



Jefferson Soil & Water  
Conservation District  
500 Market Street  
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Steubenville, OH 43952  
740-264-9790

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# The County Cooperator

A PUBLICATION OF

THE JEFFERSON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

September

2023



## Did You Know?

- Roosevelt signed the Soil Conservation Act of **1935** which established the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) within USDA.
- Soil erosion impacts markets worldwide, including \$8 billion in losses due to lower crop yields and increased water usage.
- The Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission (OSWCC) was established in 1941 when the 94th Ohio General Assembly enacted House Bill 646.

Photo submission by: Amy O'Donnell



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### JSWCD Mission Statement

“Promoting Conservation of  
Our Lands and Waters”

#### JSWCD BOARD:

Mark Nelson, Chair  
Duayne Wetherell, Vice Chair  
Shawn Dougherty, Secretary  
Ken Perkins, Treasurer  
Stephanie Vance, Public Relations

#### JSWCD STAFF:

Irene Moore, District Administrator  
Wendee Dodds, Operations Manager/Natural Resources Specialist  
Mark Petho, Stormwater Resources Coordinator  
Aaron Dodds, Projects Manager  
Crystal Conaway, Cross Creek/Yellow Creek Watershed Program Manager  
Kirsten Zwick, Ag & Natural Resources Technician  
Amy Browning, Bookkeeping Manager/Program Assistant

JSWCD ASSOCIATE BOARD MEMBERS: Dr. Eric Haenni, Jodee Verhovec, Kam Pendleton & Paul Sweeney

We are online and on Facebook

[www.jeffersonswcd.org](http://www.jeffersonswcd.org)



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If you would like to stop receiving printed newsletters and would prefer to receive electronic versions via email, please instruct us by contacting us at 740-264-9790 or [abrowning@jeffersoncountyoh.com](mailto:abrowning@jeffersoncountyoh.com)

We appreciate your help in minimizing unwanted printed mail.

If you still want the print issue, no action is required.

- Farm Science Review · September 19-21
- JSWCD Board Meeting · September 18
- Columbus Day (Office Closed) · October 9
- JSWCD Board Meeting · October 16
- Veterans Day (Office Closed) · November 10
- Thanksgiving Day (Office Closed) · November 23
- JSWCD Board Meeting · November 20
- JSWCD Board Meeting · December 18
- Christmas (Office Closed) · December 25

## FRIDAY FUN FACT

Kirsten the Districts Ag and Natural Resources Technician will be posting a FUN FACT every FRIDAY on our Facebook page. Follow us on Facebook to expand your knowledge of Fun Facts related to Natural Resources.

Please join us for the  
*Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District's*

## 78th Annual Meeting and Banquet

*Monday, October 30th*

**St. Florian Hall**  
286 Luray Drive  
Wintersville, Ohio



740-264-9790 or [imoore@jeffersoncountyoh.com](mailto:imoore@jeffersoncountyoh.com)

*by October 20th*

**\$28.00 per/ticket**

*5:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m.*  
**Supervisor Election Voting**  
**Photo Contest Voting**

*7:00 p.m.*  
**Introductions**  
**Dinner**  
**Awards**

# 2023 Board of Supervisors Election

The Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District (JSWCD) is guided by 5 volunteer board members who are elected to their positions for 3 year terms. These board members are community members who help make funding decisions on how local and state funds are spent to improve the use of conservation practices in Jefferson County.

Stephanie Vance has decided after serving the community since 2012 to not run for re-election. Incumbent, Duayne Wetherell, whose board term expires this year, will join Andrew Morris on the ballot. These two highly qualified candidates will run uncontested for our two open positions on the Jefferson SWCD Board of Supervisors.

The Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission will cause an election of Supervisors of the JSWCD to be held in accordance with Chapter 940 of the Ohio Revised Code.

Voters eligible to cast a ballot for JSWCD must be 18 years of age or older, a resident or own land in Jefferson County or own a corporation, partnership, association or other entity registered with the Ohio Secretary of State in Jefferson County. Residents wishing to vote to affirm either or both Duayne Wetherell and Andrew Morris positions on the Board may request a ballot application and ballot from our office by any of the following ways: Requesting an application by either calling the office at 740 264-9790 or by emailing [imoore@jeffersoncountyoh.com](mailto:imoore@jeffersoncountyoh.com).

Upon request to vote, the SWCD will provide a ballot application, election ballot, and ballot envelope. The election period starts on October 1st. Ballots must be received (not postmarked) in the office by noon on October 30, 2023.

You may also vote in person at the JSWCD office located at 500 Market Street, Mezzanine, Suite 4, Steubenville, OH 43952 during office hours Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm.

Casting of ballots will also be accepted 5:30 pm to 6:45 pm prior to the convening of the JSWCD Annual Meeting and Banquet scheduled for October 30 to be held at the St. Florian Hall, Wintersville, Ohio. Reservations for the Annual Meeting and Banquet are not required to be eligible to vote.

**Duayne Wetherell** is completing his term as an elected Jefferson SWCD board member. He was born and raised in Jefferson and resides just outside of New Alexandria. He is a former dairy farmer now living and operating a small farm with his wife, Monica and their five children. Together they raise livestock and harvest and sell hay. He graduated from Buckeye Local High School and received a Natural Resources Historical Interpretive Services degree from Hocking College. While attending college, he volunteered at the historical Robbins Crossing Village. Duayne is presently employed by Crummitt and Sons' Vault Co. He is a member of the Jefferson County Farm Bureau serving on the Board of Trustees. He has represented the Farm Bureau membership in Columbus and in Washington D.C. He also has served on the Young Agriculture Professionals Committee. He was an Assistant Scoutmaster in the Boy Scouts of America where he volunteered as a leader in Steubenville Troop 3. Duayne grew up in the 4-H program as a youth and has now been an adult advisor for the Liberty Gals and Guys 4-H club for over 20 years. He enjoys spending time outdoors, as well as hiking, kayaking and spending time with family.



**Andrew Morris** is interested in serving the community on the Jefferson SWCD board because of his lifelong connection to water. From growing up as a swimmer, camper, and lifeguard to his professional career working for water utilities and local governments, Andrew loves and knows the water, nearby land, and their uses. As a Catholic, serving his community and being a good steward of our shared natural resources are core parts of Andrew's beliefs. Through the course of his career, he has worked on water and natural resource issues in the private, government, and nonprofit sectors. He and his wife recently moved from metropolitan Atlanta to Steubenville seeking a place with more traditional values to raise their children. They live in Brady Estates and enjoy frequent trips to downtown Steubenville and to the nearby countryside in Jefferson County. Andrew currently works on water policy and programs for the Alliance for Water Efficiency, a national nonprofit dedicated to helping utilities use water efficiently and sustainably. Andrew graduated with a BA in History from the University of Georgia and a JD from the Notre Dame Law School, both with honors.



## Paved with Soap?

Did you happen to be one of the many motorists who did a double take at what was on the roads and in the highway ditches this summer? A white, bubbly substance was observed by many here in the upper Ohio Valley, and possibly provided a few challenges during your commute.

But what was this soapy substance you may ask? Well-it was SOAP. No, there was not a truck driving around the valley dumping Tide or Ajax, but this was a naturally occurring phenomenon thanks to our northern neighbors.

You probably remember looking outside and noticing how hazy the sky appeared on numerous days this summer. Smoke and ash from Canadian wildfires traveled south, effecting air quality for much of the Mid-Atlantic, Northeastern United States, and Great Lakes



territory. Throughout this region, EPA air quality monitoring indicated levels to be in the moderate to unhealthy category at times.

Particulates of wood ash left a fine dusting on just about every surface—creating a nuisance more than anything. As this ash particulate laid dormant and the rain moved in, a chemical reaction occurred and lye was created. The concentration of lye was weak, but when mixed with the oils found on the roadways, it was just enough in some areas to create a crude soap.

Like the pioneers before us used to make (and some people still today), it's a simple and effective recipe for detergent. So next time you're camping, or perhaps cleaning out the fire place, conduct an internet search for "Wood Ash Soap" and you too can create what mother nature delivered to the valley.

## Welcome Aboard



Greetings all!

My name is Mark Petho, and I am the new Stormwater Resources Coordinator. I come from the small riverfront community of Powhatan Point, Ohio, where I reside with my beautiful fiancée, Beckie.

Prior to joining the JSWCD, I earned my A.A.S. in Civil Engineering Technology from Belmont College while working as a Highway Technician for the Ohio Department of Transportation. Along with my position here at JSWCD, I also serve on the Powhatan Fire Department.

Outside of work, I enjoy fishing, traveling, DIY projects, and learning new things. Even though I may not be a native of Jefferson County, I'm looking forward to meeting new faces and getting to know the people who make this county different from Ohio's other 87.

So if you have any stormwater issues going on in your neighborhood, an environmental concern regarding a construction site or illicit discharge, or just want to learn more about what a stormwater resources coordinator does – give me a call, and I'll be happy to talk with you.



My name is Crystal Conaway and I am the new Cross Creek / Yellow Creek Watershed Coordinator for JSWCD. I was born and raised in Jefferson County, but recently started the gratifying task of renovating the farm house on my boyfriend's family's Dairy farm in Carroll County.

Before joining the team at JSWCD, I spent my work days at The Jefferson County Courthouse working for the Commissioner's Office. In addition to my new position at JSWCD, I also have served as the Secretary for the Jefferson County Agricultural Society for the last 5 years.

When I'm not working, Mom and Coach are the titles I wear. I have one son, Jacob and Blue heeler, Chase (who thinks he is my second child). I enjoy coaching and watching baseball and can't wait for Spring baseball season to be here again. I love being outdoors and taking in the beauty Ohio has to offer. I'm looking forward to my new role at JSWCD, so if you see me around the county stop and say Hello. Working together is how we make Jefferson County a place people love to call home.

# Helping to save endangered species... HELLBENDER

*Indian Creek High School has an interesting new inhabitant with the addition of a hellbender salamander at the Wintersville building. ICHS is the first public high school statewide to partner with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Columbus Zoo to save the salamander from extinction.*

ICHS is the fourth site in the state and the only public high school collaborating with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Columbus Zoo to raise a hellbender salamander. Students will raise and study the amphibian and provide data for professional research while juvenile hellbenders will be cared for onsite and eventually released back into the wild.

The school is working in conjunction with JSWCD and officials said it will be a cross-curriculum program that could benefit all of the district's schools.

*"I think it's a great opportunity for our kids to help the environment and get some hands-on training," said Assistant Principal Keith Swearingen, who worked with science teacher Crystal Fluharty on the program. "The students will be feeding and raising the hellbender and doing data collection."*

Swearingen said Fluharty began working on the plan last year after she collaborated with the JSWCD to raise quail. JSWCD has been part of the hellbender program for 15 years and cares for the salamander at its office, plus 500 acres of county land have been appropriated for natural habitats with a majority of it located within the school district.

Discussions spurred Fluharty to become involved with the hellbender project and officials sought approval through state channels. The ODNR ultimately agreed and a 3-year-old hellbender was provided by the Columbus Zoo while facilities are being formed to properly house the animal at the school.

The hellbender, which is the largest known salamander, has been found in the area for at least 160 million years with Jefferson County considered the epicenter of the species' habitat. Interestingly, the eggs used in the program were harvested at Cross Creek. The hellbender can grow to 2 feet long and live up to 60 years in creeks,

but in recent years has been placed on the endangered list.

The Columbus and Toledo zoos hatch eggs, many of which are harvested locally, and raise the hellbenders for release. John Navarro, who oversees aquatic animals for ODNR, and Pete Gau, head zookeeper of the Columbus Zoo, have assisted in bringing the school project to fruition. A room at ICHS will be transformed with tanks, food and soil, stones and water from local creeks, and the Indian Creek Foundation also provided a \$15,000 grant to help create the state-of-the-art, bio-secure environment.

It will feature 24-hour security and a collaborative atmosphere and the program will be incorporated into multiple studies. Students will tend to the animal and collect data that will ultimately be used for professional research and future plans are to keep juvenile hellbenders to raise and release.

Officials said the project would cross educational lines with pupils participating in other classes. For example, the interactive media program would assist in designing a logo and work on merchandise and other promotions and tech support students would join forces with the engineering class to create a microchip prototype for data collection.

Each school in the district has donated a name to be drawn from at hat. Name to be announced at a special ceremony to formally introduce the new ambassador.

*Contents contributed "Indian Creek High School helping to save endangered species." Herald Star (August 16, 2023)*



Silo photo submitted by  
Jeremy Moore, 2022

## JSWCD PHOTO CONTEST '23

### 3 Categories:

#### The Wonders of Wetlands

Capture the diversity of wetlands by taking photos of the insects, animal life, or plants that depend on that ecosystem to survive

#### The Power of Weather & Climate

Depict the subtle and extreme power of weather and climate, including images of extreme drought, floods, thunderstorms, tornadoes as well as snowscapes

#### Catch All

Anything nature, agriculture or wildlife related that takes place within Jefferson County

#### Entry

Open to amateur photographers only

Submit up to three 8x10 print(s) along with entry form to the JSWCD office by 4:30 on Friday, October 13th.

No fee to enter

Judging takes place at the JSWCD Annual Meeting on October 30<sup>th</sup>.

Photo contest rules and entry form available at [www.jeffersonswcd.org](http://www.jeffersonswcd.org)

## Award Ribbons Given at County Fair



JSWCD hosted their annual **Name Plate Recycling Contest** at the Jefferson County Fair. Contest participants in each barn were judged on the creativity, originality, attractiveness and diversity of recycled materials used to make a stall name plate of

either their own or animals name.

Ribbons made of recycled materials were awarded to a winner in each barn and each winning name was placed in a drawing for a cash prize.



**Congratulations Guner** for winning the 2023 JSWCD Recycled Name Plate drawing. Guner's name was drawn during the Livestock Auction on Saturday. He entered "Match" into the contest.

## Thinking About Soil Testing Your Pasture, Hay, or Crop Fields? We Can Help!

The District will continue to offer limited soil testing as a service to agricultural producers and growers in Jefferson County.

We will send out staff to collect soil samples on up to 100 acres of crop or pasture fields per producer per year, at a cost \$20 per sample. Fields over 20 acres or with differing management or landforms will require multiple samples and will be determined with you prior to sampling. A & L Great Lakes Laboratories will be used for sample analysis. In addition to soil test results, lime and fertilizer recommendations will be provided.

If soil testing through the District seems like the solution for you, we would like you to be there! It's a great opportunity to catch up and talk about your farm.

Although we would love for you to walk with us as we collect samples over all of the acreage, that isn't a requirement; however, we would like you to meet with us on site either ahead of time or on the morning of sampling to go over any pertinent items such as field maps, cropping history, yield goals, etc. If we will be testing pasture fields, we ask that you please remove livestock from the fields to be tested during sampling.

If you wish to test more than the 100-acre limit, or if you would like to take the samples yourself, the District can provide a soil sampling probe and empty sample bags. The sampling probe can be checked-out for a maximum of 10 days, and requires a \$100 deposit, which will be returned to you when you bring the probe and filled sample bags back to the office. The cost of each sample taken yourself is \$10.

To find out more, or to schedule soil sampling, please call the District office at (740)264-9790.



Jefferson County couple awarded Ohio Conservation Farm Family

# Verhovec Family Brings Land Back to Life

The Ohio Conservation Farm Family Awards program recognizes farmers who are doing an outstanding job of protecting and conserving soil, water and related natural resources on the land they farm. Coordinated by the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Division of Soil and Water Conservation and cosponsored by Ohio Farmer magazine and the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation, the program emphasizes the application of technically sound, innovative and cost-effective conservation practices and encourages the sharing of this information with other farmers and the general public.

Five finalists were selected from Ohio and recognized as winners of the Ohio Conservation Farm Family Award at a ceremony during the Farm Science Review.

Jodee and Jules Verhovec are one of the 2023 Ohio Conservation Farm Family Award winners. They were high school sweethearts, have been together for 55 years and have been married for 48. They live in Smithfield in Jefferson County and are pictured with some of their Charolais cattle in one of the paddocks used for rotational grazing.

Jules and Jodee, though retired, are still active and busy as stewards of the land. They both have roots in agriculture, but it wasn't until Jodee's father, Fred Straus, passed away that they considered becoming farmers. In 2007, property adjacent to the family homestead came up for sale and although the 60-acre parcel was strewn with debris and refuse and swallowed up by invasive multiflora rose bushes and other overgrowth, they bought it.

Strewn was everything from mattresses and toilets to couches and bathtubs, metal and lots of tires. They recycled through their local annual recycling program, scrap yard and a program though Clean Ohio.

In the end, the scrap metal filled 14 industrial-sized dumpsters. "Our kids thought we were nuts, but it adjoined the farm and made sense for us," says Jules, who recounts standing up on his tractor while brush hogging to see where he was going. "You could not see the front of the tractor, the front tires did not touch the ground," he says.

"Over the last 15 years, they have transformed the property, so much that you can't tell where the original pastures end and the additional acres begin," says Mark Nelson, board chair of the Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District Board, which nominated them for the award. Jodee served on that board for 15 years and also on the state board for quite a few of those years.

With ideas from the Eastern Ohio Grazing Council and guidance from the Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, they were able to install an extensive gravity-fed watering system that helped with subdivision of the paddocks. Bale feeding, rotational grazing and fertilizer application have helped to regenerate the fields into pasture.

Regenerative agriculture with rotational grazing was a new way of thinking for the Verhovecs, but one that intrigued and coaxed

them into many conferences and pasture walks to learn more. "When we first started into it, we'd spend a whole week after a pasture walk talking about what we saw, what we liked and how to incorporate it into our farm," Jodee says.

"The ticket is to do soil samples and fertilize your pastures," says Jules of his nine paddocks. "It's just fabulous how that grass is growing and how it's growing our cows, who are very healthy." He puts cows in when forages are 8 inches. "You want them to eat half and leave half - ideally leaving 4 inches. When rotating cattle like that, they only eat the good stuff, so once I move them, I go in and brush-hog the weeds."

At one informational meeting, Jules remembers the speaker saying, "You never want your cow to have a bad day." He says, "That really stuck with me. I really want them to be healthy and happy."

Water is a key component to successful rotational grazing. A spring located on one of the hills was developed to create a water source. With the high elevation, they used underground piping to develop four additional watering sources that were each split between two paddocks.

Overflow is then routed to the pond, which is fenced in to keep cattle out, and surrounded with filter strips to keep runoff contained. Fruit trees, protected from deer with 4-foot-high woven wire, were planted to attract pollinators.

The cattle are bred and in good condition going into the winter season. One paddock has access to a lean-to, but Jules says they rarely go there. "They prefer the protection of trees in high winds and stormy weather," he says.

With a hay bale roller, he unrolls round bales for the first freezes or inclement weather. "They love to lay out on that, and I will strategically place it in a field with weak fertility," Jules says. "I only unroll it for two days of feed, so they don't waste too much when they're doing their business on it. By targeting a weak spot in fertility, I'm pinpointing fertilization."

For high-traffic areas, Jules went down 12 inches, installed geotextile fabric, then applied heavy limestone and topped with fines. A heavy use pad was also installed. "It really cuts down on erosion because once you start making ruts, it's never-ending," he says. "When it rains, you get more ruts."

Looking ahead, the Verhovecs like to continue to share their ideas and what they have done. Numerous landowners, business leaders, elected officials and conservation professionals have visited and toured their farm during such events as the EOGC's pasture walks, and the soil and water district's countywide bus tour.

Farming and conservation go hand-in-hand, Jules says, if you put the effort in, you can see the results and be proud of it. Jodee adds, "We don't believe in the degradation of our land. We believe in being good stewards to what God has given us, and that's not just our farm, but also our village. Whatever you choose to do, do it with respect and show pride in it."

## Soil & Water Relaunches Stream Debris Removal Program

*Working together to clean-up our streams*

**Cleaning up our streams...** The Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District (JSWCD) in partnership with the Jefferson County Commissioners and JB Green Team officially opened the second application period Fall 2023 Stream Debris Removal Program. This program initially was introduced to the county in 2022 to assist land owners with the removal of debris build up in local creeks and streams, in an effort to reduce flooding and reduce stream bank erosion. The program was the first of its kind for Jefferson County, and after a successful run with first round applicants, the JSWCD has been working to broaden the scope of the program to fund additional sites.



for debris removal, if debris meets certain qualifications. The only expense to the property owner would be a \$50 fee to cover the court recording cost of a 5-year conservation easement of the riparian zone that was effected by the debris. This easement would ensure the stream bank could achieve proper vegetative growth to prevent further erosion from occurring.

**Who should apply?** Persons or organizations who own property within Jefferson County, Ohio, and have a concern regarding downed trees or various other types of unearthed debris in their waterway should apply. There is no cost to complete an application – only sites that are awarded funding will be required to pay the \$50 fee.

**Why this program was created...** The topography of Jefferson County, in combination with its short distance to the Ohio River, results in many small streams and creeks that flow through heavily wooded areas. These small waterways often become littered with various forms of organic and manmade debris that can pose a significant threat when a large rain event occurs. Landowners, both private and public, are all too familiar with the damaging power of water in the spring and summer months. In Ohio, while the water is the property of the government, the land beneath it and the materials resting on the land are the responsibility of the landowner. According to past census data for Jefferson County, land along these waterways are often owned by low-to moderate income households, who often do not have the resources to remove these hazards. In an effort to aid in the removal of debris buildup, the JSWCD developed and launched the stream debris removal program. Thanks to the generous help of the Jefferson County Commissioners, as well as the JB Green Team, the program will allow land owners to apply and have their property assessed

Applications can be obtained online at our website, or in person at the office – 500 Market St, Suite #4, Steubenville, Ohio 43952.

Looking forward to hosting another round in 2024. Additional information will be released when funding is available. Watch our Facebook page and website for up to date information.

More information regarding this program can be found by visiting our website at [www.jeffersonswcd.org](http://www.jeffersonswcd.org) or by calling the office at (740)264-9790.

