

RITA In Action!

Restoring Roots

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Much of southwest Indiana is situated on past coal mine land, both reclaimed and abandoned. Warrick County landowners, in particular, are seeing the effects of this due to the successes of the coal mine industry in the area. Large-scale producers and urban growers alike are experiencing difficulties with growing crops, gardens, orchards, and forests. Warrick County Soil and Water Conservation District applied for and received a forestry-focused grant, which includes a series of educational workshops, the first of which took place in early April.

The Restoring Roots workshop emphasized the importance of transforming and maintaining abandoned coal mine land in a forestry setting. Expert speakers from Purdue Extension and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) taught attendees about: (1) establishing trees on surface mine land, (2) tree species selection and care, and (3) the best ways to bring native birds back home. Special attention was given to the most recent research, much of which has been conducted by the State's top universities. Participants found much value in all three topics and many were interested in the technical support and funding available through the [Abandoned Land Mine Program](#). Landowners interested in planting trees found the research-based information regarding species selection, specialized maintenance, and general care invaluable. Birders, naturalists, and wildlife enthusiasts enjoyed learning about the 12 indicator bird species in Indiana, why their populations are declining, and how to maximize their habitat availability and success.

Individuals were given the opportunity to listen to presentations, ask targeted questions, and interact with one another throughout the event. In hopes to promote native tree plantings and aid in tree identification, the district gave the first 20 registrants a free *101 Trees of Indiana* field guide. As a Resilient Indiana technician, I was honored to be asked to help with this event from the planning phases through the execution of the workshop. I created event flyers, promoted the workshop to the public, and helped with the "behind the scenes" work on the day of the event. It was a pleasure to watch all of the hard work of each agency, organization, and conservation partner come to fruition.

This interactive workshop was well-attended as the first in the workshop series, bringing together nearly 40 Warrick County landowners and conservation professionals. This diverse group of participants included anyone from suburban homeowners with only a small yard to landowners with hundreds of acres of recreational property. Participants have expressed great appreciation and are interested in future workshops in this series! Warrick County Soil and Water Conservation District hopes to continue this series well into the future, as more and more citizens become aware of local concerns and are interested in being part of the solution!