



**United States
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OPINION EDITORIAL

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Op-Ed: Indiana Landowners Are Doing Their Part to Improve Water Quality

By Jerry Raynor, Indiana NRCS State Conservationist

Drive across Indiana or fly overhead and you will see evidence of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) work on the state's landscape. Conservation practices such as grassed waterways, restored wetlands and fields planted with protective cover are just a few visible signs of the agency's work in our state.

Throughout Indiana, NRCS conservationists work with farmers and private forest landowners to plan and install these and many other conservation practices. The agency offers more than 170 individual practices and suites of practices that are used to improve soil health, water quality, air quality and wildlife habitat. And while planning these practices, our NRCS staff works to help producers maintain or improve their agricultural productivity.

As the nation celebrates National Water Quality Month in August, Indiana NRCS salutes the conservation-minded farmers and private forest landowners who do their part to improve water quality and other natural resources on their operations. The impacts of their efforts are significant and rewarding.

For instance, the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative (MRBI) targets small watersheds with the highest potential for water quality improvements. It offers incentives to eligible farmers and landowners to carry out voluntary conservation practices that avoid, control, and trap pollution in 13 states, including Indiana.

Likewise, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) targets producers in select watersheds in the states surrounding the Great Lakes — Huron, Superior, Michigan, Erie, and Ontario. NRCS staff works with farmers and landowners to combat invasive species, protect watersheds and shorelines from non-point source pollution and to restore wetlands in these select watersheds. NRCS is seeing results from producers' efforts through these water-focused initiatives.

NRCS is also using the latest technological advances to help producers improve water quality through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). In northern Indiana, NRCS and the Indiana Watershed Initiative are building on previous research that shows how two-stage ditches combined with cover crops are helping to improve water and soil quality in Shatto Ditch's 3,000-acre watershed. While these two conservation practices have been researched, developed, and successfully applied in Indiana's agricultural landscape on individual fields, a watershed-scale implementation has never been evaluated in terms of improved water quality and soil health. Water testing completed by students from the University of Notre Dame show that the combination of these two practices have improved water quality by reducing nutrient loss from the field and removing additional nutrients that are lost after they enter the stream channel.

Our success in improving water quality in Indiana rests with our producers and I am confident they will continue to do their part. For many farmers, investing resources in environmental resources is a tradition that goes back generations.

But we need more producers to include conservation as part of their operation. You are invited to learn more about the Natural Resources Conservation Service, conservation practices and water quality. Stop by and talk with your District Conservationist or visit our website www.in.nrcs.usda.gov. To locate the office nearest you, visit: <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

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