



Hoosier Headlines

Issue 88

February 2022

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Heart to Heart with RAYNOR

One of USDA-NRCS' core values is respecting the diversity of all people and communities we engage. This includes appreciating the perspectives, ideas, cultures and experiences our employees embody and bring to the workplace. In February, we took the time to celebrate Black History Month. It was a time to reflect and celebrate the remarkable achievements of Black men and women and their contributions to our great nation and agency, but also a time to reflect on the trials and tribulations that African Americans suffered and continue to face today. As we move into March, we continue the celebration by observing National Women's History Month to commemorate and encourage the study, observance and celebration of the vital role of women in American history. At Indiana NRCS, we know that the work of women in our field reaches far beyond one month out of the year and should be celebrated every day. We honor you for your action, your service, your persistence and your fearlessness. I want to take a moment to thank all of our Special Emphasis Program Managers. They have done an exceptional job ensuring that these months are celebrated to the fullest extent.



*Jerry Raynor,
Indiana State Conservationist*

Our farmers are dedicated to feeding a growing world population. This dedication is equaled only by their commitment to protecting the land that makes it possible. Farmers across the country live by this commitment every day. As stewards of a healthy planet, they care for the soil, their animals and the crops that provide us food, fuel and clothes. March 22 is National Ag Day, a time when producers, agricultural associations, corporations, universities, government agencies and countless others across America gather to recognize and celebrate the abundance provided by American agriculture. Join us in celebrating Ag Day by telling our conservation stories and helping spread NRCS' mission of "helping people help the land."

Is it winter? Is it spring? Is it fall? You wouldn't know by the unpredictable weather we have in Indiana, but springtime is just around the corner! Get geared up to hit the fields and work with our producers and landowners in getting conservation on the ground! Let's continue to make FY22 one of Indiana NRCS' best!



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Joseph Bridges, District Conservationist

As the one of the newest NRCS employees, please help us get to know you better.

I grew up in Columbia, Mississippi just 30 minutes west of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. I attended Alcorn State University where I earned a bachelor of science degree in Agriculture Economics and a masters of science degree in Agronomy.

How long have you worked for NRCS?

I started as a Pathways Program student trainee in 2015 in Onalaska, Wisconsin while I was an undergraduate. I spent the summer of 2016 in Prentiss, Mississippi and from 2017 to 2020, I was the Soil Conservationist in Natchez, Mississippi. From 2020 to 2021 I was located in Eupora, Mississippi as a soil conservationist and I now serve as a district conservationist for Anderson and Marion counties in Indiana. Through all my experience, I've been with the agency for roughly seven years.

How did you become interested in conservation?

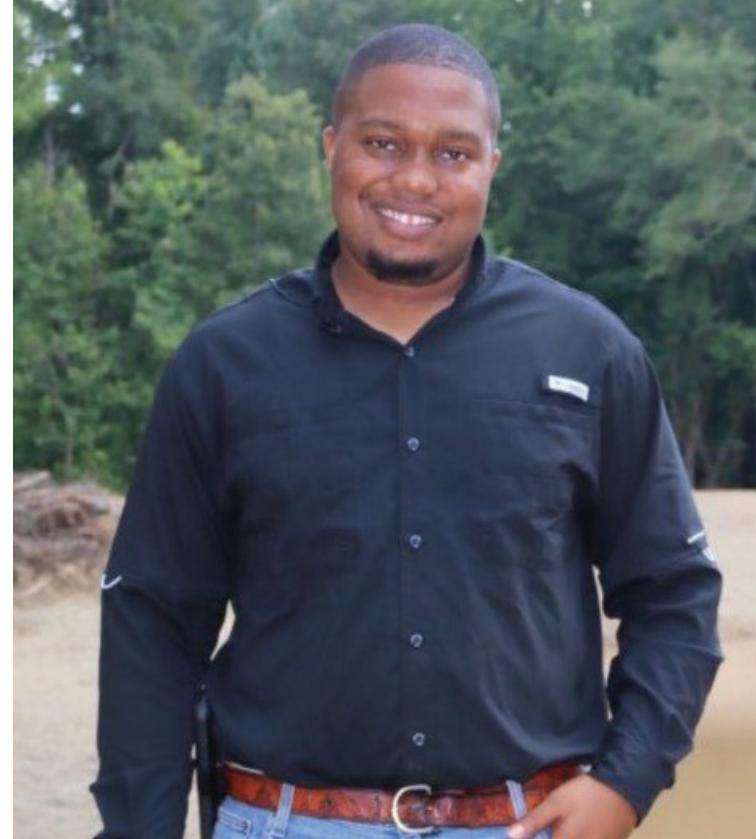
While I was attending Alcorn State University, a few of my friends were already working for the agency. They gave me a firsthand look at how NRCS "Helped People Help The Land." They also helped me apply for my first internship. Once I started, I have enjoyed every year.

What do you enjoy most working for NRCS and with Indiana landowners?

I enjoy being able to be a catalyst for conservation and working with the landowners. They have a lot of valuable information from the years they put in working on their operations.

What are you looking forward to most in your position?

I look forward to working with our landowners and accomplishing some outreach efforts to get more people involved in conservation.



Joseph Bridges, District Conservationist

Do you have any professional or personal goals for 2022?

Yes, take some leadership training, do some outreach, and become a better DC every day.

Now for the fun stuff...

Favorite movie or TV show?

The Fast and the Furious

Favorite food?

NY Strip Steak.

Favorite hobby?

Traveling with my wife.

Favorite animal?

A lion.

COX WINS INDIANA LICA AWARD

For over 80 years, the Land Improvement Contractors Association (LICA) has paved the way for growth and expansion. LICA is made up of contractors from coast to coast, providing a wide range of services and work in urban and rural areas, on farms and in neighborhoods. They work with dedication and commitment to the professional conservation of soil and water. At this year's Indiana LICA Convention, Mike Cox, Indiana NRCS State Engineer, was presented with the Affiliate of the Year award. The Affiliate of the Year isn't an award that is selected every year, but when LICA feels an affiliate has gone above and beyond for the organization. Over the years of his involvement with the Indiana LICA, Mike has served as their technical advisor attending board meetings, contributing to newsletter articles and the planning of field days. He has willingly presented sessions at both area meetings and conventions and has been a great asset to Indiana LICA.



Mike Cox, right, is presented with the INLICA Affiliate of the Year award.

KUDOS TO...

Patrick Glassman (Rensselaer CDT Engineer) for scheduling and facilitating several good practice design trainings for the Rensselaer and Lebanon Conservation Delivery Teams. He's doing a good job explaining the details to our newer staff! - **Submitted by Jeff Cannaday (Area Engineer)**

Jennifer Chen (Resource Conservationist) for her efforts in putting together statewide training for CD/CART, via TEAMS. She did an outstanding job! - **Submitted by Dan Lucynski (Resource Management Specialist)** and **MaryJo Woodruff (Greensburg CDT Leader)**

Eamonn Ertel (Soil Conservationist) for creating the printable PDF User Guide for Indiana NRCS planners and clientele. - **Submitted by Mike Hughes (Acting Financial Program Specialist)**

All staff, especially area program specialists and northwest staff, for stepping up and helping me out while I was on leave with my daughter. I appreciate all that you did so that I did not have to worry about work and could concentrate on her recovery. She is making a full and successful recovery from her concussion and

multiple fractures from her sledding accident. Thank you all. - **Submitted by Susannah Hinds (NW Grazingland Specialist)**

Don Donovan (District Conservationist), Rick Duff (District Conservationist), Genny Helt (Resource Management Specialist), Jeremy Palmer (District Conservationist), Tim Schwipps (District Conservationist), Kerry Smith (District Conservationist), Derek Thompson (District Conservationist), Clint Harrison (District Conservationist) and Jake Walters (District Conservationist) for helping to test and troubleshoot the program payment estimators and providing feedback and suggestions for improvement. - **Submitted by Adam Heichelbech (ASTC-Programs)**

Clark and Floyd County SWCD Boards, Staff and other local Partners of the 2022 Friends of NACD District Grant. In cooperation with the Clarksville Parks and Recreation and the Floyd County Native Habitat Restoration Team, the SWCD will establish an educational outreach program to increase invasive species awareness within Clark and Floyd counties and promote the benefits of native species. - **Submitted by Darrell Nicholson (Southeast Area Conservationist)**

A HOOSIER TALE OF TRIUMPH OVER TRIBULATION

Submitted by Keith Williams, Black Special Emphasis Program Manager

When you think about the words in the phrase Black History Month one might think that we are talking about ancient history or something that occurred generations ago, but it is completely different when we discuss black history. Yes, it is a celebration of accomplishments that have happened in history, but its primary purpose is to highlight the fact that despite great progress, there is still work to do. With this in mind, I wanted to share a story with you about a man who recently retired in 2019, and he began his career in Indiana.

Before Leonard Jordan retired from NRCS, he was able to occupy the highest office in our agency. He served as our NRCS Chief (Acting) for over two years before handing over the reigns to NRCS' 16th Chief, Matt Lohr. Despite all of his accomplishments in his career, Jordan was always willing to mentor anyone who asked for his counsel. He was even willing to take a phone call from me in retirement for the purpose of this article. Even though he achieved more than he ever expected, he continued to remain humble and appreciative of all the opportunities he received throughout his long 40 year career, especially his beginnings in Indiana.

After graduating from Tennessee State University, his first jobs in Indiana included technician positions for Vanderburgh and Posey Counties. He eventually accepted his first district conservationist (DC) position in southeast Indiana. He was the first black employee to hold a DC position in that county. When he arrived, he was welcomed by his area conservationist (AC) who assisted him in accommodations, including helping him find a home. This AC helped him clean and paint this home to make it ready and they became friends.

Unfortunately, not everyone was so welcoming and Jordan was not greeted with open arms by all in his new community. There were some that chose to ignore or not do business with him, yet others threatened him and even committed vandalism to his car. Finally, the Indiana state and local police departments were involved, and things settled down for a while. Yet though all of that, he never let these incidents distract him from his commitment to his plan of having a long career in conservation. He would not be triggered by negativity and instead focused on changing hearts and winning over the very



people who did not want to see him succeed. He did exactly that. One of the people who gave him the hardest time in the beginning ended up becoming a lifelong friend, and they still talk to this day. By the time Jordan left that county for a promotion many considered him a local celebrity.

When I asked Jordan what advice he would give young employees as they begin their career in conservation, he offered the following:

- Have a good work ethic
- Always be a learner
- Find a mentor or mentors
- Become a sponge and absorb everything you can
- Overcome fear and obstacles

As we celebrate Black History Month let us remember the people in our past, but also keep in mind our current and future employees. If we all work together, we can ensure that no other employees will have to overcome some of the obstacles that Jordan and others had to face just to do their jobs. Black History Month is an annual celebration for all employees to remember the importance of supporting each other, so that we all can continue to do the great work in conservation for generations to come.

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

IN Dept. of Natural Resources: 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

DYNAMIC SOIL PROPERTIES SAMPLING PROJECT

Submitted by Dena Anderson, SE Area Soil Scientist

In early November, a team of multi-disciplined agencies and states came together to extensively sample a multitude of soil pits in order to evaluate dynamic soil properties. In the shadow of the terminus of the Wisconsin Glacial Advance, the team sampled the older Illinoian-aged, poorly-drained Cobbsfork and somewhat poorly-drained Avonburg soils under various management systems. The management systems ranged from a nearly undisturbed site in a woodlot to traditional tillage to a long term soil health system. These evaluations were meant to provide a baseline data set to measure the benefits of soil health building and regeneration through no-till and cover crop usage over a long term.

The Cobbsfork (Fine-silty, mixed, active, mesic Fragic Glossaqualfs) and Avonburg (Fine-silty, mixed, active, mesic Aeric Fragic Glossaqualfs) soils are formed in windblown silty material known as loess and the underlying glacial materials. These soils were formed under forested conditions and have naturally low organic matter contents. This low organic matter content coupled with the loess, which has very low strength in wetter conditions, sets the stage for easy degradation of the soil structure through tillage.

The sites are located in Decatur County, Indiana which is between Indianapolis and Cincinnati. Roger Wenning, a farmer and longtime soil health advocate offered the sampling sites for this project. Wenning is extremely enthusiastic about building soil health on his land and has an ongoing quest for knowledge in this arena.

The first sites sampled were on a farm recently acquired by Wenning. These

soils had been farmed using traditional tillage in the past. The soils' structure had been degraded over time creating compaction and subsequent drainage issues in the fields. Wenning's hope is that through the incorporation of soil health practices he can regenerate these fields to better productivity.

Adjacent to these sites, a woodlot was sampled to provide an example of what the soil properties would have been prior to clearing and cultivation. These sites will provide the historical aspect of the sites in which to weigh the amount of degradation and subsequent rebuilding of the soil's physical and chemical properties.

The third set of sites were in a field using a long term (20+ years) soil health management system. These soils were managed using continuous no/never till, cover crops, planting green and drainage management. These sites will hopefully show some progression on the road to regaining a healthy soil.

Finally, the fourth set was a traditional tillage type management. This site was owned by a neighbor of Wenning's who was gracious enough to allow the team to sample his fields. As the science behind how and why we use reduced tillage systems, and now more aggressive soil health practices come to the forefront, these types of traditional sites are becoming more difficult to find.

The team sampled a wide variety of physical soils properties in December. One main soils pit was used to collect samples for soil texture/particle size evaluation, (amount of sand, silt, and clay), bulk density, cation exchange capacity (CEC), pH, organic material and mineralogy. A detailed soil description was made identifying the various layers or horizons in the soil profile, depths to

water tables, depth to limiting layers and various parent materials were described. Intensive evaluation of water infiltration rates was done using a constant head permeameter (aka Amoozometer.) This tool measures the rate at which water infiltrates at a known depth under a constant amount of "head" pressure. This main pit was described to a depth of approximately 2 meters. Two smaller "satellite" pits were dug to evaluate textures, bulk density, and organic matter content. Infiltration tests were done on these sites utilizing the compliant cavity method.

Sites near the pits were also evaluated utilizing the current national soil health worksheet. Aggregate stability and earthworm counts were among those properties evaluated.

The soil samples were sent for testing to the NRCS Kellogg National Soils Laboratory in Lincoln, NE. This is an ongoing project and updates will be released in future Hoosier Headline newsletters – be on the lookout!



The team sampling an Avonburg pit in long term soil health practice field

PERSONNEL UPDATES

SELECTIONS FROM VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Katelyn Fagan, State Program Specialist, Indianapolis, effective 3-13-22
 Josean Torres, District Conservationist, Boonville, effective 3-27-22.
 Alejandro Carrero Muniz, District Conservationist, LaPorte, effective 3-27-22.
 Cassidy Hoback, Pathway Intern, Williamsport, effective 6-5-22.
 Brooklynn Williams, Pathway Intern, Brazil, effective 5-8-22.
 Kristopher Green, District Conservationist, Portland, effective 3-13-22.
 Kellyam Valle-Cancel, District Conservationist, Evansville, effective 3-27-22.
 Emily Kelly, District Conservationist, Petersburg, effective 2-27-22.

RETIREMENTS

None

PATHWAY CONVERSIONS

Errick Hayes, Pathway Conversion to Soil Conservationist, Albion CDT, effective 2-13-22.
 Kayla Mitchell, Pathway Conversion to Natural Resource Mgmt Specialist, Lebanon CDT, effective 1-30-22.

OTHER STAFFING

Shelby Ruffner, Indianapolis, Resignation, effective 2-5-22.

RETIREE ROUNDUP

Submitted by Jane Hardisty, Former Indiana NRCS STC

It's been a while since my last update to you. As many of you know, my dad passed away on Veterans Day and then the Holidays, so I am now trying to catch up. Thank you for all the prayers and cards. It really did mean a lot to me. Here are some updates since my last message in September:

REMINDERS:

The ICP Golf Outing is May 20 at the Albany Golf Club in Albany, IN. There will be a shotgun start at 9:00 AM. Cost is \$37.00 and includes green fees, cart, one sleeve of Bridgestone golf balls and a bucket of range balls. There is a \$10 non-refundable entry fee due by May 6th. Teams and play are a 4-Person Best Ball Scramble! For more information, please contact Andrew Pursifull at andrew.pursifull@usda.gov or (260) 249-762.

The SWCS International annual meeting will be in person in Denver, Colorado from July 31-August 3, 2022. You can check out the agenda at www.swcs.org/22AC

IN MEMORY OF:

Joe Hayes: Joe was 92 when he passed. It is believed that Joe's last position with NRCS was RC&D Coordinator for Hoosier Heartland.

Charles McKee: Charles passed away on November 27 at the age of 95. Charles was the director of IDNR Soil Conservation.

Chief Paul Johnson: Chief Johnson was SCS Chief from 1994-1997. He passed away in November 2021.

Carrie Henry, daughter of Curt Heaton: Carrie passed away on January 24 at the age of 54. She had been a first grade teacher for 32 years at Kettering City Schools.

Marvin Thompson: Martin passed on February 5 at the age of 90. He was a retired district conservationist in Daviess County and one of the first and best promoters of no-till in the area.