Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District

Conservation News

Volume V, Issue 11

Spring/Summer 2011

Dates to Note

6/8/11—SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 7:30 AM USDA Service Ctr.

6/11-2011—Discover the Wildcat at Adam's Mill 10-4 PM

6/14 & 6/16—Hoosier Riverwatch Workshop

6/27/2011—Cover Crop Breakfast at Clinton County Fairgrounds 7:30 AM Reservations requested

7/4/2011—4th of July Holiday, SWCD closed

7/5/2011 S. Fork Wildcat Steering Committee Meeting 2-4 PM

7/6/2011 SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 6:30 PM Farm Bureau

7/6/2011 Local Work Group convenes, 5:30 PM Farm Bureau

7/10/11—7/17/11—Clinton County 4H Fair

8/3/11—SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 6:30 PM Farm Bureau

Highlights:

In Wet and Dry Years Cover Crops Are a Valuable Practice

INDIANAPOLIS, May 18, 2011—Farmers all over Indiana are realizing the benefits of cover crops, even in a wet year. Fields with cover crops may dry out earlier than fields left bare over the winter, due to their ability to stabilize wet fields by taking up moisture.

State Agronomist Barry Fisher with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service says, "In a wet year cover crop growth can be much farther along than planned, so the management decisions on how to kill the cover crop have to be adjusted. Under these conditions a faster acting herbicide may be needed. However, cover crops are still worth the investment because they stabilize moisture levels and reduce erosion, scouring and nutrient losses."

Cover crops are grown between regular crop rotations like corn, soybean and wheat. Examples of cover crops are annual ryegrass, crimson clover, oats, oil-seed radishes, and cereal rye. Cover crops are not intended as a harvestable crop, but are grown to enhance productivity. Benefits of cover crops include: improving soil structure by increasing soil organic matter and root penetration; protecting otherwise bare soil from wind and water erosion; using nitrogen left in the soil, preventing it from polluting waterways; and cycling nutrients back into the soil that will be available for corn and soybean crops.

Fisher explains that when used as part of a conservation cropping system, cover crops increase soil productive health and decrease risk, no matter what the conditions. "Fields have less erosion and better moisture management with a cover crop, lessoning risks from drought or flooding. Fields in long term no-till with cover crops made it through last year's drought with higher yields than expected," said Fisher.

Information on cover crops and conservation cropping systems can be found at http://www.in.gov/isda/ccsi/ For more information on cover crop management techniques, visit the Purdue Extension Weed Control Guide at http://www.btny.purdue.edu/Pubs/WS/WS-16/WS-16.pdf. F

For assistance with conservation planning producers should contact their local NRCS office located at the USDA Service Center.

DISCOVER THE WILDCAT CREEK! — JUNE 11, 2011

The 7th annual "Discover the Wildcat" event will be held at Adam's Mill near Cutler, Indiana on June 11th from 9am to 4pm. Sponsored by the Wildcat Creek Guardians, Wildcat Creek Foundation, and Wildcat Creek Watershed Alliance, this event celebrates the beauty and value of the Wildcat Creek and offers something for the whole family. Canoe rides will be offered and will allow opportunities to float the North Fork of Wildcat Creek around the oxbow at Adam's Mill. Past years have also included live music, tours of the nearby Adams Mill Oxbow Natural Area, and educational booths. The Clinton County SWCD will be in attendance this year with information about the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Partnership which is being hosted by the Clinton SWCD. So stop by and learn more about the South Fork of Wildcat Creek. We will also have an educational activity for the family that gives children and adults an opportunity to learn more about the natural water cycle and build your own water cycle bracelet.

Parking is provided across the road from Adams Mill. Don't miss this exciting opportunity to relax and learn more about our local natural treasures!

Adam's Mill is located just off SR 75 1/2 mile east of Cutler in Carroll County.

Precision Agriculture: A Cost-Effective and Environmentally Responsible Approach to Farm Management

Farming practices have come a long way from horse drawn implements. With the 21st century has come a flurry of new computers, automated meters, ,global positioning systems (GPS) and other information-rich technologies that have allowed producers to more accurately apply inputs (e.g. seed, chemicals, soil amendments) and monitor productivity of specific areas over large acreages. These types of guided measure technologies, combined with our modern farm equipment, allow producers to break away from a traditional "one size fits all" approach and introduce a more site-specific approach to farm management that is focused on the true capabilities of your farm. For example, it is no big secret that some areas are more productive than others. However, with new guided measure technologies producers can start to manage for those specific capabilities; optimizing inputs, more accurately identifying limitations, and even justifying the retirement of certain areas to conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), and Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). By taking advantage of these new technologies, area producers are able to operate more efficiently and effectively while also lowering their impact on the local environment through the reduction of waste products such as over-applied nutrients and chemicals that may runoff into local waterways.

More and more producers are experiencing real benefits with precision agriculture. In a 2000 literature review done by researchers from Purdue University's College of Agriculture, 69% of the 108 studies that were reviewed indicated positive net returns on implemented precision agriculture practices while only 12% indicated negative returns. Given the rising costs of inputs (e.g. diesel fuel) and more in-field experience learning these new technologies, one might expect that this occurrence of positive net returns has increased in the past decade.

An indication of this may be seen in more recent reports of how quickly precision agriculture practices are being adopted. In a 2009 survey of crop input dealers conducted by Crop Life magazine and Purdue University's Center for Food and Agricultural Business, 91% of Midwestern respondents indicated that their dealership used precision technologies in some capacity. By 2012, Midwest dealers estimate that around 40% of their total market area will be using GPS guidance with auto-steer while over 50% of their market area will be using manual GPS guidance (i.e. lightbar). These projected participation rates compare to just 4% and 25%, respectively, seen in 2005. The use of yield monitors was also predicted to increase significantly in the future with many dealers expecting producers to begin integrating harvest data with custom, GPS-applied pest and nutrient management programs.

The *South Fork Wildcat Creek-Blinn Ditch and Kilmore Creek-Boyles Ditch Cost-Share Program*, delivered by the Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District, offered incentive payments for producers using various guided measure technologies to carry out custom pest and nutrient management plans. Practices applied included the installation of flow meters for manure and nutrient applications, GPS guidance systems including auto-steer and lightbars, swath control, auto-boom shutoff and height control. As a result of this program, over 2,500 acres of cropland draining to the Kilmore and South Fork Wildcat Creek now have custom pest and nutrient management plans being carried out through various guided measure technologies. Its estimated almost 3,600 lbs of nitrogen, 2,000 lbs of phosphorus, and over 1,500 tons of sediment will be prevented from entering local streams and creeks each year.

Summer Programs at Camp Cullom

The Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District has teamed up with Camp Cullom to offer environmental education programs throughout the summer.

Some programs may count towards requirements for earning merit badges for Scouts and or project completion for 4-H.

SWCD staff will conduct programs on the following dates:

June 23rd—The Rainstick

July 19th—Soils Investigations

July 26th— Who Lives Here—Ponds, Wetlands and Creeks

August 9th—Wacky Waterdrops

Please watch the Frankfort Times for additional programs and times. Or call Leah Harden at the CCSWCD at 765-659-1223 extension 3.

Rossville High School FFA Team wins Indiana Envirothon State

The Rossville FFA Members of Mary Crail, Micah Koehler-Marsh, Angela Meador, Quinton Hufford, and Joe Murphy competed at the Regional Envirothon Competition on March 8 in Bedford, Indiana – they placed first out of 28 teams after testing their knowledge in the natural resource areas of soils/landuse, aquatics, forestry, wildlife, and current environmental issues.

Winning at a regional contest earned them the opportunity to compete at the state competition held April 20 at Vincennes University. The team was again tested on their natural resource knowledge by taking written tests. In addition, the team was given situation or scenario relating to a current environmental issue. The team was to asked to address the situation and provide a 15 minute oral presentation to a panel of nine judges.

The team placed first in the knowledge testing segment as well as the oral presentation, making them the overall winners. The team will now advance to International Canon Envirothon Workshop and Competition to be held at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick in Canada in late July where they will compete for scholarships and prizes.

Congratulations to the Rossville High School FFA Envirothon Team—they have worked very hard to reach their goal of competing at the Canon Envirothon! Dale Griffin, is the teams advisor.

The Indiana Envirothon is sponsored by Soil and Water Conservation Districts across the state. If you would like to learn more about how your school, homeschool group, club, or scout group can become involved contact Leah Harden at the Clinton County SWCD or visit http://www.iaswcd.org/district_tools/envirothon.html

Water Conserving Rain Barrels

A rain barrel is a container used to collect and store rainwater from your roof that can then be used later to water plants, wash your car, or add to a swimming pool. Ordinarily the water would simply be diverted to a storm drain or out onto your property. This "soft water" contains no chlorine, lime or calcium, so your plants will love it. Other benefits include protecting the environment from driveway and yard run-off, saving money by lowering your household water bill, and reducing the amount of water possibly flowing into storm sewers.

The SWCD currently has rain barrels for sale. The 55 gallon barrels come in Black, Terra-Cotta and Gray. Each one comes with a hose shutoff on the front which accepts a standard garden hose thread. A fitting with a cap towards the bottom is for linking multiple barrels together, if you wish. Towards the top is an overflow fitting and cap where the homeowner can install a short section of an old garden hose to direct the water to a more acceptable location after the barrel is full. This overflow eventually lowers the water back below the screen on top of the lid. Plastic fittings are used because brass and steel do not interface well with plastic barrels, which could leak.

The hole(s) in the top is/are covered with residential grade aluminum screening which is strong enough to keep shingle grit, leaves, debris, small animals and mosquitoes from getting into the barrel.

The homeowner has a couple options to redirect the water from the downspout. Both involve cutting the downspout off a few inches above the height of the rain barrel. One can then add an inexpensive flexible tube available from a hardware store or reattach the bottom angle piece off of the cut off downspout so that it points towards the top of the barrel.

Homeowners should place their barrel on a pedestal approximately 12 inches high, which allows easy use of a watering can without unscrewing the top and it also increases water pressure. This pedestal can be made out of treated wood or concrete blocks.

The cost of the rain barrel is $70.00 (including tax). If you are interested in ordering one, please send an e-mail message to leah.harden@in.nacdnet.net or call the office at 765-659-1223 ext. 3.

Native Bees and Your Crops

Native bees, butterflies, beetles, ants and flies are all valuable crop pollinators. Pollinating insects help to increase crop yields and may add money to your bottom line. There are simple, inexpensive ways you can increase the number of native bees living on your land. Any work you do on behalf of pollinators will support other beneficial insects and wildlife. Improvements to pollinator habitat also may be eligible for financial support from government programs.

Principles of Farming for Crop Pollinators

1. Know the habitat on your farm. Look for areas on and around your land that can support native bees.

2. Protect flowering plants and nest sites. Once you know where bees are living and foraging, do what you can to protect these resources from disturbance and pesticides.

3. Enhance habitat with flowering plants and additional nest sites. Adding flowers, leaving some ground untilled, and providing bee blocks (tunnels drilled into wood) are all ways to increase the number of native bees on your farm.

Critical Requirements of Native Bees

Food. Bees eat only pollen and nectar. In the process of gathering these resources, they move pollen from one flower to another, and thus pollinate your crops. Bees rely upon an abundance and variety of flowers, and need blooming plants throughout the growing season. Native plant species are particularly valuable.

Shelter. Native bees don't build the wax or paper structures we associate with honey bees or wasps, but they do need places to nest, which vary depending on the species.

- Wood-nesting bees are solitary, often making individual nests in beetle tunnels in standing dead trees.

- Ground-nesting bees include solitary species that construct nest tunnels under the ground.

- Cavity-nesting social species—bumble bees—make use of small spaces, such as abandoned rodent burrows, wherever they can find them.

Protection from pesticides. Most insecticides are deadly to bees, and unnecessary herbicide use can remove many of the flowers that they need for food.

Getting Started

Here are two things that you can do to begin improving habitat for native bees on your land:

Minimize tillage. Many of our best crop pollinators live underground for most of the year, sometimes at the base of the very plants they pollinate. To protect them, turn over soil only where you need to.

Allow crops to bolt. If possible, allow leafy crops, like lettuce, to flower if they don't need to be tilled right away. This gives bees additional food sources.

Going Further

If you want to do more to increase the number of native bees pollinating your crops, you can plant hedgerows or windbreaks with a variety of flowering plants and shrubs, reduce or eliminate your use of pesticides, or work with your neighbors to protect natural areas around your farm.

Exercising Care with Insecticides

If you use insecticides, choose targeted ingredients (for example, Btk for pests such as leaf rollers) and the least harmful formulations (granules or solutions). Spray on calm, dry evenings—and do so soon after dark, when bees are not active. Keep in mind that even when crops are not in bloom, some of your best pollinators are visiting nearby flowers, where they may be killed by drifting chemicals.

NRCS Notes

Program Decision Support System

RFF recently completed an online tool to help landowners find appropriate federal programs for their property and conservation goals. The Conservation Programs Decision Support System (DSS) was built with support from a Conservation Innovation Grant from USDA, NRCS. Check it out at www.icaer.com.

Follow Indiana NRCS on Twitter

Stay up to date on Indiana NRCS news and information by following the agency on Twitter. Twitter is a real-time information network that connects people to the latest information of interest to them. "Tweets," the information provided to followers through Twitter, are limited to 140 characters. Tweets will link to the full information or news item. Go to the Indiana NRCS News tab at http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/news/ for complete news coverage.

Followers can find Indiana NRCS by typing IndianaNRCS on the Search line at http://www.twitter.com/

NRCS Headquarters and the USDA also have Twitter accounts to follow national news.

Hoosier Riverwatch Volunteer Stream Monitoring Workshop

Learn basic water testing techniques at a Hoosier Riverwatch workshop scheduled for July 27 and 29 at the Kirkendall Nature Center in Kokomo's Jackson Morrow Park. This workshop introduces citizens and educators to water quality monitoring utilizing hands-on habitat, chemical, and biological assessment methods. Participants gain experience and skills in the use of chemical monitoring kits and aquatic insect collection and identification. Activities are held both inside and outdoors. After completion of this training, participants become "Certified Volunteer Monitors" and are qualified to submit data to the statewide volunteer stream monitoring database. Any interested adult or high school age student is welcome to attend. Participants in previous workshops are also welcome to attend and refresh their knowledge.

Hoosier Riverwatch topics and activities are correlated to Indiana's Academic Standards for Science and educators may receive CRUs for attending a workshop. Also, after successfully completing the workshop, individuals that work for schools, non-profits, and government agencies may be eligible to apply for a Monitoring Equipment Package of testing supplies and materials.

The workshop will take place from 5:00 to 9:00 pm on Tuesday, June14th AND Thursday, June16th. YOU MUST ATTEND BOTH SESSIONS. The workshop is free but pre-registration is required! For more information or to register, Leah Harden at 765-659-1223 extension or email leah.harden@in.nacdnet.net

Financial Assistance Available to Plug and Cap Abandoned Water Wells

The Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District has been awarded a Clean Water Indiana grant from the Indiana State Department of Agriculture to provide a cost-share incentive to rural landowners who have identified and would like to plug and cap abandoned water wells on their property. The SWCD may provide cost-share at a rate of 75% of actual costs up to $500.00 per well. Decommissioning of the well may not begin until an application has been received and approved by the SWCD Board of Supervisors.

Abandoned water wells provide a direct conduit to groundwater, which is the source of drinking water for virtually all homes in Clinton County. These wells present a potentially serious threat to groundwater quality and some cases may present a physical safety hazard where a child or pet may fall into a well. Plugging an abandoned well can eliminate these risks on your property.

For more information about this cost-share program contact the SWCD office at 765-659-1223 ext. 3.

Cover Crop Cost-Share Program Introduced

The Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) recently announced a new cost-share program available to assist producers who are interested in incorporating cover crops into their cropping system. The funds are being made available through the Indiana State Department of Agriculture Clean Water Indiana grants program.

Eligible landowners may receive a 75% cost-share up to $20.00 per acre to establish an acceptable winter cover crop. The maximum number of acres per approved applicant is forty acres.

If aerial seeding, a minimum acreage requirement of 40 acres has been established to allow for the aerial seeding. Cost-share funds are limited and will be allocated on a competitive basis. Seeding must occur in late summer/fall 2011 in accordance with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field guide standards for seeding of cover crops. Applications for the Cover Crop cost-share program are currently being accepted and will continue through July 30, 2011. Applicants will be notified once all applications have been reviewed and approved by the SWCD Board of Supervisors.

If you would like to know more about how cover crops can benefit you please plan on attending a cover crop breakfast on June 27th beginning at 7:30 AM at the Clinton County Fairgrounds in the Community Bldg.. Hans Kok, Indiana Conservation Cropping Systems will be the featured speaker. This will be an informal meeting designed to allow for time for discussion from those in attendance. Reservations are requested and may be placed by calling the Clinton County SWCD at 765-659-1223 ext. 3

CLINTON COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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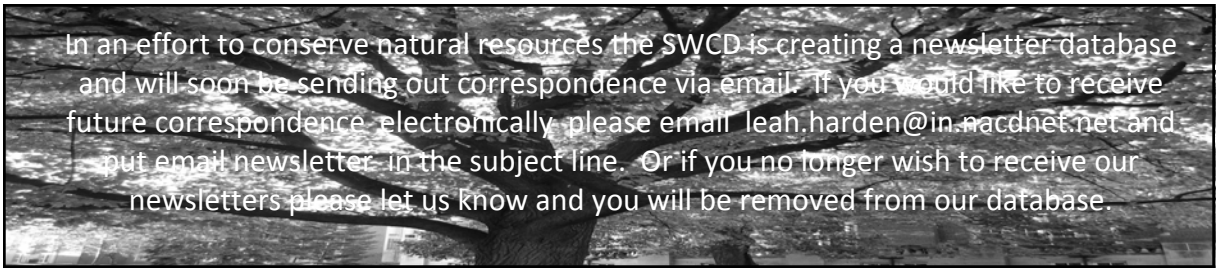

New Website for the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Partnership

The South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Partnership will soon have their new website up and running which will give local stakeholders a direct connection to what's going on in the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed. This new site will a part of the existing Clinton County SWCD website and can be accessed at www.clintonswcd.org/south. The South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Partnership website will include interesting facts and educational links regarding watersheds and water quality as well as provide a central location for stakeholders to access up-to-date information on watershed management plan drafts and local events. For more information about the new South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Partnership website please contact the Clinton County SWCD at (765)-659-1223 x. 3 or Benjamin.reinhart@in.nacdnet.net