Conservation News

Coles County Soil and Water Conservation District

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Volume 64 Issue 2

USDA Reopens Signup for Continuous Conservation Reserve Program

The USDA began accepting applications for the Continuous CRP signup on Jan. 12, 2024. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages agricultural producers and landowners interested in conservation opportunities for their land in exchange for yearly rental payments to consider the enrollment options available through Continuous CRP. Additionally, producers already participating in CRP can apply to re-enroll if their contracts will expire this year. A producer can both enroll new acres into Continuous CRP and re-enroll any acres expiring Sept.30, 2024.

"We are pleased to announce we are now accepting Continuous CRP offers," said FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux. "Continuous CRP is one of the best conservation tools we can provide producers and landowners. Whether a producer wants to focus on water quality benefits or work with one of our partners to address a natural resource concern in their area, the program offers many options to help you meet your resource conservation goals."

To submit an offer, producers should contact the FSA at their local USDA Service Center by July 31, 2024, in order to have an offer effective by Oct. 1, 2024. To ensure enrollment acreages do not exceed the statutory cap, FSA will accept offers from producers on a first-come, first-served basis and will return offers for approval in batches throughout the year.

Water quality practices, such as riparian buffers, prairie strips, grassed waterways, and wetlands, will receive an additional 20% incentive. Buffer practices have a positive impact on water quality. Additionally, the Climate-Smart Practice Incentive launched in 2021 is also available in the Continuous signup.

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through Sept. 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including CRP, to continue operating.

For more information, call your local USDA Service Center or visit *https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/news-releases/2024/usda-to-reopen-signup-for-continuous-conservation-reserve-program*

Upcoming Events:

April:

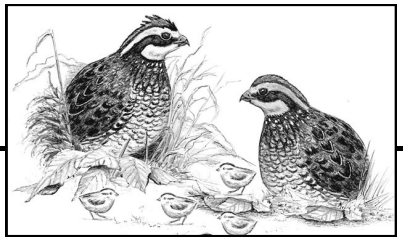
3rd—Fish Sale Pickup, 11am
5th—Tree Sale Pickup
9th—Board Meeting
15th—Ground-Nesting Season Begins

May:

1st—PFC Applications Due
1st—Photo Contest Entries Due
3rd—Native Plant Orders Due
14th—Board Meeting
15th-17th—Native Plant Pickup
27th—Memorial Day (Office Closed)

June:

11th—Board Meeting



Delay mowing of roadsides and waterways from April 15th—Aug. 1st for ground-nesting birds… Don't Mow, Let Them Grow!

Creating a backyard habitat with native plants offers a lot of benefits

Native plants are essential to a biodiverse backyard habitat and can provide a variety of other benefits to our local environment as well. Many native plants, particularly those that are found in prairies, have very deep root systems—some more than 18 feet! These long roots help rainwater infiltrate deeply into the soil and reduce the amount of water that runs off into storm sewers and surface waters like rivers, lakes, and streams. These roots also excel at holding onto soil, preventing erosion. When properly selected for a site, native plants require much less supplemental watering, fertilizer, and pesticides than non-native garden plants, further reducing pollutants that could otherwise enter local water systems.

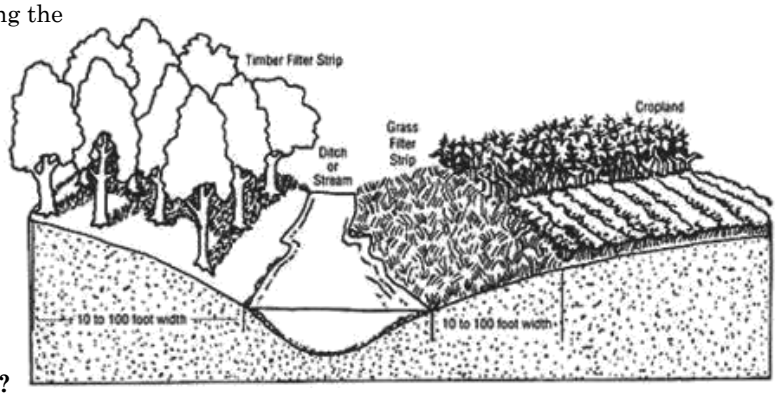
Native plants create habitat for wildlife that is both beneficial to the environment and adds life to your outdoor space. We tend to think of the benefits to obvious pollinators like native bees and butterflies, but these plants also create food and shelter for small animals like birds, toads, small lizards, and more, including microscopic organisms in the soil. Some of these soil microbes help clean up heavy metals, some are specialized for storing carbon, and some help convert nutrients in the soil into forms that plants can use. Healthy soil is full of life, and our local soils were 'built' under prairies and woodlands with the native plants, animals, and microbes to match!

Plants thrive in their original environment, and native plants can be just as attractive as traditional landscaping. Native species are likely to establish more quickly, be hardier, and be healthier to boot. When planned properly, native plant gardens provide a wealth of colors, textures, varying heights, and bloom times, resulting in a stunning display over multiple seasons. The Coles County SWCD is offering a selection of native plants suited to a variety of habitat types—everything from sunny, dry prairies to wet, shaded pond edges and everything in between! Pre-orders are due by May 3rd. Photos, planting tips, and more information for each species can be found in the plant catalog on our website.

Need help choosing species or designing your new backyard habitat? Give us a call! Looking for a species we're not offering this year? A few other local organizations are also having native plant sales this year; check with Douglas Hart Nature Center or Grand Prairie Friends to see if they have the species you're looking for!

Filter Strips Benefit Water Quality and Your Wallet

A filter strip is an area of permanent vegetation located between cropland or grazing land and an environmentally sensitive area, such as a stream. Vegetative filter strips can reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and provide significant habitat for grassland wildlife. They filter runoff by slowing water flow and causing contaminants such as excess nutrients, sediment, and chemicals to get trapped in the vegetation before reaching the environmentally sensitive area. Accumulated nutrients and chemicals are utilized by the vegetation rather than entering the water supply. Filtered water then enters the water bodies.



The Illinois Vegetative Filter Strip Assessment Law provides tax incentives for the development of filter strips for the primary reason of reducing soil erosion. Filter strips **do not have to be enrolled in other SWCD or USDA programs** to qualify for the tax incentives, but the vegetative filter strips must meet NRCS standards and specifications to be assessed at a reduced rate. SWCDs have the authority in certifying that existing vegetative filter meet requirements.

Do you have an existing filter strip on your property?

Landowners with fully established filter strips on their land need to complete certification to qualify for the property tax reduction. If interested in applying for the property tax reduction on filter strips, stop by the Coles County Soil and Water Conservation District to fill out the necessary paperwork. In order to complete the forms, the property tax identification number for each filter strip area is needed. An aerial map or FSA farm and tract number of the location is also helpful, but not required. Once eligibility has been determined, it is the landowner's responsibility to file documentation with the office of the Coles County Assessor in Charleston.

Could your property benefit from adding a filter strip?

If you have a body of water (creek, pond, wetland, etc.) on your property that does not currently have at least 30 feet of dense, permanent vegetation around it, that might be a good spot for a filter strip! If the area is on existing farm ground and meets a few other qualifications, it may be eligible for enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). In addition to the reduced tax rate already discussed, CRP provides cost-share for installation of the practice and an annual payment for acreage enrolled in the program. Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local USDA Service Center to learn more or to apply for the program. If the land in question doesn't qualify for CRP, some other programs exist as well. Give the SWCD office a call and make an appointment to talk to Lauren for more information.

Coles County SWCD
2024 Native Plant Sale

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	Height	Bloom Color and Time							Soil Moisture
	(species availability subject to nursery supply)			*Apr*	*May*	*Jun*	*Jul*	*Aug*	*Sep*	*Oct*	*Dry↔Mesic↔Wet*
	~Nodding Pink Onion	*Allium cernuum*	1'-2'								M
	~Meadow Anemone	*Anemone canadensis*	6"								M
	~Red/Wild Columbine	*Aquilegia canadensis*	2-3'								D, M
	Prairie Milkweed	*Asclepias sullivanti*	3'								M,W
	Butterfly (Orange) Milkweed	*Asclepias tuberosa*	2-3'								D, M
	~*Marsh Marigold	*Caltha palustris*	2'								W
	*White Turtle Head	*Chelone glabra*	3-5'								M,W
	Pale Purple Coneflower	*Echinacea pallida*	2-3'								D, M
	*Queen of the Prairie	*Filipendula rubra*	3-5'								W
	~Prairie Smoke	*Geum triflorum*	1'								D, M
	*Swamp Rose Mallow	*Hibiscus moscheutos*	5'								M, W
	~*Blue Flag Iris	*Iris virginica shrevei*	2-3'								M, W
	Rough/Tall Blazingstar	*Liatris aspera*	2-3'								D, M
	*Marsh/Dense Blazingstar	*Liatris spicata*	3-6'								M, W
	~Allegheny Monkey Flower	*Mimulus ringens*	2-3'								M, W
	~Foxglove Beardtongue	*Penstemon digitalis*	2-3'								D, M
	Prairie/Downy Phlox	*Phlox pilosa*	1-2'								D,M
	~Black-Eyed Susan	*Rudbeckia hirta*	1-3'								D, M, W
	*Three Square/Chairmaker's Rush	*Schoenoplectus pungens*	4'								M, W
	Compass Plant	*Silphium laciniatum*	5'-8'								D,M
	Prairie Dropseed	*Sporobolus heterolepis*	2'-3'								D,M
	~Calico Aster	*Symphyotrichum lateriflorum*	2'								D
	x $2.50 = $										

~tolerates partial shade *great for rain gardens, wetlands, and pond edges

Orders Due May 3rd, Pick Up: May 15-17th

Return order form with payment to:
Coles County SWCD
6021 Development Drive, Suite 2
Charleston, IL 61920

Stop by the office or visit us online for pictures of each species, wildlife benefits, and growing tips!

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
Phone : _____
Email: _____

Please remind me prior to pick up: o Phone o Email

For Office Use: Date Rec'd: _____ **Check#/Cash:** _____ **QB:** _____ **Ex:** _____

Photo Contest Open Until May 1st

Are you an amateur photographer residing in Coles County who would like a chance to enter your photos in a local, state, and nationwide contest? The Coles County SWCD is sponsoring a conservation photo contest to recognize individuals whose pictures are worth more than words!

In addition to the chance to win at the local level, local winners will be entered in the statewide Association of Illinois Soil & Water Conservation District Auxiliary Photo Contest. Winners at the state level will then be submitted to the National Association of Conservation Districts photo contest, where monetary prizes are awarded! Entries must be received by May 1st to be considered for this year's contest.

Photographs can be entered in the following categories:

- Conservation Practices
- Close-Up Conservation
- Conservation in Action
- Conservation Across America
- Youth: Submissions from a photographer under 18 years of age, (Must fit into one of the above categories.)

Complete rules and entry forms are available at *http://www.colescountyswcd.org/events/annual-photo-contest/*

COST SHARE SIGN UP

Coles County SWCD

Sign Up by May 1st!

Practices Include: Cover Crops, No Till/Strip Till, Conservation Cover (Pollinators), Well Decommissioning, Filter Strips, Grassed Waterways, Terraces, Pasture & Hayland Planting, Saturated Buffers, Bioreactors, Rain Gardens, and more!

For practice information and applications call or email:

217-345-3901 x 3

info@colescountyswcd.org

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Protect Illinois forests by removing invasive garlic mustard this spring

Every spring, early blooming ephemeral flowers are a welcome sign from nature that winter is almost over. But Virginia bluebells, mayapples, spring beauties, and other native plants are fighting against invasive species for a place in Illinois forests. Forest owners, land managers, and natural area visitors can help. Now is the time to scout for and remove garlic mustard.

"Garlic mustard is a high-priority invasive species for Illinois," says Christopher Evans, Research and Forest Specialist with University of Illinois Extension. "Large infestations limit the growth and productivity of native plants and threaten the long-term health of forests."

Garlic mustard's early spring growth can quickly cover the forest understory. Infestations form a monoculture that competes with native plants for light, water, and nutrients. This threatens wildflowers, tree seedlings, insects, wildlife, and future forests. Large populations reduce nutrients in the soil and release allelopathic compounds that slow the growth of other plants.

Garlic mustard plants produce hundreds of seeds that spread easily. Plants are easiest to identify and remove when they bolt and flower in the early spring.
Photo credit : Christopher Evans, University of Illinois Extension.

Infestations impact the ecosystem and reduce the ability to harvest timber, hunt, collect mushrooms, enjoy spring wildflowers, watch birds, and spend quality time in beautiful, healthy forests.

"The best way to manage garlic mustard is to keep it out of your forest," Evans says. "Large infestations take a lot of time and effort to control but catching plants before they spread is the easiest way to keep your forest healthy."

Prevention methods include cleaning boots, tires, and horse hooves to remove seeds after visiting an area. Monitor for garlic mustard along pathways of entry such as forest edges, creeks, trails, and in disturbed areas. Mark plant locations with a map app or flags. Mark the location with a flag or mapping app to relocate it later. Landowners can discuss their concerns about invasives with neighbors and plan to work together to manage them.

Garlic mustard has a two-year, or biennial, growth cycle. First- and second-year plants will grow together and in large infestations will rotate dominance in the landscape every other year. Garlic mustard is easiest to identify in spring when second-year plants are flowering. The flowering stalk is 1-to-4 feet tall with triangular, toothed-edged leaves and its small flowers have four white petals. Those visiting recreational nature areas should report sightings to staff and with the EDDMaps app or online at www.eddmaps.org.

For those who have garlic mustard, Evans says there is a 6- to 8-week window in spring to remove plants before they produce seeds and spread further. Removing garlic mustard is a multi-year process that focuses on preventing at least 90% of plants from producing seeds to prevent spread. Be prepared to manage annually for at least five years to deplete the seed bank and plan for long-term monitoring to prevent reinvasions. Sporadic management can make infestations worse.

Removing garlic mustard is a multi-year process and control options include mowing, cutting, hand pulling, prescribed burns, and herbicides. No management method is entirely effective. Before treatment, develop a long-term strategy that considers available time and labor resources, as well as the infestation size and location. Get help with garlic mustard identification, explore removal options, and consult with an Extension educator at https://extension.illinois.edu/invasives/invasive-garlic-mustard

Adapted from an article by Emily Steele, University of Illinois Extension and information from the Illinois Extension website.

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The Field Office has "moved." We're still in the same building, but our office is now in the suite to the left when you enter the front doors of the building.

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