Strategic Plan

2023-2028

Allen County
Soil & Water
Conservation District

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Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District Business Plan

I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving – Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

Who We Are:

The Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District is a sub-division of State Government. It is a public body which exercises public powers. It is governed by five supervisors, each a resident of Allen County, three elected and two appointed. The District receives its statutory authority from Indiana District Law (Indiana Code IC 14-32-5-1).

What We Do:

The Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District provides information, education and technical assistance to the public on soil, water and related natural resource conservation; identifies and prioritizes local soil and water resource concerns; and connects land users and other residents to sources of education, technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices and technologies.

Our Mission:

To Promote the Wise Use of Our Soil, Water and Related Natural Resources

Core Values:

-Protection of natural resources
-Providing excellent customer service
-Accomplish goals through voluntary programs whenever possible
-Partnering with other Districts, government entities, counties, organizations and interested parties

Our Key Partners and how they assist:

- **Allen County Government**
  - Financially supports the District through staff and administrative program funding
- **City of Fort Wayne**
  - Financial and program support for ongoing projects such as the Water Quality Monitoring Program (WQIS).
- **Other local municipalities such as City of New Haven, Leo-Cedarville, Huntertown, Monroeville, Grabill, Harlan, etc.**
  - Program coordination support
- **Indiana State Department of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation**
  - Financial and administrative support through the Clean Water Indiana Program, District Support Specialist, and Resource Specialist.
- **Indiana Department of Environment Management**
  - Education, technical and financial assistance efforts supported by IDEM for landowners and farm operators.
- **Purdue Cooperative Extension**
  - Educational assistance with public meetings, field days and special events such as the Fort Wayne Farm Show Educational Programs
- **USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service**
  - Educational, technical and financial assistance through Federal Farm Bill Programs such as the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and easement programs
- **USDA, Farm Service Agency**
  - Financial support through cost-share and incentive payment programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program
- **USGS, United States Geological Survey**
  - Support for edge of field on-farm monitoring of conservation practices
- **Local watershed organizations**
  - Technical, financial, and educational assistance to landowners and farmers through groups such as the St. Joseph River Watershed Initiative, St. Marys River Watershed Project (pending), the Upper Maumee River Watershed Partnership, Flatrock/Auglaize Watershed Committee, Save Maumee Grassroots Organization, and the Maumee Watershed Alliance
- **Maumee River Basin Commission**
  - Comprehensive basin-wide flood control and remediation programs throughout the Indiana portion of the Maumee River basin
- **Neighboring Soil and Water Conservation Districts**
  - Watershed based program implementation

Other partners, organizations, and groups

- **Nongovernmental Organizations such as (NGO such)**
    - Indiana Association of Conservation Districts (IASWCD)
    - National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)
    - The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
    - Indiana Farm Bureau, Inc. and it's county partners
    - Indiana Ag Nutrient Alliance (IANA)
    - Indiana Corn Growers Association (ICGA)
    - Indiana Soybean Alliance (ISA)
    - Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI)
    - Allen Co. Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA)
- **Schools, Colleges, and Universities**
    - Purdue University Fort Wayne
    - Indiana Tech
    - Ivy Tech
    - New Tech Academy

A Look at Our District: *History of the Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District*

The Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a subunit of state government. The Allen County SWCD is responsible for the conservation and development of our soil, water, and related natural resources through education, public information, leadership, technical and financial assistance, and development of innovative programs. The Allen County SWCD was organized in March 1945.

A board of five supervisors, who are Allen County citizens, governs the Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District. Three of the supervisors are elected by residents in the county and the State Soil Conservation Board, upon the recommendation of our local SWCD appoints two.

Allen County is marked with tremendous diversity. Since 1945, the District has witnessed many changes regarding natural resource conservation issues. When the Allen County SWCD started in 1945, we used a single resource management approach, where natural resources were considered on an individual basis. Today a multi-watershed approach must be applied, where conservation issues and practices take into account the relationships between our natural resources and their impact on the economic and social well-being of our community.

Our Long-Range Business Plan is developed to guide our programs over the next five years, clearly setting forth Resource Issues, Statements of Intent and Priority Actions that are designed to meet our Mission as we prioritize our program during this time frame. Our plan was developed with input from our citizens at locally led meetings, where concerns, goals, and priorities were discussed by a cross-section of our county land-users.

Major Watersheds

St. Marys River Watershed
Maumee River Watershed
St. Joseph River Watershed
Little Wabash River Watershed
Eel River Watershed
Auglaize River Watershed

Our Critical Watershed Issues Are:

1. **Degraded water quality in streams, rivers, ponds and lakes.**

   Contributing factors:

   - Sedimentation due to erosion, scouring, and field drainage
   - E. coli (livestock, septic systems, Combined Sewer Overflows, Storm Sewer Overflows, pet and wildlife waste)
   - Excessive nutrient loading into nearby lakes, rivers, and streams
   - Improper application of pesticides
   - Flooding and floodplain encroachment
   - Dissolved organic compounds
   - Illicit discharges
   - Loss of wetlands and lack of protection of existing wetlands
   - Improper Livestock Management (i.e. Pasturing in streams, mortality, waste handling)
   - Lack of proper pasture and hay land management

2. **Degraded soil health including loss of soil structure, loss of organic matter, biological activity, soil nutrient balance, permeability, and infiltration.**

   Contributing factors:

   - Lack of soil cover
   - Excessive cropland tillage
   - Lack of crop rotation and cover crops
   - Excessive earthmoving activities during construction activities
   - Failure to preserve existing vegetation on construction sites (including trees)

3. **Natural resource loss and/or degradation due to the implementation of zoning plans and ordinances.**

   Results of implementation:

   - Land use fragmentation
   - Loss of prime farmland
   - Loss of productive forest lands
   - Loss of wildlife habitat
   - Loss of floodplain and wetlands
   - Spread of noxious and invasive species
   - Lack of proper maintenance on tile drainage systems

4. **Fragmentation of watershed-based organizations with both disparate and overlapping goals.**

   Results of fragmentation:

   - Competition between similar groups for the same funding opportunities while working towards the same goals
   - Mixed messaging regarding similar watershed issues

To address these critical issues in the next five years our goals are:

1.) **Improve water quality in streams, rivers, ponds and lakes**

2.) **Improve soil health, including rebuilding of soil structure and organic matter, increase of biological activity, improved soil nutrient balance, permeability and infiltration**

3.) **Advocate for zoning plans and ordinances in support of natural resources**

4.) **Support and collaborate with multi-watershed-based organizations**

To achieve these goals, we will implement the following strategies:

On Agricultural Land (Large Scale)

The district will work with producers to achieve the following:

- 40% of corn and 80% of soybeans and wheat acres will be produced under high-residue system, such as no till or vertical tillage that maintains at least 30% land cover
- Maintain current buffers (i.e. filter strips, riparian buffers, waterways) and increase new implementation by 10 miles
- Increase number of acres of cropland utilizing nutrient management plans (includes both commercial and organic fertilizer) that meet NRCS standards and specifications by 6,000 acres
- Reduce number of operations with livestock in streams, ditches, and/or adjacent waterways by 20%
- Increase use of cover crops by 10,000 acres
- Increase acres of diversified crop rotations by 5,000 acres
- Increase tree planting by 500 acres
- Increase number of acres under forest stand improvement by 500 acres
- 500 additional acres of upland and floodplain wildlife habitat plantings
- 50 acres of wetland restoration

Urban and Small Farms

The district will work to achieve:

- Cooperation with other entities to work with at least 50 owners of small tracts of land to implement conservation practices.
- Increase pasture management planning on at least 20% of pasture land in the county
- Increase acres of diversified crop rotations by 500 acres
- Reduce number of operations with livestock in streams, ditches, and/or adjacent waterways by 20%
- Increase number of growers using cover crops and other soil health measures by 35 growers
- Develop at least 3 additional sites demonstrating regenerative agriculture practices
- Develop at least 3 additional educational displays for the District's Education Trailer

On Non-Agricultural Land

The district will:

- Work to reduce nutrient and pesticide sources such as pet and wildlife waste, lawn fertilizer, septic systems and other non-ag land sources.
- Cooperate with local Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) communities by assisting residents with the implementation of practices.
- Assist MS4s and other local communities to address soil loss and water quality impairments caused by land development.
- Cooperate with educational institutions, local organizations, and/or municipalities to develop an additional educational site, demonstrating Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as permeable pavement, rain gardens, green roofs, bio - retention areas, etc.
- Cooperate with the Health Department & local watershed organizations to replace or upgrade failing or inadequate septic systems.
- Cooperate with the County Surveyor's Office & other appropriate agencies (i.e. Maumee River Basin Commission) to restore stream banks and ditches
- Cooperate with the Maumee River Basin Commission and other local entities to expand the awareness of local stormwater and floodplain ordinances and programs.
- Cooperate with local entities to encourage commercially developed lands to implement conservation practices. (i.e. permeable pavement, bio-swales, green roofs and wetland retention).
- Cooperate with all city and county government agencies to incorporate conservation practices and technologies into all their land use activities.
- Educate local officials, businesses, organizations and the general public to the economic and environmental benefits of using urban conservation practices.
- Cooperate with local organizations and groups to develop and maintain a CISMA that will encourage the removal of invasive species.

Information / Education

The district will provide conservation information and education utilizing:

- Newsletters (printed and electronic)
- Website
- Brochures and other publications
- Technical Workshops
- Field Days
- Conservation Education Activity Modules
- Seminars and other special events
- Annual Meeting
- Customer Service (daily contacts, phone calls, soil survey, planning specifications, tree planting information, etc.)
- Classroom Education

Demonstrations

The district will provide demonstrations on the following:

- No-Till, Strip-Till and Vertical Tillage
- Nutrient and Pesticide Application
- Cover crops
- Forage Management
- Forest Management
- Pond Management
- Urban Stormwater Management

Marketing / Outreach

The district will continue efforts to spread the word about conservation through the following:

- Promoting conservation programs
- Local water / river centered events (i.e. River Fest, 3 Rivers Festival, etc.)
- Service Club presentations
- Radio and TV interviews
- News Releases
- Contests

Technical Assistance

The district will provide technical assistance utilizing:

- One on one conservation planning and application assistance
- Survey, design and installation assistance by regional tech team
- Conservation equipment systems
- Urban conservation

Financial Assistance

The district will provide financial assistance to landowners through the following:

- Federal conservation programs (i.e. farm bill programs)
- State conservation cost share/incentive programs
- Funding provided through public and private grants to support conservation application for urban and rural residents.

Funding

The district will promote conservation programs and practices utilizing funds from:

- County appropriations
- State grants including Clean Water Indiana and Lake and River Enhancements grants
- IDEM 319 grants
- Great Lakes Commission
- Other grants, foundations, etc.
- USDA Conservation Program funding

Partnership Collaboration

The district will collaborate with various partners through:

- Support and collaboration with other conservation partners with similar missions and goals
- Implement conservation education programming through tools such as but not limited to Hoosier Riverwatch, Project Wet, Project Wild, Project Learning Tree, Infield Advantage, and Farmer Advocate Program
- Supporting partner grant applications

Desired Outcome: Improved Quality of Life

Overall, the district hopes to accomplish the following:

- Economically and environmentally compatible land uses that maintain or improve water quality throughout the county's six major watersheds.
- Soil erosion levels at or below the tolerable soil loss on all agricultural land.
- Sedimentation from all land disturbing activities reduced to levels that do not have any adverse off-site impact.
- Water quality that supports the presence of native wildlife and aquatic species in their natural habitats.
- Pathogens, pesticides and nutrients within acceptable levels for safe drinking and full human body contact.
- Wildlife habitat that supports diversity in species native to northern Indiana.
- Aesthetically appealing river corridors.
- Increased recreation activities on the rivers.
- Responsible economic development opportunities adjacent to the rivers.