

STATE SOIL CONSERVATION BOARD MEETING

MINUTES

September 8, 2026

Location: Habecker Dining Commons, Huntington University
[502 Lake St, Huntington, IN 46750](#)

MS Teams

Board Members

Gene Schmidt
Jane Hardisty
Brad Dawson
Jewel Wise
Jeff Healy
Larry Clemens
Chris Lee

ISDA Present

Jennifer Thum
Breegan Andersen
Tara Wesseler-Henry
Sandra Hoffarth
Geneva Tyler
Julie Harrold

Holden Abrell
Heath Hurst

Partners Present

Damarys Mortenson
Meg Leader
Amy Work
Cheryl Jarrett
Mary Lou Watson
Elspeth Cooley

Present Virtually

Bri Ollier
Cora Brown
Dana Risch
Ophelia Davis

Sara Day
Andrea Gogel
Leah Harmon
Sandra Hoffarth
Hailey Kane
Leah Walthery
Megan Malott
Julie Morris
Lilly Pryor
Megan Ritterskamp
Don Ryan
Shalyn Sargeant
Rebecca StClair
Grace Williams

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM ET by Gene Schmidt. Board members, ISDA staff, partners, and attendees were welcomed. Meeting protocols were reviewed. Gene Schmidt asked for approval of the agenda. Jane Hardisty moved to approve the agenda with the addition of the CWI budget. Jeff Healy seconded the motion. Motion was approved.

II. Approval of Minutes

The draft minutes from July 14, 2026, were reviewed. Chris Lee moved to accept the minutes. Larry Clemens seconded the motion. Jane Hardisty commented that the tree in Bob Eddleman's memory has not been planted yet. The July minutes were approved as corrected.

III. Huntington University Agricultural Program

Nate Perry and Dr. Jessica Hayes presented:

- Program growth to 140 students from 12 states.
- Curriculum emphasizing soil science, agronomy, horticulture, drone use, soil judging, and cover crop studies.

- Hands-on learning through Thornhill Farm's 80-acre facility with yield trials, cattle operations, and cover crop research.
- Collaboration with local SWCDs and hosting statewide soil competitions.

IV. Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) – Temporary Appointments

A temporary elected appointment for Martin Co SWCD was discussed due to Kyle Turpin's resignation. Nolan Lottes was recommended to fill the vacancy. His conservation involvement and qualifications were highlighted.

Board members discussed procedures for resignation letters, emphasizing transparency while protecting personal information. Staff may provide summaries of resignation letters containing sensitive content.

Larry Clemens moved to approve the temporary appointment. Jewel Wise seconded the motion. Motion passed.

V. Clean Water Indiana (CWI)

Budget Reporting & Surplus Allocation

Jennifer provided an extensive report on the CWI budget, noting a \$1.7 million carryover due to unspent allocations from CREP and grants. She recommended:

- Increasing the CWI grants program budget to \$2 million.
- Increasing the cover crop premium discount program to \$432,000.
- Allocating \$371,759.39 for emergency conservation funding tied to disaster declarations.

Board members agreed the CWI budget should be a standing monthly item. Updates will follow once August financials are received.

Terminology Clarification

Board members discussed replacing "carryover" with "allocated but not invoiced" to ensure public clarity.

Staffing Updates

Jennifer provided updates on new district support specialist positions, vacancies, staff salaries, vehicle expenses, and IOT charges funded through CWI. Further analysis was requested for upcoming meetings.

Grant Application Review

36 grant applications were received with \$3 million in funding requests. Tara Wesseler-Henry explained the review process, conflict-of-interest requirements, and use of Microsoft Forms and OneDrive. Reviews and ranking comments are due October 2.

A late submission was discussed; Jane Hardisty made a motion not to accept it to maintain fairness and precedent. Jewel Wise seconded the motion. Motion passed.

DJ Case Capacity Study Update

Tara Wesseler-Henry and Breegan Andersen reported:

- Completion of in-person interviews and ongoing surveys.
- Survey designed to capture internal–external partner dynamics.
- Final data collection scheduled for end of September.
- Final deliverables expected March–April and to be presented at the IASWCD Annual Conference.

CWI Grant Modification

Washington Co SWCD submitted a modification request for their active CWI grant. Jeff Healy moved to approve the modification. Jane Hardisty seconded the motion. Motion carried.

VI. Committee Reports

Chairman's Report – Gene Schmidt

Chairman Schmidt reflected on partnerships, district engagement, and emphasized strategic alignment across conservation entities.

Committees

Reports were shared from:

- CWI Grants Committee
- IMAGE Cost-Share Committee
- CCSI Oversight Committee
- ICP Partnership Team

VII. Break

A brief recess was taken, followed by lunch. Attendees reconvened after approximately 30 minutes.

VIII. IMAGE Program

Holden Abrell reported extensive updates on the pilot program:

- 24 applications received in July; \$155,000 requested for August.
- \$335,000 allocated to date; \$10,000 cap per project.
- Applications bundled by county; SWCDs serve as financial pass-through entities to avoid requiring landowners to become state vendors.
- Supervisors applying must file conflict-of-interest disclosures; ISDA staff prohibited from participation for ethical reasons.
- Plans to explore statewide expansion and the need for additional funding. Comprehensive program results will be presented at the November meeting.

IX. Presentation – Indiana Nutrient Reduction Strategy

Julie Harrold delivered a detailed presentation covering:

Strategy Overview

- Co-led by ISDA and IDEM.
- Connects state conservation work to reducing nutrient runoff affecting the Gulf of Mexico.
- First official strategy released in 2015; latest update published March 2026.
- Updated every five years.

Stakeholder Engagement

The strategy incorporates input from commodity groups, TNC, USDA, USGS, EPA, and partners at state and local levels.

Watershed Prioritization

A subcommittee reassessed priority watersheds based on six data-driven factors. Results are now integrated into IDEM's 319 program processes.

Science Assessment Components

Julie detailed two main components:

- Nutrient Trend Analysis: Reviewing statewide water quality monitoring and modeling.
- Conservation Practice Effectiveness: Evaluating 25 practices using technical bulletins and published findings.

Research Gaps & Data Needs

Gaps include limited modeling capacity, missing datasets, and need for improved shared research across Midwest states.

Communication & Outreach Improvements

Board members encouraged strengthening connections between nutrient strategy and conservation delivery systems (ICP, SWCDs, partners). Printed and digital educational materials are recommended. Julie agreed.

X. Partner Reports (Non-ISDA)

IASWCD / CCSI / RITA / Small Farms

Partner organizations provided updates on events, collaborations, training sessions, and progress on conservation initiatives.

USDA (NRCS & FSA)

Federal partners shared updates on conservation programs and technical assistance efforts aligned with state initiatives.

Purdue University / IDEA / Other Partners

Updates covered program developments, watershed activities, and stakeholder engagement.

XI. ISDA Report

ISDA staff presented reports, highlighting:

- CREP and water quality initiatives.
- Nutrient stewardship programs.
- Technical assistance capacity.
- District support activities.

Additional Updates

- Red Gold Field Day success and upcoming meeting with program partners.
- Discussions with Dannon regarding sustainability and ESG metrics.
- Partnerships and conservation event participation, including the Western Lake Erie Basin anniversary and State Fair activities.

XII. Public Comment

Public attendees were invited to comment.

- In-person attendees signed in.
- Virtual attendees turned on cameras and notified the Chair.

XIII. Adjournment

Chris Lee moved to adjourn. Jewel Wise seconded the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 1:42 pm ET.