



Helping People...

...Help the Land.



Family Controls Flooding While Providing Wildlife Habitat



Shawnee Creek overflowing its banks and flooding cropland.



Cropland two days following a storm event.



New wildlife area on Newkirk Farm.

Year after year, anywhere between six to ten acres of a crop field on James and Cindy Newkirk's Farm washed out during storm events, leaving standing water for long periods of time. The field lies adjacent to a wooded area and near where the Shawnee Creek flows in from the north. The only time a crop could be harvested off the field was during a drought year. The loss of top soil from the field, flooding of the road, and lack of income from planting a crop that did not produce was troublesome for the Newkirk family.

In 2012, the Newkirks decided to do something and inquired about enrolling the field in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP), one of the Farm Bill programs administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). After talking with the NRCS District Conservationist about their goals, they selected conservation practices that would benefit wildlife and eliminate their concerns about water runoff, loss of crops and standing water.

In 2013, the Newkirks created a one-acre shallow wetland and a one-acre pollinator habitat. The wetland includes a banked berm area to help reduce the overflow of water on to a nearby road, two small mounded areas for wildlife habitat, and an area to hold water and slowly release it back into Shawnee Creek, which reduces flooding downstream. Next year, they plan to plant trees as a buffer near the creek. Planting these trees will add over two acres to their existing woodland and will provide additional water quality protection and wildlife habitat.

The Newkirks want to be involved in each step of implementing this plan on their farm. They took the initiative to hire a contractor to do the layout and seeding and they met with NRCS soil scientists and engineering technicians to complete the soil borings and design the layout of the shallow wetland.

Newkirk Farms has been in James' family for eight generations so good land stewardship is very important to both him and Cindy. They took a wet, unproductive field out of production and turned it into a wildlife viewer's paradise, that eliminates flooding and erosion and, in turn, improves local water quality. With CStP and NRCS technical assistance, this land is being transformed into a healthy and safe habitat for native and migrating birds and other wildlife. In fact, the Newkirks recently discovered a new resident on their farm—ground-nesting bees, an important Indiana pollinator. When asked about their progress so far, the Newkirks describe the benefits of converting their land as immeasurable.