

Jasper County Soil and Water Conservation District Late Fall and Early Winter Newsletter

Written by JCSWCD Staff: Joshua Kesling and Cayci Lane



Happy Early January, All

This correspondence marks the first time you will formally hear from Joshua Kesling and Cayci Lane in newsletter form! We are both new Jasper County SWCD staff members, and we are eager to come aboard to this new and lively community. Both of us are passionate about soil and water conservation in our county, and although we pilot unique projects, services, programs, and resources, we complement one another and the mission of our district. One of our most meaningful collaborations involves the Lower Kankakee Watershed Initiative, commonly known as the LKWI. This watershed-scale conservation and monitoring initiative involves consistent collaboration between the Jasper and Newton County SWCDs. In addition to this initiative, two other grants we consistently pull on for landowners include free garden and yard scale soil sampling and invasive species removals.

For a little more context, Cayci is the District Coordinator and Treasurer, and she brings a wealth of agricultural-specific, local knowledge to our team. Besides maintaining the financial health of our district, she engages in grant-writing, fund-raising, cost-share participation coordinating, and invasive species conservation planning. Joshua is the Watershed Specialist and Applied Ecologist, and he spends most of his time visiting both urban and rural landowners. With these landowners, Joshua works to fold conservation practices into various operations. He prepares management plans for ditch, yard, woodland, prairie, wetland, pond, and stream systems. Joshua also crafts grants, raises funds, and educates students and adults through different media. Collaboration is key in our office, and we certainly find that co-operating projects results in richer products for our community!

We thoroughly enjoyed getting to know many of you during the summer and fall, while also holding conversations about the role our SWCD plays in the greater conservation movement. Since starting this late summer, we have held several unique outreach events, in addition to our standard site-visiting, office chats, and digital messaging.



This summer and fall, we assisted Arrowhead Country RC&D with their annual river rafting (moments before launching our raft) program at Tippecanoe River State Park. During this program, we worked with students and delivered educational materials facing rivers, forests, and freshwater flora and fauna. One of the educational highlights included when we taught students about some of the different macrophyte (water plants) species that occupy unique deep and nearshore river zones. The students loved American Pondweed! Both Cayci and Josh learned a lot from the county staff (and the river ecosystem) during their first expedition, and they thank everyone for their patience as we entered this new community.



In the later Fall, we also participated in a Halloween outreach event. We enjoyed handing out candy and educational materials to families at Rensselaer Central High School. Around this same time, our assistance with the newly reinstated Jasper County Weed Control Board ramped up, and we began compiling invasive plant species management information. The JCSWCD and the JCWCB exist in a conservation partnership, and we collaborate to position the community toward native ecosystem health and resilience through the management of invasive plant species.



One of our most popular conservation practices includes the use of cover crops (cereal rye above). As many of you know, cover crops prevent erosion of topsoil, stabilize cropland, retain or grab vital nutrients, draw pollinators, and in some cases, provide unique habitat areas for wildlife. Our district works with landowners through several different grants to either partially or fully finance these project types. One of these grants includes LKWI, which is an initiative to pull on diverse conservation practices for watershed and landscape health. We are in our second year of the LKWI grant with Newton County, and yes, we have remaining funding for urban and rural landowners spread throughout our priority zone (image attached below). Another grant allowed us to fund cover crop practices via airplane or drone use. Namely, Drop-Your-Crop, we worked with farmers interested in flying on their cover crop seed. Please reach out to our team if you recently cover cropped via an air method! Please contact Joshua Kesling at (219) 869-8216 or e-mail jaspercountysoilandwater@gmail.com for additional information on some of the qualifying urban and rural practices!

As we commence our 2026 activities, we draw your attention to an exciting event. We look forward to hosting our annual meeting on February 24th at 5:00 PM CT at Embers Venue. This inviting venue is situated in downtown Rensselaer, and we open our arms to all interested Jasper County attendees. On another short note, we are still accepting sponsors for this year's event, so if you or anyone you know is interested in sponsoring, please reach out to us before the close of the working day on January 16th. Of course, if you do not reside in Jasper County and still want to sponsor a portion of the event, you are more than welcome to join us in Rensselaer.

The event is free, and we will hear from one of Indiana's most seasoned conservationists, Dawn Slack, from the State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management. We will learn about the state of invasive plant species and management considerations in our state, and there will be plenty of opportunities to ask questions! Please stay tuned for more information regarding our annual meeting in the next couple of weeks. You will receive our flyer shortly.

Joshua's contact information: (219) 869-8216

Cayci's contact information: (219) 869-8194

E-mail: jaspercountysoilandwater@gmail.com