Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District

Newsletter edition 57
Winter 2026

The Conservation ChALLENge

SERVING ALLEN COUNTY'S SOIL AND WATER

While the challenges of 2024 and 2025 have brought numerous changes to our location, staffing, and leadership, our commitment to the mission of our District remains staunch:

to promote the wise use of soil, water and related natural resources.

As we begin the process of renewing our Strategic Plan, the Board of Supervisors spent several months collecting feedback on the District strengths and weaknesses as well as our opportunities and challenges. As we enter the coming seasons, we ask for your feedback. What do we do well? Where should we improve? What do wish the Conservation District did for you or your land and water? Please provide feedback here:

NEW DISTRICT STAFF

With the return of funding, we have old projects to complete and new opportunities to pursue. See page 4 for current projects, and look for our new folks (page 6) as they take leadership roles in projects focused on large and small farms, education and outreach, and water quality in the St. Mary's and St. Joseph rivers.

WATER QUALITY FOCUS: ST. MARYS WATERSHED

In late 2024, we were notified that an application to IDEM (EPA) had been accepted to revise the 2003 Watershed Management Plan. Adams County SWCD and Surveyor will join us, Allen Co. Surveyor, and the City of Fort Wayne Utilities to conduct public meetings and data analysis that will lead to a new plan for implementing improvements in that watershed.

Never hesitate to reach out. If you have conservation questions or resource concerns, please contact Julie Good directly at (260) 702-8426.



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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Chad Shaw, Chairman (elected, term 2027)

Tom Miller, Vice Chair (appointed)

Jain Young, Treasurer (elected, term ends 2028)

Tom Crowe (appointed)

Tyler Stieglitz (elected, 2026)

Associate Supervisors
Don Rekeweg
Dick Crowl

Each year one position of the elected Supervisors is voted at our Annual Meeting (February) in a rotating 3-year term.

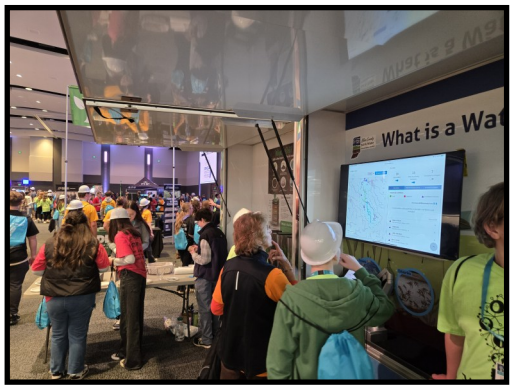
Please join us and learn about conservation as an Associate Supervisor or by running for Supervisor.

Supporting Junior Achievement: Allen SWCD wows the high schoolers at JA Job Spark

On November 4-5, 2025, the local Junior Achievement hosted "Job Spark", a massive career event aimed at thousands of high school students in the tristate area to aid their career planning. Over 3,000 students converged to visit careers from construction to health-care. ACSWCD staff taught students about watersheds, municipal and rural septic systems, and drone imaging; just to name a few topics! This event is a hands on learning experience for young people to be exposed to the world of agriculture and conservation as they start to consider schooling and careers.









***Mission of the Allen County SWCD**: to promote the wise use of soil, water, and related natural resources*

FARM SHOW: regional attendance increases at annual Fort Wayne event

Over 28,000 attendees attended the Fort Wayne Farm Show at the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum between January 12-14, 2025. Attendees enjoyed the equipment and vendors, with education sessions focused on the Markets, Climate, Water resources, Risk, and Careers. Allen Co. SWCD was pleased to offer the first "walking job fair" for attendees to find companies who were actively hiring. Another change was the location of the District booth, partnered with FSA, NRCS, ISDA, and other Conservation Partners. We moved into the Main Exhibit Hall, and plan to stay for this year's event. Find the 2026 Farm Show agenda on page 7. Hope to see you there!

FORT WAYNE FARM SHOW

January 13-15, 2026

Rivers Summit IV

One Basin. One Mission.

December 2025

The Rivers Summit is an annual meeting hosted by the Maumee Watershed Alliance in partnership by the Maumee River Basin Commission and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Fort Wayne is situated in three watersheds, one of them being the Upper Maumee River watershed. The Rivers summit focused on the importance of water quality in the Maumee River, the main tributary to the Western Lake Erie Basin.
Passionate speakers from across Indiana and Ohio highlighted the importance of reducing the input of phosphorus (P) into the Maumee River.

- Dr. Christopher Winslow, Director of Ohio Sea Grant, spoke about past trends and necessary trajectories to mediate harmful algal blooms in the Western Lake Erie Basin.
- Dr. Tanja Williamson, research hydrologist for the US geological survey shared her expertise on sediment and P sources in the Maumee River.
- Mark Williams, research agricultural engineer from USDA Agricultural Research Service, clearly outlined the differences between new and old P.
- A panel of experts shared their ideas and opinions on the panel discussion. Dan Kaminsky (Adams County SWCD), Megan Bourns (Purdue University), and Joe Nester (Nester Ag LLC), all weighed in on the feasibility of nutrient management implementation.
- Ben Wicker, executive director of Indiana Agriculture Nutrient Alliance and Aaron Heiler, Director of nutrient Management & Agricultural Policy at the Ohio Agribusiness Association tag teamed the priorities for P management, including the 4 R's of nutrient management: Right place, Right time, Right source, and Right rate.

For more information about the organization and their continued efforts to sustain healthy watersheds throughout the Maumee watershed, please visit their website.
https://maumeewatershedalliance.org/

Maumee Watershed Alliance
partnerships for healthy rivers



(www.americanrivers.org)

RETURN TO FUNDING: Technical Assistance in the Western Lake Erie Basin and also specific to Fort Wayne

In spite of the uncertainty in Federal funding nationally, Allen County SWCD has benefited from several reinstatements to our work. While we lost one funding source focused on urban growers, we were surprised by another that focuses on soil health in the south and central Fort Wayne area. This *temporary* funding ends in March 2026, but permits us to move into several zip codes where fresh produce is not readily available and soil health has not been a priority.

Titled "Flourish Fort Wayne", this effort boasts an energetic group of individuals joining the staff this summer, and brings a wide variety of skills. Notably, recruitment of interested parties has not been a problem! Numerous groups, including churches, community gardens, and individuals have signed up for macronutrient soil tests that will lay the foundation for technical assistance in their gardens.

Additionally, our service to growers with focus on unique products or smaller footprint will be enhanced by a Federal contract titled "Small Farms Technical Assistance" agreement. Our efforts with IN Association of SWCDS will continue but take a focused approach to target production agriculture on the small farms that impact the Great Lakes. The goal is to improve water quality and soil health in this region through the implantation of conservation practices.

Focus of our work:
SOIL HEALTH feeds your crop and keeps water from running off.



Look for our Equipment Trailer on the road. Call or email for availability



BCS 2-wheeled tractor is available with either a flail mower or a rotary harrow for shallow cultivation.



Does your church or civic group need equipment to prepare beds for winter? Use our Equipment Trailer.

Your SWCD is busy in the community.



Tori Kidd, Autumn Straessle, Maiya Rizzo, and Grace O'Hara welcome guests to Dave Thomas' garden.



Dave Thomas' High Tunnel Garden



Flourish event held at St. Henry's community gardens.

EDUCATION FOR CONSERVATION

A major effort of the District is contact with the community. We connect with them at Fairs, Festivals, Field Days, camps, and our Annual Meeting.

This fall we hosted a series of educational sessions at local community gardens. Focused on healthy soil and conservation gardening, our hosts included Brett Bloom (Dirt Wain), Chris and Vonda Walker (Bloomingdale Garden), Dave Thomas, and Paul Gerardot (St. Henry's Community Gardens). THANK YOU!

FLOURISH FORT WAYNE: PROMOTING COMMUNITY GARDENING

The initiative of this project focuses on the importance of establishing healthy soil to start growing food where you live.

Technical assistance is available with no cost to you which includes; soil testing, equipment bundles to help you get started, compost, and access to our small farm equipment trailer for more gardening equipment.

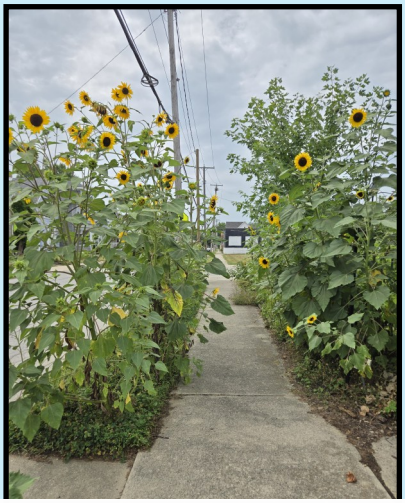
Are you interested in learning more? Please take this survey!











Summer flowers at Bloomingdale Garden



NEW STAFF: 4 New Watershed Project Managers and 2 New Conservation Program Technicians

TORI KIDD

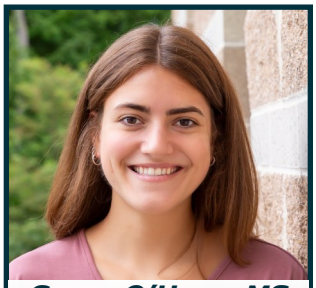


Tori Kidd
(Watershed Project Manager)

A recent graduate of Indiana University, Tori holds a BS in Earth Science and a minor in Biology. Her academic focus included sedimentary structures, water systems, and geomorphology. She will lead the Flourish For Wayne project, which centers on improving soil health and remediation within Fort Wayne city limits.

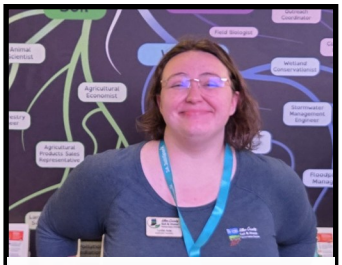
GRACE O'HARA

Coming to Indiana from the East Coast, Grace completed her BS in Environmental Science at Union College. After college, Grace earned her MS at University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) in Frostburg, MD where her thesis focused on evaluating the functionality of green stormwater infrastructure using stable isotopes of nitrate in stormwater within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Grace will take lead on the On-Farm Demo project in the Western Lake Erie Basin.



Grace O'Hara, MS
(Watershed Project Manager)

LYDIA ADE



Lydia Ade
(Conservation Technician)

A current student at Oregon State University studying Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences, Lydia has expertise in field sampling, ecology, vertebrate biology, and GIS mapping. She serves as a conservation technician at ACSWCD to help develop and promote educational programs centered around soil and water health for the community.

MICHAEL RYAN



Michael Ryan
(Watershed Project Manager)

Michael was born and raised in Fort Wayne and then spent 7 years in the Navy as a helicopter aircrewman. After military service Michael graduated from Colorado State University in 2024 with a bachelors in Soil Science. Michael will be leading the Small Farm Program in the Western Lake Erie Basin.

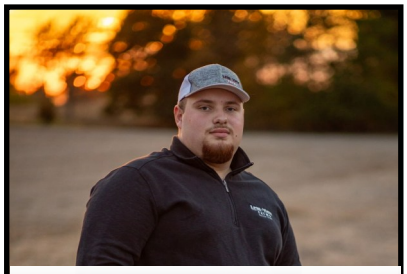
AUTUMN STRAESSLE



Autumn Straessle
(Watershed Project Manager)

Autumn is a Purdue University alumni, earning an AS and BS with a major in Biological Sciences. After graduation, Autumn has pursued an MS in Ecology and Conservation at Purdue University Fort Wayne, her thesis focuses on connectivity patterns and movement ecology of wood turtles in MI. This research will be used to create a suitable framework for continued conservation attempts of endangered wildlife. Autumn will play a key part in serval projects doing data analysis and map creation.

MITCHEL LEMON



Mitchel Lemon
(Conservation Technician)

Mitchel has two certificates from Ivy Tech, one in Agribusiness management and the other in plant production. He has experience working on his family farm operating machinery and equipment. Mitchel will be assisting with technical conservation implementation to teach people about conservation agriculture.

FORT WAYNE FARM SHOW 2026

January 13th 9 am - 5 pm

January 14th 9 am - 8 pm

January 15th 9 am - 4 pm

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13

Moderator: Elysia Rodgers

10 AM
MARKET AND WEATHER OUTLOOKS
Rob Winters, David Kohli, & John Cavanaugh
Ryan Martin (weather)

12 PM
BARNYARD MIRROR: HOW ANIMALS REFLECT OUR OWN HEALTH
Elysia Rodgers, Purdue Extension Educator

2 PM
PESTICIDE APPLICATOR AND ANHYDROUS AMMONIA SAFETY
Office of the Indiana State Chemist
Ann Kline, Purdue Extension Edcucator
James Wolff, Purdue Extension Educator

Applied for Indiana PARP and CCH Credits
PARP Credits sponsored by Indiana Corn Marketing Council and Indiana Soybean Allianace

INDIANA CORN Marketing Council

INDIANA SOYBEAN ALLIANCE

*All Extension/SWCD programs are in Appleseed A

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14

Moderator: Bill Horan

10 AM
PURDUE MARKET OUTLOOK
Michael Langemeier, Director of the Center for Commercial Agriculture, Purdue University

11:30 AM
FARM BUREAU LUNCHEON: WATERS OF THE U.S.
Indiana Farm Bureau sponsored lunch
Brianna Schroeder, Attorney with Janzen Schroeder Agricultural Law LLC
Lunch is in Appleseed B
Lunch is limited seating and first come, first served.

Indiana Farm Bureau

2 PM
BIOSECURITY ESSENTIALS FOR LIVESTOCK OWNERS
Dr. Jennifer Strasser, BOAH

5:30 PM
CODE RED: A PRACTICAL TOOL FOR YOUR FAMILY AND FARM CONTINGENCY PLAN
Purdue EDGE in Ag Team

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15

Moderator: James Wolff

10 AM
PESTICIDE EXAM TRAINING
James Wolff, Ann Kline, & Brad Kohlhagen
Purdue Extension Educators

This session will prepare pesticide applicators for the CORE pesticide applicator test. It will utilize the Indiana Pesticide Applicator Core Training Manual (PPP-C). Manuals can be purchased through Purdue Extension the day of the program or at https://edustore.purdue.edu/ppp-c.html.

Tests will not be given at this training.
No PARP or CCH credits available

JOB FAIR

Are you looking for a career in Agriculture, Conservation, or Natural Resources?
Look for the 'We're Hiring' signs at vendor booths!

WE'RE HIRING!

ASK HERE FOR OPPORTUNITIES

UPCOMING: Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District's Annual Meeting will be held on date at location from time. We will be discussing financials and board member nominations. Please join us on date for lunch/dinner!



UPCOMING ON-FARM DEMO:

MUNTZINGER FARMS — Cover Crop Field Day on 3/26/26

9:30am—3pm, 9720 Homestead Rd Roanoke, IN 46783

Western Lake Erie Basin On Farm DEMO
Conservation through Education

Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District

2720 Dupont Commerce Court,
Suite 101
Fort Wayne, IN 46825

Phone: (260) 484-5848
Extension 3 (NRCS also)
YES! Phones are working!

email: allenswcd@gmail.com
web: www.allenswcd.org

Allen County Soil & Water Conservation District

PLEASE PLACE STAMP HERE

Enjoy this newsletter! *Since my arrival at the District in 2024, things have proceeded at break-neck pace; I apologize that this letter is later than we planned. I am so grateful for every one of you who has helped my transition back to my roots in agriculture.*

If we have not already met, I look forward to meeting you soon! Call or stop by anytime. Sincerely, Julie Good, Director