



Issue No. 114

# Whiteside County Soil & Water Conservation District



July 2009

HAPPY  
RETIREMENT, NANCY!

For the past nine years, the school children of Whiteside County have had the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of environmental activities due to the efforts of Nancy Anderson, Education Coordinator of the Whiteside County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Nancy has worked with thousands of students from the age of early childhood through high school with a wide variety of special environmental programs. Students have participated in nature walks, have planted their own prairie gardens at their schools, have had the chance to view eagles, owls, and hawks up-close as these live birds visited their classrooms, have participated in a



special grant program on water quality, and have competed annually in the Envirothon. This year over 200 students submitted posters for the "Dig It" poster contest. The two winning posters have been sent on for the state contest and will be on display at the Summer SWCD Conference. About 750 trees were

distributed to third grade students to highlight Arbor Day.

Nancy has accomplished all these activities with the cooperation of the SWCD Board, with grants, and with the generous assistance of sponsors. She has enriched the lives of so many children on a shoe-string budget. Nancy has always given the credit to others, citing volunteers for the success of the many programs, but she has always been the driving force, planning and implementing wonderful experiences for the students.

It is with regret that the SWCD Board has accepted Nancy's decision to retire this year. Her dedication and enthusiasm have awakened an appreciation of nature and an awareness of each student's own responsibility in caring for and improving the environment. Nancy's efforts will have a lifelong effect on the students she has taught, resulting in an additional bonus for the rest of us that live in this world.

Of her work, Nancy stated, "This is a wonderful job. It is the one job in Whiteside County that an individual has the opportunity to teach a child that nature is there for all of us but also to understand that it is a responsibility we all share." Thank you, Nancy, for using that opportunity to make an important difference in the lives of so many children.

## 2009 Whiteside SWCD's BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Pictured Left to Right:

Michael Jacobsen, Sec/Tres; Jeff Melton, Director; Paul D. Young, Chairperson; Dave Cook, Director; and Tim Keller, Vice-Chairperson



## RC RANTS AND RAMBLINGS

David Harrison, Resource Conservationist



**E**ven though you are probably reading this article after the fact, the SWCD, U of I Extension, and the IDNR sponsored a CRP weed & brush control workshop. Over the last couple of years I have gotten several calls about thistles and other weeds becoming a problem in CRP fields.

**T**he answer I give to most land owners is to monitor these fields like a crop field. Take a walk through the field 2-3 times a year and see what is growing out there. The earlier you can recognize a weed or brush problem the easier it is to treat. If you can spray the weeds at an early age you have a better chance of control.

**W**ith perennial weeds such as thistle spending more money the first time you spray, the better off you are in the long run. One spray with a more effective herbicide may be cheaper than multiple sprays with a less effective chemical. The best example of this is Canada thistle, 2 4 – D/ Dicamba, and Stinger. Without endorsing one product over the other one chemical is definitely more effective with one spray than the other.

**T**iming of the control is also very important especially with perennial weeds. These weeds are best controlled in the fall or just as the flower buds are forming. Spraying at other times will result in top kill but not total elimination.

**B**esides spraying mowing and hand weeding should be part of your control plan. Both of these control measures should be geared to prevent the weed from spreading by seed. Using these measures along with spraying can go a long way toward getting your weed under control.

**O**ne final point I would like to make is health of the seeding cover in the field. A lot of the problems I see are as a result of the cover being thin or not being managed to the level they should be. Cover should be maintained to keep a thick vigorous cover on the property that will crowd out the weeds and brush.

**S**o, there are my recommendations. Try to keep your CRP fields free from nasty weeds and brush while keeping your neighbors happy.



Please stop by the office to see our newest addition to the Soil & Water Conservation District Education Foundation's wildlife collection. **“Thank You” to Dean & Rosemary Huisingh whom generously donated the otter’s display case.** \*The animals and birds displayed in the SWCD office are possessed and displayed under a permit granted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Please visit the District's website @ [www.whitesidecountyswcd.com](http://www.whitesidecountyswcd.com)

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## ***A Letter from Nancy*** BY: *Nancy Anderson, Education Coordinator*



“A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity.”

\*Aldo Leopold – A Sand County ALMANAC.

I think that this is the key idea that I have tried to instill with the many children that I have worked with these last nine and three-quarter years of teaching in Whiteside for the Soil & Water Conservation District...we are the caretakers of nature. The goal of developing an “ecological conscience” is a pretty lofty goal for any teacher for any group of children; but, if you can start in the earliest years in school classrooms presenting this information it will be a part of that child when they have grown into an adult. And, if each year the child is taught more about the value and importance of how we maintain the quality of nature we are creating the caretakers for the “health” that is needed for self-renewal of our natural resources. Education is the key to understanding the land ethic and a repetition of these ideas over the

total school program for a child will create a youth that is an environmentalist, a care taker of nature.

The preservation of our natural resources is the job of everyone – of every age group. It is a necessity if we are to maintain the quality of nature which is a very fragile balance. I have tried to teach that we are not tree huggers. We are not impractical. We are realistic in recognizing that nature and economics often meet



*Morrison High School 2009 Envirothon—First Place Team  
Pictured Left to Right: Conner Bealer, Junior; Steven Karvelious, Senior; Mitch Stichter, Senior; Luke Barry, Senior; and Nick Anderson, Senior*

head-on in many environmental issues; however, the aim is to always maintain a balance. Nature’s many proponents and supporters will continue this very tough struggle. However, if children are educated from their very young pre-school years through high school about the importance of environmental understanding and facts about maintaining this balance, we can hope that the

quality of our environment will be maintained.

The lessons are often not easy and clear-cut as the reasons that we hunt to maintain the quality and health of our wildlife populations. We now know that we do not pollute water, but why do we need to conserve in the use of water when we are getting flooded out almost every year in the spring? Trees are everywhere – why do we continue to plant so many? Soil can grow

anything – just add fertilizer that will take care of the problem of less soil on the land; and, prairies are for animal life, not really needed for people. We will always hear the screaming and gnashing of teeth from these bitter battles between man and nature in trying to find out where is the fair

medium for this balance; however, if we are well informed and educated it

makes the struggle so much easier and winnable. And that is the job of this Education Program: to get into all of the schools of Whiteside and set-up the guidelines of learning, and understanding just what is expected of everyone to maintain this quality and balance in nature. Pre-K thru Grade 12 conservation – environmental education supplements the schools programs in a

Continued on page 4...

content area not taught in most of our schools. It is very important that we provide this education to the schools -a free resource, Pre-K thru Grade 12.

**Special Thanks To-**

This has been a wonderful job as Education Coordinator. I have taught for 43 years and these last years here at the Soil & Water have been my most enjoyable years, as I know that what I taught was for some children their only access to knowledge about nature and the natural environment. School curriculums in all of our schools are so very full of many necessary content areas. In the beginning, I let the teachers know that I was available as a resource to them and each year my group of environmentally active teachers kept growing. There are too many teachers now to acknowledge – **but, a special thank you to all of you excellent Whiteside County teachers for sharing your love of nature with your classrooms of children. Many special friends that I have grown to respect and know very personally.**

**The Board of Directors** - For allowing me the freedom to teach what I felt needed to be taught in content and in supporting all of my projects (with the exception of buying a bus to take animals to the schools! I always thought that an old bus would make a great wildlife ring for cows, piglets and goats !).

Paul and Tim- your many years



February 20, 2009, Whiteside County Environmental Educators Attend Soil & Water Education Workshop

of dedication to the SWCD Board is so commendable. Thank You. We have shared lots of memories over these last few years. I appreciate you always being there for me in strong support – two great Principals! And Mr. Besse- who for so long was a major part of the team- your leadership here and throughout the state was always so important.

**The Natural Area Guardians ( the NAGS)** – Such a group of talented and wonderfully knowledgeable individuals that meet monthly to share their love of prairies, birds, all forms of wildlife....the membership includes many self-taught environmentalists that any university would be very blessed to have on their staff. Volunteers that work so hard to maintain the integrity of the natural environment of our prairies. The Kellers-Tim and Carolyn, and Mae Do-mack are the life blood of this special group. Even though Mae has been gone since last summer, her influence and memories are still so alive through her art work that reflects her spirit and love of nature; and, it continues with each burn of the prairies in the spring.

My last day is June 30<sup>th</sup>. I plan to be very busy with projects at home and in the community. It has been a true labor of love that I am so very proud I had the opportunity to share with so many. And as one little boy told me last week, “When I grow up I want to be just like you. I want to show kids how to learn all kinds of stuff about nature – like worms! I love worms!”

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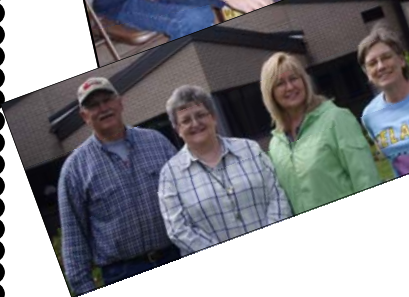


Whiteside County  
**PHEASANTS forever**

Chapter 811

Website: [whiteside.pheasantsforever.org](http://whiteside.pheasantsforever.org)

**"THANK YOU"  
TO ALL OF OUR  
SWCD Volunteers & Stewards Of The Land.**  
Sincerely,  
Whiteside County SWCD's  
Directors & Staff



# CONSERVATION

CONSERVATION

Mark Kaiser  
District Conservationist



Wow! What happened this spring? It seems like some producers threw conservation right out the window. For the past 20 years, I thought we were doing a pretty good job of working towards no-tilling the highly erodible land (HEL) fields and getting our grassed waterways established. At this point, I didn't think I would have to remind some producers about conservation compliance and the basic conservation systems they need to be following to be eligible for USDA program benefits. Since 1985, all USDA farm bills have had conservation compliance written in them. Nothing has changed in that respect. Here are the 2 basic systems and 1 conservation practice that needs to be existing on (HEL) fields:

1. Corn-soybean rotation; both crops need to be no-tilled. (Corn no-tilled into soybean stubble, and soybeans drilled or planted into cornstalks.)
2. Continuous Corn; No-tilled, or at least 50% crop residue cover left after planting if using equipment that leaves high residue. (Anytime corn follows corn, this is what's needed, if for example, you were in a C-C-SB rotation.)
3. Grassed waterways; need to be shaped and seeded as needed. This spring really showed where they need to be. If you had a gully running down the field, and you couldn't cross it, you need a grassed waterway. Obviously some producers took some equipment and filled in the ditches. No waterway needed. Out of sight, out of mind. WRONG! Grassed waterways are needed, filling in ditches every year does not solve the problem. Tons of soil are leaving these drainageways every year. 400 TONS of soil leaves the mouth of the Mississippi River every MINUTE! At least we know where some of it is coming from if you don't have grassed waterways. Drainage tile can be a good thing, and is needed for sub-surface drainage. Unfortunately some producers think they can

drain all the surface water into a tile and eliminate the need for a grassed waterway. WRONG AGAIN! 1 inch of rainfall over just 1 acre of land generates 27,152.4 GALLONS OF WATER! Lets see...a 2" rain falling over 30 acres that drains into a drainageway in an hour would generate 1 MILLION, 629 THOUSAND, 144 gallons of water! You might be able to handle that volume if you could afford to install a 6 FOOT storm drain down the middle of the draw. An 8", 10", or 12" tile isn't going to do it. And besides, by attempting to put surface water into your tile line, you are overloading it so it won't drain the wet soils, which is the original reason most tile is installed in the first place.

Cost-share programs exist to assist farmers to construct and seed these grassed waterways. See our office for details. We have told some producers and even sent letters to some producers about their need for grassed waterways. Fortunately most have responded. Some have ignored us, which they apparently are farming under the out of sight out of mind concept.

Producers that no-tilled this spring found that their patience and wisdom really paid off. Their fields were firmer and they could get on them sooner than any tilled field. Many fields that had a tillage trip or two are now crusted over and now need ANOTHER tillage trip; some need to be replanted. Compaction issues will show up soon on fields that were worked too wet. I was hoping by now we would have learned that we cannot "beat the soil into submission" with tillage. Thank goodness our silt loam soils are very forgiving. Some parts of the country with more fragile soils you would not get away with this tillage abuse. The benefits of no-till are (at least I thought) well known; increased water infiltration, less water runoff, better soil tilth and texture, increased organic matter, fuel and time savings, less

equipment costs, soil conservation, better soil health etc. etc. etc. High residue systems in corn following corn have some similar benefits, but not quite as good as no-till. I have seen some no-till corn following corn on Garden Plain road, Frog Pond road, and U.S. route 30. See if you can find them and check them out this summer. And of course, there are several no-till corn fields into soybean stubble that you can check out. The question no-tillers and myself are asking; why did some producers till their fields, especially soybean stubble on HEL??? Some will be getting out of compliance letters. The conservation systems I mentioned earlier are BASIC systems. On our really steep soils (10% slopes or steeper), even they will not control erosion to sustainable levels without the addition of small grains or grass/alfalfa in the rotation. So when producers till soybean stubble (or do excessive tillage on cornstalks) on these real steep HEL fields, the soil erosion is REALLY excessive. Unfortunately our current agricultural economic climate doesn't allow small grains and alfalfa/grass to be a viable option for most producers. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) would be an excellent opportunity to get some grass on the really steep parts of these HEL fields if USDA announces a CRP general sign-up in the future. Or if biomass energy demands more grass production in the future, this would be another great possibility to get some grass on these steep slopes. I'm proud of the producers who have been no-tilling over the years and stayed with it this year. You will need to keep leading the way and setting the example. You are the ones who will show the public that you can farm AND conserve our soil and water without the need for more regulations. Most of you are willing to share your knowledge, experience, and wisdom among yourselves and with other producers. Keep up the good work, it has NOT gone unnoticed!

CONSERVATION

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## Kerr Family and Natural Land Institute Protect Centennial Farm

Sue Merchant, Natural Land Institute

The Corliss and Russell Kerr family of Morrison finalized a conservation agreement with the Natural Land Institute in December 2008. The agreement shields from development the family's 379-acre farm in Whiteside County, including the home farm purchased by Corliss Kerr's great-grandfather in 1871.

"There were actually two goals behind this easement," said Jane Kerr, the third generation to treasure the farm. "We wanted to protect the agricultural acreage that has been in our family for more than a hundred years and preserve the land that my parents acquired 40 years ago and restored with natural areas. My dad had grown up wandering through woodlots and wild areas, and purchasing the land was one of his dreams."

Corliss Kerr said she and her family want the scenic vistas to remain for future generations to enjoy. "While our local area isn't currently under intense development pressures like some urban-edge communities, they may not always be the case. We've always felt it's important to maintain the natural areas and agricultural uses of this region. The conservation easement means that this property, that has been carefully stewarded for so many generations, will never be turned into stone quarries or golf courses, junkyards or housing developments, huge meat factories or ethanol mills," Corliss Kerr said.

Mrs. Kerr said the family is happy that their neighbors and the community will benefit from their efforts. "We hope

many of our neighbors will realize that they, too, can easily protect their farms and take advantage of the tax benefits of donating an agricultural conservation easement," she stated.



Pictured left to right:  
Jane, Corliss & Duane Kerr

**Corliss Kerr's father, Harvey C. Cobb, was a founding member of the Whiteside County Soil and Water Conservation District when they organized in July of 1944.** He used terraces and contour farming methods, and later Russell Kerr added minimum tillage and no-tillage practices. The current lessee of the farm, Steve Belha, continues with those practices.

Forty-six acres on the Kerr farm are enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program and are planted to black walnut trees and cool season grasses. Ninety-one acres are forested with black oak, red oak, black walnut and black cherry.

Native plants, including little bluestem, thimbleweed, bush clover, asters and goldenrods, grow in a small prairie remnant on the edge of a woodland area. Rick Lawrence, project director for the Natural Land Institute helped the Kerrs create the agreement that protects the conservation values of their land. "They will continue to own the property, they can sell it or leave it to heirs, but it will never be developed. They agree to continue to use conservation farming methods and maintain the forests and prairie that they love," Lawrence said.

The Kerr family will be able to take advantage of the significant tax benefits included in the 2008 Farm Bill for protecting their farm. Like many families, they are finding the conservation agreement is one of the smartest ways to benefit financially from an expanded federal tax incentive, conserve the land they cherish, while maintaining their private property rights.

*The Natural Land Institute has a 51-year history of protecting land in northern Illinois. For information about land protection options for owners of various types of property, please call 815-964-6666 and visit our website at [www.naturalland.org](http://www.naturalland.org).*

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Rockford, IL 61104  
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SHOWY ORCHID

Photographed by: Michael & Gail Jacobsen  
at Hilltop Meadows Hunt Club

**Whiteside County Soil & Water Conservation District  
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