



## Dubois County Soil & Water Conservation District

1486 Executive Blvd. Suite A • Jasper, IN 47546

812-482-1171 x3 • [www.duboisswcd.org](http://www.duboisswcd.org)

Winter, 2018-2019

# The Conservation Conversation

## Conservation Farmer of the Year Award

**T**he Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District presents an annual award to a Dubois County farmer who uses good soil and water conservation practices on their farm and puts extra effort into conserving natural resources. During the SWCD's Annual Meeting held at Venue 1408 in Huntingburg on Tuesday, February 5th, 2019, Tim Robinette, Senior Vice President of Commercial Lending from Old National Bank, Alex Hohl, Direct Sales Manager for Beck's Hybrids and Brenda Sermersheim, Ag Lender from German American Bank presented the 2019 Otto J. Bauer Outstanding Conservation Farmer of the Year to Dustin Schmett. The Otto J. Bauer Outstanding Conservation Farmer of the Year award is named in memory of Otto J. Bauer. Bauer was a champion of soil and water conservation efforts in Dubois County and a member of the SWCD Board of Supervisors from 1969-1986.



A life-long farmer, Schmett began farming with his father, the late Mike Schmett, and now partners with his mother. Schmett farms 1,700 acres in both Pike and Dubois Counties which benefit from his thoughtful management style. Schmett raises wheat, corn, and soybeans.

Schmett lives a strong conservation ethic and has put time and effort into his farm management practices over many years. Conservation practices he utilizes include cover crops, grade stabilization structures, water and sediment control basins, waterways, no-till, nutrient and pest management, underground outlets, and subsurface drains. He has CRP acres and has also utilized EQUIP contracts to carry out his stewardship plans. Over the years, he has utilized less tillage and more no-till practices. He recently started using more true cover crops which he believes holds the soil in place and sees less erosion. These practices also have built soil structure and helped to improved water quality. He reads articles and talks with other farmers to learn more about the latest trends in farming and is open to try new conservation practices. He hopes to be able to pass the farm to one of his three children.

Schmett is a member of the Huntingburg Kiwanis and feel success is getting through these tough agricultural times. He enjoys seeing the progress of his work from his own hands. Beck's Hybrid will be covering the expense to send Schmett to the next National No-Till Conference in Indianapolis.

### Contents

**Front Cover**  
*Conservation  
Farmer Award*

**2**  
*Friend of  
Conservation  
Award*

**3**  
*Forester Award*

**4**  
*Forestry Notes  
Upcoming event*

**5**  
*Patoka Watershed*

**6**  
*Grazing Bites*

**7**  
*Grazing Bites,  
continued*

**Back Cover**  
*Staff  
and  
Rental Equipment*

## Friend of Conservation Award, 2019

---

Dubois County has many champions of conservation, so Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District decided to create an award to recognize their efforts. On February 5th, at the 73rd SWCD Annual Meeting held at Venue 1408 in Huntingburg, Alan Smock was presented with the first annual Friend of Conservation Award.

Smock grew up on a grain and livestock farm in Bartholomew County and was raised with ethics to respect natural resources. A few of the lessons his father taught him was to treat the livestock well and not work wet soil. He realized at an early age that farming creates a great sense of responsibility for the land and believes farming has a close relationship with Mother Nature. Natural resources are for our use and not to be misused.

Smock still owns and farms the family property which includes 10 acres in Classified Forest. One piece of the property, owned by his brother, has been in the family since 1850. After graduating from Rose Hulman with a mechanical engineering degree, working for ten years at GM, and getting married, it came apparent to him that it was more important *where* he lives than *what* he did. He and his wife, Kay, searched for a year before deciding to move to Jasper. They purchased 70 mostly wooded acres and then planted 10 more acres of trees.

Since his retirement from MasterBrands, Smock served as Dubois County SWCD Supervisor for two terms. He served as Vice Chair for several years. At this time, his philosophy changed from personal conservation actions to becoming more interested in public outreach. During his tenure as a SWCD Supervisor, the Dean of Vincennes University Jasper Campus approached the SWCD, asking if SWCD would be interested in managing their 50 acres of cropland. The SWCD agreed and the VUJC Land Stewardship Initiative (LSI) was born. Smock has been a champion of the LSI program since its inception seven years ago. He has served as the Chair of the LSI Steering Committee and has led the LSI Agricultural Operations Committee since 2012. He attends conferences to learn more about soil health and brings his wealth of knowledge to bear on the VUJC farm ground.

Smock is a past member of the Indiana Forest and Woodland Owners Association and is a current member of the Four Rivers Forestry Committee. He is active in his church and is on two boards at the Southern Hills Counseling Center. He believes in the benefits of improving your soil's health and continues to actively raise the awareness of these benefits to the local farming community.



Brenda Sermersheim,  
Alan Smock with his award,  
Pat Eckerle,  
and Glenn Goeppner

## Forester of the Year Award, 2019

---

Tom and Louise Brames were presented the OFS Brands Forest Stewardship Award by Scott Reckelhoff, Property Manager of OFS Brands during the Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District's (SWCD) Annual Meeting held Tuesday, February 5th, 2019 at the Venue 1408 in Huntingburg. Dubois County contains many acres of highly erodible land; steep ground for which the best use is tree cover. Many landowners do not actively manage their forest ground which reduce their forest yield. Some forested land is not managed properly thereby causing soil erosion and negative impacts on local water quality. Finally, the wood industry in Dubois County is large and local forest owners with under-managed woodlands are not full reaping the benefits of the local wood market. The SWCD Board of Supervisors annually recognizes forest landowners who carry out wise forestry stewardship programs on their land.

This year's recipients, Tom and Louise Brames, lifelong residents of St. Anthony, own 68 acres in Dubois County and 300 acres in Perry County. All of their acreage is under Classified Forest and is owned for recreation, hunting, investment, and their enjoyment. Some of the Brames' conservation practices are cutting vines, reforestation through tree planting, completing TSI, and planting and maintaining food plots. Tom stated how he loves the peace and quiet he feels when standing in his wooded acres. When asked what he would recommend to other forestland owners, he commented, "Love your woods." With this in mind, one of his goals is to improve the forest with the main objective of controlling invasive species. Tom routinely monitors and controls invasive species when he finds them. In 2017, Brames took an eroded, previously grazed hillside and worked with David Howell, Wildlife Biologist, to put in warm season grasses and wildlife plantings to protect the soil and benefit wildlife. He especially enjoys tree planting; knowing that some of these forests will be here in 100 years providing benefits to society and the environment. One of the challenges of extensive tree planting Brames has discovered is deer browsing. Tom is semi-retired from farming and works part time with Multi-Resource Management (MRM) since 2017. Tom and Louise are active in their church and much involved with their grandchildren.

Tom and Louise Brames receiving  
the Forest Stewardship Award  
and  
Scott Reckelhoff,  
OFS Brands Property Manager



# The Importance of Young Forests

As a nature lover and professional biologist, I like to brag that my daughters can identify trees, birds, insects, and even snakes. But one day, I received a tiny stab to my prideful heart. My daughter, Natalie, had created a poster for her elementary school ecology class that had the message, “Don’t kill trees.” When I saw it, I realized that in teaching her about trees, I hadn’t passed on to her an important lesson: that forest go through stages of life just like people do.

Forests start out young and fresh, growing in leaps and bounds with abundant plant and animal diversity. Several mid-stages of development then define what kind of forest will be established, often driven by land management decisions. The final stage can be a mature forest that is majestic and worthy of admiration but if not monitored can become unhealthy with little value for humans or wildlife.

Each stage of a forest, or ‘age class’ as foresters say, provides critical habitat for wildlife. Young forests have more seeds, berries, and beneficial insects sought by breeding, migrating, and over-wintering animals. Many species of wildlife depend on young forests to reproduce. Even species associated with older forests also seek out patches of young forest to access seasonal food and cover.

In the Eastern United States, wildlife populations that depend on young forests have been in decline for decades. In New England and the Mid-Atlantic, nearly 70 percent of young-forest bird species experienced significant population declines between 1966 and 2010.

In response, owners of private lands are working with USDA’s Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and other conservation partners to manage forests on private lands in sustainable ways. These efforts benefit non-game species; such as, birds, turtles, snakes, and small mammals and support game species like American woodcock, wild turkey, deer, moose, elk, bear, snowshoe hare, and ruffed grouse.

Healthy young forests are winners for people, too. Game and other wildlife are attracted to regenerating forests. Hunters can bag a trophy buck or some other prized game in their own young forest habitat instead of having to travel elsewhere. Hunting leases can help offset land ownership and manage expenses.

Those managing for timber production are ideal participants in the creation of young forest habitat. By participating in an age-class conversion to young forests, landowners have found they can receive assistance from NRCS to reset the clock on low-value forest, re-establishing a healthier and more valuable stand of trees, and contributing to a long-term solution for healthy forest landscapes.

Sometimes, landowners and communities are reluctant to cut forests to allow for regeneration, fearing lost aesthetics and lower property values. That is why it is important for you to remember that: young forests are critical need for wildlife, regenerated sites will green-up amazingly fast and the number of trees will actually increase, and your voluntary participation with NRCS means you can call the shots in managing your young forest. Think of it this way, healthy forests, just like healthy human populations, are sustained by a diversity of age classes. Each class has a role to play in maintaining wildlife and human communities for years to come.

NRCS offers technical and financial assistance to landowners wanting to implement sustainable forestry practices on their land. Learn more by contacting: [nrcs.usda.gov/wildlife](http://nrcs.usda.gov/wildlife).

*Posted by Bridgett Estel Costanzo, NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife East Coordinator*

## Learn-N-Burn Woodland

Prescribed Fire Workshop

April 6, 2019, 9am-2pmEDT

Southern Indiana Purdue Ag Center

11371 E Purdue Farm Road, Dubois IN 47527

Space is limited. Registered by April 1st, 2019

Call Ron Rathfon at 812-678-5049 or [ronr@purdue.edu](mailto:ronr@purdue.edu)



# Patoka Watershed News



With 2019 here, perhaps you have been looking forward. Perhaps you have even ‘resolved’ to do something new or even quit doing something. Some people join a gym, others vow to stop smoking. . . But sadly, many of us find that by the time February is here, there isn’t much left of our resolution to change.

Farmers and producers may be planning which fields will be planted with which crop. Or perhaps, like me, you already know what you will plant and have the seed ordered. But have you considered when you will plant? It will, of course, be dependent on nature and the winds and the rains and the sun’s warmth as to when we can get into the fields to plant the crops. So much is out of our control.

One thing can be decided, determined, “resolved” now, however. And that is whether you will consider no-till planting and fall cover crops. Just as you plan ahead to order the right variety and bags of

seed from your preferred dealer, you need to plan ahead to fall cover crops as well.

Now is the perfect time to research blends that match your circumstances. This year’s and next year’s crop as well as soil types are all vital information to help determine the best cover crop mix. Now is a good time to check availability of seed and find out how soon you can place an order.

Soil health and water quality improves with each acre that is no-tilled with fall cover crop. As Tom Kasper, USDA, Iowa stated, “Cover crops have many potential benefits for both soil and water quality in an annual grain cropping system, like the corn-soybean rotation. Cover crops provide these benefits by growing during the fallow periods between harvest and planting of main crops. Studies have shown that rye and oat winter cover crops can reduce erosion and nitrate leaching in corn-soybean rotations, which improves both water and soil quality.”



Let us all resolve to improve southern Indiana’s soil health and the water quality by working together to plant more no-till acres this spring and plant more cover crop acres this fall.

*Julie Loeher, Patoka River Watershed Coordinator*

## Indiana Cover Crops

Already a national leader for use of cover crops, Indiana wants a fivefold increase in cover crop acreage planted in the offseason grains by 2025. If the Hoosier state pulls this off, nearly half the state’s 11 million acres of corn and soybeans will be growing something year-round. That degree of adoption could push the needle on reducing nitrate and phosphorus fertilizer runoff into rivers and lakes, according to research by Purdue University and Iowa State University.

But big questions remain, including how Indiana will get more farmers on board without more money for subsidies and whether the effort will be worth it.

“Time will tell,” said Jordan Seger, deputy director of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture. “The new area of growth is to get all the livestock groups aligned around those goals. Farm Bureau touches a whole different audience than our government group do.”

Cover crops like rye, wheat, and oats grown over the winter and spring between cash crops have been shown to reduce fertilizer runoff and boost organic material in the soil.

*Read more of the December 2nd, 2018 Gazette article written by Erin Jordan at <https://www.thegazette.com/subject/news/government/treading-water-cover-crops-indiana-corn-soybeans-purdue-university-iowa-state-university-reduce-nitrate-phosphorus-agricultural-runoff-dead-zone-surface-runoff-hypoxia-20181202>*

I wasn't going to talk about the weather in this issue. I will say though, that I believe most livestock producers are really appreciating any rock pad they have built. It's one thing to have snow on top of ice, but in much of the state, that **was** over the top of mud. I also **was** a bit envious of the northern portion of the state that I've referred to before as being in semi permafrost, until the polar vortex hit.

I really don't mind mud occasionally, it's certainly expected in the livestock business, but not for weeks or months on end. Most producers are done grazing for the winter or their pasture wishes they were done. The impact of a bunch of cows on water saturated soils can be quite disturbing, no pun intended.

Areas with heavy vegetation from stockpiled forage are also barely able to hold up, even moving animals every day. If there is not much vegetation left, then the chance of it being 'plowed' is inevitable.

The forage residual acts like a buffer up to a point. When there is a lot of plant material present on the soil surface and livestock create divots in the sod and soil, the hooves move some vegetative matter into the soil. I'd like to think that there might be something positive about that.

Think about this; divots in the soil with copious amounts of decaying plants jammed in them. If there is sufficient nitrogen in the system, then this material could break down into useful organic matter, and if soil life is present (fungi, bacteria, worms, etc.) then it will make use of this material and even pull some of it into the soil profile. This certainly could speed up the process of conversion of above-ground nutrition for plant and terrestrial life use. Normally, root growth and turnover have more impact on increasing soil organic matter.

Second, I wonder if there is any possibly benefit of the divot itself. Talk about thinking way outside the box! Besides possibly helping to speed up any deposited plant material on the soil surface, if the soil is presently aggregated and functioning properly, there is a normal freezing and thawing processes, then these divots could help increase water infiltration and reduce runoff in the long run. There are a lot of ifs in that statement, but it's still worth the effort to try to make lemonade out of lemons. Of course, I would never do this on purpose. If there is little vegetation present, then most likely, you don't have good soil aggregates present and more likely compacted soil. This is quite often the fact on overgrazed sites, especially on continuously grazed pastures.

The other possible positive attribute might be the creation of an improved environment for frost-seeding legumes into the stand. Severely damaged fields will probably require more TLC, if not total renovation in some cases. I think it is important that we limit the amount of damage whenever possible. The livestock must be somewhere over winter, especially after all grazing is done. It is best to limit that to only one field to limit the damage. The establishment of good pasture is not cheap. It's also best to not use the same field for overwintering every year or that field will most likely become a weedy mess due to the loss of desirable species.

I was asked recently about temporary or summer cover for overwintering areas. Overwintering areas, especially because of winter feeding, tractor tracks, a lot of disturbance, and an overabundance of nutrients and organic material are often a mess once the growing season starts up again. I'll address how to handle these areas and what to seed on them in March or April but for now I want to point out that these areas should always be a good distance from any water body. You need to keep at least a two hundred-foot buffer between winter feeding areas and streams, creeks, ponds, or any other water body. That two-hundred-foot buffer should also be left year-round with good vegetation on it to help filter out sediment and nutrients. Heavily disturbed pastures should also be buffered, but usually require less of a buffer since they usually still are capable of some filtering. Standing in the field should give you some good insight as to what is happening and where.

The impact of these wet soils is also somewhat dependent on the animals present. Small ruminants; such as sheep or goats, don't do quite as much damage due to size. Surprisingly for some, their little hooves seem to do more compacting sometimes than larger grazing ruminants. Smaller sized cattle certainly have less impact than heavier cattle. It's best not start down that rabbit hole today, but cattle size is a good topic.



Back to where I started, mud is certainly worse around feeding, watering, and other concentrated areas, so most producers could benefit from having some heavy use area pads for winter use, especially when the ground stays wet and is not frozen. These are fairly simple and economical practices to construct.

Start by leveling the area. Remove excess organic matter, manure, and top soil if necessary, to get a firm foundation to build on. Geo-textile fabric is laid down first, followed by crushed limestone, usually #53's which is applied 6-8 inches deep depending on the site and conditions. Finish it with a couple inches of lime. The lime makes it easier to scrape and/or clean later and a little lime spread out on the field or pasture certainly won't hurt anything.

These pads supply a firm well drained area for feeding hay in rings, feeding silage in bunks and for area around watering tanks, similar designs can be used for concentrated walking area and lanes. If you happen to be on softer or sweeter soils, then a layer of #2 lime stone could be laid underneath for a firmer base.

Mud increases stress for both humans and the livestock. Mud increases energy requirement and at the same time can decrease intake. Mud can also tend to increase disease problems. Bottom line is mud can cost you big bucks!

Rock and geo-textile fabric is cheaper than concrete and requires less maintenance than rock alone. These feed pads can also be placed right along the outside fence line, adjacent to a road or drive. In this way, the silage, grain, or hay can easily be fed without entering the field with the tractor.

Heavy use protection areas are cost-sharable practices available through several USDA programs. Contact your local Soil and Water Conservation office for more information (Dubois County SWCD, 812-482-1171, ext #3).

Keep warm, dry, and don't lose your boots in the mud with the next thaw and we'll look forward to 'keep on grazing!' (For more pasture information and/or past issues of *Grazing Bites*—<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/technical/landuse/pasture>)



**The Dubois County  
SWCD Annual Report  
was once again placed as  
an insert in  
*The Ferdinand News*  
in January, 2019.**

**If you would like to have a  
complimentary copy,  
stop by the SWCD office  
at  
1486 Executive Blvd in Jasper**

**or to view it online  
go to our website at  
[www.duboisswcd.org](http://www.duboisswcd.org)**





**Dubois County Soil & Water Conservation District**

1486 Executive Blvd. Suite A • Jasper, IN 47546  
812-482-1171 x3 • [www.duboisswcd.org](http://www.duboisswcd.org)

**The Conservation Conversation**

**OFFICE HOURS: MON-FRI 8 AM TO 4 PM**

**OFFICIAL BUSINESS NEWSLETTER**

NON PROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE PAID  
JASPER IN 47546  
PERMIT NO. 191

For address corrections or to be taken off the list,  
please contact the office by email at  
[patti.schroeder@in.nacdnet.net](mailto:patti.schroeder@in.nacdnet.net)  
or call 812-817-3447



*Follow the SWCD on Facebook!*  
**[facebook.com/dcswcd](https://facebook.com/dcswcd)**



*Follow NRCS on Twitter!*  
**[twitter.com IN\\_NRCS\\_Dubois](https://twitter.com/IN_NRCS_Dubois)**

**SWCD Board of Supervisors**

Brenda Sermersheim, Chair

Glenn Goepfner, Vice Chair

Glenn Menke, Member

Pat Eckerle, Member

Alex Hohl, CCA, Member

**Dubois County SWCD Staff**

Judi Brown, Executive Director

Justin Bary, Resource Technician

Melissa Ruschau, Program Technician

Radius Weisman, Technical Specialist

Bart Pitstick, Technical Specialist

Jennifer Knable-Thompson, Program Support Technician

Emily Finch, Invasive Species Specialist

Patti Schroeder, Program Assistant

**Partnership Staff**

Taylor Gundlach, NRCS District Conservationist

Andrea Gogel, ISDA DOSC



**Rental Equipment Available  
at Dubois County SWCD**

• **No-Till Drill**

Great Plains No-Till drill has a seeding width of 7 feet, and can be used to plant soybeans, wheat, legumes, grasses, etc. It can also be used to plant native, or warm season, grasses. *Rental fee is \$8/acre or minimum of \$50.*

• **Stapler/Staples**

Installing erosion control blankets? This stapler makes completing the job easy! The plunger simply pushes the staples into the ground. *Rental fee is \$10/use and box of 1,000 staples is \$50 per box.*

• **Spinning Jenny**

Use to install high-tensile wire fences. Load with wire and set on the ground. Walk away pulling the end of the wire and it will spin, preventing your wire from tangling. Slow down gradually before stopping to prevent over-spinning and tangling. Can also be used to rewind wire in the field. *No Rental Fees.*

• **Tile Flags**

Flags on 36" wire staff can be used to mark underground power lines, or surveying jobs. *Cost is \$7.00/bundle of 100.*