FALL 2025

# CONSERVATION CORNER

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Tippecanoe County Soil & Water Conservation District

## *Annual Meeting -*

*February 11 9 am @ John S Wright Forestry Center*
*1007 N 725 W, West Lafayette, IN*

### Lenny Farlee

*Lenny Farlee, Extension Forester with Purdue Forestry and Natural Resources take you on a winter walk to discuss a health forest in winter.*

### Emily Usher

Emily Usher, Diverse Corn Belt Project Manager at Purdue, will share insights on the latest research and recommendations from the Diverse Corn Belt Project. Reimaging Agricultural Diversity

### Business Meeting & Breakfast

**Registration is free!**
**To Register - visit tippecanoecountyswcd.org/2026-annual-meeting**

*For more information, please visit our website, call or visit our office.*

| tippecanoecountyswcd.org | 1812 Troxel Dr. Lafayette, IN 47909 | 765-474-9992 ext.3 |

## This issue:

# Building a Year-Round Ecosystem to Improve Garden Health and Productivity

By Robert Suseland, Habitat Specialist
rsuseland@tippecanoe.in.gov | (765) 474-9992 ext. 4008

Establishing and maintaining patches or strips of native grasses, sedges, and broadleaf wildflowers near your garden will attract, support, and sustain a beneficial ecosystem. This ecosystem will improve crop health and productivity. Many bee species needed for vegetable and fruit pollination nest and/or overwinter in the ground or in the stems of native plants. Plantings that provide bees with floral resources and year-round cover will result in healthier on-site populations of bees available for pollination. Native plants also provide resources to beneficial insects including predatory wasps, parasitoid wasps, ground beetles, lady beetles, solider beetles, lacewings, etc. all of which help naturally control pest insects that are detrimental to vegetable and fruit production. The following information outlines some considerations for planning and establishing pollinator habitat.

Select plants native to your county or a surrounding county. A great website for learning more about plant species is minnesotawildflowers.info. The plant profiles on this website include information on plant height, bloom period, light requirements, soil moisture requirements, and native range down to county level. Pay special attention to the plant's light and moisture requirements. The more species of native wildflowers, grasses, sedges, and rushes, the better. Be sure to include enough wildflower species to have blooms from April – October. When developing seed mixes or plug planting plans for small plantings, I recommend selecting plants that are not going to aggressively spread through seeds or rhizomes. I also recommend plants that do not grow taller than 4 feet. Shorter plants look tidier and are less likely to fall over into production beds or walkways.

Plant seeds and plugs into firm, bare soil. Inadequate site preparation is the primary reason for a failed planting. Converting fields that have been used for crop production for several years requires the least amount of site preparation effort. Converting lawns, pastures, hayfields, and other areas established to non-native grasses require the most site preparation effort. Herbicide and solarization are the most effective site preparation methods. Site preparation methods such as occultation (covering with black plastic), repeated tillage, smother cropping, or a combination of these methods can result in a properly prepared seedbed but can take several years to be effective.

Native, perennial pollinator habitat of any shape and size planted in or near your garden will improve pollination and decrease populations of garden pests. Don't hesitate to start with a small area and add more areas as you see what works and what doesn't. If you need help planning pollinator habitat, email me at rsuseland@tippecanpoe.in.gov or give me a call at (765) 474-9992 ext. 4008. Happy gardening!

# NRCS Update

By Sarah Vaughn, NRCS District Conservationist
sarah.vaughn@usda.gov | (765) 474-9992 ext. 3

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## Joint Indiana FSA/NRCS Conservation Showcase - CREP

Photo Credit: Ouiatenon Preserve - A Roy Whistler Foundation Project Facebook

## Finding a Delicate Balance Between Conservation and History

*By Kris Vance, Indiana NRCS State Public Affairs Specialist*


*The Ouiatenon Preserve sign welcomes visitors to the area.*

On the banks of the Wabash River, nestled within a landscape shaped by centuries of change, a quiet transformation is underway, one that honors the deep history of the Ouiatenon area while protecting its ecological and archaeological legacy. The Ouiatenon Preserve: A Roy Whistler Foundation Project is not your typical habitat restoration project. It's a rare and complex convergence of cultural preservation and ecological restoration, made possible by a unique collaboration between landowners, archaeologists, biologists and conservation agencies.

"This project was really unlike anything I'd worked on before," said Angie Garcia Miller, Area Biologist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who helped guide the project from concept to execution.

Read the rest of the story here:
www.nrcs.usda.gov/state-offices/indiana/news/turning-marginal-farmland-into-lasting-value-with-crp

NRCS offers free technical assistance and conservation planning to landowners and agricultural producers. Contact your local District Conservationist, Sarah Vaughn, at sarah.vaughn@usda.gov to discuss your vision and schedule an appointment.

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USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

## Soil Health and Pollinator Habitat Demonstration Garden

By Mike Smith, Conservation Ag Specialist

This spring district staff began operating a plot at the Master Gardener Association of Tippecanoe County community gardens on Sagamore Parkway S next to the Humane Society for Greater Lafayette. The plot will demonstrate both vegetable production systems that improve soil health and how to establish and manage native habitat for beneficial insects. In May, we planted plugs of native broadleaf wildflowers, grasses, and sedges. In January, we will broadcast native seeds on another section. In the vegetable production side, 2025 was spent in transition of a minimal tillage cropping system. Following two rounds or tarping to smother existing weeds and exhaust weed seeds at the soil's surface, we established a cover crop of crimson clover and cereal rye. This cover crop should over winter, providing nitrogen, suppressing weeds, and increasing soil tilth. Around may of 2026, we plan to terminate the cover crop and begin vegetable production. We hope to have a workshop to showcase our progress on this project next summer!

# District News

**Due to the Federal Government Shutdown, Soil and Water Conservation District employees will be temporarily located at the Purdue Extension offices located at 1950 S 18th St, Lafayette, IN 47905.**

**We will not have access to our federal email account during this shutdown, however our county email will continue. Should you need to speak to a staff member please call us at 765-474-0793 ext. 3 or email us at soil.water@tippecanoe.in.gov or our individual emails:**

**kgertz@tippecanoe.in.gov**
**mjsmith@tippecanoe.in.gov**
**rsuseland@tippecanoe.in.gov**

# MANAGING VOLES IN SOIL HEALTH SYSTEMS

By Mike Smith, Conservation Ag Specialist

Tippecanoe County farmers are increasingly adopting cover cropping and minimal tillage systems. These practices improve farm profitability and a soil's yield resiliency to weather extremes. Creating an environment for the soil life that delivers these benefits can also encourage a common agricultural pest. Meadow vole (Microtus pennsylvanicus) populations can increase more quickly without tillage to disrupt nesting and when provided year-round forage through cover crops. These challenges can be exacerbated by mild winters and cooler wetter springs that favor vole survival. Fortunately, there are management adjustments that can help control vole populations without giving up the benefits of improved soil health.

Begin scouting for voles in areas near dense, tall vegetation such as fence rows.

In fields with cover crops, voles are likely to overwinter on drier ridges provided there is enough cover to provide a screen from predators. Colonies are more difficult to identify in the fall shortly after harvest, but scouting early can enable management to keep populations below economic threshold. Consider some form of management if fall populations exceed five colonies per acre.

One of the simplest methods for keeping vole populations in check is to encourage predators. Leaving dead trees (snags) in tree lines will encourage hawks, falcons, owls. Coyotes are also voracious vole predators. During harvest, ensure that residue is evenly distributed to reduce available cover.

If populations remain high in the spring, consider terminating your cover crop earlier than usual, 30-45 days before planting. A roller crimper with either chevron or straight blades have been shown to be effective at reducing adult vole populations and may disrupt some nests. Vertical tillage at 3-4 inches deep is generally recommended only as a last resort and is typically not recommended as a standalone practice.

For more information about vole management in soil health cropping systems contact Mike Smith at mjsmith@tippecanoe.in.gov

## Upcoming Events:

October 8 - SWCD Board Meeting - Cancelled

November 11 - Office Closed

November 12 - SWCD Board Meeting

November 27 - Office Closed

December 10 - SWCD Board meeting

December 24 & 25 - Office Closed

February 11- Annual Meeting

# Equipment Loans and Rentals

If you are planning to apply dry phosphorus and/or potassium this fall, our spreader presents an excellent opportunity to add a cover crop quickly in the same pass. This application typically means following a combine, when cereal rye is a particularly good option due to its ability to germinate at lower temperatures and overwinter.

The spreader can be operated without powered hydraulics, making it easy to pull with a variety of implements. It is available to rent for $75 per day. Check availability at tippecanoecountyswcd.org.

Not for use with manure. For applications other than seed or dry fertilizer, contact mjsmith@tippecanoe.in.gov.