

Locally Led Conservation

How can YOU be involved?

The Winnebago County SWCD is currently looking for candidates to serve as District Directors or Associate Directors. Concerned citizens in Winnebago County can help conserve natural resources by serving on the District Board. The District provides landowners and operators with technical and financial assistance thru multiply federal and state programs to address local natural resource concerns and provides educational information.

Directors are responsible for establishing and supervising district policies and programs, including assessing resource needs and providing guidance and developing strategies to address these needs. Some of the major program and activities involving board input at this time include:

- develop programs and workshops that will encourage landowners and operators to address soil erosion, residue management on cropland acres as it relates to the State's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS) and the associated IDOA Soil Health Assessment
- provide landowners the tools to manage and enhance their natural resources through planning and participation in local, state and federal programs
- participate in the promotion and administration of USDA programs - Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) & Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
- participate in the promotion and administration of the IDOA Partners for Conservation (PFC) Program
- prepare an annual plan of work for resource management within district boundaries
- collaborate with other organizations in promoting natural resource awareness and protection
- Provide natural resource information to planners, developers and public officials for sound land-use management decisions and future land use planning
- provide education assistance to schools, partner organizations programs and others

(continued on page 3)



Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), established in 1937 under the Illinois Soil and Water Conservation District Act, are local units of government. The Act gives SWCD'S the responsibility to provide technical information to individuals and groups on methods of soil and water conservation and to provide natural resource inventory information on properties slated for zoning changes. The Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation was formed in 1940 and is a locally operated unit of government functioning under Illinois Law. Our purpose is to promote the protection, maintenance, improvement and wise use of the soil, water and related resources within the District.

Who develops the policies of the Winnebago County SWCD?

The Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District is a public body made up of citizens concerned with the protection of our natural resources. It is governed by a five-member board of directors elected by District landowners and residents. This Board of Directors, along with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) develop annual and long range plans that direct the activities of the District and NRCS.

Who funds the SWCD?

Districts have no taxing authority. Funding is provided by the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA). Districts offer several programs and services which supplement IDOA funding. The additional funding is utilized for operation expenses and education programs.

Melisa Long


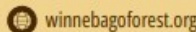

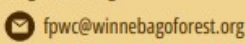
Horizons Editor

Inside this Issue	Page
Locally Led Conservation - How can YOU be involved?	cover 3
Notice of Acceptance of Nominations	3
Scholarships & Grants Available	4
CRP - the often-neglected alternative crop	5
Soy Candle Class	6
Tree Sale 2025	6
Program Measurement Data	7-8
Sponsors	2, 9

HORIZON SPONSOR - 2024
(continued on page 9)

**DISCOVER
THE NATURE OF LIFE**

44 Forest Preserves in Winnebago County offer opportunities for year-round outdoor activities, including hiking, fishing, paddling, cross-country skiing, camping, and much more!

- assure the District has the resources to fulfill local agreements, including:
 - * Winnebago County Health Dept. - soil borings for septic suitability and/or subdivision development
 - * Winnebago County Zoning Dept. - provide Natural Resource Inventory Reports & Resource Concern letters
 - * Winnebago County Highway Dept. - construction site plan reviews and site inspections
 - * Illinois EPA - construction site inspections and contractor training
 - * USDA-NRCS - administrative assistance agreement - EQIP & CSP programs
 - * USDA-NRCS/FSA - technical assistance agreement - CRP program

Directors are expected to attend monthly board meetings which are currently held the last Tuesday of every month (subject to change) and are expected to participate in district programs and activities. Directors will be paid a \$20 stipend for each board meeting they attend.

There are Land Use Councils that meet quarterly, and the attendance of one Director per district is requested. Our council includes some of our counties to our east and meets in Sycamore. The State Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD) holds a summer conference in July in Springfield, with one Director per District is encouraged to attend, to pass on the needs of the District to the State Association, and to vote on statewide policies and directives.

Board Directors are elected to a two-year term. The election of Directors takes place in January or February, with the term starting in March. Associate Directors are also appointed at the March meeting. If these issues and program interest you, and you would like to consider running as a Director candidate, or serve as an Associate Director to better understand the District, contact one of our current Directors, Associates or the Executive Director, Dennis Anthony at (815) 965-2392, Ext. 3247 or at danthonyswcd@comcast.net.

NOTICE OF ACCEPTANCE OF NOMINATIONS

To all persons of legal voting age who own or reside on land located within the boundaries of the Winnebago County Soil & Water Conservation District; beginning on Friday, November 11, 2024 nominations will be accepted for a two-year term of the office of Director of the Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District at the District's Office at 4833 Owen Center Rd., Rockford, IL, during our normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Please call the office for details at (815) 965-2392, Ext. 3. To be considered for nomination as a candidate for the office of Director, nominees must provide proof of residency or ownership of land located within the boundaries of the District. Interested persons must respond by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, December 23, 2024.

Conservation Reserve Program

Do you have land in CRP? You might see us out in the fields looking at your CRP for status reviews. Spring and fall are the typical time periods we are getting out to look at CRP fields.

If you have any questions about field visits or want management advice for your CRP contact the Rockford field office at 815-965-2392 Ext. 3

There are several reasons why we complete status reviews: to verify your CRP has been planted, to verify your CRP has established, and to check for compliance for future re-enrollment.

SCHOLARSHIPS & GRANT AVAILABLE



There are two scholarship opportunities available to residents of Winnebago County pursuing a degree in the soil and/or water conservation, or a related natural resource field.

The **Winnebago County SWCD** has a scholarship available in the amount of \$1,000 for any resident in the County pursuing a degree in an agricultural or natural resource field.

The Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Northeast Illinois also has a scholarship opportunity, the **Soil and Water Stewardship Scholarship**. This scholarship is available to residents of Winnebago county and counties to the east, including Boone and DeKalb County's. This scholarship is also in the amount of \$1,000 for someone pursuing a degree in the natural resource field.

The deadline for both of these scholarships is February 15. For more information regarding either of these scholarships, email danthonyswcd@comcast.net. The scholarship applications are also available on our website www.winnebagoswcd.org.

Zimmerman Agriculture/Natural Resource Educator Grant

This grant is in memorandum of Eldora "Dorie" Zimmerman. Dorie was a lifelong supporter of the Winnebago County SWCD, an advocate for locally led conservation and very passionate about the education of our natural resources, especially to our youth. Teachers or educators of grades pre-kindergarten through 12 in Winnebago County, including home-school teachers, may apply to the Winnebago County Soil & Water Conservation District to receive funding for natural resources-related field trips; or classroom activity(s)/event(s).

This is a \$1,000 maximum grant. Multiple teachers within the same school can collaborate on a field trip or multiple field trips; or in-classroom activities/events to reach this maximum amount.

The deadline to submit an application for this grant is November 15, 2024. For more information regarding this grant, email danthonyswcd@comcast.net. Additional information and applications are also available on our website www.winnebagoswcd.org.



CRP - the often-neglected alternative crop

By: Dennis Anthony, Executive Director

A person reading the title of this article may think - Whoa, CRP isn't a crop. Over the years, most of the ground that has been put into the CRP program (Conservation Reserve Program) were areas that were either too shallow to bedrock, too steep and erodible, too sandy, too wet, often prone to flooding, or odd-shaped fields (or parts of fields) that were not feasible or economical to farm, especially as equipment sizes got larger. So, as an ALTERNATIVE, the producer or landowner decided to enroll those area into the CRP program.

When CRP first came out, most of the areas enrolled were on soils that were either highly erodible or shallow to bedrock, and the ground was seeded down to predominantly cool season grass and legume mixes. These practices were typically a lot easier to establish, and maintain. Over time, the program evolved to include filter strips along streams, flood prone areas and various upland warm season grass and pollinator mixes. These practices can be harder to establish, and long-term maintenance is a little more challenging, with reed canary grass overtaking wet areas subject to flooding, invasive shrubs popping up in 6-foot tall native prairie plantings, wildflower components getting choked out by the grass species and various other things like encroachment, maybe herbicide drift, etc. All of these challenges impact the compliance of your CRP contract.

Routine annual maintenance of your CRP, done outside of the nesting season, can help keep you in compliance. Think of your CRP like you would a commodity crop. You plant your corn or soybeans and scout the field routinely for weeds, such as waterhemp, or other diseases or insects like tar spot, rust, white mold, rootworm beetles, silk beetles, aphids, etc. You implement a combination of pre and post pesticide application treatments and sometime rescue treatments, to control those pests, to maximize your return on investment to that cash crop. Why should CRP be any different? Scout the fields while you're scouting your crop fields, check for invasive trees and shrubs, reach out to the office for control methods that you can implement and try to maximize that investment in the CRP ground for its intended wildlife and environmental benefit and maintain program compliance.



As many of you are aware, we have been directed to look at contracts a year or two before they expire, referred to as "maintenance" reviews, to check for compliance, and make the participant aware of any deficiencies. Sometimes these deficiencies are what we call "natural degradation", like where a waterway has a sediment build-up in the center, losing its design capacity; or when a legume component dies off in a stand. In other instances, it is maybe a lack of awareness, not knowing that woody species are not allowed on that practice, or that what is coming in is maybe invasive. Then, there are also those instances where there is just perhaps some neglect, and woody encroachment or cropland encroachment, has been allowed over time.

The purpose of checking these contracts a year or two before they are up for reenrollment is to provide the participant ample opportunity to take corrective actions on any deficiencies, so that the reenrollment process goes smoother vs. the old way of doing things where we often relied on an agreement that "the deficiencies will be taken care of" during the reenrollment process.

There is an old saying from Benjamin Franklin, that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," so let's try to be proactive on scouting your CRP fields for maintenance issues and addressing them before they get out of hand. The USDA service center, whether it be the District staff, NRCS staff, or our partners with IDOA, Pheasants Forever and NGRREC, are here to help you manage your "alternative" crop.



Soy Candle Class

Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau

October 26, 2024

10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

(Supplies and lunch are provided.)

Learn the art of making your own soy candle with the ladies from Farm to Wick Candle Co.

Register by October 24th



Join us
for just
\$30



Tree Sale 2025



Tree brochures will be available in December.
If you are on our email list you will be sent one when available.

To be added to the email list call (815) 965-2392, Ext, 3
or email winnebago.co.swcd@gmail.com.

Place orders early. Supplies are limited.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY SWCD

PROGRAM MEASUREMENT DATA

FISCAL YEAR 2024

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

CUSTOMERS BENEFITTED THROUGH SWCD PROGRAMS

Land Use Programs: Soils, Natural Resource Information, Plat Reviews, Sediment & Erosion Control

Soil Boring Evaluations for Septic Systems	71 parcels (2 Boone); 4 supplemental visits
Natural Resource Inventory - Full Reports (Ag/vacant land)	26 reports - 419.42 acres
Zoning Letters for Variances and Special Use permits	23 reports - 199.44 acres
In-office Plat Reviews	10 - 123.05 acres
IEPA Construction Site Inspection	182 inspections on 50 active sites (25 New)
County/MS4 Erosion Control Agreements	25 inspections on 6 active sites, 2 plan reviews

Natural Resource - Education, Information and Outreach

Educational Events – District Sponsored or Partner Programs

Youth - Academy Expos, Oak planting program, Envirothon, groundwater festival	6 events – 700 Attendees
Youth/Adult – Pollinator Palooza, NLI Pelican Fest, Farm Dairy Breakfast	3 events – 350 Attendees
Adult – Herbal Thyme Club, Watershed Stewardship Seminar, Rockford Rotary	3 events – 78 Attendees
Technical Workshops – Agricultural Workshop, Erosion & Sediment Control	2 workshops - 110 Attendees

Partnership Meetings - Provide Technical & Natural Resource information to partners

RIPC Technical Com., Climate Resiliency Forum, Community Advisory Com, No. Regional Groundwater Committed, Kishwaukee R Ecosystem Partnership	26 meetings - 390 attendees
Multi-Watershed Outreach and Demonstration IEPA 319 grant	

Resource Material - maps, soil sampling and water testing kits, etc.

150 customers

Reference Materials - educational brochures/handouts

300 people - office & partnering events

Conservation Products and Sales

Conservation ID books - trees, birds, butterflies, wildflowers, etc.	16 books sold
Conservation Seed Sale - for wildlife and conservation plantings	23 customers - 124 acres of seed
Rain Barrel Program - 55-gallon food grade plastic drums	43 rain barrels sold, plus accessories
Tree and Shrub Sale & Accessories Program - bare root seedlings	154 customers, 3,385 trees sold
Fish Sale – stocking of ponds	25 Customers, 2,466 fish (80 lbs. minnows)

Public Relations

Horizons newsletters	4 published - 2,427 mailed/1074 e-mailed
News Releases/TV interviews	6 print, 1 TV interview
Facebook, Website	used to distribute information, share partner events

Local Organization & Group Participation

Ag in the Classroom - Ag Literacy Advisory Com.	Pheasants Forever – Winnebago County Chapter
Certified Professional in Erosion & Sediment Control	Region 1 Planning Council
City of Rockford – water division – water testing kits	Climate Resiliency Forum
City of Rockford – Stormwater Team	MPO Technical Committee
Forest Preserves of Winnebago County	Community Advisory Forum
Four Rivers Sanitation Authority	Watershed Education and Outreach group
Illinois Department of Natural Resources	Water Resource Management Planning
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency	Rockford Park District
Illinois Soil Classifiers Association	Severson Dells Nature Center
Illinois Urban Manual Update Committee	Soil Science Society of America
International Association of Administrative Professionals	University of IL – Cooperative Extension Service
Lower Rock River Watershed Planning Committee	Winnebago - Boone Farm Bureau
LUC 16 (NE Illinois) Envirothon Committee	Winnebago County Health Department
Natural Lands Institute	Winnebago County Highway Department
Northern Regional Groundwater Protection Planning Com.	Winnebago County Planning & Zoning Department

WINNEBAGO COUNTY SWCD/USDA OFFICE

PROGRAM MEASUREMENT DATA - FISCAL YEAR 2024

PRODUCERS BENEFITTED THROUGH SWCD & USDA-NRCS/FSA & IDOA PROGRAMS

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - Environmentally sensitive cropland or pastureland are enrolled into 10, 15 or 30-year contracts. Areas are planted to cool season grasses and legumes or warm season grasses and forbs. Some practices are planted to trees and shrubs. The program goals are to establish grass cover to prevent soil erosion on highly erodible land, improve the health and quality of the soil; improve water quality by filtering sediment and nutrients from runoff before they enter streams and rivers; restore functional wetlands in floodplain areas; and increase or enhance wildlife habitat. Information for Winnebago County for Fiscal Year 2024 includes:

- **490** contracts with **372** landowners covering **7,276.95** Acres
There are about **50** contracts on **400-450** additional acres in the County, but administered by adjacent offices
- Federal dollars brought into the County through annual rental payments total approximately **\$1,737,000**
In addition, payments are made to landowners for practice installation for new acreages, and to complete mid-contract management practices such as burning, managed mowing, spraying, inter-seeding or light disking
- On a yearly basis we work with **35-40** percent of the contracts and landowners

Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) – Environmentally sensitive lands are put into long-term or permanent easements. The Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) Program re-establishes wetlands that had been converted to cropland. The Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) Program protects cropland and pastureland by preventing the conversion of the land to non-agricultural uses.

- Monitor **6** parcels with **1,631** acres enrolled in Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) program; with an additional **320**-acre parcel located in Winnebago County monitored by an adjacent USDA office
- **1** New Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) on **28** acres in Shirland Township
- Streambank, wetland and habitat enhancement projects continue to be completed on the easements as needed

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – The program is designed to compensate agricultural producers who agree to increase their level of conservation by adopting additional conservation activities and maintaining their baseline level of conservation. Participants earn payments based on the level of conservation performance. Practices include cover crops, nutrient & pest management, adding buffer strips, creating pollinator habitat, etc.

- **28** Active contracts with **24** Producers, covering **23,758** acres – Annual payments totaled **\$385,431**

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) – This program provides financial and technical assistance to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits, such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, and improved or created wildlife habitat. This program can include targeted sign-ups to address state and/or local watershed initiatives.

FY24 – 6 New contracts (single-year or multi-year contracts) with total anticipated payments of **\$738,923**

- **1** – Grazing Management – **21** Acres
- **1** – Waste Storage Facility for dairy operation
- **1** – Forest Land Improvements – **8.7** acres
- **3** – Cropland Management BMP's – **437.4** Acres

Oak Ecosystem Regional Conservation Partnership Program (EQIP-RCPP) – This partnership project leverages resources, engages partners, targets assistance where it is most needed, and works collaboratively with agriculture producers and forest land managers. The goal is to restore, enhance, and protect oak ecosystems (forests, woodlands and savannas) to improve ecosystem health, connectivity, and biological diversity on private lands in regions of Wisconsin and Northeast Illinois where oak ecosystems once thrived.

FY24 - 7 contracts on **152.9** acres, with a total cost-share of **\$11,677**

Partners for Conservation Program (PFC) – This is our State Cost-share program that provides up to 75% in cost-share assistance for the construction or adoption of conservation practices such as establishing grassed waterways, no-till planting, cover crops, and other practices to address the State's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS). Urban-type programs and practices include well sealing, rain gardens and pollinator plantings.

In **FY24** there was **\$26,092** allocated to the following practices, resulting in **156** tons of soil saved.

- **2** landowners – **3** waterways – **4.67** acres
- **2** landowners - sealing of abandoned wells
- **4** landowners – **14.3** acres of pollinator projects
- **2** landowner – **140** Acres of cover crops

Illinois Cover Crop Initiative - This program was available to farmers who planted cover crops following their 2023 cash crop. Farmers received **\$10** per acre for cover crops planted by December 1, 2023. This program was available for new or repeated fields of cover crops (but could not be used with select other initiatives)

- **5** Producers – **2,183** Acres - **\$21,830** in payments

HORIZON SPONSORS - 2024

The following businesses are sponsoring your Soil and Water Conservation District.



WINNEBAGO-BOONE FARM BUREAU

Ann Marie Cain, FBCM
Farm Bureau Manager
(815) 962-0653
wbfbmanager@winnebagoboonefarmbureau.org
www.winnebagoboonefarmbureau.org
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craighedummer@gmail.com

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Owner

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Res.: (815) 938-2543
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WINNEBAGO COUNTY
**SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**



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ELEVATOR INC.**

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Winnebago County SWCD

4833 Owen Center Rd.
Rockford, IL 61101-6007

Office Hours
Monday - Friday
8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Follow us



www.winnebagoswcd.org

SWCD STAFF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - Dennis Anthony
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IDOA STAFF

CONSERVATION PLANNER - Hunter Cejka
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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Justin Krohn - Chairman
Paul Beuth - Vice Chairman
Jim Morrison - Secretary/Treasurer
Larry McPheron
Mike Leick

ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS

Judy Barnard
George David Mullen
Dwayne Proctor
Harlan Tipton

Monthly board meetings are held the last Tuesday of the month at the Soil & Water Conservation District Office. Call the office for meeting times and dates.

Meetings are open to the public and interested citizens are encouraged to attend.

Additional details on the SWCD District can be found on our website www.winnebagoswcd.org.

PHEASANTS FOREVER STAFF

FARM BILL BIOLOGIST- Lucas Wilson
lwilson@pheasantsforever.org

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