



# 2023 annual report

# DUBOIS COUNTY

# SOIL & WATER

# CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## 2023 Soil & Water Conservation Achievements

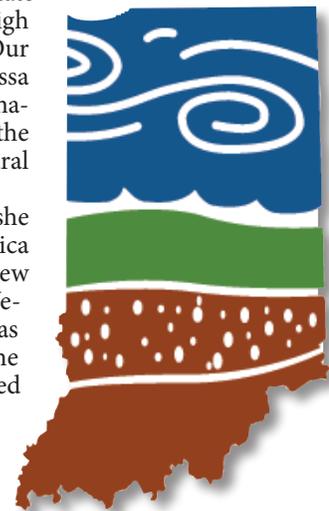
*By Aubree Pond*

With the end of 2023 also comes the end of another year of helping Dubois County Landowners to reach their conservation goals. The Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has completed its 78th year of working to establish conservation practiced in Dubois County.

2023 was a year full of transition! Judi Brown, who served as the executive director of the SWCD for 25 years, retired at the beginning of the year. While the county searched for someone to take the mantle from Judi, the staff and supervisors were responsible for making sure the SWCD goals and strategic plan were still on track. This included hosting last year's Annual Meeting, hosting workshops, and continuing to connect landowners with resources when requested. A few of these workshops included an Invasive Species Spring Speaker Series hosted by the Invasive Species Awareness Coalition of Dubois County (ISAC) and a new workshop focused on small farms and gardeners hosted at Arlene Fleck's Property, one of our Supervisors.

After careful consideration, the County and the SWCD Board of Supervisors selected Aubree Pond to begin serving as the new Executive Director. She is excited to plant some roots here in Dubois County and help the SWCD make a difference in the world of conservation. Aubree was able to get a feel for how the Dubois SWCD interacts with the state at the state Envirothon Competition held for high school students and FFA chapters. Our Soil Health Resource Specialist, Melissa Ruschau, is this year's state test coordinator and is working to help educate the next generation on all things natural resources.

Not long after Aubree started, she had the privilege of welcoming Veronica Helming to the SWCD team as the new Administrative Assistant. Since Veronica's husband Andrew Helming was serving as a supervisor at the time, he stepped down, and the Board welcomed Mark Welp, of St. Anthony, to the Board in his place.



*Photo by Emily Finch*

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# 2023 Soil & Water Conservation Achievements

*(Continued from page 1)*

The SWCD also had the opportunity to house a summer intern. Ella Goepfner, a local Dubois County Resident is a student at Purdue University studying Agricultural Education. The SWCD was happy to give her insight into a different side of education with the work they do to help promote and teach landowners about the benefits of conservation. Ella, with the help of Women4theLand, was able to host a pollinator workshop over the summer. It consisted of a small group of women interested in agriculture with a passion for protecting our native pollinators. It included roundtable discussions, hands-on activities to identify pollinators, native and invasive plants, and a plant ID walk at the Parklands in Jasper.

Soon after Ella started, our new NRCS District Conservationist, Clay Cox, also joined the office. As a native to Kentucky, Clay is familiar with the importance of conservation when it comes to farm ground. If you have any questions about current NRCS programs, give our office a call.

The office was finally fully staffed again! As everyone started to find their groove as a

team, the SWCD was quickly able to participate in a few office wide projects. As a staff, we attended the Dubois County Fair with our Soil Health Display. This display highlighted the importance of soil testing and why growers, both large and small, should take soil health into consideration when making plans for their operation. This was directly related to our new Soil Health Working Group that was established this year in partnership with the Dubois County FFA Chapters, Purdue Extension, and the Sisters of St. Benedict. The goal of this working group is to encourage small landowners and gardeners to focus on soil health in their backyard gardens.

Shortly after the fair, school started here in Dubois County, and the FFA Chapters were preparing for various Career Development Events (CDEs). The SWCD has historically hosted a soils judging

invitation every year, and this year was no different. With one staff member having assisted with this project in the past, it was a great opportunity for our Resource Specialist Justin Bary to show off his soils knowledge. With the help of Duane Hopf, who kindly let us use his property to host our

soils competition, we were able to host 9 schools from around southern Indiana with a total of 65 students participating. This invitational has become quite the competition among the Dubois County FFA Chapters that participate in soils, and Jasper FFA was able to walk away with a win under their belt.

This year also marked a historic event for Natural Resource Conservation in the State of Indiana. The Clean Water Indiana Program that helps fund conservation efforts across Indiana through various grants and other financial assistance to landowners was able to secure a 2 million dollar increase over the next two years within the Indiana budget. Districts across the state are hop-



**Resource Specialist Melissa Ruschau engages with students at the JMS Career Cruises on April 5, 2023.**



**Ron Rathon of Purdue Extension lectures attendees of the SIPAC Landowner Training held on September 9.**

ing to encourage our legislators to make this a permanent addition to the Indiana Budget. While our SWCD chose to sit out a year in pursuing a CWI Grant, first due to our leading or assisting on 3 grants at the time, and second to help our new staff get accustomed to grant writing and management, the office is excited to jump in next year to go after a piece of CWI funding to

help landowners here in Dubois County.

Two of our three CWI grants wrapped up at the end of 2023. The first was a livestock grant aimed at helping establish Heavy Use Area Protection Pads (HUAPs) to protect soil from the impact of livestock, watering facilities, pasture renovation, and cover crops. Through this grant we were able to help 6 producers with HUAPs, 4 with putting in watering facilities for their cattle, 4 producers chose to do pasture renovations and at the end of the grant 4 producers decided to do fall cover crops.

Our second was used to fund our Invasive Species Specialist position, held by Emily Finch. Finch conducted landowner site visits to provide technical assistance on managing invasive species. After the site visits Finch would write up invasive management plans for the landowners to control the invasives on their property.

Many events were hosted in 2023 in partnership with ISAC, Purdue Extension, and SIPAC. In 2023, ISAC with the help of Finch

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hosted volunteer Weed Wrangles at Niehaus Park in Huntingburg and Old Town Lake in Ferdinand. Also, two events were to help at the Southern Indiana Purdue Agricultural Center (SIPAC) to inform landowners on how to control invasive species.

Other events included the Parklands Prairie Walk, Jasper Home Expo, Memorial Hospital Earth Day, and the Ferdinand Folk Fest.

At the end of the year, we had to say our goodbyes to Finch as she is now serving Daviess, Martin, and Orange Counties under a new Invasive CWI grant.

The SWCD is hoping to establish a full time Invasive Position in the future without the reliance on grant funding and will be working closely with ISAC to find a way to secure a permanent source of funding. For now, if you have any questions on invasive species, please direct them to our office and someone will reach out soon.

2023 was a year full of new beginnings and transition. As an office, we were able to continue to serve the landowners of Du-

bois County and are excited to see what the 79th year has in store! Feel free to reach out with any questions you may have regarding upcoming programs, or if we have any resources to help with your conservation efforts at home.

The SWCD staff and Supervisors are visible within the community, planning, hosting, and participating in a variety of events to provide information and technical advice to county landowners.

**Events Hosted, Assisted With, and Participated in:**

- Career Cruise, Jasper High School
- Dubois County Four H Fair Display
- Explore Small Farms Workshop
- Getting to the Root of Cover Crops

**Workshops**

- Envirothon, Regional and State
- Ferdinand Folk Fest
- Prescribed Grazing Workshop
- Invasive Species Landowner Workshop
- ISAC Prairie Walk
- ISAC Weed Wrangles, Workdays
- Jasper Home Expo
- LSI Data Driven Decisions Workshop
- Memorial Hospital Earth Day Event



The Dubois SWCD focused on Soil Health during the 2023 Dubois County 4-H Fair.

- Patoka Lake Clean Up Day
- Southwest Indiana Soil Health Expo
  - Tour of Opportunities Organizations supported:
    - Dubois County Ag Advisory Board
    - Dubois County Weed Board
    - Four Rivers Forestry Committee
    - Indiana District Employee Association
    - Indiana Forest and Woodland Owners Association
    - Invasive Species Awareness Coalition of Dubois County
    - Jasper Stormwater Board
    - Patoka 2000, Jasper Chamber of Commerce

Ron Rathon explaining herbicide application at the Landowner Training for Invasive Species held in September, 2023.

- Patoka Lake Watershed Steering Committee
- NRCS Southwest Soil Health Team



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# Bart Pitstick received Dubois County Friend of Conservation Award

*By Veronica Helming*

On Tuesday, February 14, 2023 Bart Pitstick was presented the Dubois County SWCD Friend of Conservation Award during the 77th Dubois County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Annual Meeting held at the Thyen-Clarke Cultural Center in Jasper.

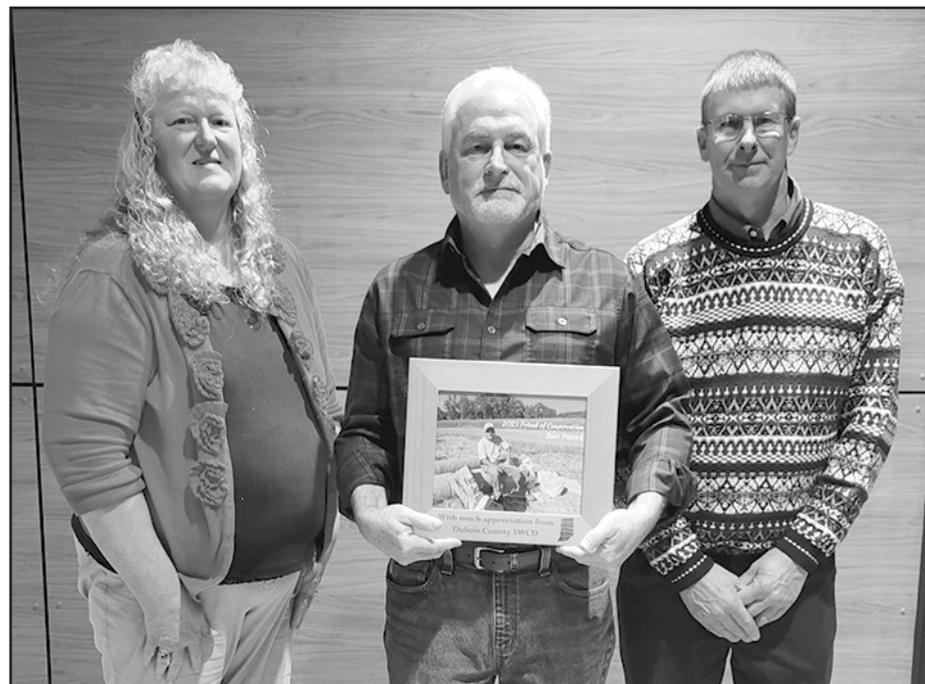
Pitstick started his career in conservation with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources before joining the NRCS in 1983 as a soil conservationist. He became a district conservationist in 1989, moving to Jasper and serving Dubois County from 1997 until his retirement in 2018.

Pitstick was instrumental in the development of the VUJC Land Stewardship Initiative, continuing to champion the project long after he retired.

Dan Hoveland, NRCS Area Conservationist said, "Bart has been one of the best conservation planners I've had the opportunity to work with in my career, always looking out for both the resource and the producer's best interest."

Congratulations, Bart Pitstick, 2023 Friend of Conservation.

**Pictured: Arlene Fleck, SWCD Supervisor, Bart Pitstick and Pat Eckerle, Supervisor.**



# Keusch Awarded Otto J. Bauer Conservation Farmer of the Year

*By Veronica Helming*

On February 14, 2023, Joe Keusch was presented with the Otto J. Bauer Conservation Farmer of the Year award. This award is sponsored by German American and Old National Banks and is presented to a Dubois County farmer who uses good soil and water conservation practices on their farm, putting in extra effort to conserve natural resources.

Keusch is a 5th generation farmer located in the Elle Creek Watershed, farming close to 200 acres. He produces corn and soybeans.

His 110-year-old farm is a little different than most in Indiana. A portion of his farm is part of a former coal mine. When the mine was reclaimed, Keusch struggled to get his soil health up to par. Keusch said, "Anyone that has ever dealt with coal mine ground knows it's very finicky the way it behaves – not only with growing a crop but the way it handles water. Seeing wash outs and sheet erosion on the old mine ground was hard to watch." Keusch finds it satisfying to watch the ground improve with all the practices he implements.

Keusch utilizes conservation practices such as no-till, cover crops, and field tile. No-tilling has been occurring on the farm since 1978.

In 1987, they stopped being an active dairy farm and no longer had a manure source, so increasing fertility and organic matter was a priority. He started his conservation planning process by adding cover crops and in three short years the microbiological activity was returning to the land.

Keusch has worked with the NRCS to obtain EQIP funding to help address his conservation needs. Retired NRCS District Conservationist, Bart Pitstick described Keusch as an innovator, a person who experiments on his land to see what works with his unique soil.

Keusch's goal is to look out for the next person who is going to farm the land and hopefully let that farmer adapt and expand as they need to.

Congratulation to Joe Keusch, Dubois County SWCD's 2023 Otto J. Bauer, Conservation Farmer of the Year.



**2022 Conservation Farmer of the Year Joe Keusch and Family.**

Melissa Ruschau and Aubree Pond attending the Memorial Hospital Earth Day on April 21, 2023.



Tour of Opportunities was held at Precision Farming Solutions in Huntingburg on October 12, 2023.

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# Urban Soil Health: Soil Health is for Everyone

By Aubree Pond

The Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is excited to announce the Local Education and Testing of Soils in Dubois County to Improve Gardens (LET'S DIG) Urban Soil Health Working Group.

This working group has been established to promote soil health and best management practices to Dubois County growers, small farms, and individuals interested in bettering soil health through education and technical assistance.

The SWCD has partnered with Purdue Extension, Dubois County FFA Chapters, and the Sisters of St. Benedicts to offer free soil testing and technical as-

sistance to landowners with gardens and small farms within the county. Be on the lookout for a workshop focusing on improving soil health on an individualized level in 2024.

The Dubois County SWCD has historically promoted soil health to large scale farm operations, and is proud to now offer similar education on a smaller scale to assist small farms and local growers alike.

If you are interested in becoming a partner of the LET'S DIG working group, have interest in improving soil health on your property, or would like to schedule a free soil test, please contact our office at (812)485-1771 Ext. 3 or email [DuboisSWCD@gmail.com](mailto:DuboisSWCD@gmail.com).

## URBAN SOIL HEALTH



## Soil Health for Everyone



Students judging one of the soils pits during the Dubois County Soil Invitational held at Duane Hopf's property on the northside of Jasper.

— Photos Courtesy of  
Annette Applegate of Forest Park FFA Advisor

## Dubois County Soil Judging Invitational

By Veronia Helming

This year's Dubois County Soil Judging Contest was held in Jasper on north Portersville Road at Duane Hopf's. The competition was held the evening of Tuesday, September 19.

The soil conditions this year were dry. 65 students

The top three teams were:

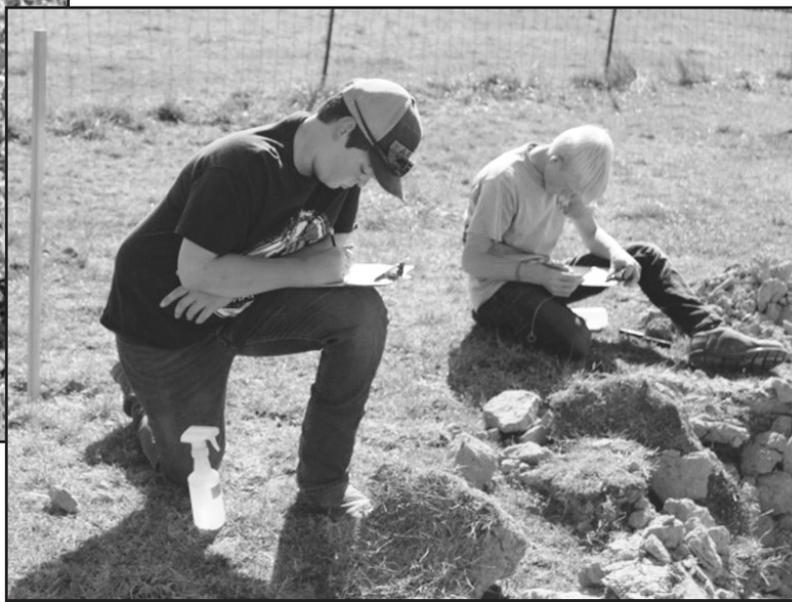
- 1st) Orleans FFA
- 2nd) Jasper FFA Gold
- 3rd) Clay City Gold.

The top 5 individuals were:

- 1st) Aiden Keller with Orleans FFA with a score of 413
- 2nd) Julia Isam with Orleans FFA with a score of 382
- 3rd) Jackson Beier with Jasper FFA Gold with a score of 353
- 4th) Grady Springer with Orleans FFA with a score of 347
- 5th) Sophie Hollsway with North Harrison FFA Team #2 with a score of 337.

The top Dubois County Soil Judging team was Jasper Gold which consisted of Jackson Beier, Grace Kluemper, Carter Wagner and Claire Linette. They will be honored on Tuesday, February 13th at the SWCD Annual Meeting with the Ken McWilliams Memorial Award for Soil Judging Excellence.

These events are designed to teach skills necessary in soil science and land use. The soil's property is evaluated to make land recommendations for agriculture production and homesite development. State contest participants must qualify at their area event.



# Local farmer receives River Friendly Farmer Award

By Veronica Helming

The annual River Friendly Farmer Award recognizes farmers for their implementation of conservation practices, like no-till and cover crops, which ultimately protect waterways and improve water quality in Indiana. Indiana's lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands are valuable natural resources.

This year, Jeff Stenftenagel was recognized as River Friendly Farmer of Dubois County. Stenftenagel's farm located in Ireland within the Patoka Watershed. He produces grain and cattle.

He uses many conservation practices such as no-till, cover crops, grass waterways, and dry dams. These practices have positively impacted his farm by reducing soil erosion and improved soil quality. The water leaving his fields has less nutrients therefore leaving the nutrients in the soil.

Stenftenagel has field borders currently enrolled in CRP (Conservation). This is to benefit wildlife and pollinators. He has also installed field tile to help drain their fields.

For his cattle operation he has installed heavy use pads for livestock feeding and he rotates the cattle on pastures.

The Stenftenagel's are involved in 4-H, FFA volunteers, and Indiana Farm Bureau members. In the past they have soil pits for the FFA soil judging teams.

Advice he would give to a new farmer or someone new to conservation is ask NRCS staff or another farmer using a conservation practice what they like or dislike and their thoughts on the practice.

Congratulations to the Stenftenagel family!



Pictured from left: Lieutenant Governor Susan Crouch, Jeff Stenftenagel and Indiana Farm Bureau President Randy Kron.

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# Local SWCDs complete 3-year Invasive Species Project

*Prepared and submitted by Invasive Species Specialist Emily Finch*

For several years, Indiana Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) have recognized the threat posed by invasive species such as Honeysuckle, Multiflora Rose, and Japanese Stiltgrass. With new invasives arriving every day, it can be an overwhelming problem for landowners. That is why since 2018 the Dubois, Daviess, and Martin County SWCDs have partnered together to support invasive species outreach and management in the three counties.

Our most recent effort is the 2021-2023 Tri-County Invasive Plant Mapping & Control Project, funded by a Clean Water Indiana grant from the Indiana State Department of Agriculture's State Soil Conservation Board. This project continued support for our Invasive Species Specialist position, filled by Emily Finch, to provide invasive species education/outreach in the area, and direct technical assistance to landowners. It also added a new goal, to conduct roadside invasive plant surveys, primarily to map populations of Poison Hemlock, an invasive species, and a regulated noxious weed toxic

to livestock.

The roadside invasive plant surveys began right away in 2021. Led by the Invasive Specialist, teams of 2 drove a total of 1,257 miles across the 3 counties, recording 1,429 individual invasive plant populations and mapping them in GIS. Most of the survey work was done in May and June to spot Poison Hemlock populations while in bloom, but an additional 19 other invasive species were also recorded. This included some new and early detection species that required follow-up surveys, including mapping a large amount of Japanese Hops vines at waterway crossings in Daviess and Martin Counties, and Japanese Spiraea, a new invasive found in Martin County. Surveys also found more invasive Wild Parsnip in Daviess and Martin counties than previously thought, but none in



**Invasive Specialist Emily Finch talks to attendees at the 2023 Landowner Invasive Plant Training about hand tools that can be used for invasive control.**



**Guest speaker Will Drews talks to attendees at the 2023 Parklands Prairie Walk event in Jasper.**

— Photo By Emily Finch

Dubois County. Wild Parsnip is related to Poison Hemlock, but while it's not toxic if ingested, the sap can cause serious contact burns to those that handle it, adding to public safety concerns.

In the second year of the project, in cooperation with NSA Crane's Forester Robert McGriff, SWCD staff were able to conduct roadside surveys within the naval facility. The Invasive Specialist was pleasantly surprised to find zero populations of Poison Hemlock or Wild Parsnip, but did find a single population of

Spotted Knapweed, the only population of this species found in the three counties. NSA Crane likely benefits from conducting their own roadway maintenance and mowing, decreasing opportunities for new invasive plants to be introduced.

The results of the roadside surveys helped direct project priorities for a variety of invasive education/outreach materials, but particularly for Poison Hemlock. The Invasive Specialist worked closely with the Dubois County Weed Board on a variety of media for a comprehensive Poison Hemlock outreach campaign. This included new displays for use at events, articles/press releases, Facebook Ads, radio public service announcements, and even a noxious weed alert sent by the weed board in Dubois County property tax mailings. A webpage highlighting Poison Hemlock was put together, allowing landowners and other SWCDs to view pictures, handouts, and videos showcasing ID and Control information (<https://www.duboisswcd.org/poison-hemlock.html>). Information was also shared beyond the

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three counties as the Invasive Specialist made presentations on Poison Hemlock, including a webinar hosted by the Midwest Invasive Plant Network, and shared created outreach materials with other Indiana SWCDs.

The Invasive Specialist was also helped on this project by several partners and volunteers, members of the Daviess-Martin Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA), and the Invasive Species Awareness Coalition (ISAC) of Dubois County. With coordination from the Invasive Specialist, both groups met regularly (36 meetings in total) to plan education/outreach activities and secure additional grant funding for outreach materials. In Dubois County, ISAC received a grant from the Dubois County REC Community Fund to purchase 2 banners for events, conduct a billboard outreach campaign, and replace invasive burning bushes at a local park with native shrubs. The Daviess-Martin CISMA received a grant from the nonprofit State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management (SICIM) to create a logo for the group and purchase event signs and giveaways.

The project included a total of 72 events across the three counties, 28 of which were events hosted by the CISMAs, such as invasive trainings, presentations, and volunteer Weed Wrangles. These events were attended by 1,557 people but reached an estimated 5,533 more with booths at large public events.

In Dubois County, some events of note included two guest speaker events featuring authors Sally & Harm Weeks in 2022, and Michael Homoya in 2023. ISAC hosted volunteer Weed Wrangle workdays at two new local parks, Niehaus Park in Huntingburg and Old Town Lake in Ferdinand, both of which had large turnouts. They also began a new partnership with the City of Jasper Parks department to hold two Parklands Prairie Walk events, showcasing the parks diverse native prairie plantings.

Volunteers and partners were crucial to the success of this grant, donating a total of 1,511 hours of their time not just at Weed Wrangles, but also planning meetings, other events, and assisting with roadside surveys. Of that, 1,374

hours is considered match, a huge value for the SWCDs in leveraging grant funds.

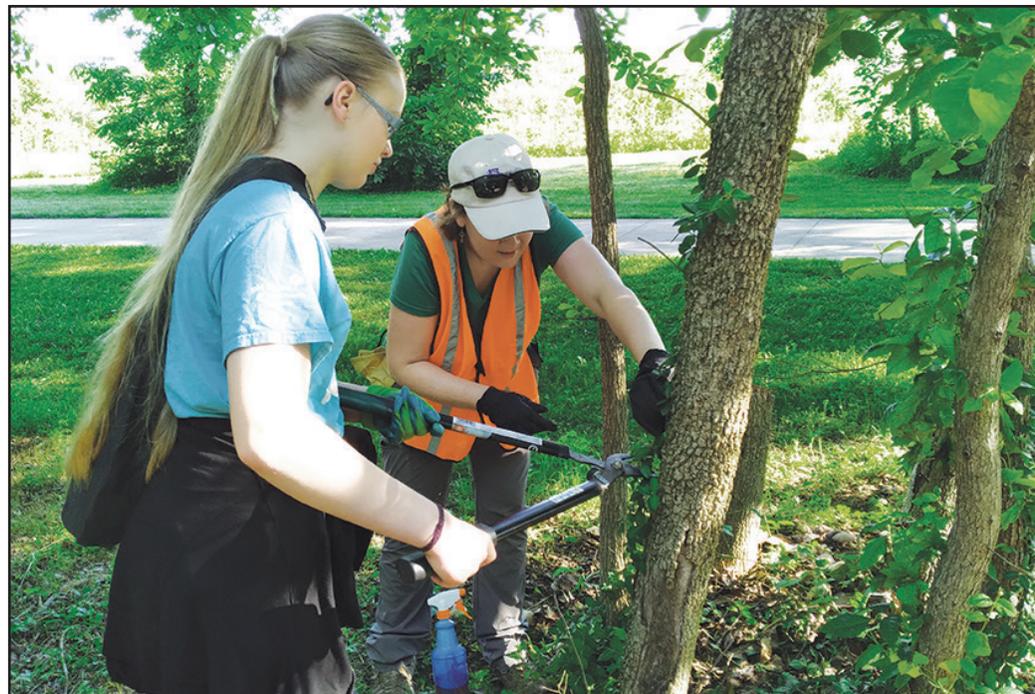
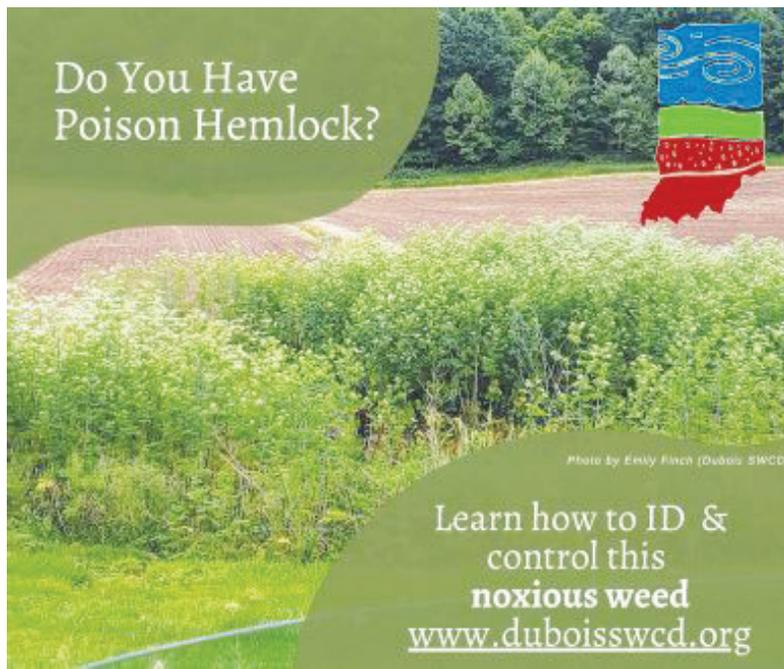
In addition to general public outreach, the Invasive Specialist also provided direct technical assistance to 129 landowners managing invasive species on their properties. This included 44 landowners that received site visits to identify invasive plants on their property, 36 of whom also received written invasive management plans. Many of these landowners were then referred to partners with USDA NRCS to pursue cost share funding for invasive plant control, timber stand improvement, and wildlife habitat practices.

This project has certainly demonstrated the value in having an Invasive Specialist position, and while all three SWCDs would love to see the position receive regular full-time staffing, this continues to be a challenge. In 2023 the Dubois SWCD worked on a proposal for Dubois County to add a permanent part-time Invasive Specialist position, but unfortunately was not successful and will lose this valuable

resource in 2024. Working with the strong ISAC partnership, the Dubois SWCD will re-evaluate their options in the coming year to continue to provide invasive species support to area landowners. For now, any Dubois residents looking for assistance or to join ISAC should contact Aubree Pond at 812-482-1171 x3, or info@isacdc.org.



The most outreach items created during the project were a cut-stump herbicide handout and corresponding 3-D displays used at events to demonstrate how herbicide is applied to the stumps of invasive plants to prevent re-sprouting.



Invasive Specialist Emily Finch demonstrates wintercreeper removal to a volunteer Girl Scout at the 2021 Niehaus Park Weed Wrangle.

# Dubois County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Vice Chair



**Mark Welp**  
Member



**Pat Eckerle**  
Member



**Arlene Fleck**  
Member

## Dubois County SWCD Staff



**Aubree Pond**  
Executive Director



**Justin Bary**  
Resource Specialist



**Melissa Ruschau**  
Resource Specialist



**Veronica Helming**  
Admin. Assist.

## Partnership Staff



**Chanis Cox**  
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**Andrea Gogel**  
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# Three new staff members in the SWCD Office and one new Supervisor

*By Veronica Helming*

There were many changes this year to the Dubois County Soil & Water Conservation District. In April, Aubree Pond started as Executive Director. In May, we welcomed two members to the office. Clay Cox is the new NRCS District Conservationist and Veronica Helming is the new Administrative Assistant. We welcomed Mark Welp of St. Anthony to the Board of Supervisors.

Aubree Pond started as the Executive Director in April 2023. As Executive Director, Pond oversees the operations of the Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District and is responsible for all projects and programs. She serves as the County Department Head, supports the SWCD Supervisors in carrying out the programs in accordance with state regulations and supervises the SWCD staff. Pond is excited about the opportunity to serve the Dubois County Community as the Executive Director of the Dubois County SWCD.

Pond is originally from Brownsburg, Indiana where she developed a love for the outdoors with her grandparents. She obtained a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Agriculture with a minor in Natural Resources and Environmental Science in 2022. While at Purdue, she was an active member of the Alpha Gamma Delta sorority, was a writer for the Odyssey Online, and interned and volunteered her time to many organizations including the Harrison-Crawford State Forest, the Columbian Park Zoo, and the DNR. Pond enjoys spending her free time outside with her beagle Ranger, backpacking, kayaking, and being with friends and family.

Veronica Helming has been the Administrative Assistant at the Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District since May 2023. As the Administrative Assistant, Helming reconciles financial reports, assists producers with equipment rental and ensures files are up to date. She processes correspondence and ensures inquiries are handled accordingly. If she doesn't know the answer, she will get you to the person that does. Helming maintains the SWCD website, prepares quarterly newsletters and assists with creating educational displays for local events. In addition to her duties with the SWCD, she also assists the NRCS District Conservationist with

administrative functions in the office.

Helming graduated with a Bachelors in Accounting and Finance from the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University in 2016. She has seven years' experience in banking and management. She currently lives on her husband's (Andy) family farm near Kyana and the Ferdinand State Forest. She has two children, Amelia and Joseph. In her free time, she enjoys helping Andy around the farm, gardening, reading, and just being outside with her family.

Clay Cox has been the NRCS District Conservationist of Dubois County since May of 2023. He develops natural resources conservation program activities in cooperation with the SWCD, partner agencies and other organizations. He serves as a technical liaison to these partners to answer questions and provide guidance concerning NRCS conservation programs and other natural resources and conservation activities. He works with local producers to promote and assist in the development and implementation of conservation plans for NRCS programs including EQIP, CRP, and CSP.

Cox is originally from Robertson County Kentucky. He graduated from Morehead State University with a bachelor's degree in Ag Business. He previously worked in Castro County in Texas as a NRCS Soil Conservationist. He relocated in May of 2023 with his wife Katherine and cat Charles. In his free time he likes to read, hunt, and spend time with his family.

Mark Welp of St. Anthony started on the Board of Supervisors in July. He took the place of Andrew Helming. Helming had to step down from the Board due to his wife getting hired as Administrative Assistant.

Mark and wife, Nancy received the River Friendly Farmer Award in 2021. Welp Farms produce grain and livestock in the Richland Creek-Flat Creek watershed. They use soil sampling to determine whether manure or fertilizer needs to be spread on their fields. They also use rotational grazing and have installed exclusive fencing to keep the cattle out of their ponds. They have also implemented waterways and filter strips and as a result have observed cleaner water leaving the farm, containing less soil and nutrients.

We welcome Mark to the Board of Supervisors!

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Attendees at the Parklands Prairie Walk in Jasper on July 26, 2023.



Explore Small Farms Workshop was held at SWCD Supervisor Arlene Fleck's Farm.

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# 2023 ISAC Highlights

*By Aubree Pond*

The Invasive Species Awareness Coalition of Dubois County (ISAC) has been a Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) since 2015. Various individuals and organizations were concerned about the ever-present threat of invasive species within Dubois County.

You may be wondering “what is an invasive species?” Well, an invasive species is a plant or animal that is not native to our area. They typically have a negative impact on our environment, and/or public health. Some of these invasives are often brought here on purpose, for landscaping, erosion control, nitrogen fixation in soil, and other purposes. Unfortunately, they then spread and aggressively invade natural areas, outcompeting the beneficial native species. Native species provide food and habitat, year-round for wildlife in our area, but when invasives produce a monoculture, the presence of a certain species in a given area, wildlife is not given the variation in food and habitat needed to sustain them. Some invasive species in Dubois County include Japanese Honeysuckle,

Autumn Olive, Emerald Ash Borer, Callery (Bradford) Pear, and Poison Hemlock. If you think you may have an invasive species on your property, contact our office to set up a site visit, or reach out to your local ISAC. If you are passionate about eliminating invasive species in Dubois County, ISAC hosts various events throughout the year, typically hosts a meeting every other month, and is always welcoming to new members.

In 2023, ISAC was able to host or participate in



ISAC members and local volunteers at the Old Town Lake Weed Wrangle in November, 2023.

— Photo by Veronica Helming



— Photo by Judi Brown

various events. One such event was the continuation of the Spring Speaker Series. In partnership with the Jasper-Dubois County Public Library, ISAC was able to welcome guest speaker Michael Homoya to town for a nature hike at Hemlock Cliffs in Crawford County and a presentation and book signing at the Thyen-Clark Cultural Center. Homoya is the author of *Orchids of Indiana*, *Wildflowers and Ferns of Indiana*, *Wildflowers and Ferns of Indiana Forests: A Field Guide*, *Wake Up Woods*, and *Wildflowers of the Midwest* (with co-author Scott Namestnik). A special thank you to the Jasper-Dubois County Public Library for helping make this event a success. Be on the lookout for our 2024 Spring Speaker Series!

ISAC was also able to hold two Weed Wrangles! Each Weed Wrangle is intended to help remove invasive species from a given area. In partnership with Ferdinand State Forest and Old Town Lake, we were able to tackle both garlic mustard, the focus of our Ferdinand State

Forest workday, and Burning Bush, Honey-suckle, Autumn Olive, and Wintercreeper, the focus of Old Town Lake workday. The goal of these Weed Wrangles is to improve forest habitat quality and encourage more native trees and understory plants to grow, so that visitors and wildlife can continue to enjoy these areas for years to come.

On the flipside of invasive species, are the native plants they compete with for territory! ISAC was able to host a Prairie Walk at the Parklands in Jasper with the help of the City of Jasper Parks Department, Native plant and wildlife experts Will Drews (Knox County SWCD), and Olivia Fry (Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever). Our experts were able to lead a guided nature walk highlighting the native prairie plants growing at the Parklands, and the history of how a former golf course was turned into a rich ecological landscape.

ISAC is excited to continue the fight against invasive species in 2024. With various events, weed wrangles, and meetings planned for the year, ISAC hopes to see you throughout the community. If you have any interest in becoming an ISAC member, please contact [info@isacdc.org](mailto:info@isacdc.org).

# VUJC: Land Stewardship Initiative Update

*By Melissa Ruschau*

Around the LSI farm a few small additions and repairs were completed this year. This included repairing 2 suck holes in field 2. In addition, several grassed waterways and filter strips were reseeded with the district's new multi-purpose seeder. A cut that was beginning to deepen in the grassed border of field 5 was repaired and a rock chute was added to handle the flow of water coming from the farm field.

On May 5th, Pat Eckerle planted soybeans green into the standing cover of Cereal Rye and Crimson Clover. The cereal rye was the only cover crop planted in the Fall of 22. The crimson clover grew from seed that volunteered from the 2022 summer cover mix. This was Pat's first time planting the LSI fields. A HUGE thank you should be

given to Duane Hopf for sharing his digital planting files with Pat and for Duane's planting of the corn and soybeans over the last 10 years of the project.

Some challenges arose this year from the 2022 summer cover crop. In a few sparse patches in the fields, some of the Sorghum Sudan grass and Sunhemp reseeded itself and began competing with the soybeans. A quick herbicide pass took care of the issue. In addition, Callery pear trees had become an issue in the WAS-COB series in field 2. These trees were terminated with herbicide and later mowed down. OFF TARGET TILLAGE?

On a positive note, the crop acres achieved the highest yield to date of beans, averaging 69 bushels to the acre. Currently, the fields are growing with Barley and Balansa Clover in anticipation of the 2024 crop.

A spring field day "Getting to the Root of Cover Crops" was held Jack Welp's farm in Birdseye. Both Jack and Aaron Krueger (Gibson County farmer) shared their experiences with a variety of cover crops. They shared cover crop mixes they find work on their operations and showed what the plants they had growing at the time looked like. Participants explored how deep cover crop roots could potentially grow. The first 6 cover crop "Root Banners" were borrowed from CCSI and premiered at this event.

LSI was excited to host 30 high school freshmen from around the county for the Tour of Opportunities Day held in October. The students were exposed to a variety of aspects of agriculture in the morning at Precision Farming Solu-



SWCD Supervisor, Pat Eckerle working on the planting of LSI.

tions. After lunch, they toured LSI and saw conservation practices on the ground and learned how to calculate yield estimates as well as tested the soybeans for moisture content.

Melissa hosted a soil health booth at the FFA job fair held at VUJC this fall. She borrowed the "Root Banners" from CCSI again, this time with the full set of 12. She also demonstrated soil health for students with the slake and slump tests using soil samples gathered from the farm.

This Fall a "Data Driven Decisions" workshop was held at LSI. Joel Reddick, a regenerative ag farmer from Kentucky, and Purdue Extension Educator Adam Shanks both spoke. Joel shared how data gathered from his farm has influenced his decisions. Adam explained some of the cutting-edge technologies available to farmers and how to decide what to add to benefit their operation.

On the horizon for the project in 2024 are: two farmer workshops and three educator trainings to be held at VUJC this year.



Melissa Raschau lecturing students during the Tour of Opportunities at LSI.

## Dubois County SWCD Annual Financial Report

Balance Brought Forward		\$36,948.91	
<b>RECEIPTS</b>			
State for District Operations		\$12,000.00	
Clean Water Indiana Grant (CWI)		\$48,419.46	
County for District Operations		\$6,400.00	
Federal Funds (not CWI)		\$11,580.00	
Non Government Grants		\$0.00	
Other Grants-NACD, PSS, D Cnty Community Foundation		\$439.00	
<b>Total Intergovernmental Receipts</b>			\$78,838.46
Equipment Rental & Farm Income		\$5,739.60	
Donations & Memberships		\$0.00	
Other Charges for Services (Describe)		\$0.00	
Other Charges for Services (Describe)		\$0.00	
Other Charges for Services (Describe)		\$0.00	
<b>Total Charges for Services</b>			\$5,739.60
Advertising		\$960.00	
Annual Meeting Income		\$4,438.08	
Interest from Checking, CDs, Savings, etc.		\$300.35	
Reimbursements & Refunds		\$2,322.06	
Sale of Used Equipment		\$0.00	
Sales Income		\$329.68	
Workshop/Field Day Income		\$1,325.00	
Other Misc Revenue-VUJC LSI		\$38,207.02	
Other Misc Revenue-Sales Tax Collected		\$135.91	
Other Miscellaneous Revenue-		\$2,677.76	
<b>Total Miscellaneous Revenue</b>			\$50,695.86
Sub-Total (before investment activity)		\$135,273.92	\$135,273.92
Sale of Investments (CDs, savings accounts, transfers)		\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>TOTAL (balance forward + receipts + investments)</b>		\$172,222.83	\$135,273.92
<b>DISBURSEMENTS</b>			
Capital Outlays (Equipment)		\$0.00	
Annual Meeting Expenses		\$3,401.89	
Audit Expense		\$0.00	
Bonding and Liability Insurance		\$1,050.67	
CWI Projects or other state grant funded projects		\$57,373.47	
Conservation Education Programs		\$0.00	
Contractual Services		\$0.00	
Cost-Share Projects/Federally/State-Funded		\$0.00	
Cost-Share Projects/SWCD-Funded		\$0.00	
CWI payments to other SWCDs		\$0.00	
Dues & Subscriptions		\$2,535.95	
Employee Salaries Paid by District		\$4,300.60	
Office Supplies		\$3,829.87	
Other Services & Charges		\$2,207.00	
Postage & Delivery Expenses		\$1,693.41	
Printing/Copying Expense		\$6,732.07	
Rent		\$0.00	
Repair Expenses, fuel		\$3,675.47	
Sales Tax Paid to Ind. Dept. of Revenue		\$75.70	
Supervisor Per Diem		\$3,361.04	
Supplies for Resale		\$337.23	
Telephone or Other Utilities		\$0.00	
Travel/Lodging/Mileage/Registration/Meals		\$6,179.86	
Workshop/Field Day Expense		\$1,503.79	
Other Disbursements-marketing, advertising, awards, sponsorships		\$4,047.80	
Other Disbursements-VUJC LSI		\$17,864.90	
Other disbursements-Federal WH, CRP salary		\$15,529.87	
Other Disbursements- misc		\$45.00	
<b>Total General Government Disbursements</b>			\$135,745.59
Sub-Total (before investment activity)		\$135,745.59	
Purchase of Investments (CDs, savings accounts, transfers)		\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>TOTAL DISBURSEMENTS (disbursements + investments)</b>		\$135,745.59	\$0.00
<b>Balance as December 31, 2023</b>		<b>\$36,477.24</b>	<b>\$135,745.59</b>

*Thank You to those who support  
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# Annual Meeting Speaker: The Talon Trust

By: *Veronica Helming*

This year's annual meeting speaker is from The Talon Trust.

Their program will be an enlightening experience with 1-3 live raptors. The program offers up-close, uncensored experiences with these magnificent predators, perfectly adapted to survival in the wild.

The Talon Trust, Inc. is dedicated to conservation of native raptors through raptor rescue and rehabilitation, and public educational experiences. They are headquartered in Evansville. They were founded by President Lauren Norvell in 2013 as an Indiana nonprofit organization and a 501c3 public charity.

They rescue injured, sick and orphaned birds of prey. It is part of their mission to rescue them from danger, tend to their injuries, illnesses, or developmental needs, and rehabilitate them until they are healthy

enough to be on their own again. Their ultimate goal is always to release them back to the freedom of the wild where they belong. All birds are cared for and housed on private property.



— Photos courtesy of The Talon Trust

## Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District Endowment

Everyone plays a role in conserving and preserving our natural resources. The Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District promotes the vital benefits of protecting and preserving all natural resources.

Soil and Water Conservation District works to reduce soil erosion and promote clean water while providing technical, financial, and informational assistance to conserve natural resources for future generations. By educating county landowners and farmers on proper soil and water management, Soil and Water Conservation District is ensuring our natural resources are preserved.

Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District Endowment was established to support the mission of this organization. The endowment helps fund the organization each year, assuring the work they do today can continue for generations to come.

Whether a small gift or an estate gift, all contributions made to the Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District Endowment support the long term sustainability of this important mission.



Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District Endowment

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## 2024 Indiana FSA Important Deadline Dates

**February 19** - Offices Closed in Observance of George Washington's Birthday

**February 29** - Final Date to Submit Application and Notice of Loss (NOL) for 2023 Losses under Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP).

**March 15** - Deadline for ARCPLC 2024 Crop Year Election/Enrollment

**Ongoing** - Submit an Application for a Farm Storage Facility Loan

**Continuous** - Submit an Application for FSA Farm Loans

**Continuous** - Signup for Local County Office FSA Text Alerts - Text Your Service Center Keyword to FSANOW (372-669)

**Continuous** - Sign up for GovDelivery Newsletters, Bulletins and Indiana Press Releases (Subscribe to USDA Emails for Farmers | Farmers.gov)

*We look forward to working with you in 2024 - FSA*



# You are invited to the ANNUAL SWCD MEETING

## TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13

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