



*Helping People...*

*...Help the Land.*



## A River Runs Through it

A lot of things have changed in almost 200 years but at least two things have stayed the same - the family of a small south central Indiana farm and their struggle with the Flatrock River. The Shank family acquired the 80 acre farm around 1820, working a predominately row crop operation of soybeans and corn. Throughout the years they have witnessed the force of the Flatrock River pound its way over their man-made levee, slowly eroding the farm ground around it. To prevent further erosion to their land, the family continually repaired the levee after each breach, exhausting both time and money. In 2001, Judith Droddy inherited the land. After seeing the struggles her previous family members had gone through, she decided it was time to stop fighting Mother Nature.

“The flood of 2008 was the straw that broke the camel’s back,” recalls Droddy. “We decided it wasn’t worth repairing the levee and to just let nature take its course.”

The removal of the levee wasn’t quite the solution the Droddy’s had hoped for. Without it, the Flatrock River created a new path across the farm, making it impossible for the Droddy’s to access farmland on the other side.

“It got to the point where we could no longer get a combine across to that land so it was basically just sitting there unused.”

Droddy reached out to her nephews, who farm the property, for recommendations on what could be done to make that piece of land more useful while protecting it from further erosion.

“My nephews have always been good stewards of the land,” said Droddy. “They’ve enrolled in conservation programs before and were very successful so they suggested I look into the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) to see if there was better use for the land and if we could make some improvements to keep it from eroding any further.”

With assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Droddy enrolled approximately 43 acres into a permanent conservation easement. She worked closely with the NRCS district conservationist to develop a plan that reintroduced native vegetation while allowing the Flatrock River to flow naturally. More than 8,300 tree seedlings, including black walnut, bur oak, swamp chestnut oak, cherry bark oak, swamp white oak, pecan, persimmon and river birch were planted in the area to hold the soil in place.

“Future generations are going to love those trees. I just hope I live long enough to see them get above the rooftops,” said Droddy.

Droddy says enrolling in WRP has inspired her to do additional conservation work on all her land. She is currently working on enlisting an additional 17 acres of her land into the State’s classified forest program. She is also working to remove invasive species around her property.

In the meantime Droddy, along with her family and friends, are enjoying the area as their own little nature preserve. The Flatrock River, once a source of frustration for Droddy and her ancestors, is now an extraordinary place to hike, camp, and enjoy nature with loved ones.