

Indiana Wildlife Federation Honors Jeanette Wilson



INDOT Central Office Intermediate Range Planner Jeanette Wilson was bestowed with the President's Award at the Indiana Wildlife Federation's 52nd Annual Conservation Awards Banquet on May 19.

A 35-year INDOT employee, Wilson has held numerous positions, but none as satisfying as promoting native vegetation alongside Indiana's outstanding transportation systems. Currently, Wilson stays involved with the initiative as a funding manager.

In 1999, Wilson gladly accepted the task of incorporating native vegetation into INDOT's roadsides. She cooperated with the Federal Highway Administration, Department of Natural Resources and Department of Environmental Management to help bolster what eventually became known as the Hoosier Roadside Heritage Program.

Excess land at the Winamac and Frankfort Subdistricts, in 2001 and 2002 respectively, was converted into native plant seed farms to kick-start the program and keep costs to a minimum. Two more farms were added at the Madison Subdistrict in 2006 and Putnamville Correctional Facility in 2008 to keep seed production up to the demand level. Department of Correction offenders at the Putnamville Correctional Facility assist with the program by cleaning seeds.

An award-winning "Wildflowers" poster initially promoted the program. Now, the program receives statewide exposure through INDOT's website presentations to Master Gardener and garden group meetings, visits to schools and a presence at Earth Day events.

"Jeanette has worked tirelessly to initiate and then promote the Hoosier Roadside Heritage Program for more than a decade," said Indiana Wildlife Federation President Steve Cecil. "She continues to make things better for wildlife habitat and the environment for all of us to enjoy."

The love of native vegetation inevitably has spilled over to Wilson's home life.

"My yard is full of native plants, including Queen of the Prairie, Baptisia, Butterfly Weed, Swamp Milkweed and Blazing Star," she said, adding that she conducts impromptu garden tours to curious visitors. "I am happy to share my love of these various plants."

Wilson credits all other INDOT employees involved in the program, which not only beautifies our roadways but offers numerous environmental benefits.

To learn more about the Hoosier Heritage Roadside Program, please visit:
<http://www.in.gov/indot/2583.htm>.