



# CONSERVATION CATCHALL

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*OUT OF DISASTERS, GOOD THINGS CAN HAPPEN*

On September 11th, most Americans paused to remember that awful day 10 years ago when terrorists brought their venom and hatred to America's shores. That day marked a turning point in our country's history and brought with it new ways of doing things. No longer would we be able to walk into an airport or a government building without first passing through a metal detector. No longer were we allowed to roam freely through airports to greet family, friends and acquaintances as they walked through the arrival gate nor could we accompany our loved ones as they sought out their gate for their departing flight. We were forced to change many things with which we had become comfortable and accustomed.

It seems it always takes some kind of major calamity or disaster to shake us out of our comfort zone and make us change the way we do things, perhaps forever.

There have been other events in our history that have had far reaching and permanent impacts on Americans, some good, some not so good. One of the "not so good" impacts in our past has resulted in a good thing for those of us alive today.

The collapse of the stock market on Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929 is credited as the onset of the great depression.

To bring America out of the depression and resuscitate the economy, President Franklin Roosevelt, in promoting his New Deal agenda, encouraged the Congress to establish a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The Corps was envisioned as a means of reducing unemployment, making a positive contribution to the future state of the nation's resources, and instilling in the young men of the Corps a sense of a stake in that future. The CCC was established "to carry out reforestation and other conservation projects in the national forests and national parks." A five-million-dollar appropriation was made available for erosion control on private and public lands, with work to be administered by the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering in the USDA.

Hugh Hammond Bennett a young employee in the Bureau of Ag Engineering at USDA approached his superior, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Rexford Tugwell, who represented the USDA on the Board of Public Works, about how the job was to be carried out. Bennett by this time had finally attained some degree of acknowledgment within the USDA. Tugwell, a new administrator with Roosevelt's administration, greeted Bennett as the nation's erosion expert. Thus, with Bennett's planning and Tugwell's support, the Soil Erosion Service (SES) was established in the Department of the Interior (DI) in September 1933. Predictably, the head of this new agency was Hugh Hammond Bennett!

Upon receiving the SES appropriation, Bennett lost no time in undertaking work that he had been trying to get done for decades. By mid-October 1933, there were twelve people on the payroll, and the erosion reconnaissance survey was started immediately. One of the first administrative actions affecting the SES was the transfer to it from the Forest Service of over 150 CCC camps.

Over the next two years, Bennett set up approximately 40 large demonstration projects, applying a wide array of soil conserving and restoring practices at the demonstration sites. The CCC participants were engaged in

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE - JAMES TODD

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President Todd's message will not appear this month due to the fall harvest.

### SB744 ~ In the Mind of Many as Veto Session Nears

As the October 25th, 26th and 27th and November 8th, 9th and 10th veto session nears lawmakers are becoming more vocal about the Governor's lack of communication regarding his specific concerns with the bill. Governor Quinn has stated that he is unhappy with what he considers an unnecessarily large expansion in gambling and the lack of oversight provided by the legislation but he has stopped short of giving any specific suggestions for "fixing" the bill to be more agreeable to him.

The lack of specifics for ways the Governor would like to alter the bill has been the source of a number of speculative comments by legislators, reporters, persons benefitted by the bill and persons who are opposed to the bill.

One of the more recent articles I have seen was written by *Monique Garcia, Tribune reporter*, for the September 20, 2011 edition of the *Chicago Tribune*.

Illinois Senate President John Cullerton said Monday that he's open to reducing the number of gaming positions in a pending casino measure to try to address Gov. Pat Quinn's concerns that it expands gambling too much.

The North Side Democrat also said he's willing to scrap plans for year-round horse racing with slot machines at the state fairgrounds in Springfield. But Cullerton said he wants to keep the five new casinos, including one in Chicago. And the lawmaker discounted the idea of getting rid of slot machines at other horse tracks, saying it would jeopardize support for the package at the Capitol.

"I think we can certainly look to reduce the number of gaming positions in the bill without eliminating any of the locations that are authorized in the bill, so the number of positions at each new location would be something that we could adjust, if the governor cares and if that helps us with getting votes," Cullerton said. "I voted for the bill, so I'm happy with the way it is, but the governor has indicated he thinks it's top-heavy."

As passed in late May, the gambling bill would allow new casinos in Chicago, southern Cook County, Lake County, Rockford and Danville. Cullerton argues those locations were picked to capitalize on gamblers who cross state lines and thus should stay in any renegotiated gambling bill.

"They are new positions, but they are really not new gamblers," Cullerton said following a taping of "Politics Tonight," which airs on CLTV, a Tribune-owned cable television station.

Currently, the state's 10 casinos each get a total of 1,200 gaming positions, or spots where customers can place bets. That number would increase to 1,600 once the bill is signed and would rise again to 2,000 positions in January 2013.

The new casinos also would be allowed to have 2,000 gaming positions each. The exception is Chicago, which would get 4,000 gaming positions that could be split between a casino and slot machines at O'Hare and Midway airports. Including slot machines at race tracks, the total number of positions in Illinois would jump from 12,000 to 39,200 under the legislation.

Cullerton said he hasn't landed on a reduced number of positions that would be acceptable. It's a delicate balance — remove too many slot machines and bidders could say the casinos would no longer be economically viable.

Cullerton said he has talked about reducing gaming positions with Quinn and is hopeful an agreement can be reached when lawmakers return to Springfield for the fall veto session next month. A Quinn spokeswoman said the governor is traveling in China and unable to offer reaction Monday.

The Senate president also said he wants to work with Quinn on other issues the governor has raised, including fears the measure would erode oversight of the gambling industry and concerns that proposed changes to the way casinos are taxed would mean less money for schools.

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTES - RICH NICHOLS

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I've noticed that the land use councils (LUCs) have been floundering these past few months. Some don't meet at all and many of those who do meet have 50% or less participation from their member districts. I've also noticed that the Association is being put on point and occasionally chastised for not doing enough for districts. I guess my response to this is, we in Springfield are somewhat at a disadvantage to effectively represent districts if there is no representation at council meetings and no clear direction coming from the districts through the councils.

The AISWCD was organized in 1948 as a "ground up" organization meaning, we take our direction from the council representatives who sit on the board of directors. That philosophy has not changed since the original by-laws were adopted. The Association's by-laws do not give staff and officers the responsibility to dictate how the districts are to function. That is the responsibility of each individual soil and water conservation district. Working through the sixteen Land Use Councils, districts have the opportunity AND THE RESPONSIBILITY to make their individual and collective voices heard at the state level. That is the reason the LUCs were included in the structure of the Association and it is the reason council directors and alternates are elected to represent their respective member districts on the AISWCD's Board of Directors.

Though AISWCD's leadership and staff do not dictate how districts function, we do respond to requests for assistance and it is our responsibility to do what we can to implement resolutions that have been passed by a majority of the voting delegates at the annual meeting.

I guess the message I want to convey is that YOU are the Association and if you are not actively pursuing solutions to your problems and concerns through your LUC then those problems and concerns will likely continue.

## SB744 ~ In the Mind of Many as Veto Session Nears

(Continued from Page 2)

Cullerton stopped the bill from being sent to Quinn shortly after lawmakers voted on the measure, fearful the governor would immediately veto the gambling expansion that was years in the works. The governor is expected to detail his specific concerns and offer possible changes before lawmakers return to the Capitol at the end of October.

Rep. Lou Lang, who sponsored the gambling measure, said he's willing to talk about reducing the number of gaming positions, but another strategy could be phasing in the number of positions outlined in the bill at a slower pace.

"I have said before that any proposal that guts the core of the bill would be a non-starter with me. As long as each of the casinos are still in the bill, if they are slightly smaller, I could live with that. But I'd want to see exactly what was being proposed," said Lang, D-Skokie. "There's all kinds of ideas, but until the governor is willing to engage in a negotiating session, we're just basically talking to ourselves."

The above article drew a response from two Springfield area legislators.

State Rep Raymond Poe, R-Springfield, who has urged that harness racing, along with slot machines, be allowed at the fairgrounds for nine months of the year, said he will vote against any compromise that takes the fairgrounds out of the mix. State fair patrons already can bet on harness races during the fair itself.

After expenses, 50 percent of revenue from harness racing and slot machines at the fairgrounds would go to improve the site's infrastructure. The other half would bolster county fairs and Future Farmers of America and 4-H programs.

State Sen. Larry Bomke, R-Springfield, said he also was disappointed to hear talk that the fairgrounds could be left out of the gambling bill. Bomke noted that the bill, which provides for new casinos in Chicago, Danville, Park City, Rockford and the south suburbs of Cook County, also provides funding for soil and water conservation districts, historic sites and state parks.

If money for those items is deleted along with funds for county fairs and agriculture education programs, "that doesn't leave much for a downstater to support," Bomke said.



## URBAN STORMWATER UPDATE - JIM NELSON

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Jim has taken a leave of absence to fulfill an agreement he had made to help clear invasive species from about 190 acres of land in Peoria County. He will return later this fall. The timing was advantageous for him and for the AISWCD as IEPA had not signed his grant agreement that was to take effect October 1. In light of the cuts at the federal level, there was some concern that funding for the grant might not be available. If the grant had not been approved the AISWCD could not have carried him for more than a few months. We have since learned that the funding is available and the grant agreement has been signed so Jim will have his job waiting for him when he returns.

## Henry County Tour Hosts Congressman Bobby Schilling

Provided by Jerry Snodgrass, Henry County SWCD Chairman and NACD North Central Executive Board Member

Below are pictures of our Henry Co Illinois SWCD tour on Monday Aug.29 with Congressman Bobby Schilling of Illinois' 17<sup>th</sup> congressional district and member of the House Ag committee. The tour went very well as we toured a dry hydrant, no-till, buffer strips, terraces, filter strips, waterways, grade stabilization structures, and a pond. All these made with federal dollars through NRCS. The tour sites were set up by our District Conservationist and his staff. Illinois State Conservationist Bill Gradle attended also. I had the opportunity to have Congressman Schilling in my pickup for the entire tour so I was able to talk to him and his staffer about what NACD is wanting in the Farm Bill and gave him a copy of the Farm Bill principles and funding that we would like to see for various parts of the bill. He was very receptive and understood some of what conservation was all about but now is a strong supporter of conservation and what it takes to get it on the ground. I believe we will have a strong ally in Congressman Schilling and will continue to keep him and his staff informed as to what we need and would like him to support. Part of the tour was held at the Bob DeBaillie farm at Orion IL.



L to R: Congressman Bobby Schilling, Jerry Snodgrass, Dan DeSmith Henry Co. NRCS Soil Technician, Bob DeBaillie Henry Co. farmer, Albert Hulting Henry Co. SWCD Vice Chair.



Dry Hydrant: Tour Stop. L to R: Nick Fritch, Jerry Snodgrass, Doug Peterson Henry Co SWCD Director, Dan DeSmith, Bobby Schilling, Mitch Hecaenkamp



## ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT'S UPDATE - SHERRY FINN

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Sherry has been inundated with work from the various programs she administers and assignments she has been given and will have no report this month. Instead, we received a lengthy article from the Lee County Natural Area Guardians and it will be posted here and on subsequent pages.

## WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE NATURAL AREA GUARDIANS?

*This month's article is submitted by Debra Carey, Lee County NAGs*

### Natural Area Guardian Committee - Lee County SWCD

The change of seasons reminds us that change is inevitable. If we had been living here in Lee County, Illinois 10,000 years ago, the last glaciers would have been receding from our landscape and possibly a stag moose or two could still be found browsing the native ferns and sedges.



Ophisaurus attenuatus - the only legless lizard. Commonly called glass snakes, they are really lizards. Rare - at Ryan Wetland.

Today, as a result of past natural events, Lee County provides excellent prairie and wetland resources in addition to many acres of agricultural fields. In early Lee County, 92% of our land was considered to be a mixture of prairie and wet prairie. The immense Winnebago and Inlet Swamps were incubators of wildlife; it is said that flocks of waterfowl darkened the skies over Lee County during the fall migrations. Market hunters shot literally hundreds of thousands of ducks and geese and sent them to the bustling city of Chicago.

That's all gone but remnants of marshes and prairies and woodlands dot our landscape today and the Natural Area Guardian committee of the Lee County Soil & Water Conservation District works hand-in-hand with landowners to manage their natural areas.

In the late 1970's a group of Lee Countians formed in an effort to locate, survey and protect natural areas in our county. By 1991, when Governor Jim Edgar signed legislation providing that each county SWCD could create a Natural Areas committee to assist landowners, the Natural Area Guardians (NAG) were a perfect fit to begin a successful partnership with the Lee County SWCD. Lee County was the first SWCD to form a NAG committee and we are still going strong many years later. The committee consists of volunteers with the committee chair serving as an Associate Director on the SWCD Board. LeeNAG is self-supporting; no SWCD funds are used for daily activities and operations.

In addition to surveying and providing advice and actual labor to owners of natural areas, LeeNAG owns and manages five areas:

#### Bartlett Woods

Bartlett Woods, a dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve, is a pristine woodland that is carpeted with spring wildflowers. This area is a prairie grove; a welcome site and oasis to early pioneers who were traveling via horse and wagon through the endless sea of prairie and slough grass. These groves provided lumber for cabins, shade from the scorching sun, and were a bit of a reminder of the eastern forests the pioneers had left behind in their search for fertile farmland. In early Lee County a magnificent 800-acre oak woodland called Knox Grove existed; today only 27 jewel-like acres remain - Bartlett Woods.

#### Ryan Wetland & Sand Prairie

At 44 acres, Ryan Wetland and Sand Prairie is the largest of LeeNAG's preserves. It was acquired in 2003 in degraded but restorable condition, heavily impacted by forestation that occurred in the wake of decades of grazing. Black cherry had invaded most of the site while soft maple dominated the shores of wetlands, encroaching on surrounding wet/mesic prairie. Amur honeysuckle, planted in the early 70s by well-meaning land managers, had quickly spread out of control and occupied much of the property, indifferent to highly variable soil structure and moisture content. Likewise, native blackberry had seized the opportunity provided by a prairie landscape beaten severely and left for dead.

The succession to forest was well under way but by no means complete, as evidenced by clearings still rich in prairie species. In these locations, and wherever trees and brush had not yet canopied, long absence of fire was the primary threat. Yet with all its problems, the potential of the new preserve was obvious.



Adult Blanding's turtle at Ryan Wetland

Today, in the 9th year of restoration, the Ryan site is roughly 75% open. Tree removal is carried out every winter while the prairie slumbers beneath the frost. In spring a quarter to a third of the site is burned, areas alternating annually. Summer is for control of invasive herbaceous species. And in

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## ISWCDEA CORNER - MEGHAN POSTON, ISWCDEA REGION FIVE REPRESENTATIVE

website: <http://www.il.ncdea.org>



The ISWCDEA has scheduled our 2012 meeting dates. They are: February 9, May 17, July 12, September 12 & 13, November 8, and Winter Training on December 6 & 7. Take a look at next year's calendar and scribble a reminder on the Mondays before those 2012 meetings to contact your region's ISWCDEA representative with issues you think the ISWCDEA needs to address. While you're marking your calendar, see if you're free on those meeting dates. If you are free, you might as well be an ISWCDEA Representative for your region! You've got nothing else scheduled on those days, right? Seriously though folks, all but Region 2 are short at least one representative. And YOU can remedy that problem.

## OUT OF DISASTERS, GOOD THINGS CAN HAPPEN

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doing the actual work on the demonstration projects, e.g., planting trees, building erosion control structures, planting cover crops. This work was well received by the farming communities and the general public, and it attracted much favorable attention. In December, Henry C. Wallace, Secretary of the USDA, sent Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Department of Interior, a memorandum requesting the transfer of the SES to the USDA, a move reputed to have demonstrated the success and popularity of the SES research and demonstrations. The value of the SES work was soon to be realized as the forces of nature were about to act in a spectacular way to drive home the reality and devastation of soil erosion, a fact that Hugh Bennett had been preaching for 25 years.

In 1934, just as the first national survey of soil erosion was being completed, wind storms hit the drought-stricken Great Plains and the term "dust bowl" was born. On May 12, 1934, a major storm hit the plains, later to be described by Bennett as a turning point in the battle to get public attention to the erosion problem:

"This particular dust storm blotted out the sun over the nations capital, drove grit between the teeth of New Yorkers, and scattered dust on the decks of ships 200 miles out to sea. I suspect that when people along the seaboard of the eastern United States began to taste fresh soil from the plains 2,000 miles away, many of them realized for the first time that somewhere something had gone wrong with the land. It seems to take something like a disaster to awaken people who have been accustomed to great national prosperity, such as ours, to the presence of a national menace. Although we were slowly coming to realize that soil erosion was a major national problem, even before that great dust storm, it took that storm to awaken the nation as a whole to some realization of the menace of erosion."

That something had gone wrong with the land was indeed evident in 1934, and the resulting public concern led to a great deal of public and private effort to remedy the situation.

In March 1935, a bill was introduced in Congress to set up the Soil Conservation Service as a permanent agency of the government. It was one of many dropped in the hopper under the urgency of the Dust Bowl and its accompanying consequences of depression, unemployment, and hunger. Bennett was called by a Senate committee to argue the case for the proposed legislation. His appearance and what followed it are now legendary. A Bennett biographer, Wellington Brink, graphically describes the event:

"The witness was not cheerful, but he was persistent, informed, and courageous. He told a grim story. He had been telling it all morning. Chapter by chapter, he annotated each dismal page with facts and figures from a reconnaissance he had just completed. . . . The witness did not hurry. He did not want to hurry. That extra ace he needed was not yet at hand. Well he realized that the hearing was beginning to drag. Out of one corner of his eye, he noted the polite stifling of a yawn, but Hugh Bennett continued deliberately. . . . Bennett knew that a dust storm was on its way. He had newspaper items and weather reports to support this knowledge. But it seemed mighty slow arriving. If his delaying tactics were successful, the presence of the swirling dust—material evidence of what he was talking about—ought to serve as a clincher for his argument. Presently one of the senators remarked—off the record—'It is getting dark. Perhaps a rainstorm is brewing.'

Another ventured, 'Maybe its dust.' 'I think you are correct,' Bennett agreed. 'Senator, it *does* look like dust.' The group gathered at a win-

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## WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE NATURAL AREA GUARDIANS?

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fall...well, what can we say? Autumn is the best time on the prairie, a good time to reconnect. Sitting becomes productive, reflection brings satisfaction, strength is gathered for the coming winter work season. Toil is the exception instead of the rule.

Floral and faunal inventories are ongoing in all seasons. Species are documented in writing, by photography and with a plant press. Every year something new is discovered. This past spring it was nesting hooded mergansers. In 2010, in a neglected corner of the preserve, northern tubercled orchid was uncovered in the mowing of a blackberry patch. In June of the present year the full extent of the colony was revealed: over 200 plants hiding among sedges and ferns. Only a few weeks ago 3-way sedge was first noticed in one of the wetlands.



Tubercled orchid - *Platanthera flava*

Most of the plants one expects to see in a prairie can be found on the Ryan site but the soil is mostly sand, in places nothing but sand, and some prairie stalwarts are conspicuous in their absence. There are no silphiums here, no purple or yellow coneflowers. We have one plant each of golden aster, purple prairie clover and rough white lettuce. In lieu of these one finds an array of sedges from wet to dry, at least eight fern species and a few allies, mats of sphagnum, reindeer moss, ponds ringed by blueflag, uplands bristling with June grass and sweet wild strawberries in abundance.

Ryan hosts 22 species of herps comprising snakes, turtles, frogs, lizards and one species each of toad and salamander. Of turtles alone there are three species: Blanding's, painted and the ubiquitous snapper. A dozen sets of remains of ornate box turtle have been found over the years but no living specimens have turned up. It is assumed the species abandoned the site as prairie gave way to forest. Some typical grassland birds have not returned to the reborn prairie. There are no meadowlarks, bobolinks or dickcissels, though all of these inhabit nearby roadsides and fields. They have adapted to the new world and forsaken the old ways. The most visible ground-nester is rufous-sided towhee; in the dogwood and viburnum, orchard oriole. Sandhill cranes visit on occasion and accipiters join northern harrier in spring and fall. Several native sparrows raise their broods here. Woodcocks fly just before dark.

### Pike Creek Prairie

Pike Creek Prairie is a historic 5-acre remnant of the Illinois Central Railroad right-of-way and is thick with native prairie plants that were blooming when the trains first appeared on the landscape in the mid-1800's and are still blooming now that the trains have disappeared. This linear prairie reminds us not only of our prairie heritage but also of the steam engines that once chugged across Lee County.

### Chaplin Creek Prairie

Chaplin Creek is a 2-acre planted prairie that is a focal point of a restored village site in our community. When visiting the Chaplin Creek Historic Site, you'll see a sliver of an early pioneer town with its blacksmith shop, little schoolhouse, barns with massive beams and an early pie shop that still offers a slice of delicious dessert during Harvest Festival Days. Chaplin Creek Prairie gently reminds us that our rich farm soil is a direct result of eons of decomposing prairie vegetation.

### Mound Hill

Mound Hill is a 10-acre site that was just donated to LeeNAG in mid-September as a memorial. This hill prairie, a limestone knob covered with a thin layer of glacial drift towering over an endless expanse of row crops, is now designated as the David O. & Helen M. Wiegel Memorial Tallgrass Prairie. The hill is crowned with a US Geological Survey marker that lies amid the prairie grasses and pale purple coneflowers.

In addition, LeeNAG manages Temperance Hill Illinois Nature Preserve for our local School Board. Temperance Hill is a pioneer cemetery with adjacent virgin prairie land. LeeNAG also volunteers at the Green River State Wildlife Area, a marvelous 2300-acre sand prairie and wetland site located in Lee County. Projects such as snake surveys, bird house monitoring, removal of invasive weeds and brush, and seed harvesting are all part of our volunteer work at GRSWA.



Tim Keller and Dave Benson at Mound Hill - Dave is chairman of LeeNAG

One of Lee NAG's long-standing projects is an on going survey for threatened and endangered turtles. In 1986 Lee NAG received the first of several wildlife grants from IDNR and we continue this survey annually now as volunteers. Blanding's turtles, which need undisturbed, shallow, sand-bottomed wetlands, once were a common species; now they are listed as Endangered. In 2011, we found the first and only hatchling Blanding's ever documented in Lee County. We have a couple local farmers who keep an eye out for turtles while farming; in fact, while I was writing this article, a man who farms a thousand acres called me with a baby turtle he had just found. It was a common species but every turtle, like every species, it is an important part of our natural world. It was the late, great naturalist Aldo Leopold who once said that "to keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering". Whether you are talking about repairing an engine or managing natural resources, we do indeed need to keep every cog and wheel. What we may feel is expendable today may be very precious tomorrow.

All ages and all interests make up the Lee County NAG group. We welcome diversity! We thank Lee County SWCD Board Chairman Kent Reed and the Directors for their support of our committee. We trust that other NAG chapters have found natural area restoration as fulfilling as we have and hope that in the inexorable march of succession, we will be replaced by others even more dedicated.



## Legislative Corner - Mike Hoffmann

### **Revisiting the Spring Session**

At the AISWCD summer conference in the last week of July, Executive Director Rich Nichols and I talked a bit about the efforts of the AISWCD during last spring's legislative session. It was a busy session for us with four major issues on the table – 1) the budget; 2) fund transfers for the cost-share program; 3) SWCD consolidation; and 4) dedicated funding via gaming legislation. These issues - some of which surfaced suddenly – necessitated repeated visits to the Statehouse by President Jim Todd, Vice-President Lonnie Wilson, and Rich. (Of course, I am present at the Capitol every day that the General Assembly meets.) We spent a lot of time talking to key legislators and staff to make sure that these issues were resolved in the best manner possible for SWCDs. I thought I would revisit for you how we dealt with these issues.

### ***Budget Watch - [HB0124](#)***

The budget is our first priority and we are talking to legislators and staff about it throughout the session, but contacts become more frequent the closer we come to the end of May and the deadline for the legislature to pass the budget approaches. This year was more hectic than most, because the House and Senate were working on different budgets, so we had to monitor what both were doing.

At one point the Senate released numbers to us that would have wiped out funding for cost-share and cut operating grants in half. When I saw these numbers I immediately called to have the AISWCD officers come over to the Statehouse. After talking to several legislators and consulting with staff, our budget numbers were restored to about a total of \$7 million, which is about where we ended up.

That is why we constantly remind you that we need to keep legislators aware of what we accomplish for the State of Illinois. As legislators are inundated with issues and requests and are looking for cuts, they may need to be reminded that soil and water conservation is an essential function of state government.

### ***The Partners for Conservation Fund and Cost-share - [SB0335](#)***

On the morning of May 3, I was screening the amendments filed in the House and Senate (as I do every day) for those that might affect SWCDs. You can never know what issue may arise from thin air. Senate Amendment #1 to SB 335 was a shocker: it would wipe out fund transfers for about all the Agricultural grant programs, including cost-share. Of course, I immediately contacted Rich Nichols and we set upon a strategy of asking the districts to contact their legislators while we again made the rounds at their Capitol offices. We also made sure that the other Ag groups were aware of the situation.

This came about very quickly and not everyone was aware of what was in the bill before it passed the Senate the next day. But our strategy worked in the House, where the Senate amendment was rejected. The end result is that the transfers were sustained.

### ***The Dept. of Agriculture and Consolidation of SWCDs - [SB0172](#)***

A similar situation arose in late March. As I was going through the amendments, I found one that allowed for a streamlined method for consolidating or dissolving SWCDs through a vote of the board with the approval of the Director of the Illinois Dept. of Agriculture. (Under the [Soil and Water Conservation Districts Act](#), districts could dissolve or consolidate only by referendum.) We were aware that two districts (Lake and McHenry Counties) had requested a consolidation and that the Dept. wanted to pursue legislation to expedite it. But the amendment to SB 172 went beyond that and would have allowed open-ended dissolution or consolidation.

Jim Todd and company made another trip the Capitol, a day or two later we sat down with the staff from the department, and we hashed out agreed legislation that protects districts while facilitating the planned consolidation. SB 172 passed both chambers was signed into law by Governor Quinn on August 16.

### ***Dedicated Funding and the gaming bill - [SB0744](#)***

An opportunity arose in the middle of the legislative session when it became apparent that legislative leaders would consider an expansion of gaming. This was not an issue that Ag groups were particularly excited about, but it was clear that votes would be needed to pass a bill - and that supportive legislators would be

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## Legislative Corner

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able to bring home benefits for their legislative districts from the revenues the bill would generate.

After talking to downstate leaders of both the Republican and Democratic caucuses in the House, I drafted a plan that would dedicate about \$25 million for agricultural and conservation programs in the State budget. These are programs that, like ours, had suffered the brunt of the cuts over the last few years as the governors and the legislative leaders fought to save social programs.

**House Amendment 001 to SB0744** authorizes slot machines at race tracks where horse racing is ongoing (including the State Fairgrounds) incorporates the bulk of that plan. In fact, the bill allocates \$10 million (40% of the \$25 million total for Ag program) of that revenue annually for grants to SWCDs. Moreover, the bill stipulates that these funds **"shall be used solely for grants to soil and water conservation districts. . . (and) shall supplement, and not supplant, other State funding for soil and water conservation districts."**

The AISWCD again went to work contacting districts and partners for support for this initiative. In the end the bill passed the House and the Senate on very close roll calls. The bill would not have passed without our support.

Although SB 744 passed both the House and Senate, it has not yet been sent to the Governor. Senate President John Cullerton has used a parliamentary maneuver to keep the bill in his hands until he has some indication as to where the Governor will fall. We hope the Governor will sign this bill. **If you have not yet contacted the Governor's office in support of SB 744, please do so.** The funding from the bill is crucial to keeping the soil and water conservation program viable, and the Governor has indicated that he is looking very closely at how the bill affects agriculture and how much support for the bill there is among the Ag groups community.

***KEEP YOUR STATE LEGISLATORS EDUCATED ON SWCD ACTIVITIES***

## OUT OF DISASTERS, GOOD THINGS CAN HAPPEN

*(Continued from Page 6)*

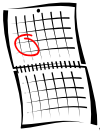
dow. The dust storm for which Hugh Bennett had been waiting rolled in like a vast steel-town pall, thick and repulsive. The skies took on a copper color. The sun went into hiding. The air became heavy with grit. Government's most spectacular showman had laid the stage well. All day, step by step, he had built his drama, paced it slowly, risked possible failure with his interminable reports, while he prayed for Nature to hurry up a proper denouement. For once, Nature cooperated generously."

The committee went back to the conference table no longer in doubt. This was the turning point. The 74th Congress passed without a dissenting vote Public Law 46, The Soil Conservation Act, the first soil conservation act in the history of this or any other nation. It was signed by the President on April 27, 1935.

The good thing that has come from the "Dust Bowl" disaster is of course the nearly 3,000 soil (and water) conservation districts spread out among the 50 states, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Palau, Guam, and the Marianas Islands.

We are the result of national calamity. Just as happened in the terrorist attacks in 2001, many people died from inhaling the dust that invaded their homes and lives during the "Dirty Thirty's" as they were called. People suffocated from lack of breathable air, those who didn't suffocate often developed a lethal form of pneumonia. No one knows how many people died as a result of the dust storms because of the various ways the dust affected people but it is certain that there were many.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts were created as the "Homeland Security" organization for our natural resources. We are the organization charged with protecting America from problems related to soil erosion and water quality. Let us never forget that the conservation districts were born out of a national disaster and that they exist to prevent that kind of disaster from ever happening again.



## MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

- 13th Biennial Governor's Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System - Hotel Père Marquette, Peoria, IL October 4 - 6, 2011

### 2011 QUARTERLY BOARD MEETING DATES

- December 2011 Quarterly Board Meeting - December 12th & 13th, Northfield Inn - Springfield, IL

## Did you know that September is:

- Classical Music Month
- Hispanic Heritage Month
- Fall Hat Month
- International Square Dancing Month
- National Blueberry Popsicle Month
- National Courtesy Month
- National Piano Month
- Chicken Month
- Baby Safety Month
- Little League Month
- Honey Month
- Self Improvement Month
- Better Breakfast Month



On September 26th, 1833 the Jacksonville Female Seminary, the first higher education institution for women in Illinois, opened its doors for the first time.

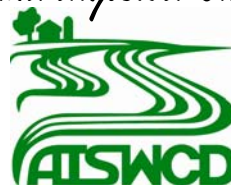
## Please have a safe harvest season!

The 2011 fall harvest season is well under way. Pay attention for vehicles leaving and entering highways and watch for slow moving traffic, especially in rural areas.



AISWCD Mission: *To represent and empower Illinois' SWCDs*

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