

NEWS RELEASE



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Conservation Practices “Weathered the Storm”

INDIANAPOLIS, July 23, 2008—If you traveled rural roads in southern or west central Indiana during the last month, you had plenty of chances to see fields and roads that were flooded, bridges and culverts that were washed out, and other damage caused by the heavy rains and flooding in early and mid-June. You might not have noticed the many conservation practices that were not washed out, but held and did their job to filter sediment and nutrients in the water running across them.

Conservation practices include grass waterways winding through crop fields to prevent gullies and erosion, grass buffer strips along streams and creeks to filter nutrients as water flows across the land, terraces installed in steep terrain, and no-till farming practices that reduce erosion. State Conservationist Jane Hardisty of the Natural Resources Conservation Service said, “We are pleased at the minimal damage we are seeing to properly installed practices, but we do want farmers who had damage to conservation practices to let us know so we can evaluate their sites and provide technical assistance.”

“We requested and now have received \$1 million in funding for doing repairs to conservation practices installed under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and another \$15,000 for those installed under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). These dollars are available for producers who need them, and we want producers with damages to those conservation practices to contact us at the local USDA Service Center.”

One example of conservation practices protecting the land during the floods is seen on no-till fields. “No-till fields sustained less erosion and scouring than conventionally tilled fields in the same area,” said NRCS State Agronomist Barry Fisher. “By having less disturbed soil and more crop residue protection, these fields were able to better weather the storms.”

William Elliott, NRCS technical services team leader in Greencastle, coordinates engineering field work in 10 counties in west-central Indiana, one of the heaviest rainfall areas. He anticipated his team would be seeing and hearing about a number of conservation practices damaged by heavy flows of runoff or rainfall that could not be absorbed by the soil. “While we were waiting for waters to recede, I developed a

spreadsheet to track damaged practices, but so far have had only two conservation practices reported as damaged. With as much damage as we have seen on roads and bridges, I am a little surprised, but so far we just aren't seeing that kind of damage on conservation practices.”

Darrell Nicholson is the district conservationist in Decatur County where there was significant flooding that caused scouring in some farm fields and deposition of debris and sand in others. Nicholson said, “Generally our designed practices held extremely well. Especially grassed waterways and filter strips withstood flooding and remained stable. I have not heard of one grade stabilization structure that failed in the big flows.”

For more information on dollars available for damaged conservation practices, please contact NRCS at the nearest USDA Service Center.

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