



Op-Ed: Farmers and Private Landowners Help Wetlands Thrive in Indiana

By Jerry Raynor, Indiana NRCS State Conservationist

Spring is a great time to appreciate the wonders of wetlands. Wetlands protect plants and provide habitat for wildlife, including endangered or threatened species. They filter water, reduce soil loss, sequester carbon from the atmosphere, reduce flooding and recharge groundwater. And they provide recreational opportunities such as hunting and fishing.

May is American Wetlands Month, a time to celebrate one of nature's most productive ecosystems and the wonderful ways wetlands enrich the environment and our lives.

Indiana was once thriving with wetlands, encompassing almost 25 percent of the landscape, but with the increase in agriculture, today we have a mere four percent of land still classified as a wetland. However, landowners are doing their part to restore Indiana's wetlands.

Farmers, forestland owners and private landowners in Indiana have been working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to create, restore and enhance wetlands for decades. They have incorporated wetlands into their operations to provide benefits to both the environment and their land through NRCS' Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE). This voluntary program offers opportunities for landowners to put marginal cropland and other eligible land into permanent and 30-year easements. Land protected by these wetland easements provides countless public benefits. In Indiana, over 2,600 acres were enrolled in ACEP in the last year alone. Once restored, these acres will join almost 80,000 acres of protected easements within the state since 1994.

NRCS is also using creative methods to help farmers and private forest landowners meet their conservation goals through its Wetland Mitigation Bank Program. Wetland mitigation banking helps restore, create or enhance wetlands to compensate for unavoidable impacts on wetlands at other locations. Working with states, local governments, and American Indian tribes, NRCS helps develop wetland mitigation banks which offers opportunities for landowners to counterbalance the consequence of lost wetlands.

As we celebrate the month, our producers, partners, educators and others deserve thanks for helping to protect wetlands.

If you are a farmer or private landowner interested in learning more about wetlands, please contact your [local USDA Service Center](#). USDA Service Centers are open for business by phone appointment only and field work will continue with appropriate social distancing. While our program delivery staff will continue to come into the office, they will be working with our producers by phone, and using online tools whenever possible.

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