



Credit: Drew McCutchan



Credit: Tracy Deer



Credit: Leah Hagermeier



Credit: Allison Shoaf



Credit: Andrew Frye



Credit: Rachel Boucher

INDIANA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

At the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we have a proud history of supporting America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. For more than 90 years, we have helped people make investments in their operations and local communities to keep working lands working, boost rural economies, increase the competitiveness of American agriculture, and improve the quality of our air, water, soil and habitat.

Thank you to the Indiana NRCS employees who have submitted photos to the statewide photo contest. You can see many of the photos submitted over the past year in this document.



Credit: Arthur Franke



Credit: Hannah Whitlock



Credit: Travis Gogel



Credit: Scott Wagner



A NOTE FROM THE STATE CONSERVATIONIST

Fiscal year 2025 (FY25) was full of changes and challenges, but I am proud of each conservation practice, every contract and all of our employees and partners for getting conservation on the ground and putting Farmers First this year. Through everything, Indiana NRCS has continued to meet and exceed expectations, working hard to preserve, protect and enhance natural resources and find solutions for our agricultural and rural communities.

This year, Indiana has seen consistent interest and participation in conservation programs across the state, including our flagship Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Throughout Indiana, producers are working hard to embrace conservation practices that benefit their bottom line. From cover crops and nutrient

management, to brush removal and rotational grazing, conservation practices make a great impact on our resources statewide, contributing to cleaner water, more diverse ecosystems and productive agricultural landscapes for years to come.

This year was especially trying for our employees. From program changes to leadership changes and beyond, our employees continued to show up for Indiana farmers and landowners. No matter the challenge or circumstance, our employees delivered excellent technical assistance, streamlined financial assistance and leaned on partnerships to help deliver conservation across the state. Our employees embodied our motto Helping People Help the Land throughout this year.

As we look ahead, I am excited about the future of conservation in Indiana. Together with our partners and producers, Indiana NRCS is ready to embrace the next year with continued dedication to finding solutions that help protect and preserve our land, water and communities.

Damarys Mortenson
Indiana NRCS State Conservationist

CRP AT A GLANCE

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program administered by the Farm Service Agency. The program encourages farmers and landowners to convert environmentally sensitive land to vegetative cover, such as trees or grasses, to improve the environment. In exchange, participants receive annual rental payments and cost-sharing assistance.

NRCS receives separate CRP funding to provide technical assistance, including conservation planning and land eligibility assessments, to landowners participating in CRP. This technical assistance helps farmers design and implement conservation practices on their enrolled land while ensuring it meets program requirements.

In FY25, Indiana NRCS and our partners completed the following CRP activities:

- Practices Evaluated: 9,000+
- Practices Planned: 5,000+

CTA AT A GLANCE

NRCS offers Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) at no cost to the producers we serve. Our goal is to give our customers personalized advice and information, based on the latest science and research, to help them make informed decisions.

NRCS makes Wetland and Highly Erodible Land (HEL) determinations to assist landowners in making informed land management decisions in order to remain compliant with the wetland conservation provisions.

In FY25, Indiana NRCS staff completed the following Wetland and HEL determinations:

- HEL Compliance Determinations: 3,313
- Wetland Compliance Determinations: 1,389

CRP SUCCESS STORY: IMPROVING MARGINAL LANDS

When Tim Wilson looked out over his 2,200 acres in west-central Indiana, he saw fields that weren't living up to their potential. The shady borders along the woods, the deer damaged corners and the pockets of thin soil were costing him money every year. Planting and harvesting corn on those acres ran more than \$1,100 an acre and, too often, the return wasn't there.

That's when Tim turned to the Conservation Reserve Program. With CRP's financial framework and NRCS' technical expertise, he began re-imagining the unproductive edges of his farm. NRCS conservation planners walked with fields with him, helping map out where native grasses and wildflowers could thrive and how prairie strips could strengthen the productivity of the land he continued to farm.

As the prairie took root, Tim noticed changes. The equipment no longer compacted his best soils during tight turns. Yields climbed from around 180 bushels per acre to as high as 210. CRP payments added stability and wildlife returned to the edges of his fields.

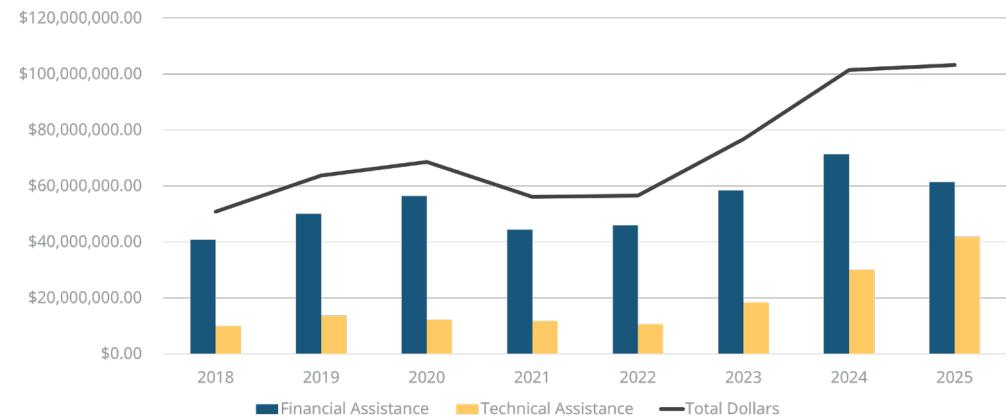
With financial assistance from Indiana's Farm Service Agency and technical guidance from NRCS, Tim didn't just retire marginal land, he turned it into lasting value.



NRCS and Partner staff discuss prairie plantings with Tim Wilson and his son Drew.

NRCS provides both financial and technical assistance to help land users protect and improve natural resources. Over the past eight years, funding for programs in Indiana have fluctuated with a steady increase over time.

INDIANA FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE VS. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: FY2018 TO FY2025



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)



New agricultural land easement in southern Indiana. Photo Credit: Cindy Suseland, Conservation Program Specialist
Inset: Sandhill Cranes in southwestern Indiana. Photo Credit: Chisara Iwuchukwu, Soil Conservationist

ACEP AT A GLANCE

ACEP helps landowners, land trusts and other entities protect, restore and enhance wetlands or protect working farms and ranches through conservation easements. ACEP includes two distinct components:

Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)

NRCS provides financial assistance to eligible partners for purchasing ag land easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of eligible land.

Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners and Indian tribes to restore, protect and enhance wetlands through the purchase of a wetland reserve easement.

NRCS conservation easements protect more than 80,000 acres across Indiana.

WETLAND RESERVE EASEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

New Enrollments:

19 contracts enrolling 1,033 acres

Closed Easements:

7 easements on 414 acres

Restoration Completed:

18 restorations on 1,028 acres

Compatible Use Authorizations:

108 CUAs approved

Onsite Monitoring Reviews:

391 easements

Offsite Monitoring Reviews:

602 easements

AGRICULTURAL LAND EASEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Closed on Indiana NRCS' second agricultural land easement

- Harrison County (154.93 acres)
- Held by George Rogers Clark Land Trust

Funding one new agricultural land easement

- Harrison County (258.7 acres)
- Held by George Rogers Clark Land Trust

New Agreements:

- Hired and onboarded new Indiana Farmland Protection Specialist
- National easement pilot umbrella agreement with American Farmland Trust.



CSP AT A GLANCE

Our Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps farmers build on existing conservation efforts while strengthening their operation. Whether they are looking to improve grazing conditions, increase crop resiliency, or develop wildlife habitat, NRCS can custom design a CSP plan to help farmers meet their goals.

NRCS can help identify natural resource problems on operations and provide technical and financial assistance to solve those problems or attain higher stewardship levels in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. For example, NRCS can look at ways to address the amount of soil lost; mitigate the impact of excess water; reduce the contribution of agricultural operations to airborne soil particles and greenhouse gas emissions; improve the cover, food, and water available for domestic and wildlife species; or promote energy efficiencies for on-farm activities.

CSP FUNDING POOLS

Funding Pool	Contracts	Acres	Dollars
Ag Beginning	37	6,762	\$1,849,691
Ag General	68	54,598	\$7,279,045
Ag Organic	2	139	\$43,910
NIPF Beginning	42	961	\$1,236,685
NIPF General	160	9,470	\$4,449,399
NIPF Socially Dis	2	38	\$50,705
Renewal Ag BFR	1	287	\$75,975
Renewal Ag Gen	15	14,372	\$1,319,882
Renewal NIPF Gen	30	1,968	\$971,950
	357	88,595	\$17,277,242

NIPF: Nonindustrial Private Forestland



Greg Woll explains the functions of his planter during a visit to his farm.

SUCCESS STORY: EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE SOIL HEALTH

Greg Woll of Whitley County, Indiana, reached a turning point in his farming operation after years of watching soil wash off his fields during heavy rains. Determined to protect his land for the next generation, he turned to NRCS for help transitioning from conventional tillage to a fully conservation-based system.

Working closely with his local district conservationist and with the financial and technical support of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Woll shifted to 100% no-till and introduced cover crops to his 2,000 acre farm.

To continue advancing his conservation efforts, Woll then enrolled in CSP. Through CSP, he added precision agriculture enhancements that greatly reduced nutrient loss and improved efficiency. Real-time kinematic auto-guidance now places fertilizer and crop protection products exactly where needed, eliminating overlaps and reducing input costs. CSP also supported Woll in transitioning his cereal rye planting to precision rows, improving his ability to plant green into cover crops and reducing equipment issues during nitrogen application.

Today, Woll's operation is more productive and environmentally sound. With healthier soils, stable yields and reduced erosion he says he's never going back. His goal is simple: not to farm more acres, but to farm the acres he has better.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP AT A GLANCE

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides technical and financial assistance to producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, increased soil health and reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, improved or created wildlife habitat and mitigation against drought and increasing weather volatility.

EQIP Initiative	Contracts	Acres	Dollars Allocated
Beginning Farmer	136	7,836	\$6,192,266
Conservation Incentive Contract (CIC)	2	851	\$274,585
Confined Livestock	57	7,428	\$7,314,185
Conservation Activities	158	44,639	\$1,140,037
Cropland	27	9,949	\$3,424,208
Forestland	35	3,176	\$2,018,058
Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)	33	8,085	\$1,586,371
Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)	59	7,412	\$3,041,406
Joint Chiefs - Ready Set Fire	45	3,324	\$2,088,160
Limited Resource Farmer	3	335	\$98,893
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative (MRBI)	1	12	\$10,656
National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)	13	1,653	\$710,676
On-Farm Energy	12	4,425	\$443,400
Organic Transition	3	716	\$147,884
Pastureland	15	1,128	\$630,449
Socially Disadvantaged Farmer	20	1,535	\$571,572
Specialty and Small Farms	56	126	\$960,215
Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB)	24	2,629	\$846,099
Wildlife Habitat	64	1,770	\$1,382,934
Working Lands For Wildlife - Monarch Butterfly	1	0.3	\$577
Working Lands For Wildlife - Northern Bobwhite	9	143	\$113,817
	773	107,172	\$32,996,446

SUCCESS STORY: SOURCE WATER PROTECTION

Agriculture is a vital part of our infrastructure and so is water. NRCS is prioritizing land and water conservation practices on private working lands that also impact public and private drinking water supplies (known as Source Water Protection Areas).

In Indiana, there are 298 source water protection watershed areas that are identified as high priorities, which are associated with intakes for surface water (lakes, reservoirs and rivers), groundwater wells in aquifers or both.

In fiscal year 2025, the following are examples of some of the planned practices that will benefit water quality in the Indiana source water protection watersheds:

Practice Name	Units
Waste Storage Facility	3 no.
Tillage Management - No Till	114 ac.
Cover Crops	6,085 ac.
Waste Facility Closure	4 no.
Roofs and Covers	2 no.
Grassed Waterway	2.2 ac.
Pasture and Hay Planting	316 ac.
Prescribed Grazing	162 ac.
Roof Runoff Structure	3 no.
Nutrient Management	387 ac.
Water & Sediment Control Basin	13 no.

no. = Number

ac. = Acre



Cover Crop in no-till corn.

Credit: Lindsey Donaldson, Soil Conservationist

TOP FIVE FUNDED EQIP PRACTICES



Brush Management **\$6,468,423** **31,711 ac.**
The removal of woody invasive vegetation through mechanical treatment to maintain or enhance native perennial grass and forb communities while leaving residue on-site.



Cover Crop **\$4,586,960** **70,913 ac.**
Unharvested grasses, legumes and/or forbs planted for seasonal vegetative cover to build soil health by reducing erosion and increasing organic matter.



Roofs and Covers **\$3,410,413** **64 count**
A specific type of cover that entails a roof structure over a waste management facility to capture biogas and reduce odor.



Waste Storage Facility **\$2,508,239** **35 count**
An agricultural waste storage impoundment or containment structure used to minimize impacts on surface and groundwater and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



Nutrient Management **\$1,871,366** **47,492 ac.**
Managing nutrients by controlling the amount, source, placement and timing to maximize plant growth while minimizing the impact on the environment and the soil.



Bison roam the fields of White Oaks Farm in northern Indiana.

SUCCESS STORY: BISON, BURGERS AND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Founded by Terry and Courtney Engstrand in 2021, White Oaks Farm is a pillar of Northern Indiana's agricultural and culinary communities. Housing 22 head of high-quality American Bison on approximately 17 acres, with plans to expand, White Oaks provides meat, bones, hides, tours, advice and more to the residents of Fulton County and beyond.

Through the National Bison Association's annual meeting, Terry and Courtney learned about the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and became interested in exploring options in Indiana for assistance getting started. The Engstrands entered into an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract in 2022, and again in 2024 after seeing success with their first. Their first contract consisted of cool season grasses in their pasture, fencing and a livestock watering facility, and their second contract included warm season grasses and a rotational grazing system.

White Oaks has become a leader in the bison community, offering a space for fellow bison farmers and enthusiasts to visit, learn and discuss habits and best management practices through tours, workshops and social media.

INDIANA RCPP PROJECTS

Kankakee Watershed Partnership (Classic):

5 easements on 131 acres
\$1,149,504 obligated



Farmers Helping Hellbenders (Classic):

6 contracts on 1042 acres
\$255,614 obligated

Grasslands for Gamebirds and Songbirds (Classic):

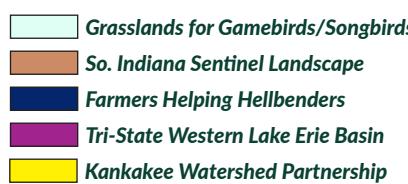
13 contracts on 163 acres
\$138,426 obligated

Tri-State Western Lake Erie Basin (Classic):

6 contracts on 4,376 acres
\$783,563 obligated

Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape (Classic):

Project canceled due to passing of the One Big Beautiful Bill



Sarah Collings looks over her wildlife habitat field, funded through the GGS RCPP project. Inset: Josh Griffin (left) and Nate Yazel (right) help identify plants on Collings' property.

RCPP SUCCESS STORY: RECONNECTING WITH WILDLIFE

When Sarah Collings inherited her family's farmland in southeastern Indiana, she faced a challenge: soggy fields, poor production and little wildlife. But a conversation with an Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) biologist set her on a new path of restoration.

Collings enrolled in the Grassland for Gamebirds and Songbirds (GGS) RCPP project. Through GGS she finally had the support to re-imagine her land for nature. Working with GGS biologists, Collings designed a tailored habitat plan which included native pollinator plantings, shrub cover, early successional patches and a 13 acre oak planting. Over time, her property transformed into a vibrant haven. Hawks, wild turkeys and quail now roam her fields, proof that her investment is paying off.

Collings' farm is a living testament as an example of what collaboration can accomplish. With support from GGS, conservation partners and NRCS, she created a place where conservation strengthens both wildlife and community.

RCPP AT A GLANCE

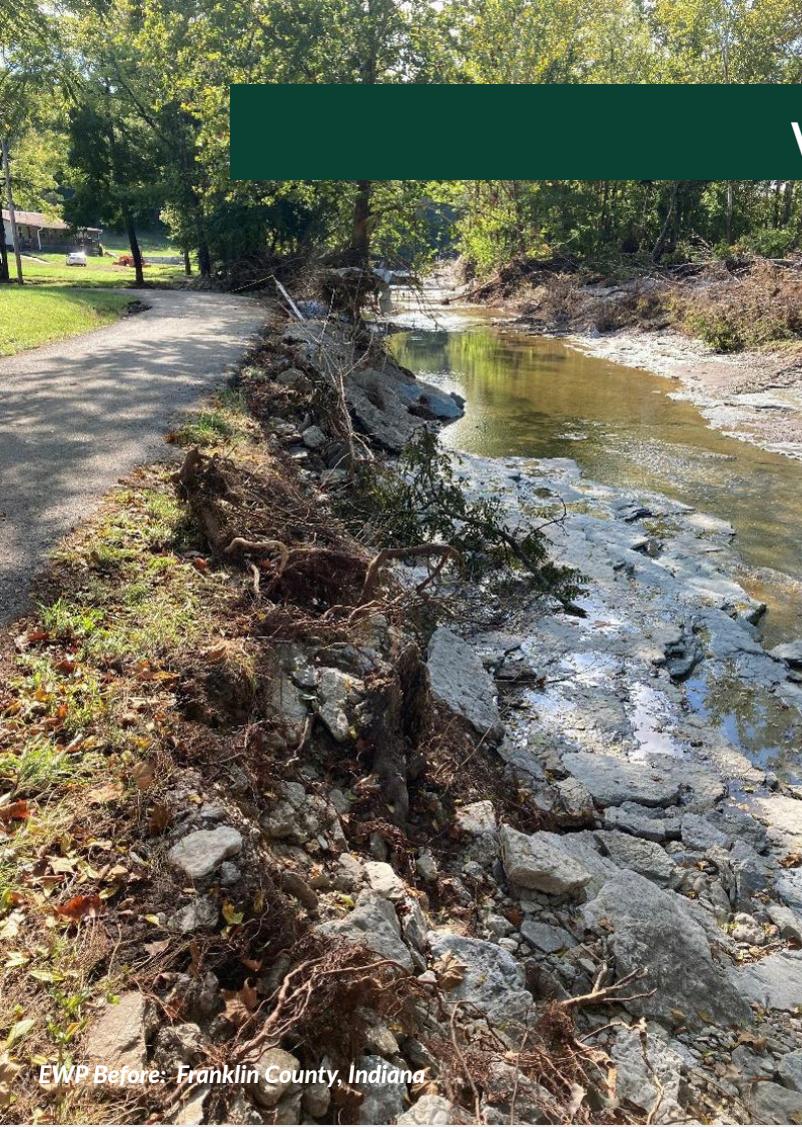
Through partnerships, Indiana NRCS coordinates the delivery of assistance where it can have the most impact. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven approach to conservation that funds solutions to natural resource challenges on agricultural land. RCPP demonstrates the power of public-private partnerships in delivering results for agriculture and conservation.

RCPP projects fall under two different categories: RCPP Classic and RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFAs). RCPP Classic projects are implemented using NRCS contracts and easements with producers, landowners and communities, in collaboration with project partners. Through RCPP AFAs, NRCS reimburses partners for conservation activities done for or on behalf of producers, landowners or other entities.

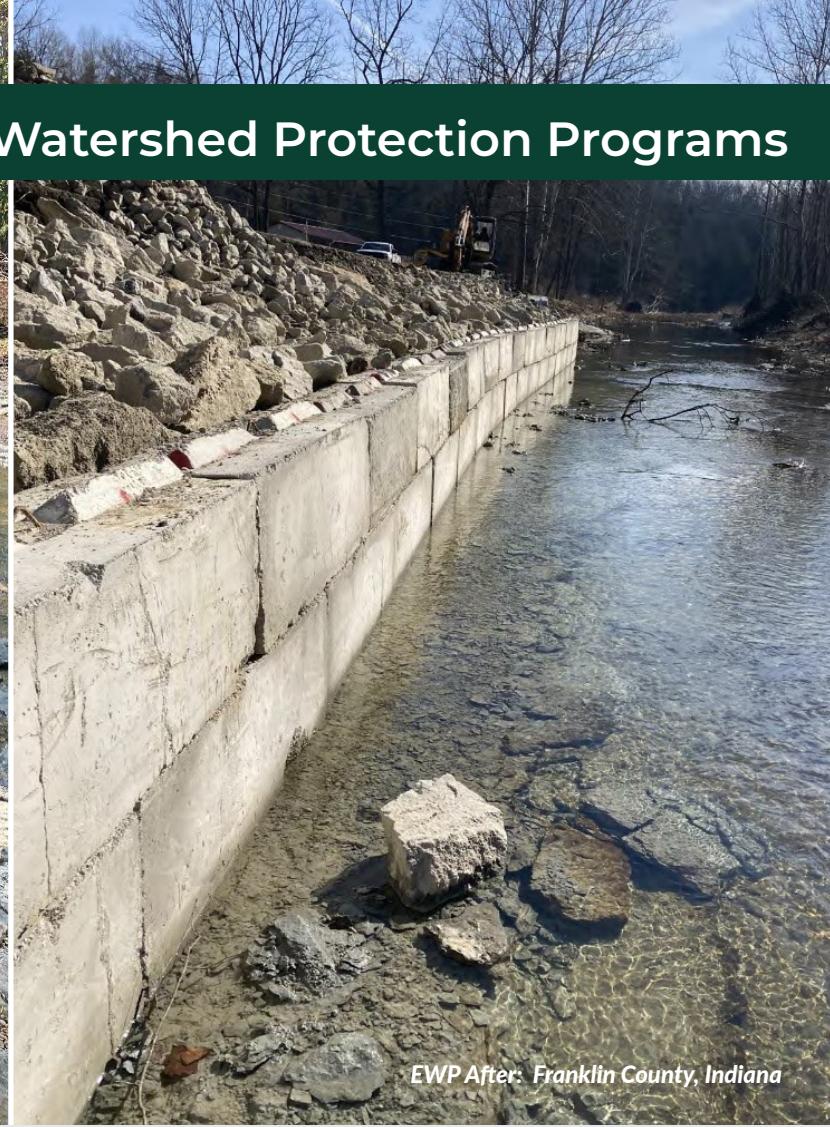
Due to passing of the One Big Beautiful Bill, two RCPP projects were canceled in FY25: Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape and Wabash River Partnership.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Watershed Protection Programs



EWP Before: Franklin County, Indiana



EWP After: Franklin County, Indiana

EWP AT A GLANCE

The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program responds to emergencies created by natural disasters. This NRCS emergency recovery program is designed to help communities conserve natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural occurrences.

EWP PROJECT STATUS

- Switzerland County (Project 5060) - Three sites completed.
- Dearborn County (Project 5063) - One site completed
- Monroe County (Project 5065) - One site requesting funding.

EWP Agreements	
Number	2
NRCS Contribution	\$1,077,816
Partner Contribution	\$316,141
Total Cost	\$1,393,957

REHAB AT A GLANCE

The Watershed Rehabilitation Program (REHAB) helps project sponsors rehabilitate aging dams that are reaching the end of their design life and/or no longer meet federal or state safety criteria or performance standards. Since 1948, NRCS has assisted local sponsors in constructing over 11,850 dams, nationally.

INDIANA WATERSHEDS

Muddy Fork #4

- Proposed Dam in Clark County.
- Provides flood control, drinking water and recreation.
- Planning/Environmental Assessment Stage.

WATERSHED REHABILITATION

Rehabilitation Funding Received

- 2 Dams on Prairie Creek located in Daviess County.
- 1 Dam on Deer Creek located in Perry County.

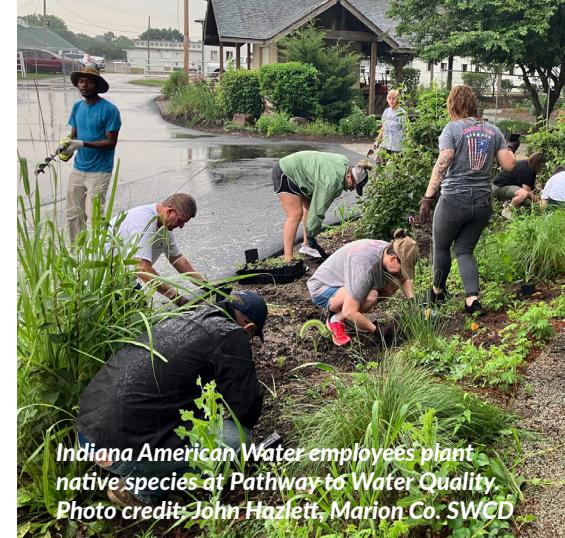
INDIANA NRCS FY25 AGREEMENT SUMMARY

	Number	Total Dollars	NRCS Contribution	Partner Contribution
Cooperative Agreements	4	\$5,209,448	\$5,209,448	\$0
Contribution Agreements	30	\$39,407,802	\$28,379,646	\$11,028,155
Interagency Agreements	4	\$1,760,000	\$1,760,000	\$0
Grants	1	\$174,449	\$174,449	\$0
TOTAL	39	\$46,551,698	\$35,523,542	\$11,028,155

AGREEMENT HIGHLIGHT: SICIM

The State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management (SICIM), through the Indiana Invasives Initiative and in partnership with NRCS, achieved several notable accomplishments in FY25.

By mid-year, the program supported 46 active CISMAS covering roughly 56 counties, with additional groups forming. Regional specialists completed more than 1,600 voluntary landowner surveys, representing nearly 50,000 acres, and helped deliver over 1,600 outreach and education events statewide. CISMAS also received reimbursement support for surveys and public education efforts, strengthening local capacity. Indiana continued to lead the nation in Weed Wrangle volunteer events, averaging more than 200 annually. Together, SICIM and its partners continue expanding invasive species awareness, technical assistance and coordinated management across the state.



Indiana American Water employees plant native species at Pathway to Water Quality. Photo credit: John Hazlett, Marion Co. SWCD

AGREEMENTS AT A GLANCE

Conserving our natural resources is not a one-person job. Agreements allow our agency to expand the reach and depth of conservation in Indiana.

A “contribution agreement” generally refers to a funding mechanism where USDA provides financial support with less direct involvement in the project while a “cooperative agreement” indicates a more active partnership where USDA participates significantly in the project alongside the recipient, collaborating on decision-making and project implementation. Grants awarded to partners have minimal NRCS involvement as the recipient primarily leads the project independently.

A cooperative agreement implies a stronger collaborative relationship between USDA and the recipient, while a contribution agreement or grant focuses more on providing financial assistance.



Magnolia's team spent the spring and fall planting cover crops, trees and native seeds to restore the Clay County wetland area. Photo Credit: Magnolia Inc.

AGREEMENT HIGHLIGHT: BIRCH CREEK WETLAND MITIGATION BANK

The Birch Creek Agricultural Wetland Mitigation Bank project is a collaboration between Indiana NRCS and Magnolia Land Partners, Inc. When development or agricultural activities impact an existing wetland, federal law requires an equal or greater amount of wetland function be replaced. This project provides a practical way for landowners and farmers to meet that requirement.

The first of its kind in Indiana, Birch Creek Mitigation Bank offers “credits” to landowners and farmers who need to offset unavoidable wetland impacts on their own property. Instead of each landowner trying to build small, isolated wetlands on their own, this site concentrates restoration in one larger location, which often creates better habitat and more reliable benefits.

For Indiana landowners, the benefits are concrete. This mitigation bank offers a streamlined, cost-effective path to meeting regulatory requirements while ensuring that important natural resources are conserved. Agricultural wetland mitigation credits are available now for past, present or future wetland impacts.

Earth Team Volunteer Program



Weed Wranglers Throughout Bartholomew County. Photo Credit: Blazing Stars CISMA

ETV AT A GLANCE

Earth Team volunteers (ETV) help NRCS fulfill its commitment to supporting farmers and forestland owners in their voluntary conservation efforts to keep working lands working, boost rural economies and increase the competitiveness of Indiana agriculture. The Earth Team offers numerous volunteer opportunities for students, retirees, veterans and others who care about conservation and are seeking to make a difference in their communities.

NRCS is proud of the dedicated Earth Team volunteers and staff who have committed their time and talents to conserving and protecting our natural resources. During FY25, Indiana NRCS accomplished the following:



VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT: BLAZING STARS CISMA

In Bartholomew County, Indiana the Blazing Stars Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) is making a real difference. Founded by passionate volunteers and supported by the local Soil and Water Conservation District, the group collaborates across public and private lands to fight invasive species, restore native habitat and educate their community. Named after the native Blazing Star wildflower, the group was inspired by a talk at a conservation conference and now leads monthly weed wrangles where over 1,000 people have volunteered more than 3,000 hours since 2021.

With help from organizations like the Sierra Club, Purdue Extension, Cummins Inc, United Way and local schools, Blazing Stars has removed aggressive plants such as bush honeysuckle and garlic mustard, restoring hundreds of acres and bringing back native species. Their grassroots efforts also include workshops and school programs, helping landowners learn proactive land management.

Their work has not gone unnoticed. They recently won the national NRCS Earth Team Volunteer Group Award. More than a project, Blazing Stars has become a model for community-led conservation, showing that with passion, partnership and a bit of elbow grease, ecological change is possible.

INDIANA NRCS FY25 STAFFING STRUCTURE

Indiana NRCS, led by our State Conservationist, Damarys Mortenson, and our State Leadership Team, serves diverse agricultural needs through 4 area offices, 8 conservation delivery teams and 76 field offices that serve all 92 counties in Indiana.



Indiana NRCS Field Delivery Structure

- ★ Area Offices
- CDT Offices
- PTL Offices
- Service Centers

Planning Team Areas

- NE-Albion North
- NE-Albion South
- NE-Huntington
- NW-Lafayette
- NW-Lebanon
- NW-Rensselaer
- SE-Connersville
- SE-Greensburg
- SE-Salem
- SW-Bloomfield
- SW-Greencastle
- SW-Princeton



Date: 4/2/2024

State Office

6013 Lakeside Boulevard, Indianapolis, IN 46278
Phone: (317) 295-5800

Northeast Area Office

2720 Dupont Commerce Court, Suite 101, Ft Wayne, IN 46825
Phone: (260) 484-5848

Northwest Area Office

1812 Troxel Drive, Lafayette, IN 47909
Phone: (765) 474-9992

Southeast Area Office

2600 N State Highway 7, North Vernon, IN 47265
Phone: (812) 346-3411

Southwest Area Office

604 Quail Run Road, Vincennes, IN 47591
Phone: (812) 882-8210

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Washington, D.C. 20250-9410

Fax: (202) 690-7442; or

Email: program.intake@usda.gov