



Grass Roots for Conservation



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Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District

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It Takes Everyone

Eighty years ago, a haunting wall of sand and dust swept across the Great Plains, driven by years of overplanting, mismanaged crops, and severe drought. In the midst of these colossal storms, people found themselves crawling for shelter, their hands invisible before their eyes. Cars stalled in the choking haze, and many believed the apocalypse had arrived. Responding to this crisis, Congress enacted Public Law 74-46 on April 27, 1935, recognizing the dire threat posed by soil and moisture depletion to the nation's welfare.

Today, we confront significant challenges in an ever-evolving environment. Carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere are skyrocketing, and extreme weather events like severe droughts and floods are becoming increasingly common. Our agricultural lands are dwindling at alarming rates. Projections suggest that within the next four decades, farmers will need to produce as much food as they have in the past 500 years to sustain our growing population. Globally, farmers and communities must adapt to the impacts of climate change and burgeoning populations.

You may wonder how a seemingly insignificant resource like soil can wield such transformative power. Yet, healthy soils play a pivotal role in mitigating the effects of extreme weather. With their exceptional water and nutrient retention capabilities, they sustain food, fuel, and fiber production during droughts and prevent flooding during heavy rainfall, safeguarding downstream communities and preserving soil integrity. Crucially, the health and vitality of our soils are indispensable for growing nutritious food to nourish our expanding populace. By collaborating with farmers and fostering a broader appreciation of soil health, we ensure agricultural resilience amidst a changing climate.

It takes collective effort to navigate our ever-changing world and safeguard the future for generations to come. The Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) stands ready to mitigate risks and mobilize resources to elevate conservation efforts. There's no better tribute to this living, irreplaceable resource than to enhance awareness of its pivotal role in food security and essential ecosystem functions.

I urge everyone to contemplate the meaning of conservation and envision what it should entail. Your personal commitment and contributions are invaluable, representing a tangible investment in our collective future. From the toil and perseverance of generations past to the stewardship of today, the value of our soil remains paramount. It's a precious asset that warrants protection and a return on investment. In the coming months, I invite you to share your perspectives on stewardship values. Let's examine these values from every angle, even turning them upside down if necessary, and assign a tangible dollar amount to showcase the returns on investment.

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 BMPs! Today, I would like to discuss ways that off-site sediment discharge from construction projects can have significant negative implications for both the environment and the project itself. One of the primary concerns is the contamination of nearby water bodies, such as rivers, streams, or lakes, due to the transportation of sediment-laden runoff. Sediment discharge can introduce various pollutants into aquatic ecosystems, including chemicals, heavy metals, and other harmful substances that can disrupt the balance of aquatic life and degrade water quality. For instance, excess sedimentation can smother aquatic habitats, leading to the decline of fish populations and the loss of biodiversity.

In addition to environmental concerns, off-site sediment discharge can also cause logistical challenges and delays for construction projects. Sediment-laden runoff can clog stormwater drainage systems and culverts, leading to flooding and erosion issues both on and off the construction site. Clearing and repairing these drainage systems can require additional time and resources, causing project delays and increased costs. For instance, if sediment runoff from a construction site blocks a nearby roadway or causes erosion that threatens neighboring properties, it may necessitate emergency maintenance activities and potentially halt construction work until the issues are resolved. Overall, off-site sediment discharge poses significant risks and challenges for construction projects, requiring careful planning and implementation of erosion and sediment control measures to mitigate its negative implications.

Implementing best management practices (BMPs) is essential for effectively mitigating sediment discharges from construction sites. One crucial BMP is the installation of erosion control measures such as silt fences, sediment basins, and vegetative buffers. Silt fences act as barriers to filter sediment from stormwater runoff, while sediment basins detain runoff and allow sediment to settle out before water is discharged off-site. Vegetative buffers, consisting of native vegetation, help stabilize soils, reduce erosion, and filter pollutants from runoff. Additionally, implementing proper site stabilization techniques such as revegetation, mulching, and temporary coverings can prevent soil erosion and minimize sediment runoff. Regular inspection and maintenance of erosion control measures are also critical to ensure their effectiveness throughout the construction project. By employing these BMPs, construction sites can significantly reduce sediment discharges and mitigate their negative environmental impacts.

Here in Elkhart County, we monitor all construction projects that disturb more than 1 acre of soil, but that doesn't encompass all the different situations that may produce sediment discharges. Some activities closer to home that may contribute to sediment discharge include:

- 1. New home construction or remodeling.**
- 2. Landscaping improvements or lawn installation.**
- 3. Farming activities.**
- 4. Plowing snow.**
- 5. Heavy winds on a dry day.**
- 6. And many more.**

You can help prevent sediment from entering our rivers, lakes, and streams by having a plan for your activities that takes into account the various ways that discharges can occur and considering ways to minimize the issues. For more information on this and other topics related to the Construction Stormwater General Permit, visit our website at www.elkcoswcd.org and click on the construction tab.



FREE

EARLY CHILDHOOD Educator Workshop

**June 11, 2024
9am-3pm**

Calling all early childhood educators....whether you are a classroom teacher, a homeschool parent or a doting grandparent this workshop is for you! Get great ideas, lesson plans and resources to help incorporate nature into your curriculum or just find fun ways to encourage the littles in your life to engage with the natural world. All participants will receive the Growing Up Wild and Getting Little Feet Wet curriculum books, both from national parent programs (Project WET & Project Wild). CEUs are available upon request.

**Bonneyville Mill County Park
53373 County Road 131
Bristol, IN 46507**



**Register at
elkhartcountyparks.org/events/**

**Questions?
kdaniels@elkhartcounty.com
574-875-7422**

Q. Why do we need more Walden's

A: Simple "the more the merrier" ha-ha. Well, that is a very good question reader. Us worms play a crucial role in soil health and ecosystem functioning. I have listed out some key reasons why me and all my friends are important in our soil:



Send your questions to Walden the Worm

The "Dear Abby" of Conservation Farming!

- 1. Soil Aeration:** Worms create tunnels as they burrow through the soil, which helps to aerate and loosen the soil. This allows air, water, and nutrients to penetrate deeper into the soil, promoting healthier root growth and enhancing overall soil structure.
- 2. Nutrient Cycling:** Worms consume organic matter such as dead plant material and animal residues, breaking them down into smaller particles through digestion. This process, known as vermicomposting, releases nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium back into the soil in a form that is more readily available for plant uptake.
- 3. Soil Fertility:** The castings (worm excrement) produced by worms are rich in nutrients and organic matter. These castings act as a natural fertilizer, enriching the soil with essential nutrients and improving its fertility. Additionally, the sticky mucous produced by worms helps to bind soil particles together, further enhancing soil structure.
- 4. Soil Erosion Control:** Worm burrows and their castings help to stabilize soil aggregates, reducing the risk of soil erosion by water and wind. This is particularly important in preventing nutrient runoff and maintaining soil productivity, especially on sloping terrain.
- 5. Biological Indicator:** The presence and abundance of worms in soil can serve as a biological indicator of soil health. Healthy soils with diverse microbial and macrofaunal populations, including worms, tend to support thriving plant growth and ecosystem resilience.

Overall, wigglers are invaluable contributors to soil health and ecosystem sustainability. Our activities improve soil structure, fertility, and resilience, making us essential allies for farmers and gardeners alike.

Happy Planting,

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

May

- 18th Hoosier River Watch:** Bonneyville Mills County Park, 53373 County Road 131, Bristol 9:00 am – 4:00 pm, you must register, email Krista Daniels at kdaniels@elkhartcounty.com
- 20th SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN
- 21st Build-A-Barrel Workshop:** Elkhart Environmental Center, 1717 Lusher Ave., Elkhart, visit our website at www.elkcoswcd.org to register.
- 27th Memorial Day Holiday:** The SWCD Office will be closed for the *Holiday* observed.

June

- 11th Early Childhood Educator Workshop:** Bonneyville Mills County Park, 53373 CR 131, Bristol • 9:00 am–3:00 pm Register at elkhartcountyparks.org/events/ if you have questions contact Krista at kdaniels@elkhartcounty.com
- 17th SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 pm, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN

SWCD - NRCS CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP DIRECTORY

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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.