

# Hoosier Headlines

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## In This Issue:

Employee Spotlight: Akhtar Soomro	2
New Load Reduction Tool Available	3
IN NRCS Attends 2018 Asian Fest	3
IN NRCS Attends 2018 OUTFest	3
Employee Kudos	3
Fletcher Received SWCS Fellowship Award	4
Partnership Websites	4
Staff Work at the Indiana State Fair	5
Personnel Update	6
Annual Retiree Meeting	6
Indiana NRCS Calendar	6

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## Heart to Heart with RAYNOR

This is my fifth week in Indiana and I must say I'm busier than I ever expected to be with my new job as state conservationist. As my schedule starts to slow down, I look forward to meeting all of you and plan on visiting field offices and attending area meetings and other events as often as I can.

I came on the job at just the right time to hit the incredible Indiana State Fair circuit. I made my rounds, meeting many partnership staff and government officials and speaking at a few events. One of my highlights was seeing the good work our partnership team is doing at the Pathway to Water Quality. I want to thank all our volunteers who participated at Pathway this year. There was a total of 74 NRCS volunteers who put in approximately 282.5 hours of time during the fair. And a special thank you to all our volunteers who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in the Pathway "work days" before the fair to get the exhibit in top shape. I know those were long days, but you truly made a difference in making this one of the best exhibits at the State Fair.



*Jerry Raynor,  
Indiana State Conservationist*

Our volunteer opportunities don't stop with the fair. Just around the bend, the 2018 National FFA Convention and Career Expo will be returning to Indianapolis, taking place from October 24-27. This annual convention hosts more than 64,000 attendees from across the country and is a great opportunity to reach out to FFA members and introduce them to NRCS programs, employment and volunteer opportunities. We will soon be recruiting volunteers to help with the judging event and expo booth. Watch for more information.

I'd also like to welcome all the new employees that have been hired within the past few months. After being under a hiring freeze since January 2017, we are pleased to be able to fill these critical positions. We are monitoring our state hiring plan as we are allowed to post jobs and you will continue to see a number of positions announced through the end of October.

As we approach the end of the fiscal year, I want to thank all of you for all the hard work you have put into getting our Farm Bill programs obligated and providing conservation planning and technical assistance to our customers. I am excited about Indiana. The good work you are doing is reflected in the amount of conservation being put on the ground.

I look forward to what we can all accomplish together in 2019.

# Employee Spotlight

## Akhtar Soomro, Cartographic Technician

**Q: As the one of our experienced employees, please help us get to know you better. Tell us a little bit about yourself.**

I grew up in Karachi, Pakistan with a family of seven siblings. I moved to the United States in 1996, and resided in the small town of Dannemora, New York. Two years later, I moved to Indiana with my wife where we had three children: Shase, Aleena and Yusuf. I have a Bachelor of Science in Accounting. I started my career with NRCS in 2001. I love working with this agency. Right now, I am with the GIS team serving as a cartographic technician.

**Q: How did you become interested in conservation?**

I have always been intrigued with farming growing up. I enjoyed visiting family farms as a child and would never want to leave. I always wanted to stay in the farm environment and experience the clean air, fresh food, live animals and open fields. When I discovered NRCS, I applied and my interest in conservation flourished. Today, I enjoy taking part of NRCS activities. Each year I sign up to volunteer for the pathway recruitment program and visit colleges to educate students about NRCS and our services.

**Q: What do you enjoy most working for NRCS?**

I like my job working with NRCS. I enjoy making GIS maps and working on other related projects. I enjoy working with people and going in the field offices for Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) data collection. I enjoy the flexibility of my job. Lastly, I enjoy my collateral duties as Special Emphasis Program Manager and educating my colleagues on the Asian and Pacific Islander culture.

**Q: Who has had the most influence on your career?**

Over the years, many NRCS staff members have influenced me in my life. Today, even though some of them have retired or moved out of state, I still keep connect with them. I learned many work-related techniques, skills, tools and much more from them. I will definite remember and appreciate the individuals who have lifted me and have helped me to where I am today professionally. The friendly and helpful environment of the NRCS is very special and I enjoy being a part of it.

**Q: What has been the most challenging part of the job?**

Project deadlines. Once in a while, on certain projects, I am required to complete work before the deadline hits. Many of the deadlines are short so time management is essential for project completion and success. It becomes a priority for me to do quality work and at the same time deliver excellence as



Akhtar Soomro, Cartographic Technician

the end result, allowing the project to move forward to the next phase.

**Q: What has kept you motivated to stay with NRCS for so long?**

I have developed close relationships with many of my co-workers. I enjoy working with NRCS whether it is my regular job duties or collateral duties. I have a decent amount of vacation days, work flexibility, medical benefits, and a better retirement. Therefore, I am blessed to work at NRCS, where I enjoy and make a great living.

**Q: When you aren't working for NRCS, what do you like to do in your spare time?**

In my spare time I take care of my lawn and garden which is also part of land conservation. Being an active father of three wonderful children and a caring husband keeps me very busy. I also enjoy biking, building and up keeping projects around my house. Additionally, I spend time with extended family members who live close by.



## New Sediment and Nutrient Load Reductions Tool

The Indiana Conservation Partnership just released a new tool to help determine sediment and nutrient load reductions from implemented conservation practices. The Indiana Sediment and Nutrient Load Reduction tool is designed to provide aggregated conservation information to interested parties such as researcher, conservation professionals, students and the public.

Sediment and nutrient load reduction numbers are calculated using the EPA's Region 5 Model for Estimating Load Reductions and only reflect sediment bound nitrogen and phosphorus. Reductions in dissolved nutrients, such as dissolved reactive phosphorus and nitrate are not accounted for by the Region 5 Model. Practices do not include the many unassisted practices designed and implemented by private landowners without ICP assistance.

You may visit the tool at: <http://arcg.is/1XGiK1>.

For more information on Indiana's Nutrient Reduction Strategy, please contact [ISDANutrientReduction@isd.in.gov](mailto:ISDANutrientReduction@isd.in.gov).

## NRCS Attends 2018 Asian Fest

On June 24, representatives from Indiana NRCS attended the 11th Asian Fest at the Indiana State Museum in downtown Indianapolis.

Each year, they spotlight one Asian country, and this year, Burma/Myanmar was on center stage. This is of particular interest to the state because Indiana has one of the largest Burmese immigrant populations in the United States.

The day was filled with entertaining cultural performances from China, Indian, Japan, Burma/Myanmar and much more including a traditional Burmese costume fashion show, Asian cuisine from local restaurants, children's activities and Asian community booths.



*Akhtar Soomro greets a visitor*

NRCS representatives discussed NRCS programs and soil health to visitors, including a "Good Soil vs. Bad Soil" demonstration. Overall it was a wonderful cultural day.

## Kudos to:

**Stephanie McLain, State Soil Health Specialist, Cara Bergschneider, District Conservationist, and Tony Branam, District Conservationist** for presenting soil health demonstrations at the Indiana Water Resources Alliance Annual Conference field day June 29. IWRA is made up primarily of geologists and water quality professionals conducting monitoring throughout Indiana. Stephanie, Cara and Tony were able to share how building soil health on farmland is important, and relate NRCS' soil health efforts to the work of the participants. They also endured one of the hottest days this summer at this outdoor event! - **Submitted by Jill Reinhart, ASTC for Partnerships**

**Ben Zuercher, SE Resources Management Specialist**, for his field and office assistance to the southeast area field employees during the ongoing Conservation Reserve Program sign up. - **Submitted by Mike Hughes, District Conservationist.**

## NRCS Represents at 2018 "Out Fest"

*Submitted by Patrick Glassman, LGBT SEPM*

Indiana NRCS staffed a booth at this year's OUTfest, an LGBT pride event held annually in downtown Lafayette, Indiana on August 18, 2018. Over 60 vendors were set up along with food and music. NRCS had a presence at the event to show the commitment USDA has at being a welcoming workplace. An estimated 500+ people attended the event.

Seven NRCS employees, an SWCD employee and an Earth Team volunteer worked the booth this year. Partnership staff spoke with people about the roles and responsibilities of NRCS. We spoke to many

groups including: landowners who did not know our services were available; city residents who we could share knowledge of the local SWCD's programs; and, most commonly, teenagers and students. Many younger attendees were interested in the volunteering opportunities. We handed out several employment info-sheets to current students.

It is important for NRCS to have these discussions while showing the Department's commitment to inclusion by being at this event.



*Left to right: Mark Eastman, Kim Lampert, Patrick Glassman, Victoria Turnipseed-Henderson, Nick Williams, Rob Miller, Angie Miller (SWCD), Arelys Ortiz.*

## *Fletcher Receives Fellowship Award at National SWCS Meeting*

This year, one of Indiana's own was awarded the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) Fellowship Award. The designation of Fellow is conferred on Society members who have performed exceptional service in advocating the conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources. This award is given first and foremost for professional excellence.

Rebecca Fletcher has been a valuable member of SWCS Hoosier Chapter Since 1989 and for the past 29 years has served in several roles and capacities for the Society. She has served as secretary, president-elect, president, and past president of the Hoosier Chapter, along with roles on several different committees. Fletcher was named a Berg Fellow in 1997 and completed a year-long leadership development program.

She served as a member of the SWCS Board of Directors for two terms from 2001 to 2007 and was the Board's treasurer for 3 years. During this time, she received multiple recognitions from her chapter and received an Outstanding Service Award from the Society along with a President's Service Award. Since 2007, Fletcher has chaired the Society's Professional and Chapter Development Committee which has trained hundreds of chapter leaders in not for profit management, project management and program development.

Fletcher has worked with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for the past 38 years in various roles including Resource Conservation and Development Coordinator. Since 2010, she has been the State Public Affairs Specialist where she oversees Indiana's internal and external communications, as well as legislative and stakeholder engagement, outreach programs to special audiences and media relations.

In 2011, Fletcher was asked to serve on Indiana's Soil Health Team to help promote the state's number one priority. At the same time, she was invited to serve on a team with the nation's top soil scientists, agronomists, communicators, and other specialists in NRCS to bring about a renewed recognition of soil as a living and life-giving natural resource that must be managed responsibly. She worked with the national soil health communications team to develop and implement

a communications strategy, "Unlock the Secrets of the Soil." This has been the most successful campaign in NRCS history, and the movement continues to ripple out across the country. The campaign won the most prestigious award in the public relations world, the 2017 Public Relations Society of America's Silver Anvil Award, and Fletcher played a vital role in that success. In 2014 she was recognized with the USDA Legacy of Conservation Award.



*Fletcher receives her award*

Fletcher has also played an important role in Conservation Cropping System Initiative, which is Indiana's soil health program. As part of these teams she has written/coauthored over 300 articles, publications and social media posts about the benefits of soil health, many featuring Hoosier farmers.

Most recently, Fletcher was appointed to the national communications team for the National Conservation Planning Partnership to help reinvigorate conservation planning throughout the country by training employees, developing tools and promoting the benefits of conservation planning. In 2016, she was detailed to serve as the agency's communications lead for this group to develop and carryout an internal communications strategy for the partners.

Fletcher's unprecedented collaboration of partners and communications efforts has made Indiana the national leader in soil health and conservation planning and has successfully informed and educated thousands of farmers, conservationists, and agri-business staff over the past few years. Fletcher has worked tirelessly educating, informing, and promoting the cause of conservation throughout her career.

## *Partnership Websites*

IN Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, Bi-Weekly Updates: [www.iaswcd.org/whatsnew/index.html](http://www.iaswcd.org/whatsnew/index.html)

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)



# Indiana NRCS Employees Work at Indiana State Fair



**Indiana State Conservationist Jerry Raynor checks out the new soil health tunnel.**



**Lieutenant Governor Crouch places her watershed on the Indiana Watersheds Puzzle**



**Geneva Tyler (ISDA) and Lisa Bolton enjoy a day at the fair**



**Fred Glover helps visitors with watershed trivia.**



**Victor Shelton and Jerry Perkins (Earth Team Volunteer) take a much needed break**



**Robert Zupancic (left) and Earth Team Volunteer, Harold Thompson (right) educate youth about soil health practices during PWQ demonstrations**



**Scott Crist congratulates a young visitor on a correct trivia answer**



# Personnel Updates

## SELECTIONS FROM VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sherman Liechty, Area Conservationist at the Fort Wayne Area Office, effective 7/8/18  
 Denise Held, Area Civil Engineer at the North Vernon Area Office, effective 9/2/18  
 Justin Mooney, District Conservationist at the Boonville Field Office, effective 8/6/18  
 Ben Lambeck, Area Resource Conservationist at the Lafayette Area Office, effective 8/6/18  
 Julie Saalfrank, Administrative Assistant at the Fort Wayne Area Office effective 8/19/18  
 Richard Nielson, State Soil Scientist at the State Office, effective 9/2/18  
 Tyler Staggs, Soil Conservationist at the Princeton CDT, effective 9/16/18  
 Michael Brenan, Soil Conservationist at the Rensselaer CDT, effective 9/16/18  
 Stephanie Mitchell, Soil Conservationist at the Princeton CDT, effective 9/30/18

## REASSIGNMENTS

Robert Lawson, reassigned to ASTC Management and Strategy, Madison, WI, effective 7/22/18  
 Rick Duff, reassigned to District Conservationist, at the Peru Field Office, effective 7/22/18  
 Joshlyn Held, Pathways conversion at the Princeton CDT, effective 8/19/18  
 Brittany Wolford, Pathways conversion at the Danville Field Office, effective 8/19/18  
 Michael Birchler, transfer to NRCS New Hampshire, effective 9/30/18



## Annual Retiree Meeting

Mark your calendars for the Annual Indiana Retiree's Meeting to be held October 2 at 11:30A.M. at the NRCS state office.

**Watch for more information and share this date with retirees you know.**

## Mark Your Calenders

### SEPTEMBER

- 3: Holiday: Offices Closed
- 4: ICP Leaders Meeting
- 5: Beginner Facilitation Training  
SAC/FAC Meeting
- 6: Intermediate/WLC Facilitation Training  
Purdue/NRCS Forestry Workshop (NW)
- 11: Diversity Day
- 12: RMS Meeting  
Southeast Area Meeting
- 18: Area Conservationist Meeting
- 19: Leadership Team Meeting
- 24: CCSI Advanced Cover Crop Meeting (NE)
- 25: Northwest Area Meeting  
CCSI Advanced Cover Crop Meeting (NW)

- 26: Southwest Area Meeting
- 27: Purdue/NRCS Forestry Workshop (NE)  
IFEC Meeting

### OCTOBER

- 3: SAC/FAC Meeting
- 10: Southeast Area Meeting
- 24-27: National FFA Convention
- 30: EQIP FY19 Rollout Session (SE)

### NOVEMBER

- 7: Conservation Desktop - Hands on Training (NE)  
SAC/FAC Meeting
- 14: Conservation Desktop - Hands on Training (NW)