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# CONSERVATION TIMES

Spring 2008



**Taylorville Wins Envirothon!**  
Pictured from left to right: Mary Dawson, Meleah Ofarcik, Christopher Burnett, Jessica Stout, Eddie Kahle, Abbie Meads, Cody Bailey, Angie Meads.



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Our local Land Use Council 9 Envirothon Competition was held on March 13, 2008, at the Bridgeview Park Building in Chatham, Illinois. Students competed in 5 areas: forestry, wildlife, aquatics, soils and a current issue that changes each year. Local Soil and Water Districts and Land Use Councils, in conjunction with partnership organizations and educators, organize local competitions. Five member teams, representing High Schools from Auburn, Gillespie, Lutheran, Staunton, Taylorville, and Rochester participated in this year's LUC 9 Envirothon competition.

This year, the winning team was Taylorville High School. The Taylorville Envirothon team consisted of: Meleah Ofarcik, Christopher Burnett, Jessica Stout, Eddie Kahle, Abbie Meads, Cody Bailey, and Angie Meads. The Taylorville High School Envirothon team will advance to the Illinois Envirothon competition on May 7 and 8, 2008, at the 4-H Memorial Camp in Monticello, Illinois. The winner of the state competition will represent Illinois at the National Canon Envirothon 2008 competition on July 28 – August 1 at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona.



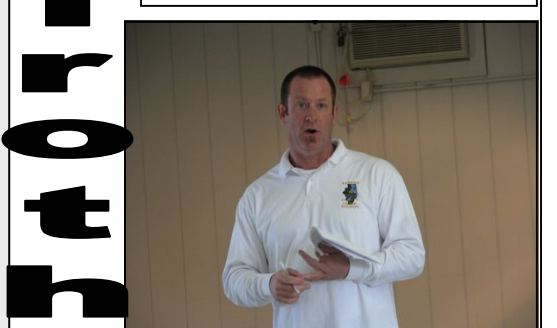
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**Mike Chandler**  
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**NOVEMBER 2008**

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# The Illinois Natural Areas Inventory Update

The Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) was a major project conducted during the mid-1970s with funding provided by the Illinois Department of Conservation. The scale of the INAI was unprecedented at the time because it was the first state-wide natural resources inventory in the United States. More than 200 staff and volunteers participated in the project. The three principal results of the INAI were the development of a natural community classification system, the grading of the quality of natural areas, and an inventory of the remaining high-quality natural areas in the state.

During the past three decades the database of areas in the INAI has been kept up to date; however, some areas have been destroyed, and some areas have since been identified that were missed by the original inventory or that were only recognized as worthy of protection as we learned more about Illinois' original landscapes. Consequently, it has been decided to do an update of the INAI taking advantage of new technologies and the most recent scientific data concerning natural areas.

An INAI Update was initiated on June 1, 2007. The INAI Update will systematically screen the entire state to find, evaluate, classify, and map natural areas. While it will use twenty-first century technology—remote sensing, Geographic Information Systems, and digital imaging—all sites will be visited by ecologists where landowner permission is granted. There is no substitute for on-the-ground experts making the final judgments on the overall quality of a natural community.

Because of its unique geographic location, Illinois has within its borders an unusually large variety of plants, animals, and habitats, and we have significant remnants of most of the nearly 100 habitat types that existed in Illinois before European settlement. Often existing only as tiny islands within developed landscapes.

Finding and documenting these islands of natural habitat has been a relatively long-term project in Illinois, beginning with the formation of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) in 1963. The major aim of the INPC is to protect "high-quality" examples of the natural features (habitats) found in the state. In order to do this, two things were needed: a way to find all these remnant natural communities and provide information on them, such as location and size; and a detailed classification

system to rate the quality of these natural communities to prioritize efforts for their preservations. At the time the original INAI was completed in the late 1970s, a total of 1,089 sites were included, covering 25,723 acres. This represented only 0.07% of *all* the land area of Illinois. A total of 99 of the 102 counties in Illinois had at least one site, but areas were concentrated in the extreme ends of the state.

Why all this fuss about finding and registering natural areas? Philosophically, humans value their heritage. We celebrate the lives of figures like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. We preserve historic landmarks associated with their activities. We name streets, buildings, libraries, and other public institutions after them. Land is also a valued commodity in our society, especially farmland, as we see it rapidly disappearing under the pressures of suburban development; but what about our natural heritage—the forests, prairies, and wetlands that greeted Illinois' settlers? Should these not also have a high value in our society?

Perhaps the answer begins with another question. What sets the Earth apart from the other planets in our solar system, perhaps from all other planets in our galaxy? The answer is simple—life—an amazing and bewildering variety of life that we call *biodiversity*. From the ocean depths to the highest mountain peaks, the Earth is enveloped in a mantle of living organisms in a variety of natural habitats. This biological diversity is the most important, yet least understood, of all natural resources. Our diverse species provides most of the life-support materials upon which we ultimately rely. Each species is unique, "a magic well of eons-old genetic information"—information that we humans cannot afford to be without. Every species that is lost reduces the options for nature—and for us—to respond to a continually changing environment.

Fortunately, Illinois retains wonderful remnants of its native habitat and biological diversity. The INAI Update will ensure that this biological heritage, a priceless resource for all Illinois citizens, continues to persist, and even thrive, into the future. For more information about the INAI Update, contact Dr. Deanna Glosser, 217-629-8949 or [dglosser@insightbb.com](mailto:dglosser@insightbb.com) or visit the INAI Update website at <http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/inai/>.



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## Christian County Farm Bureau Legislative Reception



February 7, 2008  
One-East Market Inc  
5:30-7:30 pm



**Christian County Soil and Water Conservation District was given the opportunity to tell Legislators and Farm Bureau lobbyists about Illinois Soil and Water Conservation District funding issues.**

## Illinois Regional Budget Hearings



Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives, Michael Madigan, announced that the House would hold a series of public hearings regarding the Illinois state budget. The 19 hearings are designed to give private citizens the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns regarding the \$59 million budget. Before they can begin work on next year's budget, lawmakers and the governor have to make difficult decisions to close a deficit projected to be \$750 million for the fiscal year ending June 30. With that challenge in mind, the Illinois House of Representatives held a regional budget hearing to give social service providers, local governments, health care facilities, school districts, colleges, labor unions, business groups and civic organizations an opportunity to offer their views on funding priorities. Lawmakers' goal is to increase transparency in the state budget process and encourage greater citizen participation. Representatives from Soil and Water Conservation Districts across the state attended these meetings to make legislators aware that we have not received our full money allocation and many Soil and Water Conservation Districts may have to close in the near future.





The Illinois Soil and Water Conservation District Legislative Breakfast was held on April 3rd, 2008 at 7:30 am. It was held at the Conservatory at the Inn at 835 in Springfield. Senator Frank C. Watson, Senate Republican Leader, graciously gave a lively, Legislative update and urged the Governor to release the Illinois Soil and Water Conservation District Funds!

**Legislators Urge Governor to Release Soil & Water Conservation District Funds at Press Conference after Legislative Breakfast**

Springfield, IL—With Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) across Illinois facing new financial hardships, State Representative David Reis (R-Willow Hill) and the Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, alongside a bi-partisan group of legislators, are urging Governor Blagojevich to release the remaining Fiscal Year 2008 SWCD funds.

The FY 08 State Budget appropriated \$7.4 million for SWCD operational expenses and \$6.0 million for the Partners for Conservation Program (formerly Conservation 2000) through the Department of Agriculture. As of April 1, only \$1.7 million of the \$7.4 million appropriation has been released to SWCDs and none of the \$6.0 million appropriated for the Conservation Practices Program has been released.

Last month, Representative David Reis and fellow legislators sent a letter to the Governor asking him to immediately release the remaining funds for SWCDs. Representative Reis is deeply concerned that SWCDs will be forced to close if the funds are not released.

“Our Soil and Water Conservation Districts are in a dire financial situation,” Reis said. “Many Districts will have to consider laying-off staff or closing their doors if the remaining funds are not released. That would hurt conservation efforts and negatively impact our farmers and families throughout Illinois.”

State Senator John O. Jones (R-Mt. Vernon) echoed the concerns of Representative Reis.

“Our local Soil and Water Conservation Districts need to know when their funds are going to be released. If they do not have the state funds released soon, many of our local SWCDs will be forced to shut down their offices,” Jones said. “This is just another example of the Governor playing political football with crucial downstate agricultural programs.”

Richard Nichols, Executive Director of the Association of Illinois Soil & Water Conservation Districts, discussed the importance of the Districts to Illinois. “One of the very important things Soil and Water Conservation Districts do is assist in the application of conservation practices to agricultural and urban lands that reduce storm water runoff, thereby reducing flooding,” Nichols said. “The loss of funding for staff and programs will severely impact the ability to provide this important benefit for the people of Illinois.”

Illinois’ 98 SWCDs, and their approximately 250 employees, represent the state’s frontline in protecting rivers, streams, and other water sources against contamination from urban storm water and agricultural chemicals and sediment. SWCDs assist in delivering programs that prevent erosion from urban development and tillable soil that threatens Illinois’ agricultural economy and the sustainability of surface water supplies. The investment of State funds in the operational expenses of SWCDs ensures the distribution to Illinois of about \$250 million from the federal farm bill and other sources.

The bi-partisan group of legislators has filed House Resolution 1127, which urges the Governor to immediately release the remaining \$5.75 million for SWCDs and the \$6.0 million for the Conservation Practices Program.

Many other Legislators attended the Statehouse press conference to show their support for Soil and Water Conservation Districts and HR 1127. These included State Representatives Mike Bost, Rich Brauer, Sandy Cole, Shane Cultra, Lisa Dugan, Roger Eddy, Bob Flider, Careen Gordon, Bill Mitchell, Jerry Mitchell, Brandon Phelps, Raymond Poe, Dan Reitz, Mike Smith, Jil Tracy and Patrick Berschoore.



Terry Davis, AISWCD President



Christian and Montgomery Co. SWCD employees and Chairmen



Representative Roger David Reis (R-Willow Hill)



Montgomery and Christian Co. SWCD Chairmen visit Rep. Hannig

The 2008 Illinois state budget was approved by the Illinois General Assembly and signed by the Governor. It contained \$7.5 million in operation funds for 98 Illinois SWCDs and \$6.0 million for cost-share program funds. *The grant money which funds the local Soil and Water District is tied up in the current fiscal year 2008 State Budget.* The funds are currently held by the Office of Management and Budget awaiting the Governor’s authorization for release. Presently, the Governor has only released \$1.7 million of the total \$7.6 million in the approved state budget. Of the amount released, each Soil and Water Conservation District has only received \$14,129.27. The Soil and Water Districts DO NOT have taxing authority and therefore must rely on the state as their primary sources of funding.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts deliver or assist in delivering programs for the Illinois Department of Agriculture, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, county government, municipal government, organizations such as Pheasants Forever, the National Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks Unlimited and many others. These programs contribute in excess of 200 million dollars annually to the state’s economy as well as provide needed services to Illinois’ citizens.

The Christian County SWCD provides a multitude of program and activities to all citizens of the county not just landowners and farmers. This includes such things as soils and topographic maps; tree and fish sales; flags; newsletters to producers, farmers, landowners, agribusinesses and legislators; contractor’s and no-till meetings; field days; Natural Resource Inventory Reports; Lake Taylorville projects; and sponsors as well as helps host an Envirothon competition for a 5 county area. The employees of the Christian County SWCD are active in the Christian County Ag Group, Christian County Ag Literacy, Christian County Soil Savers, Christian County Fair and Ag Appreciation Dinner, The Dudley Smith Initiative, Lower Sangamon River RC&D (Resource Conservation and Development), and Lower Sangamon Valley Ecosystem Partnership (LSVP).

The Soil and Water Conservation District offices promote several, new programs that are introduced every year. In Christian County, the Landowner’s Incentive Program (LIP) allows landowners in the Lower Sangamon River Watershed to manage their land for species in greatest need of conservation. In addition, the Christian County SWCD offers assistance with the Illinois Carbon Credit Initiative (ICCI), which is a joint project of the State of Illinois and the Delta Institute that allows landowners to earn greenhouse gas emissions credits for conservation tillage, grass, or trees. Equipment rental such as a Kinzie 3600 12/23 planter or tree planter are also available at the Christian County SWCD office.

In 2006 and 2007, the Christian County SWCD provided county landowners with \$93,055.82 of funding for water control basins (WASCOB’s), waterways, grade stabilization structures, and terrace projects through the State Cost-Share, Conservation Practices Program. We currently have a list of Christian County landowners waiting to take advantage of the CPP program. We also administer the State Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in Christian County, which is a unique, state program that is a voluntary incentive based program which targets environmental problems of highly erodible land and land in the floodplain of the Illinois River Basin. The Christian County SWCD currently holds a total of 42 CREP easements on 3,421.74 acres of land in Christian County that can be valued at approximately \$5.5 million dollars.

There are 2 months left in the fiscal year and to date, the Christian County SWCD has only received 17% of their funding. The Christian County SWCD Board of Directors concluded that due to lack of funding, the Administrative Coordinator, Sue Davis will work 30 hours per week, while Resource Conservationist, Stephanie Porter will work only one day a week starting in May. The part-time CREP assistant, Amy Mann will continue in her current position through June 30th, because her salary is paid by a federal grant. The Board will re-evaluate the situation in July, and the next step will be office closure. The Board has discussed what to do for several months, and has had to make these changes so that savings are not depleted. The Christian County office is only one of many across the state making hard choices.

It would be unfortunate for the Christian County community to lose all of the services that the Christian County SWCD provides. In the past year, we have provided or assisted in administering programs in Christian County which total 1.5 million dollars. In return, there has been a considerable amount of soil saved and protected wildlife in Christian County. For questions, comments, or concerns, please contact the Christian County SWCD office at (217) 287-1315 ext. 3. **We would like to thank all of those in Christian County that have supported us through this difficult and uncertain time.**

**I will end with the following statement made by a Soil and Water District employee that attended the Joint Ag Hearing:** *“Do you want comments/observations on the morning session? None of them too good. We are being held hostage. The administration is asking the legislators to allow the governor to sweep unused funds from all state accounts. In turn, a small fraction of that money will be all that is needed to fund the ag programs represented in the hearing room 114 at the State Capitol Building on Wednesday morning, April 16th. None of the legislators will be agreeable to that scenario because the sweep could net the governor upwards of 900 million dollars. He only needed \$50 million to fund the ag interests. The additional money will be his to use without legislative oversight for whatever pet projects he cares to fund. These may include state wide health care - the pilot program to start in Chicago. The new bridge to St. Louis of which Illinois is paying the lion’s share. And who knows what other projects. Therefore, we are in the middle of a standoff with no clear outcome in sight. The government is as dysfunctional as one legislator said he has seen in his 40 some odd years.”*