Dubois County Soil & Water Conservation District

1486 Executive Blvd. Suite A • Jasper, IN 47546
812-482-1171 x3 • www.duboisswcd.org

Spring, 2016

The Conservation Conversation

Gypsum Workshop

On February 18th, 2016, the Dubois County SWCD and the VUJC LSI project held a workshop on gypsum and the termination and selection of cover crop seeding options. This interactive session was well received and attended by Ag Retailers, Ag Professionals, FFS students; as well as, the local farming community.

The morning session was lead by Ron Chamberlain, Gypsoil Division of Beneficial Reuse Management, LLC and assisted by Ashley Hammac, CCSI Agronomist or Purdue University.

Key benefits from appropriate application of Gypsum is to combat excessive sodium, increase magnesium level and improve phosphorus dispersion in the soil nutrient structure. 60% of soil tests show a deficiency in sulfur and Gypsum may be a good sulfur source. While clay based soils are the prime candidates for gypsum applications, it is not beneficial to pure sand or pure silt soil conditions.

As with most soil fertility practices a 'one-time' application usually does not solve the problems. Maintaining good soil health using conservation practices is a 'journey, not a destination you arrive at upon making one application." The same is true of one year of no-till or one year of using cover crops!

The afternoon session was lead by Barry Fisher, USDA NRCS Soil Health Team Leader, leading a discussion on the cover crop termination options and cover crop selections.

In Indiana; especially with a corn crop but also to some degree with soybeans, there are not a lot of options depending on the weather and the timing to plant and harvest these crops. To get a good cover crop growth, it is best accomplished by drill-in application. Cover crop selections are primarily cereal rye, annual ryegrass in this area, and a few others are what is being used in this southern Indiana area. A main concern with ryegrass is that it is particularly hard to kill. Fisher pointed out that the chemical herbicide mix, the time of day, and application type of equipment are all important to be successful.

There are several specific web sites that are good resources for dealing with the mode-of-action of each herbicide group that predicts how tolerant a cover crop may be to each class of chemistry that will be helpful to avoid carryover risk problems.

http://extension.psu.edu/plants/crops/soil-management/covercrops/hervicide-persistency/hervicide-carryover-table

https://ag/purdue.edu/agry/dtc/pages/CCFG.aspx

https//ag.purdue.edu/btny/Extension/Pages/WeedScience.aspx

http://nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in./technical/ecoscience/agronomy/

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2016 OFS Brands Forest Stewardship Award

Werner, Werner, Margarida LLC was presented the OFS Brands Forest Stewardship Award by Scott Reckelhoff, Property Manager of OFS Brands at the Huntingburg Event Center during Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District's (SWCD) Annual Meeting held on February 4th, 2016. The SWCD Board of Supervisors annually recognizes forest landowners who carry out wise forestry stewardship programs on their land. Dubois County forestlands provide numerous environmental benefits from wildlife habitat to buffering and the filtering of water runoff. The forestry industry also helps support a large sector of our economy with providing over 7,000 jobs and 1 billion dollars in sales for our country.

This year's recipients are owners of multiple forest tracts within Dubois County and some in Martin County. Arch and Ruth Margarida, Jerome and Connie Werner, and Ralph and Karen Werner work together as a collaborative group to follow management plans through enrollment in the Classified Forests and Wildlands program, completed supervised timber harvests under the direction of consultant foresters, ensured that Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) is completed on the properties when needed and have completed work on their land through at least three EQIP programs. The group started purchasing different tracts of properties starting in the mid-1980's. Most of the properties is wooded but about 45 acres are tillable cropland.

Much of their current focus is the wooded acres located in the WITZ bottoms and is used primarily for deer hunting and timber investments. While doing most of the work themselves, Thom Kinney, a professional forester, helps with their management plans.

The group has had several select harvests and has also removed the storm damaged trees, the dying trees, the junk trees, and invasive species to optimizes the overall growth and nourishment to improve the timber and forestlands. Arch stated, "It's like a garden. You need to keep the weeds out so the rest of the garden will grow."

The only hindrance that the group has seen is the occasional flooding of portions of the forestland. "But it usually is there and gone because of the tremendous actions of the Patoka Lake reservoir. The flooding doesn't stay long," Arch stated.

Scott Reckelhoff, far right,
with Werner, Werner, Margarida LLC

2016 Conservation Farmer of the Year Award

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. The 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 the Huntingburg Event Center on February 4th, 2016, Tony Sanders, Ag Lender from Old National Bank and Brenda Sermersheim, Ag Lender from German American Bank presented the 2016 Outstanding Conservation Farmer of the Year to Alan Weyer of rural Ferdinand.

Alan and his family have utilized many conservation practices over the years and participated in several of the USDA Farm Bill programs including CRP and EQIP. They have also installed practices on their own with no cost share assistance from the state or federal government. Alan is innovative in the use of cover crops on his farm and has experimented with different mixes and plants them under his cash crops. Besides the cover crops, Alan's list of conservation practices include: fencing, 8 watering facilities, Heavy Use Protection areas, Forest Stand Improvement, prescribed grazing, a waste storage facility, a pumping plant, nutrient management, pest management, ten water and sediment control basins, an underground outlet, used exclusion, pasture and hay planting, and CRP field borders. He has also hosted a SWCD pasture walk on his farm in 2014.

Weyer generously gives of his time to assist others with conservation work. He has helped his neighbors and encouraged the owners of his rental properties to utilize conservation methods as well. Alan served on the FSA County Committee for 9 years. He is currently an Associate Supervisor for the SWCD and assists with the Land Stewardship Initiative (LSI). He previously served four terms (12 years) on the SWCD Board of Supervisors and for six of those years he was the Chair. During this time, he also served as the southwest representative on the State Association of SWCD's. The Indiana Association of SWCD recognized Weyer as their first Supervisor of the Year in 2009.

Tony Sanders, Old National Bank;
Alan Weyer;
Brenda Sermersheim, German American Bank

Windbreaks are barriers made of living trees and shrubs that are used to reduce wind speed. They are the most commonly used type of agroforestry in the United States. Windbreaks can also be used to reduce noise and odors. There are also windbreaks that are not considered agroforestry because there is no tree/crop or tree/livestock interaction, such as, those that protect farmstead buildings. In any case, the vast majority of windbreaks are planted for a single purpose, to slow the wind, which results in reduced soil erosion, increased crop yields or protected livestock. Many people think windbreaks take up land that could be producing a cash income, even though windbreaks do increase yields and subsequently income.

By selecting tree and shrub species that grow another crop, landowners can gain additional income along with the desired conservation benefits. In some cases a windbreak could produce more income than the alternative use of the land.

Typical cost share programs assist with the establishment costs based on the cost of conservation grade seedling, which is likely much less than the cost of improved selections, varieties and hybrids or larger plant stock that will likely be used for growing tree crops.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) restricts the harvesting and income generation from the acres under contract for the length of the contract.

The windbreak, even with crop producing trees and shrubs, must still meet the design criteria in order to be eligible for the cost share assistance. However, cost share assistance is a less important consideration when the windbreak will be producing additional income with a few years.

Windbreaks, riparian buffers, field borders, and other conservation buffer practices have the potential to perform double duty and become a source of additional farm income.

Good planning and design principles for location, height, density, width and especially selecting trees and shrubs suited to the soils are important.

Consider how the harvesting of tree crops may affect the density and width of the windbreak and subsequently its ability to provide wind protection.

It will be even more important to minimize drift of broadleaf herbicides when income producing crops are grown in the windbreak.

Selected trees and shrubs must be suited to the site conditions. Care must be taken not to place taller plants too close to shorter ones because the resulting shade may reduce production of the shorter plants.

Pest control will be important to protect the tree crops from wildlife damage and browsing. It may make sense to delay planting any fragile production species into a windbreak until the windbreak is well developed and these species can be better protected.

Investigate the markets of potential tree crops before starting your windbreak. Determine what if any specialized equipment for harvesting or storage are needed.

For more information, contact
USDA National Agroforestry Center
at 402-437-5178

Forestry Best Management Practices

Rich, fertile soils form the basis for our forests and it can take up to 500 years or even longer to form one inch of topsoil. Loss of topsoil can affect forest growth, but also lower water quality from surface run-off. The following are some of the more commonly used practices.

Roads and trails provide access for logging but also facilitate regular access for many other land uses. Landowners should minimize the amount of roads and their width as much as possible. Keep grades between 2 and 10 percent if possible and avoid environmentally sensitive areas including seeps and waterways. Federal, state, and local regulations may limit use and crossings in and around wetlands and some streams.

Depending on equipment available and future road use, landowners should install dips, culverts, turnouts, or water bards on sloped roads. The spacing of drainage structures depends on the steepness of the slope.

If a road must cross a stream, cross at right angles at a point where the streambed is straight and uniform and limit activities to periods of low to normal flows. A temporary bridge, culvert or ford may be necessary for crossing some streams depending on site characteristics and planned road use. Temporary structure should be removed as soon as their use is completed.

Avoid using roads during wet periods. This may cause excessive rutting or erosion and may damage other features.

Improper handling of fuels, lubricants and other chemicals can contaminate soils and water. Restrict fueling and maintenance activities to a designate area away from water and not prone to runoff.

Even though they were developed in accordance with the US Clean Water Act and in cooperation with the Indiana Flood Control Act, Forestry Best Management Practices are not require by law in Indiana for logging done on private lands. It is up to each landowner to specify their use in the timber sale contract. In many cases, timber companies are set up and trained to install BMPs and the benefits to soil health and water quality are worth having the BMPs done by the logger at the time of harvest. Installing BMPs on a timber sale is the right things to do to be a good steward of the land. The Indiana Classified Forest and Wildlands program and the Forest Stewardship Council requires landowners to control soil erosion. As always, the advice of a professional forester can be invaluable to landowners.

Excepts by
Brian MacGowan and
Duane McCoy, fall, 2014

Pollinators

In the past, native bees and feral honey bees could meet the pollination needs of orchards, melon and pumpkin fields, seed producers, and berry patches because these farms were typically adjacent to areas of important pollinators' habitat. Today farms are larger and have less adjacent habitat to support bees. Yet the need for pollinators in agricultural landscapes has never been greater.

Honey bees account for about 80% of all pollination. Butterflies, hummingbirds, fruit bats, and moths are also on the list of pollinators.

Commercial beekeepers are experiencing an unsustainable percentage of their honey bees each year because of a combination of habitat loss, diseases and pests and pesticide exposure.

Private landowners can do a lot to help support these critical pollinators by providing habitat and flowering plants that provide food for pollinators. Part of the habitat is providing a clean source of water. Plants like lavender, thyme, sunflowers, and marigolds provide nourishment from nectar and pollen. A third requirement for pollinators is having an undisturbed area for nesting.

A perennial pollinator cover crop planted between rows of grape vines or fruit tress not only prevents weeds from growing, requires no mowing, and increases other beneficial insects.

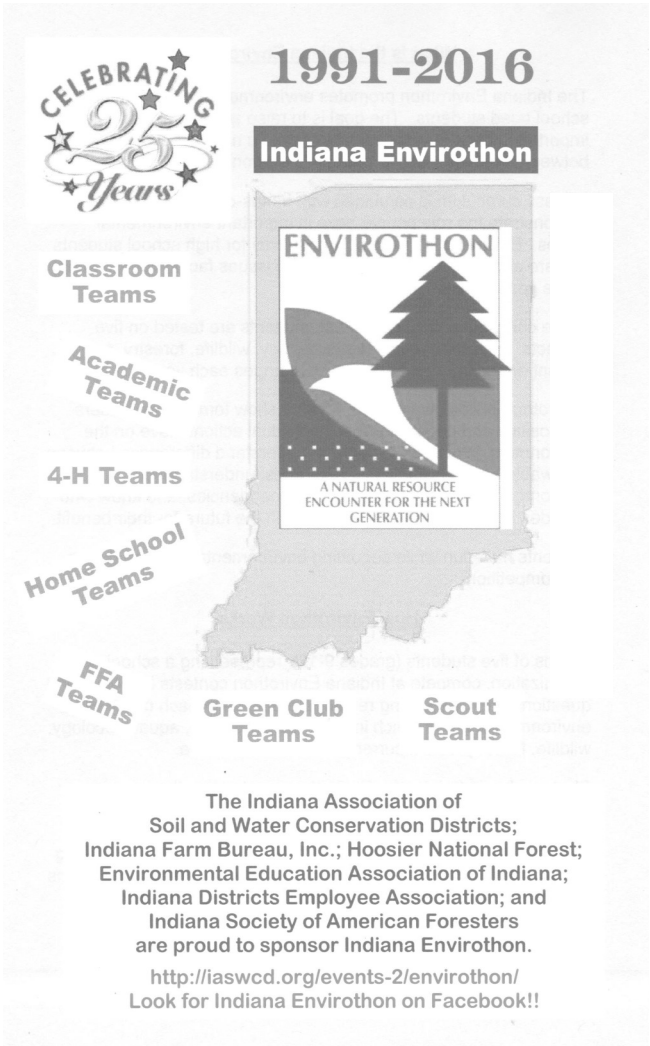
Pollinators need access to plants with overlapping blooming times from early spring to late fall. Start with early spring flowers and fruit trees and continue with flowering shrubs flowering annuals, and fruit trees into the summer and finally into fall. The following are several suggested plant choices: hyssop (July-September), oregano (June-September), lambsear, (May-July) purple coneflower, (July-September) lupine (June-July), sneezeweed (July-September), culver's root, (July-September) foxglove (June-July), Joe Pye weed (July-September), New England aster (September -October)

Garden for year round life of pollinators as many species of insects will over-winter in hollow stems and other parts of the plants. Bumblebees will often hibernate in plant litter and abandoned rodent nests, especially in areas where the grass is allowed to grow long, so hold the fall clean-up until early spring. Leaving vegetation intact through winter provides a habitat for many bees. One can preserve areas of bare or sparsely vegetated, well drained soil and consider nesting boxes. Minimizing lawn size and maximizing perennial plantings and naturalist area help make your home more pollinator friendly. Plant in masses of diverse native plants. Eliminate or minimize insecticide use.

Envirothon

Second Place Winners:
Aaron Hurst, Melissa Mutchman, Madison Giesler, Sara Weyer, and Clarissa Weyer

Third Place Winners:
Kendra Steckler, Sara Helming, Kendra Schipp, Lauren Luebbehusen, and Jarod Knust



The Indiana Envirothon promotes environmental education to high school aged students. The goal is to raise awareness of the importance of achieving and maintaining a natural balance between the quality of life and of the environment.

In-class curriculum is combined with hands-on field experiences to demonstrate the role people have in important environmental issues. Envirothon is an exciting, fun way for high school students to learn about the environmental issue facing current and future generations.

At the completion of each contest, students are tested on five subjects: soil/land use, aquatic ecology, wildlife, forestry, and a current environmental issue, which changes each year.

Envirothon builds awareness. It helps show tomorrow's leaders the positive and negative effects individual actions have on the environment. Youth who take part understand differences between renewable and nonrenewable resources, understand environmental interactions and interdependencies, and know who provides information that can be used in the future for their benefit.

Students have fun while becoming environmentally aware during the competition. The top two teams from each regional contest are invited to compete at the Indiana State Envirothon Contest. Forest Park's second place team will be heading to the state contest on Wednesday, April 27th at West Lafayette. Forest Park's third place team will be an alternate.

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