



SYCAMORE TRAILS
RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, INC.

GREENCASTLE, INDIANA

AREA PLAN

JANUARY 1, 2009 – DECEMBER 31, 2013



1007 Mill Pond Lane, Suite B
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SYCAMORE TRAILS RC&D AREA PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

This document is the long-range plan for Sycamore Trails Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council, Inc. It was developed by soliciting public input through a well publicized survey in the nine-county area served by Sycamore Trails RC&D. In addition to the survey results, program participants, agency partners, committee members and local Council members were directly involved with and provided guidance on the development of this plan. The counties served by the Area Plan include the following: Clay, Fountain, Montgomery, Owen, Parke, Putnam, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo.

The purpose of this plan is to provide a strategic direction for the organization. The organization is stronger than ever before, yet more efforts are needed to ensure a strong, sustainable organization that serves the communities in our area.

Congress passed the Food and Agricultural Act of 1962, which authorized the Resource Conservation and Development areas. The purpose of the act was to expand opportunities for conservation districts, local units of government, and individuals to improve their communities in multi-county areas. This included assistance in enhancing the economic, environmental and social well-being of the RC&D areas. Currently, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service administers the Federal RC&D Program. This document serves as an agreement between NRCS and the Sycamore Trails Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc.

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

Vision

Our Vision Statement, created in 1995, is: Local citizens cooperating to maintain a healthy, vibrant, and diverse environment and economy in the Sycamore Trails RC&D area.

Mission

Our Mission Statement, created in 1995, is: To motivate, assist, enable, and coordinate local citizens in the conservation and development of natural, human, and economic resources.

Background and Structure of the Council.

The original sponsors of Sycamore Trails RC&D were the County Commissioners and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Clay, Parke, Putnam, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties. A Steering Committee adopted bylaws, and submitted an Application for Assistance to the Secretary of Agriculture to improve the economy through orderly development and conservation of resources through the Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D). USDA approved this request in 1975, and the Sycamore Trails Resource Conservation and Development Area was established.

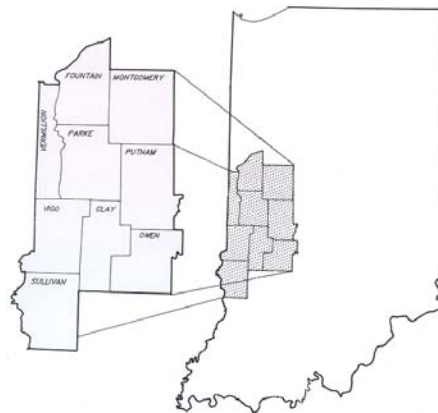
The RC&D Council was established to represent the sponsors and carry out an Area Plan of action. In 1992, USDA officially approved the expansion of Sycamore Trails RC&D Area to include Fountain, Montgomery and Owen Counties.

Early sponsors recognized the opportunities available to nonprofit organizations, and in September 1987, Sycamore Trails Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc. was incorporated in Indiana as a not-for-profit organization. In April of 1993, the IRS issued a letter of determination recognizing Sycamore Trails as a 501(c)(3) organization.

The governing body of Sycamore Trails RC&D is the membership. Members include the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Boards of County Commissioners, and the County Cooperative Extension Boards from each of the nine counties. In addition, the City of Terre Haute is a member, and the bylaws permit up to five At Large members. Each year the members elect a five-member Executive Committee to carry on the day to day operation of the Council.

Overview of the Area.

The Sycamore Trails RC&D Area is located in west central Indiana and includes Clay, Fountain, Montgomery, Owen, Parke, Putnam, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties. The area is bordered on the west by Illinois and the Wabash River.



Most of this area is made up of privately owned farms which produce both cash-grain crops and livestock. The less sloping soils are used for corn and soybeans. Some small grain, such as winter wheat, oats, and grain sorghum are also grown in the area. A small acreage is used for specialty crops such as vegetables and melons.

The major resource concerns are: seasonal wetness, water erosion, maintenance of the content of organic matter and productivity of the soils, excessive sediments, nutrients, and pesticides in surface water, nutrients and pesticides in ground water, and the loss of wildlife habitat.

When this area was settled, the broad, nearly level uplands in the northwestern part of the area supported prairie vegetation. The rest of the area supported hardwoods. Pin oak, swamp white oak, blackgum, American sycamore, green ash, silver maple, and cottonwood trees grow on the wetter soils. Walnut, poplar, oak, shagbark hickory, sugar maple, and white ash are the major tree species on the better-drained soils. Some of the major wildlife species in this area are white-tailed deer, fox, squirrel, raccoon, opossum, rabbit, quail, ducks, turkey, dove, and geese. Fishing occurs in constructed impoundments, rivers and streams. The species of fish in the area include bass, catfish, bluegill, and crappie.

The area is covered almost entirely with a thin to moderate layer of loess. The loess throughout the area is underlain dominantly by glacial deposits of Wisconsin or earlier glacial periods. The loess and glacial deposits are underlain by Pennsylvanian-age bedrock (shale, siltstone, sandstone, and limestone). Bedrock outcrops occur on the valley walls along the Wabash River and at the base of some steep slopes along minor streams and drainage ways.

The soils are dominantly very deep, very poorly-drained to well-drained, and loamy or silty. The dominant kinds of parent material are till, outwash, loess, and alluvium.

Demographics

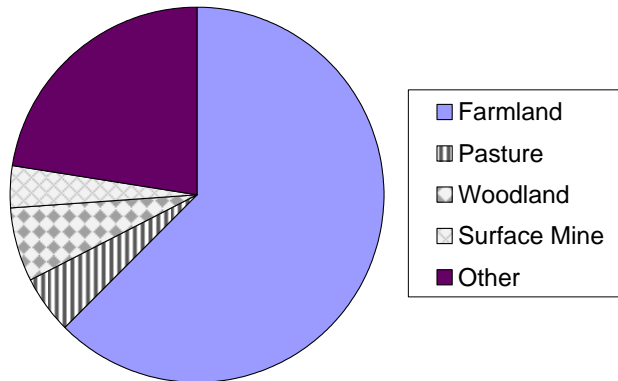
According to the 2000 census, the population of the Sycamore Trails RC&D area is 302,116 people. The ethnic breakdown is listed in the table below.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA							
	2000 Pop	2000 female %	2000 White M/F %	2000 Black%	2000 Amer Indian %	2000 Asian %	2000 Latino %
Clay	26556	51	98	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.8
Fountain	17954	50	98	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.7
Montgomery	38173	49.6	97.5	1	0.2	0.5	2.9
Owen	21786	50.4	98.2	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.9
Parke	17241	52.2	96.4	2.3	0.3	0.2	0.7
Putnam	36019	47.8	94.8	3	0.4	0.9	1.3
Sullivan	21751	46.2	94.2	4.4	0.3	0.2	0.9
Vermillion	16788	50.8	98.3	0.4	0.3	0.1	1
Vigo	105848	50.7	90.6	6.1	0.3	1.7	1.3

Natural Resources

The nine counties covered by the Sycamore Trails RC&D area have a rural landscape. Soils designated as ‘prime farmland’ comprise 70% of the area. These soils are the most productive and have the fewest limitations for growing crops.

Land Use in Sycamore Trails Area



Agriculture

According to the 2002 Agriculture Census, 65% of the land, or 1.5 million acres, in the nine-county area is in farmland. Two counties are ranked in the top four counties for production. Montgomery County is #1 with soybeans and sheep and #4 in hog production. Putnam County ranks #2 in sheep production.

In 1997, there were 22 sawmills within the Sycamore Trails RC&D area processing hardwood logs, the majority of which were grown locally. Forestry continues to be an integral part of the agriculture industry.

Socioeconomic Information

SOCIOECONOMIC DATA

	2000 Work Travel Miles	2004 Median Income	2004 % persons below Poverty	2006 Unemployment % Rate	% Adults w/ HS diploma & higher	% with BA or higher
Clay	26	40120	10.7	5.6	82.3	12.8
Fountain	25	40879	10.1	4.8	80.7	10.1
Montgomery	20.4	46486	10.3	4.1	85.7	14.7
Owen	33.6	38589	11.3	5.3	74.9	9.2
Parke	27.5	37467	12.4	5.5	80.5	11.6
Putnam	25.6	42273	9.9	5.3	81.2	13.1
Sullivan	26.8	35882	13	6	81.8	9.4
Vermillion	22.7	39545	10.3	6.5	81.2	11.2
Vigo	18.7	35736	15.4	6.3	81.2	21.4

RESOURCE NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Public Participation Activities

The Sycamore Trails RC&D Executive Committee developed a one-page survey that was distributed to the citizens of the nine-county RC&D area (see Appendix). The primary dispersion method was through the sponsoring organizations of County Commissioners, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), and Cooperative Extension Boards.

The survey was distributed through newspaper articles, at SWCD Annual Meetings, on the council website, at committee meetings, at watershed and conservation group meetings, and at a community environmental event at DePauw University. There were also direct mailings from council members to targeted groups such as firemen, the Amish community, and local officials. An ad hoc task force of county representatives (council members) coordinated the distribution of the surveys in their counties.

After tabulation and evaluation of the 381 surveys that were returned, the same ad hoc task force summarized and prioritized the results. The results were discussed and verified as accurate at a full council meeting. They also brainstormed ideas for the two new areas of involvement for the council—Energy Conservation and Alternative Crops.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS BY RC&D PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Land Conservation – Land Conservation was a concern listed through the surveys. Protection of land from soil erosion due to water is the key concern. The local Soil and Water Conservation Districts are heavily engaged on this front and are making positive improvements as they work with land owners on cropland, pastureland, and urban sites. There is also a concern of soil erosion on private woodland and surface mined acreage. The Forestry Committee will focus on educating the woodland owners. The Abandoned Mine Lands Committee works with landowners on the surface-mined sites that were abandoned prior to 1967.

Water Management – The protection of water quality was identified as important. Currently, there are three watersheds encompassing an eight digit Hydrologic Unit Area that are gathering resource information such as water assessment monitoring, evaluating field data, gathering and training steering committees, and developing watershed plans. We will continue to partner with these groups.

Community Development – This was an area of great but varied interest. Economic development was the highest ranking response. Individuals drive from 19 to 34 miles daily to their place of employment. The development of good, local, well-paying jobs is an area in which the council can partner with other organizations to improve the community.

We have found that public awareness of Sycamore Trails RC&D is an area that could use improvement. We are a well-kept secret. To find potential partners, we need to improve

our communication. We also need to improve the sustainability of the council. Funding levels will need to increase in order to provide for sufficient staffing to accomplish our goals.

Land Management – The need for improvements in forestland, wildlife habitat management, and land use received a high number of responses. However, the top concern expressed was the need for development of alternative and renewable energy resources. This is an area that has recently moved to the forefront as the cost of living has increased. The most visible increase has been the cost of energy.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES

Land Conservation

Goal 1: To reduce soil loss on agricultural and forest land by cooperating with local agencies and groups to implement 4 projects directly related to the control of soil erosion by 2013.

Objective 1: Partner with 2 local agencies and groups to develop and implement erosion and sediment control projects on agricultural or forest land by 2013.

Strategy 1: Contact SWCD, NRCS and Cooperative Extension offices for project needs by 2013.

Strategy 2: Assist with 4 projects by 2013.

Water Management

Goal 2: Establish reciprocal relationships to protect water quality in lakes, streams, and groundwater with at least 2 units of government, business enterprises, or nonprofits by 2013.

Objective 1: Assist existing and potential partners in at least 2 watersheds by 2013.

Strategy 1: Assist the Busseron Creek Watershed Steering Committee in the planning and implementation of water quality improvement projects by attending meetings, assisting in educational efforts and researching funding sources to implement practices by 2013.

Strategy 2: Assist the Big Walnut/Deer Creek Watershed Steering Committee in the planning and implementation of water quality improvement projects by attending meetings, assisting in educational efforts and researching funding sources to implement practices by 2013.

Objective 2: Work with existing and potential partners to reclaim abandoned mine land sites to reduce the degradation of water quality in at least 6 counties by 2013.

Strategy 1: Secure funding for a project coordinator to assist landowners with the planning and implementation of reclamation efforts annually through 2013.

Strategy 2: Assist with a cost share program for landowners to repair 35 impacted sites by 2013.

Community Development

Goal 3: Promote economic development in the Sycamore Trails area by assisting at least one business, unit of government, or economic development group yearly.

Objective 1: Assess opportunities by contacting at least two businesses or economic development organizations yearly.

Strategy 1: Partner with at least one business or economic development group in creating or maintaining employment opportunities yearly.

Goal 4: Improve Council vitality and sustainability via 3 methods by 2013 to enable the Council to fulfill its mission.

Objective 1: Increase assets of the council by \$50,000 by 2013.

Strategy 1: Initiate a fund-raising task force to bring income opportunities to the council by 2010.

Strategy 2: Investigate fee-for-service opportunities to provide assistance to clients while increasing funds by 2011.

Objective 2: Increase board capacity by 10%

Strategy 1: Strive for increased diversity as vacancies on the Council are filled through 2013

Strategy 2: Provide annual board training.

Strategy 3: Institute a mentor program for new board members by 2010.

Strategy 4: Review and update the job description of a Director by 2009.

Objective 3: Develop stronger public support for Sycamore Trails by at least 3 methods by 2013.

Strategy 1: Increase committee membership by 20% over the 2009 numbers by 2013.

Strategy 2: Increase name recognition among public and elected officials by increasing marketing activities by 20% by 2013

Strategy 3: Increase communication with RC&D sponsors, state agencies, legislators, and non-government organizations by distributing 3 publications annually and by asking each board member to visit with 2 elected officials annually.

Land Management

Goal 5: Seek 4 opportunities to increase awareness of how to improve energy conservation in homes and personal transportation by 2013.

Objective 1: Provide training to 20 homeowners on energy conservation strategies by 2013.

Strategy 1: Collaborate with partners on 2 projects by 2013.

Objective 2: Provide information to 50 drivers on energy conservation strategies for personal transportation by 2013.

Strategy 1: Collaborate with partners on 2 projects by 2013.

Goal 6: Promote at least one alternative and/or renewable energy source by 2013.

Objective 1: Investigate one or more energy options appropriate to Sycamore Trails area by 2010.

Strategy 1: Survey potential partners that have expertise in this field about the optimal energy sources by 2010.

Strategy 2: Collaborate with partners on 2 energy related projects by 2013.

Goal 7: Promote the production and marketing of alternative crops in at least four counties by 2013.

Objective 1: Partner with others who have the expertise in this area on at least 2 projects by 2013.

Strategy 1: Co-sponsor 2 workshops to educate the public about alternative crops by 2013.

Goal 8: Protect lands, including forest areas, from conversion by supporting efforts of 2 land trusts or other organizations by 2013.

Objective 1: Improve public awareness of and participation in land protection activities via 2 methods in the Sycamore Trails area by 2013.

Strategy 1: Partner with 2 organizations to host work days to provide hands-on opportunities for volunteers interested in conserving the ecosystem on protected lands by 2013.

Strategy 2: Assist in the establishment of the Ouabache Land Conservancy as a non-profit by providing administrative assistance and by participating on the board of directors by 2011.

Goal 9: Promote awareness and use of environmental stewardship practices in our area by 2013.

Objective 1: Train at least 500 target audience members in environmental stewardship techniques by 2013.

Strategy 1: Sponsor 4 educational events per year.

Strategy 2: Provide technical environmental information to a targeted audience through 15 media releases/publications by 2013.

Strategy 3: Investigate the acquisition or lease of permanent areas to hold workshops and field days and to demonstrate the long term benefits of environmental stewardship practices by 2013.

Objective 2: Keep council members and committees abreast of legislation and regulatory issues impacting environmental stewardship practices annually.

Strategy 1: Identify pertinent legislators, agencies, and other interested groups by June 2009.

Strategy 2: Communicate with pertinent contacts twice a year.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH USDA AND OTHERS

The Sycamore Trails RC&D Council and committees work with numerous partners. We have realized the value of partnering rather than trying to accomplish our mission by ourselves. There are not enough resources of staff, money, or time to address all the needs. The Council makes efforts to avoid obvious conflicts with other organizations, choosing instead to forge partnerships that can be more effective than any single organization. The SWCDs and Extension saw this potential early, and actually created Sycamore Trails for that purpose.

Sycamore Trails actively works at developing and strengthening partnerships in all its areas of operations. It recognizes that community problems can be addressed more effectively and efficiently by elimination of duplicative activities and combining and coordinating the focus of available resources.

The technical assistance in the development of this area plan was provided by the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) RC&D Coordinator and Program Assistant. Implementation of this plan will be carried out by the council and committees, along with the assistance of our many partnering units of government and organizations. NRCS District Conservationists, Indiana Department of Natural Resource Foresters and Biologist, Purdue University Extension staff and others will provide technical assistance along the way as requested.

Current funding partners include the IDNR-Division of Reclamation, Clean Water Indiana, and the Indiana Office of Tourism Development. The Sycamore Trails Board of Directors also have made a commitment that 100% of the board members will financially support the Council and its activities.

Current partners include: The Nature Conservancy, Friends of Shades and Turkey Run State Parks, Pheasants Forever, Indiana Forest and Woodland Owners' Association, The Putnam, Parke, Sullivan, and Vigo County Community Foundations.

Potential partners are numerous, including local, state, and federal units of government; private natural resource or community organizations; universities; and local businesses and corporations.

LINKAGES TO THE NRCS STRATEGIC PLAN

NRCS Overarching Strategies addressed in the Area Plan include:

Cooperative Conservation – Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Watershed Approach – Goals 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Market-based Approach – Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

NRCS Mission Goals and Outcomes associated with Sycamore Trails RC&D projects include:

High Quality Productive Soils – Goals 1, 2, 7, 8, 9

Clean and Abundant Water – Goals 1, 2, 8, 9

Water Quality

Water Management

Healthy Plant and Animal Communities – Goals 1, 2, 7, 8, 9

Forest Ecosystems

Fish and Wildlife Habitat

Wetlands

Clean Air – Goals 5, 6, 8, 9

Adequate Energy Supply – Goals 5, 6, 7

Energy Conservation

Alternative / Renewable energy

Working Farm and Ranch Lands – Goal 7, 8

Connected Landscapes

Viable Agriculture

REQUIRED CLAUSES AND SIGNATURES

The Sycamore Trails RC&D Council's program will be conducted in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions as contained in Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1967 as amended, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (P.L. 100-259) and other nondiscrimination statutes; namely, Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and in accordance with regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7CFR-15, Subparts A&B) which provide that no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or handicap/disability be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial (or technical) assistance from the Department of Agriculture or any agency thereof.

The Sycamore Trails RC&D Council agrees that the signing of this document constitutes agreement to comply with federal laws concerning restrictions on lobbying, a drug-free workplace, and responsibilities for procurement, suspension, and disbarment.

The Sycamore Trails RC&D Council has had this application reviewed by the state. Comments made through the state single point of contact have been considered prior to submission of the application and all applicable procedures have been followed. An environmental impact statement will not be prepared during the development of the area plan, but an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement will be prepared concurrently with the development of each project, when applicable, in accordance with federal procedures.

Sycamore Trails Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc. hereby adopts this RC&D Area Plan and agrees to use effectively the assistance provided by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to realize the goals and objectives outlined herein.

Sycamore Trails RC&D Council, Inc., Indiana

By: 
President

Date: 10-21-08

Attest: 
Council Secretary

Date: 10-21-08

U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service

The State Conservationist hereby acknowledges the attached Area Plan of Sycamore Trails RC&D Council, Inc. as meeting the requirements under Public Law 97-98 to receive assistance from USDA.

Acknowledged by:



State Conservationist

Date: 10/23/08

APPENDIX

Needs Assessment Form for Public Input.....14
Needs Assessment Summary Information.....16



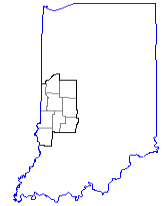
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strcd@sycamoretrails.org
www.sycamoretrails.org

SYCAMORE TRAILS RC&D NEEDS ASSESSMENT



COUNTY _____ DATE _____

Sycamore Trails Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) is currently seeking input from the public to guide updating of a long range plan for the nine-county area. The local RC&D, operating as a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, works with local units of government, community organizations, groups, and individuals to coordinate technical and financial assistance to meet the needs of the local area. Through these partnership opportunities, Sycamore Trails RC&D strives to meet needs not currently being met by other programs. The RC&D program concentrates on the areas of land management, water management, land conservation, and community development.

What needs do you foresee for your community over the next five-to-ten years?

Please select no more than 3 in each category.

A. Environmental Concerns:

- Protection of water quality in streams, lakes and groundwater.
- Improvements in forestland, fisheries and wildlife habitat protection and management.
- Improvements in management of solid and/or hazardous wastes
- Improvements in planning for natural resource protection.
- Protection of land from soil erosion

B. Economic Concerns:

- Improvements in tourism promotion
- Development of recreation amenities in your area
- Industrial development and job creation improvements.
- Production and marketing of alternative crops, diversifying farming operations, and production of food on small acreages
- Development of alternative and renewable energy resources such as wind, geothermal, biomass, or methane from livestock facilities.
- Improvements and assistance in small business startups.

C. Social Concerns

- Improvements, development, and protection of historic sites, artifacts, documents, etc.
- Sewer and water system improvements. Rural ____ Public ____ (Check one that is a priority)
- Improvements in services for elderly, disadvantaged, child care.
- Improvements in community facilities (recreation, fire, community centers).
- Grant writing, project planning, and funding assistance.
- High-speed internet access/improvement

More on other side of page

D. Are there other needs that do not fit into the above categories? Please describe.

Optional

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ (Hm) (Wk) (Cell)

Email _____

_____ I would like to be contacted. Best time to call _____

_____ I would like to be added to the Sycamore Trails RC&D ___ mailing ___ emailing list

I am interested in activities of the Committees listed below: (circle as many as apply)

Environmental Education Forestry Fish & Wildlife Invasive Plants

Land Protection Abandoned Mine Land reclamation Other _____



SYCAMORE TRAILS

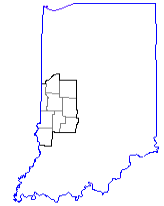
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SYCAMORE TRAILS RC&D NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Final Summary



Sycamore Trails Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) is currently seeking input from the public to guide updating of a long range plan for the nine-county area. Sycamore Trails RC&D strives to meet needs *not currently being met by other programs*. The RC&D program concentrates on the areas of land management, water management, land conservation, and community development. Needs to be addressed in next five-to-ten years.

Water Management – The conservation, use, and quality of water, including irrigation and rural water supplies; the mitigation of floods and high water tables; the repair and improvement of reservoirs; the improvement of agricultural water management; and the improvement of water quality.

294 votes - Protection of water quality in streams, lakes and groundwater.

Land Management – Energy conservation that includes the production of energy crops, the protection of agricultural land as appropriate from conversion to other uses, farmland protection, and the protection of fish and wildlife habitats.

248 votes - Development of alternative and renewable energy resources such as wind, geothermal, biomass, or methane from livestock facilities.

174 votes - Production and marketing of alternative crops, diversifying farming operations, and production of food on small acreages

147 votes - Improvements in forestland, fisheries and wildlife habitat protection and management.

113 votes - Improvements in planning for natural resource protection.

Land Conservation – The control of erosion and sedimentation.

218 votes - Protection of land from soil erosion

Community Development – The development of resource-based industries; the protection of rural industries from natural resource hazards; the development of adequate rural water and waste disposal systems; the improvement of recreation facilities; the improvement of rural housing; the provision of adequate health and education facilities; the satisfaction of essential transportation and communication needs; and the promotion of food security, economic development, and education.

202 votes - Industrial development and job creation improvements.

161 votes - Improvements in management of solid and/or hazardous wastes

158 votes - Sewer and water system improvements. **Rural _57_ Public _32_** (Check one that is a priority)

154 votes - Improvements in community facilities (recreation, fire, community centers).

150 votes - Improvements and assistance in small business startups.

147 votes - Grant writing, project planning, and funding assistance.

137 votes - Improvements in services for elderly, disadvantaged, child care.

136 votes - High-speed internet access/improvement

124 votes - Improvements, development, and protection of historic sites, artifacts, documents, etc.

82 votes - Development of recreation amenities in your area

73 votes - Improvements in tourism promotion