# VUJC Land Stewardship Initiative

# 2013 Annual Report

Dubois County
Soil and Water Conservation
District

VUJC
Land Stewardship
Initiative
*soil health...the root of everything*

VINCENNES UNIVERSITY
Jasper Campus

# VUJC Land Stewardship Initiative

*soil health...the root of everything*

The VUJC Land Stewardship Initiative has made significant progress in 2013. With a clear mission and a well-established organizational structure, we have been able to begin implementing a variety of sustainable management practices across the property. This work coupled with continued collection of data on the health of the property's fields, forests, and watercourses will allow us to demonstrate the benefits of sustainable management.


**2013 saw the LSI shift its focus from planning to implementation.**

## Fields

• We have continued to manage our fields according to a conservation cropping system. Continued sampling will document the gradual improvements of the property's soil health and productivity.

• The 2013 harvest was completed with a yield monitor equipped combine. This year, the farm averaged 138 bushels per acre of corn.

• We have purchased precision ag software and used it to generate yield maps of the harvest. These maps will help us develop a nutrient management plan for 2014 that will minimize run-off and make the most of applied nutrients.

• Buffer strips of grass have been planted around each field and are becoming well-established. These buffers will reduce erosion and nutrient run-off. Though they occupy some low-productivity land that could be cropped, the benefits far outweigh the minimal loss of revenue.

• A gulley that had been widening along College Ave. and Meridian Rd. has been repaired and stabilized. Along with solving an erosion problem, the repair will allow us to add around an acre of land to crop production.

• An innovative field tile system has been designed and will be installed next year in the small, triangular field across from Bohnert Park. The system uses a structure that can block the tile's outlet at certain times of the year, flooding water back through the tile lines under the field. The system will have multiple uses: Nutrients normally lost in the fall as the previous year's crops decay can be held in the field until collected by cover crops. Not only will nutrient run-off be reduced, but less fertilizer will be required to grow the next year's crop. The multi-purpose system will also include two surface inlets to collect storm water from a nearby residential area, turning a nuisance into a valuable agricultural resource during dry summers, and demonstrating a cost-effective approach to dealing with urban drainage issues. Additional tile is planned for other fields. These lines should increase productivity and allow us to crop an area that has previously been too wet.

• The prairie planted near the campus entrance is growing well; no management was necessary this year. We will monitor the area to ensure it continues to provide the beneficial wildlife and pollinator habitat.

## Forests

• Following the completion of a forest inventory, DNR District Forester Adam Dumond drafted a management plan for the property's forests. This plan will be the basis of the Initiative's future activity in the forests. Invasive species management is currently the priority.

• Several Initiative members volunteered their time to clear 1.6 miles of forest edge of invasive species. These plants, mainly japanese honeysuckle, callery pear, bush honeysuckle, and autumn olive, represent the majority of the seed-producing invasives on the property. However, further treatment will be necessary next year as well as constant "maintenance" thereafter.

## Watercourses

• Monitoring of the habitat quality and nutrient load in the ditches and creeks around the property has ensured that our management practices do not harm the watercourses. As our cropping system continues to improve the soil's health, we hope to see improvements in the watercourses as well.

• We have begun collecting and sampling water leaving the tiles of one of the property's fields. This will provide a baseline estimate of the amount of nutrient currently leaving the field. Between the implementation of a nutrient management plan and improvements in the soil, we expect to see these levels decrease in the future.

## Community Outreach

• The Initiative hosted an open house this July for county officials and the public. The open house provided an opportunity for both to learn about the Initiative's mission and see how the Initiative had progressed.

**Dubois County District Conservationist Bart Pitstick describes the LSI's property and cropping system to the county's elected officials.**

• The campus is consistently available as a location for conservation events. Events in 2013 included a public rain garden workshop, soil judging contest for local students, and staff training days for the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

• VUJC has continued to serve as one of the four state hubs of the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative. The campus has functioned as a convenient location for trainings and workshops in the southwest region of the state.

• In the spring, several members of Boy Scout Troop 185 cleaned up the fields and forest edges around the property. Over the course of an afternoon, the scouts collected several bags of construction debris, broken tile pieces, and litter. Their work will help the property function as a showcase of conservation practices in the future.

**CCSI's Barry Fisher speaks at an event on the LSI farm.**

## Finance

• The finance committee has drafted a donation solicitation letter and developed a plan for how to recognize businesses and individuals who help support the Initiative. We plan to begin formally seeking donations shortly after the beginning of 2014.