

## Thank you 2015 Affiliate Members

- \*Abbett Farms LLC
- \*Bernard Grott Family
- \*Centier Bank, Gail M. Mahl
- \*Co-Alliance, Rolling Prairie
- \*Helen Brust
- \*Hugh & Diana Glasgow
- \*Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society (INPAWS), North Chapter
- \*Larry Smith, Halderman Farm Management
- \*La Porte County Conservation Council
- \*La Porte County Farm Bureau
- \*La Porte Savings Bank
- \*Myrna Harder
- \*Minich Dairy Farm
- \*Rassel Family Chiropractic Center
- \*Richard Tuholski
- \*Rolling Prairie Conservation Club
- \*Saugany Lake Conservation Club
- \*James Simon
- \*Ted and Irma Daube
- \*Tryon Farm Institute
- \*Zahl's Elevator Feed and Mill

## 2015 Associate Supervisors

Bernie Baltes	Tony Ekovich
Larry Cadwell	Pete Lestinsky
Noelle Conklin	Gene Matzat
Jim Simon	Darla Aldred

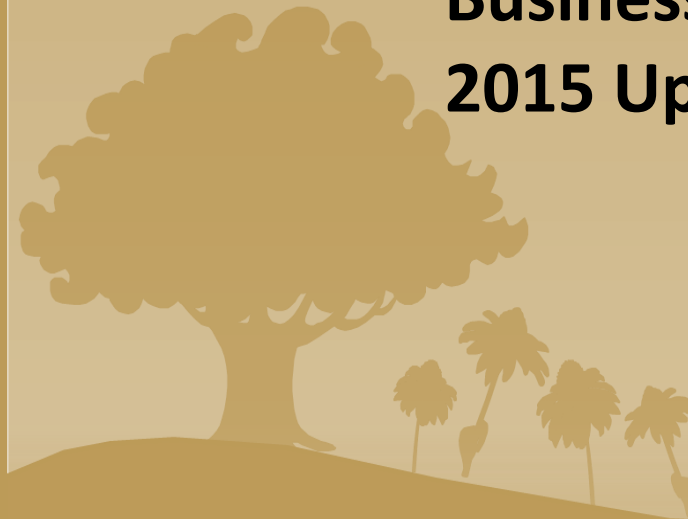
This business plan was updated May 2015 by the La Porte County SWCD supervisors and staff.

Don Lode, Chairman  
Nate Mrozinski, Vice Chairman  
Myrna Harder, Treasurer  
Sacha Gee-Burns, Secretary  
Gene Schmidt, Member

## LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District



## Business Plan— 2015 Update



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## Who We Are

The La Porte County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a subdivision of State Government. It is a public body which exercises public powers. It is governed by five supervisors, each a resident of the County, three elected and two appointed. The district received its statutory authority from Indiana District Law (Indiana Code IC 14-32).

## What We Do

We identify and prioritize local soil, water and related natural resource concerns and provide information, education and technical assistance to help address them. Serving as an information clearinghouse to the community, we also connect land users to many other sources of educational, technical and financial assistance to help them implement conservation practices and technologies.

## Who We Serve

The La Porte County SWCD serves local land-owners and users with natural resource concerns. We work both proactively and reactively by addressing all concerns that are brought to our attention.

## Our Mission

We provide leadership, education and technical assistance to empower La Porte County residents to conserve and improve our soil, water and related natural resources.

## Our Core Values

- We believe strongly in the necessity of robust, locally-led conservation efforts
- We believe in a voluntary approach to addressing soil, water and related natural resource concerns rather than regulation whenever possible.
- We will strive to provide excellent customer service

## Key Partners

Member agencies of the Indiana Conservation Partnership:

- Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD)
- Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM)
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)
- Indiana State Department of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation
- Purdue Cooperative Extension Service
- State Soil Conservation Board
- United States Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

### Affiliate Members

Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry

Kankakee River Basin Commission (KRBC)

La Porte City Park Department

La Porte County Board of Commissioners

La Porte County Conservation Council

La Porte County Council

La Porte County Drainage Board

La Porte County Farm Bureau, Inc.

La Porte County Plan Commission

La Porte County Park Department

La Porte Co. Row Crop Food Producers Team

Michigan City Park Department

Michigan City Sanitary District

National Conservation Groups such as The Nature Conservancy, Conservation Fund, etc.

Northwest Indiana Regional Plan commission (NIRPC)

Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society (INPAWS), North Chapter  
State and federal representatives

The Lake Michigan DNR Coastal Program

Trail Creek Watershed Partnership

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Unity Foundation

## **A Conservation Ethic Guides Sustainable Economic Development**

The well-being of our citizens depends on economic activity. Economic development must take place in such a way that our quality of life is enhanced. Decisions about economic development must be made by the citizens. The SWCD can bring a critically important conservation perspective to this process by:

- Participating in economic development discussions
- Partnering with our county agencies
- Promoting conservation projects throughout the county
- Continuing to seek funding opportunities to support conservation activities

### **Specific goals to meet these objectives are:**

- Continue and improve District communication and cooperation with La Porte County Council and Commissioners
- Continue and improve District attendance at meetings of key Boards and Planning Committees throughout county
- Continue pursuit of funding opportunities for conservation projects, including Clean Water Indiana grants, IDEM 319 grants, LARE, etc.
- Continue and improve communication with Local and state representatives through Legislative Breakfast and other means
- Build a relationship with La Porte County Redevelopment Commission so a conservation perspective is represented in decisions and promotional materials

- We believe that education, outreach and technical assistance are vital tools for addressing resource concerns.
- We recognize that we cannot fulfill our mission unless private citizens take action to implement conservation measures on the land.

### **We Work to Provide Everyone in La Porte County With:**

- Healthy and productive soils
- Clean streams and water resources
- Profitable and sustainable agriculture
- Productive woodlands and plentiful wildlife habitat
- A natural resources perspective where a conservation ethic guides sustainable economic development

### **LaPorte County and its Natural Resources**

LaPorte County is approximately 383,000 acres, making it the 2nd largest county in the state. It is unique in that it contains a coastline on the north, a feature shared by only two other counties in the state. The Valparaiso Moraine extends across the county in a northeastern direction and divides drainage areas. Land south of the moraine drains into the Kankakee River. Land north of the moraine drains north into Lake Michigan.

Lying within highly urbanized and industrialized northwest Indiana, agriculture still makes up over 67% of land use in LaPorte County. Urban makes up 29.7% and the remainder is forested. While cropland consists mainly of row crops, there is a significant amount of specialty crops. As urbanization occurs throughout the county, soil variability calls for care in development.

## **Geographic Areas of Focus**

- Little Calumet-Galien Watershed
- Kankakee Watershed

## **Natural Resource Areas of Focus**

### **Soil Quality**

(Low organic matter and biological activity)

- Soil erosion
- Excessive cropland tillage
- Lack of crop rotation and cover crops
- Excessive grading and earthmoving activities during construction
- Failure to preserve existing vegetation and topsoil on construction sites

### **Surface Water Quality**

in streams, rivers, ponds and lakes

- Sediment
- Nutrients and pesticides
- E. coli (failing septic systems, waste from livestock including horses, pets, and wildlife)
- Combined Sewer Overflows, Storm Sewer Overflows
- Flooding and Floodplain encroachment
- Impervious surface runoff ( oil, grease from parking lots, streets, etc.
- Illicit discharges
- Loss of wetlands and lack of protection of existing wetlands
- Lack of proper Livestock Management (including pasture and hay land)

## **Informed Citizens are involved with Conservation Issues**

Everyone lives in a watershed and everyone lives downstream, making stewardship of our natural resources everyone's business. Conservation is about choices and informed citizens make better choices. One of the primary functions of the La Porte County Soil and Water Conservation District is to provide information and we will accomplish that by working to:

- Raise awareness about conservation issues-developing and utilizing partnerships like those we have with Blue Thumb and Trail Creek and Galena watersheds
- Invite more people to be involved in district activities
- Develop partnerships with a diverse group of companies, interest groups and agencies
- Continue to improve our interaction with local schools and youth oriented activities
- Enhance communication with local, state and federal officials

### **Specific goals to meet these objectives are:**

- Continue quarterly conservation newsletter and updating SWCD website and social media content
- Continue involvement in Ag Days, Envirothon, 5th Grade Field Days, Project Learning Tree and La Porte County Fair
- Continue to establish relationships with local businesses to identify and develop mutually beneficial opportunities
- Continue and expand community outreach activities such as Coastal Awareness Month
- Continue Storm water education and public involvement

## Productive Woodlands and Plentiful Wildlife Habitat

Woodlands in La Porte County are an underutilized resource. Many strategies and incentives are available to improve the quality of this resource while at the same time realize economic return.

Small fields have become less practical to farm using modern methods. They represent an opportunity to create habitat for game animals and non-game wildlife, including songbirds, raptors, reptiles and amphibians, as well as woodland and prairie plant species. The quality of our wildlife habitat is a reflection of our stewardship of the land.

Our general objectives are:

- Encourage and enable private woodland management
- Identify wildlife habitat opportunities
- Promote native prairie restoration, wetland restoration and re-forestation

### Specific goals to meet these objectives are:

- Additional woodland management plans, wildlife habitat and acres of restored wetlands consistent with the goals of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and the Trail Creek and Galena River Watershed Management Plans

## Groundwater Quality

- Failing septic systems
- Uncapped abandoned wells
- Nutrient management
- Brown field sites
- Irrigation management

### Land use conversion/fragmentation resulting in:

- Loss of prime farmland
- Loss of productive forest lands
- Loss of wildlife habitat
- Loss of natural wetlands
- Creation of isolated small-acre tracts
- Increased runoff/flooding from land conversion to acres of impervious surface
- Damaged/disrupted drainage systems

### Loss of Habitat

- Critical native pollinators
- Aquatic species of plants and animals
- Terrestrial species of plants and animals
- Invasive species



## Key Strategies

We plan to address the above Areas of Focus by utilizing the following Key Strategies:

### Information & Education

- Newsletters
- Website, social media (Facebook, google)
- Brochures and other publications
- Technical Workshops
- Field Days
- Conservation Education Activity Modules
- Seminars and other special events
- Annual Meeting, Legislative Breakfast
- Customer Service (daily office contacts)

### Technical Assistance

- One on one conservation planning and application assistance
- Survey, design and installation assistance by regional tech team
- Conservation equipment systems
- Urban conservation
- IN Field Advantage (Guided Stalk Sampling)
- Field Days

### Marketing & Outreach

- Promoting Conservation programs for Partner Agencies
- Service Club presentations
- Radio and TV interviews
- News Releases
- Enhanced District Recognition of individuals, partners and groups
- Associate Supervisor Program
- Affiliate Membership Program
- Social Media

## Profitable and Sustainable Agriculture

Agriculture makes up over 67% of land use in La Porte County. It is crucial that this significant component of La Porte County's economy remain profitable and sustainable for the long term.

A wealth of knowledge and, in some cases, incentives are available about low impact and precision farming and Best Management Practices (BMPs).

In our role as a clearinghouse for information, we are committed to providing opportunities to share information throughout the community.

### Specific goals to meet these objectives are:

- IN Field Advantage—Guided Stalk Sampling
- Continue cover crop information field days
- No-Till, Strip-Till and Vertical Tillage Demonstrations
- Cover Crop demonstration Plot at Conservation Walk site with Root Pit for additional field days



## Clean Streams and Water Resources

La Porte County has abundant water sources, including a rapid-recharge aquifer unique to this region. Conveying the connection between water quality and quality of life is basic to our mission. To enhance stewardship of this valuable resource we intend to:

- Provide leadership in Agricultural Irrigation Water Management
- Use a watershed based approach to monitor streams/rivers for planning and implementing projects
- Encourage proper management, use and monitoring of nutrients and pesticides in agricultural, commercial and residential areas
- Encourage Best Management Practices (BMPs) to alleviate runoff due to impervious surfaces
- Identify opportunities for wetland enhancement, establishment and restoration
- Promote the installation of riparian buffers, filter strips, waterways and other vegetative buffers.

### Specific goals to meet these objectives are:

- Increase awareness of appropriate nutrient management and pesticide application practices
- Continue as sponsor, utilizing IDEM Trail Creek 319 grant funds for a series of seminars, public meetings, events and educational outreach to implement BMP's to reduce both business and residential storm water runoff
- Look for opportunities to implement the goals outlined in the Galena Watershed management plan
- Support and encourage Kankakee Watershed planning.
- Continue coordinating with local MS4

## Demonstrations & Field Days

- No-Till, Strip-Till and Vertical Tillage
- Nutrient Management
- Soil Health
- Cover Crops
- Native Plantings & Management
- Irrigation Management
- Forage Management
- Forest Management
- Pond Management
- Urban Storm water Management

### Capacity Building

- Supervisor attendance at training opportunities
- Supervisor attendance at IASWCD Annual Conference
- Staff attendance at training opportunities
- Staff attendance at IASWCD Annual Conference

### District Funding

- County appropriations
- Project-based State and Federal grants, including Clean Water Indiana grant, IDEM 319 grants, NRCS contribution agreements other grants, foundations, etc.
- Self-Funding: Affiliate Memberships, Annual Tree & Plant Sale, other project-based grant & foundation funds

### Landowner Financial Assistance

- Federal conservation cost share/ incentive programs (i.e., Farm Bill programs, IDEM 319)
- State conservation cost share/incentive programs (i.e., Lake and River Enhancement, Clean Water Indiana)

## **Soil and Water Conservation Districts— Your Clearing House for Information and Action!**



**Homeowners  
Landowners  
County Officials  
Ag/Commodity Groups  
Local Businesses  
Recreationists  
Media  
Farmers  
Developers**



**SWCD**



**USDA Natural Resources Conservation  
Service  
Purdue Cooperative Extension  
USDA Farm Service Agency  
ISDA Division of Soil Conservation  
IN Dept of Environmental Management  
IDNR Division of Fish & Wildlife  
IDNR Division of Water  
Army Corps of Engineers  
IDNR Division of Forestry  
Local Government Agencies**

## **Healthy and Productive Soils**

Soil is one of our most important natural resources. Soil loss results in reduced yield potential on our agricultural lands.

The resulting sedimentation pollutes and degrades our streams, reducing biological diversity and limiting recreational opportunities. We intend to protect and improve this vital natural resource in the following ways:

- Promoting conservation cropping systems
- Providing information on soil biology and its impact on soil health and productivity
- Providing information on benefits of native plants for business, home and urban landscaping

### **Specific goals to meet these objectives are:**

- Enhance Community Conservation Walk for program use
- Enhance District Recognition of individuals, partners and groups
- Cooperate with all city and county government agencies to incorporate implementation of conservation practices and technologies into their land use activities.
- Continue to work with La Porte County Plan Commission to utilize programs and strategies for the preservation of working farmland and natural areas (urban and rural)
- Continue sponsorship of Cover Crop, No-till, strip-till or vertical tillage demonstrations/field days
- Continue at least one urban Blue Thumb event annually promoting native plants in landscaping