



# Clinton County Conservation News



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*The Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District encourages you to think about your personal responsibility to be a good steward of natural resources during its annual Stewardship Week celebration. The National Assn. of Conservation Districts has proclaimed April 29th—May 6th Stewardship Week marking the 57th year of the national event. The 2012 Stewardship Week is themed “Soil to Spoon” - Responsible land management and care of our soil makes it possible to feed a population that is increasing, while agricultural land is decreasing. Conservation Districts across the country are working on the ground each day with local farmers and landowners to protect our soil, water and air for future generations. Everyone has the responsibility to our family and community to make the connection from where our food comes from, to the agricultural community which not only helps produce the food but cares for the land where it grows.*

*Stewardship materials are available at [www.nacdnet.org/stewardship/2012](http://www.nacdnet.org/stewardship/2012). Children in grades k-12 are invited to participate in the annual poster contest using the current theme. If you or someone you know would like to participate please call for more information.*

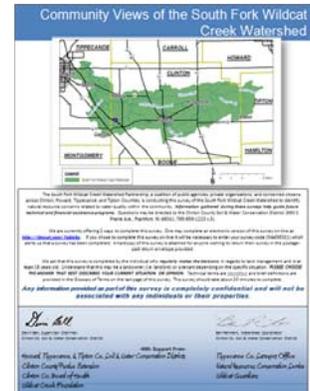
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## Water Quality Survey Distributed to Local Residents

Keep an eye out for a survey in your mailbox this February. The Clinton County Soil & Water Conservation District, with support from the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Partnership, is administering a survey to better understand the concerns and behaviors of local residents in regards to the quality of water in our local streams and creeks. Targeted specifically for urban and rural residents with land draining to the South Fork Wildcat Creek or its tributaries, this survey is part of the planning effort being led by local stakeholders for the development of a comprehensive Watershed

Management Plan for the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed. Once this plan is completed, which is expected to wrap up by the fall of 2012, landowners within the drainage area of the South Fork Wildcat Creek will be eligible to apply for funding to implement various land improvement practices. Our survey of residents, titled “Community Views of the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed”, will help us gather the necessary information to design future cost-share programs or outreach initiatives. Any responses gathered as part of this survey process are completely voluntary and will be kept confidential.



Surveys can be filled out by hand and returned in a postage-paid envelope or enter their responses online using the provided web link. It is expected to take survey recipients approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey. Any individuals with questions regarding this survey may contact the Clinton County SWCD.

## Soil Health Workshop—March 1

The Greater Wabash River Resource Conservation & Development Council (RC&D) and its partners who include Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Purdue Cooperative Extension are planning a Soil Health Workshop, Thursday, March 1, 2012 at the Beck Center located at the Purdue Agronomy Center for Research and Education

(ACRE) in West Lafayette, Indiana. Thursday’s agenda will include presentations on the management of a complete no-till system for soil quality and profitability, cover crops to reduce nitrate losses to drainage waters, manure and cover crop strategies. In addition, local producers will share their tips with managing

cover crops in a corn-soybean system. The workshop is being promoted in conjunction with the Midwest Cover Crop Council meeting being held on February 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. The registration brochure is available on their website and can be accessed at <http://www.mccc.msu.edu/MCCCmeeting.html>. Or call the SWCD office to request registration information.

## Be A Part of the Wabash/Wildcat Sampling Blitz

Volunteer to be part of the second annual Spring Wabash Sampling Blitz this April! Join 250 volunteers to collect a snapshot of the water quality of the Wabash River, Wildcat Creek, and their tributaries. Since the fall of 2009, volunteers throughout the Region of the Great Bend of the Wabash River watershed volunteered each spring and fall to complete a snapshot of water quality throughout the watershed. Volunteers monitor temperature, water cloudiness (turbidity), nutrient levels, and pathogen concentrations. Volunteer with a friend, your family, or alone and we'll assign you a partner. Volunteer to sample your local stream, your favorite canoe spot, or try a new stream within the Wabash River or Wildcat Creek watersheds.

How it works? Each volunteer group is assigned to a staging or starting location. Staging locations are assigned

as sampling slots are available on a first volunteer, first assigned basis. Arrive with your partners to be assigned a group of sampling sites – sites are assigned based on location choice and selected access difficulty ranging from easy access (walk right in sites) to where you'll need to channel your inner mountain goat (difficult). Our staging location volunteers will provide all sample collection equipment and instructions, maps, and driving directions. They will not provide you with waders, boots, dry clothes, bug spray, ivy off, or food.

What now? Don your waders or knee boots and spend approximately two hours wading through approximately four stream sample sites. At each site, you will need to identify an appropriate access point. After entering the stream, wade to the center and fill your provided sample bottles. Then, measure stream

temperature and water cloudiness with the provided thermometer and turbidity tube. Once complete, photograph the stream and any unique or interesting features and travel to your next site. Once you've sampled all of your streams, return to your staging location to filter your samples for laboratory analysis, measure water quality with provided test strips, and download your photos.

Want more information? Visit [www.wabashriver.net/wabash-sampling-blitz](http://www.wabashriver.net/wabash-sampling-blitz) to view videos that detail sampling, review previous results, and read about past events. Volunteer to be part of the third annual Spring Wabash Sampling Blitz online at <http://www.wabashriver.net/blitz-registration/> or by calling the Clinton County SWCD at 765-659-1223 extension 3

## USDA Announces CRP General Sign-Up

Acting Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services (FFAS) Michael Scuse announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture will conduct a four-week Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general signup, beginning on March 12 and ending on April 6. CRP has a 25-year legacy of successfully protecting the nation's natural resources through voluntary participation, while providing significant economic and environ-

mental benefits to rural communities across the United States.

CRP is a voluntary program available to agricultural producers to help them use environmentally-sensitive land for conservation benefits. It is the largest private-lands carbon sequestration program in the country. Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to improve the quality of water, control

soil erosion and develop wildlife habitat. In return, USDA provides rental payments and cost-share assistance. The contract is good for 10-15 years. Producers with expiring contracts and environmentally sensitive land are encouraged to evaluate their options under CRP.

Please contact your local USDA–Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service for more information.

## Public Comment Sought for Sugar Creek Watershed Project

Public input is sought from landowners and residents of the Sugar Creek Watershed in Clinton and Boone counties. The second public meeting for the Sugar Creek-Brown's Wonder Creek Watershed Diagnostic Study will be held Thursday, April 12, 2012 at the Kirklin Town Hall located at 113 N. Main St. in Kirklin. The meeting will begin at 6:30 PM.

The Clinton and Boone County Soil and Water Conservation Districts applied for and received a grant from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to conduct a Diagnostic Study of water quality in the Sugar Creek-Brown's Wonder Creek watersheds. The source of funding is through the Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) Program. The LARE program goals are to reduce sediment and nutrient

pollution of surface waters, improve aquatic habitat for fish and wildlife, and to insure the continued viability of Indiana's publicly accessible lakes and streams for multiple uses, including recreational opportunities.

The project's purpose is to collect water quality data in the targeted sub-watersheds and to summarize that data to aid in the development of long term guidance to restore and protect area streams in the Sugar Creek watershed. The project will also incorporate existing water quality data and consolidate information from a variety of sources to prepare the diagnostic study for the more than 120,869 acre watershed. The Diagnostic Study will also describe the current condition in the selected streams and their watersheds; identify potential nonpoint source water quality problems; prioritize potential

improvement projects; propose specific direction for future work and provide assessment factors for success of future work.

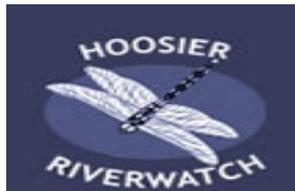
Once complete the project area will meet the eligibility requirements for implementation through the IDNR-LARE program. Implementation funds would be applied for by the Clinton/Boone SWCD's upon completion of the Diagnostic Study in late 2012. These funds will allow the Clinton/Boone SWCD's to provide cost-share to landowners in priority areas as identified in the Diagnostic Study. The cost-share will focus on practices such as conservation tillage, cover crops, diversions, fencing of livestock, field windbreaks, filter strips, grade stabilization structures, grassed waterways, livestock watering facility, tree planting and closure of waste storage facilities.

## Hoosier Riverwatch Training—learn how to conduct a water quality

The Clinton & Howard County Soil & Water Conservation Districts are partnering to host a Hoosier Riverwatch Workshop on Tuesday, June 12 & Thursday, June 14 from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. each night.

Hoosier Riverwatch is a statewide program that supports volunteer water quality monitoring of local waterways. Workshop participants will learn about stream ecology and tools for assessing water quality through several fun

activities both indoors and outdoors. Teachers and home school educators may be especially interested in this workshop as many of the activities can be adapted for use with all grade levels and are cross-referenced with state teaching standards. Participants should plan to attend both sessions. The workshop is



free of charge and open to individuals of high school age or older.

The workshop will be led by Riverwatch Instructors Leah Harden and Sarah Brichford. All activities will take place at the Kirkendall Nature Center in Kokomo's Jackson Morrow Park. There is no fee for the workshop however registration is required. To register, please call the Clinton County SWCD at (765) 659-1223 ext. 3.

## Financial Assistance Available to Plug and Cap Abandoned Water Wells

The Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District provides a cost-share incentive to eligible 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.

## Clinton SWCD and The Nature Conservancy Looking for Ditch Restoration Sites

The Clinton County Soil & Water Conservation District and The Nature Conservancy are working together to locate potential restoration sites along agricultural drainage ditches to implement what is called a 2-Stage Ditch. The 2-Stage Ditch practice mimics the natural processes of larger streams and rivers by constructing a low-lying bench along the waterway to provide the benefits of a natural floodplain.

As mentioned above, a 2-Stage Ditch differs from a traditional trapezoidal ditch by introducing low lying benches along the waterway that act as a floodplain for the channel and increase the overall storage capacity of that section of ditch. As the water level within the waterway begins to rise following a storm event, flood waters spill out over the low-lying benches allowing the water to slow down. This results in two major benefits. First, the slower moving water has less en-

ergy thus reducing the amount of bank failures and loss of land adjacent to the waterway. Second, suspended sediment and soil is deposited on the benches rather than within the main channel which means fewer required maintenance activities such as regular dipping of the channel. This all adds up to a ditch that is more stable (i.e. less maintenance), can help reduce flooding issues, and is environmentally friendly.

Certain sites are better suited for 2-Stage Ditches compared to others. A couple indicators to look for are ditches where banks are starting to fall into the channel or where a channel has begun to fill in with sediment and water routinely gets out of its banks. Another important characteristic of an ideal site is the slope of the ditch. Too flat and the practice will function more as a wetland. Too steep and the practice

may not be adequate at stopping lateral erosion or headcutting in the waterway. Generally an ideal site will have a slope of 4 tenths or less. Ditch depth should also be considered as deeper ditches will usually require a larger amount of excavation which increases the total cost of the project. Also, having areas adjacent to the ditch to spread excavated spoils allow the landowner to avoid costs of hauling spoils off-site. 2-Stage Ditches are not suitable for ditches where a large amount of clearing needs to be done prior to construction. Wooded riparian corridors along waterways provide a number of important benefits to protecting water quality and local wildlife.

If you are interested in scheduling a site visit with the SWCD and The Nature Conservancy, or to find out more about 2-Stage Ditches, please contact the SWCD office.



**Figure 1. Traditional agricultural ditch experiencing severe bank erosion and channel filling. The ditch itself is trying to establish a lower lying floodplain bench by undercutting its ditch banks and allowing them to fall into the wide channel bottom. (Photo Courtesy-The Nature Conservancy)**



**Figure 2. A constructed 2-Stage Ditch establishes a stable low-lying bench along the main channel. This allows for the effective conveyance of high and low storm flows, increased flood storage, and various water quality and environmental benefits. (Photo Courtesy-The Nature Conservancy)**

## Consider This for a Resolution: Give Your Soils a Check-Up This Year

By Ben Lambeck, District Conservationist, Warren County

Those of us in agriculture will see and hear the term “soil health” pop up more and more in the months ahead. First of all, what is meant by soil health? In general, soil health can be regarded as overall soil quality, or you might say that it refers to the environment a soil provides for plant growth. I want to draw attention to the aspect of soil health that deals with the balance and quantity of beneficial microbial life in the soil. Soil with a healthy population of both bacteria and fungi will provide many agricultural benefits resulting from improved aggregation, nutrient cycling, and organic matter production.

I’m guessing most land users haven’t thought much about soil life. You may be aware of the good things that visible organisms such as earthworms do for the soil. We’re also concerned with the part that microscopic organisms play in soil function. It has a lot to do with the battle between bacteria and fungi for resources within the root zone of our crop plants. An important aspect of soil biology is that certain types of fungi are critical in aggregating soil – which improves natural drainage and at the same time, water-holding capacity, among other benefits – as well as enhancing the ability of plant roots to take up nutrients. So, the biological condition of the soil has a big impact on other characteristics that we are used to

seeing, such as drainage, tillth, residue decomposition, and plant condition.

You may be wondering how to evaluate soil health. Most of us don’t have a microbiology lab in the shop...soil microbial analysis is actually a possibility, but these tests are not yet widely available. There are simpler ways to evaluate soil health through some simple observations of soil condition. A shovel full of soil, especially when compared to that of other fields with different soil types or management, can tell us a lot about soil structure (aggregation), drainage, and whether there are concerns such as compaction.

Earthworms are always a good sign. A soil test report is another good tool to use: If your organic matter (OM) content is decreasing over time, it is likely your soil health is declining with it; or, if you note an OM percent increase over several sampling cycles, that is definitely a good indication. In my opinion, building soil OM should be a high priority in a soil health management system.

A healthy soil is a more productive soil – now how do we manage for it? It boils down to two basic principles: Disturb the soil as little as possible, and keep something growing in the field as much of the time as possible. The impact of tillage is not easily seen over a short period of time, but over years and

decades, the effect is destructive to soil health. Tillage does in fact destroy soil organic matter – in addition to the potential for erosion, tillage results in the breakup of soil aggregates which house beneficial fungi, and soil bacteria go on a feeding frenzy with newly exposed sugars and other “glues” that bind soil aggregates. In short, soil bacteria literally eat a small portion of soil OM after tillage, all the while multiplying and disrupting microbial balance, which makes it more difficult for the soil to re-establish structure. As for the second principle, any crop farmer serious about improving soil function should consider cover crops. The fungi that benefit our crops need living plant roots to thrive. Cover crops offer many agronomic benefits, and important among them is the maintenance of mycorrhizal fungi that live in association with plant roots and increase nutrient uptake. Your cover crop will also generate organic matter, reduce erosion, and do work for you that no piece of equipment can match.

If you are interested in the health of your soil, contact Brandy Daggett, District Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service to schedule and visit to your farm to discuss strategies to improve soil function. There are even financial assistance programs available to help with changes to your system.

## Contact Your Local SWCD For the Following

### *IDNR Tree Nursery -*

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry operates two tree nurseries to produce tree and shrub seedlings and conifers for conservation plantings. Landowners may order and plant these trees for reforestation, erosion control, wildlife habitat development, watershed improvement, wetlands enhancement, windbreaks, or other conservation purposes.

For more information visit [www.dnr.IN.gov/forestry](http://www.dnr.IN.gov/forestry) or visit your

local Soil and Water Conservation District for tree seedling order forms and tree species availability.

### *Truax No-Till Drill -*

The drill has a planting width of 6 feet and has three seed boxes for a variety of seed plantings.

Using a tractor to pull the drill requires a minimum horsepower rating of 50, with a place to hook up 2 hydraulic hoses for raising and lowering the drill.

Rental rates for the drill are a \$75.00

usage fee plus \$10.00 per acre planted. If you are interested in scheduling the use of the Truax no-till drill please call the SWCD office at 765-659-1223 extension 3.

- 2012 Plat Books \$20.00
- Survey Flags \$10.00/bundle
- Rain Barrels \$70.00 In stock now— grey, blue & terra cotta
- Tile Probe
- Contractors Lists

# Mississippi River Basin Initiative—Wildcat Creek Sign-up period ends March 9

The Mississippi River basin is a critical ecosystem in the U.S. - equaling 41% of the country. The basin drains to the Mississippi River which carries an average of 436,000 tons of sediment each day to the Gulf of Mexico.

Nutrients, like nitrogen and phosphorus, are carried down-stream with the sediment and cause water quality issues both locally and within the hypoxic zone of the Gulf.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has developed the MRBI to address these water quality problems. **The goal is to encourage producers to voluntarily implement conservation systems that avoid, control, and trap field runoff; protect, restore, and enhance wetlands; maintain agricultural productivity; and improve wildlife habitat.** Nationally, \$50 million was available in financial assistance through the MRBI-CCPI (Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative) to eligible partnership projects in 41 focus areas. The Greater Wabash River Resource Conservation & Development Council (GWRRCD) partnered with the Carroll, Clinton, Howard, Tipton, and Tippecanoe County SWCDs and a host of others to submit an application to bring **2.25 million dollars** to our counties over three years.

**Don't miss out on this great opportunity! The 2012 sign-up period ends March 9, 2012. Call your local USDA Service Center to make an appointment.**

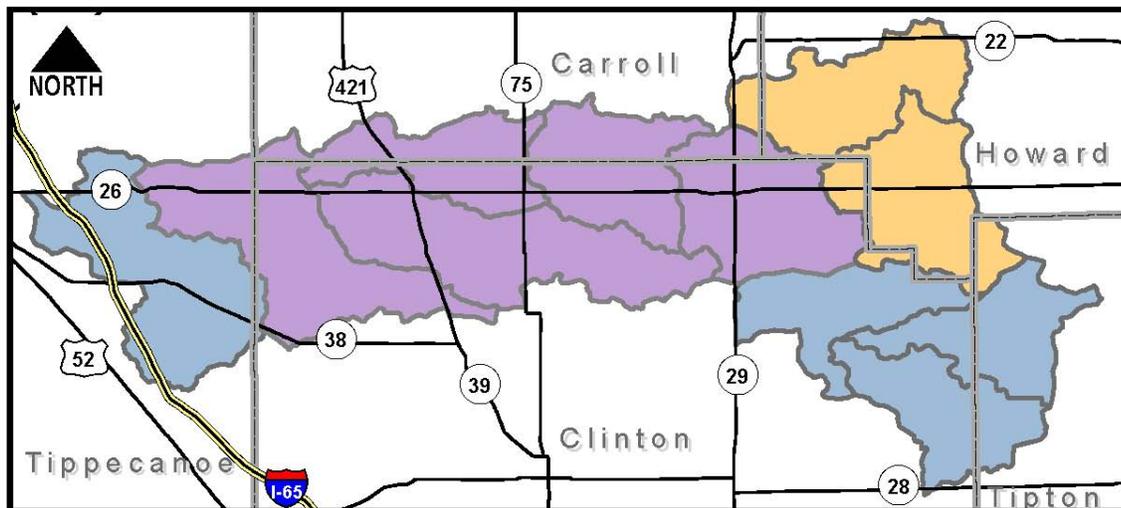
Through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), producers will be able to apply for funding to install conservation practices that will benefit both them and the environment. **The 2012 sign-up is the final year of the Initiative. Approximately \$605,000.00 is available through the EQIP program to install practices such as: Residue and Tillage Management, Waste Utilization, Cover Crops, Grassed Waterways, and Nutrient Management. Through the WHIP program, \$90,675.00 will be**

**available in 2012 to install practices to enhance wildlife habitat such as wetland creation and restoration and wildlife plantings.**

What makes the MRBI-CCPI EQIP and WHIP different? The planning committee worked hard to make the MRBI-CCPI attractive so that as many conservation practices as possible could be installed by our producers at a low cost. Instead of

applications competing against others in the state, you'll only be competing against others in the Wildcat Creek focus area (making the likelihood that you'll receive funding higher). Additionally, the partners involved in the initiative are committed to making the application process easier for you by assisting participants in meeting local, State, and Federal regulatory requirements; assisting with Conservation Planning; and even assisting you, the producer, during the application process.

**Wildcat Creek MRBI-CCPI Focus Area**



Targeted sub-watersheds are highlighted. Colors differ based on watershed and are not an indicator of funding amounts or priority area.

## Wildcat Creek River Festival Art Contest

The Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District and the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Partnership invite you to participate in the 2012 Wildcat Creek River Festival Art Contest. This years theme is "Wildcat Creek: Protecting Our Community Treasure".

Artists may submit entries in three possible categories—Wildlife and Nature, Recreation or Rural Living. Artists may submit only one entry per category. Any art media may be used including, but not limited to, photography, short films, paintings or drawings, pottery, woodworking or fiber art.

Projects will be grouped by age category and will be judged by a local panel of

judges. Cash prizes will be awarded to the top artist(s) in each category. Art will be displayed at the Frankfort Community Library\* in the Hubbard or Mae Conard galleries. Artists will encouraged to attend an Open House on the evening of September 13, 2012.

There is no cost to enter the art contest. However, artists should call the Soil and Water Conservation District to indicate their intent to participate by July 1, 2012. A registration form and complete details will be provided at that time.

\*The Frankfort Community Library Board of Trustees reserves the right to decide if work is inappropriate for display.



## WILDCAT CREEK LOGO DESIGN CONTEST

The Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District and the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Partnership are hosting a Logo Contest as part of the 2012 Wildcat Creek River Festival. The winning logo will receive a cash prize of \$100. In addition, the logo will be used as the new logo for the South Fork Wildcat Creek

Watershed Partnership and appear on the cover of the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Management Plan. Logo designs should look to inspire local residents by highlighting unique and beautiful characteristics of the South Fork Wildcat Creek.

Interested students may submit ONE design on 8.5" x 11" or 11" x 17"

paper. Logos may be designed using mediums such as ink, pencil, paints, or computer-generated graphics. There is no cost to submit entries. Please contact the Clinton County Soil & Water Conservation District with any questions or to fill out a complete registration form. ALL ENTRIES MUST BE SUBMITTED BY AUGUST 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2012.

## Insurability of Crops Following Cover Crops

An announcement made by the Risk Management Agency (RMA) outlines changes that will provide producers more flexibility when insuring a crop that follows a cover crop in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio.

Heavy spring rains last year delayed planting in parts of the Midwest raising concerns about the impact a cover crop may have on insurability of a subsequent spring crop. Restrictions limited insurance coverage on crops that

followed a cover crop that was harvested or reached the budded stage in the same crop year. For 2012, crops planted following a cover crop are insurable as long as the cover crop is killed on or before June 5th. Whether the cover crop has headed, budded or has been harvested no longer effects insurability. The cover crop practice is defined as a crop planted within twelve months of planting the insurable crop and is recognized as a sound agronomic conservation practice for the area.

For more details on how cover crops may impact your crop insurance policy, contact a crop insurance agent. Winter is the perfect time to review your crop insurance needs for 2012. Information on cover crops can be found by going to the "Information Browser" link at the RMA website at [www.rma.usda.gov](http://www.rma.usda.gov). Producers can get the specifics by entering the crop and county where the farm is located and looking at the Special Provisions.

**CLINTON COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

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Frankfort, IN 46041  
765-659-1223 extension 3

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We're on the web!

[clintonswd.org](http://clintonswd.org)

**Please Plan to Attend the Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation Districts' Annual Meeting—Wednesday, March 7th**

Please plan to attend the Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation Districts' annual meeting and dinner on Wednesday, March 7th beginning at 6 PM at the Clinton County Fairgrounds in the Community Bldg.. A complimentary catered dinner prepared by the Extension Homemakers Council will be served. The public is invited to attend. There is no cost for attending, however reservations are required and may be placed by calling the SWCD office at 659-1223 extension 3 by Friday, March 2nd. If the meeting is cancelled due to hazardous travel conditions the meeting will be held March 14th.

At the conclusion of dinner the District will highlight accomplishments from the past year, provide updates on conservation programs, conduct the election of supervisors for the SWCD and recognize several



individuals for their conservation accomplishments. USDA staff will be providing timely updates on current Farm Bill conservation programs.

Brian MacGowan will be the keynote speaker. Brian is an Extension Wildlife Specialist in the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources at Purdue University.

Brian's presentation will provide information on the Natural Resource Enterprises Program (NRE). The NRE focus is to provide information to landowners and community leaders that will encourage informed decision making regarding the management of land and enterprises. NRE has hosted workshops across the state designed for landowners interested in learning about developing enterprises from the natural resources on their

property or learning more about wildlife habitat and business management.

SWCD Supervisor Election

At the 2012 SWCD Annual Meeting one supervisor will be elected. Devin Bell, who resides in the Colfax area is seeking re-election. Devin received his B.S. in Ag. Economics from Purdue University. Devin is employed by Syngenta and is actively involved in the daily management of a 900 acre farm with his father.

Nominations will also be accepted from the floor.

SWCD Business Meetings are public meetings and are held the 1st Wednesday of each month at the Farm Bureau Insurance