

Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District



Volunteer Handbook

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Let us know if our volunteer program is meeting **your** needs. Thanks for volunteering!



Section 1 - *Welcome to the Kosciusko SWCD!*

The Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a local unit of state government responsible for conservation and development of local soil, water, and related natural resources. We have been serving the communities and citizens of Kosciusko County since 1957. Our **mission** is to help people manage, conserve, and enhance natural resources for present and future generations. We provide education, technical assistance, and innovative programs to achieve this mission.

We have a small but passionate staff of 4 people, and we rely heavily on volunteers like you to further conservation in our county. In 2023, the value of Kosciusko SWCD volunteer service hours was over \$34,000. We need you and we greatly appreciate everything you do.

Why do we focus on soil and water? Soil and water are the lifeblood of our natural systems, and of human civilization. All around the world, agricultural systems rely on soils. Healthy soils are vital to food production and support vibrant natural communities. Water also plays an important role in supporting life as we know it. In Kosciusko County, we are constantly reminded of the importance of water with the abundant lakes and rivers in our communities. Clean water is a resource worth protecting. In Indiana, the number one water quality pollutant by volume is sediment. Soil and water conservation are intertwined, and the programs at your local SWCD aim to protect these valuable resources.

This is where you come in! We need volunteers to teach at education programs, collect soil samples, and keep our office running smoothly. Please look at the following pages to see what you would like to do. Fill out an application, read the other materials and call to have your questions answered.

Benefits of volunteering include:

1. New friends and fellowship with others who deeply value conservation
2. Exercise for the mind, body and soul
3. Special training and skills; learning about soil health, aquatic ecosystems, and environmental education
4. An insider's perspective on local conservation projects
5. Knowing that you are helping to protect natural resources in your own community
6. Helping others to learn about and treasure our shared natural resources
7. Hours may be used for volunteer service programs such as Indiana Master Naturalist, NRCS Earth Team Volunteer, Master Gardener, etc. subject to approval from the administrators of these programs.

Section 2 – *Organizational History and Background*

Organizational History and Background

One of the worst environmental crises in American history was the Dust Bowl. The Dust Bowl was caused by extended drought, poor agricultural practices, and unusual weather patterns which caused extensive wind erosion. The Dust Bowl had severe agricultural, ecological, economic, and human health consequences for rural communities. In the year's following the Dust Bowl, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote the governors of all the states recommending legislation that would allow landowners to form soil conservation districts, and so SWCDs were born. The Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District was formed in 1957.

Every county in the state of Indiana has a SWCD that focuses on local natural resources issues in partnership with other organizations. One of the most important partners of SWCDs is the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS is a federal agency that provides cost-share and technical assistance to private landowners for the purpose of implementing conservation practices. With 97.8% of the land in Indiana being privately-owned, the work we do with NRCS to promote and support conservation on private land is vital.

Every SWCD is directed by a board of supervisors. Three supervisors are elected by the public and two are appointed by the State Soil Conservation Board. The Kosciusko SWCD also has several associate supervisors who advise the district, but who are not able to vote. In addition, Kosciusko SWCD has 4 staff members who work to achieve the goals of the district. Staff at the Kosciusko SWCD focus largely on educational programming (for K-12 students and adults) and providing technical assistance for producers, landowners, and home gardeners to improve conservation efforts.

Our Goal – To promote responsible land use decisions for the conservation, protection, and improvement of soil and water resources by providing information assistance through effective partnering, technical guidance, and education.

Our Purpose –

- Provide information about soil, water, and related natural resource conservation.
- Identify and prioritize local soil and water resource concerns
- Connect land users to sources of educational, technical, and financial assistance, to implement conservation practices and technologies

Who We Serve - We serve the citizens and communities of Kosciusko Co. by working towards cleaner water and healthier soils. We provide programs for landowners, farmers, home gardeners, adult learners, and local schools that improve natural resources for all people. Join us in conserving our natural resources by reaching out about our programs or volunteering!

Section 3 – *Getting Started*

When you are ready to volunteer...

1. Read the volunteer handbook.
2. Complete a volunteer application.
3. Sign the volunteer agreement, or have a parent complete the parental consent form if you are under the age of 18.
4. Complete background check (if volunteering for the education team).
5. Sign up for volunteer opportunities! Pending a clear background check, you will be added to email lists that will be sent periodically about upcoming needs and volunteer opportunities.

Please drop off your completed volunteer agreement or parental consent form to our office located at 217 E Bell Drive in Warsaw. If you are volunteering for the education team, we will provide you with the background check form at that time.

What Volunteers Can Expect from Kosciusko SWCD

Kosciusko SWCD values our volunteers and we want you to have clear expectations and understanding of how you fit into our organization and help to further our mission. It's important for everyone to have the same, shared expectations about the volunteer process.

Definition of a *VOLUNTEER*: An individual who performs hours of service... for civic, charitable, or humanitarian reasons, without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation for services rendered. (U.S. Department of Labor)

What the volunteer should expect from the organization:

1. To work in a healthy and safe environment.
2. To be engaged in accordance with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation.
3. To be given accurate information about the organization for which you are volunteering.
4. To be given a copy of the organization's volunteer handbook, policies, and any other policy/procedures that affect your role.
5. Not to fill a position previously held by a paid worker.
6. To be provided with orientation to the organization and your volunteer role.

Section 4 - *Finding your Niche in Volunteer Opportunities*

Read over our volunteer job descriptions below and let us know how you would like to contribute to our team!

Education Team: If you enjoy being outdoors, working with students, and learning about the natural world, then the education team is a good fit for you! Kosciusko SWCD has a robust education program which is primarily volunteer driven. We offer field trips for K-12 students to local areas including creeks, nature preserves, and more. We also host an annual raft trip for 6th grade students. We need volunteers to teach at field trips, guide rafts, and help with logistics. We provide lesson plans and trainings for education volunteers.

Outreach Events: If you enjoy meeting new people and chatting about conservation, we need volunteers to greet people who visit our booth, answer questions, and share information about SWCDs and our programs. We regularly attend community events such as Taste of Ag, Earth Day Festival, Arbor Day, and more. We also occasionally host community events.

Office Assistance: If you prefer to work indoors or like office tasks, we could use your help too! We need volunteers to help with mailing, repairing/creating educational supplies, entering data, preparing for large events, organizing, and more.

Urban Healthy Soils Team: If you are passionate about gardening or small-scale agriculture (<10 acres), our Urban Healthy Soils (UHS) program is for you! Our UHS team travels around the county collecting soil samples and speaking with small farmers and home gardeners about conservation. The UHS team receives special training in collecting soil samples and soil health. The UHS also regularly hosts educational workshops for the community.

Tree Sales: If you're a tree hugger, the Kosc. SWCD hosts an annual tree sale to provide a low-cost source of trees to our community. We need volunteers to help package and distribute trees. We also need volunteers to help prepare order forms, package fertilizer tablets, and more. Most of the tree sales volunteer opportunities take place in early April.

Associate Supervisors: If you're dedicated to the mission and goals of Kosciusko SWCD, we need associate supervisors! Every SWCD is directed by a board of supervisors, but the Kosciusko SWCD also has several associate supervisors. Associate supervisors participate in monthly board meetings with staff, partners, and the public to make decisions regarding the district and also assist with district events.

Section 5 – *Policies and Procedures*

Eligibility Requirements

1. At least 18 years old, or under 18 with parental consent; and
2. Understood and signed the conduct agreement(s) and waiver(s) below; and
3. Subject to a background check, if over 18 years of age.

Code of Conduct

Work Ethics

1. Be respectful of the Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District: our mission, employees, other volunteers, partners, and customers. Disrespectful or harmful conduct including but not limited to harassment, physical or emotional violence, discrimination, smoking in undesignated places or during programs, or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol while volunteering is cause for immediate dismissal.
2. Be on time. Please call ahead if you are going to be late. If you must cancel a scheduled volunteer activity, please contact a SWCD representative as soon as possible.
3. Keep confidential any sensitive information (e.g. contact information) you learn during your volunteer assignment.
4. Be properly dressed for scheduled activities. This may include wearing weather and terrain-appropriate clothing and footwear for outdoor activities.
5. Be drug-free and alcohol-free while volunteering.
6. Maintain professional boundaries. Volunteers should not engage in any sexual activity, acts of violence, or swearing/use of obscene language while representing Kosciusko County SWCD.

Safety Concerns

1. Please observe and follow all safety precautions, wear and use proper equipment, and follow safety procedures. Be especially careful around equipment.
2. **All accidents and injuries must be reported** to a SWCD representative immediately - no injury is too small to be reported.
3. Be familiar with the safety precautions appropriate to the job you'll be doing, and the instructions given to you during training. It is your responsibility to ask questions when unsure of anything. No question about safety is too insignificant to ask.

Anti-Harassment

The Kosciusko SWCD does not permit, nor will we tolerate, harassment of volunteers, employees, or the public by other volunteers, employees, or the public.

Harassing conduct, whether directed at an employee or non-employee, includes but is not limited to:

- Engaging in sexual harassment, an egregious form of prohibited harassment and a form of sex discrimination. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome conduct such as sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or dates, unwelcome remarks about an individual's appearance, discussions, remarks, or jokes of a sexual nature, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.
- Using derogatory words, phrases, epithets, gestures, pictures, drawings, slurs, or cartoons not otherwise protected by the First Amendment's guarantee of the right to freedom of speech and the right to religious free exercise.
- Using electronic devices or forms of communication (computers, cellular telephones, tablets, internet, email, and/or other technological equipment) to intimidate, harass, demean, or degrade another (i.e., cyberbullying).
- Retaliation against any individual for reporting matters under this policy, or for an individual's involvement in an inquiry related to such a report. Using negative comments regarding employees age 40 and over.

Non-discrimination

The Kosciusko County SWCD considers allegations of harassment to be very serious. Employees and volunteers who witness harassment should immediately report it to the Executive Director or Board Chairman of the SWCD, before the harassment becomes severe or pervasive in the workplace. Individuals who believe they have been subjected to or witnessed harassment in the workplace are encouraged to inform the alleged harasser directly the conduct is unwelcome and must stop. Employees and volunteers should also report harassment to management at an early stage to prevent its escalation. Reports of harassment need not be in writing or conform to a set format. Allegations of harassment will be addressed by a management inquiry or investigation by the Executive Director and/or Board of Supervisors of the SWCD.

In accordance with Federal civil rights law Kosciusko SWCD, it's employees, board of supervisors, and volunteers are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in its hiring, use of volunteers, and all program elements.

Working with Minors

1. Under no circumstances should a volunteer be alone with a minor unless they are the legal guardian of that minor.
2. Volunteers may not take photos/videos of minors for personal use. All photos/videos taken of minors for the purpose of Kosciusko SWCD marketing may not be shared with anyone besides SWCD staff and the board of supervisors.
3. A strict 'no touch' approach is impractical in many situations and may, in some circumstances, be harmful to the child. There are occasions when it is entirely appropriate and proper for the SWCD staff and volunteers to have physical contact with children (e.g. assisting children with uneven footing in the creek), but it is crucial that they do so only in appropriate ways. Physical contact with a child should be (i) done only in response to the child's needs following disclosure and obtaining the child's verbal acknowledgement, when possible, (ii) of limited duration, and (iii) appropriate to the age, development, gender, ethnicity and background of the child. An action that is appropriate with one child in one set of circumstances may be inappropriate in other circumstances or with another child. The SWCD staff and volunteers should use their professional judgment at all times.
4. SWCD staff and volunteers should never use any form of degrading or violent treatment to punish a child for misbehaving. The use of sarcasm, demeaning or insensitive comments or corporal punishment is not acceptable in any situation and may be unlawful. Leave behavior management and discipline to school staff.

Section 6 – *Emergency Procedures*

MEDICAL:

- A. In the event of a medical emergency when an SWCD staff or board member is NOT present:
 1. If it is a life-threatening situation, call 911. Next, contact SWCD staff.
 2. Immediate “Good Samaritan” first aid may be given until the paramedics arrive, if it is within the competence of the SWCD representative or another bystander to provide.
 3. Take down critical info of “WHO, WHAT, WHERE”
 4. If they do not want 911 called and it doesn’t seem to be a life-threatening situation, inform SWCD and we will notify the individual’s emergency contact.
 5. Complete the Incident Report Form and email to kosciuskoswcd@gmail.com with the subject line “Incident Report Form – NAME” or drop the form off at the office.

- B. In the event a medical emergency occurs when a staff or board member IS present:
 1. Determine if a 911 call is needed and if so, call. Contact office/staff as above.
 2. Immediate “Good Samaritan” first aid may be given until the paramedics arrive, if it is within the competence of the SWCD representative or another bystander to provide.
 3. SWCD representative may assist individual to get closer to a vehicle-accessible area, if needed, to be picked up if this seems medically advisable.
 4. In most situations, our staff or volunteers should not transport ill or impaired individuals in their vehicles or SWCD vehicle.
 5. Take names/telephone numbers of witnesses if the situation is serious.
 6. Complete the Incident Report Form and email to kosciuskoswcd@gmail.com with the subject line “Incident Report Form – NAME” or drop the form off to our front desk at the office.

Incident Report Form (available at the office)

Name of person reporting: _____

Name of injured person: _____

Date and Time: _____

Location site of incident: _____

Staff on site at time of incident: Y / N Who: _____

Was injured person a minor? Y / N Parent or guardian present? Y / N

Thorough description of incident:

Was first aid given? Y / N By whom? _____

Was 911 called? Y / N Time of call: _____ Time of arrival: _____

Resolution of incident:

Witness Names and Numbers:

Name (print) _____ Date _____

Signature _____

Section 7 - Volunteer Time Reporting

All hours volunteered for the Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District are eligible for Indiana Master Naturalist and Advanced Indiana Master Naturalist certifications. They are also eligible to be tracked for the NRCS Earth Team Volunteer program. If a volunteer plans to report volunteer hours for Indiana Master Naturalist or Earth Team Volunteer, they are responsible for reporting hours to these programs. Trackable volunteer hours for SWCD start when the volunteer arrives at the site to volunteer and end at the time that they leave the site after their volunteer effort is completed. For soil sampling, volunteers may also include time spent traveling to and from the office to the site of the soil sample.

SWCD staff record all volunteer hours. You do not need to turn in a volunteer time report to SWCD. However, please respond to communications from SWCD regarding questions or clarifications about volunteer time. Volunteer hours provide valuable match to many grants, and we must provide accurate documentation.

Appendices

A. Contact Information:

1. Vacant, Executive Director

Email: kosciuskoswcd@gmail.com

Office: 574-267-7445 ext. 3

2. Amanda Heltzel, Education and Outreach Coordinator

Email: amanda.heltzel@in.nacdnet.net

Office: 574-267-7445 ext. 5374

Cell: 574-205-2737

3. Vacant, Conservation Program Technician

Email:

Office:

4. Tashina Lahr-Manifold, Soil Health Specialist

Email: tashina.lahrmanifold@in.nacdnet.net

Office: 574-267-7445 ext. 5377

6. Chad Schotter, NRCS District Conservationist

Email: chad.schotter@usda.gov

Office: 574-267-7445 ext.5373

Work Cell: 260-366-3839

7. David Ransbottom, SWCD Board Chairman

Email: ransbottomexc2@yahoo.com

Cell: 574-453-1623

B. Directions and/or Addresses to Education Program Locations:

1. Eagle Creek – Eagle Creek is located on the WCHS/Edgewood/Washington School campus. From the Kosciusko County Courthouse, drive south on Lake St. Turn right on W Winona Ave. Turn left on Logan St. Turn left at the sign for Edgewood Middle School. Turn left at the first drive that leads back towards a shed and a covered picnic area west of the track and field. Park in the grass.

2. Cherry Creek – Cherry Creek is located in Winona Lake across from Limitless Park. From the roundabout at Argonne Rd/Park Ave/E Winona Ave/Kings Hwy drive south on Park Ave. Turn right into the parking lot at Limitless Park to park. The creek is across the road and can be reached via the bike/walking trail.

3. Ring Ditch – Ring Ditch is located on the Claypool Elementary School campus. Claypool Elementary is located at 2024 W 700 S, Claypool. Park in the school lot. Go into the building to check in and receive a tag from the front desk. Ring Ditch can be reached by walking north along S 200 W until you reach the bridge. The outdoor classroom is located on the left side down the lane. There is also a short trail you can use to reach the ditch, the trailhead is behind the playground and goes through the woods.

4. Mentzer Park – Mentzer Park is located in Mentone. From the Mentone Marathon Gas Station, drive south on S Walnut St, turn right on W Washington St. The park is at the intersection of W Washington St and S Oak St, south of the Bell Aircraft Museum

5. Kelly Park – Kelly Park is located at 239 E Baker St, Warsaw. There is parking available on the south side of the park off of E Baker St and on the north side of the park, accessed by Fawley St. Parking in the Fawley St lot is recommended.

6. Pike Park – Pike Park is located at 311 Northwood Dr, Akron.

7. Pike Lake Wetland / Beyer Boardwalk – The Pike Lake Wetland/Beyer Boardwalk trail runs from the Pike Lake Campground, through the wetland, and ends at Provident Drive in Warsaw. It is recommended to park at the east end of the boardwalk. The parking lot is off Provident Drive, across from MedStat. There is also parking and a bathroom (available seasonally) on the west end of the boardwalk, located at 1011 Arthur St, Warsaw. If you park on the west end, on Arthur St, walk east past the Fireman's Building to find the trailhead.

8. Wildwood Nature Preserve – Wildwood Nature Preserve is owned by ACRES Land Trust and is located east of Silver Lake at 409 IN-14, Silver Lake. Watch for the ACRES Land Trust sign along the road. Drive down the lane until you reach the parking area near the house.

9. Pisgah Marsh – The Pisgah Marsh boardwalk is owned by the Indiana DNR and is part of the Tri-County Fish and Wildlife Area. It is located at 9939 E 350 N, North Webster. The property can only be accessed from the east via IN-5. Once you turn off IN-5 onto E 350 N, drive down the road until it ends, and turn right to drive up the hill to park.

10. Grassy Creek – Grassy Creek is accessible from E 500 N, west of North Webster. The boat ramp is on the south side of the road, watch for the Grassy Creek/DNR boat ramp sign. The ramp is between EMS T9 Ln and EMS T8 Ln. For rafting, we will shuttle vehicles to YMCA Camp Crosley, where they be waiting for you at the end of the day. YMCA Camp Crosley is located at 165 EMS T2 Ln, North Webster.

C. The Kosciusko Soil and Water Conservation District Office

USDA Service Center
217 E Bell Drive
Warsaw, IN 46582

Hours: M-F, 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Office is closed on the following days:

New Year's Day	Independence Day	Thanksgiving
Good Friday	Labor Day	Christmas Eve
Primary Election Day	Election Day	Christmas Day
Memorial Day	Veterans Day	New Year's Eve

D. Find Us On The Internet!

Website: www.kosciuskoswcd.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100068979013418>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/kosciusko.conservaion/>

Kosciusko SWCD Volunteer Application

First name _____ Last name _____

Email _____ Phone _____

How did you hear about Kosciusko SWCD (check all that apply)

- Newspaper
- Indiana Master Naturalist
- Website
- Word of mouth
- Social Media
- Other: _____

How are you interested in volunteering (check all that apply)

- Education Team
- Urban Healthy Soils Team
- Outreach Events
- Tree Sales
- Office Assistance
- Other: _____

Do you have any special skills that you would like to share with Kosciusko SWCD?

Fill out a digital version of this form at kosciuskoswcd.org/volunteer or turn in a hard copy to the office at 217 E Bell Drive, Warsaw.

Kosciusko SWCD Volunteer Agreement

Please read the Volunteer Handbook and sign below before volunteering:

By signing, you acknowledge that you have received and read the Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District Volunteer Handbook which contains the Code of Conduct for Volunteers of the Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

Waiver of Liability:

I hereby agree that the Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District assumes no liability for any loss of property or claim of personal injury, including death, as a result of my participation in volunteer activities. I herein release, discharge and agree to indemnify, defend and hold harmless the State of Indiana, Kosciusko County, and the Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District, their board of supervisors, employees and/or successors from all claims and suits, including court costs, attorneys fees and other expenses, that are related to any injury to property and/or persons, including death, which may occur within or during my volunteer activities.

Code of Conduct

As a volunteer for the Kosciusko Soil and Water Conservation District, I agree to follow the Code of Conduct outlined in the Volunteer Handbook.

Photo/Video Release

I hereby authorize the Kosciusko Soil and Water Conservation District to use photographs and video of me and circulate for the purposes of advertising, publicity, and news media without time limitation.

Initial for photo/video release: YES or NO

Print name _____ Date _____

Signature _____

Emergency Contact

Print name _____ Phone _____

For office use only.

Received and verified by:

Print name _____ Date _____

Signature _____

Kosciusko SWCD Parental Consent Form

Volunteers under 18 are required to bring a signed waiver form prior to or on the day of the volunteer project, or have a form on file with Kosciusko SWCD. Without it, the minor will not be able to volunteer. A parent or legal guardian of each minor must read and agree to the following:

By signing this form, I the parent or legal guardian of the named below, consent to the child's participation in the volunteer activities organized by Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District. I understand that the child will be provided with orientation and training necessary for the safe and responsible performance of the volunteer duties and will be expected to meet all requirements of the position, including compliance with Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District's policies and procedures. I understand that my child will receive no monetary compensation for this work.

I hereby agree that the Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District assumes no liability for any loss of property or claim of personal injury, including death, as a result of my child's participation in volunteer activities. I herein release, discharge and agree to indemnify, defend and hold harmless the State of Indiana, Kosciusko County, and the Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District, their board of supervisors, employees and/or successors from all claims and suits, including court costs, attorneys fees and other expenses, that are related to any injury to property and/or persons, including death, which may occur within during my child's volunteer activities.

I _____ (parent/guardian name) give permission for my child, _____ (child's name), to volunteer at Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District.

I hereby authorize the Kosciusko Soil and Water Conservation District to use photographs and video of my child and circulate for the purposes of advertising, publicity, and news media without time limitation.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Date _____ Phone (in case of emergency) _____

For office use only.

Received and verified by:

Print name _____ Date _____

Signature _____