build on the momentum in fiscal year 2025, advancing conservation practices that benefit our land, water and communities.

Damarys Mortenson
Indiana NRCS State Conservationist

CTA AT A GLANCE

NRCS offers Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) at no cost to the producers we serve. Our goal is to give our customers personalized advice and information, based on the latest science and research, to help them make informed decisions.

CRP AT A GLANCE

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program administered by the Farm Service Agency. The program encourages farmers and landowners to convert environmentally sensitive land to vegetative cover, such as trees or grasses, to improve the environment. In exchange, participants receive annual rental payments and cost-sharing assistance.

NRCS receives separate CRP funding to provide technical assistance, including conservation planning and land eligibility assessments, to landowners participating in CRP, helping farmers design and implement conservation practices on their enrolled land while ensuring it meets program requirements.

In FY24, Indiana NRCS and our partners completed the following for CRP:

- Status Reviews: 10,900+
- Plans Developed: 4,000+
- New Practices: 1,000+



Blue Bells blooming in southwestern Indiana. Photo Credit: Travis Gogel, Area Soil Scientist

CTA HIGHLIGHT: WETLAND AND HEL DETERMINATIONS

NRCS makes Wetland and Highly Erodible Land (HEL) determinations to assist landowners in making informed land management decisions in order to remain compliant with the wetland conservation provisions.

Wetland determinations

To participate in most USDA programs, agricultural producers agree to comply with the wetland conservation provisions, which means producers will not farm converted wetlands or convert wetlands to enable agricultural production. Wetland determinations are used to identify areas that are subject to these wetland conservation provisions.

HEL determinations

Highly erodible land (HEL) is land that is susceptible to erosion at an excessive rate, which can lead to long-term decreased productivity. HEL is designated on a field basis, and is determined by the proportion of the field that contains soils with an erodibility index of eight or more.

In FY24, Indiana NRCS staff completed the following Wetland and HEL determinations:

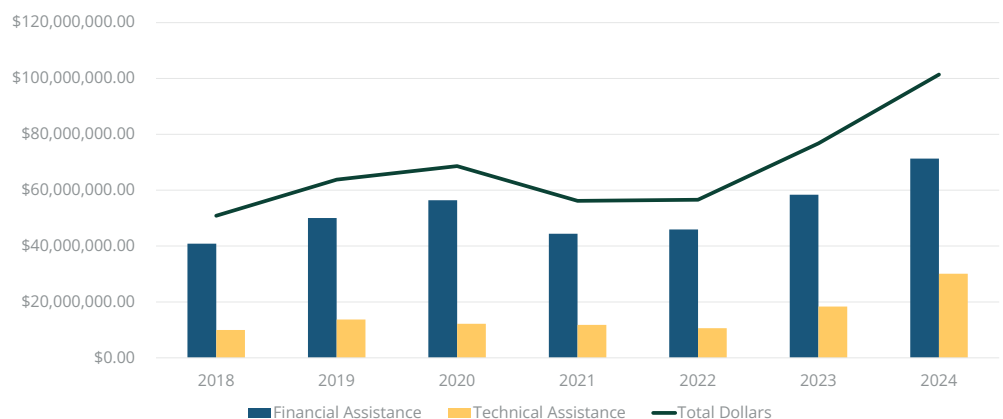
- Highly Erodible Land Compliance Determinations: 2,674
- Wetland Compliance Determinations: 3,818



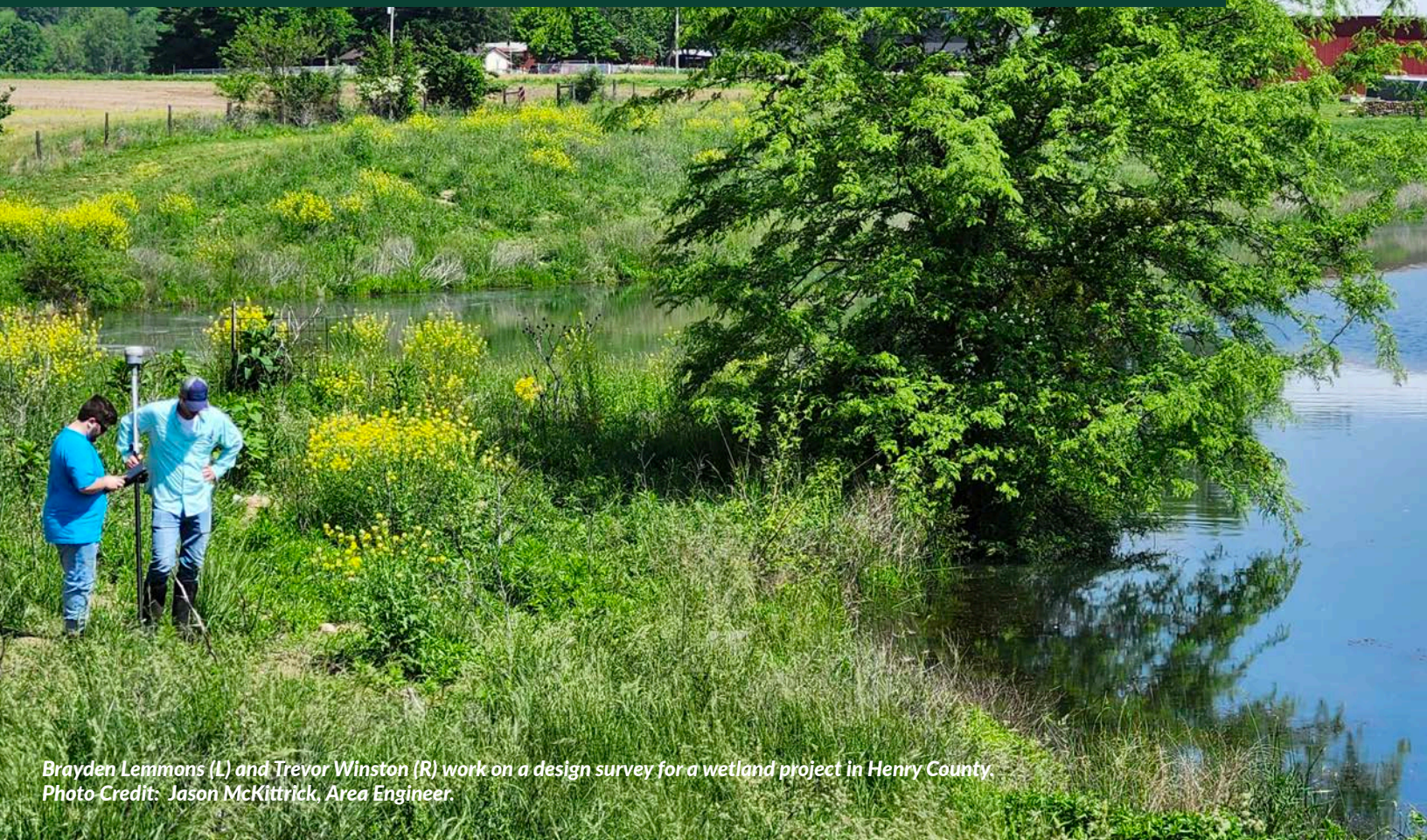
Herbaceous cover training in Warren County. Credit: Dan Shaver, State Forester

NRCS provides both financial and technical assistance to help land users protect and improve natural resources. Over the past seven years, funding for programs in Indiana have fluctuated with a steady increase over time. In fiscal year 2024, NRCS received additional funding through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), increasing landowner support by 45 percent.

INDIANA FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE VS. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: FY2018 TO FY2024



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)



Brayden Lemmons (L) and Trevor Winston (R) work on a design survey for a wetland project in Henry County.
Photo Credit: Jason McKittrick, Area Engineer.

ACEP AT A GLANCE

ACEP helps landowners, land trusts and other entities protect, restore and enhance wetlands or protect working farms and ranches through conservation easements. ACEP includes two distinct components:

Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)

NRCS provides financial assistance to eligible partners for purchasing ag land easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of eligible land.

Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners and Indian tribes to restore, protect and enhance wetlands through the purchase of a wetland reserve easement.

NRCS conservation easements protect more than 80,000 acres in Indiana.

WETLAND RESERVE EASEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

New Enrollments:	28 applications on 1,502 acres
Closed Easements:	23 easements on 887 acres
Restoration Completed:	8 Restorations
Compatible Use Authorizations:	53 CUAs
Onsite Monitoring Reviews:	330 easements
Offsite Monitoring Reviews:	636 easements

AGRICULTURAL LAND EASEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Three New Easements:

- Harrison County (299 acres)
- Scott County (248 acres)
- Miami County (157 acres)

New Land Trust Partnerships:

- American Farmland Trust
- Wood-Land-Lakes RC&D Land Trust

New Agreements:

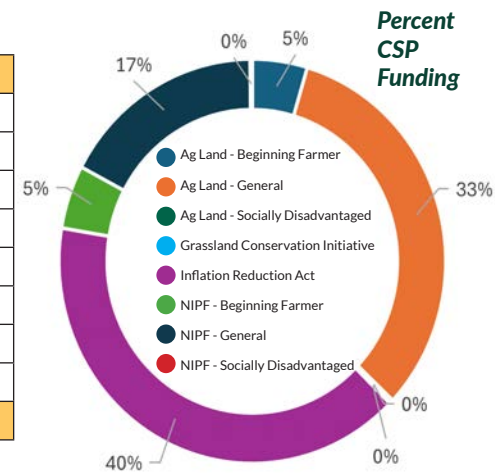
- Working with American Farmland Trust to hire an Indiana Farmland Protection Specialist



CSP FUNDING POOLS

Funding Pool	Contracts	Acres	Dollars
Ag Beginning	23	5,191	\$988,893
Ag General	92	64,040	\$6,987,480
Ag Socially Dis.	2	210	\$64,742
Grassland	4	79	\$7,120
IRA	118	58,701	\$8,654,597
NIPF Beginning	35	929	\$1,094,133
NIPF General	135	8,595	\$3,677,511
NIPF Socially Dis	1	94	\$39,195
	410	137,838	\$21,513,671

NIPF: Nonindustrial Private Forestland



CSP AT A GLANCE

Our Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps farmers build on existing conservation efforts while strengthening their operation. Whether they are looking to improve grazing conditions, increase crop resiliency, or develop wildlife habitat, NRCS can custom design a CSP plan to help farmers meet their goals.

NRCS can help you identify natural resource problems on operations and provide technical and financial assistance to solve those problems or attain higher stewardship levels in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. For example, NRCS can look at ways to address the amount of soil lost; mitigate the impact of excess water; reduce the contribution of agricultural operations to airborne soil particles and greenhouse gas emissions; improve the cover, food, and water available for domestic and wildlife species; or promote energy efficiencies for on-farm activities.



Dan McGuckin, Habitat Solutions President (L), Schmeiser (C) and Dan Shaver, NRCS District Forester (R) look at a oak seedling on the Schmeiser property.

SUCCESS STORY: A JOURNEY TO FOREST CONSERVATION

Bryan Schmeiser, a Carmel, Indiana resident, pursued his dream of creating a natural haven for his family by purchasing 80 acres in Morgan County in 2015. Inspired by his childhood memories of rural life, he envisioned a property where his children could explore, play and connect with nature.

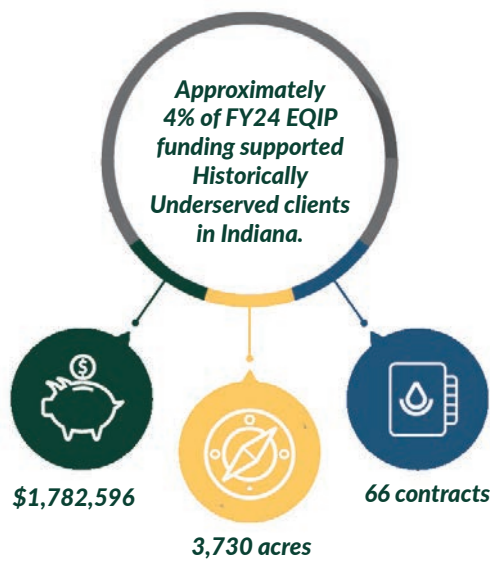
Schmeiser enrolled in the Indiana Department of Natural Resources' Classified Forest and Wildlands program, securing tax benefits and laying the foundation for conservation efforts. With guidance from NRCS experts, he tackled invasive species through EQIP and enhanced the property through CSP. These programs enabled him to restore native vegetation, improve wildlife habitats and focus on conservation practices such as timber stand improvement through the Forestry for the Birds initiative, led by the Sam Shine Foundation and The Nature Conservancy.

Over the years, Schmeiser's property transformed into a thriving habitat, home to 47 bird species. The Forestry for the Birds program played a key role, encouraging practices that benefit songbirds facing population declines. Supported by professionals and financial assistance, Schmeiser not only achieved his vision but also earned recognition, including the Conservationist of the Year.

Bryan's story exemplifies how individual efforts, combined with expert guidance and partnerships, can make a significant impact on conservation.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)



NRCS PRIORITY: EQUITY AND INCLUSION FOR ALL FARMERS

Indiana NRCS is steadfast in its mission to ensure equitable access to agricultural resources, emphasizing its commitment to historically underserved farmers. These groups—defined as socially disadvantaged, beginning, limited resource and veteran farmers—face unique challenges in accessing tools, funding and technical assistance necessary for sustainable farming.

Recognizing these barriers, NRCS provides tailored programs to address critical needs. Through EQIP, NRCS provides separate funding pools and higher payment rates for these farmers to help level the playing field.

By prioritizing inclusivity, NRCS not only addresses historic inequities but also uplifts diverse agricultural voices. Supporting these farmers is essential for the resilience of Indiana’s agricultural systems, ensuring that all producers, regardless of background, can contribute to a sustainable and secure food supply.

Initiative	Contracts	Acres	Dollars Allocated
Beginning Farmer/Rancher	27	3,039	\$1,163,393
Conservation Incentives Contracts	5	1,790	\$521,305
Forest Service Partnership	30	2,334	\$998,647
Great Lakes Restoration Initiative	43	10,389	\$1,541,738
Inflation Reduction Act	538	114,202	\$26,190,989
Limited Resource	13	438	\$207,551
Monarch Butterfly Project	9	287	\$340,006
Mississippi River Healthy Watershed Basin Initiative	8	722	\$416,636
National Water Quality	13	4,159	\$949,608
On-Farm Energy	7	133	\$66,447
Organic Transition	6	37	\$71,914
Planning	182	33,486	\$129,5971
Socially Disadvantaged	26	253	\$411,652
State Funding Pools	160	13,353	\$11,666,165
Western Lake Erie Basin	38	4,367	\$990,330
Wildlife	51	2,489	\$1,328,081
Working Lands for Wildlife	18	609	\$496,859
TOTAL Non-Historically Underserved Funding	1,108	188,358	\$46,874,696
TOTAL Historically Underserved Funding	66	3,730	\$1,782,596

EQIP AT A GLANCE

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides technical and financial assistance to producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, increased soil health and reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, improved or created wildlife habitat, and mitigation against drought and increasing weather volatility.

SUCCESS STORY: CONSERVATION TRANSECT

The Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP) has conducted periodic surveys of agricultural land since 1989. These surveys are primarily designed to gather information on various agricultural practices, including tillage and cover crops. Led by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, ICP staff conducted the survey in each county in the state to estimate the adoption of cover crops and post-harvest tillage.

In fiscal year 2024, the conservation transect noted:

- 1.6 million acres of cover crops
- 596,000+ acres of living cover in corn
- 931,000+ acres of living cover in soybeans



Cow/Calf pair stand in a field in Brown County.
Photo Credit: Leah Hagemeyer, Soil Conservationist

TOP FIVE FUNDED EQIP PRACTICES



Cover Crop

\$11,801,938

Unharvested grasses, legumes and/or forbs planted for seasonal vegetative cover to build soil health by reducing erosion and increasing organic matter.



Brush Management

\$10,585,024

The removal of woody invasive vegetation through mechanical treatment to maintain or enhance native perennial grass and forb communities while leaving residue on-site.



Nutrient Management

\$6,453,642

Managing nutrients by controlling the amount, source, placement and timing to maximize plant growth while minimizing the impact on the environment and the soil.



Roofs and Covers

\$2,606,476

A specific type of cover that entails a roof structure over a waste management facility to capture biogas and reduce odor.



Waste Storage Facility

\$2,140,129

An agricultural waste storage impoundment or containment structure used to minimize impacts on surface and groundwater and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

New radiant heating and barn insulation in one of John Baker's poultry barns.



SUCCESS STORY: INFLATION REDUCTION ACT IN ACTION

John Baker, a turkey farmer in Washington County, Indiana, faced rising energy costs and inefficiency in his operation, which raises 28,000 turkeys per cycle. Determined to lower expenses and improve sustainability, John partnered with NRCS. Through the EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative, he conducted a comprehensive energy audit and received additional funding through the Inflation Reduction Act to install radiant heating and barn insulation recommended in his energy audit.

These upgrades reduced energy usage, cut costs and improved bird health during harsh winters, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions. John credits NRCS for transforming his operation into a more sustainable and profitable farm, and he encourages other farmers to explore NRCS programs for climate-smart solutions.

INDIANA RCPP PROJECTS

Big Pine Watershed Initiative (Classic):

- 1 contract on 890 acres
- \$121,404 obligated
- 2 Historically Underserved Contracts

Farmers Helping Hellbenders (Classic):

- 11 contracts on 2,931 acres
- \$1,109,981 obligated
- 3 Historically Underserved Contracts

Grasslands for Gamebirds and Songbirds (Classic):

- 5 contracts on 48 acres
- \$21,939 obligated
- 2 Historically Underserved Contracts

Tri-State Western Lake Erie Basin (Classic):

- 6 contracts on 194 acres
- \$50,876 obligated
- 1 Historically Underserved Contracts



- Grasslands for Gamebirds/Songbirds
- So. Indiana Sentinel Landscape
- Big Pine Watershed Partnerships
- Farmers Helping Hellbenders
- Tri-State Western Lake Erie Basin
- Kankakee Watershed Partnership

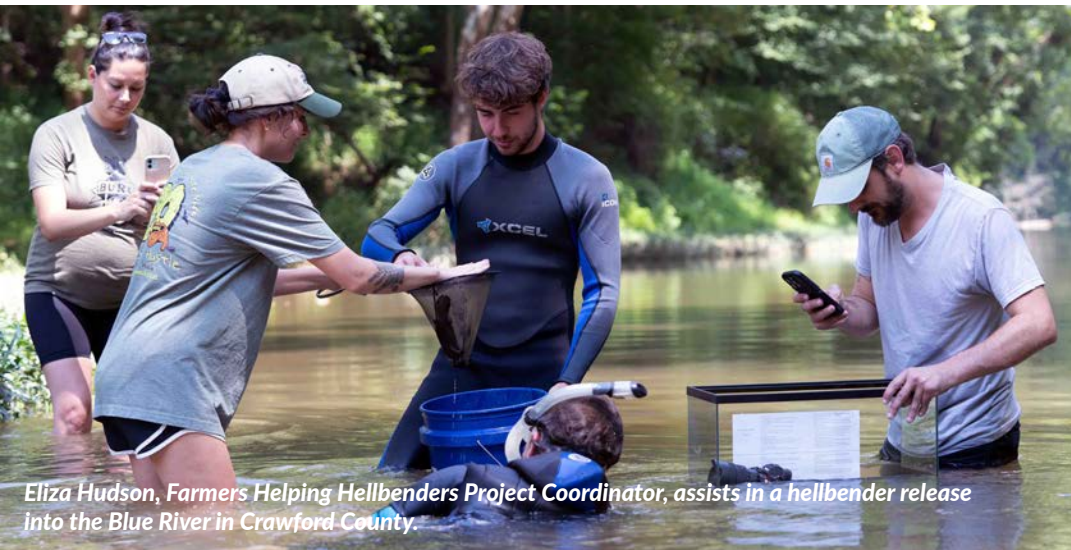
Preserve Your Heritage
Stop The Dam
Save Big Pine Creek

RCPP AT A GLANCE

Through Partnerships, Indiana NRCS coordinates the delivery of assistance where it can have the most impact. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven approach to conservation that funds solutions to natural resource challenges on agricultural land. RCPP demonstrates the power of public-private partnerships in delivering results for agriculture and conservation.

RCPP projects fall under two different categories: RCPP Classic and RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFAs). RCPP Classic projects are implemented using NRCS contracts and easements with producers, landowners and communities, in collaboration with project partners. Through RCPP AFAs, NRCS reimburses partners for conservation activities done for or on behalf of producers, landowners or other entities.

In Indiana, two new RCPP projects were awarded in FY 2024: The Kankakee Watershed Partnership and The Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape.



Eliza Hudson, Farmers Helping Hellbenders Project Coordinator, assists in a hellbender release into the Blue River in Crawford County.

SUCCESS STORY: FARMERS HELPING HELLBENDERS RCPP

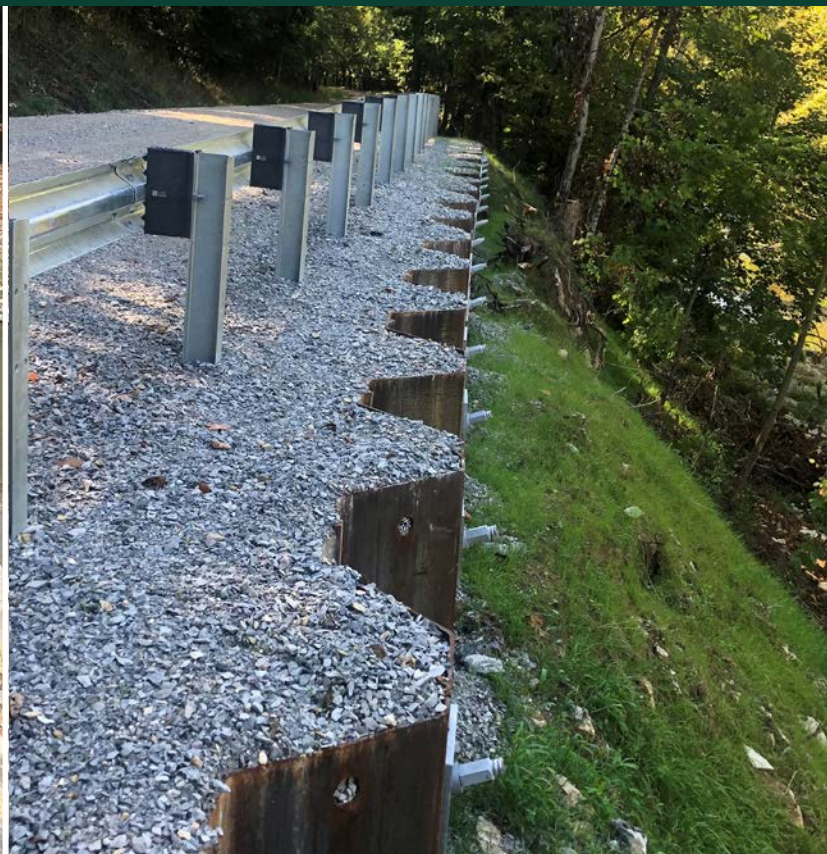
Indiana's Blue River is home to the endangered Eastern hellbender salamander, a species critical to local ecosystems. Once thriving, their populations have drastically declined due to pollution, sediment accumulation and habitat modification. The Farmers Helping Hellbenders project, led by Purdue University and supported by 14 partners, addresses these challenges by improving water quality and habitat conditions.

Farmers are key to the success of the project, adopting practices like cover crops, riparian buffers, and nutrient management to reduce sediment and pollutants entering waterways. The project also includes rearing and releasing juvenile hellbenders, with over 500 released since 2017. Collaborative efforts with zoos and regional wildlife agencies ensure a sustainable population.

This targeted, science-based approach is restoring habitats and fostering partnerships, promising a hopeful future for the species.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Watershed Protection Programs



EWP AT A GLANCE

The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program responds to emergencies created by natural disasters. This NRCS emergency recovery program is designed to help communities conserve natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural occurrences.

EWP PROJECT STATUS

- Switzerland County (Project 5060) - Two sites completed. One site remaining.
- Johnson County (Project 5061) - One site funded.
- Franklin County (Project 5062) - Two sites completed.
- Dearborn County (Project 5063) - One site currently under construction.

EWP Agreements	
Number	3
NRCS Contribution	\$2,396,876
Partner Contribution	\$0
Total Cost	\$2,396,876

REHAB AT A GLANCE

The Watershed Rehabilitation Program (REHAB) helps project sponsors rehabilitate aging dams that are reaching the end of their design life and/or no longer meet federal or state safety criteria or performance standards. Since 1948, NRCS has assisted local sponsors in constructing over 11,850 dams, nationally.

INDIANA WATERSHEDS

Muddy Fork #4

- Proposed Dam in Clark County.
- Provides flood control, drinking water and recreation.
- Currently in the Planning and Environmental Assessment Stage.

WATERSHED REHABILITATION

Rehabilitation Funding Received

- 2 Dams on Prairie Creek located in Daviess County.
- 1 Dam on Deer Creek located in Perry County.

Dam Assessment Funding Received

- 1 Dam for Borden Tri-County in Clark County.

INDIANA NRCS FY24 AGREEMENT SUMMARY

	Number	Total Dollars	NRCS Contribution	Partner Contribution
Cooperative Agreements	9	\$7,205,345	\$7,200,326	\$5,019
Contribution Agreements	38	\$43,071,454	\$31,286,265	\$12,685,180
Interagency Agreements	3	\$1,700,000	\$1,700,000	\$0
Grants	2	\$1,184,795	\$924,449	\$260,340
TOTAL	52	\$53,161,594	\$41,111,040	\$12,950,539

AGREEMENT HIGHLIGHT: BLACK LOAM EVENTS

The third annual Indiana Black Loam Conference was held on Friday, November 1 and Saturday, November 2 at the historic Madame Walker Legacy Center. Hosted by Legacy Taste of the Garden, leaders from the agriculture, conservation and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities in Indiana gathered to learn about strategies, resources, tips and tricks to farming and sustainability. Keynote speaker Ashley Smith, co-founder of Black Soil KY, shared her story and the successes of her initiative, offering advice and insights into how community centered programs can help increase access to fresh, nutritious foods to underserved communities.

In addition to offering resources for sustainable farming, this year's Black Loam Conference hosted sessions aimed to help prospective farmers and landowners through the financial side of agriculture. From the role of credit in farm financials to how to become market ready, representatives from Farm Credit Mid-America and local farmers from Cleavs Family Market and The Narrow Way Farm shared their advice to participants on how to improve their bottom line.



Ashley Smith shares her story at the 2024 Black Loam Conference in Indianapolis.

AGREEMENTS AT A GLANCE

Conserving our natural resources is not a one-person job. Agreements allow our agency to expand the reach and depth of conservation in Indiana.

A “contribution agreement” generally refers to a funding mechanism where the USDA provides financial support with less direct involvement in the project while a “cooperative agreement” indicates a more active partnership where the USDA participates significantly in the project alongside the recipient, collaborating on decision-making and project implementation. Grants awarded to partners have minimal NRCS involvement as the recipient primarily leads the project independently.

A cooperative agreement implies a stronger collaborative relationship between the USDA and the recipient, while a contribution agreement or grant focuses more on providing financial assistance.



Volunteers at the Jefferson County High Tunnel Build and Learn Event put on by Urban Soil Health. Photo Credit: Elli Blaine, Urban Soil Health Project Coordinator

AGREEMENT HIGHLIGHT: URBAN SOIL HEALTH

Urban Soil Health Team:

- Reached 3,100+ people
- Held and partnered on 120 events
- Completed 114 site visits; 70 received Technical Assistance
- Completed 100+ soil tests

Working Groups (27 Statewide)

- Reached 1,400+ people
- Held 75 events
- Completed 278 site visits; 172 received Technical Assistance
- Received \$50,000 in incentive payments for site visits and Technical Assistance support activities

Earth Team Volunteer Program



Water Testing on the Wabash River. Credit: Mariah Underwood, District Conservationist



Knox County Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area invasive plant removal.

ETV AT A GLANCE

Earth Team volunteers help NRCS fulfill its commitment to supporting farmers and forestland owners in their voluntary conservation efforts to keep working lands working, boost rural economies and increase the competitiveness of Indiana agriculture. The Earth Team offers numerous volunteer opportunities for students, retirees, veterans and others who care about conservation and are seeking to make a difference in their communities.

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 FY24, Indiana NRCS accomplished the following:



VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT: GARY STRUBEN

Gary Struben has made remarkable volunteer contributions to the Pathway to Water Quality (PWQ) exhibit at the Indiana State Fairgrounds, dedicating 67.5 hours to maintaining and enhancing this vital educational resource. The PWQ exhibit, a collaboration by the Indiana Conservation Partnership, educates tens of thousands of visitors annually on the importance of water quality, soil conservation and sustainable natural resource management. It serves as a living classroom, empowering visitors to adopt practices that protect the environment.

Gary's efforts were instrumental in preparing and cultivating the exhibit's soils area, a centerpiece demonstrating soil's critical role in sustainable agriculture and ecosystem support. His work not only improved the exhibit's appearance but also enriched the educational experience for visitors, providing insights into sustainable land practices.

The PWQ exhibit also highlights conservation strategies such as cover cropping and no-till farming, which improve agricultural productivity while protecting waterways. Gary played a key role in preparing the exhibit for the 2024 Indiana State Fair and ensuring its successful operation throughout the event. His dedication exemplifies the power of volunteerism in advancing environmental stewardship and public education, making a lasting impact on both the exhibit and its visitors.

INDIANA NRCS FY24 STAFFING STRUCTURE

Indiana NRCS, led by our State Conservationist, Damarys Mortenson, and our State Leadership Team, serves diverse agricultural needs through 4 area offices, 8 conservation delivery teams and 76 field offices that serve all 92 counties in Indiana.

State Office

6013 Lakeside Boulevard, Indianapolis, IN 46278
Phone: (317) 295-5800

Northeast Area Office

2720 Dupont Commerce Court, Suite 101, Ft Wayne, IN 46825
Phone: (260) 484-5848

Northwest Area Office

1812 Troxel Drive, Lafayette, IN 47909
Phone: (765) 474-9992

Southeast Area Office

2600 N State Highway 7, North Vernon, IN 47265
Phone: (812) 346-3411

Southwest Area Office

604 Quail Run Road, Vincennes, IN 47591
Phone: (812) 882-8210



Indiana NRCS Field Delivery Structure

- ★ Area Offices
 - CDT Offices
 - PTL Offices
 - Service Centers
- Planning Team Areas
- NE-Albion North
 - NE-Albion South
 - NE-Huntington
 - NW-Lafayette
 - NW-Lebanon
 - NW-Rensselaer
 - SE-Connersville
 - SE-Greensburg
 - SE-Salem
 - SW-Bloomfield
 - SW-Greencastle
 - SW-Princeton



Date: 4/2/2024

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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form,

Call: (866) 632-9992.

Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or

(3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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