



Smithsonian Soils Exhibit Opens for Visitors

Participants at the NACD Legislative Conference were some of the first to see the newly-opened "DIG IT! The Secret of Soil" exhibit at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum. The state soil monoliths featured in the display were like celebrities waiting to have their pictures taken with conservation district supervisors and others. The exhibit's design appeals to all ages. In the exhibit you will be able to help solve a soil crime scene mystery, learn the difference between silt, sand and clay as well as understand the importance of soils across the globe. Education materials designed in partnership with NACD, Smithsonian and the Soil Science Society of America will soon be available at the NACD marketplace and the Museum store. Learn more at www.nacdnet.org.

NACD IN ACTION

DISTRICTS AT WORK...Adapting to Emerging Needs

Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District, Indianapolis, IN



Marion District Supervisor Dennis Slaughter eagerly awaits visitors to the District's Earth Day booth so he can discuss backyard conservation at a downtown Indianapolis Earth Day event.

The Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is working to meet the emerging urban/suburban natural resource needs in Indianapolis, Indiana. Major land use changes have shifted workload priorities to homeowner and development erosion and sediment control, water quality and drainage issues, green space protection and enhancement, and invasive species control. Even with the increased urban/suburban workload, the SWCD still assists its remaining farmers on their 24,000 acres, including the home farm of U.S. Senator Richard Lugar.

The District is using the skills of their staff to meet the more traditional natural resource challenges. They are also finding that with new clients, they need to do a better job of creating awareness about practices like bio-swales and rain gardens. This means the SWCD has had to broaden their technical abilities and focus more on their communication/outreach efforts. Carrying out new outreach activities for new clientele has particularly been a problem, as federal support has lessened, and local and state funding have

remained level for over five years. To reach more people with less resources and funding requires new efforts and skills.

The SWCD Board has vigorously pursued grants, sought new partners, and asked various groups to become affiliate members to help fund their efforts. Staff members have expanded their skills in marketing, website development and print media efforts. A new logo was developed to indicate the increased urban/suburban roles. The SWCD integrates their printed material (quarterly newsletter, letterhead stationary, business cards, fact sheets, etc.) with a similar look, or "branding", so clientele can recognize their identity on all information items. Mark Kautz, District Chair, says, "We're not totally there yet, but we are working on it."

The SWCD improved their website, making it more user-friendly. They also support multiple watershed efforts, helping these groups with their websites. The District developed an annual two-page activities report, with charts, finding a shorter document has more chances of being reviewed by government and community leaders. They produce a short weekly news release that is shared with more than 25 news print media outlets, and electronically sent to more than 250 community and agency leaders. They found it helps to keep the SWCD name in front of the public as often as possible. The District sponsors adult education workshops such as Pond Pro Management, Green Site Planning and Stormwater Management Training.

Due to the District's outreach efforts, supervisors and staff have been recruited to assist a variety of organizational efforts such as the Mayor's Green Print Natural Resources Committee, the Marion County Tree Board, Health by Design, and various working committees of the Hoosier Heartland Resource and Conservation Development Council. They participate in booths at Earth Day in Downtown Indianapolis, the Annual Flower and Patio Show, Arbor Day at State Museum, National Science Fair Day at Convention Center, and even helped host an American Society of Agronomy National Land Use Tour.

Examples of programs and activities, including conservation fact sheets, are available on the District website at www.marionswcd.org. For more information, contact the District at ron-lauster@iaswcd.org.

