

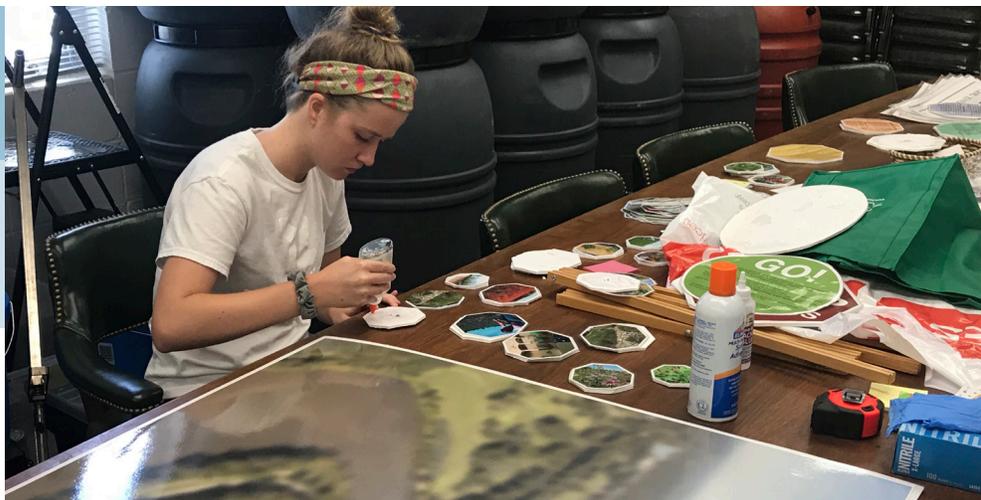


*Helping People...*

*...Help the Land.*



**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**



## Volunteer Develops Database of Native Indiana Plants

Over the fiscal year 2019, Grace Cochran volunteered 210.75 hours of her time supporting Indiana's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Indiana Conservation partners in Hamilton County and throughout Indiana.

Each year the Hamilton County Service Center utilizes a student from the Noblesville School District. This year Grace applied for the opportunity and was selected. The match was perfect. Grace brought a vast knowledge of new technology and a love for the land into the workplace. She jumped right in and began working on several projects that the staff simply did not have the time to focus on but knew would be of great benefit to the office.

The most time-consuming project Grace worked on was developing a database of native Indiana plants to support the emerging cooperative invasive species management area (CISMA) in Hamilton County. While there is currently a database to support grass and forb planting, one is not

available for shrubs and tree planting. Restoring native plant habitat is vital to preserving biodiversity. With Grace's hard work and effort, this tool will not only help with planting recommendations locally, but it can be used statewide to help other counties with their native planting projects.

Grace offered additional day-to-day support to the office by assisting with the annual tree and native plant sales and volunteering her time to the demonstration garden tower for the urban agriculture program. She worked hard on data entry for the local well program, assisted with well testing and analyzed data for trends to be used for future funding opportunities. Grace designed a "Be a Conservation Friend of the River" poster and other education and outreach materials to be used in the classroom and during field days. She also helped promote conservation and soil health to affiliate members at local events, on social media, and at the 4-H fair.

Grace was required to put in several hours for school and report back to her adviser, much like an unpaid internship, but she went above and beyond what was required in support of NRCS' mission. Grace has since graduated high school and has been accepted to Indiana University where she plans to volunteer in the Bloomington Field Office as her schedule allows.

For more information about the Earth Team Volunteer program, contact your local USDA Service Center or log on to:

[www.in.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov)

