



#### 2013 ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION

##### MEETING SCHEDULE:

March 12\*\*

June 4\*

September 10\*\*

December 3\*

May 17--Annual Indiana-Michigan St. Joseph River Basin Symposium

All meetings are open to the public and begin at 10:00 a.m.

\*Elkhart County Public Services Building  
4230 Elkhart Road (US 33), Goshen, Indiana



\*\*Elkhart County Administration Building  
117 No. Second Street, Goshen, Indiana

Consult website for agendas and possible meeting changes--  
Meeting presentations are also linked at this site when available

**Editor's Note:** The St. Joseph River Basin Commission has periodically focused on the conservation practice of **filter strips** in this newsletter. While this practice is visible throughout the River Basin, there remains many waterways that either have no buffering or inadequately-sized vegetated filter strips.

### A SIMPLE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Practice Standard, a filter strip is "A strip or area of herbaceous vegetation that removes contaminants from overland flow." A simple structure with a mighty job!

Filter strips are an "edge-of-field" practice serving to catch sediments and absorb nutrients, when other conservation practices are not in place or are not working affectively.

While there will always be natural movement of the waterway, "relocating" soils and the flow path of the water, a filter strip serves to reduce the artificial or manmade impacts. Filter strips or "vegetated buffers" are



not a new concept and producers have long been encouraged to install them along production land.

Undisturbed soils along with deep plant roots, bind the soil particles together, strengthening the structure of the land, resulting in less impact from flowing water. The vegetation slows the velocity of water running over a field, filtering out contaminants that might be headed off the land into a neighboring waterway.

### WHY INSTALL FILTER STRIPS?

Sediments and nutrients represent the highest contribution of pollutants to waterbodies. In combination with other conservation practices, filter strips can reduce

- ◆ Sediments by 56 to 95 percent;
- ◆ Nitrates by 46 to 75 percent;
- ◆ Phosphorus by 27-87 percent;
- ◆ Pesticide (Atrazine) by 28-35 percent (Iowa study).

Increasingly, producers are recognizing not only the conservation benefits of filter strips but also the positive impacts on their land and agricultural operation as a whole.

- A filter strip, requires only occasional mowing, and removal of sediment after several years of use—Land along waterways may ordinarily require additional care and amendments to produce a good crop
- By using filter strips and other conservation practices, producers reduce their liability of contributing pollutants to neighboring waterways
- Filter strips coupled with other conservation practices reduce the frequency and funds needed to dredge or remove sediments--Soil eroded off production or disturbed land into neighboring waterbodies, deposits downstream reducing flow, clogging field tiles, and destroying aquatic habitat
- Filter strips serve as a good migration corridor for wildlife, and essential land habitat for some lifecycles of amphibious animals

- Filter strips serve as a deterrent for Canada geese between small lakes and land—they don't like contact with tall grasses!
- Filter strips serve to accommodate occasional bankful events along stream corridors without damage to vegetation—While, crop loss may be experienced if inundated with water for a long period of time

### MONETARY VALUE OF FILTER STRIPS

A concern often arises that land placed in stream buffers is land taken out of production--a cut in potential profits. However, there is growing evidence that if any losses do occur, they are minimal. The US Farm Bill has included cost-share opportunities for development and Conservation Reserve Program funds for maintenance of filter strips. The values listed above should be incentive enough for producers to buffer every waterway with at least 20 feet of protection on each side.

However, Indiana has a long-standing law in place that serves as yet another incentive infrequently used—"The Filter Strip Law".



The law serves to reduce property taxes a producer is assessed, if production land is converted to permanent filter strips.

The process is relatively simple.

- A parcel owner agrees to commit a corridor of at least 20 feet, but not more than 75 feet into a filter strip along their entire section of flowing waterway or around a wetlands or lake;

- A property owner consults with the local County Surveyor and Drainage Board to obtain the local application and procedure for this purpose;
- The property owner further consults with the local Soil and Water Conservation Service to obtain plant information that meets filter strip specifications and agrees to comply with those specifications;
- The proposed land is surveyed and an assessment of the parcel is requested from the County Assessor by the land owner;
- If all procedures are followed and it is the opinion of the County Surveyor that the parcel meets the requirements of a "certified filter strip", a notification will be forwarded to the County Auditor and County Recorder to reduce the property tax assessment for the filter strip segment of land;
- Section *IC 6-1.1-6.7-9* states that land classified as a filter strip "... shall be assessed at one dollar (\$1) per acre for general property taxation purposes;"
- Drainage assessments associated with maintenance of regulated drains may still be assessed. However, check with your local Drainage Board;
- An annual inspection may occur to insure the parcel is maintained as a filter strip to continue receiving the tax break.

The formula for preserving and protecting all our water resources should include continued development of filter strips and use of other conservation practices. Are they in your land management plan?

(NOTE: Filter strips are not just for land in agricultural production. Buffers can also be used to protect urban waterways. Consult the internet under "Urban Stormwater Management; "Green Infrastructure" and "Low Impact Development"—"LID".)

### St. Joseph River Basin Commission

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