

STATE SOIL CONSERVATION BOARD MEETING MINUTES

May 12, 2026

Location: Monroe County Courthouse
100 W. Kirkwood Ave, Bloomington, IN
MS Teams

Board Members Present

Jane Hardisty
Brad Dawson
Jeff Healy
Chris Lee
Larry Clemens

Shane Johnson
Martha Miller
Erica Myers
Liz Rice
Elli Blaine
Ray Chattin

Julie Good
Leah Harmon
Julie Harrold
Jessica Hatt
Sandra Hoffarth
Heath Hurst
Meg Leader

ISDA Present

Holden Abrell
David Bausman
Laura Fribley
Allison McKain
Jennifer Thum
Geneva Tyler
Tara Wesseler-Henry

Present Virtually

Breegan Andersen
Lindsey Bluhm
Bonnie Brown
Rick Clawson
Ophelia Davis
Sara Day
Toby Days
Colson Doyle
Chris Gardner
Andrea Gogel

Megan Malott
Christopher Mitchem
Courtney McFall
Julie Morris
Megan Ritterskamp
Clark Smith
Nathan Stoelting
Jewel Wise (**SSCB Brd. Member**)

Partners present

Brandi Fraiser

I. Call to Order

Welcome and introductions

Ms. Jane Hardisty welcomed Larry Clemens back to the SSCB.

- A tribute was given to Sherm Bryant from Kosciusko County, a great conservation leader who recently passed away. He was a strong supporter of local districts and conservation efforts.

Review of meeting protocols

- The meeting is being recorded, and public comments are welcome.
- An optional tour of the Monroe County SWCD office will be available after the meeting.
- The main topics for the meeting are the approval of the CWI budget, and the CWI guidance documents.

Duties of the SSCB – Action Items

II. Approval of Minutes

- After review, Mr. Jeff Healy moved to approve March 23, 2026 minutes, and Mr. Chris Lee seconded the motion. All in favor, motion passed.

III. Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD)

- Temporary Appointments – None at this time.

IV. Clean Water Indiana

Annual Financial Report (AFR) Compliance and District Payments:

- All districts that submitted annual financial reports on time have received their funding.
- Two specific district cases required a board discussion and a vote.
- Mrs. Tara Wessler-Henry addressed two districts' compliance with their AFR submissions. They will be presented in two different cases. The SSCB will need to make a motion to determine the course of action for the capacity payment and the AFR. leading to the SSCB decisions on capacity payments and communication strategies.

District A -not responding and has yet to start their AFR report. Tara reported a district's failure to submit its annual financial report and lack of response to staff outreach.

- The board discussed withholding the additional \$10,000 capacity payment, but not the statutory \$10,000 match which is legally required upon AFR submission.

District B – Late but Responsive District and started their AFR report.

- The district was highly communicative and responsive, and the report was submitted quickly once the staff member returned. This district is not typically late with submissions.
- Mr. Brad Dawson moved to send a letter to District A County's SWCD Board of Supervisors and their County Council. Additionally, they will need to attend an SSCB meeting to receive the \$10,000 capacity payment. Mr. Chris Lee seconded. Motion passed.
- Then, for District B, Mr. Larry Clemens moved to approve the full \$10,000 capacity payment, as the AFR was submitted and they had extraneous circumstances. Mr. Chris Lee seconded the motion. All in favor, motion passed.

Clean Water Indiana Grant Program Updates for 2027

CWI Grants Committee Report

- Brad, Tara, and the grants committee presented and discussed updates to the Clean Water Indiana competitive grants guidance. The changes were:
 - **Notification of Intent (NOI) Requirement:** Applicants must now submit a notification of intent before applying, including lead contact information and board signatures, to improve communication and transparency.
 - **AI Usage:** Guidance clarifies that AI tools may be used for support functions, but we encourage SWCD's to review the documents and not just rely on the AI grant application. not for subject matter expertise, and
 - **Vendor Registration:** Applicants must be registered vendors in Indiana to be eligible for funding.
 - **Budgeting:** Applicants are encouraged to include bid quotes for accurate budgeting, and certain project types.
 - **Job Description and Salary Justification:** Grant applications requesting staff funding must include detailed job descriptions and salary justifications, aligning pay rates and hours with project outcomes.
 - **Cover Crop Cost Share and Resource Priorities:** Updated cost share rules specify eligible rates, and proposals must address at least two of three state priority resources: soil health, water quality/quantity, and key natural resources. Rates were updated to \$30/acre for single/double species and \$40/acre for multi-species (3+) mixes on new acres.
 - **Mileage Reimbursement:** The mileage reimbursement rate used as a match has been clarified to be 49 cents per mile.
 - **Board Review and Timeline:** The board discussed the review process, timeline for applications, and the use of scoring rubric, with applications due September 3rd and ranking to follow.
 - **Application Timeline:**
 - Applications are due by noon on September 3rd.
 - A Grant Management System (GMS) refresher training will be offered on September 8th.
 - The committee and board will begin ranking applications around September 11th.

Discussion on Grant Application Review Process

- The board discussed whether they should continue to review all applications (approximately 30-34 annually) or if a committee should pre-screen them.
- The new scoring rubric is expected to make the evaluation process easier.
- There was a concern that grant applications are sometimes straying from the original intent of the Clean Water Indiana program. The group discussed whether this is an issue with the program's guidance or with the districts' capacity.
- Staff noted that applications not meeting the state code are typically flagged and discussed.
- Staff are working on providing grant writing training, which will be open to anyone but targeted at districts.
- A significant number of applications in the previous year were submitted last-minute, prompting discussion on how to encourage earlier preparation.
- Staff have been meeting with unfunded applicants to encourage them to reapply and continue their projects.

Clean Water Indiana Program Outreach and Activities

- **Farm to Capital Event:** Staff attended the Farming Capital event on May 7th, sharing information about the Clean Water Indiana program with state employees.
- **Communications:** A new communications staff person is updating the website and developing a plan to share project stories via social media.
- **Trademarking:** The Clean Water Indiana logo is being pursued for a trademark.
- **Agricultural Tour:** An agricultural tour is being planned for late June in Lawrence County for state legislators and senators.
 - The tour will showcase conservation projects, including Clean Water Indiana initiatives.
 - It is a collaboration with Indiana Corn and Soy, Beck's, and the Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District.
 - A key stop will be a Mesonet site to demonstrate its role in agriculture and conservation.

Update on the DJ Case & Associates District Capacity Study

- The study, funded by Clean Water Indiana, is launching with listening sessions and district visits starting the week of July 21st.
- DJ Case & Associates will conduct informal interviews with supervisors, district staff, and local partners (e.g., Purdue Extension, commissioners, DC) using a prepared list of questions.
- Two DJ Case staff will travel across the state in multiple phases.

- Week 1: July 21-24, starting in the northeast and moving south.
- Week 2: August 24-28, continuing with more listening sessions.
- Sessions are planned for mornings with light refreshments to accommodate participants' schedules, especially those in farming.
- A virtual session will be held in August for those unable to attend in person.
- An online survey will also be launched in August for individuals who prefer to provide written feedback.

2027 State Fiscal CWI Budget – Requires a vote

Clean Water Indiana (CWI) Budget Review and Approval: Mrs. Jennifer Thum conducted a detailed review of the Clean Water Indiana budget for fiscal year 2027, discussing appropriations, staff salaries, operational expenses, program allocations, and reserve management, culminating in a motion and approval of the budget.

Mr. Larry Clemens moved to approve the budget; Mr. Chris Lee seconded the motion. Motion passed.

- The State Soil Board operates as an extension of the Department of Agriculture (ISDA), and they are not their own department or organization.
- Funding includes \$2.5 million from the cigarette tax fund and \$6 million for operating expenses.

Staffing and District Support Specialist Expansion: Discussion included funding for existing staff, justification for two additional district support specialists to reduce county coverage, and the process for allocating new positions.

SWCD Support and Conservation:

- This section includes the AFR (Annual Financial Report) program, which has a set allocation of \$920,000 as mandated by code.
- It also includes capacity payments to districts, which are up to \$10,000.
- A recommendation was made to establish “guardrails” on how capacity payment funds can be spent to ensure they are used for on-the-ground projects and not left unused for extended periods.
- A report detailing the use of these funds from the previous month will be re-sent to board members who have missed it.

Competitive Grants and Cost Share Programs: The board allocated \$1.8 million for competitive grants, maintained a minimum of \$1.5 million for cover crop cost share, and discussed expansion of pilot programs and statewide initiatives. The CWI grants

committee and reviewers were thanked for their diligent work in ensuring funds are awarded to effective projects.

V. State Soil Conservation Board Committee Reports

Chairman's Report – Gene Schmidt

- Ms. Jane Hardisty mentioned that she spoke with Chairman, Mr. Gene Schmidt and they wanted to make sure the board was thinking of ways to continue with the conservation programs and how to leverage the push for Healthy Soil and Healthy Hoosiers.

Committee Reports:

- CWI Grants Committee – report given above.
- IMAGE – cost-share committee – information was given about the IMAGE during the budget discussion.
- CCSI Oversight Committee
- Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP)
 - The ICP is updating its partnership agreement for the first time in many years. A formal signing ceremony is planned for August 18, 2026 (Farmer Day) in the afternoon at Pathway.
 - The previously canceled ICP Accomplishment webinar has been rescheduled for July 30th. It will be held at Purdue with Walt Sell's assistance and feature a facilitated open discussion with partners.

Secretary's Report – Jennifer Thum – Division of Soil Conservation

- Jennifer reported on discussions with the State Board of Accounts regarding audit price disparities, identifying causes and planning joint educational sessions for districts to improve audit preparation.
 - **Audit Price Analysis:** Jennifer explained that audit prices increase with more findings and years audited, and ongoing agency conversations aim to clarify and address these disparities.
 - **District Training Initiative:** The State Board of Accounts offered to collaborate with ISDA to provide training for districts on audit preparation, with DSS tracking district concerns and facilitating educational sessions

VI. Presentation – Monroe County SWCD (10 Minutes)

- The Monroe County district staff, Martha Miller and Erica Myers, presented on their successful relocation to a county-owned space in the Showers Complex after October 1, 2025. Martha and Erica spoke about the districts increasing collaboration with their county office. Martha spoke about their new credit card machine to be able to accept credit cards for programs like their tree sales, drill rental and soil sampling.

Both Martha and Erica continued to speak about their SWCD's programs and continued successes.

VII. Partner Reports (Non-ISDA) – 3-5 minutes each

IASWCD

CCSI – written report was provided

RITA – written report was provided

Small Farms – Elli Blaine provided a written and verbal update.

USDA

NRCS – Shane Johnson, provided a written report was provided and a verbal update.

- **CSP:** 770 applicants with a \$16.5 million allocation and a \$21 million backlog.
- **EQIP:** 467 applications pre-approved for \$21.5 million, with a \$120 million backlog.
- **RCPP:** 27 applications pre-approved for \$2.5 million.
- For both CSP and EQIP, 25% of funds are for the Virginia Pilot Program (RPP).

VIII. ISDA Report – 5 minutes

CREP & Water Quality Initiatives

- The State Nutrient Reduction Strategy was released in March 2026. It re-assessed and prioritized watersheds, and presentations are scheduled to raise awareness.
- The 2025 CREP Annual Report is now available on the ISDA website.

Nutrient Stewardship – Mrs. Ophelia Norman provided a written and verbal report.

Technical Assistance – None at this time.

District Support – Mrs. Laura Fribley spoke about the upcoming June 12th workshop.

XII. Public Comment – 3 minutes

No public comment was provided.

XII. Adjourn –

Meeting adjourned at 2:15PM.