Conservation in the Neighborhood

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Welcome John Hazlett

Marion SWCD's New District Manager

It's been a truly great honor to accept the District Manager position at the Marion County SWCD, a position that has been unoccupied since 2011 with the passing of Ron Lauster, a professional mentor and friend. I was lucky enough to work with Ron throughout my previous years as an employee of the City of Indianapolis Department of Public Works and truly saw the impact of his legacy in the years following his passing. Ron left big shoes to fill and I'm excited about this next chapter in my career. Luckily I have been able to serve on the board of this dynamic organization for the last several years and come to this position with a great deal of background on the District's current programs and operations.

My first two months on the job have included spending time in the field with several of my employees to better understand our day to day workload, while also putting fresh eyes to the Plan of Work update that will guide our programs and activities over the next few years. Highlights of my first few months have included visits to Indy Urban Acres, the Butler CUE Farm and other small urban agricultural operations as well as variety of construction sites. This week, a few of my board members, my SWCD staff and NRCS representatives traveled to the Cincinnati, OH region for meetings with the Hamilton County SWCD in Ohio and Kenton County SWCD in Kentucky. This day long information exchange ended with a trip to Morning View Heritage Area on the Licking River in Kentucky and insightful conversations with employees and board members that will inform the Plan of Work.

I look forward to serving the residents of Marion County in this new (but old) position as we work to get conservation on the ground!

Hamilton Co. Ohio SWCD shares ideas & urban conservation success stories with our staff

Our staff & Supervisors tours Kenton Co. Kentucky SWCD's Morning View Heritage Area

Welcome to the Board!

Scott Minor new SWCD Supervisor

Scott Minor appointed as new SWCD Supervisor

Scott is a landscape architect and environmental planner for the White River Alliance, a multi-stakeholder nonprofit working to improve and protect the waters of the Upper White River Watershed. After seven years with a small design firm working on trails and park design, community redevelopment planning, and large scale infrastructure projects, Scott transitioned from a board seat to a permanent position with the Alliance in order to work on regional-level environmental issues. Scott is a LEED-accredited and SEED Public Interest Design Professional with certifications in wetland delineation and environmental habitat stewardship and a strong interest in permaculture systems. His work today includes outreach planning for the Office of Land Stewardship, development of educational tools and workshops for the Alliance and Clear Choices Clean Water, and helping advance efforts to develop a statewide, regional planning framework to protect Indiana's water assets.

Drainage Problems – who to call & who's responsible

The first step to finding help with your drainage problem is to call the Mayor's Action Center at 317-327-4622

By Julie Farr, *Resource Conservationist*

Drainage and flooding problems are fairly common in Marion County. Our office receives numerous calls throughout the year from distraught homeowners with standing water in their yards, failing septic systems and sump pumps that run continuously. The primary reason for these problems is the nature of many of our soil types in our county. This, compounded by drainageways clogged with sediment and debris as well as inadequate surface drainage creates health and safety problems for many of our residents.

There is often confusion among residents regarding who is responsible for standing water, drainage swales and other drainage problems. The city's ordinance requires that landowners maintain drainage on their own properties. This means if you have a drainage swale in your backyard, you should be keeping it clear of debris and anything else that would impede the water from flowing on through to the next neighbor.

Sometimes this entails working with adjoining neighbors to have a swale re-graded if it has silted in, grown up in weeds and brush or cleaning off a storm drain inlet which has been covered up with leaves, limbs or trash on private land or on common ground held by your HOA.

If the drainage problem is caused by a storm drain that is not functioning properly call the Mayor's Action Center (MAC) at 317-327-4622. They will send out an inspector to see where the problem is & who is responsible. The city will make sure the drains are maintained, though landowners are responsible for keeping the inlets clean. If they find that homeowners are responsible they may refer you to our office for technical assistance to help find a solution to your problem. In addition, contact MAC if the problem involves flooding streets, severe road degradation or other health and safety issues. The city maintains information from MAC referrals to set priorities for future infrastructure projects. Information on drainage around your home can also be found on our website.

Soil Health Program's Roller Crimper Tested at Indy Urban Acres

By Eliana Blaine

One of the challenges of small-scale organic farming is having tools that can help the farmer easily accomplish soil health practices. Cover cropping is strongly encouraged by our soil health team, yet some cover crops take more time and effort to manage. Cereal rye is a grass cover crop that is seeded in the fall, and grows tall and thick in the spring. Organically killing the cover crop on your farm or garden before planting vegetables requires the right tools and right timing. The District recently purchased a roller crimper to help accomplish this task.

Cereal rye is best terminated in the spring when it is tallest and flowering. To do this organically, the primary methods are to cut it or crimp it. Cutting it may result in some re-growth of the rye grass. Pictured below, the crimper was custom built for small farm uses. It is 500 pounds when fully weighted – which provides enough PSI (pounds per square inch) to successfully kill the rye grass.

The crimper was used at Indy Urban Acres as a trial and to demonstrate the crimper's uses. The staff crimped 100' x 30" raised bed crop rows. The crimper is built with an attachment for a 3-point hitch for a BCS or small tractor. However, the Indy Urban Acres staff chose to pull the machine by hand, using straps and a metal bar. Safety precautions should be taken to ensure people are far enough away from the roller crimper. The rye was crimped on May 24th, and as of now has not shown regrowth. Some rye was cut by scythe on May 12th and again on May 24th, and does show some re-growth.

Two crops were trial planted into the crimped rye – green beans (by seed) and summer squash (by transplant). The beans and squash were both planted a few days after the rye was crimped. It is generally recommended to wait 10-20 days after crimping, cutting, or tilling in rye grass before planting due to allelopathy. Rye releases a chemical compound that can inhibit other plant's growth. It affects small seeds more than large, and affects transplants even less. The Indy Urban Acres team wanted to see what would happen without waiting for that time window. Thus far, bean seed germination and squash growth shows minimal effect.

Beans grow well in a nutrient and nitrogen limited environment. The rye grass can "tie up" or use up nitrogen while breaking down, because it has a high C:N (Carbon to Nitrogen) ratio, thus providing a good environment for the bean seeds. Seeds were planted by making a furrow in the crimped rye with pointed hoes – hand tools. This proved challenging, but do-able on the small scale.

Squash was transplanted in 1 row down the center of the bed with crimped rye. Holes were dug by hand, with a small amount of vermicompost added to each transplant hole. It was easy to make a nice "part" in the rye down the center of the row – like parting hair.

The roller crimper is available for use via the District for other farms and growers in Marion and surrounding counties. Contact Kevin Allison at 317-786-1776 for information.

Support the Marion County SWCD by becoming an Affiliate Member. For information check our website: www.marionswcd.org or email julie-farr@iaswcd.org

Contact Urban Health Specialist Kevin Allison for more information on our soil health program

Big or Small

Healthy Soil Helps Us All

By Harold Thompson

Whether you farm 10,000 acres or a 10 x 10 garden plot in your backyard, you can improve your soil's health. Soil health is the capacity of a soil to function as a vital, living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans.

There are four basic principles that improve the health of the soil. These principles will work on any soil, most anywhere and when used together as a system, will build organic matter & biodiversity in the soil.

1) Keep your soil covered
2) Reduce soil disturbance
3) Keep living roots growing as long as possible
4) Plant a diversity of plants

Large farmers, special crop producers and backyard gardeners in and around Marion County have had success in starting their soil health journey by adopting these principles. For many decades, conservation-minded farmers have used a variety of methods to reduce soil erosion by keeping their soil covered at all time, such as leaving crop residue over the winter, no-tilling or strip tilling, and planting cover crops. Cover crops are grasses, legumes and other species that are planted either after harvest or in the spring for the purpose of providing ground cover and keeping a living root growing as long as possible.

Over the past 10 years, there has been a resurgence among large scale farmers in planting cover crops as part of their farming operation because of their many valuable characteristics in addition to erosion control. Cover crop roots grow deep creating pockets in the soil where air and water can flow. They hold soil in place through heavy fall and spring rains, add organic matter to feed the soil's biodiversity and aid suppressing weeds and fixing nitrogen. For the same reasons, small farmers have discovered that adding cover crops works well in their operations.

Most vegetable crops will not leave an adequate amount of residue over the winter to provide the soil cover needed and often additional mulch such as alfalfa, straw, wood chips, etc. will help supplement the ground cover to control erosion and suppress weed growth. Reducing soil disturbance in this type of crop production can be challenging and requires patience and planning. Changes may be needed in

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machinery and hand tools, not to mention thought processes.

Traditionally, our fathers and their fathers plowed or rototilled to prepare seedbeds in the spring and control weeds throughout the growing season. Many large scale farmers reduce soil disturbance by strip tilling or no-tilling, where seed is drilled into the covered soil rather than opening a wide furrow. Small farmers can use similar procedures, such as using a pointed hoe to open a narrow strip in the soil. For weed suppression, try using barriers such as plastic, cardboard, newsprint in conjunction with your mulch. These barriers will also keep the soil cool and help retain moisture.

Regardless of the size of your farm (or garden), plant diversity is important in improving the health of the soil. Bio diversity breaks up disease cycles and controls pests naturally. Large-scale farmers accomplish this by alternating their plantings of corn and soybeans. Similarly, vegetable growers can rotate varieties of vegetables in different areas of the field each year.

There is much to learn about soil health and how these four principles are used together as part of a soil health management system to sustain and improve your land. Visit the soil health initiative webpage found on the Marion County SWCD website http://marionswcd.org/ for more detailed technical information about these principles or contact us at 317-786-1776.

NRCS Assists with Soil Investigation for Indy Urban Acres

On May 31st, a group of soil specialists visited Indy Urban Acres to extract soil cores. This valuable service was done by Michael Wigginton NRCS Resource Soil Scientist, Brittany Wolford, NRCS Soil Scientist, and Harold Thompson, Hoosier Heartland RC&D. Soil health specialist Kevin Allison and Outreach Coordinator Elli Blaine were interested in knowing more about the soils at Indy Urban Acres, a site that has been under crop production since 2011.

The soil cores - also known as monoliths – that are taken by the NRCS bore 42 inches deep in the ground, and provide a profile of all of the soil horizons that are in that section. They give valuable visual information about how well or poorly drained the soil is, how deep the topsoil layer is, and an idea of organic matter content.

The soil monoliths will be used to create a display that will be used for educational purposes.

Temporary Seeding for Erosion Control

For help with controlling erosion on construction sites contact Cheyenne Hoffa at 317-786-1776

STOP That Dirt! Erosion Watch Campaign

Sediment is the #1 water pollutant by volume in the United States. Sediment consists of the loose sand, clay, silt and other soil particles that are carried from a site by runoff water that eventually settles at the bottom of streams, rivers, lakes and ponds. Sediment comes from soil erosion. Water runoff, stormwater from rain or melting snow flows from rooftops, over paved streets, sidewalks, parking lots, across bare soil, through lawns and fields. As it flows, the runoff collects and transports soil as sediment, pet waste, salt, pesticides, fertilizer, oil and grease, litter and other potentially toxic pollutants. This water drains directly into storm drains or nearby drainageways into creeks, streams and rivers most often without receiving any treatment at a sewage plant. Sediment is the most common pollutant in our waterways. While natural soil erosion produces about 30% of waterway sedimentation, accelerated erosion from human modifications of the land accounts for the remaining 70%. The most concentrated sediment releases come from construction activities which can often exceed 100 times that from agricultural use of the land.

One of the easiest and most effective means of controlling erosion on construction sites is the use of temporary seeding. Plants are soil protectors, sheltering the soil from raindrops with their leaves and holding soil in place with their roots. Temporary seeding is used in areas which are not going to be disturbed for several weeks or months. It can be used for buffers around the edges of the site, along drainageways and other sensitive areas. It also can be used to protect slopes and individual building lots. It has been shown that lots which are seeded are much more appealing to buyers than those which are left bare and will therefore sell quicker.

Contractors have the choice of many plants for temporary seeding. The most popular include rye grass, winter wheat and oats. The seedbed should be prepared, mulched and kept moist until germination. If planting during dry seasons additional watering (1" per week) may be needed to keep it growing & healthy.

Invasive Highlight: Creeping Charlie

Creeping Charlie, a common invasive plant in Indiana

Photo from Funduhmental.com

Creeping Charlie, also known as ground ivy and creeping jenny, is a low-growing perennial weed that thrives in moist, shady areas of the lawn and garden, but will invade sunny areas. The four-sided stems grow to lengths of 15-30 inches with roots forming at the nodes, where leaves join the stem. Its leaves resemble those of the common geranium, round and scalloped, but are much smaller in size. In the early spring an abundance of tiny, lavender to blue flowers appear on 2 or 3-inch spikes. It has a minty smell when mowed. You may control creeping charlie chemically by applying a herbicide containing 2,4-D and MCPP as its active ingredients. The herbicide will damage or possibly kill any woody or broadleafed vegetation that comes in contact with the spray, so it must be used with caution. Always follow label directions. Fall spraying is best.

For more information on invasive species check out our website pages: http://marionswcd.org/invasive-species/

Photo from Hort.uwex.edu

USDA Resumes Continuous Conservation Reserve

One-Year Extension Available to Holders of Many Expiring Contracts through Continuous Signup

As part of a 33-year effort to protect sensitive lands and improve water quality and wildlife habitat on private lands, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will resume accepting applications for the voluntary Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Eligible farmers, ranchers, and private landowners can sign up at their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office between June 4 and Aug. 17, 2018.

FSA stopped accepting applications last fall for the CRP continuous signup (excluding applications for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and CRP grasslands). This pause allowed USDA to review available acres and avoid exceeding the 24 million-acre CRP cap set by the 2014 Farm Bill. New limited practice availability and short sign up period helps ensure that landowners with the most sensitive acreage will enroll in the program and avoid unintended competition with new and beginning farmers seeking leases. CRP enrollment currently is about 22.7 million acres.

2018 Signup for CRP

For this year's signup, limited priority practices are available for continuous enrollment. They include grassed waterways, filter strips, riparian buffers, wetland restoration and others. View a full list of practices.

FSA will use updated soil rental rates to make annual rental payments, reflecting current values. It will not offer incentive payments as part of the new signup.

USDA will not open a general signup this year, however, a one-year extension will be offered to existing CRP participants with expiring CRP contracts of 14 years or less. Producers eligible for an extension will receive a letter with more information.

CRP Grasslands

Additionally, FSA established new ranking criteria for CRP Grasslands. To guarantee all CRP grasslands offers are treated equally, applicants who previously applied will be asked to reapply using the new ranking criteria. Producers with pending applications will receive a letter providing the options.

About CRP

In return for enrolling land in CRP, USDA, through FSA on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), provides participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. Landowners enter into contracts that last between 10 and 15 years. CRP pays producers who remove sensitive lands from production and plant certain grasses, shrubs and trees that improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and increase wildlife habitat.

The new changes to CRP do not impact the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, a related program offered by CCC & state partners.

More information on CRP can be found at www.fsa.usda.gov/crp.

To sign up for CRP contact the Marion/Johnson FSA office at 317-736-6822 For technical assistance contact District Conservationist Jerod Chew.

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The Mission of the Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District is to assist Marion County land users in conserving soil, water, and related natural resources by providing technical, financial and educational services.

THANK YOU Supporting Affiliate Members!

Paul Wright Hayes and Ruth Rosser Hayes in honor of:

- **George Harley**
- **Glenn Lange**
- **Marilyn Hughes**
- **Eli Bloom Memorial**

George Haerle and Marion Haerle

Stephanie Schuck

Dennis Slaughter

RSVP: https://tinyurl.com/Inhabit-Indy

Follow us on our new Facebook page!

Inhabit is a feature length documentary detailing permaculture: a design method that offers an ecological lens for solving issues related to agriculture, economics, and governance. The film presents a vast array of projects, concepts, and people, and it translates the diversity of permaculture into something that can be understood by an equally diverse audience. For those familiar, it will be a call to action and a glimpse into what's possible – what kind of projects and solutions are already underway. For those unfamiliar, it will be an introduction to a new way of being and a new way of relating to the Earth. For everyone, it will be a reminder that humans are capable of being planetary healing forces.

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