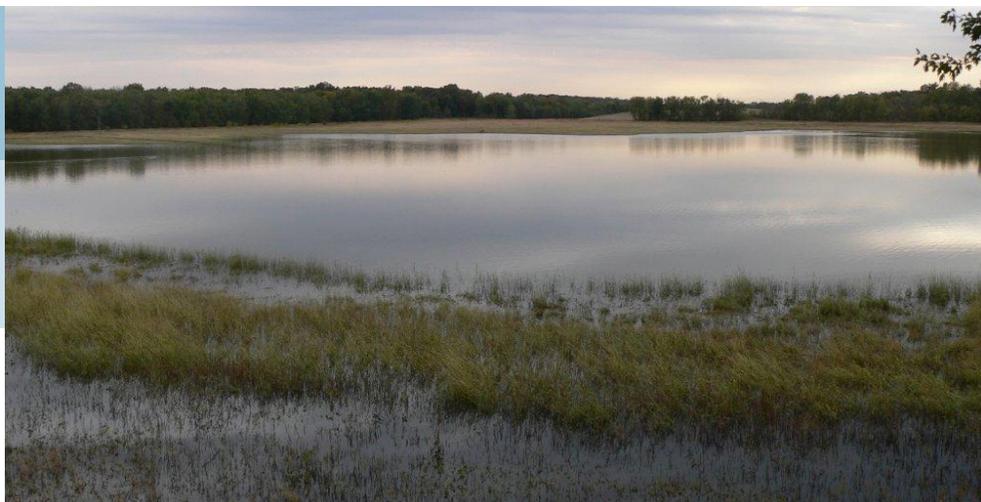




Helping People...

...Help the Land.



Word of Mouth Helps Protect Wetlands

Word of mouth travels fast - especially when it involves saving some money and helping protect our land. That's just how Blake Krueger became interested in the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), now called the Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) Program.

In 2006, Krueger purchased just over 71 acres of river bottom cropland in Dubois County, Indiana with the intention of preserving it as wildlife habitat.

"I knew the basic structure for prime wildlife habitat was already in place but the ground still needed quite a bit of work to make it into a great wildlife habitat," said Krueger. "Financially, I was unable to convert it into what I had envisioned."

As an avid hunter and part of the waterfowl community, Krueger turned to a waterfowl chat line for advice. He was introduced to WRP by fellow wildlife enthusiast, Terry Grindlay. Grindlay had enrolled several properties in WRP and proved to be a great mentor to Krueger.

"Terry walked me through the process. He gave me the steps, told me the benefits and was my leader on how to enroll in WRP," said Krueger.

On Grindlay's recommendation, Krueger contacted the Dubois County NRCS office and began the conservation planning process with District Conservationist Bart Pitstick to convert his land into a permanent wetland easement.

"Bart has been great to work with. He was able to get us in touch with wildlife biologists and we all worked together to develop a long-term

plan," said Krueger. "It took about five years, but the wait was well worth it because I got the results I was looking for - a wildlife-rich wetland environment."

And rich in wildlife it is! On any given day, Krueger and his family can go out and see a variety of wildlife ranging from foraging bald eagles and shorebirds, to bobcats and river otters. And he envisions it only getting better as the cypress trees he planted continue to mature. The property is used extensively by waterfowl in the fall and the spring, with thousands of ducks flocking into the area. Krueger has restored the waterfowl habitat he had imagined when he first purchased the flooded agricultural land.

"Initially I planned to use this land primarily as hunting ground, but I am quickly becoming more of a wildlife observer," said Krueger. "There is nothing better than walking around the property and witnessing the wildlife and beauty of the land, knowing it will always be there for my kids to enjoy."

Krueger's mentor has since passed away but he hopes he can continue Grindlay's legacy by influencing other wildlife enthusiasts to enroll in the WRE program.

"I encourage anyone to enroll in the program just like Terry encouraged me," said Krueger. "It allowed me to obtain, protect and restore my wetlands. It was a significant cost that I didn't think I could afford but the easement program made it possible."

We hope Krueger continues Grindlay's legacy of spreading the word about easements too. After all, good news travels fast!

Wetland Reserve Easements provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity and provide opportunities for educational, scientific and limited recreational activities. For more information NRCS' easement programs, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/in/programs/easements/?cid=stelprdb1248149>.

To learn about technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or contact your Indiana NRCS District Conservationist <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>.