

TIPPECANOE COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2030



Tippecanoe County
Soil & Water
Conservation District



2026-2030 Tippecanoe County Soil Water Conservation District Strategic Plan

WHO WE ARE

The Tippecanoe County Soil and Water Conservation District is a sub-division of Indiana State Government. It is a public body which exercises public powers. The District is governed by a five member board of Tippecanoe County residents. Three are elected at the local annual meeting of land occupiers and two are appointed by the State Soil Conservation Board based upon recommendations of the leadership in the District. Selection of all five supervisors is based on input from the local people they serve. As public officials responsible to the district and state, supervisors are required to subscribe to a standard public oath of office. The District receives its statutory authority from Indiana District Law (Indiana Code IC 14-32-5-1). The Tippecanoe County District was organized through a public referendum held in 1940 in accordance with the Indiana Soil Conservation Act.

WHAT WE DO

The Tippecanoe County Soil and Water Conservation District provides information, education, and technical assistance to the public on building productive and healthy forests, grasslands, crops, and communities. We identify and prioritize local soil and water resource concerns. We connect residents to financial assistance to implement conservation practices and technologies.

OUR MISSION

The Tippecanoe County Soil and Water Conservation District is committed to provide quality technical, educational, and informational resources for the community through leadership, service, and citizen involvement to foster natural resource conservation and environmental stewardship.

OUR VISION

The Soil and Water Conservation District is recognized by the community as Tippecanoe County's foremost conservation organization providing leadership and assistance through promotion of science based natural resource stewardship and planning.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

All metrics described in the following strategies are totals for the 5 years this plan covers.

Organizational Development and Community Outreach

Goal 1: Strengthen and expand conservation partnerships

- Strategy 1: Identify and contact relevant conservation agencies, Non-Government Organizations, and commercial entities annually. Our current partner list in Appendix 1 will be updated as additional partners are identified.
- Strategy 2: Participate in at least 25 community and partner events with informational materials and conservation activities

Goal 2: Expand community outreach

- Strategy 1: Publish at least 1,000 written posts and 250 short-form videos that educate and engage county residents in conservation practices
- Strategy 2: Communicate the value of the district to currently uncontacted county residents through media, events, and other outreach activities

Goal 3: Expand financial capacity

- Strategy 1: Seek opportunities for grant funding through at least two sources per year through funding sources such as the National Association of Conservation Districts, Section 319 grants, Clean Water Indiana grants, and private and corporate foundations
- Strategy 2: Seek sponsorships for district events
- Strategy 3: Encourage endowments, donations, and legacy contributions
- Strategy 4: Expand fundraising efforts

Healthy Soil, Healthy Water

Conservation agricultural systems have the potential to improve soil function, increase farm profitability, and protect water quality. The principles of managing for soil health apply equally to the largest row crop farms and the smallest specialty and horticultural crop operations. Expanding the adoption of soil health principles by Tippecanoe County producers will directly serve the District's mission.

Goal 4: Increase adoption of regenerative agricultural systems that build soil health, increase crop diversity, integrate livestock, and reduce crop inputs

- Strategy 1: Coordinate a minimum of five educational events promoting regenerative ag systems in large-scale/row crop operations and five in small-scale/vegetable operations
- Strategy 2: Write 20 newsletter articles on regenerative ag systems—10 targeting small-scale/vegetable and 10 targeting large-scale/row crop operations
- Strategy 3: Assist 50 producers in implementing systems that enable long-term reduction in tillage frequency and/or intensity
- Strategy 4: Assist 35 producers in adopting cover crops or adjusting cover crop management to account for improved nutrient use efficiency or forage for livestock
- Strategy 5: Maintain and promote a soil health demonstration plot at the Master Gardener Association of Tippecanoe County's Community Gardens

Goal 5: Promote edge of field practices which protect water quality

- Strategy 1: Assist 5 producers in installing edge of field practices that protect water quality such as filter strips, saturated buffers, denitrifying bioreactors, and drainage water management systems
- Strategy 2: Engage 20 producers in a review of cropland profitability to identify economically marginal ground and offer suitable alternatives

Healthy Ecosystems

Goal 6: Foster healthy forests on public and private lands in agricultural, industrial, rural residential, and urban sites across Tippecanoe County through technical assistance, partnerships, and public outreach

Forests provide habitat for many species of wildlife, improve water quality, and improve air quality. They also contribute to the economy through timber production, recreation, and tourism. Tippecanoe County's forests face numerous challenges, including urban and suburban development and invasive plant infestations. Science-based forest management is crucial to sustaining healthy forests for future generations in Tippecanoe County.

- Strategy 1: Write a minimum of 25 brush management plans
- Strategy 2: Promote Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry's Classified Forest and Wildlands Program to 15 landowners
- Strategy 3: Host a minimum of 5 forest management programs or workshops for residents and/or partners
- Strategy 4: Write a minimum of 10 newsletter articles on forests
- Strategy 5: Create posts or share partner posts about forests on social media a minimum of 120 times

Goal 7: Foster healthy early successional habitat on public and private lands in agricultural, industrial, rural residential, and urban sites across Tippecanoe County through technical assistance and public outreach

Early successional habitat including prairies, hedgerows, insectary strips and small native plantings provide critical habitat for numerous species of wildlife. These habitats reduce water runoff, prevent soil erosion, and sequester carbon. Agricultural and urban development, invasive plant infestations, lack of adequate management, and the exclusion of fire threaten these habitats. Science-based habitat restoration and management is crucial to protect these valuable ecosystems for future generations in Tippecanoe County.

- Strategy 1: Write a minimum of 50 wildlife habitat establishment plans
- Strategy 2: Write a minimum of 25 herbaceous weed control plans
- Strategy 3: Coordinate a minimum of 5 early successional habitat establishment and management programs or workshops for residents and/or partners
- Strategy 4: Coordinate a minimum of 2 prescribed fire workshops
- Strategy 5: Write a minimum of 10 newsletter articles on early successional habitat establishment and management

Goal 8: Foster healthy aquatic ecosystems including wetlands, lakes, ponds, and streams on public and private lands in agricultural, industrial, rural residential, and urban sites across Tippecanoe County through technical assistance, partnerships, and public outreach

Wetlands are crucial ecosystems. Wetlands absorb excess rainwater, and reduce the risk of flooding while also improving water quality by trapping pollutants and sediment. Wetlands are home to a rich variety of flora and fauna, including many species of birds, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, insects, and aquatic plants. Wetlands face significant challenges, such as drainage for agricultural use, urban and suburban development, and pollution from runoff. Efforts to restore and protect Tippecanoe County's wetlands are critical to maintaining their ecological function and the services they provide to both the environment and local communities.

Buffering ponds and rivers is essential for maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems and protecting water quality. Buffers of native vegetation filter pollutants such as sediment, nutrients, and pesticides, before they enter surface water. Native buffers reduce erosion by stabilizing banks. Buffers add habitat for many species of wildlife including birds, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and insects. Additionally, buffering ponds and rivers can reduce flooding by absorbing excess water during heavy rains, reducing pressure on drainage systems. Overall, effective buffering practices are vital for preserving the ecological integrity of freshwater systems, supporting wildlife, and promoting public health and recreational opportunities in Tippecanoe County.

- Strategy 1: Write a minimum of 5 plans that add perennial, native vegetation to riparian and wetland areas
- Strategy 2: Promote the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Wetland Reserve Easements to 25 landowners
- Strategy 3: Meet with 15 neighborhoods to discuss pond management
- Strategy 4: Host a minimum of 2 pond management workshops
- Strategy 5: Write a minimum of 10 newsletter articles on wetland restoration, stream buffering, pond management, and best practices for improving water quality

PLAN ADOPTION

This plan was adopted by the Tippecanoe County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors on December 10, 2025.

Mark A. Eastman
Mark Eastman, Board Chair

Melody Clouser
Melody Clouser, Board Vice Chair

Deb Grady-Ruth
Deb Grady-Ruth, Supervisor

Steve Kerkhove
Steve Kerkhove, Supervisor

B D Osborn
Doug Osborn, Supervisor

The staff of the Tippecanoe County Soil and Water Conservation District are equally committed to carrying out the priorities established within this document to further the SWCD mission and its commitment to foster natural resource conservation and environmental stewardship.

Kris A Gertz
Kris Gertz, District Administrator

MS
Michael Smith, Conservation Agriculture Specialist

Robert Suseland
Robert Suseland, Habitat Specialist

Appendix 1

This is a list of current and potential partner conservation agencies, non-governmental organizations, and for-profit entities. This is a living document that district staff will update as additional partners are identified. If you would like to be added to this list, please email. soil.water@tippecanoe.in.gov.

- The Andersons
- Archer Daniels Midland
- Black and Gold Ducks Unlimited
- Boy Scouts of America
- Cargill
- City of Lafayette
- City of West Lafayette
- Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative
- Diverse Corn Belt
- Farm Service Agency
- Farm Credit Mid America
- Good Samaritan Project
- GrowLocal Lafayette
- Helena Agri-Enterprises
- Indiana Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- Indiana Native Plant Society
- Indiana State Department of Agriculture
- Keystone Cooperative
- Lafayette Parks and Recreation Department
- Lafayette Ag Club
- Master Gardener Association of Tippecanoe County
- National Association of Conservation Districts
- The Nature Conservancy Indiana Chapter
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- National Wild Turkey Federation, Wea Chapter
- National Wildlife Federation
- NICHES Land Trust
- Nutrien Ag Solutions
- Pence Ag Group
- Pollinator Partnership
- Primient
- Purdue Extension
- Ouiatenon Preserve, Inc
- Roy Whistler Foundation
- State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management
- Sagamore Chapter of Pheasants Forever
- Tate and Lyle North
- This Old Farm
- Tippecanoe County Farm Bureau
- Tippecanoe County Partnership for Water Quality
- Tippecanoe Invasive Cooperative Invasive Taskforce
- Tippecanoe County Parks & Recreation Department
- Urban Soil Health
- Wabash River Enhancement Corporation
- West Lafayette Parks and Recreation Department
- Wildcat Guardians
- Xerces Society

Last Updated: 02/11/2026