

Town & Country

Hamilton County Soil & Water Conservation District

Spring 2016

SUSTAINABILITY WORKSHOP

Creating a sustainable homestead on your suburban lot

Sessions:

Beekeeping 101

Kate Franzman of Bee Public

Intro to Backyard Chickens

Andrew Brake of Naptown Chickens

SWCD Backyard Conservation & Purdue Extension: How we can help!

Claire Lane of HCSWCD & Diane Turner of Purdue Extension

Eating Local: Where to find local food and overview of home production

Chef Thom England of Ivy Tech Culinary Program and co-founder of Dig IN

Urban Soil Health

Kevin Allison of Marion County SWCD

Food Preservation Basics

Joyce Moore of Urban Patch



PURDUE
EXTENSION

HAMILTON COUNTY

Saturday, April 2nd

Hamilton County 4-H Fairgrounds

Exhibition Hall C

2003 Pleasant St. in Noblesville

9am—4pm

(registration begins at 8:30)

\$15 per person (includes lunch)



Registration Form (due by Friday March 23)

Name(s): _____

Email: _____

Please mail this form and payment to:

Hamilton County SWCD
1717 Pleasant St. Suite 100
Noblesville, IN 46060

Make checks payable to Hamilton County SWCD.

Online registration and payment at:

www.hamiltonswcd.org/workshops--events.html

Questions? Call 317-773-2181
claire.lane@hamiltoncounty.in.gov
or turnerda@purdue.edu

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John Talbot

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John South
District Engineer-Manager

Mark McCauley
Resource Conservationist

Claire Lane
Urban Conservationist

Amy Shankland
Office Coordinator

Angie Garrison
NRCS District Conservationist

Town & Country

Published quarterly and distributed to landowners, farm operators, teachers, local agencies, public officials, conservation organizations and other interested individuals.

1717 Pleasant St. Suite 100
Noblesville, IN 46060
317-773-2181
soil.water@hamiltoncounty.in.gov

Annual Meeting Recap

The Hamilton County SWCD Annual Meeting took place on Thursday, February 18 at the Hamilton County 4-H Fairgrounds. Approximately 100 people attended. After a welcome message from Board of Supervisors Chair Rodney Rulon, attendees could attend one of two workshops. Davis Annus, Capstan Ag Systems, Inc. and Education Specialist, gave a presentation on "Improving Sprayer Efficiency with Capstan Technology." Megan Dillon, Indiana DNR Urban Wildlife Biologist, presented on "Urban Wildlife Habitat".



Amy Shankland takes part in the grain bin safety demo



Kevin Allison, Marion County SWCD, presents on Soil Health and Conservation in Your Garden

Late morning workshops included a grain bin safety demo led by Michael Williams of Co-Alliance and a "Soil Health and Conservation in Your Backyard" presentation given by Kevin Allison of the Marion County SWCD. Attendees could also visit the numerous vendors before and after the workshops.

After lunch, Rodney Rulon reported on the results of the supervisor election and SWCD District Manager John South presented some highlights of 2015 activities. The following awards were presented: Outstanding Partners of BYC Program, City of Carmel Utilities, Sue Maki, and City of Carmel Storm Water Program; Friend of Conservation, Terry Murphy; River Friendly Farmer Award, Bob Thomas; Retiring Supervisor, Brad Roberts; and Service Awards, Mark McCauley and John South.

SWCD Welcomes New Supervisor and Associate Supervisor

District Says Farewell to Brad Roberts

SWCD annual meeting attendees elected Dustin Forrer as a new board supervisor. Dustin has been farming for 11 years and also worked on a farm as a child and continued through college. He believes that conservation of soil and water is important for everyone. "For me, reducing the erosion of top soil on my fields is important. Keeping the soil in place reduces runoff and helps maintain soil health," he continued. "With more frequent major rain events, this is becoming critical. Reducing soil runoff keeps our water resources cleaner as well."

Dustin is taking the place of Brad Roberts, who served as treasurer. Roberts is ending his second three year term on the board of supervisors.

Amy Jo Farmer was also named as a new associate supervisor for the board. Amy has been a beekeeper and farmer since 2008. In 2012 she and her husband planted a Conservation Resource Program border and alfalfa in their field. They also established a grassy waterway and an added drainage tile. The Farmers added a season extension high tunnel and heritage livestock in 2015.



Rodney Rulon presents an award to outgoing board member Brad Roberts

Discounted Rain Barrels Available to Noblesville Residents Starting April 1st

The City of Noblesville Clean Stormwater Program is again offering subsidized rain barrels to city residents through the SWCD. Noblesville residents come to the SWCD after April 1st with a copy of their sewer bill (proof of residence), a print out showing they completed a www.ClearChoicesCleanWater.org pledge, and \$30 to secure their barrel. Pre-ordered barrels can be picked up at our pick up event on Friday May 13th between noon and 6pm at the SWCD. Quantities of discounted barrels are limited so pre-order and pay early! More info on our website.

Full prices rain barrels (\$70 + tax) will be available to any customer, regardless of city of residence, starting Monday May 15th. Diverters and other installation tools will also be available.

2016 Brings Staff Transitions at the SWCD

The SWCD has hired Amy Shankland to fill the newly formed position of Office Coordinator. Amy provides support to department personnel, prepares and maintains records, directs the marketing programs and assists the public. She also serves as Secretary for the Soil and Water Conservation District Board and performs duties assigned by the Treasurer. Amy began her position on January 25.

Prior to being hired to work for Hamilton County, Amy worked as the Community Engagement Coordinator for the City of Noblesville. She set up the city's grants team and processes to enable Noblesville to find, apply for, and manage grants. Amy worked with 10 different city departments to bring in over \$5.6 million in federal, state, corporate, and foundation grants. She also created and oversaw the Sustain Noblesville Committee to help city departments and the community become more sustainable and save money. Amy led a multi-department team to apply for, receive, and maintain Comprehensive Local Environmental Action Network (CLEAN) status with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management in 2010 and 2014. Amy also led the initiative to bring the Simple Recycling curbside program to Noblesville, the first in the state of Indiana. Simple Recycling enables residents to recycle household goods that are unfit for donation to charities. She also helped plan and recruit volunteers for various City of Noblesville events including Earth Day ArborFest and the July 4th festival.

"I am thrilled to be a part of a team that has a huge impact on the sustainability of not just Noblesville, but Hamilton County," said Shankland. "I look forward to learning even more about how to improve the environment and building my skills."

"We believe this position will provide more time for Claire Lane to grow the Backyard Conservation program in her new position as Urban Conservationist. We hope Amy's grant proposal writing skills will produce more dollars for conservation." said Rodney Rulon, HCSWCD Board Chair.

Claire Lane formerly performed both office coordinator and Backyard Conservation duties. As the Urban Conservationist, she is now able to expand existing programs and launch new ones such as the native plant sale.

"Claire is already starting out with a bang in her new role," said John South, SWCD Director. "We are excited to see what she's been planning and implementing for 2016."

John South to Retire After 38 Years of Service



John South receives an award from Rodney Rulon at the 2016 annual meeting

The SWCD board and staff recognized District Engineer/Manager John South at the 2016 annual meeting in anticipation of his retirement June 30. John has been with the SWCD since his graduation from Purdue in 1978. He began working for the Soil and Water District 38 years ago this coming June. He is now among a small group of employees who have worked for the county for over three decades. After receiving his degree in Ag Engineering, John began working for the SWCD under then District Conservationist, Tom Shellenberger, surveying and designing various erosion control and drainage practices throughout the county. Much of this early work centered around rural landscapes as urban conservation work had not quite fully developed yet.

Over the years the SWCD became more involved in the urban landscape as well, addressing erosion control on developing construction sites. John helped the Hamilton County SWCD to become an early leader in this field, developing services and workshops to train and assist contractors in following better erosion control measures and implementing storm water pollution prevention plans.

Throughout his time with the District, John has been an advocate of educating the public and getting conservation measures on the ground. Over the years the Hamilton County SWCD has been a leader both locally and statewide in pioneering new and effective conservation programs, workshops, field days, demonstration sites, and much more. John has been a big part of that.

"John has done a tremendous job of leading the SWCD through its growth and many changes," said Board Chair Rodney Rulon. "We will all miss him but wish him the best of luck in his upcoming retirement."

The board and staff wanted to recognize John at this event since it was his last official SWCD annual meeting as a District employee. Watch our website or call 317-773-2181 in May for information on a more formal event to be held closer to his retirement date.

Backyard Conservation Spotlight

Claire Lane, Urban Conservationist



Bicentennial brings new opportunities for families to explore nature

In 2016 Indiana celebrates its bicentennial and the National Park Service and Indiana State Parks celebrate their centennials. These birthdays provide special opportunities to reconnect kids with nature.

Special ways to get kids outside in 2016:

Every 4th grader can print a free **Every Kid in a Park** pass that provides entry to all national lands and waters— that means free trips to all National Parks! Indiana State Parks and State Forest Recreation Areas are also accepting these passes! Learn more and print your pass here: www.everykidinapark.gov/. Not a fourth grader? No problem! **State Parks Passes** are available for check out in every Public Library system across the state in 2016. Check out a pass and visit our great state parks. Both types of passes allow entry for an entire vehicle of guests in most cases. Find a park near you here: www.in.gov/dnr/.



On June 19th, **The Children of Indiana Nature Park: A Celebration of the Hoosier Bicentennial** will be dedicated. This park is a 28 acre park located adjacent to the Cope Environmental Learning Center in Centerville in eastern Indiana. K-12 children from all over Indiana will be able to be part of Hoosier history and claim a bicentennial ceremonial deed of trust for a parcel of land in the park. Can't make it to the park? Kids will be able to explore their parcel online at a website being created by The Nature Conservancy Indiana (www.nature.org/childrenspark).

Finally, the **Indiana Children and Nature Network (ICAN)** is encouraging families and nature centered institutions to jump start their summer of fun outdoors by attending or hosting a Nature Play Day between June 11th and 19th. Nature Play Days will take place across the state at libraries, parks, summer camps, and more! Find one near you at www.indianachildrenandnature.org.

Additional tips on connecting kids with nature can be found on the ICAN website as well as activity ideas, resources for parents and teachers, and great locations across the state where you can visit to engage with the outdoors!



Create Habitat for Monarchs and Other Pollinators: Replacing grass with pollinator habitat

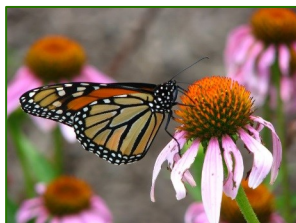
Monday May 9th from 6-8PM at Cool Creek Nature Center

Learn how you can create habitat for Monarch butterflies and other pollinators in your yard, church, business or neighborhood common area.



Creating a pollinator habitat provides a beautiful addition to your property, gives threatened pollinators a place to rest, refuel, and reproduce, and can even reduce property maintenance costs. Join us to learn about how to plan your project, maintenance considerations, financial assistance that may be available, and for first hand experiences from an HOA that has converted turf grass areas to pollinator habitat.

Pre-registration preferred. Register by calling 317-774-2500 or emailing cool.naturecenter@hamiltoncounty.in.gov



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Urban Conservation
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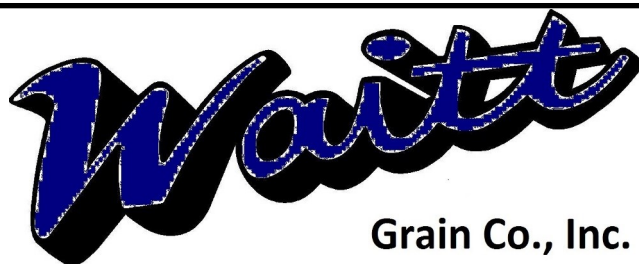
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When is the Best Time to Adopt Conservation Practices?

John South, District Engineer/Manager

There is an old saying: "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now." – *Chinese Proverb*. Now is a good time to sign up for grass filter strips along open ditches and streams. The strip of grass provides a buffer between water resources and the herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers and soil erosion that occurs in the field. The practice is easy to implement and low maintenance. The Conservation Reserve Program pays for part of the establishment cost and pays a cash rent for land taken out of production. The minimum width is 20 ft. Warm season grasses are recommended for filter strips. They're a bit harder to get established but provide superior wildlife habitat.



Field border next to a woodlot. The addition of wildflowers will provide food sources for pollinators.



Grass filter strips help protect water resources from pesticides, fertilizers and soil erosion. It's a diaper. Controlling soil and water movement with conservation tillage and cover crops is the best solution.

Another easy conservation practice to consider is a field border (Upland Bird Habitat). Cropfields that lay next to woods are often not productive. Even heavy fence rows rob the crop of sunlight and water. This is a great location to establish a field border of grass. The minimum width is 30 feet. Again the cover will consist of native grass varieties and may include wildflowers as well.

Both of these simple conservation practices can be enrolled at your FSA office. Angie Garrison with NRCS will work with you to plan the filter strip or field border and get the paperwork done. Sign up now and you should be able to plant seed this spring. Don't delay!

Heartland Backyard Conservation Program Accepting Applications

The Indiana State Department of Agriculture has awarded Hamilton, Hancock, Marion, and Madison counties a 2016 Clean Water Indiana grant. This will allow them to build and expand on the success of the Backyard Conservation Program and Fall Creek Watershed Partnership. This new grant makes financial assistance available for projects that stop erosion, create wildlife habitat, or support clean water across the four-county area. Guidance on what projects may work on your property and how to implement them is available as well as cost share funds to aid in installation.



Heartland Backyard Conservation Program

In addition to the ongoing cost share program at the Hamilton County SWCD, this program allows us to offer financial assistance on critical area improvements (erosion) and soil health improvements. Soil testing and amendments, cover crops for gardens, and even composters are applicable projects for this program in addition to traditional practices like rain gardens, pond edge plantings, prairie establishment, and more.

The first application deadline is April 7th. Contact the SWCD to arrange a free site visit or to inquire about the program.



2016 SWCD Photo Contest

The Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District is sponsoring its third annual photo contest for youth and adults. There are two categories for each division: farm animals and pollinators. Digital files must be submitted by July 1, 2016. Photos will be displayed at the 4-H Fair July 21st through the 25th. Winners in each of the categories will receive a \$50 award.

More info and submission details can be found online at <http://www.hamiltonswcd.org/photo-contest.html>.

*Photo : Sarah Foltz Jordan,
The Xerces Society*

Cover Crops... will this be the year you try them?

Mark McCauley, Resource Conservationist

So you're "on the fence" concerning cover crops? Not sure if all the hype is trustworthy or not? My advice would be to at least try them somewhere in your farming operation on a small scale and judge for yourself. In the early days of no-till soybeans, I remember many farmers feeling the same way about no-till, but now we kind of take that practice for granted. No-till corn is still a challenge for many, but that's another topic for another newsletter. The benefits of cover crops to soil quality and the environment are fairly well known in most scientific studies, but putting the economics to it may not be quite as obvious. Also, like many practices involving living plants, unpredictable weather, varying input costs, etc., there will be years that the benefits are quite obvious, and some where they are not. Overall, the benefits should far outweigh any temporary setbacks when looking at the bigger picture.

So what are the benefits? **Soil Structure:** Increase soil organic matter, increase earthworm population, improve soil microbiology, improve soil aeration & porosity, improve water holding capacity, reduce soil compaction, reduce soil erosion, reduce surface runoff. **Soil Fertility:** Improve nutrient cycling, Increase nitrogen fixation, enhance availability of phosphorous, improve pH buffering. **Environmental Quality:** Improve soil conservation, improve water quality, reduce erosion, reduce nitrogen leaching, reduce surface runoff. **Benefits To Pest Management:** Improve habitat for beneficial insects, improve weed suppression, helps control nematodes. **Potential Forage Source:** Cover crops can also provide superior forage for production animals. Many cover crops provide opportunity for production livestock producers. Cover Crops such as brassicas, cereal grains, clovers, and annual ryegrass produce excellent forage for grazing and/or chopping.

Where would you start if you have never tried cover crops? I would advise going simple at first, using a plant (or combination of plants) that winter kill, are easy to plant, are tolerant to a range of weather conditions, and are not too expensive. Something like cereal rye would be an excellent option ahead of soybeans (it does not winter kill so you will need to spray it out with your normal burn down). Other potentials would include oats and oilseed radish ahead of no-till corn. There is a great tool online that I like to promote that can help guide you through the selection process, called the "Cover Crop Decision Tool". It was developed by the Midwest Cover Crop Council and is located at <http://mcccddev.anr.msu.edu/VertIndex.php#>. Using this tool, you can select your cash crop, planting and harvest date, soils drainage, along with up to three attributes you would like your cover crop to provide. The tool will then give you a list of potential cover crop species, showing establishment dates, risks, etc. It is a great tool for anyone new to cover crops.

Hamilton County farmers are continuing to increase their use of cover crops, but there are still many who have not yet made a decision to try them. The SWCD took a "cover crop survey" throughout the county last fall to estimate the usage. Although those numbers are not yet finalized by our partner agencies, we do have the 2014 numbers, which looked encouraging. 11% of corn acres (5797 acres), and 8% of soybean acres (5080 acres) were planted to a cover crop in 2014. If you would like more information on cover crops, contact Mark McCauley at the Hamilton County SWCD 317-773-2181 mark.mccauley@hamiltoncounty.in.gov



Opportunity for Local Farmers to Participate in a New Project to Assess the Economic Benefits and Costs of Soil Health Practices

As the importance of soil health and erosion control in conservation policy are becoming more recognized, studies on the economic benefits of conservation practices are becoming more important. In this study we seek to gather information by conducting entire-field data on the economics of cover cropping systems. We are looking for willing farmers to participate in the study by providing data from five of their farm fields both with and without cover crops.

This study differs from other studies conducted on cover crops because entire fields will be used, as opposed to strip trials. Only farms with corn-corn or corn-soybean rotations on the targeted fields will be accepted. Farmers must provide five years of historic data on the five fields used for the study. Data will also be supplied for the three years of project operation resulting in eight years of total data. Both cover crop and non-cover crop farms and fields are needed. Farmers will be compensated for participating in the study at a rate of about \$1000/year. Also, soil health test results will be provided to participating farmers. All supplied and collected data will remain confidential, unless the farmer explicitly releases the data. For more information or to sign up for the study, contact: Dr. Wallace Tyner: wtyner@purdue.edu or Stephen Lira: slira@purdue.edu.

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Questions? Contact the SWCD at 773-2181 or Claire.lane@hamiltoncounty.in.gov

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