

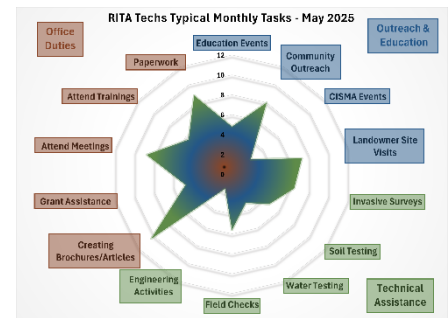
RITA in Action
Annual Report – 2025 Edition
 By Meg Leader
 Resilient Indiana Program Director

This past year was not the year I expected for RITA twelve months ago. But even with weathering the nearly two month long furlough last spring and the federal shutdown this fall, the RITA Team has flourished and grown.

RITA has the goal of providing three benefits to Indiana.

Capacity Building for our local SWCD offices to assist with program implementation and provide more services to local communities - We started the year with seven RITA Techs, covering roughly half of the SWCD offices. We finish the year with 13 of the 14 positions filled and RITA Techs working closely with 77 of the SWCD offices and our ICP partners.

Technical Assistance, including training and outreach to local communities. Each RITA Tech develops their own Plan of Work based on their own interests and the priorities of the offices they work with. In both 2024 and 2025 the RTTA Techs took a single month to develop a snapshot of what an average staff member would work on. While many of the tasks have stayed consistent, in 2025 the team saw a 25% increase in the time they are spending on Technical Assistance.



Workforce Development to instill in early career professionals the desire to continue working in this field. Over the past year, the team has attended nearly 300 workshops, trainings and conferences. The list of workshops etc. ranges from SWCD and Extension organized field days to the International SWCS conference. In addition, most of the team has either completed, or is currently enrolled in the Soil and Water Conservation Society's Emerging Leaders Program.

Here is a selection of the metrics that the RITA Team tracks and what was accomplished in 2025.

Attend SWCD Board Meetings	161
Attend ICP Meetings	216
Attend Field Days and Trainings	292
Present at SWCD Board Meetings	85
Present at a Field Day or Training	25
Present to the general public	143
Technical Assistance to landowners/producers	460

Rather than me trying to share the impact of Resilient Indiana, the Mentor Techs, those that were hired in the first round back in 2024, have been sharing the RITA in Action essays all year. For this report I've asked them to give you a quick summary of their year.



I cover six counties and I get to see a wide range of land resources, communities, and District priorities. This allows me to take part in so many different projects and events that display the diversity of Indiana's landscapes. These differences effect the priorities of each District, exposing me to a range of conservation practices and projects. I helped organize several outreach projects, including a "Moth Night" event allowing community members to view moths up close and learn about their importance as pollinators. I've spent time both doing water sampling and educating the public on water quality testing methods. I've also worked with many landowners seeking assistance for woodland and pond management by performing invasive species surveys and site visits to develop management. Being a part of RITA has allowed me to see firsthand the impact that Districts can have on their communities and the opportunity to take part in that work and help others do the same.

Emma Bodnarick



For personal points of pride, I shot up like a weed in my growth as a conservation professional this year and anticipate even more opportunities in 2026. I presented at my first conference while visiting California for the first time this summer during the Soil and Water Conservation Society's annual meeting. I gained experience with event hosting through women's learning circles, weed wrangles, and K-12 educational days. I learned a ton from my peers, my board and community members, and more than a few training courses. I also officially became a Hoosier this year! I'm grateful to have my niche in the Indiana conservation community and look forward to where 2026 takes us.

Jamie Davenport



This year has been challenging, but we as a team have persevered through it. Throughout it all, the SWCD's have been huge supporters, and I couldn't be more thankful for my counties. There are so many different ways I was able to help my Districts, but here are just two examples. I organized the Sugar Creek Canoe Clean-up, with about 45 volunteers to help remove debris from the creek. I also helped set up and present the soil health trailer to the 8th grade classes at Clay's annual Nature Bowl. Despite the obstacles faced this year, I am grateful for the dedication and perseverance of the District staff and supervisors. Their continued commitment to educating their communities on conservation made it an honor to be a part of this field. I cannot wait to see what we do in 2026!

Hanna Garriott



As a RITA Mentor Technician, I have been blessed with the unique opportunity to help shape conservation in my seven District area. Over the past year, I have developed a strong interest in youth education and community outreach in my region. I believe that advancing conservation begins with educating the next generation and fostering a genuine appreciation for the outdoors among youth. One way I supported this effort was by developing a short curriculum guide for local Girl Scout troops. Through these activities, second and third grade girls attended one of their regularly scheduled meetings, participated in planned outdoor activities, and earned their Outdoor Adventurer Badge. To meet these requirements, I planned a variety of hands-on activities, including bracelet-making using invasive honeysuckle vine, an outdoor scavenger hunt, creating a healthy snack box, and collecting litter around the campground. The girls thoroughly enjoyed these activities and gained confidence in their abilities as they successfully earned their badges!

Sydney Hassfurth



This year challenged me in unexpected ways, through it all I felt my entire region rooting for me. The encouragement and support from SWCD staff and partners were truly meaningful and reinforced the importance of collaboration and connection in conservation work. Throughout the rest of the year, I witnessed the dedication of local SWCDs as they continued serving their communities despite ongoing stress and uncertainty, from funding to staffing worries. So much of conservation work is rooted in relationships, from joining a producer in the combine during harvest to discussing water sampling with a curious biker. Our shared commitment to conservation in Indiana is strengthened by these connections, no matter how fleeting they may seem. The ups and downs of this year have made me even prouder of the work I am part of, and I look forward to building more relationships in 2026.

Camille Szczerbowicz