

Three County Partnership Reduces Runoff and Improves Wildlife Habitat

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If you ask members of the Decatur County SWCD Board of Directors, one of the greatest challenges in addressing nutrient loading to waterbodies is improving nitrogen management on local farms. Because nitrogen is so costly, finding tools and approaches that assist farmers in using nitrogen more efficiently offers opportunities to benefit water quality, wildlife habitat and the farmer's back pocket.

The Decatur, Bartholomew, and Jennings County SWCDs are collaborating on a Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) project in the Upper East Fork White watershed, funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Approximately \$500,000 was awarded to the project over the five year project timeline. The goal of the project is to avoid and reduce nutrient runoff to improve water quality while maintaining agriculture productivity. To address nutrient loss, low levels of nutrient management, and nutrient loading the Alliance is implementing practices that reduce nutrients from leaving the fields. This project encourages producers to evaluate and fine tune nutrient plans and practices.



To achieve this objective a systems approach of three practices are being implemented: cover crops, nutrient management, and guided stalk sampling. The three county partnerships within the project are working to implement a total of 3,300 acres of cover crops during the three year implementation phase. The 3,300 acres will be spread over the seven treatment subwatersheds. The project also plans to implement 1,650 acres of nutrient management over three years within the same area. In addition to the nutrient management a total of 50 fields will also be implementing guided stalk sampling, with five of these fields being used for detailed research.

Another aspect of the project is partnering with the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, who received a Conservation Innovation grant from NRCS to conduct On Farm Network[®] guided stalk sampling and strip trials. Throughout the watershed, 14 producers are conducting guided stalk sampling or strip trials on 29 fields. The sampling is currently being conducted throughout the three counties. Results for the sampling will be available later this fall when the producers meet to share data and information from the sampling.

In the first year of the project, 11 applications were submitted for potential funding, and four were funded totaling \$153,000. The three partnering SWCDs will continue to work with producers and encourage practices that avoid and reduce nutrient runoff. Water monitoring by Indiana University is also taking place throughout the target watershed over the life of the project to document any changes in water quality.