

## Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)

There are 98 soil and water conservation districts making a difference in your community. No matter how big or small each of the 102 counties is represented equally. From educating homeowners on practical utilization of water, to helping rural landowners save soil and improve water quality; it takes everyone working together to protect our soil and water! Without these vital resources our communities could not thrive!



Legislators, we are requesting your assistance in creating a source of funding that will fund soil and water conservation districts at a level that will allow them to carry out the State's core function of protecting Illinois' land, water, air, plants and animals for many years to come.



## THIS ISSUE

May is National Wetlands Month P.1

SWCDs Request Legislative Help to  
Secure Long Term Funding P.1

Districts' Spotlight P.2

SWCDs Assist with Correcting  
and Preventing Problems P.2

## May Is National Wetlands Month

In February, 2011, a big story emerged in Illinois when two unusual looking birds were seen foraging in a recently restored floodplain. They were migrating whooping cranes—one of the most endangered wetland-dependent species in North America. It was big news, but there's more to it than just the endangered birds.

While the initial sighting of the cranes was extremely exciting, an even bigger story emerged. Along with the cranes there were also mallard ducks feeding in the shallower water with teal, shoveler and pintail ducks in the shallowest areas. The significance of this is that the wetland had already begun to support a diverse group of bird species, each with their specific needs.

Proximity of this floodplain with other wetland sites is another important feature that demonstrates the positive and immediate usability for our traveling friends. Just as we need hotels, restaurants and gas stations placed along the highway to help us travel across the country, these wet areas work in the same way. Migrating birds move extensive distances and need places to stop, rest and refuel for the next leg of their trip.

The new floodplain that gained recognition for helping the whooping cranes was a product of the President's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, where flood-prone cropland was purchased and restored to its former wet state. Through ARRA and other programs, Illinois has enhanced or restored almost 100,000 acres dedicated to wetlands throughout the state.

Not all wetland projects are floodplains; some may be wet depressions in cropped fields or edges of fields allowed to be reestablished. In Lawrence County alone, there are 23 Wetland Reserve Program and Flood Plain Easement sites covering 5,566 acres. Even though not all are located next to each other, they are close enough to re-create what used to be a continuous section of shallow water where birds and other wildlife can find food and shelter. The floodplain that drew so much attention with the whooping cranes is located within a contiguous area of 453 acres of floodplains along the Embarras River.

The whooping crane event was not by accident, nor was it a surprise. It shows that when we restore and protect wetlands like these, the benefits come quickly.

To take it a step further, the land alongside the floodplain can often be converted back to a natural upland habitat. The upland habitat

supports native grasses and plants that produce food and shelter for other wildlife such as pollinators, mammals, and game birds like quail. Insects and aquatic life flourish when the plants protect the land from erosion and siltation of the wetland below it. Bottom line, these two different habitats complement each other by completing the whole package.

### Not just for the Birds!

Floodplain benefits go far beyond just migrating birds and wildlife. They play an important role for humans as well. From a monetary view, if you compare the cost of flood and crop insurance on a yearly basis, with just one payment for a floodplain easement and restoration, you have saved millions in tax dollars. We often take for granted the broader view of what natural resources like floodplains give us and our communities when properly restored. When done correctly, this is how tax dollars work for all of us.

### Floodplains benefit people and wildlife by:

- holding water from heavy rains, preventing it from flowing downstream and causing damage to roads, communities and agricultural lands, including possible life-threatening events.
- filtering the water of excess nutrients and impurities; they process organic wastes before water re-enters the ground water or other water bodies.
- enhancing communities by providing open space, restoring and enhancing forest lands, creating recreational opportunities, or offering simple enjoyment of their aesthetic beauty.
- providing a diverse habitat and homes for a variety of species which may not - or cannot - exist in any other habitat. Many federal and state listed endangered and threatened species live in these locations as we have experienced in Illinois.

The next time you see a flock of migrating birds, ducks or other waterfowl, or happen on some endangered species, remember that we are responsible for their survival or their decline. Giving them back the land they need to survive is what voluntary wetland restoration is all about.

*Article by Paige Buck, USDA-NRCS*

Fact: SWCDs working with NRCS and US Fish and Wildlife Service have enhanced or restored nearly 100,000 acres of wetlands in Illinois.



## Soil and Water Conservation Districts Work with Individuals, Groups and Governmental Bodies to Correct Current Problems and Protect from Potential Future Problems

- Utilizing programs such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program, Flood Plain Easements and the Streambank Stabilization and Restoration Program SWCDs help provide relief from flooding and create valuable wildlife habitat.
- In urban areas channel armoring, lunkers, A-Jacks and other similar practices protect stream banks and help maintain streams and wetland areas and reduce flooding.



**NOTE:** SWCDs DO NOT have taxing authority and must rely on state source funding to employ staff to administer programs.

PROTECT & CONSERVE

## Districts' Spotlight

### Carroll County:

Stream bank erosion throughout all of Illinois has delivered millions of tons of sediment to Illinois waterways and degraded countless acres of land. Sediments have traveled downstream causing damage to rivers and lakes and even to the Gulf of Mexico. The Carroll County SWCD worked with Charles Guenzler of rural Mount Carroll to armor 450 feet of stream bank. This was in the form of Peaked Stone Toe Protection and a Grade Sill at the lower end of each stretch of protected bank.



This eroding stream bank is eating away the adjacent field and filling the stream with sediment.



Now that it is protected from normal stream flow, the eroded bank will heal and remain stable for many years.

A trench was dug across the stream channel and filled with rock to prevent the bottom of the stream from eroding lower and threatening the side bank protection. The row of peaked stone along the stream bank prevents the base of the bank from eroding which would allow the upper part of the bank to fall into the stream and be washed downstream. This is one of many soil and water conservation practices that are employed by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Illinois to improve water quality and prevent loss of productive land.

Statewide, SWCDs have worked to protect nearly 64,000 feet of eroding stream banks and the areas adjacent to them.

### Marion County:

The George P. Irwin Conservation Education Station (GPICES) was established in September of 1993 with the transfer of a 382 acre tract of land to the Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District. A total resource management approach is being used to develop the property which consists of timber, bottoms, grassland and cropland - much of which is considered highly erodible land (HEL). In 1997, most of the cropland was enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. Some of the demonstration sites at the Station include sustainable agriculture projects, shallow water wetlands, warm season grasses and legumes. Prairie burns are conducted annually at the Station. These burns have been used as training sessions for area residents. A hunting lottery is held each July. Wildlife hunted at GPICES include deer, turkey and upland game. Permits for trapping can also be obtained.



This shallow water wetland was created in 1995 with assistance from the US Fish and Wildlife Service



Issue 5 Vol. 2 • May 2011

YOUR LAND, YOUR WATER, YOUR ILLINOIS

association of illinois  
**SOIL &  
WATER**  
conservation districts

4285 North Walnut Street Road  
Springfield, IL 62707  
217.744.3414 ph  
217.744.3420 fax  
www.aiswcd.org