



Grass Roots for Conservation



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Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District

59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN 46517 ~ Phone: (574) 523-2030 – jhess@elkhartcounty.com

79th Annual Meeting of Elkhart County SWCD to be Virtual

The 79th Annual Meeting of the Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) will have a different look this year. Instead of the typical banquet setting, the meeting will be virtual via Zoom on March 4, 2021 at 5:00 pm.

Everyone is encouraged to attend and be a part of our annual meeting. This will be the first time in 79 years that the event will not be held in-person. The district wants to still honor those that have put conservation on the ground and in the classroom. We will be highlighting our River Friendly Farmer, Conservation Farmer, Urban Conservationist, and Conservation Educator of the year, as well as our Friend of the SWCD.

Along with the award winners, this virtual zoom meeting we will also be sharing the district's year-end financial report, an overview of the SWCD accomplishments of the past year and the all-important election of a supervisor to the SWCD board.

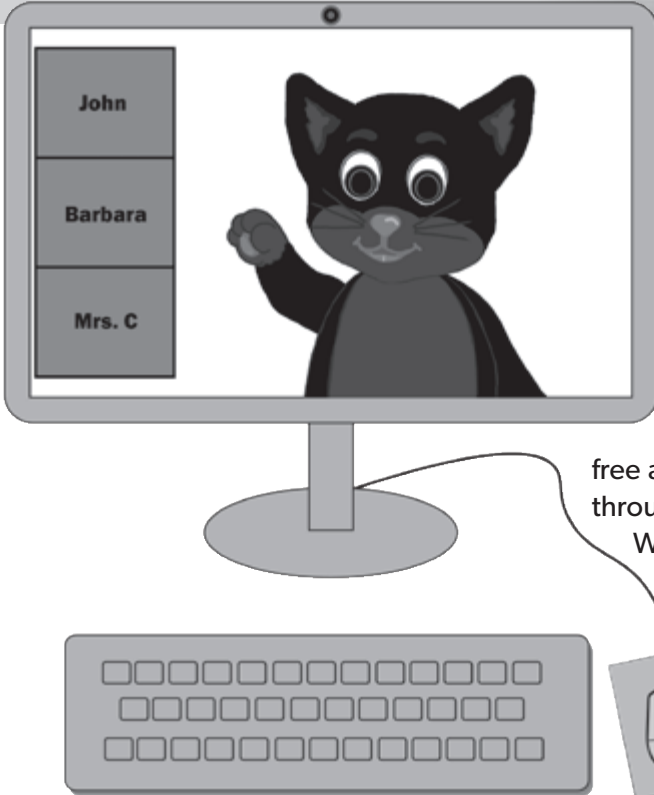
Tom Kercher is running for re-election to the SWCD board. Tom has been a supervisor for the last 25 years, serving as its Chairman for 5 of those years. Dean Rink has agreed to be re-appointed to his appointed position on the board and will be sworn in at the conclusion of the meeting.

During the meeting, there will be an opportunity to make additional nominations to the election slate. If there is a nomination, the election will take place using a poll feature on Zoom, which simply allows participants to click on their choice. If there are no additional nominations, the election will be confirmed by participant verbal consent.

To connect to this event, contact the SWCD office at (574) 523-2030 or latkins@elkhartcounty.com. An email will be required to receive the meeting link.



WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!



In-person, virtual, and hybrid classrooms, where does one even begin to plan their lessons? Our teachers are struggling right now trying to figure out how to carry out their normal lessons. Finding creative ways to adapt lessons to whatever restrictions are in place can be a daunting task! Here at the Elkhart County SWCD, we want you to know that WE ARE HERE FOR YOU. It is our mission to be a resource for our community and that means educating even during a pandemic.

In an effort to be more accessible, we have converted many of our lessons to an online format to provide teachers free access to our materials. Each lesson has a video that walks through the background information and the hands-on activity. We also have several ready-to-present PowerPoints that anybody can access free of charge with background information included in the notes. If you don't like any of the slide shows that are currently available, continue to check in regularly to our Conservation Education Library for new content. This library grows all of the time and can be found on our website www.elkcoswcd.org.

Would you like someone to speak to your class but have restrictions on visitors? The Elkhart County SWCD has conservationists who are knowledgeable on a variety of topics that would absolutely love to talk with your class virtually. The conservationists are also available for students to contact directly as a resource on projects or assignments. We want to share our knowledge with you in the safest way possible.

Do you have other ideas? We would love to chat about how to get conservation into your classroom and expose your students to invaluable resources. Email Jenna if you would like to receive our educator emails.

Jenna Wait
jwait@elkhartcounty.com
(574) 523-2030 ext 4



BLOGGING BMP'S

A monthly Blog discussing the Best Management Practices (BMP's) that must be used to aid in erosion and sediment control.

Welcome back to another edition of Blogging BMP's! I hope everyone has been able to settle in to the February freeze we are having in recent weeks. For myself, like many others, these cold snaps are nothing more than a minor inconvenience. I might need a warmer jacket for my trip out to the car, my girls have to bundle up a little tighter, and the few animals that are sprinkled around my residence need to be monitored a little more closely. Overall, it is quite manageable and the cold, crisp air makes for wonderful snowscapes that almost erase the many imperfections an uncovered earth can display. Along with that beauty, however, that blanket of snow is hiding a permafrost that penetrates ever deeper as the temp stays below zero that rears it's ugly face when the spring thaw arrives.

2020 never really had any extended periods of deep cold and, therefore, the spring thaw was almost non-existent. Construction activities were able to recommence with very little delay and a minimal amount of snow melt made for ideal conditions in both the farming and construction industries. This year will not be nearly as friendly to us.

Last month I covered some winter BMP's to aid in the maintenance of job site erosion control snow management. This month I am going to discuss the impending snow melt and spring rain combination that really has the potential to wreak havoc on your farms, job sites and homesteads.

Re-establishing and Monitoring BMPs in the Spring

The risk of high sediment discharges are greatest in the spring when vegetative cover is not yet established and snow melt runoff occurs. The following practices are recommended:

- Conduct weekly (or more frequent inspections) to ensure the integrity of erosion and sediment control practices.
- Immediately repair damaged perimeter controls and cleanout deposits in traps and basins.
- Stabilize any exposed soils with a thick cover of mulch or erosion/sediment control product within 14 days.
- Check any drainage tile inlets on your farm to ensure they are clear of sediment and debris.
- Monitor any snow piles that have been stacking up in front of your house. These are inevitably sediment laden and will wash down into the storm drain. Check the storm drains to make sure they do not plug with said sediment.

It seems like we are so far from spring at this point, especially knowing that Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow and we have six more weeks of winter ahead. I am going to be positive and say that spring is just around the corner so let's get prepared for the extra water that is coming our way. If you have any questions on best management practices for the spring thaw you can email me at tclark@elkhartcounty.com or visit our website at www.elkcoswcd.org. IDEM also has a field guide that will help you with these and other BMPs. You can find that information at https://www.in.gov/indot/files/Indiana_Storm_Water_Field_Guide.pdf. As always, any questions or comments would be great, I always appreciate your *THAW*ts.





Send your questions to Walden the Worm

The "Dear Abby" of conservation farming!

Dear Walden,

Are cover crops a new fad in agriculture or are they going to be sustainable long-term?

**Sincerely,
A skeptical farmer**

Dear Skeptical,

Hello, Walden here. I am an Anecic earthworm and pushy by nature. I will share from my experience, small brain, and much help from the underground web.

If cover crops are a fad, it began thousands of years ago. Manuscripts from ancient Greece tell of cover crops used to maintain soil productivity. In more recent history, the soil of the western states declined rapidly when cover was removed and led to the Dust Bowl days. Those were tough years for man and worm because there was no food for either species! The correction to the Dust Bowl was conservation agriculture put forth by the US Government. Also note, the degraded state of the soil was not just sustained by covering the soil but the soil was actually improved and regenerated.

As farmers, I suggest you note the condition and structure of the soil in your fields, field perimeters, and fence rows. As I move from meal to meal opening your soil to roots and rain water, I notice that it takes less effort to move through soil that is covered with a living plant year round.

Wishing you all the best soil health,

– *Walden*

Send your questions to elkhartcountyswcd@gmail.com or drop them off at the office and have your question answered by Walden the Worm in upcoming Grass Roots publications!

UPCOMING EVENTS

- March 4 79th SWCD Annual Meeting: *Save the Date***
5:00 PM - Our Annual Meeting will now be Virtual, to attend contact the office at (574) 523-2030 or email: latkins@elkhartcounty.com
- March 15 SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM,
SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart
- April 19 SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM,
SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart

UPCOMING FSA DEADLINES

ARC/PLC SIGNUP DEADLINE

It is time to elect coverage and enroll farms for the 2021 crop year.

Deadline is March 15th, 2021

- Election changes to multi-year contracts are optional
- If you change your election for program year 2021, a new contract needs to be signed.

Call the office at (574) 533-4383 ext. 2 to schedule a phone appointment.

Never miss a deadline! Signup for text alerts by texting **INElkhart** to 372669. No more than one text a month.

USDA Service Centers are open for business by phone appointment only. Please contact the Elkhart County FSA and NRCS service center by phone (574) 533-4383 ext. 2 to schedule time for program services or with any questions.

SWCD - NRCS CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP DIRECTORY

59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN 46517

Ph. (574) 523-2030

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Lora L. Atkins, Secretary/Treasurer	Jenna Wait, Conservationist

NRCS Staff:

Wes Krug, District Conservationist

All programs and services of the Conservation Partnership and the Soil and Water Conservation District are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.