



Butterfly on Sunflower  
Submitted by Don Donovan

# Hoosier Headlines

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## Heart to Heart with RAYNOR

Spring is in the air throughout Indiana. Flowers are blooming and farmers have started planting. The first few monarchs have been spotted in the state and the cicadas will soon be making their first appearance in 17 years.

It is shaping up to be an exciting spring and summer here at Indiana NRCS and country-wide as we get closer to reopening and moving past the pandemic. The past year has had its challenges and a lot has changed with a new administration. To help Indiana NRCS and our staff all across the state adapt to these changes and to chart our course forward, I recently reorganized the State Conservationist Advisory Council. The council will meet two to four times a year and will advise me regarding issues that affect Indiana NRCS' ability to deliver conservation and conditions affecting employees in the field. Any field staff may submit questions/concerns or recommendations throughout the year. More information about the council and past meeting minutes can be found by visiting: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/in/people/employees/>.



Jerry Raynor,  
Indiana State Conservationist

Throughout May, please join us in honoring the culture and contributions of Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders and native Hawaiians. Each May since 1992, America has celebrated Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) History and Heritage Month. This year it is a critical time to learn about these cultures as there has been a sizeable increase in hate incidents directed toward members of these communities. Please join me in taking a little bit of time and learning more about Asian American and Pacific Islander History and Heritage Month by visiting <https://asianpacificheritage.gov/>.

In exciting national news, after a long wait the vehicle management tool (VMT) can be accessed and fully utilized on your government issued mobile devices. This will give you greater flexibility to reserve and return vehicles for field visits. One major benefit of using VMT Mobile is that you can attach receipts to report after usage and return a vehicle forms by simply taking a picture with your device.

Finally, I want to highlight an important detail opportunity currently available to Indiana NRCS employees at the border. USDA is actively seeking volunteers to help the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement via 30-120-day details assisting with managing the influx of unaccompanied minors at the border. We have already had three employees in the state inquire about applying and I encourage anyone who is interested to talk with his or her supervisor about potentially taking part. For more information reach out to Roger Kult.

Have a great spring,



# EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

## Tristan Elmore, Soil Conservationist for Salem CDT

### Why did you pursue a career in agriculture?

I chose to pursue agriculture as a means to continue my career within natural resources. My academic background and earlier employment was with fish and wildlife management. Within the wildlife management profession, it is common to start out as a seasonal technician doing field work in three to nine month stints. Towards the end of one of those stints, someone sent an advertisement for a partnership technician position with the local soil and water conservation district (SWCD) to me. After talking with the SWCD and NRCS staff as an outsider, I thought it sounded like a great opportunity to grow professionally and to, "help people help the land" that we all rely on!



*Tristan Elmore, Soil Conservationist for the Salem Conservation Delivery Team*

### How long have you worked for Indiana NRCS?

I have worked for NRCS since March 2018. Since starting, I have been a partnership technician, soil conservation technician and now soil conservationist.

### What is your favorite part of working for NRCS?

While working for NRCS I find myself continuously learning about, and gaining an appreciation for, topics that are often taken for granted or that are not considered by the general public, even though they regularly impact our lives. Then, we are given the opportunity to share what we've learned with our customers and see the impact that applied knowledge has on improving the quality of the landscape and products that depend on it.

### Do you have any advice for the younger NRCS staff members that hope to stick with NRCS for a while?

Find a mentor, learn everything you can from them,

and make it a priority to thank them often. For someone new to the profession, or new to the geographic area, a long-time NRCS employee and/or a stewardship-minded farmer will be a wealth of local knowledge concerning what challenges the area might present, and the most effective ways they've found to address those challenges.

## NOW LET'S GET A LITTLE MORE PERSONAL!

### Favorite movie or TV show?

Unbroken, based on Laura Hillenbrand's telling of Louis Zamperini's life from troublesome youth, to Olympian, serviceman, prisoner of war, and his time after returning home.

### Favorite food?

Whatever I'm grilling next, and don't forget those garden fresh vegetables!

### Go to hobby?

Getting outdoors! I'm not too dedicated to one hobby, but kayaking, hiking, and camping top the list right now. I also got into running within the last couple of years, and have ran some 5Ks, I hope to run a half marathon this year.

### Favorite animal?

My dog Ruger. He's half bloodhound, half redbone, and comes with a built in alarm system, tracking capabilities, and works for food.

# WELCOME TO INDIANA NRCS!

# WE WANT TO SEE YOUR #PLANT2021 PHOTOS

After a long winter and a challenging year, spring has finally arrived. As the world around us bursts into song and color, our farmers will begin to work the soil they've protected all winter and plant the seeds they will nurture for months to come. Later this year, the fruits of their labor will become the food that feeds our communities, the fiber that clothes our families, and the fuel that powers industries.

This planting season, let Farmers.gov showcase your work by participating in the #Plant2021 campaign. We'll share your story on @FarmersGov on social media and a nationwide storymap. Here's how:

Using your smartphone or digital camera, take photos of what's happening on your operation during planting season. Videos may be too large to email as attachment, so you can email them to us via mail drop (iPhone), Google Photos (Android), or any other file sharing service. A few ideas:

- If you're comfortable, we'd love to see the people that make it happen set against the backdrop of your agricultural operation.
- Take a photo from inside the tractor cab so we can see what you see.
- Photos at sunrise or sunset are always beautiful!
- Behind-the-scenes photos showing us the amount of planning and preparation it takes to have a successful planting season are welcomed.
- Emerging (baby) crops.

Submit your photos/videos along with the following information by email to [SM.FP.Social@usda.gov](mailto:SM.FP.Social@usda.gov):

- Your name if you're comfortable sharing.
- Location of the operation (city or county and state).
- Information about what's in the photo/video and what's being planting.
- Your thoughts about this year's planting season. Is this year different from previous years? How do you feel about the season? What are you hopeful about?
- If your operation has a Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram account, please include it so that we can tag you.

Please note that by submitting your photo/video, you are granting USDA permission to use these materials for outreach and education purposes.

Follow @FarmersGov on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and we look forward to sharing your story!



*Aaron Krueger of Gibson County is planting soybeans into cover crops.*



*Jamen Fredrick of Pike County is planting corn into a cover crop field.*

## KUDOS TO...

**Brianne Lowe, State Biologist**, for winning the Best Presentation Award for her Women4theLand presentation at The Wildlife Society meeting. The Wildlife Society's awards program annually honors professional excellence, recognizes outstanding achievement and highlights contributions to wildlife science and management. - **Submitted by Zack DeYoung, Indiana Department of Natural Resources**

**Jamie Shonkwiler, Soil Conservationist**, for her outstanding work as Acting Business Tools Specialist for Indiana while I was on detail to national headquarters. Jamie embraced this new role with the same dedication and motivation she exhibits in her regular position. Jamie was attentive to the questions and needs at the state office, area, and field office levels, and was proactive in providing guidance when it was needed. With Jamie acting, I was able to focus my time on the work I was doing on my detail and I knew Indiana was in good hands. Thank you Jamie!" - **Submitted by Jennifer Chen, Resource Conservationist**

**Shannon Zezula, State Resource Conservationist** and **Jerry Raynor, State Conservationist**, for allowing me to work on detail at national headquarters for four months. Letting any employee do this puts an additional strain on the state and staff because they have to fill in the gaps while that person is away. Both Shannon and Jerry were very supportive despite these strains, and encouraged my participation to help me grow personally and professionally. Thank you!" - **Submitted by Jennifer Chen, Resource Conservationist**

**Beth Clarizia, Easement Program Manager; Chad Schotter, District Conservationist** and **Deb Knepp, District Conservationist** for taking time out of their busy schedule to assist with the Indiana Conservation at Work video series, highlighting wetland easements and two-stage ditches. I'm looking forward to see and promoting the final products! - **Submitted by Kris Vance, State Public Affairs Specialist**



# DIVERSITY MEANS RESILIENCE

*Submitted by Jennifer Chen, AA/PI Special Emphasis Program Manager*

I listened to the April 19 Town Hall meeting with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. Although he shared a number of things with the group that were thought-provoking, several statements really struck me, especially as we celebrate Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May.

- “The great power in agriculture, in my view, is in its capacity to embrace and reflect diversity.” – Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack
- “If we can embrace diversity in all of its forms, our rural communities, our rural economy will be much stronger.” – Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack

Diversity is good! We talk about this in our technical work with clients regularly – we promote the use of conservation crop rotations, diverse species in cover crops and more diverse wildlife habitat plantings.

Why do we encourage these practices? Because more diversity in nature means more resilience – resilience when there are different temperatures, landscape positions, levels of precipitation or other changes in the environment.

Diversity in nature also means more stability and support – whether it’s a wildlife planting intended to provide food and cover year round, or different cover crop species to provide benefits for various soil health factors such as reducing compaction, maintaining winter cover or building organic matter.

Why wouldn’t the same concept apply to the people we work with and the people we live with in our communities?

Diversity in our population also means more resilience – we all have strengths and weaknesses. Having more diversity in our offices and

our communities, means we collectively have more resilience and different skills that help support us all. Each of us fills a niche in society.

Diversity keeps things interesting! Colleagues, neighbors, acquaintances, etc. have different experiences and different stories. Having said that, each time I talk with people who might have different backgrounds, upbringings, etc., I find that there is at least one thing we can both identify with (and often more than one thing). So, while having connections with a diverse group of people is indeed interesting, it might also show us we’re more similar than we think.

In summary – we promote diversity on the landscape in the technical assistance and financial assistance we assist producers with each day. It’s a part of our agency’s mission - “Helping people help the land.” Seems to me those same principles can and should be applied to ourselves and each other. “Helping people help people.” Or even “Helping people and helping ourselves.”



## PARTNERSHIP WEBSITES

IN Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, Bi-Weekly Updates: <http://iaswcd.org/news/newsletter/>

IN Conservation Partnership: <http://icp.iaswcd.org>

IN Dept. of Environmental Management: [www.in.gov/idem](http://www.in.gov/idem)

IN Dept. of Natural Resources: [www.in.gov/dnr](http://www.in.gov/dnr)

IN State Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation: <http://www.in.gov/isda/soil/>

Purdue Cooperative Extension Service: <https://www.extension.purdue.edu/>

USDA Farm Service Agency: [www.in.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.in.fsa.usda.gov)

# VOLUNTEER WINS NATIONAL AWARD

Indiana NRCS is excited to announce that one of our volunteers was selected as the national recipient of the Earth Team Individual Volunteer Award! This award recognizes an outstanding individual who exemplifies the dedication and service of a volunteer. **Congratulations to Allana Whiteside of Bartholomew County.** Read her story here:

On a recent visit to the Bartholomew County Fairgrounds, Heather Shireman found an exciting scene — about 10 monarch caterpillars eating all the milkweed that had been planted around the base of the new pollinator habitat.

For Shireman, who is the district coordinator for Bartholomew County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), the presence of the caterpillars was proof that the recently installed habitat structure was serving its purpose and bringing pollinators to the area.

The metal and wood structure was built in the spring as a senior project by Allana Whiteside, who is now a freshman at Purdue University. Along with plants for caterpillars to feast upon around the base, the main habitat structure also has space for moths, butterflies, ladybugs and bees to escape from the elements and lay eggs. It was placed at the fairgrounds in Columbus, Indiana as part of their existing Conservation Corridor, which was built through a partnership between the SWCD and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The corridor has been in place for about five years and is a small-scale version of the Pathway to Water Quality exhibit located at the State Fairgrounds. The corridor includes pollinator plants, prairie grasses, an education area and more. The purpose, Shireman said, is to educate the public about conservation and things they can do at home to protect the environment.

Whiteside had been involved in the corridor from the beginning as an Earth Team volunteer and returned each summer to

weed the area, rake leaves and help in any way she was needed. So, when it came time to complete a senior project as part of her high school graduation requirements, she decided adding to the corridor would enable her to have a positive impact while learning new skills.

"I've kind of been interested in conservation all of my life," Whiteside said.

"I've always been in 4-H, so I've done projects regarding the conservation of the earth and stuff like that through 4-H. So, then I was like, 'Oh, this is kind of perfect. I already know a little bit about it.'"



*Allana Whiteside, Earth Team Volunteer, puts the finishing touches on her newly installed pollinator habitat.*

The senior projects require students to learn new skills while serving their community. For some of her classmates, that meant learning about event organization while putting together a fun run, she said. As part of her pollinator habitat, Whiteside set out to learn metal working skills such as welding and using a plasma cutter. The skills were a key aspect of the project because the main structure where the different habitats are located is made of metal to fit in with the modern architecture located throughout Columbus.

"My dad actually knows how to weld so he helped me with that part," Whiteside said. "He taught me how to weld before I did my project. So, I spent a lot of time with him out in the shop before starting my project. I just wanted to make it look nice so it could fit in with Columbus because everything is so architecturally structured."

The new habitat — which has different living areas for different insects such as boxes for butterflies, pinecones for ladybugs and wooden burrow holes for solitary bees — has a dual purpose of protecting the pollinators and serving as an educational resource.

Shireman said they were able to hold a pollinator habitat workshop at the corridor in September and use Whiteside's habitat to talk about ways people can protect pollinators in their backyard. There are also plans to add signs detailing how the structure works and the benefits of providing habitats for pollinators and insects, even if it is something as simple as a pile of sticks in the backyard.

"When Allana came to us and said, 'Hey, I want to put this here,' we thought that'd be a great idea because we're really trying to build a pollinator habitat," Shireman said. "We have all the flowers. We have a bunch of things like that, but we really didn't have homes for them."

The presence of the caterpillars shows that the new structure is already working.

The total project took about 80 hours to complete, Whiteside said. At the beginning of the project, she had promised the SWCD Board, who not only approved her constructing it at the corridor but also gave her grant money to help, that she would finish it. So, she decided to forge ahead and complete it even after the senior project requirement was canceled for her class due to COVID-19.

"It really makes me like feel accomplished and just happy that my work is actually going to be used for quite some time," Whiteside said. "Every summer I'm going to plant new plants, so that they can be there through the months of July through November."

To learn more about the Bartholomew County Conservation Corridor, visit: <http://www.bartholomewswcd.org/pathway-project/>.

## PERSONNEL UPDATES

### SELECTIONS FROM VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Kristen Giesting, GS-0457-9, Soil Conservationist, Greensburg CDT, effective 5-23-21.  
 Andrea Baker, GS-0457-9, District Conservationist at Rochester, effective 4-11-21.  
 Lyndsie Beasley, GS-0499-3; Pathway Student Intern, Soil Conservationist at Paoli; effective 5-9-21.  
 Grace Moore, GS-0499-3; Pathway Student Intern, Soil Conservationist at Indianapolis; effective 5-9-21.  
 Joshua Adams, GS-0499-3; Pathway Student Intern, Soil Conservationist at LaPorte; effective 5-9-21.  
 Carly Whitmore, GS-1099-3; Pathway Student Intern, Public Affairs at Indianapolis; effective 5-9-21.  
 Kayla Mitchell, GS-0499-3; Pathway Student Intern, Soil Conservationist at Indianapolis; effective 5-9-21.  
 Cassandra Vondran, GS-0457-11, Soil Conservationist at Huntington CDT; effective 3-14-21.  
 Lucas Fledderman, GS-0457-9, Soil Conservationist at Greensburg CDT; effective 2-28-21.  
 Sydney Lockett, GS-0457-9, District Conservationist at Greenfield; effective 2-28-21.  
 Jacob Walters, GS-0457-7, Soil Conservationist at Bloomfield; effective 2-28-21.  
 Keith Williams, GS-0457-12, Supv District Conservationist (PTL) at Princeton, effective 3-14-21.  
 Sarah Vaughn, GS-0457-9, District Conservationist at Lafayette; effective 2-28-21.

### REASSIGNMENTS

Josean Torres, Soil Conservationist, Reassignment from North Carolina NRCS, Danville FO, effective 5-9-21.

### RESIGNATIONS

Kenny Streett, Cartographic Technician, Indianapolis; Resignation, effective 3-12-21.

## SOILS TOUR FOR VINCENNES UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

On Thursday April 15, Tom Held, District Conservationist and Travis Gogel, SW Area Resource Soil Scientist, presented soils information to the Vincennes University Ag 204 class.

Fifteen students were in attendance as Tom and Travis took to the field to discuss the different characteristics of soil. They also incorporated various soil health concepts into the presentation by discussing the benefits of no-till, cover crops and biological improvements that soil health practices can provide. The presentation ended with a discussion about careers with NRCS and the Indiana Conservation Partnership.

Have you taken part in any cool presentations or field days lately? Share your story and photos with Kris Vance ([kris.vance@usda.gov](mailto:kris.vance@usda.gov)) and your story may be in the next issue of Hoosier Headlines!



## NEW MICROSOFT TEAMS GRAPHIC BACKGROUNDS

By now, we should all be familiar with Microsoft Teams, a collaborative and interactive meeting platform featuring a variety of tools to enable more effective communication amongst employees working around the country. If you're tired of blurring your background to hide that untidy home office, you'll be happy to know that there are an assortment of new USDA graphic backgrounds that you can use with Microsoft Teams, ranging from farms, to flower gardens, to forests, and more. We think you'll find that there's something for everyone! View all of the graphic background options available on [myFPAC](#).