

CONSERVATION CONNECTION



MACON COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEWSLETTER



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 WWW.MACONCOUNTYSWCD.NET
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UPCOMING EVENTS

21 APR FISH SALE ORDERS DUE
 (CARP ORDERS DUE 4/6)

30 APR FISH SALE ORDER PICKUP
 AT SWCD OFFICE

13 APR TREE SALE ORDER FORMS
 DUE

21 APR TREE SALE ORDER PICKUP
 AT SWCD OFFICE

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MCSWCD UPDATES

Macon County SWCD |

ANNUAL MEETINGS ARE BACK!

On February 26th we met to discuss the district's operations, accomplishments, and future. After breakfast and updates from the district and partners, there was a panel of representatives of different conservation programs that received questions about the programs they help administer. We are appreciative of the opportunity to celebrate conservation in Macon County. This event was made possible by our sponsors. Thank you for partnering with us to conserve Macon County's natural resources!

Brown Seed Sales, ADM, Adams Aerial Solutions, Seevers Farm Drainage Inc, and Scheels!



SPRING FISH AND TREE SALE

Be sure to take advantage of our fall fish and tree sale this season. The fish sale includes game and management fish as well as pond supplies. The tree sale includes blooming trees, maples, oaks, walnuts, evergreens, larger trees, and fruit trees. See insert for more information.



Interested in becoming an associate member of the Macon County SWCD Board?

Our board is made up of 5 individuals with a vested interest in natural resource management and environmental stewardship. As an associate member, you would have the opportunity to participate in local conservation.

Call 217-877-5670 X3

CRP STATUS REVIEWS

You may have seen the Macon County SWCD truck in your neck of the woods recently. The district is responsible for checking the status of CRP fields in Macon County so if you see our crew on the roadside it is likely we are conducting a field check. In these CRP checks, we are simply looking to confirm that the practice is in compliance with FSA and NRCS standards. If you have a field of CRP and having questions regarding maintenance please contact FSA or the SWCD.

LET'S STAY IN TOUCH!

Follow us on Facebook-**Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District**

Visit our website-**www.maconcountyswcd.net**

You can also subscribe to our **email newsletter** on our website.

1006NT 10 FT END WHEEL NO-TILL DRILL AVAILABLE FOR RENT

Looking to do some interseeding or other springtime small-scale planting? Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District has a 10FT No-Till Drill available for rent. \$100 per day with a \$100 cleaning deposit. Contact the office for availability and to complete a rental agreement form!



MACON COUNTY PARTNERS FOR CONSERVATION

Macon County Soil and Water has funds available for our FY25 Cost Share money. If you are looking for 75% cost-share assistance for cover crops, pollinators, or another conservation practice call us at 217-877-5670 ext 3. This is the perfect opportunity for acres not included in other programs or to try out something new without bearing the full cost or signing up for a long term program! The application window is open NOW!

UPDATE ON CHANGES IN NRCS

If you are someone that participates in programs through NRCS you may have heard of some of the changes coming. NRCS is moving towards programming that includes whole-farm, outcomes-focused planning and is implementing this in their new Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP) as well as changes to the future of CSP and EQIP programs. For questions please contact the USDA office.

NEED NATIVE SEED?

Macon County SWCD has teamed with Pheasants Forever to get you the seed you need!

All seed is compliant with NRCS Standards.

To take advantage of this opportunity call us at 217-877-5670 X3



PRESCRIBED FIRE

Macon County SWCD |

TIPS FOR USING PRESCRIBED FIRE AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

MITCH LOVGREN - MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGER

Prescribed fire has become one of those staples many have come to rely on for land management. Now that the frost is coming out of the ground and spring is right around the corner our prime burn season is almost here in central Illinois. The application of fire is not something that should be taken lightly and there are several things that need to take place before going out and lighting fires.

The type of habitat you are trying to manage and your goals are the first step in the application of fire. Waterways and edges are always particularly problematic for brush encroachment. These areas are often not feasible to use mowing and chemical treatment. Prairies and grasslands also require frequent burning to reduce brush encroachment. Frequent burning is especially important when trying to establish new prairies. High fire frequency will help promote the native fire adapted species and reduce many of our non-native species that are not adapted to fire.

Woodlands on the other hand often don't carry high enough fuel loads to carry fire frequently. Fire helps to reduce invasion of brush into your woodland areas and promote hardwood trees, such as oaks and hickories, that are fire adapted. The exception to this is new tree plantings where heavier grass fuel loads can lead to higher fire intensity and tree mortality. Burning should be avoided in tree planting until trees are well established and grassy fuels have been reduced by light competition from the tree canopies.

Once you have identified your target area the next step is to make a prescribed burn plan. There are certain elements, which I will touch on later, that are required to go into a prescribed burn plan. I suggest contacting your local or state conservation agencies to obtain a sample burn permit you can use as a template. The use of fire as a management tool is protected by the Illinois Prescribed Burning Act (525 ILCS 37) and regulated by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency through an open burn permitting process. Open burn permits are free to obtain through Illinois EPA and are required for doing prairie and ecological landscape burns under the

clean air act. It is important to note the permit is not required if you are simply burning agricultural waste, such as a buildup of corn stalks from flooding in a field, from standard farming practices. The permitting process and planning can be daunting for someone new to prescribed fire, so I suggest consulting a certified prescribed burn manager for assistance in planning or you can contract prescribed burns with a contractor. Most conservation agencies have staff that are certified in prescribed burning or can point you in the right direction to get assistance.



Firebreak preparation and planning ahead of the burn day is critical to a successful burn. Disked firebreaks with bare dirt are best but not always practical. Many of our fire breaks at the conservation district utilize hiking trails or mowed breaks. I always recommend a minimum of 20 feet in grasslands and 8-10 feet in a woodland leaf blown break. Our goal is always to have a firebreak accessible by motorized equipment. For woodland burns pay close attention to standing dead or hollowed out trees as they can catch fire easily and create a major hazard if near a firebreak for spot over into unburned areas.

Equipment for the burn day is another important component. I always recommend a minimum of one motorized unit with a spray tank anytime burning and a minimum of three people. Metal or soft hand pump packs are always a good backup in case a water unit



fails. We utilize gas and electric powered leaf blowers where it is possible to put out fire and conserve water use. Metal tined leaf rakes and rubber flappers are also very useful for knocking out low creeping backfires. A drip torch with a 3-1 mix of diesel fuel and gasoline is the preferred ignition device. Some local NRCS offices have limited availability of some of these tools that can be borrowed.

Burning conditions are the single most important factor affecting success or your burn. Humidity, wind, and temperature are the primary factors we monitor on the ground. The National Weather Service is the best place to get a forecast of these conditions for the burn day. In general, I prefer relative humidity between 60-40% for grassland and between 50-30% is for woodlands, and winds in the 5-10 Mph range for grasslands and the 10-15 mph range for woodlands. Light and variable winds are never recommended because winds can shift quickly and turn a creeping back fire into a head fire. Lastly as temperatures rise throughout the day generally your relative humidity goes down so fire intensity will increase as the day goes on. These are just general guidelines and it is important to note that things like our current drought can greatly increase fire intensity even at high humidities due to lack of soil moisture. Always light a test fire on your downwind side that can be easily be put out before lighting a large area.

Smoke management is the other major factor to consider on your burn day. Make sure you have notified neighbors and your local fire agency to save headaches from unnecessary call ins. Keep smoke away from major roads and don't burn if you have high winds or stable air that cause poor smoke lift. Stable air masses can be recognized by stable winds, hazy conditions, and layered clouds. As the sun sets you will also often see a temperature inversion set in and hold smoke down at ground level. Think of people burning leaves in town and after dark an inversion holds all that smoke at ground level how easily it can smoke out a whole neighborhood.

Always check your local and state regulations before burning to make sure you are staying legal. Fire is great tool when used properly but can cause devastation when used carelessly. Lastly there are many great private, local, and state conservation groups that can help you on your journey to add prescribed fire to your bag of tools as a land manager.

GROWING FOR THE FUTURE



RICHLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S AGRICULTURE PROGRAM IN PROCESS OF MASSIVE EXPANSION DAVE SHILEY - OUTREACH COORDINATOR FOR AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS

"Growth" is the best word to describe how the Agriculture Department at Richland Community College has changed in the past six years. What once was a program housed in a section of the main campus building has now expanded across the street to its own space: the Michael D. Andreas Agriculture Building. This, along with program changes and growing scholarship opportunities, is helping Richland's Agriculture Department create bigger opportunities for students.

Today, the Agriculture and Horticulture programs are housed in the Michael D. Andreas Agriculture Building. The structure, originally an FBI Farm Progress Show demonstration building, serves as the core. The interior was designed to meet the needs of students with a large student lounge, two conference rooms, three classrooms, and a large multipurpose laboratory room. Horticulture and Agriculture students also benefit from the attached greenhouse and headhouse facility.

With this expansion, the enrollment of Agriculture and Horticulture students is increasing by the year. In 2019, 18 students were enrolled, and today, there are over 50. Approximately three quarters of Richland Ag students are planning to transfer to a 4-year institution to complete a bachelor's degree, so the College is making multiple upgrades to increase the number of students in the 2-year Applied Associate Degree program.

A new scholarship opportunity and additional certificates are part of those changes. The new FFA Promise Scholarship, established by the Andreas Family Foundation, provides tuition and fee scholarships to former FFA members from high schools within Richland's district. This scholarship applies to high school seniors coming to Richland after graduation to pursue any degree or certificate. The department is also expanding certificate options - adding a Regenerative Agriculture Certificate, Greenhouse Management Certificate and Local Foods Certificate. They even added hydroponics systems to enhance hands-on learning.

You may not know that Richland Community College is a member of a community college collaborative called C2A3 or the Community College Alliance for Agriculture Advancement. This is a national network of 2-year colleges dedicated to strengthening agriculture education through applied research, shared curriculum, and professional development. This collaborative is supported by the Natural Resource Conservation Service through a national partnership.

One of several programs within C2A3 is a leadership development program for students known as ASPIRE. This school year, Richland had eight students participating in the ASPIRE program. In the fall of 2025, ASPIRE students attended the C2A3 professional development conference in Wausau, Wisconsin. They learned about agricultural innovations, explored career opportunities, and networked with other C2A3 member college students. In February 2026, these eight students joined other C2A3 college students to attend the USDA Agriculture Outlook conference in Washington, DC. These two student opportunities were supported through a C2A3 grant.



In addition to ASPIRE, Richland agriculture students have other learning opportunities outside the classroom. Students participate in the Agriculture Club and help facilitate FFA events hosted by the College. Student involvement makes Richland Farmers Market events possible which include our largest event, the Spring Plant Sale, (May 1 from 7 AM - 6 PM and May 2 from 7 AM - 1 PM)



Looking into the future, the Agriculture Department is developing an Urban Agriculture Campus through a C2A3 grant. Last summer, construction began on 16 raised beds to be used for student and community education projects. This summer, a high tunnel will be completed as well as demonstration "Food Forest Pod" examples that could be replicated in urban backyards. Plans are currently being developed that will include community education opportunities during monthly Farmers Markets that we host on the Agriculture Campus. The 2026 summer markets will be held on June 17, July 15, August 19, and Sept 16 from 3-7pm each market day.

The department is also developing a master plan for the Agriculture Campus that will include corn and soybean demonstration and research plots which incorporate cover crops. These demonstration areas will be adjacent to the Agriculture Building to enhance hands-on learning.

Visit Richland's Agriculture Campus anytime. Explore opportunities, ask questions, and get involved. Let us help you cultivate your future.



MACON COUNTY SWCD WELCOMES NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBER TO THE BOARD, CLINT GORDEN



Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District is pleased to welcome Clint Gorden as a new Associate Board Member. Raised in Blue Mound, IL, Clint earned his degree in Agronomy Management from Illinois State University. Today, he farms alongside the support of his wife, Ashley, and their son, Beckett.

Clint is a first-generation farmer starting 2019 with help from great friends and neighbors. While Clint is a first-generation farmer, agriculture has been a part of his farm family history before. His grandfather farmed but passed when Clint was very young and his parents made the decision not to farm.

On his farm, Clint implements conservation practices including strip till, no till, cover cropping, CRP and set-aside grasslands, buffer strips, variable rate fertility practices to support soil health and long term sustainability.

When asked why he decided to join the board Clint said, "The chairman invited me to attend, which I did. I figured out that there are a lot of people interested in conservation, but unaware of how to get involved. To maintain the direction agriculture is going, we need to consciously preserve our land, water, woodlands and wildlife."

The district is thankful for Clint's contributions and perspective as an Associate Board Member and appreciates his commitment to furthering conservation in Macon County.

LOOKING FOR OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT CONSERVATION IN MACON COUNTY?

APR

06

Agucation
Macon County Farm
Bureau

APR

18

Rooted in Community
Macon County Conservation
District

APR

25

Festival of Spring
Macon County Conservation
District

MAY

28

Wine in the Wild
Macon Co Conservation
Foundation Fundraiser

MACON COUNTY SWCD



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BALANCE BENEATH THE SURFACE

HOW A WELL-MANAGED POND DELIVERS BETTER FISHING AND FEWER PROBLEMS

LEO JOHNSON - FISHERIES TECHNICIAN & VEGETATION MANAGEMENT EXPERT

The most successful ponds all share one key trait: balance. A well-balanced pond doesn't just look healthier—it performs better, requires less intervention, and provides a more enjoyable experience for both anglers and pond owners. Understanding what balance means is the first step toward unlocking its many benefits.

A balanced pond begins with the right predator-to-prey relationship, most commonly a 10:1 ratio of bluegill to largemouth bass in Midwest ponds. This ensures predators have enough food to grow while preventing prey species from becoming overcrowded. Along with proper ratios, it's important to avoid excessive biomass. Every pond has a limit to how many fish it can support, and staying within that limit keeps growth rates high and stress low.

Water quality also plays a major role. Keeping nutrient loads under control helps manage algae and aquatic vegetation naturally, reducing the need for aggressive treatments. Adequate habitat and structure—such as brush or rock—give forage fish places to hide and reproduce, which supports a strong food base. That forage, whether minnows, golden shiners, bluegill, or supplemental fish food, is what fuels the entire system. Finally, balance requires active harvest. Removing certain fish helps maintain healthy size and age structures, preventing gaps that lead to long-term issues.

When these pieces come together, the benefits are immediate and long-lasting. Fish densities stay at ideal levels, allowing target species to relate to structure and making fishing more consistent and enjoyable. Predatory fish grow larger thanks to reduced competition and abundant food. Management becomes simpler, with fewer vegetation problems, less need for stocking, and reduced dependence on supplemental feeding.

A strong forage base also helps reduce pests like mosquitoes, improving the pond environment both in and out of the water. Perhaps most exciting, a balanced pond creates opportunities to add specialty species such as musky, walleye, perch, or hybrid striped bass. In short, balance turns a pond into a healthier, more productive, and more versatile fishery—one that works smarter, not harder



MACON COUNTY SWCD IS THANKFUL FOR PARTNERSHIP WITH HERMAN BROS. HERMAN BROTHERS FISHERIES IS THE SUPPLIER OF OUR SPRING AND FALL FISH SALES AND OFFERS OTHER SERVICES AS WELL INCLUDING CONSULTATION AND CONSTRUCTION SERVICES.



LADY LANDOWNERS

Macon County SWCD |



In the heart of Macon County, a unique group of women united by a shared love and passion for agriculture, has been growing, learning, and supporting women in agriculture for decades. The Macon County Lady Landowners was founded in 1985 with the mission to bring together women who are interested in agriculture and land stewardship—whether they own land, work on the land, or simply have an interest in the agricultural industry.

In summer of 2025, the women hosted a celebration to recognize the group's 40 year celebration. The gathering consisted of women from all different parts of the county, some of which were members of the group since it began. The keynote speaker, Peggy Kay, spoke on the early years of women entering the agricultural industry's workforce. Entering a male dominated industry had its challenges, but women like Peggy helped paved the way for the younger generations of women to also become involved in the agricultural industry.

Since the group's beginning, the Lady Landowners have remained true to its founding goals- providing education and fellowship to women who share a love for agriculture. The group meets every other month for an educational tour or speaker in various sectors of the industry. Meeting have featured tours of The Great Pumpkin Patch, Mariahs Mums, ADM, Local Farms, Anheuser-Busch, Wineries, and many more. The group also has been able to provide college scholarships through Richland Community College. Dues are only \$20 per year, which allows the group to provide a college scholarship through Richland Community College. If you are interested in joining this organization, please contact the Macon County SWCD office for more information.

Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District is proud to sponsor and support the Macon County Landowners for over 40 years.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR ARTICLE AUTHORS!

Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District is thankful for partnership with others in conservation, people who are experts in their fields.

Have any ideas for things you would like to see included in our newsletter? We are open to suggestions!



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SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR ANNUAL MEETING SPONSORS AS WELL!

Our annual meeting is an event to celebrate conservation and give back to our farmers and partners.

It would not have been possible without the monetary donations and door prize donations from the following companies.

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KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THE FALL EDITION 2026