

RITA In Action

Bartholomew County Community Urban Forestry Grant

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Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are essential resources for local citizens. The employees here are the people who care about the turtles crossing the road, the stormwater runoff, and making practical decisions to improve local sustainability. With each county having a SWCD, they can address both local needs, and partner with other SWCDs or other state, federal, or non-governmental organizations focused on conservation to address regional needs.

The Bartholomew County SWCD is one of the counties that I serve, and it is a great example of a district that cares about their local environment. They helped to establish a Cisma in 2021 and have been instrumental in removing and educating citizens on the damages of invasive species.



In October, we were presented with an opportunity to apply for a Community Urban Forestry grant from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to plant trees in urban areas. A prerequisite for this grant is that the city must have some tree management plan or ordinance in place to ensure that the trees would be cared for. With Columbus's tree ordinance in place, the district was excited to hear about this grant as they have worked to remove invasive species from a city park and being able to replace those invasive plants with trees would bring the park closer to achieving their goal of creating a stable ecosystem within the park. I was also excited to hear about the opportunity because grant writing is a skill that I want to become proficient in and Bartholomew County has allowed me to help write their grant applications.

Soon after we learned about the open application, a concerned citizen contacted the district about assisting with planting trees in the public rights-of-way of their neighborhood to restore their canopy from storm damage and over-mature trees with younger trees. This brought me a smile as that is exactly what SWCDs are for; to help their communities grow in sustainability.

After discussing how the goals of the district aligned with those of the neighborhood, we gathered the necessary quotes, management plans, and described how planting these trees would benefit the community. After the two week review period, we were informed that we got the award! This grant exemplifies the idea that it takes a team to make conservation happen. With the city's tree ordinance, concerned citizens, SWCD facilitation, and state grants funded by the federal government, conservation was able to advance.