

Conservation News

Coles County Soil and Water Conservation District
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www.colescountyswcd.org

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Address subscription questions to the Coles County Soil and Water Conservation District, 6021 Development Drive, Suite 2, Charleston, IL 61920. Postage is paid at Charleston, Illinois and at an additional mailing office.

Education Updates~ Fraun Lewis Education Liaison



We've gone "pumpkin crazy" this fall! We have reached over 160 students with our pumpkin kits so far---helping teach our grade school students about this crop, growing season, soil, and general value to the Illinois farm economy. Did you know that Illinois is the #1 pumpkin producer?

Over 1000 different informational pamphlets/activity books on conservation have been distributed for student use. Also, newsletters describing our services and available resources were delivered to each school building (public and private) in Coles County.

We partnered with Mattoon High School's FFA by offering a workshop featuring our kits and activities that the high school group can use when they make presentations to grade school classes. Hopefully we can work together on future projects.

Fraun, along with Martha Burris of Douglas County, presented two sessions on "Agriculture in the Classroom" at the Regional Teacher Institute Day on October 5th. Nancy Pals provided prairie dock, rattlesnake master, big blue stem, cup plant, etc. to illustrate the size, texture, and beauty of Illinois prairie plants for our teacher groups. It was an excellent opportunity to inform teachers of the resources available.

This month and next we'll talk to Girl and Boy Scout leaders, hoping they can use our kits to augment their badge work. So far response has been very positive.

Coles County can stand proud in regard to their commitment to conservation education!



Mattoon High School FFA Workshop



Talking with Boy Scout leaders

What is a Drought?
Nancy Pals
Resource Conservationist

What exactly is a “drought”? The common thought is “no rainfall”, but it’s just not that simple. Drought is known as the “creeping disaster” and it is hard to identify. Typically in our area a drought occurs when there is less than normal rainfall over an extended period of time. Sometimes drought can be caused when water supplies aren’t sufficient to meet everybody’s needs. The main definitions of drought are:

- Meteorological drought; is usually an expression of less rain than normal over a given amount of time. This is the first indication of a pending drought event.
- Agricultural drought; occurs when there isn’t enough soil moisture to meet the needs of a particular crop and a particular time. This happens after a meteorological drought but before a Hydrological drought. Ag is usually the first economic system affected by drought.
- Hydrological drought; refers to deficiencies in surface and subsurface water resources, and is measured as stream flow and as lake, reservoir and groundwater levels.

Drought is a normal feature of our climate and an insidious hazard of nature. A drought can result in major impacts on agriculture, city water supplies, tourism and recreation, energy production, river navigation and the environment. We are all affected by shortages of water. Take Decatur, this year the residents were held to strict water conservation guidelines. The City is struggling to find supplemental water sources, fall rains are coming none to soon. Imagine what would happen if we experienced further water shortages or if we don’t get normal to above normal precipitation this winter. It won’t take much to push us into the extreme droughts they are experiencing further south.

As you watch the southeastern part of the US struggle with drought, you will see maps depicting the affected areas. The drought monitor map identifies general drought areas, labeled by intensity, with D1 being the least intense and D4 being the most intense. Here in Coles County we are sitting at D1, a moderate drought. Further south in Illinois a D2 rating or Severe Drought has been given. Kentucky is labeled D3, Extreme Drought and Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama have areas that are labeled D4, Exceptional Drought.

I just returned from a trip to Tennessee two weeks ago and I was shocked at the dry conditions down there. I spoke with several farmers who have sold all of their livestock as a direct result of the drought. They can’t afford to have hay shipped in and there certainly wasn’t anything green south of the Nashville area for the cattle to eat. Pond after pond was dried up as I drove along I-24. It is my hope that it continues to rain and we end up with a wet fall, however the forecasts I just looked at show us having a drier than average winter, not good. Not good at all.

State Cost Share for Conservation Projects

The Coles County SWCD is now taking application for Cost Share on Conservation Projects on farmland. Cost share is typically 60% of approved costs to construct and/or complete terraces, waterways, diversions, structures, no till/strip till, pasture plantings and nutrient management plans. This cost share is a one time payment. All structural practices must be maintained for 10 years. For more information contact the SWCD office at 345-3901, ext.3.

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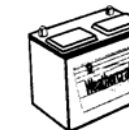
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