

The History of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts

The Dust Bowl to Today



Learning Objectives

Do You Know?

What ecological disaster caused the creation of conservation districts?

Who was a key person or people in the formation of the Soil Conservation Service and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts?

What does our local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) do?

In the early 1930s,
along with the
Great Depression,
came an ecological
disaster known as
the Dust Bowl.

Huge black dust
storms stretched
across the nation,
blotted out the sun,
and swallowed the
countryside for
nearly a decade.



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

What Caused the Dust Bowl?

Poor agricultural practices and years of sustained drought resulted in extensive soil erosion.



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Conservation District Timeline



1931 Over-plowed and over-grazed land turns to dust when drought hits the Midwest and southern plains.

May 1934 The drought is the worst in U.S. history, affecting more than 75% of the country.

December 1934 100 million acres of cropland has lost topsoil.

Conservation District Timeline

April 14, 1935 “Black Sunday” – the worst “black” blizzard of the Dust Bowl

April 27, 1935 Congress declares soil erosion a national menace and establishes the Soil Conservation Service within the US Department of Agriculture



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Many farmers did
not trust the
government at
that time

but Congress realized that
only active support from
landowners would guarantee
the success of conservation
on private land

This is how the
idea of
Conservation
Districts was born



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

By December of 1935, an estimated **850 million tons** of fertile topsoil had been blown off the southern Great Plains

It was time to implement the new legislation to start putting conservation practices on the land but there was a problem...



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Conservation District Timeline



May 1936

SCS published the "Standard Conservation District Law"

March 1937

Arkansas is the first state to enact the Standard Conservation District Law

August 1937

The Brown Creek Soil Conservation District, in North Carolina, is the first Conservation District is organized



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Conservation District Timeline

1938

Extensive conservation work has reduced blowing topsoil by 65%

Fall 1939

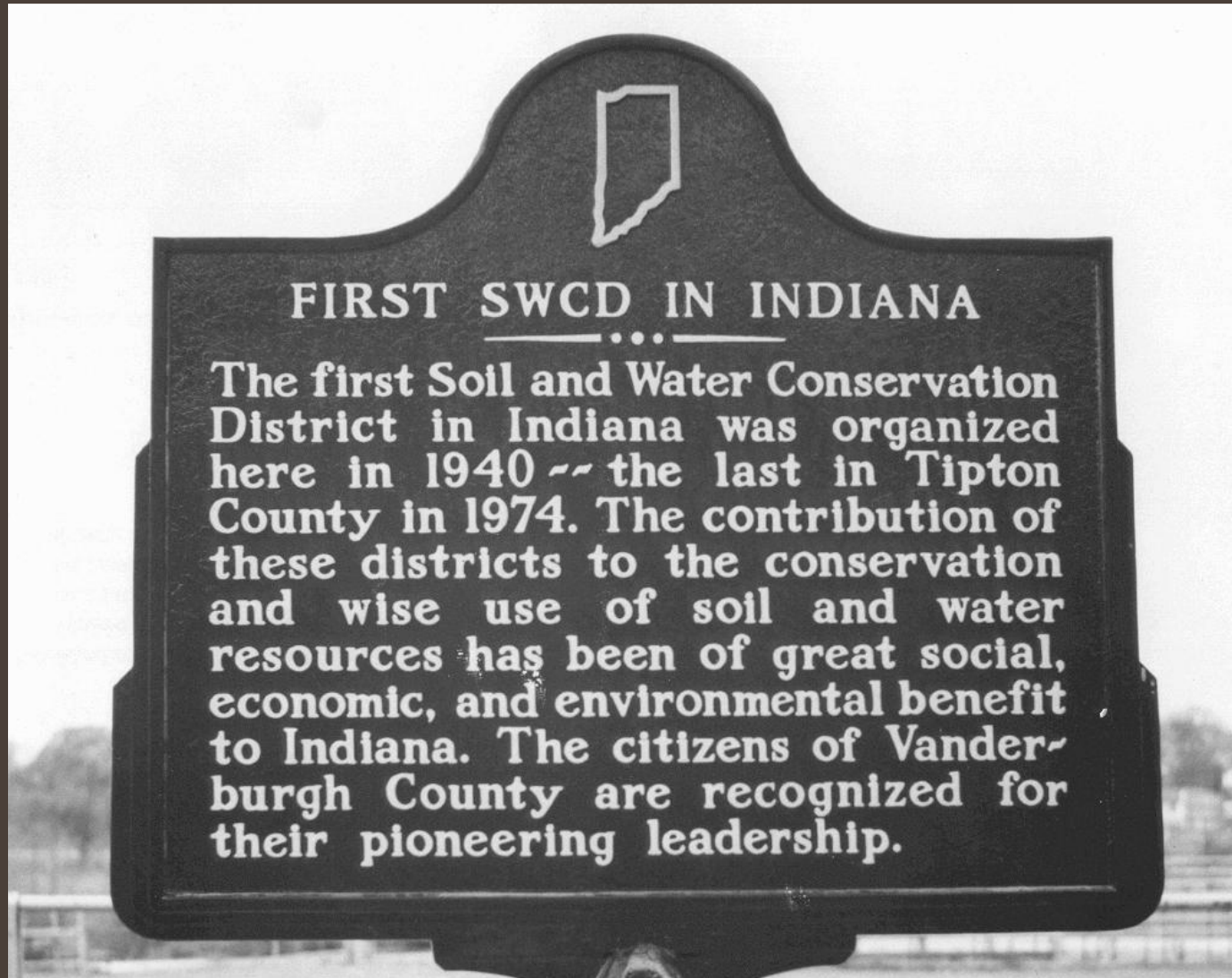
Rain arrived, ending the Dust Bowl Drought



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

In 1940, Indiana's first Conservation District Law (IC 13-3-1) was enacted.

- Vanderburgh County was the first to establish a Soil and Water Conservation District in Indiana

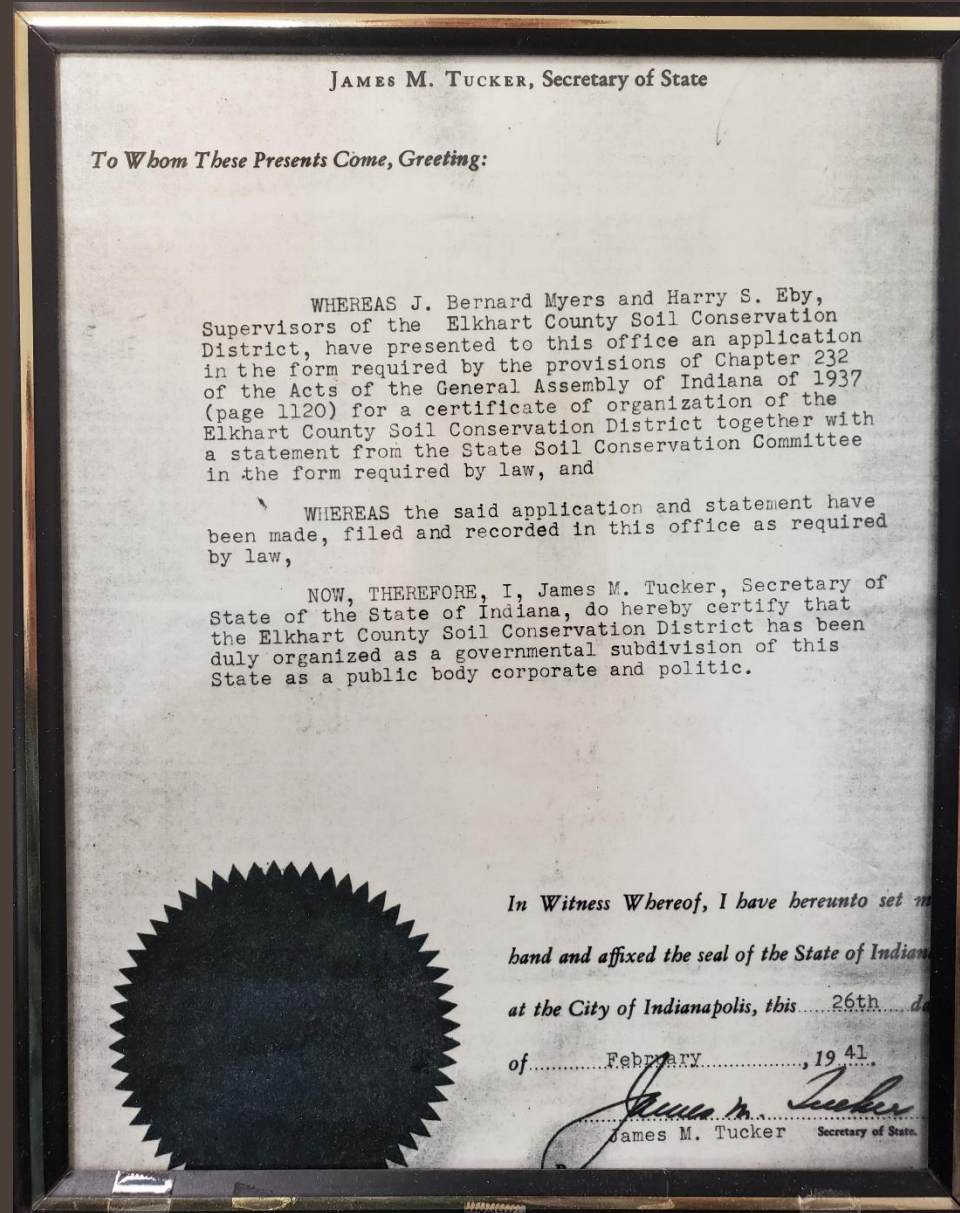


Elkhart County Soil
and Water
Conservation
District was
established on
February 26, 1941

J. Bernard Myers and
Harry S. Eby successfully
applied to the State in
order to establish the
SWCD office



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Harry Eby

Early work by the
Soil and Water
Conservation
Districts focused
on assisting
farmers with
conservation
“measures”

Now, we refer to these
“measures” as practices.
The goal was and is to
keep soil from blowing
and washing away
(eroding)



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

SWCD's also
helped put
conservation on
the ground by:

1. Making specialized
equipment available for
use by interested
landowners



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

SWCD's also
helped put
conservation on
the ground by:

2. Being involved in
watershed projects for
flood control and
drainage



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

SWCD's also
helped put
conservation on
the ground by:

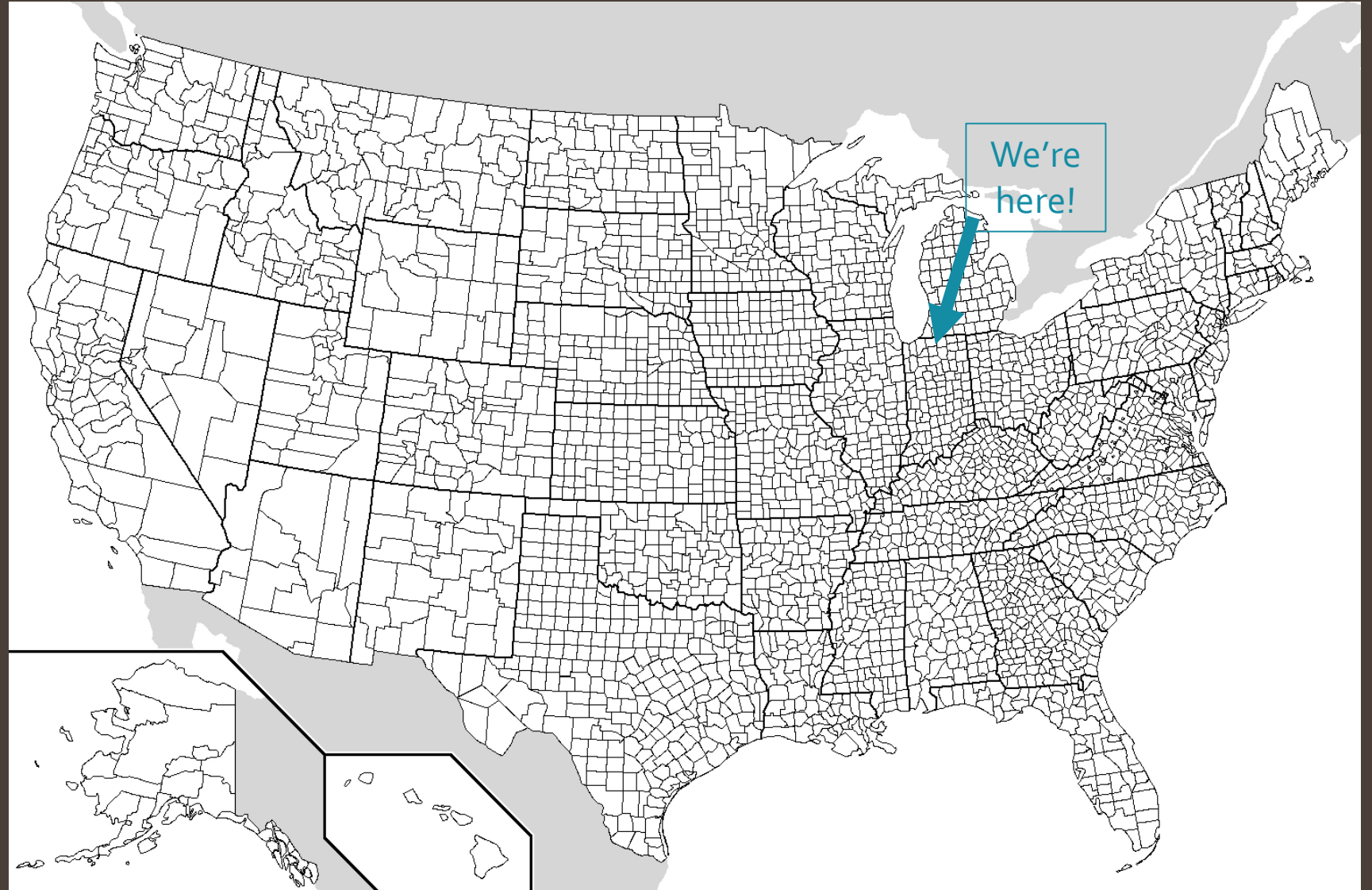
3. Helping landowners
develop conservation
plans, which outline best
management practices
for conservation on their
property



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Today, there are
nearly 3,000
SWCD's
nationwide

That's 1 in almost every
county in the U.S!



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Indiana has a
“Conservation
Partnership”
made up of many
agencies

Our state has been
nationally recognized for
our collaborative efforts
in getting conservation
on the ground.

Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

92 County Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Indiana Department of Environmental Management

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

ISDA Division of Soil Conservation

Purdue Cooperative Extension Service

State Soil Conservation Board

USDA Farm Service Agency

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service



Within the
Indiana
Conservation
Partnership, the
Elkhart County
SWCD has three
main objectives



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Agricultural Conservation

We are a resource for farmers to learn about and implement conservation practices, especially no-till, cover crops, and filter strips.



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Urban Conservation

We are a resource for citizens and landowners to learn about and implement conservation practices, especially rain gardens and rain barrels.



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Conservation Education

We provide educational opportunities and materials for adults and K-12 students.



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Soil conservation efforts were born in a time of natural disaster and economic hardship

Today, our nation is facing challenges to produce enough food and fiber for an ever-growing population without depleting our natural resources.



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

By working
together to
educate others
and ourselves, we
can leave a
healthy and
productive
environment for
the next
generation.



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Explore these
links and the
“notes” section
below each slide
for background
information

Learn More!



ELKHART COUNTY
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Supporting Information, Resources, and Classroom Activities



7th-12th Grade:

<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/dustbowl/educators/lesson-plans/>

“Whirlwind” Activity Ideas for All Grades:

<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/dustbowl/educators/whirlwind-activities/>

More Information from Ken Burns’ PBS Special:

<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/dustbowl/about/overview/>

US Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Service historical pieces:

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/history/?cid=nrcs143_021383

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/about/history/>
https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/history/?cid=nrcs143_021395

Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District

Still want to know
more?

Contact us!

17746-B County Road 34
Goshen, IN 46528

574-533-4383 ext 3

www.elkcoswcd.org

