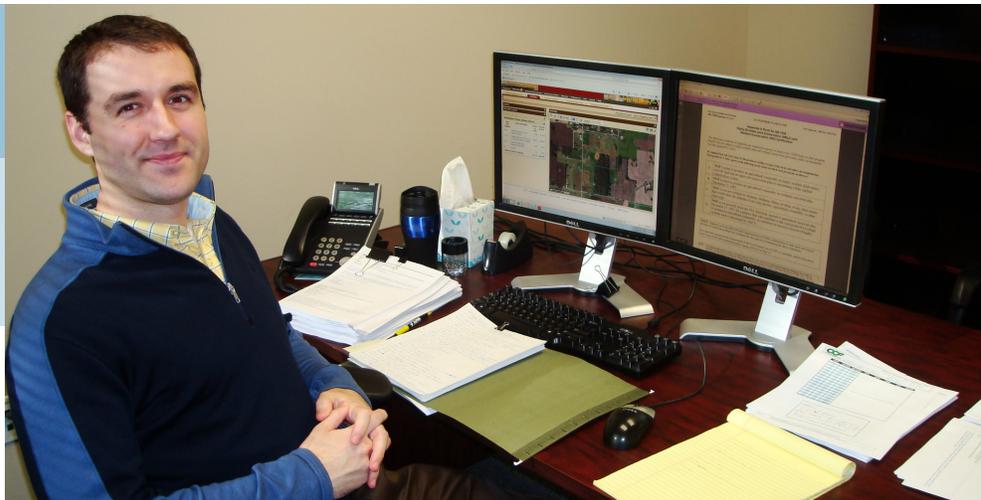




Helping People...

...Help the Land.



VOLUNTEER HELPS REDUCE SOIL EROSION ON CROPLAND

It was a huge workload for any field office – over 300 requests for highly erodible determinations in three months. The 1985 Farm Bill requires farmers with highly erodible land (HEL) who utilize certain USDA benefits to be in compliance by reducing soil erosion on cropland and reducing sedimentation to improve water quality.

While the legislation has been amended several times over the years, the requirement for timely determinations remains the same. NRCS has fourteen days to make the determination and notify landowners. Because of office workload with requests for technical assistance and other Farm Bill programs, District Conservationist Ruth Hackman, Salem Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Office was concerned about meeting the deadlines. So Ruth turned to Earth Team Volunteer Levi Shelton for assistance.

Levi became an Earth Team Volunteer in 2012 to learn about NRCS and its services and programs. In his time as a volunteer, Levi has become familiar with work processes and after a few training sessions he was ready for the assignment of assisting with the HEL determinations. Levi set up case files and customer files in the agency's on-line tracking system (which requires information such as location, conservation plan, soil maps, etc.), completed NRCS-CPA-026s based on determinations made by soil conservationists who visited sites, and he prepared and mailed correspondence and documents to landowners.

During a two-month period, Levi donated over 281 hours, most of which came in long days. His hours of service saved NRCS staff valuable time, which helped the District Conservationist meet the HEL determination deadlines and allowed Conservation Technical Team Soil Conservationists to focus their attention priority field work. If you equate his time at a professional fee rate of \$22.14 per hour, Levi provided more \$6,200 in services to the agency.

The completed determinations were sent to producers prior to spring planting, in time for them to utilize required conservation plans to

reduce soil loss on highly erodible land. It is estimated that of the 300 determinations completed over ninety percent of these contained HEL acreage.

To put the value of Levi's work into perspective, consider this: on average, soil loss on a field before implementing an alternative conservation system would be greater than ten tons per acre per year. After applying an alternative conservation system soil loss would be reduced to at least six tons per acre. Using an average of ten acres per HEL determination on 270 tracts with a reduction in soil loss of four tons per acre by applying an approved alternative conservation system, the soil loss savings is greater than 10,800 tons per year! That's a lot of sediment not making its way to our streams and rivers which can have huge and positive impacts on the environment and our water quality, not only for Washington County but in major watersheds such as the Ohio River and the Mississippi River Basin.

Additionally, because of the prompt completion of the HEL determination requests producers, which included beginning and limited resource farmers and specialty crop producers, were able to receive their Farm Service Agency direct payments on time.

Hackman would like to see other NRCS field staff using Earth Team Volunteers when they have time consuming tasks that need to be completed in very short timeframes. She hopes that by sharing Levi's accomplishments she can encourage NRCS staff to recruit other volunteers that interested in making a difference.

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

www.in.nrcs.usda.gov