

2026 Annual Report



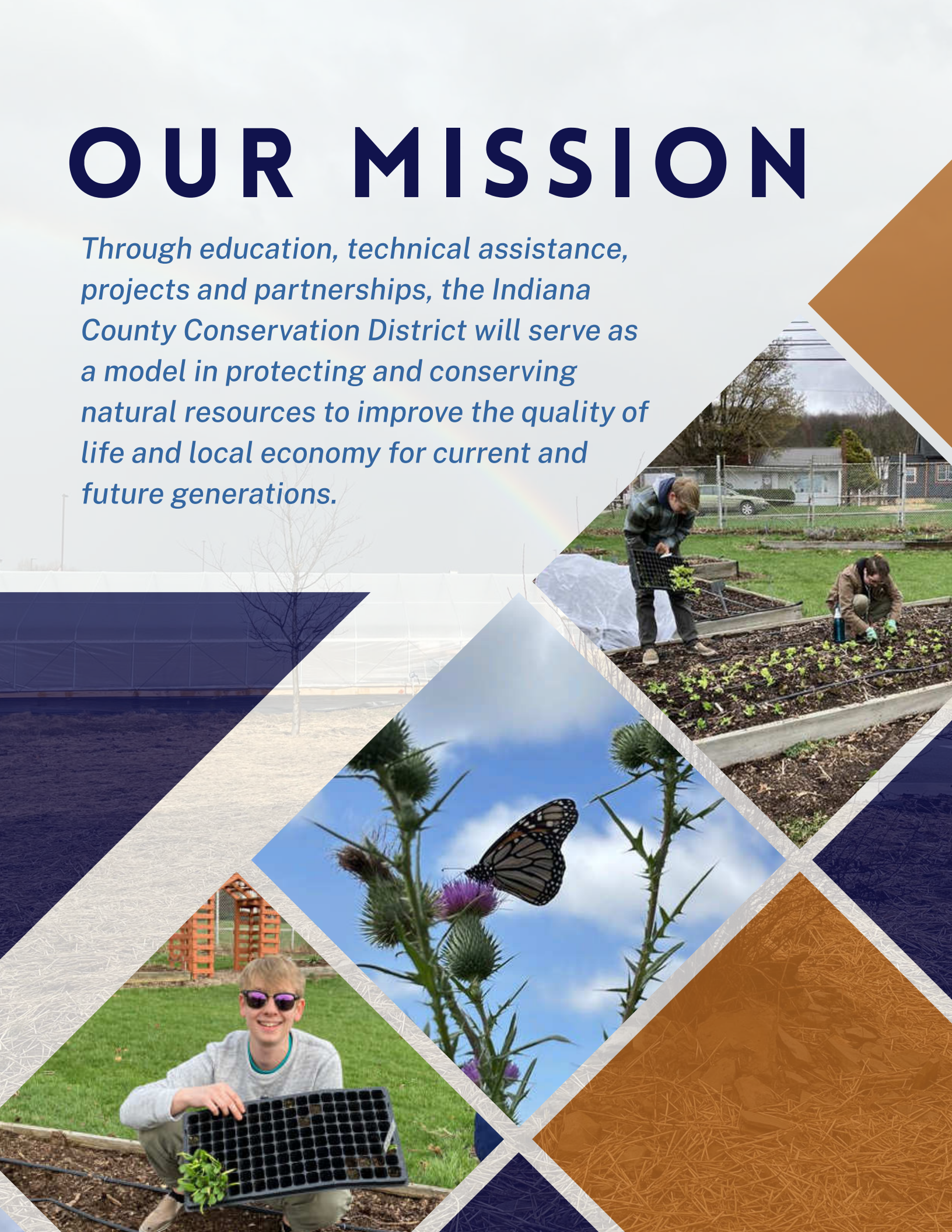
INDIANA COUNTY
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

Resilience in food, water, and environment.

OUR MISSION

Through education, technical assistance, projects and partnerships, the Indiana County Conservation District will serve as a model in protecting and conserving natural resources to improve the quality of life and local economy for current and future generations.



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



Throughout my travels in 2025, a recurring theme was exploring and learning about the Indigenous peoples of the regions I visited.

In May, I traveled to Acadia National Park, where I was struck by the beauty of its landscapes and rich natural history. During my visit, I came to understand Maine's deep and lasting significance to the Wabanaki, the People of the Dawnland.

I also learned that gathering sweetgrass within the boundaries of Acadia National Park, a once common ritual along the shores of what is now the State of Maine, had been for most of the last century prohibited by the federal government. The Wabanaki people considered Sweetgrass one of the four sacred medicines, a connection between two worlds.

Thanks to National Park Service funding, researchers began studying the effect of harvesting on sweetgrass growth in Acadia, and their understanding evolved to fully support Indigenous practices as part of the science. It became clear that a Wabanaki-led approach and listening to the gatherers opened up a vast amount of knowledge about sweetgrass and the importance of the renewal of this substantial cultural practice of gathering it.

Then in 2021, President Biden committed to incorporating Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in federal scientific and policy processes thus recognizing Indigenous knowledge for its contribution to the “scientific, technical, social, and economic advancement of the United States and our collective understanding of the natural world.”

As I reflected on the resilience of the Wabanaki people and the strength they draw from their relationships with the land and one another, I realized that many of those same values are reflected in the community I have proudly called home for more than thirty years: Indiana, Pennsylvania.

Later in the year, I experienced a similar insight when I delved into the Indigenous cultures and histories of the Blackfeet Nation while visiting Browning, Montana, a town adjacent to Glacier National Park. The Blackfeet Nation have a long history of bison-based economy, seasonal migration, and deep spiritual connections to the prairie.

They also maintain traditional cultivation, practicing three sisters agriculture (corn, beans, squash) and hold bison restoration and wildlife management central to their cultural and spiritual life.

By preserving and embracing their Indigenous heritage, these tribes are meeting modern challenges with solutions rooted in traditional knowledge. Their efforts strengthen community resilience while helping to ensure food security, cultural continuity, and environmental sustainability for future generations.

This is exactly the mindset of the Indiana County Conservation District: we are building on past achievements and tested and reliable methods of conservation to achieve resilience in food security, clean and abundant water, and an environment that promotes a healthier, more equitable society.

As chair, I often tout the District as a vital partner to agriculture, environment, business, and education, playing a serious role in the development and growth of Indiana County and its path to prosperity. In 2025, Conservation District efforts brought more than \$2.1 million dollars to the communities of Indiana County. Through strong leadership and the dedication of a working Board of Directors, the Conservation District achieved these milestones all while continuing its mission to protect and enhance the natural resources that sustain our communities. From the Growing for Good Health initiative, which increases access to fresh produce, to the Tide Trail project, which aims to transform abandoned mine lands into recreational destinations, these efforts demonstrate how conservation can improve environmental quality, support local economies, and enhance quality of life.

In closing, I am delighted to elevate the District's enduring commitment to instilling appreciation of conservation education in the youth of Indiana County. Approaching its 40th year in existence, the District once again held the Senior Envirothon, offering field and academic competitions on forestry, wildlife, soils and land use, aquatic ecology, and current environmental issues, while promoting teamwork, leadership, and a deeper understanding of Pennsylvania's natural resources. Since its founding, more than 2,500 students have benefitted from this remarkable movement that promotes environmental stewardship and prepares future conservation leaders in Indiana County.

I love the work that the District does for environment and the people of Indiana County, every day. Together, we are building resilient and resourceful communities that can address the challenges that modern life brings. Enjoy reading about the many accomplishments of 2025 and remain with us on this journey of "Cultivating Community!"

Sincerely,



Sherene Hess, 2025 Chair, Indiana County Conservation District



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Conservation in America is not a single moment in history. It is a continuing promise. A promise that the land, water, and resources entrusted to us will be cared for with intention and passed on stronger than we received them.

President Theodore Roosevelt once wrote, "The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value." That belief helped shape the American conservation movement and ultimately led to the formation of conservation districts like ours. It was not simply about protecting land. It was about building a culture of stewardship.

Pennsylvania has long embraced that responsibility. From restoring forests once stripped bare, to improving watershed management and advancing agricultural conservation practices, our Commonwealth has shown that restoration and resilience are possible when communities commit to them.

Our own story reflects that same spirit. The District began as the Blacklick Soil and Water Conservation District, focusing on protecting farmland, controlling erosion, and restoring watershed health. As the needs of Indiana County grew and evolved, so did we. Today, as the Indiana County Conservation District, our work spans regulatory programs, watershed restoration, agricultural assistance, education, and community engagement. Yet the core principles of soil and water conservation remain the foundation of everything we do.



The work accomplished in 2025 is part of that larger story. This year, we advanced watershed restoration initiatives, supported farmers in implementing conservation practices, and assisted municipalities in addressing local water and infrastructure needs.

At the same time, collaborative planning efforts strengthened Indiana County's local food system by connecting producers, markets, and community partners in ways that enhance agricultural viability and long-term land stewardship. Internally, policies and compliance systems were refined to reinforce transparency and accountability, while partnerships across local, state, and federal levels continued to grow. Through continued investment in workforce development, the District is helping prepare the next generation of conservation professionals to carry this work forward.

Each of these efforts represents more than a completed task. They are building blocks. They strengthen our capacity, expand our impact, and position the District to meet the challenges ahead with confidence.

Conservation is both practical and hopeful. It is grounded in science and engineering yet driven by the belief that thoughtful action today shapes a better tomorrow. As you read through the projects highlighted in this report, you will see how that belief takes shape on the ground across Indiana County. Each completed initiative reflects collaboration, technical expertise, and a shared commitment to stewardship. Together, they illustrate how deliberate action leads to measurable, lasting impact.

The legacy of conservation in Indiana County is visible in our working farms, our forests, and our streams.

It lives in the farmers who invest in their soil, in local leaders planning responsibly for growth, and in residents who value clean water and healthy land. It is strengthened by collaboration and sustained by the steady commitment of those who understand that stewardship is a shared responsibility. We are proud to be part of that living legacy.

Conservation is never finished. It is carried forward year by year, partnership by partnership, project by project. The progress achieved in 2025 strengthens the foundation on which we will continue to build.

Together, we move forward with purpose.

Respectfully,

Douglas M. Beri Jr.
Executive Director
Indiana County Conservation District





PACD LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE AWARD FOR BOARD LEADERSHIP

The Indiana County Conservation District was honored this year with the State Conservation Commission Leadership Excellence Award for Board Leadership, recognizing the vision and dedication of the ICCD Board of Directors.

The award celebrates boards that move conservation forward through leadership, innovation, and a commitment to serving their communities. In Indiana County, that leadership has translated into creative programs that connect conservation with real community needs. Among the initiatives highlighted were ICCD's Growing for Good Health program, which connects agriculture with improved food access and community wellness, and the Agriculture Conservation Technician Apprenticeship, an innovative workforce development program preparing the next generation of conservation professionals.

The recognition was presented during the Joint Annual Conference of the State Conservation Commission and the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, celebrating ICCD's continued commitment to conservation leadership and community impact.



Left to right: Aaron Simpson, Tom Beresnyak, Craig Andrie, Hunter Overdorff, Tammie Robinson, Douglas Beri Jr., Janis Long, Cindy Rogers, Sherene Hess, Barb Peace

A man wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, khaki pants, and a grey baseball cap is walking away from the camera through a grassy field. In the background, there is a dense forest of green trees. The image is overlaid with large, semi-transparent geometric shapes: a yellow triangle on the left, a blue triangle on the right, and a dark grey triangle at the bottom. The word "AGRICULTURE" is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

AGRICULTURE



“The conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem, it will avail us little to solve all others,” said Theodore Roosevelt in his speech to the nation after the Dust Bowl in 1930. The conservation of our natural resources is a primary goal of the Indiana County Conservation District. One of the many ways this is done is through the installation of best management practices (BMPs). These are methods and techniques that are recognized as the most effective and practical ways to preserve our natural resources.

Farmers can apply for funding to install BMPs on their property at ICCD. This can be done through the Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP). The goal of this program is to improve soil health, protect local waterways, and reduce erosion through the installation of BMPs. Among the many conservation practices supported through ACAP are manure storage facilities, barnyard stormwater controls, streambank fencing, and cover crops.

In 2025 the Indiana County Conservation District spent over \$745,000 on the installation of BMPs through the ACAP program and saw the completion of several projects throughout the county. These projects included animal heavy use areas, grazing systems, and access road improvements – all of which contribute to ICCD’s goal of preserving our natural resources. While funding to our farmers helps get BMPs on the ground, education is also a key component to our goal. In 2025 we provided on-farm technical assistance to more than 60 farmers in Indiana County. Educational efforts focused on BMP’s can inspire new perspectives, changes in management styles, and an awareness for the importance of conservation.

In addition to working with farmers to install BMPs, ICCD administers Chapter 91, which is the regulation that requires every farm, regardless of size, that produces or spreads manure to develop and implement a manure management plan (MMP). Under this regulation farmers are able to develop their own MMP using DEP’s “Land Application of Manure – Manure Management Plan Guidance” workbook, but ICCD has the capability to develop a plan at a minimal cost. Act 38, Pennsylvania’s nutrient management law, is another program that the District oversees. A nutrient management plan (NMP) is required for any operation classified as a concentrated animal operation (CAO). A CAO is defined as an ag operation where the animal density exceeds the animal equivalent units per acre, suitable for manure handling, on an annualized basis. The main difference between manure and nutrient management plans is a NMP must be developed by a certified plan writer and reviewed by the District.

The efforts to protect our soil and water resources will remain a direct mission of the Indiana County Conservation District. Through programs like ACAP the District can continue to make meaningful progress towards improving soil health and protecting local waterways.

ACAP Project

WOOD CREST POINT - HUA

One of the most notable projects of 2025 was the installation of a heavy use area (HUA) and manure storage at Wood Crest Point Farms located in Brush Valley Township. This project received an ACAP contract of \$250,000.00, which allowed the farm owner to address environmental resource concerns on the farm. Prior to the implementation of this Best Management Practice (BMP), the area where the cattle were housed was experiencing soil runoff, pasture degradation, and lack of space to store manure. These issues created concerns for soil quality and downstream water courses.

In February of 2025, construction was underway and by April of 2025, a 48' x 152' Heavy Use Area (HUA) and a 32' x 48' manure storage area was completed. The installation of this BMP allows the operator to house his cattle in there during winter, times of drought, or periods of long rain. The manure storage area is designed to hold up to 6 months of storage.

This project highlights the value of collaboration between local producers and the Indiana County Conservation District. The installed HUA will help improve manure management, reduce soil erosion, and protect local water resources. Projects like this demonstrate how targeted conservation practices and the ACAP program can create long-term benefits for both farmers and the surrounding environment across Indiana County.



During - construction of framing

DATE OF PROJECT

February 2024 - May 2025

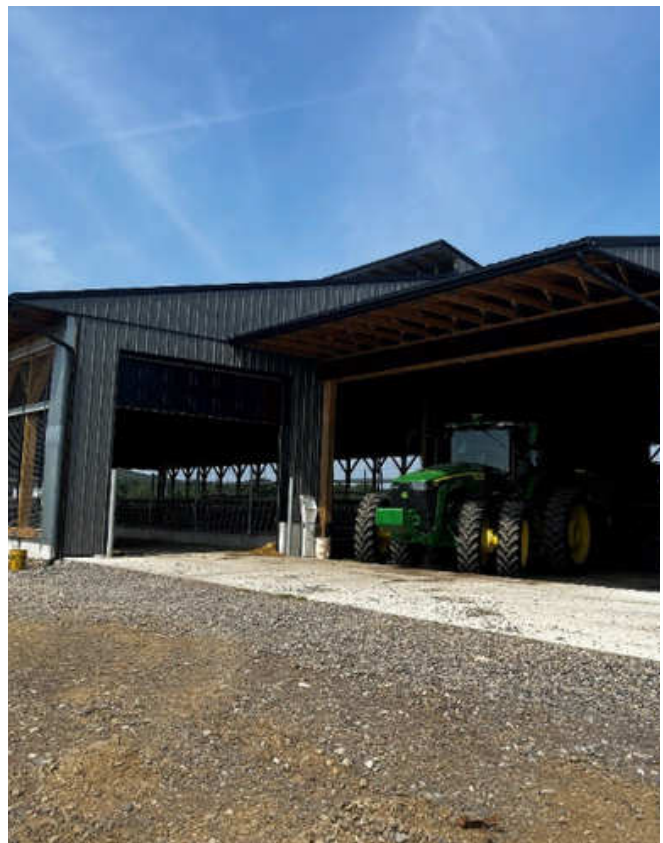
TOTAL PROJECT COST

\$550,994.83

GRANT SOURCES

ACAP - \$250,000

REAP - \$225,745.87



After - completion of HUA building

ACAP Project

LONE OAK FARM - GRAZING SYSTEM

Another example of a successfully completed ACAP project in 2025 can be seen at the Lone Oak farm in Smicksburg. This project included the installation of a grazing system, watering system, and stormwater control practices. While most of the work was completed by the farm owner, the project was fully funded by the ACAP program, providing the resources needed to implement these BMPs.

With ACAP funding, over 17,000 feet of fence, five watering facilities with heavy use protection pads for cattle, spring developments that supplied water to the watering facilities, as well as multiple diversions to divert stormwater into a controlled outlet were installed.

Through the installation of these best management practices, livestock have access to clean water, resulting in strengthened pasture health and reduced potential for soil erosion from storm water. Through partnership with ICCD, the efficiency of this grazing operation was maximized, while also taking steps to preserve the soil on the property and water in the community.



Before - water/sediment runoff



After - storm water outlet

DATE OF PROJECT

June 2023 - 2025

TOTAL PROJECT COST

\$197,331.32

GRANT SOURCES

ACAP - \$250,000



DIRT, GRAVEL, LOW VOLUME ROADS

DGLVR Project

EAST MAHONING - BLACK RD

Black Road was a difficult site to drain due to the steepness of the roadway and proximity to adjacent farm buildings. The road acted as a ditch that drained directly into a tributary to Pickering Run, a high-quality cold-water fishery. Due to decades of erosion, the road was lower than the surrounding ground and had to be addressed as part of the solution. The goal of this project was to shed water where possible and contain it safely where water had to flow in ditches.

This project included 580 feet of underdrain, 2160 tons of road fill (to raise the road 2-3 feet), and four new drainage pipes – all installed in 2024 – as well as 487 tons of Driving Surface Aggregate (DSA) placed in June 2025. East Mahoning Township worked hand-in-hand with two contractors to haul and compact the fill material, install new drainage features, and place the DSA. The District consulted with the Penn State Center for Dirt & Gravel Roads Studies to ensure proper placement of DSA for a long-term wearing surface. This capital investment not only improved the roadway but also improved our local waterways.

DATE OF PROJECT

Summer 2024 - Spring 2025

TOTAL PROJECT COST

\$63,812

GRANT SOURCES

DGLVR - \$56,674

IN-KIND SOURCES

East Mahoning Township - \$7,138

PROJECT PARTNERS

East Mahoning Township, Penn State Center for Dirt & Gravel Road Studies



Before - steep, deep ditch road



During - addition of fill



After - raised road and improved drainage

DGLVR Project

SOUTH MAHONING - WILSON RD

Wilson Road was a steep dirt road causing severe erosion and safety concerns with deep ditches. It had no drainage infrastructure prior to this project! Water from the roadway regularly flooded a local church and Mahoning Road at the bottom of the hill. The solution was simple: break up the water and allow it to infiltrate into neighboring pasture fields. This was a traditional Dirt & Gravel Road project that included 10 new drainage pipes and 2800 tons of road fill (a combination of shale and limestone) to completely restore this section of road. The Township was heavily involved in this project and contributed their time, trucks, grader, and roller to the project and contracted a local excavation company for dozer and excavation services. The District is proud of such local investments that benefit not only the roadway but local streams as well!



Before - deep ditch, low drainage road



During - addition of drainage pipes

DATE OF PROJECT

July 2025

TOTAL PROJECT COST

\$82,608

GRANT SOURCES

DGLVR - \$59,270

IN-KIND SOURCES

South Mahoning Township - \$23,338

PROJECT PARTNERS

South Mahoning Township



After - raised road and improved drainage



INDIANA COUNTY
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Community Outreach

APPLE FESTIVAL

The Indiana County Conservation District's Apple Fest continued its remarkable growth in 2025, welcoming approximately 2,500 attendees for a full day of fall celebration, community engagement, and conservation outreach. What began just a few years ago as a small gathering has quickly become one of our signature annual events, drawing families, local producers, community partners, and residents from across the region.

The event grounds were filled with a diverse mix of local producers, artisans, food vendors, nonprofits, and conservation organizations. Guests explored vendor booths, connected with local businesses, and learned more about agriculture and environmental stewardship in Indiana County. Throughout the day, ICCD staff shared information about conservation programs, volunteer opportunities, and educational initiatives, using Apple Fest as a welcoming and approachable platform to engage with the community.

A major highlight of the 2025 celebration was the live local folk music performed by Mountain Meets the Moon. Their music created a warm, inviting atmosphere that carried throughout the grounds and truly shaped the feel of the event. We are especially grateful to Friends of the Parks for generously funding the band's performance. Their support helped to elevate the event experience and add a memorable cultural element that attendees enjoyed all day long.

The Penns Manor FFA petting zoo was once again a tremendous success and a favorite stop for families.



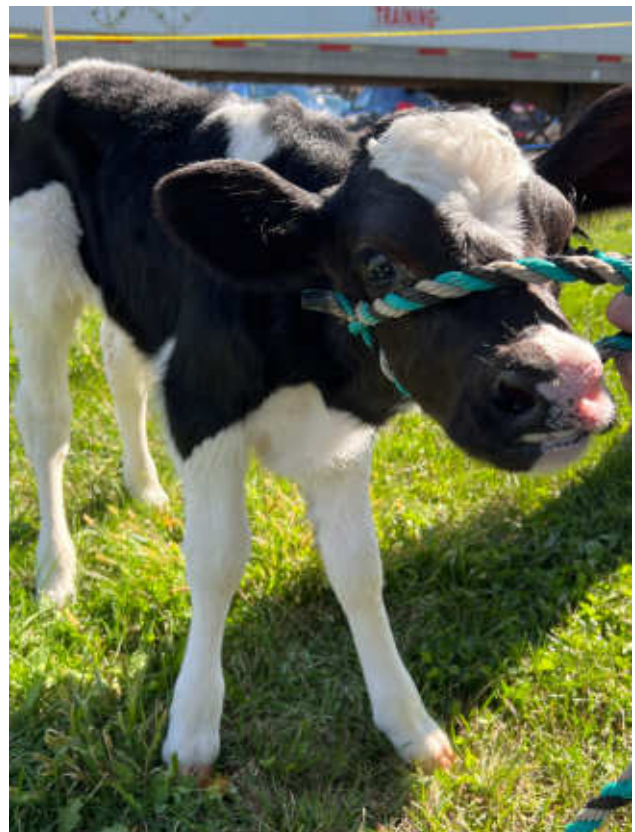
The hands-on animal interactions provided children and adults alike with an opportunity to connect directly with agriculture and livestock in a meaningful and educational way. The Mini Cooper Car Club also joined the celebration, adding a unique and eye-catching feature that brought additional excitement and variety to the festival atmosphere.

Fresh cider pressing, educational displays, open gardens, and conservation conversations filled the day. Apple Fest continues to serve as an important opportunity for ICCD to bring together agriculture, environmental education, and community pride in one accessible and family-friendly setting. The strong turnout and enthusiastic participation in 2025 demonstrate the growing momentum behind this event and its role in strengthening community connections while highlighting the importance of conservation and local agriculture in Indiana County.



**150+ gallons of
homemade cider**
a popular favorite made
fresh at Apple Fest

2,500 attendees
double the number of
previous years!



Community Outreach

FUNDRAISING & GARDEN INITIATIVES

The Indiana County Conservation District (ICCD) continues to expand its community gardening and food access efforts through educational programming and plant sales that support these initiatives. One of the key events supporting this work is ICCD's participation in the Indiana Garden Club's May Mart, a two-day garden expo that brings together local gardeners, plant enthusiasts, and community organizations.

During the event, ICCD sold native flower plugs along with select herb and annual flower plugs grown through the District's greenhouse program. In addition to serving as a fundraiser, the event provided an opportunity to educate community members about the importance of planting native species and the role they play in supporting pollinators, improving habitat, and strengthening local ecosystems.



1,300 lbs
of produce
donated to Chevy
Chase and ICCAP



Volunteers and District employees donating produce to ICCAP





Through conversations with visitors, ICCD staff were able to share guidance on native plant gardening while building support for the District's broader conservation and community initiatives.

Proceeds from the plant sale directly support ICCD's Growing for Good Health program and its community garden and food donation efforts. Vegetables grown in District's garden plots and the high tunnel are donated to local food banks, kitchens, and community organizations, thereby increasing access to fresh, healthy food throughout Indiana County. In 2025, ICCD donated approximately 1,300 pounds of fresh produce grown through these gardens.

Beyond food production, these spaces also serve as outdoor classrooms where community members, volunteers, and students can learn about gardening, soil health, pollinators, and sustainable food systems. Native plant meadows and flower borders incorporated throughout the gardens provide valuable habitat for pollinators and beneficial insects, supporting healthy ecosystems while demonstrating conservation practices that residents can replicate in their own landscapes.

\$2,000
in donations raised during
May Mart to support our
greenhouse and
hightunnel



Through initiatives like May Mart and the continued development of ICCD's gardens, the District is able to strengthen community connections, promote sustainable gardening practices, and improve access to fresh food while supporting the health of Indiana County's natural ecosystems.

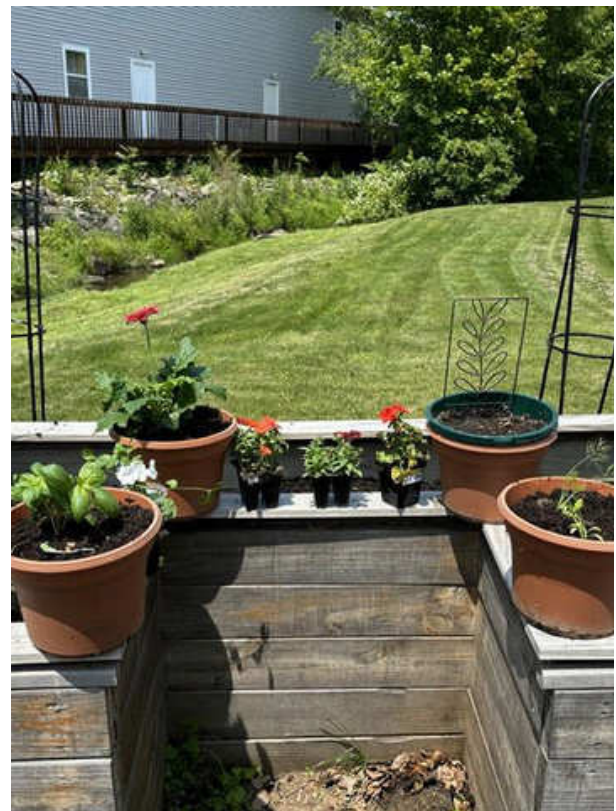
Community Outreach

GROWING FOR GOOD HEALTH

In 2024, the Indiana County Conservation District (ICCD) launched the Growing for Good Health initiative to promote nutrition, wellness, and food security among older adults in Indiana County. Funded in part through a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the program partnered with Aging Services, Adagio Health, and the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank to create hands-on opportunities for seniors to learn about growing and preparing fresh food.

Accessible raised garden beds were installed at the Chestnut, Mahoning, and Indiana Social Centers, creating welcoming spaces where participants could garden together while learning about food access, planting techniques, and healthy cooking. The program was delivered as a three-part series that included education on local food resources, hands-on planting and garden maintenance with ICCD educators, and nutrition and cooking demonstrations led by Adagio Health. These sessions helped participants gain confidence in growing their own food while also highlighting the physical, mental, and social benefits of gardening.

Due to the strong response from participants and partners, ICCD continued supporting and planting the gardens in 2025 while offering additional workshops and educational opportunities at the sites in partnership with community organizations.



Start of season - Raised beds at the Indiana Aging Services

The program is grounded in a simple idea captured by the well-known saying, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Rather than only providing food, Growing for Good Health focuses on teaching participants how to grow it themselves, building long-term skills that support healthier lifestyles, stronger communities, and a deeper connection to local food systems.

Building on the success of the original program, ICCD is now working to expand Growing for Good Health beyond Aging Services. Future efforts aim to increase access to gardens and food system education throughout Indiana County by supporting gardens at schools, community gardens, and other community spaces. By combining gardening education with access to fresh food, ICCD hopes to strengthen community connections, improve nutrition, and help residents better understand the relationship between healthy food, healthy environments, and healthy communities.



Growing season - Raised beds at the Indiana Aging Services

Education

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Each summer, the Indiana County Conservation District (ICCD) partners with local organizations to provide hands-on environmental education opportunities for youth across the county. Through a variety of summer camps and youth programs, ICCD introduces students to conservation, agriculture, and natural resource topics while encouraging curiosity about the environment and potential career paths.

One of ICCD's largest summer education efforts is our partnership with Respective Solutions Group's summer camp program. During the summer, ICCD staff traveled to Purchase Line and Forest Hills School Districts for ten weeks, visiting each school once per week to lead conservation-based lessons and activities. These programs reached approximately 120 students each week, ranging from first through eighth grade.



Penns Manor Ag. student volunteers assisting with garden work at ICCD

Lessons focused on topics such as plants, animals, ecology, water quality, and other natural resource concepts, allowing students to explore the environment through hands-on learning and outdoor activities.

ICCD also hosted its Agriculture Career Camp, a four-week program designed to introduce youth to agriculture and environmental career pathways. The camp combines classroom learning at ICCD's Discovery Center with field experiences at local agricultural operations and environmental sites. Students meet with agricultural professionals, tour working farms and businesses, and participate in hands-on activities that highlight the many sectors within agriculture. The program helps students better understand where their food comes from while also exposing them to potential careers in conservation and agriculture.

In addition to these larger programs, ICCD assisted multiple organizations throughout the summer by providing outdoor environmental education and activities for youth programs across the county. Staff worked with groups including local Girl Scout troops, and other community partners, at locations including Yellow Creek State Park, the Chevy Chase Community Center, and community gardens to deliver engaging lessons that connected students with nature and conservation.

Through these summer programs, ICCD continues to expand opportunities for youth to experience environmental education outside the classroom. These camps build a deeper appreciation for natural resources, agriculture, and the importance of conservation in communities by providing participants with hands-on learning experiences.

Education

WINTER SOWING WORKSHOP

In January 2025, the Indiana County Conservation District hosted its first-ever Winter Sowing Workshop, welcoming 38 participants for an engaging and hands-on introduction to native seed starting. As an inaugural event, the strong turnout and enthusiastic participation demonstrated a clear community interest in sustainable gardening and native plant education.

Winter sowing is a simple and effective seed-starting method that uses recycled containers, such as milk jugs, to create miniature greenhouses. Seeds are sown outdoors during the winter months and naturally undergo cold stratification – a process many native species require in order to germinate. By allowing seeds to experience natural temperature fluctuations, snow, and moisture, gardeners can grow strong, resilient plants that are well-adapted to local conditions. The method is low-cost, accessible, and beginner-friendly, making it an excellent introduction to native gardening.

During the workshop, each participant assembled and took home their own winter sowing jug filled with native seeds. Attendees also learned about the ecological importance of native plants, including their role in supporting pollinators, wildlife, and healthy soil systems. Practical growing tips and seed-starting guidance were shared to ensure participants felt confident continuing the process at home.

This event was strengthened through collaboration with local gardeners, Indiana Community Garden, and community garden partners who helped provide native seeds and growing advice. The workshop created space not only for hands-on learning but also for relationship-building among individuals passionate about conservation and community-based gardening.

Our first Winter Sowing Workshop marked an exciting step forward in expanding winter education programming and promoting accessible environmental stewardship in Indiana County.



Participants at the Winter Sowing Workshop



Established winter sowing jugs

Envirothon

JR. ENVIROTHON

One hundred fifteen enthusiastic students competed in the 2025 Junior High Envirothon at Blue Spruce Park. The day was filled with learning and hands-on activities as 23 teams rotated through five stations, where they explored various aspects of the contest theme “Conservation in Agriculture”, and demonstrated their knowledge through a series of challenges and evaluations.

The Soils and Land Use station educated students on how a farmer protects fields from erosion and how to keep soil healthy for crops. At the Aquatics station, students learned how actions on the land affect streams, ponds, and wetlands. Students discovered how pollinators, birds, and mammals play a role in food production and farm health at the Wildlife station. The Forestry station explored trees as a crop and as protection for farmland, providing shade, shelter, and resources. At the Current Issues station, students learned how farmers and communities work together with conservation districts to solve modern challenges.

The competition for seventh and eighth graders included students from Homer Center, Indiana, Marion Center, Penns Manor, Purchase Line, River Valley, and United school districts, and the Homeschoolers for Christ Co-op.

The United Lions White team placed first in the seventh-grade category, followed by Homer Center’s Team 1 in second, and Indiana’s team Red in third.

In the eighth-grade category, a three-way high score was settled via a tie breaker with the Homeschoolers for Christ Co-op securing first place, while Marion Center’s Team A took second, and the United Lions White team placed third.



Students at the soils station



Students at the forestry station

Envirothon

SR. ENVIROTHON

“The skills I acquired as a participant in Envirothon enable me to thrive in my role as an Environmental Health and Safety professional.” As Sophia Naugle’s encouraging testimonial affirms, the Envirothon equips participants with skills that serve them well beyond the competition. Cultivating a desire to learn about the natural world, the Sr. Envirothon also challenges students to think critically about personal impacts and responsibility to the environment.

On a perfect spring day, 125 motivated students met to test their knowledge in natural resources and environmental science during the 39th annual Senior Envirothon. The competition brought together 25 teams of five students each from Homer Center, Indiana, Marion Center, Penns Manor, Purchase Line, River Valley and United High Schools, and the Homeschoolers for Christ Co-op. Teams prepared for months leading up to the event and tackled field-oriented tests in aquatic ecology, forestry, soils and land use, wildlife, and this year’s current issue, “Roots and Resilience: Forest Stewardship, of a Canopy of Change.”

The 2025 event results were: 1st place, Homeschoolers for Christ Co-op; 2nd place, Marion Center’s Bee Hive Five; and 3rd place, Penns Manor’s The Wild Ones. The Homeschoolers for Christ Co-op advanced to represent Indiana County at the Pennsylvania State Envirothon where they placed 5th in the competition featuring county champions from across the Commonwealth.

The Envirothon competition creates a lasting impression for all who participate, inspiring local students and fostering the next generation of conservations leaders.



Student participants at Sr. Envirothon

Envirothon

DAVID S. FRICK EDUCATION GRANT

“These scholarship funds were incredibly helpful as I finished my journey as a high school student and transitioned to college-living and a rigorous course load at university. This support not only lightened the financial burden of pursuing my education but also motivated me to continue striving toward my academic and professional goals. Knowing that others believed in my potential from a young age means more than I can express. Thank you for investing in my future and giving me the opportunity to focus on learning, growing, and making a positive impact. Your generosity truly made a difference. Today, I serve in the manufacturing industry as an Environmental Health & Safety professional. The skills I acquired as a participant of Envirothon allow me to thrive and explore new aspects of my role from the environmental perspective; specifically, I hone the skills for water, air, and chemical testing within my facility, guaranteeing a safe, comfortable work environment for our team members! Thank you, Envirothon!”

~Sophia Naugle- Former Indiana County Envirothon winner~

Each year all five members of the winning Sr. Envirothon team each earn a \$500 grant for higher education expenses. The grants are funded by donations from local businesses, conservation organizations, and private citizens. You can invest in our future conservation leaders by donating online at the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies website.

Thank you to our 2025 contributors: Susan Bowers, Bankson Engineers, InFirst Bank, S & S Screen Printing, Blacklick Creek Watershed Association, J.H. Hickman Surveying/MECALL Services LLC, HRG, Indiana Garden Club, Ken Sink Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Duncan Financial Group, Lias Tire, Bonni Dunlap, Keller Engineers, Dilltown Sportsman's Club, Joe and Arlene Yackuboskey, Crooked Creek Watershed Association, and Hunter Overdorff.



SCAN TO DONATE



First-place recipients of the 2025 Sr. Envirothon Scholarship



INDIANA COUNTY FOOD SYSTEMS PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

The Indiana County Food Systems Planning and Development Project began in 2025 with the goal of strengthening the local food economy while advancing equitable economic opportunity, food security, health, and community well-being. The project is working toward the development of a Farm Stop, Food Business Incubator, and Teaching Farm to support farmers, food entrepreneurs, and the broader community through a more integrated and collaborative regional food system.

To support this effort, ICCD partnered with Rural Support Partners, a national leader in rural economic development and food systems planning, to develop a comprehensive strategic and business plan. ICCD also partnered with the Indiana County Technology and Entrepreneurship Center (TEC), which brings expertise in business development, marketing, digital infrastructure, and community engagement.

In 2025, the project focused on laying the groundwork through community outreach, stakeholder engagement, and a comprehensive food systems feasibility study. The study examined the regional food system from an ecosystem perspective, including supply, demand, transportation and logistics, and institutional readiness and alignment. ICCD and its partners conducted extensive outreach, engaging more than 30 producers, surveying over 200 consumers, and consulting with more than 20 institutional and advisory partners.



Swine operation at an Indiana County Farm

This work resulted in a feasibility report identifying key opportunities, challenges, and priorities for strengthening the regional food system through cross-sector partnerships, expanded infrastructure, and increased support for local producers and food businesses.

This project will continue work into 2026 by completing strategic and business planning while beginning early implementation through pilot programs, pursuing funding, and formalizing partnerships.

DATE OF PROJECT

April 2025 - ongoing

TOTAL PROJECT COST

\$57,000

IN-KIND SOURCES

Indiana County Conservation District - \$3,000
Indiana County Technology and Entrepreneurship Center - \$10,000

GRANT SOURCES

PDA Innovation - \$10,000
Pitcairn-Crabbe Foundation - \$20,000
Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank Impact - \$10,000
Collective Impact Initiative Working Group Stipend - \$4,000

PROJECT PARTNERS

Indiana County Technology and Entrepreneurship Center, Rural Support Partners (Strategic Planning Firm), Indiana Regional Medical Center, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana Borough, Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank, Indiana Farmers Market, Indiana Community Garden, Adagio Health, Indiana County Community Action Plan, and Indiana County Schools



Fat Raddish Farm, Indiana County



PERMITTING



CHAPTER 102 & NPDES

In accordance with the Pennsylvania Clean Streams Law (Title 25, Chapter 102), individuals and entities conducting earth disturbance activities are required to develop, implement, and maintain best management practices (BMPs) to effectively minimize erosion and sedimentation during and after construction activities.

The Indiana County Conservation District (ICCD) operates under a Level II delegation from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to administer the Erosion and Sediment (E&S) Pollution Control Program. Through this delegation, ICCD is responsible for reviewing E&S Control Plans, conducting site inspections, responding to complaints, and processing permit applications in coordination with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).

The NPDES program is a federally mandated program requiring permits for construction activities that disturb one acre or more. These permit applications are reviewed by the District as part of its delegated responsibilities. NPDES permits are issued under three categories: PAG-01, PAG-02, and Individual Permits, with PAG-02 and Individual Permits representing the majority of applications received by ICCD.

CHAPTER 102 ACTIVITY

- Total Plan Acres – 8,846
- Total Disturbed Acres – 5,450
- E&S Plan Review Fees – \$8,700
- District Disturbed Acre Fees - \$571,900
- PAG-02 NPDES Permits Issued/Reviewed – 18
- Individual NPDES Permits Issued/Reviewed – 5
- Total Site Inspections - 66



Example of Compost Filter Sock (CFS) not properly installed on a logging site

A key distinction between these permit types is that the DEP retains responsibility for acknowledgment and Post-Construction Stormwater Management (PCSM) review for Individual Permits, as these projects are located within High Quality or Exceptional Value watersheds.

In 2025, 11 E&S plans were reviewed for projects that were disturbing less than one acre. ICCD reviewed a total of 18 PAG-02 permits (including new and amendment applications) and five individual permits. Some projects that required NPDES permits include Jimmy Stewart Airport, Homer City Dollar General, Rura Field, 25621 US 119 over SR 8001 NB/SB, Heilwood Mitigation Project, Homer City Generation Power Block Phase 1, and IUP Demolition of Obsolete & Underutilized Buildings.



WATERSHEDS

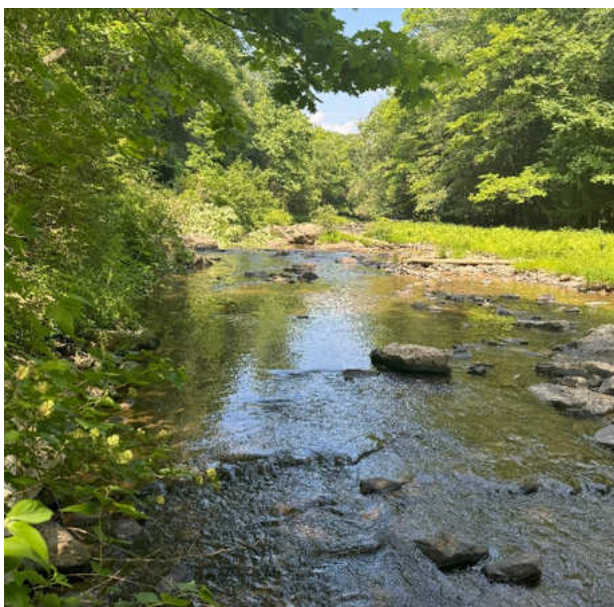
Watershed Projects

LITTLE MAHONING STREAMBANK STABILIZATION - PHASE 1

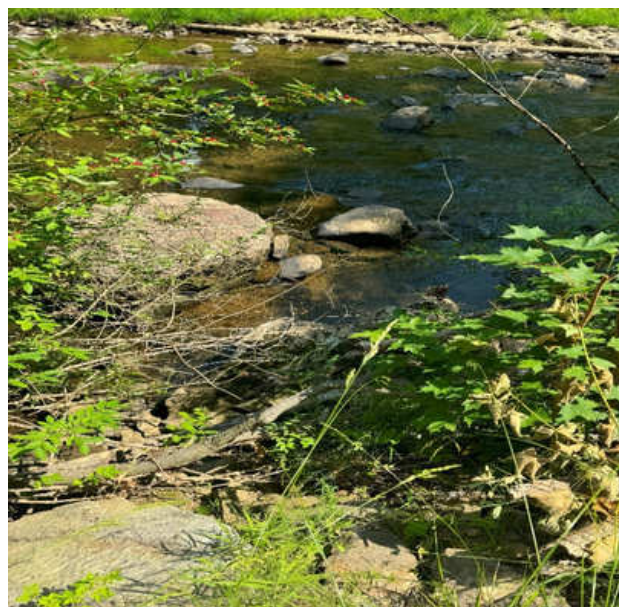
The Little Mahoning Streambank Stabilization Phase I Project proposes to install streambank stabilization and fish habitat best management practices along Little Mahoning Creek. This project aims to stabilize an eroding streambank and improve in-stream habitat on a section of Little Mahoning Creek, located upstream of Mahoning Creek Lake. This section of Little Mahoning Creek (High Quality – Cold Water Fishery) is stocked annually by PA Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) and Ken Sink Chapter of Trout Unlimited (KSTU). The project will restore approximately 1,040 feet of streambank on a publicly accessible stream located along East Creek Road in Rochester Mills. This project is the first of three phases with the intent of applying for subsequent rounds of Growing Greener funds to install more structures upstream.

A total of 10 log and rock devices are planned to be installed according to PFBC standard drawings. These structures include deflectors and vanes that will centralize stream flow, increase scour pools, stabilize eroding streambanks, and enhance fish habitat. This project will stabilize a section of eroding streambank adjacent to East Creek Road, protecting road infrastructure.

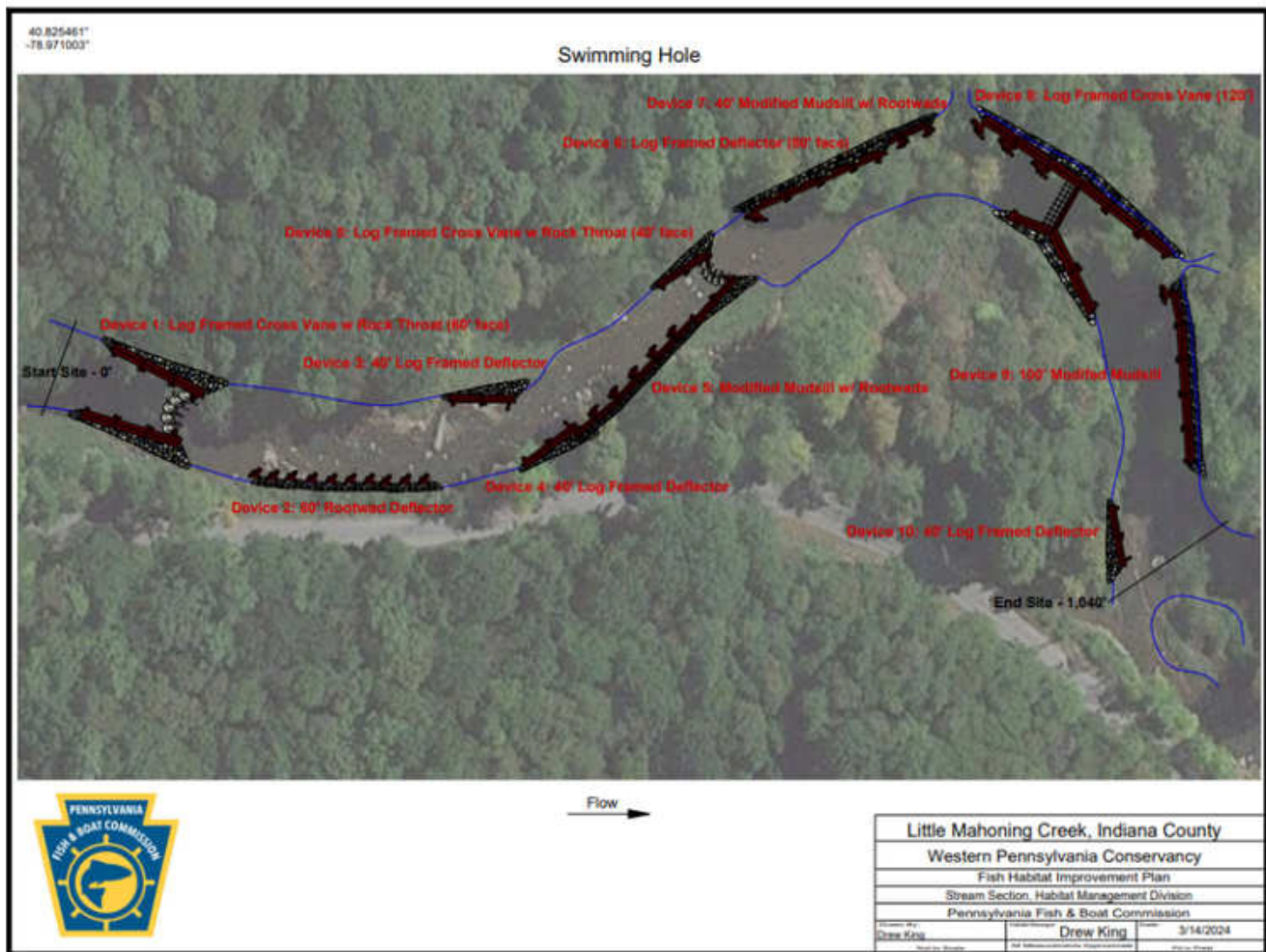
This project will not only improve in-stream habitat for aquatic organisms, but also reduce nutrient and sediment loads to Mahoning Creek Lake and a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' flood mitigation dam downstream of the lake. This project expects to reduce sediment loads of 59.8 tons/year, nitrogen loads by 200 pounds/year, and phosphorous loads by 181 pounds/year (Model My Watershed).



Little Mahoning Creek, looking upstream



Steep, eroding streambank from the edge of the road



Project designs overlayed onto project site map

DATE OF PROJECT

January 2025 - ongoing

TOTAL PROJECT COST

\$206,935

GRANT SOURCES

DEP Growing Greener - \$175,336

IN-KIND SOURCES

Indiana County Pennsylvania Senior

Environmental Corps - \$4,882

Indiana County Conservation District - \$7,477

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy - \$7,200

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission - \$12,040

PROJECT PARTNERS

Indiana County PaSEC, Western Pennsylvania
Conservancy, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat
Commission

Watershed Projects

LUCERNE 3A WATERWORKS PASSIVE TREATMENT SYSTEM

The Lucerne 3A/Waterworks Passive Treatment System project was started back in 2020 to replace an existing lime-dosing silo that was installed to treat acidic mine water from the Lucerne 3A mine discharge. The site is located at the Waterworks Conservation Area with the discharge draining directly into Two Lick Creek. With the silo ineffective, ICCD determined that a new passive treatment system would need to be constructed to properly treat this discharge impacting Two Lick Creek.

After some roadblocks, the project continued into 2024, when construction could occur after the acquisition of additional funding. The system consists of the raw mine water flowing equally into two vertical flow ponds lined with limestone medium to neutralize the acidic water. This allows for any dissolved iron in the water to precipitate out and become trapped in a polishing wetland. Lastly, before eventually flowing into Two Lick Creek, the treated water goes through a final limestone channel to catch any remaining metals and to ensure neutral pH water before combining with the stream water.

ICCD performed three sampling events in the first half of 2025 to confirm the efficacy of the new system at each step. The passive treatment system has proven effective at improving water quality at the Lucerne 3A discharge. Monitoring indicates that the system is reducing iron by 8.50 lbs/day, aluminum by 8.45 lbs/day, manganese by 0.13 lbs/day, and acidity by 167.10 lbs/day, while increasing alkalinity by 41.76 lbs/day. pH levels have improved significantly, rising from 2.75 at the influent to 7.2 at the effluent, and conductivity has decreased from 1,418 to 1,170.5 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$. These improvements demonstrate the system's success in neutralizing acidity and reducing metal loading to Two Lick Creek.

Additionally, the location of this system provides educational opportunities about the impact of legacy mining for Indiana County youth and community members and the steps that ICCD is taking to provide solutions.



Before - aerial view of original limestone silo

DATE OF PROJECT

December 2020 - December 2024

TOTAL PROJECT COST

\$663,292.65

PROJECT PARTNERS

BioMost Inc., Ken Sink Trout Unlimited, Armstrong Conservation District and PMSC AmeriCorps

IN-KIND SOURCES

BioMost Inc. - \$11,936.65
Indiana County Conservation District - \$15,700
Ken Sink Trout Unlimited - \$7,641
PMSC AmeriCorps - \$37,000
Armstrong County Conservation District - \$1,500

GRANT SOURCES

DEP Growing Greener - \$491,515
Foundation for PA Watersheds - \$18,000
Office of Surface Mining Watershed Cooperative Agreement Program - \$80,000



After - Flow splitting box



After - treatment wetland



After - one of two vertical ponds

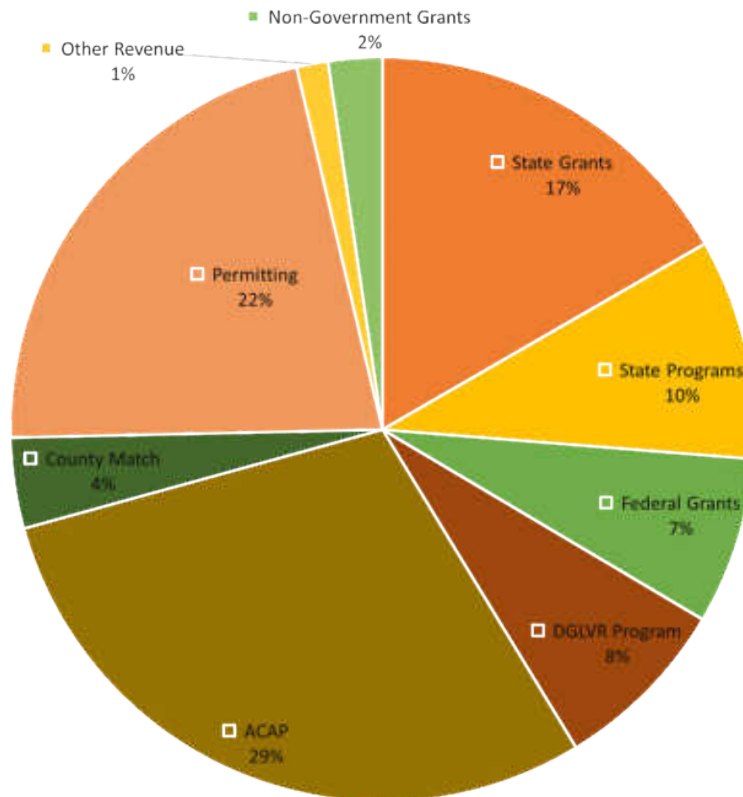


After - limestone outlet to Two Lick Creek



FINANCIAL REPORT

DISTRICT INCOME

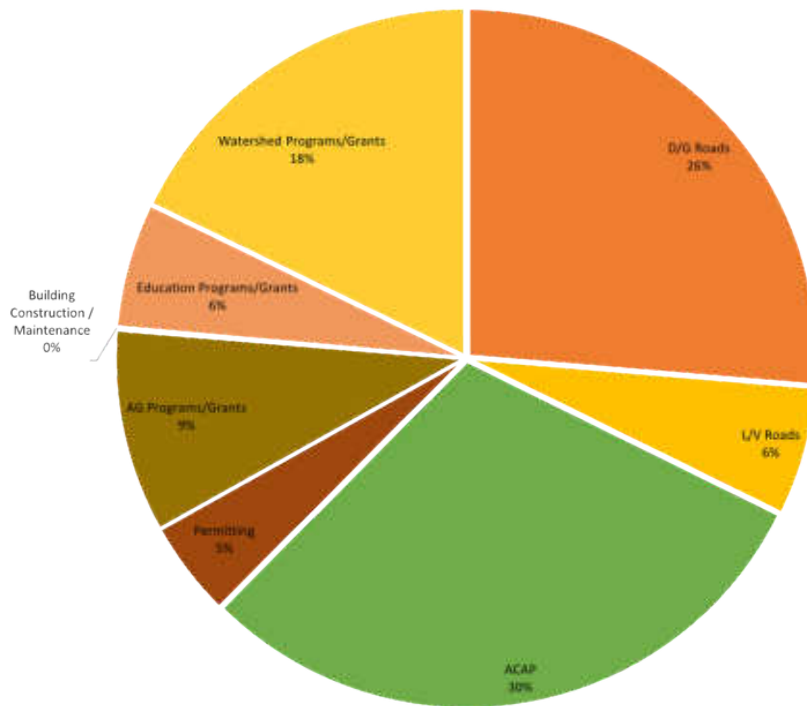


The District brought in over \$2.89 million in funds from outside of the county comprised of money from various foundations, state and federal programs, and grants. This money directly benefits Indiana County residents through implemented conservation projects and programs.

Every \$1.00 of county funds brought in \$24.51 in matching funds from state and federal programs that would otherwise not have benefited the county. This is a 2451% return on investment.

In 2025, the Indiana County Conservation District's investment of \$1,376,740.72 in locally awarded engineering and construction contracts for conservation projects is estimated to generate approximately \$2.16 million in total economic output within Indiana County. This significant economic activity, which includes direct, indirect, and induced effects, is also projected to support approximately 13 job-years and \$537,000 in labor income for the county. These figures underscore the dual benefit of our conservation efforts, not only enhancing our natural resources, but also strengthening our local economy.

DISTRICT EXPENSES



In 2025, the Indiana County Conservation District secured over \$650,000 in grant funding, advancing critical conservation projects, infrastructure improvements, and community-focused environmental initiatives across Indiana County.

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

\$2.89 million
in funds brought
to the district

\$24.51 match
for every \$1 of
county funds

\$2.16 million
in economic
investment for
Indiana County



WHO WE ARE - 2025 STAFF & BOARD



Staff: Douglas Beri Jr., Tammie Robinson, Blake Mauthe, Mackenzie Marbain, Marisa Matlin, Rebecca Caldwell, Nancy Clawson, Joece Lynn, Brooke Russick (not pictured: Benjamin Wenger, Alexis Shank)



Directors: Craig Andrie, Gregg VanHorn, Commissioner Sherene Hess, Janis Long, Barbara Peace, Aaron Simpson (not pictured: Cindy Rogers)



Associate Directors: Tom Beresnyak, Charles Flinn, Doyle Freeman, Hunter Overdorff (not pictured: Nathan McNutt, Alysha Trexler)



Partners: Ned Kimmel (PA Game Commission, Group Supervisor), Tom Beresnyak and Stephen Campbell (Penn State Extension), Ariel Coleman (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service), Mason Frumkin (PA Game Commission Warden)



INDIANA COUNTY
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Indiana County Conservation District
435 Hamill Road
Indiana, PA 15701

Contact us:

724-471-4751
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2026 Personnel

Board of Directors

Sherene Hess, Chairperson / Commissioner
Barb Peace, Vice Chair/Rural Member
Aaron Simpson, Treasurer/Rural Member
Craig Andrie, Rural Member
Janis Long, Public Member
Cindy Rogers, Public Member
Gregg VanHorn, Rural Member

Associate Directors

Tom Beresnyak
Charles Flinn
Doyle Freeman
Nathan McNutt
Hunter Overdorff
John Somonick
Alysha Trexler

District Staff

Douglas M. Beri Jr., Executive Director
Brooke Russick, Conservation Program Manager
Tammie Robinson, Office Administrator
Tiffany Wirick, Office Administrator
Marisa Matlin, Conservation Program Specialist
Adelaide Aberle, Conservation Program Specialist
Nathan Edwards, Conservation Program Specialist
Blake Mauthe, Conservation Program Specialist
Alexis Shank, Conservation Program Specialist
Nancy Clawson, Office Assistant
Rebecca Caldwell, PMSC AmeriCorps Member
Lee Dunlap, PMSC AmeriCorps Member

