

STEUBEN COUNTY SWCD

1220 N. 200 W., Ste. L; Peachtree Plaza 200 – Angola, IN 46703
(260) 665-3211, Ext. 3 Fax: (855) 391-1908
www.steubenswcd.org

2021 – 2023

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 12/09/2020.

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:

It is the mission of the Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to provide leadership and assistance in the proper use and management of soil, water, and related natural resources in Steuben County.

Who We Are:

The Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a subdivision of State Government and operates as a Department of Steuben County Government. Established in 1948 by a referendum of the people, it is a public body which exercises public powers. The district receives its statutory authority from Indiana District Law (Indiana Code IC 14-32). It is governed by a board of five supervisors, each a resident of Steuben County 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. District Supervisors coordinate technical and financial assistance for conservation programs in Steuben County. The district does not have power of eminent domain nor power to tax or bond. Steuben County Government funds the current full-time staff positions, Administrative Coordinator and Resource Conservationist. Staff members are employees of the county.

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 a 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.
- *All programs and activities of the Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District and its Partnership Agencies 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:

City of Angola - *The Steuben County SWCD works with various departments within the City of Angola to promote conservation. This includes assistance with the implementation of the City's Storm Water Program.*

* **Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP)** – *The ICP is comprised of eight Indiana agencies and organizations who share a common goal of promoting conservation. To that end, the mission of the ICP is to provide technical, financial and educational assistance needed to implement economically and environmentally compatible land and water stewardship decisions, practices and technologies. Agencies include:*

- **Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD)** - *IASWCD shares a single mission with the Steuben County SWCD: to coordinate assistance from available sources (public and private, local, State and Federal) in an effort to develop locally driven solutions to natural resource concerns.*
- **Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM)** - *Staff at IDEM provide environmental oversight and technical assistance for the community. The Steuben County SWCD works with IDEM for the implementation of the Rule 5 program. IDEM also provides funding for conservation through the 319 grant program.*
- **Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)** - *IDNR provides the District with technical and financial assistance as well as programs for public education and outreach. The IDNR area Forester and Wildlife Biologist provide technical assistance for habitat and wildlife related questions. IDNR also provides funding for conservation through the Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) grant program.*
- **Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) Division of Soil Conservation (DSC)** - *The State Soil Conservation Board, through ISDA-DSC, provides support, training, education, and funding for the Steuben County SWCD. Clean Water Indiana grants utilized by districts across the state are administered by ISDA-DSC.*
- **Purdue Cooperative Extension** - *Purdue University's Agriculture and Natural Resources Team is the premier source of educational programs and information about agriculture, natural resources, and the food system. They assist the Steuben County SWCD in educational assistance with public meetings, field days, workshops, and other conservation education activities.*
- **State Soil Conservation Board** - *Established within the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, the State Soil Conservation Board (SSCB) provides guidance and coordination to the state's 92 Soil and Water Conservation Districts as they provide local leadership in the protection of Indiana's soil and water resources. Additionally, the SSCB, in conjunction with ISDA, administer the Clean Water Indiana Grants Program - a water quality related erosion and sediment reduction program.*

- **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA)** – *The Farm Service Agency equitably serves all farmers, ranchers and agricultural producers through the delivery of effective and efficient agricultural programs. The Steuben County SWCD, in cooperation with its partner the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), work jointly with FSA to administer Farm Bill Programs to local landowners and operators.*
- **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** – *The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides educational, technical, and financial assistance through federal Farm Bill programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS is our chief source of technical expertise. The NRCS District Conservationist advises the local SWCD Board as they seek to address conservation concerns in the county. The Steuben County SWCD assists NRCS in getting conservation applied on agricultural lands in Steuben County.*
- * **Neighboring Soil and Water Conservation Districts** - *Educational, technical, and financial support through partnership programs.*
- * **Pheasants Forever** - *Pheasants Forever is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to the protection of and enhancement of pheasant and other wildlife populations in Northeast Indiana and across the United States. NE Indiana Chapter 182 partners with the Steuben County SWCD to provide wildlife food plot seed for distribution to landowners to plant each spring. Additionally, they work with the SWCD and conservation partners to assist landowners in establishing wildlife habitat on their land.*
- * **Steuben County Government** - *primary funding for the office and staff comes from the Steuben County Commissioners and County Council. The SWCD is considered a Steuben County Department with responsibilities and privileges that entails. The SWCD works cooperatively with other departments of county government on projects of joint interest that affect the natural resources of Steuben County.*
- * **Additional Organizations / Partners**
 - ACRES*
 - Blue Heron Ministries*
 - Clear Lake Township Land Conservancy, Inc.*
 - Friends of the St. Joseph River*
 - Landowners and Producers*
 - Maumee River Basin Commission*
 - St. Joseph River Basin Commission*
 - Steuben County Lakes Council and Area Lake Associations*
 - St. Joseph Watershed Initiative*
 - The Nature Conservancy*
 - Trine University*

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.

Steuben County Present Land Use:

According to the 2010 census, the county has a total area of 308.7 square miles. Steuben County is the 78th largest county in Indiana by area.

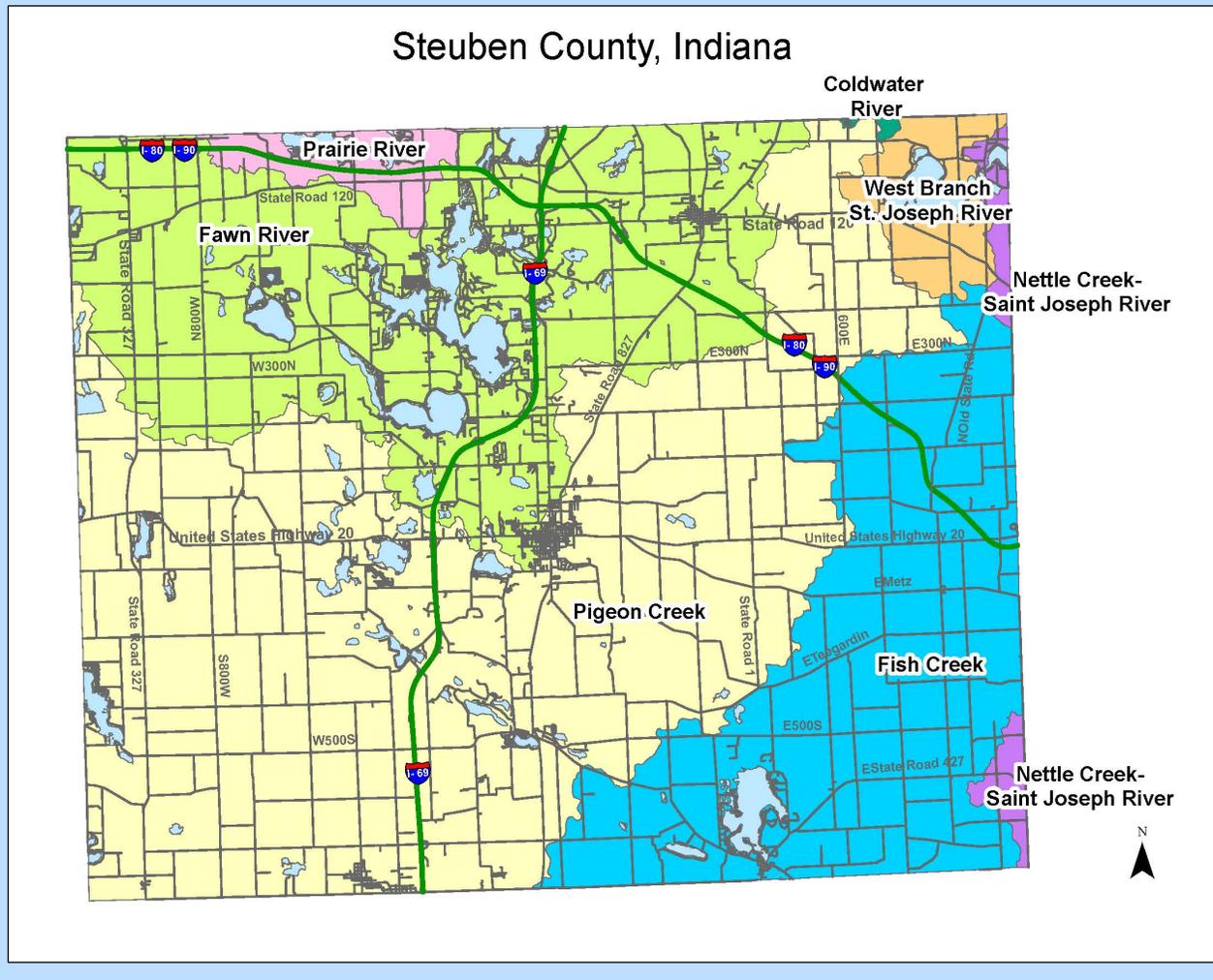
	<u>Acres</u>	<u>State Rank</u>
Total Land Acres:	197,617	78
Farmland:	120,324	69
Cropland:	101,665	66
Harvested Cropland:	91,426	68
Pastureland, all types:	2,957	76
Woodland:	9,007	48
Average size of farm:	255	49

Source: 2018-2019 Indiana Agricultural Statistics Service;

USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service and Purdue University College of Agriculture

Steuben County Watersheds and Critical Geographic Areas:

County-wide problems – Water Quality/Soil Erosion, Field Tile Maintenance, Failed Septic Systems, Fertilizer, Pesticides & Nutrient management, and Urban Sprawl & 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.



Critical Natural Resource Issues (rural, urban and aquatic issues):

These are the 2020 natural resource issues identified and agreed upon by the Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors and Staff.

1. Water Quality

Surface water quality degrading contributions from agriculture land include:

- Sediment
- E. coli (livestock and wildlife waste)
- Nutrients and pesticides (phosphorus, nitrogen, dissolved reactive phosphorus)
- Lack of buffers along major streams, rivers and tributaries
- Altered hydrology (due to subsurface drainage and irrigation)

Contributions from non-agricultural land include:

- Sediment
- E. coli (septic, pet and wildlife)
- Fertilizer and pesticides
- Pollutants from storm water runoff
- Failed septic systems and combined sewer overflows
- Altered hydrology as a result of development

2. Soil Quality/Soil Health

Contributing factors from agricultural land include:

- Soil erosion - gully, sheet & rill
- Tillage practices
- Depletion of organic matter
- Poor soil biology (due to lack of crop rotation, lack of cover, and soil organism diversity)
- Increased compaction

Contributing factors from non-agricultural land include:

- Soil erosion
- Excessive grading and compaction
- Failure to preserve existing vegetation on construction sites (including trees)

3. Forestry, Wildlife, Wetlands

- Loss of woodlands and wetlands to development and agricultural use
- Loss of wildlife habitat to development and agricultural use
- Inadequate cover/shelter, food, and water for wildlife
- Invasive/Exotic Species



4. Plant Conditions, Grazing, Hayland

- Inadequate nutrient and manure management
- Pesticide/Herbicide resistant species
- Excessive soil erosion and deposition
- Invasive/Exotic plant and insect species

5. Land Use

Contributing factors from agricultural land include:

- Loss of wetlands, woodlands and pollinator habitat
- Loss of wildlife habitat
- Invasive/Exotic Species

Contributing factors from non-agricultural land include:

- Urban sprawl and development
- Loss of farmland
- Loss of wetlands, woodlands and pollinator habitat
- Loss of wildlife habitat
- Creation of impervious surfaces
- Habitat fragmentation
- Invasive/Exotic Species



Conservation Objectives

Each year, the Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District hosts a Local Working Group (LWG) public meeting to assist the NRCS District and State Conservationist with setting local natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs. Working Groups consist of representatives who can provide input for a wide range of natural resource and agricultural concerns for the county. In 2020, the top ten resource concerns the group identified included: (1) soil organic matter depletion, (2) excessive sediment in surface waters, (3) excess nutrients in surface and ground waters, (4) soil compaction, (5) ephemeral gully erosion, (6) sheet and rill erosion, (7) undesirable plant productivity and health, (8) inadequate cover/shelter, food, water and habitat continuity for fish and wildlife, (9) inadequate feed and forage for livestock production, and (10) excess/insufficient water. The Board of Supervisors and staff of the Steuben County SWCD developed objectives which reflect the top resource concerns identified to guide our conservation work. The following tables states those objectives and show the identified natural resource issues they address.

Objectives	Natural Resource Issues				
	Surface Water Quality Degradation	Soil Quality Degradation	Forestry / Wildlife / Wetlands	Impaired / Undesirable Plant Production	Land Use Conversion
Agriculture Lands					
<i>Promote</i> the adoption of conservation practices on agriculture lands	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Monitor</i> the status of conservation on agriculture lands	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Secure funding</i> for conservation implementation on agriculture lands	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Promote education</i> on the benefits and management of agriculture lands	X	X	X	X	X
Woodlands and Wildlife					
<i>Promote</i> the adoption of conservation practices for existing woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife lands	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Promote</i> the establishment of woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife lands	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Secure funding</i> for conservation implementation on woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife lands	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Promote education</i> on the benefits and management of woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife lands	X	X	X	X	X

Objectives	Natural Resource Issues				
	Surface Water Quality Degradation	Soil Quality Degradation	Forestry / Wildlife / Wetlands	Impaired / Undesirable Plant Production	Land Use Conversion
Non-Agriculture & Developing Lands					
<i>Promote</i> implementation of conservation on non-agriculture and developing lands	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Secure funding</i> for conservation on non-agriculture and developing lands	X	X	X	X	X
Public Information / Education					
<i>Provide land users</i> with sources of educational, technical, and financial assistance	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Plan and participate in</i> conservation efforts and events that address identified resource concerns	X	X	X	X	X



Conservation and Key Strategies

To address our natural resource concerns, the Steuben County SWCD Board of Supervisors and staff use the following strategies to accomplish our conservation objectives:

Information

The district provides conservation information to the public with the following items:

- Annual Meeting
- Brochures, newsletters and other publications
- Customer Service (e.g., telephone calls and walk-in requests for information)
- Educational Programs
- Partnership Contacts
- Social Media (<https://www.facebook.com/SteubenIndianaSWCD>)
- Website (<https://steubenswcd.org>)

Education

The district educates the public through the following events and activities:

- Customer Service (e.g., providing soil surveys, tree planning information, etc.)
- Demonstration Sites
- Displays
- Education and Outreach Materials (e.g., natural resource videos, etc.)
- Field Days
- Partnership Education Events (participate in & assist)
- Presentations
- School Outreach
- Social Media (<https://www.facebook.com/SteubenIndianaSWCD>)
- Website (<https://steubenswcd.org>)
- Workshops (e.g., Spring Garden Series, Steuben County Life, etc.)
- Youth Education (e.g., Conservation Camps, Duck Days, Youth Conservation Field Day, etc.)

Marketing

The district promotes conservation to the public using the following strategies:

- Advocate for conservation within/between departments of local governments
- Create materials to promote the SWCD in the community & educational events such as educational videos and brochures, billboards, radio ads, etc.
- Customer Service – promoting various conservation programs available
- Displays
- Field Days
- News Releases
- Newsletters (The Conservator, Annual Report and partner organization newsletters, etc.)
- Social Media (<https://www.facebook.com/SteubenIndianaSWCD>)
- Supervisors and staff serving on various boards and committees
- Website (<https://steubenswcd.org>)

Technical Assistance

The district provides technical assistance in the following ways:

- Assistance with administration of Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) Rule 5 / General Permit program
- Assistance to county government in natural resource related matters
- Conservation planning, design, and implementation
- Customer Service (e.g., provide soil survey information, topography maps, etc. to the public)
- Identify resource personnel
- Track and monitor program participation and conservation activity on agricultural lands and for wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife lands

Financial Assistance

The district connects landowners in Steuben County to the following sources of conservation financial assistance:

- Federal conservation programs (e.g., Farm Bill programs, Great Lakes Commission)
- IDEM 319 grants
- Other grants, foundations, etc.
- Partnership opportunities / programs
- Specialized / targeted funding opportunities
- State conservation cost share/incentive programs [e.g., IDNR Lake and River Enhancement (LARE)]
- State Grants (Clean Water Indiana)
- Steuben County SWCD District cost share program

Funding for District Operations and Conservation Education

The district receives financial support from the following sources:

- Steuben County Commissioners and Council
- State grants, including annual Clean Water Indiana Statutory funding and Clean Water Indiana grants
- Affiliate Memberships
- SWCD flag and rain barrel sales
- Other grants, foundations, etc. (e.g., Field Day and Workshop sponsorships and grants).

Administration

Accountability:

- Maintain financial records
- Maintain record of District activities (e.g., annual report, tally sheet – customer service)
- Complete all required reporting (e.g., annual SWCD financial report, grant reports, etc.)
- Maintain and implement Steuben SWCD Internal Controls
- Spring and Fall Tillage Transect Surveys

- GIS, Conservation Desktop and Conservation Tracking
- Reports to Steuben County Officials

Staffing:

- Complete annual employee and Supervisor evaluations
- Review individual job titles, descriptions, and responsibilities annually
- Identify potential staffing needs
- Create and utilize a recruitment strategy for supervisors and associate supervisors

Funding:

- Advocate for annual SWCD budget from Steuben County Government
- Pursue partnership opportunities for program funding

2021-2023 Natural Resource Critical Issues Goals:

On Agricultural Land

- Increase county-wide cover crop usage by 200 acres/year
- Increase cropland conversion to hay or pastureland by 100 acres/year
- Increase no till usage on cropland acres by 100 acres/year
- Increase county-wide nutrient, manure, and pest management usage on cropland by 100 acres/year
- Promote rotational grazing & livestock watering systems
- Plant an additional 25 acres of trees/year
- Plant and/or manage an additional 25 acres of native wildlife habitat/year
- Work with landowners to remove 25 acres of invasive species/year
- Discuss forest management and conservation with 10 landowners/year

On Developing Land

- The district will continue the formal arrangement set up with IDEM for reviewing development plans for adequate erosion and sediment control.
- 100% of erosion control complaints on construction sites will be forwarded to IDEM for review and investigation.
- The district will work with the City of Angola/Trine University Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Coordinator to develop additional educational materials and workshops to promote best management practices such as erosion control measures, vegetative swales, raingardens, rain barrels, etc.

Other Land Users

- Meet with County Departments to gain ideas to further conservation.
- Cooperate with all city and county government agencies to incorporate conservation practices and technologies into all land use activities (e.g., assist the city as they work to improve sediment and erosion control compliance on construction sites); assist the county health department (e.g., assist with promotion of proper septic system maintenance to reduce contamination from failing septic systems); and assist the county surveyor's office in improving drainage while protecting water quality.
- Review educational and outreach programs to other land users in relation to technical assistance, general concerns/complaints, 4H fair booth, workshops, field days, etc.

Desired Plan Outcomes

- ✓ 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
- ✓ Maximize voluntary conservation implementation in county with landowners, farmers, livestock producers, foresters, etc.
- ✓ Increase conservation awareness in county, demonstrated through active conservation actions by landowners
- ✓ Sedimentation from all land disturbing activities reduced to levels that do not have any adverse off-site impact
- ✓ Cleaner streams, rivers, and lakes - reduced sedimentation & impairment
- ✓ Improved soil productivity
- ✓ Increased woodland resources & better managed woodland acres, with native species thriving
- ✓ Functional and effective SWCD recognized as source for conservation information and assistance
- ✓ Continued development of Board Supervisor's and staff (e.g., Leadership Institute training, etc.)
- ✓ Pursue pertinent grants
- ✓ Enhanced quality of life for Steuben County citizens and our downstream neighbors

Current Full-Time Staffing

Administrative Coordinator
Resource Conservationist

Current Part-Time Staffing

Office Clerical (*works offsite; assists with grant management*)

Additional Funding Needs:

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