

2012

annual report

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Fiscal year 2012 was a busy year for Indiana NRCS. In addition to the conservation planning, contracting, implementation, and partnership work we do each day, Indiana NRCSers also went above and beyond 'normal' last year.



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Indiana has been recognized as a national leader in the Soil Health movement. Our employees are well trained, we have established active area Soil Health Teams, and we are working closely with conservation partners to promote Soil Health through the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative. To further promote the agency's priority, we worked with partners, including the Hoosier Chapter of Soil and Water Conservation Society to hold a Soil Health Symposium bringing together nearly 200 employees, producers, and partners.

In 2012, NRCS employees responded quickly and efficiently to disasters caused by severe weather. Because our employees were prepared, we were able to quickly assess and respond to tornado damage in southern Indiana through the Emergency Watershed Program. During the historic drought and extreme heat of the spring and summer, we provided support, technical assistance, and funding to producers. Our employees were proactive and responsive with policy adjustments, providing much needed information, and obtaining additional funding resources.

This report summarizes information about our Farm Bill Programs and the number of acres we impacted with conservation practices. It also includes some highlights of our special initiative projects. We prepared 3,982 conservation plans that benefited 386,070 acres. Among the 38,061 practices applied, no till, cover crops, and nutrient management were among the top requested by landowners. We are proud of our high quality technical assistance and our ability to get funds into the hands of producers who are working to improve our natural resources.

Working together with our partners, Indiana NRCS not only met our goals for 2012, we were able to meet tight deadlines when emergencies and new priorities hit.

As we move into 2013, we will continue to make soil health and training for our employees a top priority.

Helping People Help the Land.

INITIATIVE REDUCES SEDIMENT AND NUTRIENTS IN MISSISSIPPI RIVER BASIN

The Greater Wabash River Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Wildcat Creek Watershed project has fully embraced the concept of leveraging limited funds. By piecing together general Farm Bill funding with a Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) project and a Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) project, and then adding a Walton Foundation grant, they have maximized the impact of their dollars to target conservation issues in their watershed. In addition, they have maximized partnerships to carry out the project. For example, they have partnered with the Wabash River Enhancement Corporation for water quality monitoring and the USDA-Agricultural Research (ARS) for load reduction modeling.

The project is designed to help producers implement a system of conservation practices to avoid, control, and trap nutrients and sediment before they enter surface water and improve wildlife habitat while maintaining agricultural productivity. The RC&D and its partners focused efforts on outreach to minorities and beginning farmers through personal contacts, hosting a series of public meetings throughout the watershed and working with media and partners to spread the word. The RC&D hosted a congressional tour in 2012 to view the project results.

Over the life of the project the RC&D has contracted more than \$2 million in Farm Bill dollars directly to producers for installing conservation practices (81 landowners

received technical assistance and 66 received financial assistance). A total of 59,907 acres were positively impacted, including more than 26,000 acres of cover crops, 10,000 acres of livestock waste utilization, 16,000 acres of nutrient and pest management, and 3,200 acres of residue management.

Water quality data collected by ARS has determined the placement of conservation practices throughout the project area has reduced sediment loading by almost 12,900 tons (a 62% decrease), reduced total phosphorus loading by 39,800 lb. (a 64% decrease), and reduced nitrogen by 12,400 lb. (a 49% decrease). (Note: Values were calculated only for surface runoff conditions, but are projected as a watershed scale reduction.)



DROUGHT RELIEF

During the historic drought of 2012, landowners in Indiana endured one of the hottest and driest periods ever recorded in history. With the crops and pastures withering, and the livestock and wildlife showing signs of heat stress, one Orange County producer saw a light at the end of the tunnel.

NRCS staff assisted the producer by developing a conservation plan outlining several practices that would benefit the landowner's pasture and forage supply, including livestock exclusion, cover crop plantings, forage and biomass plantings, and heavy use area protection.

These conservation practices provided adequate rest for perennial forages to restore plant vigor, built winter plant reserves, accumulated forages for later use, and provided cover, and improved conditions for wildlife during that period.

Additionally, these practices are giving cattle an outstanding food source through the spring, while providing erosion control, improving soil health, recycling nutrients, suppressing weeds, managing soil moisture, and reducing soil compaction.

NORTHWEST IRRIGATION SYSTEMS GET UPGRADED

After four years of concentrated effort to improve irrigation efficiencies, the LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District is pleased to have achieved their goals.

In 2009 the SWCD applied for an Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) project, which targets additional Farm Bill dollars to their county in partnership with the NRCS. With project funding, they hired a technician to help landowners evaluate their irrigation systems and adopt more efficient practices.

This additional technical assistance directly to farmers has extended the field office's resources and has resulted in 21 farmers, 42

irrigation systems and impacting 5,523 acres. Farmers now have a better handle on their irrigation management, and are benefiting soil health, water quality and their bottom line. But the bigger story is that their outreach efforts have resulted in many farmers adopting irrigation improvements on their own.

By increasing the use of soil moisture monitoring, uniformity tests and the use of irrigation scheduling tools, the SWCD is influencing change in their county. LaPorte County SWCD has one year remaining in the program, but hopes to continue the work past the formal AWEP project.



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM

Indiana received over \$17.4 million in EQIP funding in FY-2012. A total of 606 contracts were entered into that will address natural resource concerns on 88,500 acres of land over the life of the contracts. These contracts provided financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland.

EQIP offered several targeted initiatives that provided funding to specific geographic areas and/or resource concerns. These included the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP), Organic Initiative, Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative, and On-Farm Energy Initiative.



CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that encourages producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities. Indiana received over \$1 million in CSP funding in FY-2012. A total of 66 new contacts received funding to treat nearly 44,000 acres of cropland, pasture and forest.



EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION - FLOODPLAIN EASEMENT

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) responds to emergencies created by natural disasters and is designed to help people and conserve natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, wind-storms, and other natural occurrences. In fiscal year 2012, NRCS responded to tornado damage in Clark and Washington Counties to remove debris from streams to restore flow, prevent flooding, and stabilize streambanks. NRCS contributed 75% of the total cost for both projects (\$796,454). Two additional projects are underway to repair 2011 flood damage in the Town of Newburgh and in the Prairie Creek Channel in Daviess County. As part of the EWP's Floodplain Easement Program, NRCS entered into one agreement treating a total of 16 acres of floodplain.

GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary conservation program that emphasizes support for working grazing operations, enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity, and protection of grassland under threat of conversion to other uses. In FY-2012, fifty acres were enrolled in GRP providing approximately \$12,000 in financial assistance.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In addition to financial assistance to landowners, NRCS is the USDA's principal agency for providing conservation technical assistance to private landowners, conservation districts, tribes, and other organizations. Conservation Technical Assistance allows NRCS and its partners to assist landusers to make sound natural resource decisions on private, tribal, and other nonfederal lands.



WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. During FY-2012, NRCS helped Indiana landowners protect and restore 929 acres of wetlands under WRP, including 72 acres enrolled in 30-year easements and 857 acres enrolled in permanent easements. Approximately \$7.8 million was brought to Indiana for the protection of wetlands in Indiana.

WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program for conservation-minded landowners who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat on agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, and Indian land. Indiana NRCS received over \$5.5 million to fund WHIP applications in fiscal year 2012. Two hundred eighty-eight contracts were approved which will treat 68,287 acres of land.



MISSISSIPPI RIVER BASIN INITIATIVE

Through the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI), NRCS and our partners work with producers and landowners to implement voluntary conservation practices that improve water quality, restore wetlands, enhance wildlife habitat and sustain agricultural profitability in the Mississippi River Basin. There were seven targeted MRBI projects in Indiana in 2012 that provided over \$3.3 million to landowners to assist with these conservation efforts.

COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

The CCPI is a voluntary conservation initiative that targets Farm Bill funding to specific geographic areas and/or resource concerns through a competitive proposal process. In fiscal year 2012, Indiana had two active CCPI projects focused on water quality issues and forest management, which provided landowners \$393,887 in financial assistance for conservation practices.

AGRICULTURAL WATER ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) is a voluntary conservation initiative. AWEP provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to implement agricultural water enhancement activities on agricultural land to conserve surface and ground water and improve water quality. Indiana NRCS allocated over \$1.5 million to AWEP in fiscal year 2012, treating approximately 14,500 acres of farmland.



GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) protects and restores priority watersheds in the great lakes region. NRCS is working with its conservation partners in the eight-state area to combat invasive species, protect watersheds and shorelines from nonpoint source pollution, and restore wetlands and other habitat areas. In 2012, GLRI contributed \$450,000 to conservation practices.

NATIONAL WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE

The EQIP National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) will assist producers to address high-priority water resource concerns in watersheds identified as impaired by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). NWQI offers financial and technical assistance to farmers and forest landowners interested in improving water quality and aquatic habitats in priority watersheds with impaired streams. In 2012, NWQI contributed \$208,390 to conservation efforts in Indiana.

WESTERN LAKE ERIE BASIN INITIATIVE

The goal of the WLEB is to contribute to a reduction of phosphorus loading to Lake Erie. In 2012, WLEB contributed \$455,413 to conservation efforts in Indiana.

Find us on the web at: www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/

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