

MARION COUNTY  
SOIL AND WATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

# Conservation in the Neighborhood

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SPRING, 2020



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## SWCD Wins NACD Native Plant Grant

The Marion County SWCD was one of 21 conservation districts across 13 states to receive funding through a partnership with the National Association of Conservation Districts and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The SWCD won a \$50,000 grant 2020 Urban Agriculture Grant, designed to help conservation districts provide technical assistance for agriculture conservation in developed or predominately developing areas.



Through this project, the SWCD will explore the potential of native plantings, hedgerows, and polycultures on urban farms to provide perennial food and medicinal products, valuable ecosystem services including biodiversity, and critical habitat for beneficial insects and pollinators.

*Native plants provide critical habitat to beneficial insects & pollinators.*

Key components of the grant includes staff training, educational workshops and trainings, and the establishment of native perennial habitat at demonstration sites. This spring, the SWCD is working closely with Indy Urban Acres, a project of the Indianapolis Parks Foundation, to grow native herbaceous species and plant them in along with locally sourced trees and shrubs on their farm. American

plum, chokecherry, dogwoods, elderberry, ninebark, northern pecan, and witch hazel are examples of the diversity of species we will be planting this year. The herbaceous list of forbs, grasses, and sedges is extensive, many of which are from our publication on [Native Plantings](#) that could benefit your own gardens. Don't forget to check out local plant sales this spring! (See page 6) We recently made a YouTube video at Indy Urban Acres to introduce our 2020 Project: Native Plant Agriculture on Urban Farms!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrK5NgnJZ5o&t=5s>



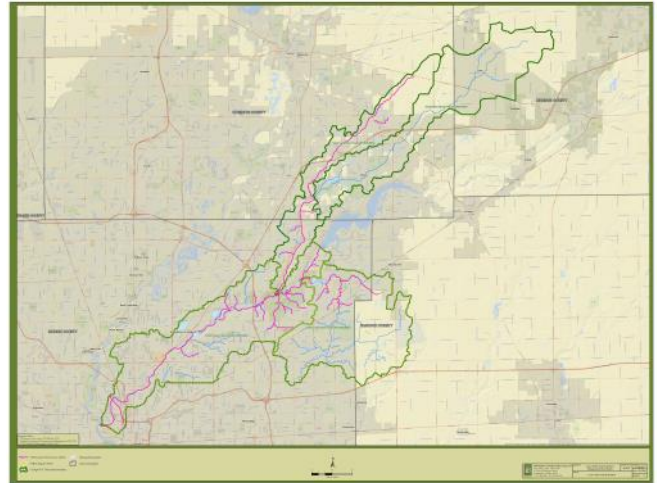


Streams in urban areas are especially impacted by pathogens, nutrients & sediment loading.

## Lower Fall Creek Watershed Management Plan Update

*By John Hazlett, District Manager*

In May 2009, the district utilized the services of local engineering firm Christopher Burke Engineering to complete a watershed management plan (WMP) for Lower Fall Creek, which drains approximately 90 square miles of rural, suburban and urban land in Central Indiana. Watershed management planning is a tool used since the late 1980s as a proven framework for improving local water quality through a series of steps to characterize existing waterway and watershed conditions, identify and prioritize problems and develop and implement strategies to address them. The plan includes portions of Madison, Hamilton, Hancock and Marion counties. The Marion County portion of the plan includes 18 miles of stream from 96<sup>th</sup> Street and Geist Reservoir downstream to the confluence of Fall Creek and White River in downtown Indianapolis, and 75% of this stretch is considered



urbanized, presenting significant water quality challenges related to pathogens, nutrients and sediment loading.

The plan completed in 2009 doesn't meet the current US EPA watershed plan checklist, a requirement to receive funding prioritization for implementation funding via IDEM's competitive 319 grant program. Utilizing funding secured through a variety of philanthropic and private donations through Reconnecting to Our Waterways, Central Indiana Community Foundation,

Axia Urban, the Children's Museum of Indianapolis and the Indiana State Fair Commission, the district has engaged Christopher Burke Engineering to assist with a plan update via five community meetings and technical analysis. Led by a waterway stakeholder group, these meetings and analysis will gather input on current water quality concerns, critical areas, recommended action items and potential locations for water quality projects.

Watch our [website](#) for future updates on this project.

# Crowd Helps to Celebrate SWCD's 50th Annual Meeting

The District's 50<sup>th</sup> annual meeting was a fun filled, informative evening attended by a variety of residents representing the wide spectrum of nature resource management topic areas we serve.

Our guest speakers were Brad Beaubien, Director of Destination Development for Visit Indy, and Kevin Hardie, Executive Director for Friends of the White River. Brad presented an update on the [White River Vision Plan](#) and Kevin Hardie shared memories of the White River chemical discharge that occurred 20 years ago. The presentations followed staff updates and presentation of a Partner in Conservation award to Soil Health Outreach Specialist Elli Blaine. St. Albans was also honored with a River Friendly Farmer award.

Board elections were led by committee representative Brian Neilson, who conducted the election of supervisors whereby Scott Minor was elected for a three year term. The evening was capped off with a community dinner and hands on demonstration by NRCS Soil Health Specialist Stephanie McClain.

Thanks to our partners at government access Channel 16, who filmed the meeting which can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmF3TqnSeZk&feature=youtu.be>



Annual Meeting attendees hear about White River improvements

## Thank you Cheyenne!

After nearly three years serving the District as Urban Conservationist, Cheyenne Hoffa is taking a new position as Division Regulatory Compliance Administrator for Westport Homes/D.R. Horton where she will oversee their NPDES and OSHA compliance programs. We can't say enough about the outstanding job Cheyenne has done for our district and her incredibly positive attitude and contributions to the City of Indianapolis Rule 5 program. In 2018 and 2019 alone, Cheyenne conducted over 1,400 site inspections for erosion and sediment control and provided additional onsite technical assistance to 49 sites. We are sad to lose her, but look forward to watching her future success and will always consider her part of our district "family"!



## Spring into Natural Lawn Care



Practicing ecological lawn care is good for people, pets & wildlife.



Bloodroot—a sure sign of spring!

What's your favorite early spring plant? Tell us on [Facebook!](#)

The grass is greening up and buds are breaking open everywhere! Spring is here!!! As our health is in the forefront of our minds it's a good time to consider how we take

care of our own little pieces of nature – our lawns.

Making small changes can yield big positive gains for our health and the health of our environment. This year take another step towards a healthier home & community by treating your lawn naturally. Here's how to start:

**Spring Cleaning** – Remove any leaves or debris left from last fall and add them to your composter to get a new batch of compost started. If you've not turned your compost over the winter, start turning it now to have it finish decomposing in time to use it for your vegetable and flower plantings.

**Help areas recover from Snow Mold** - Snow Mold Disease is caused by a fungus that is active during the winter months. It doesn't generally kill the grass but makes unsightly areas in

the yard. It can be caused by a number of things including not mowing the grass short enough in the fall so it bends over, or from soil that holds a lot of moisture. The grass will recover on its own but you can help it with a little **light raking**, adding some **compost** and if severe, **aeration**.

**Soil Testing** – If you did not get your soil test done last fall, take samples and send them in this spring to help you adjust your fertilization plan for this summer and fall - add only what your lawn really needs! Adjust the pH of the soil as needed. Scroll down our website under the [Lawn & Garden link](#) for a listing of soil testing labs and instructions for how to take your samples.

**Overseeding** – spot seed bare or sparse areas now before weeds take over those spots. Seed, mulch and compost then water those areas as needed to sprout the seeds and give them a strong start.

**Mowing** – Bump your mower up a level. Keeping your lawn height higher will help to shade out weeds, improve your grass root structure, keep the soil

cooler and reduce moisture loss. Keep your grass 2.5 – 4 inches tall (depending on type of grass) and only mow 1/3 of the blades' height at a time.

**Core Cultivation & Compost Topdressing** – Core Cultivation or Aeration helps to decrease thatch, improves water percolation and air movement through the soil. Spring is a great time to aerate and prepare your lawn for compost topdressing while the temperatures are still cool. Compost will add much needed organic matter and some nutrients to your soil. Compost can also help speed up decomposition of thatch. Add a ¼" layer of compost over the lawn and drag a mat or otherwise work the compost into the holes created with core aeration.

**Corn Gluten and Herbicidal Soaps** – Corn Gluten has been shown to be an effective natural herbicide, but it needs to be put on NOW, in early spring before the weed seeds have sprouted.

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Invasives Highlight: Bull Thistle

The Bull Thistle is very spiny and is a common plant that occurs in most Indiana counties. It is a biennial, forming a rosette in the first year and an erect branched blooming stem in the second year. This thistle is from Eurasia, and it has existed in the United States since the 19th century, if not earlier. Habitats include pastures, abandoned fields, fence rows, lawns, golf courses, areas along roadsides and railroads, cut-over woods, and miscellaneous waste areas. This species prefers disturbed areas and it is not common in high quality natural areas. A good control technique is a foliar spray on the first year rosettes of triclopyr plus 2,4-D in the late fall or in the early spring before flower stalk formation.

More information on invasive species identification and control can be found on our website:

<https://marionswcd.org/invasive-species/>



Photos University of Georgia



First year's growth



Fluffy Seed head

*(Continued from page 4)*

Don't use it if you plan to overseed this spring because it works to kill young seedlings. Corn Gluten application can be a little tricky to time. It needs watering the day you put it on, then needs 2-3 days of dry weather. If it rains, it will decrease the effectiveness. You will need to treat your lawn for 3 years in order to obtain 90% weed control.

Herbicidal soaps are also used with success on small annual and biennial weeds. They don't work well on perennial weeds with extensive root systems. They will kill desirable plants as well as weeds so use it carefully.

Other tools for weed management for the natural lawn may include manual removal, flame weeders, hot water weeders, flameless radiant heaters, and soil solarization for large weedy areas.

**Check your sprinkler system** – make sure your sprinkler system is functioning properly, not wasting water by watering the driveway or street and setting the timer so it only comes on as needed. Adjust timing so that it isn't needlessly watering when we've had enough rain.

Check out our website for more information:

<https://marionswcd.org/lawn-and-garden/>

## Protecting the Peepers

Can you hear them? One of the earliest signs of spring is the song of the spring peepers! We love hearing their happy little chirps but they are shy and rarely seen. In many areas frog populations are declining. This is disturbing because amphibians are good indicators of ecological health. Their eggs and skin are highly absorbable so that they can absorb water and oxygen. Unfortunately they can also easily absorb pollutants.



Controlling soil erosion is a proactive way to protect water quality and amphibian habitat. Soil is our #1 pollutant by volume and soil also is a carrier for other pollutants. The SWCD is involved in helping landowners control erosion by offering technical assistance and helping monitor erosion on construction sites.

You can help by becoming a SWCD Affiliate Member. See page 7 for more information or click [HERE](#) to donate. Thank you!

# Spring 2020 Native Plant Sales

Support Pollinating & beneficial insects.

Beautify your farm, garden & yard.

## SALE DATES & LOCATIONS

Hamilton County SWCD

April 17th

[Deadline to order online](#)

Indy Urban Acres

April 19th

Deadline to [order online](#)

In person sales April 25-May 17

Nina Mason Pulliam EcoLab

April 1st — April 30th

[Online only](#)

Native Plants Unlimited

May 1st— May 17th

[Sale Details](#)

Indiana Native Plant Society's

May 9th

Native Plant Sale & Auction

[Sale Details](#)

Friends of Mounds State Park (DNR)

May 9th

[Sale Details](#)

Hamilton County Master Gardeners

May 16th

Plant Sale

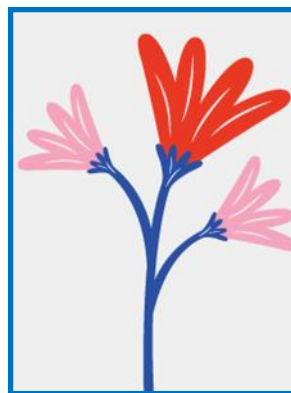
[Sale Details](#)

Indiana Wildlife Federation

Mostly fall sale— [Online only](#)



**Kick off the warmer months with your purchase of local native plants.**



Other nurseries with native stock can be found [HERE](#).





MARION COUNTY  
**SOIL AND WATER**  
—CONSERVATION DISTRICT—

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**Find us on the web: [www.marionswcd.org](http://www.marionswcd.org)**

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.

**\*\* PLEASE NOTE\*\***

**Due to the current COVID 19 crisis our office is temporarily closed and staff is working remotely. Use the “Contact Us” tab on our website to leave a message & we will get back with you as soon as possible.**

## Please Join our Team!

*Join our Conservation Team to benefit Marion County! Donate to become an Affiliate Member.*

**What is a SWCD Affiliate Member?** Affiliate members are individuals, groups or organizations who choose to financially support the work of the Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District. These funds are vitally needed to sustain and enhance the work we do for our county.

**What are the Affiliate Membership funds used for?** Gifts from affiliate members are used to continue services provided to county residents including consultation in land use, erosion control and drainage problems. For many of our lower income residents, it is not financially possible to hire private engineering and consulting firms to design and install drainage and erosion control practices on their property. In many instances our office can provide simple, do it yourself suggestions that will alleviate or minimize their problems. No other agency is able to do this for individuals and small neighborhood groups.

Funding is needed to help continue erosion control inspections which are a critical part of improving and protecting water quality in

the county. New construction, without proper erosion control can release literally tons of sediment into our waterways each year. Sedimentation clogs drainage ways, is a carrier for pollutants and is detrimental to fish and other aquatic life.

The District is also strongly involved in education of soil health principles which improve the nutrition of locally grown food. We provide technical assistance to land-owners and small farmers and hold a number of educational workshops during the year.

In addition, the SWCD is active in promoting wise land use and improvements in water quality through their other educational programs, workshops and publications. Education is key to long term progress in soil and water quality and has always been a high priority for this District.

To become an affiliate member visit our website link [HERE](#). **We now accept PayPal for your convenience!**



**Follow us on Facebook!**



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