

Update on Two-Stage Ditch

With winter becoming a fading memory, that means a few things are almost definite to happen: NCAA Basketball, Spring, and ditches running full, to name a few. Last summer The Nature Conservancy embarked on the construction of another 2-stage ditch project in the St. Joseph Watershed. This project is being funded by The Joyce Foundation and is allowing us to look more in-depth at this relatively new way to construct ditches.

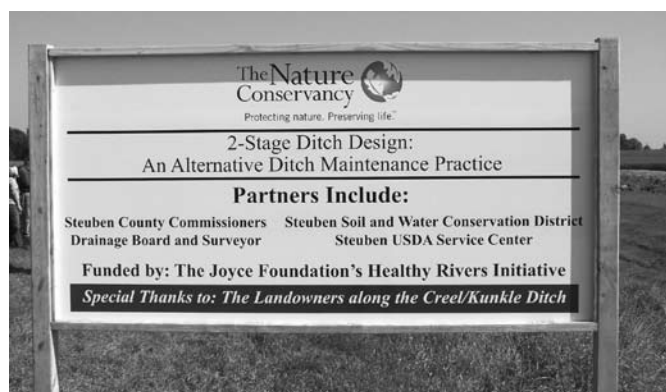
As everyone knows, this can be a very contentious issue. Rest assured, we get plenty of strange looks when people hear that a conservation organization (The Nature Conservancy) is looking at ways to improve the function of drainage ditches while improving the environmental benefits that these watershed arteries could provide to the river system.

As we have reported in the past, the Creel ditch is located in Steuben County, Indiana in the Fish Creek sub-watershed of the St. Joseph River watershed. Construction was completed on 1.1 miles of ditch in September of 2008, and we have had a few field days at the site to showcase this to local officials, conservation staff, and interested landowners and farmers. These have been well attended and the word appears to be getting out. During one particular field day in September, the Conservancy played host to a wide array of public and private professionals for a technical workshop on construction, followed by a site visit.

We expect to construct an additional 1.4 miles of 2-stage in this ditch this Spring once the weather breaks. After construction is complete, an additional year of monitoring is scheduled to help gauge the results of our actions.



Creel Ditch—Steuben County



Many thanks go to the landowners along the Creel Ditch and their participation in this project.

Joe Draper, Project Director

Incorporating Conservation into Your

Wetland Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Program / SAFE

The **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** is a voluntary program for landowners wanting assistance in restoring, protecting and enhancing the original landscape of their property. The Program's emphasis on protection of wetland's ecosystems provides for the promotion of habitat for wildlife, improvement of water quality, lessening water flows during floods, re-charging ground water, protection of open space and native flora and fauna, as well as contributing to education.

How it works: The Program provides landowners an opportunity to receive financial incentives to enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal land from agriculture. There are three enrollment options: Permanent easement—with easement payments; and 30-year easement—75% of what would be paid for a

permanent easement, and cost-share for restoration - up to 75% of cost with no easement.

Who is eligible: In order to qualify for an easement, the landowner must have owned the land for at least seven years. The Indiana landowner can file for an exemption to this rule through the State office.

The land must be restorable and suitable for wildlife benefits. Funding is determined through an application ranking process.

For further information, contact Ed Sprunger, at (260) 665-3211, ext. 3.

CRP/SAFE Program

The Conservation Reserve Program's (CRP) State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Program (**SAFE**) is intended to fine-

tune CRP practices to improve, connect or create higher quality habitat to promote healthier ecosystems in areas identified as essential to effective management of high-priority species.

How it works: Producers within the SAFE area apply to voluntarily enroll acres in CRP contracts for 10-15 years. In exchange, producers receive CRP rental payments, incentives and cost-share assistance to establish habitat-enhancing natural covers on eligible land. Check out new soil rental rates!

Who is eligible: Land must be in a SAFE project area and meet basic CRP requirements, including cropping history.

For more information, contact your local county FSA office.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife—US Fish & Wildlife Service

The **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**, through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife (Partners) Program, enters into voluntary agreements with landowners to provide expert technical assistance and financial cost share to restore fish and wildlife habitats on private lands.

What it covers: A local Service biologist works one-on-one with a landowner to develop a project plan that addresses the goals and objectives of both the landowner and the Service to benefit fish and wildlife species on his/her private land. Before starting projects that are eligible for funding, the Service requires a landowner to sign an agreement to maintain the project in place for a minimum of 10 years. Together, the landowner agreement and project plan will provide information on project implementation and financial assistance. Generally, those

practices eligible for financial assistance include forest, native prairie, and wetland restorations.

Eligibility: Any privately-owned land is potentially eligible for restoration, including those lands already enrolled in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Eligible parties are encouraged to inquire at anytime of year, since projects are evaluated throughout the year based on their biological value. Contacts made outside of the growing/construction season allow additional time for habitat restoration planning and may have a greater opportunity to be funded.

Once an agreement is signed, the restoration project will be designed to provide important habitat on private lands for the benefit of migratory birds and/or threatened and endangered species. Most

recreational activities will be permitted as long as the activity does not destroy or set back the goals of the habitat restoration project. It should be noted the landowner is NOT required to provide public hunting or access.

Additional Incentives: In addition to the normal Partners Program cost-share of 50% or more, the Program may provide up to 100% funding for tree planting projects within the Fish Creek Watershed in Indiana.

Over the past 20 years, the Partners Program has provided technical and financial assistance to willing Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio landowners through cooperative partnerships on private land sites, restoring thousands of acres of wetlands, upland prairie/hardwoods, and riparian forest.

For additional information contact: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Partners Program biologist in your respective state. Indiana: (812) 334-4261 Ext. 210 or 212; press "1" before dialing extension. Michigan (517) 351-6235. Ohio (419) 898-0014.

Property's Long –Term Management Plans

WHIP – Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

The **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program** (WHIP) is a voluntary program for landowners to help create high quality wildlife habitats through cost-share incentives from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Benefits include improving upland wildlife habitat, for example, native prairie, but also riparian and wetland areas.

NRCS also provides the technical assistance for developing with the landowner a wildlife habitat development plan along with a timeline. Usually the restoration actions occur over a five to ten year period, depending on the practices installed.

Eligibility: anyone (private landowners) can sign up for this program as no crop-

ping history is required. Applications are accepted all year.

Incentive: cost-share for restoration practices can be anywhere from 50 to 75% of actual cost of expenses.

Typical installations and restoration work include: Grasses, warm-season grasses, trees, shrubs, wetland restoration, invasive plant control.

The process begins with an application from the landowner. After funding is established for the program, the applications will be ranked. Those receiving the highest number of points and approved may then enter into a contract for restoration work with NRCS.

For more information

Before applying, please contact your local District Conservationist for state-specific requirements.

Steuben County:
Richard Neff, (260) 665-3511

DeKalb County:
Bill Lambert ((260) 925-3710, ext. 3

Williams County:
Brian Barclay (419) 636-2057

Hillsdale County:
Jason Wheeler (517) 849-9890

Invasive Species Management

Aliens? And you mean they are HERE?!?

Yes! There are aliens here in the Upper St. Joseph Watershed, and they are NOT the kind from outer space. These aliens are invasive plants brought here intentionally or quite by accident from other parts of the world. An invasive plant is defined as a plant that is not native and has negative effects on our economy, environment, or human health.

Asian bush honeysuckle, autumn olive, and multiflora rose threaten our local forests by shading out native tree seedlings and interrupting forest regeneration. These shrubs form dense thickets and thorny tangles, displacing wildlife and providing them less palatable and less nutritious food sources. They can also quickly invade tree plantations. If you are planting trees beware of these invaders!

Invasive plants do not just affect our natural areas. Some weeds are serious agricultural pests, such as Canada thistle, spotted knapweed, and leafy spurge. These plants invade pastureland and agricultural fields. Once invaded, the quality of pastureland can be seriously reduced because livestock will avoid eating those plants.

What can I do about weeds on my property? There are resources online and brochures available to provide assistance with identification and treatment.

Funding is available too. The **WHIP program** funds work to treat these invasive plant species: kudzu, Asian bush honeysuckle, tree-of-heaven, autumn olive, glossy buckthorn, multiflora rose, Japanese honeysuckle, and periwinkle.

For more information about invasives, visit the website for the Midwest Invasive Plant Network: www.mipn.org.

Beth Mizell, NE Indiana Land Steward
for The Nature Conservancy



Canada Thistle

USDA NRCS. Wetland flora: Field office illustrated guide to plant species. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Provided by NRCS National Wetland Team, Fort Worth, TX.

Upcoming Events:

April 25 TNC Volunteer Work Day at Swamp Angel Preserve

Help us pull Garlic Mustard! Contact Beth Mizell at 260-665-9141 or emizell@tnc.org to RSVP.

May 9 INPAWS Native Plant Sale & Auction, 10 am

Indianapolis, IN. Contact Wendy Ford at 317.334.1932 or wwford@comcast.net.

May 9 TNC Volunteer Work Day at Douglas Woods Preserve, DeKalb County.

Help us pull Garlic Mustard! Contact Beth Mizell at 260-665-9141 or emizell@tnc.org for further information.

May 25 Renewable Energy 101 Seminar, 5:30 pm

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center, Wolf Lake, IN. Contact Wood-Land-Lakes office at 260.665.3211, ext. 5

July 29 Agronomy field Day at Anderson's Farm, Waterloo, Indiana

Jointly hosted by the DeKalb and Steuben County Soil & Water Conservation Districts.

Look for announcements of upcoming field days for TNC and local restoration projects this summer!

Additional Land Incentives:

Through a 2009 Clean Water Indiana Grant, the Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District would like to promote and demonstrate the advantages of using cover crops in the Fish Creek and Crooked Creek Watersheds by offering a cost-share incentive program. Sign-up will be on a first-come, first serve basis. An incentive rate of \$12 an acre to help pay for seeding will be offered, with a maximum sign up of 75 acres per participant. A sign-up sheet will be available to sign up more acreage should funds still be available following the initial sign-up period.

If interested, please contact Kayleen Hart at the SWCD at 260-665-3211, extension 3.



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