



Conservation District Capacity Assessment

Division of Soil Conservation
Breegan Andersen, Deputy Division Director

NASCA 2026

OUTLINE

- **Why are we doing this project?**
- **How are we implementing the project?**
- **What are we getting out of this assessment?**
- **Other updates**

**What do Soil and Water Conservation
Districts need to effectively serve their
communities?**

Overview

What are we doing?

ISDA is conducting a statewide district capacity assessment to better understand what Indiana SWCDs need to serve their communities well.

Why are we doing this assessment?

To identify strengths, gaps, and what support districts need most, then use those findings to inform strategic planning and future resource allocation.

How are we carrying it out?

The State Soil Conservation Board (SSCB) obligated Clean Water Indiana (CWI) program funds allowing ISDA to procure an experienced third-party service to ensure quality work in carrying out the project. ISDA has engaged DJ Case + Associates to lead the assessment and gather input from across the state.

The Project Team

Core Project Team

- **Breegan Andersen**
Deputy Director, Division of Soil Conservation
bandersen3@isda.in.gov
- **Tara Wessler-Henry**
Clean Water Indiana Program Director
twessler@isda.in.gov
- **DJ Case and Associates**
Contracted Vendor

Responsible for the day-to-day of project support, implementation, and finalization.

District Capacity Advisory Workgroup

- Indiana District Employee Association (IDEA)
- Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD)
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA)
- State Soil Conservation Board (SSCB)
- Women for the Land

Responsible for advising the core project team toward successful project implementation, providing feedback to the vendor, and assisting in reviewing draft reports.

About DJ Case + Associates

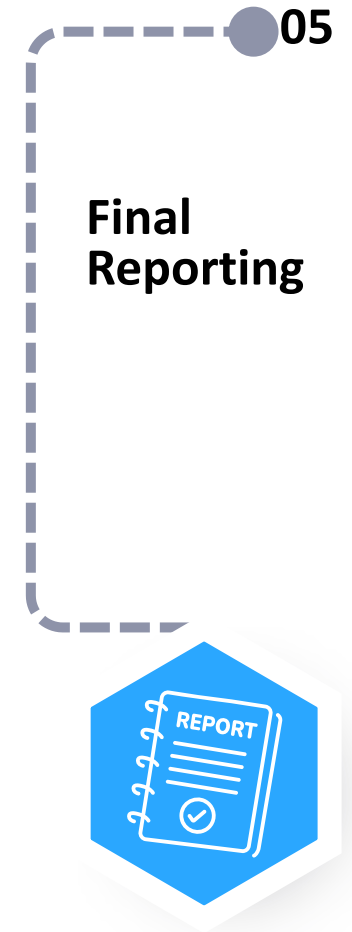
- Small communication and marketing firm
- Headquartered in Mishawaka, IN
- Expertise in strategic marketing, social science research, video and multimedia production, web application development, and interface design.
- We are working with their social sciences team
- Worked with several government agencies across Indiana and the US



Indiana State Nonpoint Source Program Management Plan 2025 – 2029

Vision: "To restore waters impaired by nonpoint source pollution and maintain water quality in healthy watersheds through locally led partnerships."

Prepared by:
Indiana Department of Environmental Management
Office of Water Quality Watershed Assessment
Planning Branch Watershed Planning and Restoration Section



How are we gathering information?



District Supervisor Listening Sessions

6 Regional Listening
Sessions targeted at
District Supervisors



On-site District Staff Visits

Total of 37 of 92 Districts
engaged in-person



Partner Interviews

7 Statewide Partner
Organizations
interviewed



Survey

Send survey to 500+
individuals who are
district supervisors or
staff

Conversations around these topics

☐ Current capacity and operational effectiveness

- Identify strengths and gaps in operations, governance, staffing, and service delivery.
- Review the adequacy of funding sources and financial management practices.

☐ Training and professional development needs

- Assess knowledge gaps and skill levels of SWCD employees and Board of Supervisors related to conservation planning, grant management, and technical assistance.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current training programs and resources and identify areas for improvement.
- Assess use and understanding of existing tools available for training and professional development.

☐ Personnel and board management

- Identify barriers of recruitment for employees and board members.
- Identify barriers of retaining employees and board members.
- Identify tools and needs to improve working relationships between employees and board members.

❑ Resource and gaps

- Assess the adequacy of technology, equipment and facilities to support SWCD operations.
- Identify gaps in digital tools and data management systems to support operations and conservation implementation.

❑ Community engagement and partnerships

- Analyze how SWCDs collaborate with local, state, and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, landowners, and other unidentified partners.
- Evaluate SWCD and county government support, connections, and interactions that would result in a SWCD to be recognized by their county.
- Identify barriers to partnerships and recommend strategies to improve coordination and engagement.

❑ Program and service delivery

- Assess the effectiveness of SWCDs in delivering conservation programs, technical assistance, and cost-share programs.
- Identify gaps in service delivery and make recommendations to improve program reach and impact
- Assess understanding and use of leveraging sheets which showcase impact of SWCD funds within the county

What are we getting out of this project?

- Critical information to support decisions.
- Recommendations for targeted support, training, and resources to help SWCD employees and boards fulfill roles confidently.
- A road map for strategic implementation for the SSCB, ISDA, and other conservation partners.



Other updates to share

Updates to Soil and Water Conservation District Law in Indiana

- Required training for appointed and elected supervisors
- New due date for annual financial reporting
- Withholding of matching funds if annual financial report is submitted late
- Annual report distribution to local governing body, public, and Division of Soil Conservation
- Election committee deadlines and restrictions
- Associate supervisor clarification as non-voting members
- Vacancy-filling rules when multiple vacancies occur at the same time

CONTACT US

Breegan Andersen
bandersen3@isda.in.gov

Geneva Tyler
gtyler@isda.in.gov