



CONSERVATION AT THE CROSSROADS

Vol. 31, No. 1, 2010

Marion County SWCD Invites You to Help Celebrate Their 40th Year! Tuesday, February 16th

Please join us on Tuesday, February 16th for our 40th annual meeting and dinner. If you have never attended one of our annual meetings, or if you've not been for several years we hope you will make this year special for us by attending.

We will be meeting on the south side at **Primo South Banquet and Conference Center**. Primo is located at 2615 E. National Avenue which is south of the I-65-Keystone exit, north of Hanna and east of Keystone Ave.

Ticket price is \$15 per person which includes dinner. Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. with the meeting and guest speaker following. Our guest speaker will be John Hazlett, Project Manager, Indianapolis Office of Sustainability.

Please mail or call in your reservation by February 4th. We look forward to seeing you there!

In 1969 a group of Marion County residents, mostly representing the farming community, which was still extensive at the time, came together to form a Soil & Water Conservation District. In March of that year the first SWCD supervisors were appointed and plans were made which would help promote conservation of the soil and water in this county. One of their primary priorities included finding ways to promote conservation education for both adults and children of the community.

John Kitley, Franklin Township resident and Beech Grove attorney, was one of the original five supervisors. John continues on our board as a Supervisor Emeritus and actively supports us by providing advice and assistance on legal & other issues.

Thank you John for 40 years of service to the county! And thanks to all who have served over the years.

Please Register to attend the Marion County SWCD Annual Meeting by Thursday, February 4th!



Name(s): _____

Number attending _____ X \$15 / person Total Enclosed \$ _____

Call Marilyn Hughes at 317-786-1776 for more information or email at marilyn-hughes@iaswcd.org

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Why Create Outdoor Labs?

Several years ago the Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District produced a short introductory video on Outdoor Classrooms entitled *Developing Outdoor Classrooms - Our Future Begins with Knowledge*. Our purpose was to have something to use when meeting with administration and school staff explaining the benefits of teaching out of doors and also the basic steps to develop outdoor learning centers.

We chose the best examples of outdoor classrooms in our area at the time, took many pictures of teachers and students using the features and interviewed teachers and administrators to find why they use the outdoor lab in their teaching and what makes one successful.

We have recently revisited the idea of outdoor labs/classrooms and have looked at studies done on the outcomes of using this concept. We were intrigued to find a number of newer studies which have shown that environment-based learning programs with suitable depth, duration, and rigor can boost standardized test scores. Other tests have found improvements in learning and retention for ADHD children who were regularly exposed to good quality outdoor nature studies.

In contrast, family expert and author, Richard Louv, says a condition in our youth best described as a “nature-deficit disorder” is becoming more widespread. Louv is among a growing number of analysts who see unprecedented pattern

changes in how young people relate to nature and the outdoors. As kids become more “wired” than ever before, they are drawn away from healthful, often soul-soothing, outdoor play. The age-old pattern of children spending hours roaming about and playing outside is becoming close to extinct due to a combination of electronics, cyberspace, and parental efforts to keep their children indoors and, in their minds, safer.

Outdoor labs are economical in the long term as many schools are experiencing cutbacks (which prohibit many field trips) but still wish to provide their students with hands-on, experiential learning opportunities. Our *Developing Outdoor Classrooms* presentation is still vitally relevant and is now available on DVD. This and a copy of IDNR’s Guidelines & Features for Outdoor Labs (download at <http://www.in.gov/dnr/nrec/files/OutdoorLabRevised0604.pdf>) will give you a great start on using your outdoor areas to improve your students learning experience. Contact our office to purchase a copy.

Thank you - 2009 Affiliate Members!

Conservation Sustaining Members
Nora-Northside Community Council
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Conservation Donors
F.L. (Rick) Bein
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George Haerle
Mark Mongin

Drainage Solutions, Inc. – Terry Noriega

The Mission of the Marion County SWCD is to assist Marion County land users in conserving soil, water and related natural resources by providing technical, financial and educational services.



Conservation at the Crossroads is published quarterly to give information to landusers by the Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District, 6960 S. Gray Road, Suite C, Indianapolis, IN 46237
Phone: 317-786-1776 FAX: 317-786-1757 website: marionswcd.org
The Marion County SWCD holds a regular monthly board meeting on the third Tuesday of each month at 3:30 p.m. These meetings are open to the public & are held at the SWCD office at the address above. This board meets to administer the program of soil & water conservation in Marion County. The district prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Indian Creek Elementary - An Outdoor Classroom Success Story

Indian Creek Elementary School continues to impress us with their hands-on science and multi-curricular program utilizing their outdoor lab. This year they have again added on to the children's learning opportunities by adding a prairie/grassland area and an additional wetland area to their discovery pond. The children were active during the entire wetland extension process, visually learning while Ed Apple, a local excavator, cleared the area and dug the wetland. A temporary dam was built to hold the water back so the children could plant wetland plants. The classes were then brought out to watch the dam removal and see the pond water fill the new wetland area.

Child sized waders have been ordered to allow the children to take water samples and get an up close look at the aquatic plants and organisms. According to Principal Dennis Brooks, with budget cuts limiting their opportunities for field trips, the outdoor lab has become even more important to reaching their goal of providing experiential learning opportunities for their students.

Indian Creek's Outdoor Lab has stood the test of time. In the spring of 1986 Ron Dixon, then SWCD Natural Resource Conservationist, was asked to help the school plan to transform six bare acres of school property into a thriving nature



Indian Creek's new wetland area

learning center. Ron stressed the need for the teachers, parents & custodial staff to all be involved in the planning and maintenance in order for the lab to be successful for the long term. He developed a general plan, designed the pond and helped train teachers to use the area.

In the summer of 1987 Ed Apple was hired to construct the pond. A dock and bridge were built to allow students to safely observe aquatic life up close. The pond was then stocked with sunfish, bluegill and large mouth bass. Through the Adopt-A-Tree program over 200 trees and bushes were planted and cared for by the students. A butterfly garden with seating for two classrooms allowed students to create journal entries while watching butterflies feed on native plants. Later, other features were created including a log cabin.

The outdoor lab is used in many ways. Thematic lessons provide students an opportunity to study weather and observe changes to the environment through the seasons. Students get a hands-on opportunity to see how archaeologists reveal history by accurately mapping and investigating their own section of the archeological dig area. The fourth grade classes use the lab for 5 days of living in



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**Support the
Marion County
SWCD by
becoming
an Affiliate
Member! Call
317-786-1776
for more
information.**

Check out our Website www.marionswcd.org

Since its inception 40 years ago, the Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) has worked through various means to educate the public regarding conservation and ecological issues. As a small staff, we have found our website to be one of the best means of getting the most information out to the most people in an economical and time saving way.

Our website can be found at
www.marionswcd.org.

The front page gives you our most recent project or workshop. Currently we're promoting our lately revised "What is a Soil & Water Conservation District?" brochure. Our website has links to a variety of environmental topics which we deal with on a regular basis, describes who we are and what we do.

Our website gives information on soils and soil maps; urban erosion control including information on Rule 5 regulations; urban drainage information including fact sheets to help homeowners who have drainage problems in and around their homes; watersheds and water quality; tree planting and care hints; wildlife; backyard conservation and links for students and educators searching for environmental education information.

We continually add to our fact sheets which cover a wide variety of how-to topics related to the environment. Our latest program is an erosion watch where citizens can contact us with erosion problem areas (see related article below).

Please check out our website and tell others about it. You'll be glad you spent the time with us.

Stop That Dirt - Erosion Control Campaign

The Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has had individuals and groups contact them concerning construction site erosion and resulting sedimentation problems in their community. Erosion of soil and the resulting sediment is the #1 pollutant by volume in stormwater runoff in the United States. Sediment is the loose sand, clay, silt and other soil particles that are carried from a site by water runoff that eventually settles at the bottom of streams, rivers, lakes and ponds. Sediment can have other pollutants attached to the soil particles that can cause severe water quality degradation of our waterways which we depend on for our drinking water, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreation. Excess sediment can also cause flooding, excessive streambank erosion and undesirable physical and chemical changes to our lakes and ponds.

Soil loss from agricultural fields average 5-8 tons of soil loss per acre per year. In urban areas, unprotected construction sites can easily have soil losses that exceed an average of 100+ tons of soil loss per acre per year. As a result of these concerns the local SWCD has developed a "Stop That Dirt- Erosion Watch Campaign".

The SWCD works with local government units in helping them control urban erosion and resulting sedimentation. They encourage interested residents to be on the lookout for signs of offsite erosion from construction sites & other Marion County areas, and to report problems found to Glenn Lange, Resource Conservationist, at the Marion County SWCD 317-786-1776 or email Glenn at glenn-lange@iaswcd.org. Copies of the form are available at www.marionswcd.org.



Environmental Literacy in America

Report finds general public has knowledge gap concerning environmental problems

By Ron Lauster, SWCD Director

Recently “global warming” has been a major environmental topic. The complexity of this issue leaves many asking for more information. The National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (NEETF) recently released a report entitled Environmental Literacy in America which looks at the environmental knowledge of the general public. The report’s findings show a nation with major knowledge limitations on the root causes of environmental problems and how their personal actions are connected to them.

The summary comes from almost a decade of collaboration with Roper Reports. These reports show a persistent pattern of environmental ignorance even among the most educated and influential members of society. For instance, according to this report 45 million Americans think the ocean is a source of fresh water; 120 million believe spray cans still contain CFCs (these were banned in 1978), 130 million believe hydropower is America’s top energy source (it accounts for only 10%). This ignorance of environmental issues accounts for why so few people understand the leading causes of air and water pollution or how they should be addressed.

However, the NEETF states “True, we have a confused public that performs poorly on basic environmental literacy questionnaires but 95% of this public support environmental education in our schools. Most Americans also want environmental education to continue into their adult lives... Over 85% agree that government agencies should support environmental programs.”



Children at Indian Creek Elementary study aquatic life at their school's discovery pond. (See page 3 for more information on this outdoor classroom)

There is evidence that the amount of environmental education (EE) occurring in schools has leveled off or even declined as the nation’s education system has increased its focus on statewide education standards and related testing. Ironically, a number of newer studies have shown that environment-based learning programs with suitable depth, duration and rigor can boost standardized test scores. Because future environmental problems will require the efforts of more skilled non-experts acting as individuals through small business or as community leaders, EE for both school children and adults is vitally important.

Effective environmental education is not a panacea for all of society’s problems but it is a responsibility that we owe both ourselves and future generations. The Marion County SWCD continues to consider EE one of its primary priorities.

What is a SWCD?

Hopefully you have heard the acronym “SWCD”, but just in case you haven’t, “SWCD” stands for Soil and Water Conservation District. Across the United States, nearly 3000 conservation districts are helping local people conserve land, water, forests, wildlife and related natural resources. Conservation Districts were originally formed during the Dust Bowl to combat the severe erosion problems caused by intense farming practices. Since that time, SWCDs have adapted to provide local assistance on a broad array of natural resource issues. They are local units of state government, established to carry out programs for conservation for current and future generations. SWCDs offer a unique way for us to work together to plan and carry out activities that will make our area a better place to live. Such activities lead to sustainable communities, prudent land use, and the sound management and conservation of natural resources.

Conservation Districts were organized by local people to address local natural resource concerns. The Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District is governed by a five member board of 3 elected and 2 appointed Supervisors who volunteer their time and expertise. They make all decisions regarding the District’s programs and activities. These programs provide technical assistance, information, and education to assist people in the county to properly manage their natural resources. Though all Soil & Water Conservation Districts are committed to conservation, each has its own special goals and objectives. SWCDs offer assistance in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the Indiana State Department of Agriculture’s Division of Soil Conservation by providing sound, solution based support that will contribute to the environmental enhancement of the community and region. The SWCD also

works closely with elected officials, community leaders, other local and state offices, including in Marion County, the Indianapolis Office of Sustainability, Department of Public, Works & Department of Metropolitan Development, the Marion County Health Department, & the Marion County Cooperative Extension Service. Locally led SWCDs are uniquely qualified to mold themselves to meet the local needs of their communities.

To learn more about SWCDs visit the appropriate websites of the National Association of Conservation Districts at www.nacdnet.org or the Indiana Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts at www.iaswcd.org. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the creation of the Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District. To learn more about the Marion County SWCD visit their website at www.marionswcd.org or contact the SWCD office by calling 317-786-1776. We have recently updated our brochure which lists our priorities and work areas.

The District and its employees continue to be strongly committed to conservation and the wise use of the natural resources of the county including proper land use and protection of our surface and ground water. Support is given through technical and educational assistance, erosion control monitoring, and cost-share programs when available. Technical services are provided without direct cost to the public.

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Farm Services Agency News
Marion/Johnson Counties
3059 N. Morton
Franklin, IN 46131
317-736-6822

DCP/ACRE Sign-up
through 6/1
Remember to report all
planted wheat acres
.....

Poisoned Waters - PBS Special with Study Guide

In *Poisoned Waters*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Hedrick Smith examines the growing hazards of water pollution to human health and the ecosystem, revealing that stormwater runoff and agricultural waste are combining with chemicals to threaten both human health and the environment. Focusing on genetic mutations in fish and marine life as the “canary in the coal mine,” *Poisoned Waters* both sounds an urgent alarm and points to citizen and government action groups that are attempting to address the massive problem of water pollution.

This guide is intended for 9th-to-12th-grade classes in social studies, civics and government, current events, economics, history, environmental studies, science and language arts. *Poisoned Waters* examines how water pollution from many sources threatens human health and the

environment and also explores potential answers to the crisis. The guide invites teachers to use any or all of its activities. The featured lesson is based on video clips from *Poisoned Waters* in addition to research on various Web sites.

The guide includes a list of questions for students to discuss after viewing *Poisoned Waters*.

Purchasing the Film:

DVDs of *Poisoned Waters* are available for purchase from Shop PBS for Teachers www.shoppbs.org/product/index.jsp?productid+=3537144. Teachers and students can watch the film streamed in its entirety on FRONTLINE’s Web site, <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/poisonedwaters>. A transcript is available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/poisonedwaters/etc/script.html>.

(Continued from page 3)

attire and explore the foods, crafts, tools, challenges and traditions of Indiana settlers of the 1800’s. The 5th grade classes experience a day at Valley Forge with American Revolution historical interpreters and parent volunteers. This day spent in the outdoor classroom allows American Revolutionary History to come to life and makes a life long memory for these students.

First through fifth graders enjoy their Explorers Club which meets to tend the gardens, study nature and lead tours.

This outdoor lab has been successful for so long because of administration support, teacher involvement in all grades, good planning and wonderful volunteers including students and many parents and grandparents. Large outdoor labs such as Indian Creek’s take a lot of work, but ask

anyone involved, including former students and you will find a group who believe the benefits are well worth the effort.



A cold December day at IC’s outdoor lab made the Revolutionary War come to life for 5th graders.

Contact Us
for more
information on soil
& water related
issues

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SAVE THE DATE! Landscaping with Rain Gardens: the ABCs of Design and Construction

Hoosier Heartland Resource Conservation & Development will be offering a one-day workshop on February 16, 2010 for professional landscapers, garden centers, nurseries, and landscape suppliers, parks departments, groundskeepers, and others who may be asked to design, construct or maintain rain gardens.

What :
Landscaping with Rain Gardens: the ABCs of Design and Construction

When: Tuesday, February 16, 2010 8:30 to 3:30

Where: Normandy Barn, Indiana State Fairgrounds

Rusty Schmidt, co-author of *The Blue Thumb Guide to Rain Gardens*, will be the feature speaker.



A new rain garden was installed at the IMA grounds near the greenhouse last fall.

For more information about the program and registration, please watch the Hoosier Heartland RC&D website www.hhrcd.org.

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