

Hi all,

I know there are many critical programs being cut from our federal budget these days, but the Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D) is one that is very close to my heart. I am writing this letter in hopes that you have had some experience with Hoosier Heartland RC&D and are people most likely to take up the fight and send an email to your Congressmen asking them to support the inclusion of this vital program in their 2011 and 2012 budgets. RC&D is not an earmark!!! We are asking for the \$50.73 million again this year, which is the amount which has been budgeted for many years. Although it never stretches far enough, it helps support the nearly 400 RC&Ds across the country to make a difference in our communities.

RC&D uses a small amount of federal dollars to support each council's volunteer board, councils, and committees in a whole gamut of natural resource issues. Key to the work is the wise use and conservation of these resources to better the quality of life in the area served. Hoosier Heartland has engaged in many levels of this work. We help landowners use and protect their resources to improve their profits while protecting those who live "downstream" from them. We create jobs based on natural resources - jobs that can't be outsourced to another state or country. We help local governments get the tools they need for better land use planning, to build plants for safe drinking water, to improve fire safety, and construct best management practices. We bring state and federal dollars and expertise to our neighbors so they not only are better stewards of the land, but have the knowledge to engage in local land use decision making. We have pushed to have about 3/4 of a million mostly native trees planted in our ten counties - trees that will be given proper planting and care so that they will clean our air, protect our soil from erosion, filter our water, and provide heating and cooling benefits to our city residents - not to mention the wildlife and human habitats they make. Putting conservation practices on the land, planting flora, improving groundwater infiltration, and building wetlands and other retention facilities all create jobs for our neighbors while providing good stewardship that we all enjoy. The small amount of federal funding is leveraged at 8 to 1 at least - Hoosier Heartland has leveraged as high as 20 to 1 as we engage businesses, partners, private foundations, and private supporters in this work.

There is so much that is still needed. Chemicals from fertilizers are creating the dead hypoxia zone in the Gulf while creating a perfect place for toxic algae to grow in our own water supplies - a small number of people in Ohio have died - when will that happen here? Farmers still till to the edge of waterways and refuse to use covercrops - and tons of soil erodes from their fields. Homeowners put too many horses on too little land and do nothing about the waste they produce - do clusters of these horseowners live upstream from you or your drinking water? developments occur on floodplain and drainage systems and yet we wonder why the floods are so bad. Counties have fewer dollars to manage their natural resources and lack funds to train planners and field staff in the latest practices. Our ash trees are dying by the tens of thousands and leaving gaping holes in our woodland where invasive and destructive bush honeysuckles overgrow our native plants. Trees die from storms, age, disease, or human damage and are not replaced. Our working canopy that cools us in summer, warms us in winter, cleans our air and filters our water is reduced every year - the suggested 40% cover in Indianapolis is closer to 16%. And the list goes on....

Each of you has your own ideas of what Hoosier Heartland is, does, or can do. Would you please take a moment and email Senators Coats and Lugar as well as your own Representative and give them your concern? Ask them to return the \$50.73 million to the budget. These dollars fund very basic support for each council across the country - a coordinator and sometimes a part-time administration position as well as office space and some equipment. These dollars free up the volunteer council to seek funds for projects, education, and on-the-ground conservation. Most of our partners who help do so at no cost or greatly reduced fees. In-kind matches further stretch the dollars we raise through grant writing, service fees, and private donations. If you want more info, please let me know - you can email me at hhrcd@hhrcd.org.

Thank you for reading through to the end of this - I can't say enough about how critical this need is. Education, healthcare, public safety all get much more air time. But none of those things matter if we can't live in the places we live, grow our food, or drink our water. I know you all care - thank you for any help you can give to help save the RC&D program!

Sincerely,
Paula Baldwin, Board Member