

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Chairperson's



Report

By Brian Neilson



Happy New Year! With another year come and gone, the Soil & Water Conservation District continues to provide leadership for local and regional conservation initiatives. The District has partnered with numerous City, County, State and National resources to continue our unique balance of integrating urban and agricultural conservation practices for the enhancement of soil and water quality for Marion County residents. The District also continues our leadership role in urban agricultural soil health initiatives, providing technical assistance to those same partners.

As with all things, we continue to change: our new offices with the Department of Public Works within the City-County Building, ongoing grant programs and new staff addition. As much as we miss Alena Jones, we welcome Robert (Rob) Kendall to our staff, taking over Alena's previous inspection role. We look to Rob's Green Infrastructure/alternative storm experience as we move towards implementing our future watershed initiatives and pursue additional grant opportunities for Marion County citizens.

Julie Farr, Kevin Allison and District Manager John Hazlett continue to excel in their service of conservation to the county citizens. Julie continues to spearhead private property drainage issues and has taken the lead on the District's new logjam removal grant activities. And of course, keeping our newsletters and website active as part of our outreach and education programs. Kevin continues his regional and now national leadership role for urban agricultural soil health. Keep an eye out for Kevin's upcoming water quality tools. Rob has started his inspection role sprinting to keep the District's stellar role in place. Supported by John, he was able to meet all deadlines and commitments for all required site soil and erosion control inspections for 2023.

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Join Us! SWCD Annual Meeting & Bethany Community Garden's "Vegetable Garden Basics Class"

We are excited to be combining our SWCD annual meeting with Bethany Community Garden's first gardening class of the year with the Hoosier Gardener Jo Ellen Meyers Sharp. Her topic for the evening will be vegetable garden basics, which will cover a variety of topics for both the novice & experienced gardener.

Jo Ellen is a 25-year, award-winning veteran of print journalism and owner of Write for You! LLC, a freelance writing and editing business. You can find her blog at hoosiergardener.com. Jo Ellen is a past president of [GardenComm](https://gardencomm.org): GardenCommunicators International, a garden coach and has a four-season commercial and residential container planting business. For 20 years, she worked at a large, independent garden center in Indianapolis, including a stint as buyer of perennials, trees and shrubs. A popular speaker, she has 50 five-star reviews at greatgardenspeakers.org. Jo Ellen publishes the award-winning, free, monthly [Hoosier Gardener Newsletter](https://hoosiergardener.com), with more than 3,000 subscribers.

Our annual meeting will be held on Tuesday evening, February 20th at 6:00 p.m. Dinner will be provided by Yamallama Deli, compliments of the Marion County Farm Bureau. Register [HERE](#) today as space is filling up quickly, and join us at Bethany Lutheran Church, 4702 S. East Street.



NOTE: If registration is full, you will be added to a wait-list. Only registered attendees will be served the free meal, but non-registered attendees can attend the program that starts at 6:30.

THANK YOU 2023 AFFILIATE MEMBERS!!!

We appreciate those who have donated to support the work and programs of the SWCD.

- ◆ Marvin Brethauer
- ◆ Carol Hooker
- ◆ Judith Houser
- ◆ Theresa Martin
- ◆ Stephanie Schuck
- ◆ Kathleen Tierney

District Manager's Year in Review

John Hazlett

2023 was an incredibly busy year for our district and looking back at the highlights I'm struck by our role as a connector in local conservation. Our experienced staff provides expert advice on drainage, soil health and construction site sediment and erosion control but ultimately it's the relationships we form with residents and other conservation driven organizations that drives the work we do.

Personally I felt a major achievement for our organization this year was the approval in April of the Lower Fall Creek Watershed Management Plan update, an update of the original 2007 plan that provides a vision and action plan for improving the water quality of Lower Fall Creek. The plan update began in February 2020 and engaged a variety of stakeholders. Read more about the plan background, diverse funding sources and check out the plan update [here](#). More recently, I'm chairing the water efforts within the 2024 All Star Game Host Committee's Sustainability Subcommittee and our district has led two key events to get the city ready for the big game-a native planting along Pogues Run in partnership with Cummins and Reconnecting to Our Waterways in November as well as more recently a cleanup of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail's storm-water planters on Alabama Street in partnership with the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Cummins, Keep Indianapolis Beautiful and Keys2Work. Lastly, we were sad to see the departure of our Urban Conservationist Alena Jones and thank her for her nearly 3 years of service. We welcomed our new Urban Conservationist Rob Kendall this Fall and he is off and running, providing oversight of construction site erosion and sediment control for sites over an acre. Welcome to the team Rob!

Our role as a connector organization in 2023 was highlighted by our work with Millersville at Fall Creek Valley, Inc. who has done incredible work along Fall Creek on the east side of Indianapolis. Highlights of this strong partnership are provided below and we are also grateful to organizations like [Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust](#), [Friends of White River](#), [SICIM](#) and [ROW](#) for helping support these and other activities across the county:

- Experimenting with live staking and seeding with various forbs, sedges and grasses in a small area upstream of the 56th St bridge over Fall Creek with various Millersville residents-big shoutout to Matt Benson for all of his work in



Stream Steward Workshop participants help to plant native plant plugs.

this corridor!

- Adding native plant material to the Millersville Overlook located along Fall Creek between the 56th St and Emerson Way bridges.
- With support from a grant through SICIM and another grant from Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center received by Millersville, treatment of various invasives along the slopes near the Emerson Way bridge and frost seeding with soil stabilization mix this past December.

All of the projects above are featured heavily in the Stream Steward workshops we partner with Friends of White River on with financial support from Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust. The workshops utilize our [Stream Steward Guide](#) that we hope to continue to update in the future!



Frost seeding with Millersville resident Matt Benson & IUPUI student intern Keegan Cougill.

Sediment Control on Construction Sites

Robert Kendall, Urban Conservationist

In October 2023, I assumed the role of Urban Conservationist at Marion County SWCD, and I began establishing connections with contractors, developers, and various partners across Marion County. Fortunately, connecting with partners proved to be the most straightforward aspect of my job transition. The steepest learning curve, however, lay in acquiring certifications and honing inspection skills.

To fulfill my contract with the City of Indianapolis and adhere to the Construction Stormwater General Permit (CSGP), I worked towards completing a supported National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program. Additionally, I began studying to obtain certification as a Certified Erosion, Sediment, and Stormwater Inspector (CESSWI). These complementary programs have equipped me with the knowledge and skills necessary for inspecting CSGP sites and evaluating their Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPP).

Given the substantial inspection workload towards the end of the year, I prioritized the completion of an NPDES-supported program in Porter, Indiana—specifically, the MS4 Compliance and Inspection Seminar. Post-program completion and shadowing experienced inspectors, I began independent site inspections in November 2023. Over two months, I successfully inspected 84 sites throughout the county.



Contractors must stabilize areas that are inactive for 14+ days.



Straw blanket was used for stabilization

Contractor was told to stabilize completed slopes



Straw blanket was used for stabilization



Soil Health and Urban Agriculture

Kevin Allison, Soil Health Specialist

2023 was the seventh year of no-till vegetable production at the SWCD Eagle Creek Demo Garden. In early January 2024, I collected soil samples from both the demonstration garden and the neighboring conventional plot to study the change. The difference is staggering. The soil has improved from light brown, lifeless, and compacted to dark, biologically abundant, and porous. The telling samples traveled to the Indiana Statehouse to accompany soil and water conservationists from around the state who convened to discuss the importance of conservation with Indiana legislators and to thank them for an historic increase in Clean Water Indiana to help fund our work.

The most notable visual change in the soil this year is destratification. The distinct layer between the existing soil below and the compost I've added to the top of beds is disappearing. Early on, the top two inches of the soil profile were noticeably darker than the four inches below it. Tillage is often used to mix compost deeper into the soil, which spreads fertility into the root zones of the plants. In a system with little or no tillage, I'm relying on the soil ecosystem, cover crop roots, earthworm activity, and time to naturally incorporate the top-dressed



SWCD Eagle Creek Demo beds with winterkilled cover crop mulch, leaf compost, and growing cover crops.

compost and deepen fertility. I add leaf compost to the garden a little at a time, and not in every bed, every year. My main goals are to cover the soil surface with biological plant food, increase organic matter, protect soil health and moisture from the intense sun, and suppress weeds. My overarching strategy is to spread out the compost more or less evenly in the beds over time. As crops rotate through the years, I focus compost on beds that are direct seeded, or planted by seed. Whereas I transplant crops such as kale, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes into a cover crop mulch, it is easier to furrow and direct seed into a soil surface that is free of cover crop debris. For me, that's beets, carrots, lettuce, spinach, and other leafy greens. I rake any debris from the bed into the pathways, which is usually the top growth



Professional development at Frith Farm in Maine with partners and growers

of a winterkilled cover crop such as oats and field peas or the remains of a previous crop that's been weed whacked and tarped. Then I plant. A crop grown by seed takes time to germinate and develop a canopy and leaves the soil too bare for my liking. A layer of compost at planting is the remedy. In 2024, one of my main goals in the garden is to fully keep the soil covered year-round, in all beds. I'll grow as much cover crop mulch as I can and have a pile of leaf compost at the ready.

Our soil health program is like the garden in that a goal is also destratification. We want to interact with growers and have our services be as useful as possible. SWCDs exist to serve the public and its conservation interests, and creating learning and sharing opportunities alongside farmers, gardeners, and conservationists is key. I invite you to continue to engage with us, our workshops, site visits, and technical documents and tools for urban agriculture. Grower input and feedback has been extremely valuable in progressing these tools, and they are truly for you. A cover crop termination guide, planting guide, and calculator are now all online, and a nutrient management calculator is coming soon. As always, keep an eye on our newsletters.

In 2023, I was involved with 40 workshops and trainings, ranging from in-garden tours, presentations, grower roundtables, hosting the USDA-NRCS Associate Chief at local farms, soil health and pollinator workshops, the Black Loam and Get the Dirt Conferences, & the co-organization of an influential trip to the soil health-centric Frith Farm in Maine with Indiana conservation leaders and farmers. I had the opportunity to talk to school kids about soil health. With a few kindergarteners hanging on my shoulders, I used a trowel to make a hole and look at their soil. One student said, "You're the best digger I've ever seen!" As a no-till gardener, I'm still wondering if that's a good thing, but it made me smile, nonetheless. See you in 2024!

LARE Grants & Education Benefit Our Streams & Ponds

Julie Farr, Natural Resource Conservationist

Erosion and sedimentation are water quality challenges for our streams and ponds. Controlling erosion and improving water quality are high priorities for your SWCD and we are always pursuing means to assist landowners with these problems.

In 2023 I was privileged to assist in two Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake & River Enhancement projects sponsored by the Marion County SWCD. The first was a grant to help remove much of a very large log jam that was increasing erosion & obstructing the drainage of Buck Creek in Franklin Township. The SWCD applied for and received a LARE grant which would pay 80% of the cost of the removal up to a total of \$35,000. The Department of Business and Neighborhood Services pitched in by waiving their permit fees. The landowner paid the cash match and the SWCD provided technical & clerical contributions with project oversight. After many meetings and contractor bids the District chose Solid Rock Contractors who were able to use their wench system to pull the logs out with minimal environmental impact to the area. The project was completed in December.



In September the SWCD sponsored a pond management workshop in Franklin Township in response to the increasing needs of landowners and HOAs who are responsible for ponds. Retention ponds, found in most neighborhoods, are created primarily for stormwater management and flood control and as such, must be adequately maintained in order to function properly. Pond problems may include erosion, sedimentation, excessive pond weeds and algae, and nuisance wildlife issues. Properly maintained, ponds can increase property values and provide valuable assets to neighborhoods. We will be hosting a second pond management workshop in 2024.

The SWCD continues to provide technical assistance to individuals in the county with natural resource concerns including drainage, green infrastructure for stormwater management, control of invasives, promotion of native plantings, and land use planning.

We also provide soils and natural resource concern information for preliminary plats to help encourage wise land use decisions. Visit our [website](#) and [contact us](#) for more information.



The second SWCD sponsored project is on Crooked Creek in Washington Township where extreme erosion of the high streambank is endangering two homes and has caused substantial sedimentation downstream. With the help of Lake & River Enhancement grant funds and Burke Engineering, testing and a preliminary engineering design are in the works. Further funding for construction of erosion control measures is being pursued.



Thank you Olivia for Serving as SWCD Board Member!

The SWCD staff and Supervisors would like to extend our appreciation to Olivia Speckman who has volunteered her time in serving on the SWCD board for the past three years. Olivia brought her knowledge and experience with ArcGIS, AutoCAD, waterway permitting, and stakeholder coordination to the SWCD Board. She served as SWCD Chairperson and two years as our Treasurer during her time with us.

It has been a great pleasure to work with Olivia and we wish her the best in her future endeavors.



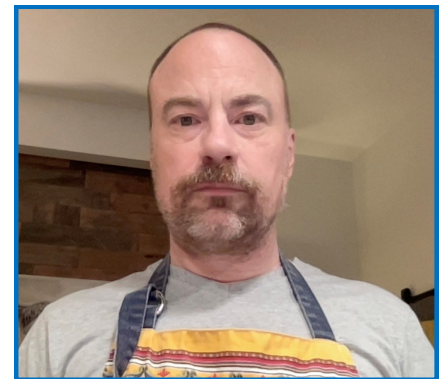
Voting information & New SWCD Board Candidate

One very important part of the SWCD Annual Meeting is our election of board members. The official governing body of a district consists of five supervisors. Three supervisors are elected (one each year for a three-year term) and two are appointed (also for staggered three-year terms) by the State Soil Conservation Board based upon recommendations of the current supervisors in the district. Thus, the selection of all five supervisors is based on input and election from the local people they serve. Before officially holding a position, supervisors are required to subscribe to a standard public oath of office by which they commit to support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Indiana, and to faithfully discharge the duties of the office of Supervisor. We are highly appreciative of the supervisors who volunteer their time and talents to serve on our board. (See more information on these individuals on the last page of this report.)

The term of office for the elected supervisor position is three years. To hold the position of elected supervisor an individual:

- (1) must be an occupier of a tract of land that is located within the district;
- (2) must maintain the individual's permanent residence within the district; and
- (3) must be qualified by training and experience to perform the duties of supervisor

This year Owen Dwyer is running for SWCD supervisor. Owen is a geographer at IUPUI. He is interested in cities, nature, and public space. Owen has lived in Irvington since 2000 and regularly teaches courses about food and the environment with Tyler Gough at Indy Urban Acres.



Owen Dwyer running for Supervisor

(Chairman's Report continued from page 1)

We cannot thank all our supervisors, associate supervisors, state and federal partners enough for the support we continue to receive. We are sad that supervisor Olivia Speckman is leaving us and very thankful for her service as we welcome our upcoming new supervisor through the election process this February at our Annual Meeting. Don't wait, [register today](#) for our February 20, 2024, event being held at our partner in urban soil health Bethany Lutheran Church for a special event, with special guest Jo Ellen Meyers Sharp, The Hoosier Gardener.



Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District 2023 Annual Activities Report

January 1 through December 31, 2023

The Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a unit of state government, supported primarily by the City-County Council with some funds from state government. The SWCD was established to provide technical assistance to Marion County residents and land users concerning the proper management of soil, water and other related natural resources. We work closely with local government, community organizations and residents on such items as water quality and drainage issues, soil erosion and sedimentation control, urban soil health, green space and wildlife habitat, conservation planning and education to help create a better-quality living environment for everyone in the county.

This 2023 annual report was developed to keep city, county, and federal level legislators, government agency directors, and various community leaders informed of our on-going activities. This is just a snapshot of our activities, anyone with any questions or comments is encouraged to contact our Marion Co. SWCD office at 200 E. Washington St. Suite 1401, Indianapolis, IN 46204 for more details. Our phone number is 317-786-1776, and our web site is www.marionswcd.org



Assisting Residents with Flooding, Stream Care & Land Use Issues



Construction Site Reviews and Inspections Help Prevent Pollution



Urban Soil Health Program Cover Crops Help Rebuild Soils

I. 2023 Major Natural Resource Projects Summary

Marion Co. SWCD conservation projects and public outreach efforts were completed to help the district communicate, coordinate, assist, and cooperate with others on conservation needs and solutions for landowners and land users in the county. The efforts can take a minimum of 2-4 hours to several days or weeks or are ongoing depending on the type of project.

Project Summary	Numbers	Date	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban Soil Health Program 			
• Urban Soil Health Program – Presentations/Workshops	40	during year	Outreach/Training
• Urban Soil Health Program – Consultations/Site Visits	23/17	during year	Outreach/Training
• Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program			
• City of Indianapolis-DPW Water Quality Meetings	12 meetings	during year	Water Quality Issues
• Other Projects & Coordination with Conservation Organizations			
• Rainscaping Workshops	1	during year	6 attendees
• Stream Steward Workshops	5	during year	49 total attendees
• Rain Barrel Workshop	1	during year	12 attendees
• Pond Management Workshop	1	9/7	21 attendees
• Marion Co. SWCD Annual Meeting w- Annual Report	50	2/21	Reported accomplishments
• Distributed newsletter on activities & watershed programs	4 / yr	during year	1507 on mailing list
• Marion County SWCD Website	10,108 users	during year	Public Outreach



I. Natural Resource Technical Requests, Contacts, & Visits with Land Users

Through on-site visits, telephone calls and written recommendations, the district assists landowners, land users, and construction site managers with drainage, water management, erosion control, vegetative management options, and other related natural resource topics. These assistance efforts take an estimated number of hours shown below depending on the type of assistance provided to schedule, inventory available site data, visit the site, plan recommendations, and respond to the request with written comments to the land user, landowner, or contractor.

Township	# Technical Assists Provided (@ 0.5 hr)	# Site Visits Made (@ 1.5 hrs)	# Reports Provided (@ 1 hr)	# Surveys Provided (@ 2 hrs)	# Residents Serviced via Group or HOA	Preliminary Plat Reviews (@ 0.75 hrs)
Center	5	16	3	1	0	19
Decatur	2	1	1	0	23	6
Franklin	8	11	11	0	71	12
Lawrence	10	22	14	1	87	12
Perry	3	7	5	1	47	5
Pike	8	6	4	0	18	9
Warren	4	6	6	0	12	11
Washington	5	24	16	1	40	8
Wayne	1	12	12	0	21	4
TOTAL	46	105	72	4	319	86

Construction Site, Erosion Control and SWPPP Stormwater Reviews, Contacts & Reports

# SWP3* Reviews Provided (@ 3 hrs)	# Erosion Control/ Pollution Prevention Inspections Completed (@ 1.5 hrs)	# Public Complaints Responded to (@ 0.75 hr)	# Technical Assistance Site Visits Made (@ 0.5 hr)
44	403	13	12

Notes: *SWP3 = Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans

III. State/Federal Cost Share/Grant Projects- SWCD brought into county additional: \$214,188.76

The Marion Co. SWCD is always looking for ways to assist landowners via a variety of county, state, and federal cost share and grant funds to assist with the installation of conservation practices in the county. Local funds are often limited or non-existent for the SWCD to provide monetary assistance for land improvement or land protection conservation measures. The projects can take a minimum of 2-4 days to several months depending on the type of activity. The following program funds are being provided through our joint, cooperative efforts with the USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) assigned to assist the Marion County SWCD and the Clean Water Indiana Grant Program, administered by the State Department of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation and the State Soil Board.

Program	Funds Provided	Type of Projects
Clean Water Indiana Grant (CWI)	\$12,000.00	General District Operational Funds
Clean Water Indiana (CWI)	\$13,750	Competitive Grant
Clean Water Indiana (CWI)	\$430.00	Supervisor & Staff Training Reimbursement
USDA-NRCS Soil Health Contribution Agreement	\$75,160.19	Urban Soil Health Program - Staff, Technical Assistance, Demonstration, Adult Education
ISDA – DOSC Regional Support	\$4,140.00	Technical & SWCD Support Staff
CCSI – USDA-NRCS	\$6,100.00	Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative
EQIP – USDA-NRCS	\$32,191.00	Cost Share
NRCS Staff Support	\$47,100.00	District Conservationist

EACH CITY/COUNTY TAX DOLLAR INVESTED IN THE SWCD LEVERAGES \$2.24 IN OTHER FUNDING





SWCD Board Supervisors

CHAIR: Brian Neilson, PE, LEED AP - B.S. Environmental Resources Engineering, Humboldt State University, Arcata, California 1985

Brian has over 36 years of experience working in both the public and private engineering sectors in the water, wastewater and storm water sectors. As an active water quality enthusiast and conservationist, Brian also works with the White River Alliance, IWEA Water for People International, and ASCE Environmental & Water Resources Institute. A fan and advocate for Low Impact Development (LID) Green Infrastructure design concepts, Brian works to integrate them into all aspects of his career.

VICE CHAIR: Maggie Goeglein

Maggie is the Development Director of the Edna Martin Christian Center, a 76-year-old community center serving Indy’s Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood. Maggie provides direct service in the youth program and assists with fund development and site development for EMCC’s new 12-acre facility. In addition to working with youth, Maggie has managed multiple large corporate service events focused on renovating the new facility and building a youth and seniors garden on the property, and worked with other staff on several successful grant applications totaling nearly \$1 million in funding.

SECRETARY: Heather Buck

As a Resource Planner with Christopher B. Burke Engineering, LLC in Indianapolis, Indiana, Heather works with the MS4 Coordinators from several NPDES Phase II communities in Indiana to develop and implement all components of their Stormwater Quality Management Programs (SWQMP). Heather also completes erosion and sediment control inspections on behalf of both public agencies and private development. In addition, Heather completes various water quality evaluations through chemical, physical, and biological data collection and analysis; including IDDE screening, QHEI, macroinvertebrate, and fish community sampling. Heather and her family reside in Franklin Township.

TREASURER: Olivia Speckman

Olivia is a scientist at V3 Companies. Olivia works with developers, property owners, and regulatory agencies in order to maintain or improve water, stream, and wooded area quality throughout the Midwest. Olivia places importance on bettering the conditions of waterways by gathering with other advocates through Reconnecting to Our Waterways and volunteering for cleanups that directly affect the local waterways. Olivia has a BS degree in Biology from Ball State University and a certification in Watershed Management through the Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy. Olivia brings experience with ArcGIS, AutoCAD, waterway permitting, and stakeholder coordination to the SWCD Board. Olivia currently resides in her hometown of Lawrence with her family and enjoys improving her community through her work on the SWCD board.

MEMBER: Tyler Gough

Tyler Gough oversees the planning and operation of all aspects of Indy Urban Acres, a project of the Parks Alliance of Indianapolis. Gough was hired by the Parks Alliance in 2011 to transform eight acres of unused city park land into a sustainable, urban farm. Today, IUA is a system of four organic farms on the east, west, and south sides of Indianapolis that grows and harvests fruits and vegetables to feed more than 50,000 individuals who are food insecure. IUA produces an average of 40,000 pounds of produce, which is delivered to food pantries and directly to families via the Veggie Box program. Gough is driven by the belief that that each member of our community should be able to attain proper nutrition for themselves and their families, and to have access to the educational tools necessary to provide for themselves.

Associate Supervisors

- Paula Baldwin
- Rick Bein
- Marvin Brethauer
- Bob Eddleman
- Mark Kautz
- Bob Kleinops
- Beth Mason
- Scott Minor
- Mark Mongin
- J. Dennis Slaughter
- Henry Wallis
- Blake Wilson

