

Chapter 14: Key Partners to Accomplish Your Programs

Indiana’s Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) have the responsibility to address soil, water and related resource concerns within their respective District boundaries. With outside assistance, their ability to tackle local concerns is greatly enhanced through cooperation with other local, state and federal agencies to deliver educational, technical and financial assistance. By exploring opportunities to fully partner with these and other groups available to SWCDs, individual districts have the ability to more effectively initiate, market and deliver programs of merit to local landowners, public officials and the general public. Several of these key partners are highlighted below:

Sec. 1 The Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP)

The State Soil Conservation Board, Indiana State Department of Agriculture-Division of Soil Conservation, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service, Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, USDA Farm Service Agency, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management comprise what is commonly referred to as the “Indiana Conservation Partnership”. The members of this partnership have a cooperative working agreement that spells out their respective roles in working cooperatively with conservation districts to carry out soil and water conservation programs locally. Indiana Conservation Partnership members have traditionally worked more closely with individual SWCDs due to individual agency goals and programs more closely geared towards or directly tied to local districts.

State Soil Conservation Board (SSCB)

Although the State Soil Conservation Board (SSCB) does not directly administer technical, financial, and educational programs on a “daily” basis, it is responsible for overseeing the broader administration and policy development of programs such as the Clean Water Indiana Program, and other soil conservation and water quality protection programs of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture Division of Soil Conservation. Additional information about the State Soil Conservation Board’s role and responsibilities is located in Chapter 1 “Introduction to Indiana Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)”.

Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA)

The Indiana State Department of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation (ISDA-DSC) directly assists districts under the direction of the State Soil Conservation Board. It provides field staff that assist with direct technical assistance to help land users apply conservation practices and technologies through conservation implementation teams (CITs) with NRCS. It also provides district program support staff to help districts in program planning and development. It does so, in part, by helping districts: (a) develop Business Plans (Long-Range Plans) and Annual Action Plans (Annual Plan of Work), (b) seek ways to secure the administrative, managerial, educational, and technical resources needed to carry out those plans, and (c) conduct

district programs in accordance with state law. The Division's District Support Specialists also conduct training at regional sites (e.g. Leadership Institute workshops, March Region Meetings, meetings for SWCD staff) around the state as well as on-site with individual districts to help support these program functions. New Staff and Supervisor training is available year-round.

The Division also assists districts with conducting their annual meetings, supervisor elections and appointments, and annual financial reports. In addition it helps plan and conduct the Annual Conference of SWCDs where supervisors, employees, and cooperating agency personnel can learn about new programs, share ideas and plan strategies for future program success.

Funding initiatives available to SWCDs through the Indiana State Department of Agriculture include:

The Clean Water Indiana (CWI) Program, administered by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture Division of Soil Conservation subject to the State Soil Conservation Board approval, provides educational, technical and financial assistance to land occupiers and conservation groups interested in implementing conservation practices to reduce nonpoint sources of water pollution. The Clean Water Indiana Program is primarily operated through local Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The CWI Matching Grants for District Operations are for use by Districts in providing technical, financial and educational assistance to landowners, conservation groups, and general public, as well as for related office and administrative needs of the respective SWCD. Appropriations are funded by Clean Water Indiana funding through statutory requirements outlined in the Clean Water Indiana law (IC 14-32-8), with disbursements of \$1 for every \$1 that a District receives from (1) a political subdivision (e.g. their respective county, city or township government), or (2) if a district receives no funding from a political subdivision, from any other funding source, with the State not required to exceed \$10,000 per District.

A final component of the Clean Water Indiana funding is cost share for Supervisor and Staff training. These dollars help reduce the cost of certain training registration fees, and provide cost share on other eligible trainings.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Under cooperative working agreement with each Soil and Water Conservation District the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides personnel, equipment, and office space to help districts attain the objectives set forth in their Business Plans (Long-Range Plans), and in turn districts help establish local priorities for providing assistance to land users under federal conservation programs and assist in carrying out these programs through providing information and education to the public about the program as well as

providing administrative and technical support. Examples of federal conservation programs for which NRCS provided both financial and technical assistance to land users included but are not limited to the Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) established under the Federal Farm Bills.

NRCS field offices are located in USDA Service Centers and are staffed by NRCS District Conservationists. These centers are located in most Indiana counties. Additional technical assistance is provided upon request by Regional Technical Teams consisting of engineers, planners and technicians. All NRCS staff are administratively responsible to the NRCS State Conservationist through the Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations.

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service (CES)

Through cooperative working agreements with each SWCD, the Extension Service assists with educational efforts such as workshops and seminars, tours, field days, demonstration sites, leadership development, etc., designed to further district conservation program goals. Primary sources of this assistance are the local Agriculture and Natural Resources Educators and campus based specialists.

The Purdue University 4-H program offers several projects and activities involving soil, water and related topics. The *4-H Soil and Water Conservation project* explores soil, water, and related issues, the *4-H Wildlife project* focuses on wildlife identification and conservation topics, and the *4-H Forestry project* teaches forestry management and conservation. All three-project curriculums focus on project and life skills related conservation issues for ages 10-19. Annual *soils judging* and related competitions provide upper-level students with the chance to learn about natural resources in a more challenge-oriented environment.

Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD)

The Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Inc. is a 501-C-3, not-for-profit organization comprised of and dedicated to serving the 92 individual districts. The Board is comprised of 4 officers, elected by the membership body, 8 region directors, elected by their region, and the Past President. The IASWCD provides districts with a unified voice in making requests to the Indiana General Assembly, as well as to state and federal agencies. It also helps facilitate the exchange of ideas and information between districts relating to program development and accomplishments. Because it is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization, the association can lobby the state legislature for increased funding, program authority and other legislation that helps conserve and enhance our state's soil, water and related natural resources. The association also holds contribution agreements and other grants that in turn provide additional resources for the local districts. Each year, an annual conference brings together over 400 conservationists in the state to discuss current issues and network.

Farm Services Agency (FSA)

The Farm Service Agency provides cost-sharing and other financial incentives to landowners applying for conservation practices through programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). USDA policy invites SWCD supervisors to participate with county FSA committees in developing county programs.

Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)

The Department of Natural Resources has a number of divisions that cover programs that assist districts in the efforts to address local soil, water and related resource concerns. A key program for SWCDs is the Lake and River Enhancement Program (LARE), which is administered by the Division of Fish and Wildlife. LARE's Watershed Land Treatment Program in particular offers grants through districts which provide cost sharing and other financial incentives to landowners, for applying needed conservation practices on the land in the respective project watersheds, to reduce nonpoint source pollution to the lake or river receiving runoff water from its respective watershed.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife also oversees educational programs utilized by a number of districts each year. *Hoosier Riverwatch Program* is a state-sponsored volunteer water monitoring initiative started in Indiana to increase public awareness of water quality issues and concerns by training volunteers to monitor water quality. Once certified, program participants then monitor water quality sites throughout Indiana and submit water quality data to the Hoosier Riverwatch database. *Project WET (Water Education for Teachers)* is an international water education program for educators of students in grades K-12 providing programs and materials in numerous water related areas, as well as watershed management and planning. Displays for district to use at educational events are also available through this program. *Project WILD*, which focuses on fish and wildlife related issues, provides programs for educators of students from grades K-12. Another program available to SWCDs is *Project Learning Tree (PLT)*, which works with educator audiences of students for grades K-8 through educational materials with a forestry viewpoint and is administered through the IDNR – Division of Forestry.

Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM)

The Department of Environmental Management offers water quality improvement demonstration grants through Section 319 of the Clean Water Act, with funding provided to IDEM by the US Environmental Protection Agency. This program focuses on demonstrating ways to reduce non-point source water pollution. A large number of districts either have or are currently carrying out a 319 grant project and many more will be doing so as long as the 319 program receives federal funding in the future.

IDEM also administers the implementation of Rule 5 (327 IAC 15-5) and the MS4 program (327 IAC 15-13) aimed at reducing pollutants in stormwater runoff. Both are regulatory programs required by US EPA under the Clean Water Act. Rule 5, which governs stormwater discharges from construction activities calls for districts to

review Stormwater Pollution Prevention plans required under the rule. The MS4 Program offers opportunities for district involvement in the construction site plan review and public education components of the rule.

In addition to these regulatory programs, district law (IC 14-32-5-4) also requires districts to conduct landfill inspections on all operating landfills within their respective district boundaries twice a year to assure erosion and resulting sediment is being controlled by landfill operators to the practical extent possible and reporting the results of their bi-annual inspections to IDEM. These inspections are typically scheduled and conducted in conjunction with IDEM Office of Land Quality personnel.

Sec. 2 Other Key Partners

The success of individual districts in fulfilling this role depends a lot on good working relationships with a number of key local, state and federal agencies that are not formally part of the Indiana Conservation Partnership mentioned above, but are still critical to the success of local conservation districts. A few important examples are included here.

County Government

Although Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Indiana are based on county lines, the only legal relationship between a district and a county is the provision that a district employee is considered to be an employee of the county in which the employee works, except as provided in subsection (c) which states: An employee of a district whose position is funded entirely from sources outside the county in which the employee works solely on the basis of the funding of the employee's position is not considered an employee of the county. IC 14-32-4-18 2 (b) and IC 14-32-4-18 2 (c).

County government, however, can be very helpful to the district in many other ways. Among them: (a) providing group health care and other employee fringe benefits; (b) appropriating funds for district programs and operations; (c) co-sponsoring watershed projects and assuming responsibility for their operation and maintenance; (d) providing use of county-owned equipment; and (e) practicing good conservation on all county-owned land

A district, in turn, can help the county, particularly its plan commission, surveyor, drainage board, highway department, health department and parks department. Some of the technical services that the district can provide to them include: (a) soil survey interpretations, (b) consultation on soil problems requiring specific structures, (c) consultation on highway and urban development-related erosion/sediment problems, (d) drainage consultation and recommendations of conservation practices (i.e. filter strips) to incorporate into drainage re-construction projects, (e) assistance on flooding and water supply problems and (f) protection of prime farmland. Supervisors or designated staff of the district may serve on technical review or advisory committees for the plan commission or serve on other county resource committees.

A starting point of establishing good district-county relations is to invite county officials to see conservation work being done and to ask for their input and assistance. District supervisors also should be familiar with the conservation-related responsibilities of county and municipal officials then build working relationships by helping them carry out those responsibilities. More information is available on developing good relationships with county, state and federal elected and appointed officials in Chapter 2 (Section 3) entitled “Working with Government Officials”.

National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)

The National Association of Conservation Districts represents over 3,000 districts throughout the nation, including the 92 in Indiana. NACD is a policy-forming body and national voice of districts to the U.S. Congress and federal agencies. Each district can help guide national conservation policy efforts through their respective state association to NACD. Policies are determined by state associations working together in regions. Indiana is in the North Central Region, along with Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin.

Resource Conservation and Development Areas (RC&D)

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Areas provide technical assistance to local communities through areas led by RC&D Councils. The purpose of RC&Ds is to accelerate the conservation, development and use of natural resources while improving the general level of economic activity and standard of living in communities across the nation. RC&D Councils coordinate conservation and rural development assistance available from federal, state, and local government and nongovernmental sources.

RC&D councils implement their area plans through projects that may include natural resource improvement, community improvement, forestry, education, economic development, water quantity and quality, recreation and tourism, marketing and merchandising, fish and wildlife habitat enhancement, and waste management and utilization. RC&D areas are organized 501-C-3 organizations, and can frequently assist SWCDs with grants and programs requiring their not-for-profit status. Funding and support for RC&D programs is typically obtained from federal, state and county sources, as well as from private foundations and organizations supporting similar objectives to those of RC&D.

Indiana District Employees Association (IDEA)

The Indiana District Employees Association is a membership based professional development organization established for and by employees of Indiana’s Soil and Water Conservation Districts. IDEA, in partnership with the IASWCD and ISDA-DSC, organizes training meetings and workshops for district employees. In addition, it assists with various events and activities to strengthen soil and water conservation programs throughout Indiana. IDEA is managed by a board of directors made up of district employees around the state with one director elected from each state region and serving a two-year term.

Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS)

The Hoosier Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) is a non-profit, scientific and educational organization of professional conservationists. SWCS serves as an advocate for the conservation professional and for science-based conservation policy. Individual chapters, like the Hoosier Chapter, carry out activities at the local, state, and provincial levels and on university campuses. The 75 chapters represent the grassroots backbone of SWCS, with each chapter electing its own officers, creating committees, sponsoring conferences, workshops, and numerous other conservation activities and formulating recommendations on local land and water resource issues.

Section 3 Other Potential Partners

There are numerous other local, state and federal government agencies that districts may enlist to assist in solving soil, water and related natural resource concerns. In many cases the districts may want to enter into a cooperative working agreement with specific agencies to carry out work within the district. In some cases it might be a contractual agreement in which districts receive a reimbursement for services if the district is helping to carry out a program locally that is the legal responsibility of a particular agency (i.e. Rule 5).

Districts should not overlook the opportunities to work with non-government entities and organizations in addressing local resource concerns. Conservation-oriented organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever and Ducks Unlimited, for example, all have a great track record for cooperative projects with various districts across the state. Agriculturally-based groups such as Indiana Farm Bureau, Indiana Pork Producers, Indiana Beef Cattle' Association, Indiana Soybean Alliance and others have cooperated with numerous educational programs and activities. Contractor groups such as Indiana Land Improvement Contractors Association and local contractor associations have also assisted with more urban and construction-related activities. The key to working with these and numerous other potential partners is to identify common programs, projects and areas of concern where the SWCD and the potential partner can cooperatively work together to meet a jointly-identified conservation goal.