# Conservation News


## Coles County Soil and Water Conservation District

**6021 Development Drive, Suite 2, Charleston, IL 61920**

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**http://www.colescountyswcd.org** **facebook.com/ColesCountySWCD**

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## Seeking Individuals to Serve on Ag In the Classroom Local Advisory Council.

The local advisory council meets approx. 4 times a year to provide guidance and direction to the education coordinator and Coles County SWCD's education program so that local students receive the best ag literacy program possible. Anyone with agriculture and/or education experience can join but we are particularly looking for educators and agriculture industry professionals to help provide networking and volunteer opportunities to grow the program here in Coles County. Please contact Misti at the contact information below if you're interested in joining our council!

## Hello From Coles County's New Agriculture In The Classroom Coordinator

Hello, My name is Misti Neal Lewis, I live in Charleston with my husband Raymond and daughter Megan. I would like to introduce myself as the new Agriculture in the Classroom Coordinator for Coles County. I am a graduate of Lake Land College and Eastern Illinois University with a Bachelors Degree in Elementary Education. I have worked in social services, mainly focused on grant work, my entire career. I am excited to start this new chapter in my profession.

I started in April as the Administrative and Education Coordinator for the Coles County SWCD. I am looking forward to working with teachers throughout the county to help bring agriculture into the classrooms with fun and educational programs that will be themed based on the month and time of year we are currently in. I am open to any ideas or questions that anyone from the general public or educational fields may have! Please feel free to reach out to me via e-mail or at the SWCD office!

Misti Neal Lewis– Education Coordinator
info@colescountyswcd.org, (217)345-3901 ext. 3

## Upcoming Events:

| October: | November: | December: |
|---|---|---|
| 8th—No Meeting | 11th—Veteran's Day (Office Closed) | 10th—Board Meeting |
| 14th—Columbus Day (Office Closed) | 12th—Board Meeting | 25th—Christmas Day (Office Closed) |
| | 28th—Thanksgiving (Office Closed) | |

## Charleston Field Office Staff and Directors

**Coles Co. SWCD Board of Directors**

**Bill Janes:** Chairman
**Justin Thomas:** Vice Chairman
**Todd Easton:** Secretary/Treasurer
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**Coles Co. SWCD Employees**

**Misti Neal Lewis**
Administrative & Education Coordinator

**Lauren Oertling**
Resource Conservationist

**NRCS Employees**

**Andy Brantner:** District Conservationist
**Stephen Head:** Soil Conservationist

**IDOA Employees**

**Shannon Kuffel:** Conservation Planner


As a cooperator of NRCS, SWCD must provide reasonable accommodations to USDA customers with disabilities, where appropriate. Individuals requiring reasonable accommodation for any NRCS or SWCD programs or services should contact Carzella Pritchett, Illinois NRCS' Disability Emphasis Program Manager, at (217) 353-6651 directly. Determinations on requests for reasonable accommodation will be made on a case-by-case basis. USDA-NRCS/SWCD are an equal opportunity employer and provider.

## Fall is the Season for Forestry Management

Christopher Evans, Forestry Extension and Research Specialist, discusses chainsaw safety at a field day in 2023.

Illinois has over 4.8 million acres of forest land, most of which, about 83%, is privately owned. With the weather cooling down and the leaves dropping, it's time to start thinking about forestry management plans and this season's management goals.

In addition to potentially reducing taxes, a forestry management plan from a certified forester will provide you with information such as the species composition and condition of the trees in your woodlands, whether invasive species are present (and how to deal with them if they are), the current and potential future marketability of the timber, and recommendations on the management of the stand, such as planting new trees or thinning the ones you've got.

If you've already got a forestry management plan in place, this is the time of year to pull it out and see if any management activities are scheduled for the winter. Good work now can reap financial rewards at timber harvest down the road.

New forest landowners or forest landowners new to management are encouraged to participate in the "Beginning Forest Landowner Program" through Illinois Extension. Several Coles County landowners have participated in the last few years, and they've highly recommended the course. The 2024-2025 Southern Illinois Beginning Forest Landowner Course will consist of four weekend programs, Friday-Saturday, plus a few additional virtual or in-person events. Each weekend will include in-class presentations, hands-on practices, and field tours. All programs start at 9 a.m. Friday at Dixon Springs Agricultural Center, 354 State Highway 145N, Simpson, IL. Some portions of the course will require short travel to other locations. For more information, visit https://extension.illinois.edu/forestry/beginning-forest-landowner-program

## Notice of Acceptance of Nominations

To all persons of legal voting age who own or reside on land located within the boundaries of the Coles County Soil and Water Conservation District. Beginning on November 1, 2024, nominations will be accepted for the two year term of the office of Director of the Coles County Soil and Water Conservation District at the District's Office at 6021 Development Drive, Suite 2, Charleston, Illinois, during our normal business hours of 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. To be considered for nomination as a candidate for the office of Director, nominees must provide proof of residency or ownership of land located within the boundaries of the District. Interested persons must respond by 4:30 p.m. on December 31, 2024.


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## Fire Prevention and Safety Tips During Harvest

Harvest season is here, and according to the latest U.S. Drought Monitor the majority of Coles County is "Abnormally Dry." These abnormally dry conditions could enhance the potential for combine and field fires this fall. Low relative humidity levels and high winds will further increase the risk of fires. Fires cause millions of dollars in property damage, including loss of machinery, crops, and time. Unfortunately, injuries to farm workers and firefighters may also occur.

Modern combines are powerful machines, which means they can produce excessive amounts of heat. All it takes to start a fire is a single high-temperature source in the engine area or an overheated bearing to ignite some dry plant material. While it's impossible to remove the heat from the engine, hydraulics, and other hard-working systems, you can minimize the risk of fires by taking a few minutes and following these fire prevention steps and safety tips.

Aftermath of a combine fire (*Abobe stock photo*)

- **Two ABC-type fire extinguishers are recommended**: a smaller 10-pound unit in the cab and a larger 20-pound extinguisher at the ground level attached to the equipment. Invert and shake the extinguishers once or twice a season to ensure machine vibrations don't compact the powder inside and ensure they are properly charged and not expired. It can also be beneficial to keep a pressurized water extinguisher (class A) on equipment. These can help extinguish fires, but also cool hot surfaces and serve as a water source to clean hands or rinse off after some sort of fuel or chemical spills. Class A water extinguishers need to be kept in a heated area during winter months as they will freeze. Keeping a shovel on the combine to throw dirt on a fire is also a good idea.
- **Prior to refueling, turn the combine off and wait 15 minutes** to reduce the risk of a spill volatilizing and igniting. Keep machinery clean, particularly around the engine and engine compartment. Check coolant and oil levels daily. Pay close attention to engine and hydrostatic pump parts as well. Use a high pressure washer or compressed air to remove caked-on oil, grease, dirt/dust and crop residue. In the field, using a leaf blower to clear away leaves, chaff and plant material works well. Doing this at the end of the day is better than in the morning when dew or overnight rain can make residue harder to remove.
- **Field fires are often ignited by the earlier passing of a piece of equipment** - Not just combines, but also trucks, tractors, or UTVs. Be mindful of non-ag equipment vehicles that may be in your fields. UTVs or passenger vehicles often sit closer to the ground and can be more prone to causing field fires. Residue buildup in UTVs engine compartment are an often overlooked source of fire ignition.
- **Fires may start from plant materials that have smoldered unnoticed** for 15-30 minutes or more. Flames aren't apparent until additional oxygen is supplied, perhaps by a gust of wind. A fire can double in size in less than a minute. Burning embers blown downwind can easily spread a fire well beyond the control of your fire extinguishers in just seconds. Be aware of possible additional fires.
- **During dry, windy periods producers should consider delaying harvest** until evening hours when winds decrease or wait for precipitation. Research from South Dakota State University suggests that if we have dry conditions and start experiencing wind speeds close to 30 mph and above, fires may be inevitable. Higher humidity levels may also reduce the potential for field fires to spread.
- **In case of fire, turn off the engine, get away from the machine, and call 911 FIRST.** Then attack with fire extinguishers only if it is safe to do so. Try to fight from the "black," the area already burned. Attacking a fire from areas with combustibles (e.g. dry corn stalks) is much riskier. Always stay upwind of a fire to minimize the risk of exposure from smoke, heat, and possible flames.
- **Have a list of the "911 addresses" of fields on hand.** This can help save time and expedite the response from emergency responders. When a fire is called in with a 911 address, dispatch can more readily identify the incident location and relay this information to the fire department. This can save precious time.
- **Harvest crews and neighbors may want to discuss a plan for emergency tillage of a firebreak** should that option become advisable. Making a tillage pass along the outside edge of a field (especially a corn field that can provide ample fuel for a fire due to high amounts of residue), has been a proven preemptive strategy to help prevent fires from spreading into a field. If safe to do so, making a firebreak with a tillage pass can help stop an active, out of control fire from spreading. The goal is to create an area that won't fuel the fire, so the fire will eventually burn itself out.
- **A good rule of thumb is to create a fire break** that is 2-3 times wider than the nearest surface vegetation or plant residue is tall (example; 8 foot tall corn = 16-24 foot tillage width). Keep in mind that depending on wind speed and gusts, the radiant heat and embers from a fire can "reach out" sometimes twice as far as it normally would be able to. Consequently, a fire break may need to be considerably wider to help ensure proper fire containment.

**Remember—Personal safety is ALWAYS far more important than property loss. Attempting to fight a fire should only happen after calling 911 and determining that it's safe to do so.**

*Note: Information compiled from Illinois Extension, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Iowa State Extension resources. For more information, visit https://extension.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/farm_fire_risks_and_prevention_fact_sheet.pdf*

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