

STEUBEN COUNTY SWCD

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2017 – 2020

BUSINESS PLAN



Conservation District Business Plan

Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District

I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving
 – Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

This plan was adopted by the Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors on 04/12/2017.

The staff of the Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District are equally committed to carrying out the priorities established within this document to further the SWCD mission and its commitment to foster natural resource conservation and environmental stewardship.

Mission Statement: We will be the lead facilitator who ensures that the natural resources of Steuben County are used wisely and are there for future generations.

History:

The Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was organized by landowners in 1948 and is a legal subdivision of the State of Indiana established by the Indiana Soil Conservation Act of 1937. The District is managed by a board of five supervisors, who are Steuben County residents familiar with the conservation needs and opportunities in the county. Land users in the District elect three of the supervisors, and the State Soil and Water Conservation Committee appoint two upon recommendation of local leaders. Steuben County Government funds the current full-time staff positions, Administrative Coordinator and Resource Conservationist. The District supervisors coordinate technical and financial assistance for conservation programs in Steuben County. According to the 2010 census, the county has a total area of 322.47 square miles, of which 308.94 square miles is land and 13.53 square miles is water. The District does not have power of eminent domain nor power to tax or bond.

What We Do:

- We serve Steuben County residents and landowners, the general public, public officials, and businesses.
- Identify and prioritize local soil and water resource concerns.
- Provide the public information about soil, water and related natural resource conservation.
- Connect land users to sources of educational, technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices and technologies.
- The District will encourage broader understanding of everyone's dependence upon soil, water and related resources. We will secure and effectively coordinate services and funds available from local, state and federal agencies and from private organizations and groups.
- *District activities and programs are offered on a non-discriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.*

Core Values

- We desire to accomplish our mission through providing excellent personal service and facilitating voluntary participation by our residents/land users to put conservation practices on the land.

Our Key Partners and How They Assist:

- * **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** - *Educational, technical, and financial assistance through federal Farm Bill programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), or the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).*
- * **Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA)** - *Administrative support through the District Support Specialist, technical assistance through the Resource Specialist, and financial support through the Clean Water Indiana Grant Program.*
- * **Steuben County Council**—*Financially supports with funding for staff, and for general operating expenses.*
- * **Steuben County Commissioners**—*General support/financial support of the District.*
- * **Steuben County Drainage Board**—*General support of the District.*
- * **City of Angola and surrounding towns**
- * **City of Angola/Trine University MS4**
- * **Purdue Cooperative Extension**—*Educational assistance with public meetings, field days, and special events.*
- * **Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts**
- * **Indiana Department of Natural Resources**
- * **Indiana Department of Environmental Management**
- * **State Soil Conservation Board**
- * **Neighboring Soil and Water Conservation Districts**—*Educational, technical, and financial support through programs in partnership.*
- * **Trine University**
- * **The Nature Conservancy**
- * **Wood-Land-Lakes Resource Conservation & Development**
- * **Friends of the St. Joseph River Watershed**
- * **Clear Lake Township Land Conservancy, Inc.**
- * **ACRES**
- * **Steuben County Lakes Council and Area Lake Associations**
- * **Landowners and Producers**

Our key partners help provide educational, technical and financial assistance to land users for implementing conservation practices and technologies on the land and/or provide direct financial support for district staffing and program operations.

Desired Plan Outcomes in 2020

Agriculture producers and landowners work towards full implementation of their conservation plans

Contractors, rural and urban landowners work to implement approved conservation practices on their property

County planners and developers to consider the impact of development and recognize the need to protect the natural resources within the district

Increase conservation awareness in county, demonstrated through active conservation actions by landowners

Cleaner rivers, lakes, streams

Improved soil productivity

Improved woodland quality, with native species thriving

Sedimentation from all land disturbing activities reduced to levels that do not have any adverse off-site impact

Functional and effective SWCD recognized as source for conservation information and assistance.



**Critical Natural Resource Issues –
Involving rural, urban and aquatic issues:**

1. Water quality

- **Excessive use of fertilizer and pesticide**
 - **E-coli**
 - **Dissolved reactive phosphorus**
- **Sediment loads**
- **Failed septic systems and combined sewer overflows**

2. Soil health

- **Soil erosion**
- **Tillage practices**
- **Depletion of organic matter**
- **Increased compaction**

3. Land use issues

- **Loss of farmland, wetlands, and woodlands**
- **Urban sprawl and development**
- **Loss of wildlife habitat**
- **Invasive/Exotic Species**

Critical Geographic areas (See map on last page):

County-wide problems – Water Quality/Soil Erosion, Field Tile Maintenance, Failed Septic Systems, Fertilizer, Pesticides and Nutrient management, and Urban Sprawl and Development. Critical areas include all watersheds in the county: Pigeon Creek, Fawn River, Fish Creek, Turkey Creek, and St. Joseph River, with prime focus concentrating on the Western Lake Erie Basin (Multi-County) and Pigeon Creek Watersheds.

Goals for addressing our Resource Concerns, and how we plan to achieve them
By December 31, 2020, we will accomplish the following:

Water Quality

Goal 1: Cooperate with other agencies and organizations to promote awareness of water quality issues, in order to reduce amounts of trash, pesticides, organic contaminants, and inorganic contaminants from urban runoff by holding at least two water quality awareness events per year.

- Host at least one (1) rain garden workshop each year to educate citizens on how to plan, install, and maintain a rain garden.
- Create displays and distribute information on water quality annually.
- Promote the use of rain barrels to encourage water conservation with Purdue Extension.
- Host a workshop with Purdue Extension concerning lawn fertilizers and pesticides.
- Invite MS4 communities to the SWCD Exhibit Area during the Steuben County 4H Fair, so that they can promote their stormwater programs.
- Highlight completed projects in media, and in events held or participated in by the SWCD.

Goal 2: Increase the use of conservation buffers (filter strips, riparian buffers) by 2 acres annually.

- Seek CWI funds and other grant source funding that would provide cost-share to landowners who wish to install buffers.
- Promote buffers using brochures previously developed from NRCS.
- Promote cost-share funds available through District cost-share and Farm Bill programs.

Goal 3: Best Management practices for nutrient and pest management used on 1,200 additional acres of the county's farmland.

- Work with our partners to train producers and others on best management practices, technologies for conservation tillage and application/use of nutrients and pesticides, while including any appropriate certification credits.

Goal 4: Continue working relationship with the City of Angola on MS4 plan implementation.

- Cooperate with local governments to assist as needed in the review of Stormwater Protection Plans program.

Goal 5: Reduce E. coli levels to acceptable state standards.

- Cooperate with Health Departments and Purdue Extension in the region to increase awareness of failing or inadequate septic systems, and to educate landowners on proper maintenance of systems.
- Continue to provide Health Departments with supplies of the brochure created through the St. Joseph River Watershed Association for distribution.
- Host a workshop on septic system care and maintenance, and on how properly maintained systems can help improve/protect water quality.
- Promote conservation practices that control livestock access to streams in areas where that may be a contributing factor to E.coli levels.

Goal 6: Seek the establishment of two rotational grazing system per year in the county.

- Identify livestock locations in the county and develop a mailing list of producers.
- Develop or adapt a brochure on rotational grazing and distribute to mailing list of producers encouraging them to install a system; use same brochure to promote practice when producers visit SWCD office.

Goal 7: Maintain 2% of fields planted to cover crops, work to increase fields planted to cover crops by 1% annually; 2020 goal of 5% of fields planted to cover crops as evaluated through the Steuben County Fall Tillage Transect.

- Seek cost-share dollars that would provide assistance to landowners to install cover crops.
- Promote cost-share funds available through the SWCD/NRCS.
- Apply for a Clean Water Indiana grants and other grant funding sources (Lake and River Enhancement Watershed Land Treatment Project grants), partnering with adjacent Soil and Water Conservation Districts as needed.

Goal 8: Work with county drainage board to research funding to repair/replace tile on outdated, undersized systems; promote surface inlet replacement (i.e. blind inlets).

Soil Conservation

Goal 1: Improve soil quality by maintaining existing levels of no-till (i.e. 50% of corn fields as no-till, with no-till goal of 60% / conventional till goal of <15% by 2020; 85% of soybean fields as no-till, with no-till goal of 90% / conventional till goal of <5% by 2020), as evaluated through the Steuben County Spring Tillage Transect. Maintain at least 2% of the individuals implementing nutrient management plans with the goal of increasing the number of applications by 5% each year.

- Promote no-till/strip tillage as an alternative to conventional tillage.
- Conduct an annual spring and fall tillage transect of Steuben County.
- Create a soil health display to be used annually at appropriate events.
- Promote practices that build organic matter through displays at 2 events each year, and semi-annual newsletter articles and news releases.
- Host a soil health workshop.
- Include soil health articles in each of the quarterly District newsletters.
- Submit at least 2 news releases to local papers on soil quality each year.

Goal 2: Increase the use of conservation buffers by 10 acres, cover crops by 300 acres, waterways by 2,000 feet each year, and the development of grazing plans by 2 each year with existing producers.

- Continue to seek cost-share dollars in the form of CWI, IDEM 319, or other grant funding sources as an incentive to landowners to install these practices.
- Host and/or partner with other SWCDs to host a workshop on conservation practices.
- Develop an inventory of acres currently utilizing these practices at the end of 2019; inventory each year thereafter and compare to 2019 figures.
- Host a CCSI cover crop tour in Steuben/surrounding counties. Will collaborate with Moody, Eden, Strough, North Central, Orland and the Anderson's.

Goal 3: Annually, install at least 2 soil-saving practices on urban lands (e.g. streambank stabilization, bioswales, detention structures, pre-construction site practices).

Goal 4: By 2020 increase hay and pastureland acres by 375 acres and enhance productivity.

- Conduct a pasture walk with LaGrange SWCD.
- Promote intensive grazing practices utilizing EQIP.
- Promote the Northern Indiana Grazing Conference.
- Hold another CCSI workshop.

Land Use/Sustainability

Goal 1: Cooperate with local entities to encourage conservation practices on commercially developed land

- Cooperate with local governments to assist as needed in the review of Stormwater Protection Plans program.
- Provide recommendations to local builders, developers, and municipalities for conservation practices suitable their development sites. Look into holding a contractor workshop, partner with a neighboring district and our district support specialist.
- Continue to participate in Rule 5 activities.
- Assist city and county planning department with future developments (i.e. – participate in design review, MS4 advisory group, etc.).
- Partner with the City of Angola and Steuben County to hold a contractor’s workshop in the spring to educate them on best management practices.

Goal 2: Maintain relationship with Wood-Land-Lakes Resource Conservation and Development to promote conservation easements.

Goal 3: Encourage acceptance of new technologies by Ag producers by promoting them at a minimum of 1 event per year in an effort to sustain economic production in modern agriculture.

- Develop a brochure to educate farm owners on the importance of maintaining soil fertility, and using cover crops to maintain fertility and control soil erosion, on their land.
- Develop a handout for Annual Meeting by 2019.
- Continue to investigate new technologies as they emerge.
- Educate landowners on the use of gypsum, develop an education brochure and explore a field day with this topic (partner with Purdue).

Goal 4: Educate 5 landowners about beneficial native plants and the negative impact of invasive plants on the environment by 2020.

- Include articles on invasive species in SWCD quarterly newsletters; a minimum of 1 article per year.

Woodland/Forestry

Goal 1: Educate at least five private woodland owners about the various incentive programs, the economic and environmental value of forests, through NRCS and IDNR

- Partner with Purdue Extension to host a private woodland owner workshop in 2020.
- Provide a source of tree stock to the community by promoting a tree-planting program.
- Work with NICIM to promote reduction of invasive species
 - Northern Indiana Cooperative Invasive Management

Goal 2: By 2020, Wildlife acreage will be increased by five acres

- Promote USDA and IDNR programs.

All of these critical issues involve applying conservation practices on the land. Some of the conservation practices we plan to implement to help us achieve these goals over the next three years include installing:

- **10 acres of filter strips**
- **375 acres of pasture/hayland plantings**
- **500 feet of grassed waterways**
- **150 acres of tree plantings**
- **6,000 feet of fencing**
- **5 wetland developments**
- **3,000 acres of conservation farm plans**
- **300 acres of cover crops**

Key Strategies:

1) Information – We will provide information to the public through:

- **Newsletters and other publications**
- **Website/Social Media**
- **One on one office contact with public**
- **Annual Meeting**
- **Partnership Contacts**

2) Education – We will provide education to the public through:

- **Workshops**
- **Field Days (Youth Conservation Field Day)**
- **Presentations / Displays**
- **Office contacts (providing soil surveys, planning specs, tree planting info, etc.)**

3) Marketing – We will reach out to the public through:

- **Public Presentations**
- **News Releases to local Media**
- **Website / Social Media**
- **Newsletters (The Conservator and Annual Report)**
- **Offsite displays**
- **Customer Service – promoting various conservation programs that are available**

4) Technical Assistance –

- **One on one conservation planning and application assistance by field office staff**
- **Survey, design and installation assistance by regional tech team**
- **Assistance to county government (i.e. Design Review committee and MS4 Advisory Council)**

5) Financial Assistance –

- **Federal Conservation Programs (Farm Bill, Great Lakes Commission)**
- **State Conservation cost share/incentive programs (IDNR Lake and River Enhancement)**
- **Partnership Programs**
- **County appropriations**
- **State Grants (Clean Water Indiana)**
- **IDEM 319 grants**
- **Other grants, foundations, etc.**
- **Affiliate Memberships**
- **NRCS (phones, computer, copier, printers, and networking)**

6) Accountability – Measuring success

- **Tally Sheet – Customer Service**
- **Annual Report**
- **NRCS progress report**
- **GIS project layer**
- **Reports to County Officials**
- **Annual meeting questionnaire**
- **Spring and Fall Tillage Transect**
- **Evaluations – annual review of Staff and Supervisors**
- **Sharepoint**

Current Staffing
 Administrative Coordinator (FT)
 Resource Conservationist (FT)
 Office Clerical (PT)

Additional Funding Needs:
 Vehicle to replace Ford Expedition
 Funding for updated watershed studies and implementation

Annual Budget Needs: Develop and share SWCD leverage spreadsheet with county officials

Salaries & Benefits: \$ _____
Equipment: \$ _____
Office Supplies: \$ _____
Programs & Cost Share: \$ _____
Rent & Utilities: Investigate current costs & plan for contingencies
Other: Budget amount needed to conduct studies identified above

Total Annual Budget: \$ _____

This business plan was completed by Steuben County SWCD Supervisors with the assistance of SWCD staff and supporting conservation agency partners beginning October 18, 2016, and at SWCD monthly meetings. Approved: April 12, 2017

Steuben County Critical Geographic Areas

Watersheds and other Critical Areas

