

BLACKHAWK HILLS



Resource Conservation and Development
Jo Daviess • Stephenson • Carroll • Ogle • Whiteside • Lee

2008 ANNUAL REPORT

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From Our President by Catherine A. Brunner

On behalf of the Blackhawk Hills RC&D Council, I am proud to present to you the *2008 Annual Report*. The purpose of this Annual Report is to highlight a few activities and projects that the RC&D Council and staff were involved with over the past year, commencing April 1, 2007 and ending March 31, 2008.

Blackhawk Hills was responsible for completing 18 projects and brought in over \$4 million in federal, state and local funding. For every dollar the federal government brought to the RC&D Council we were able to leverage \$20. These projects touched the lives of everyone within our six-county area and we will always try to spread our talents to support as many worthwhile projects as we can.

As a volunteer, it is hard for me to take all of the credit for our accomplishments. Our staff is an integral part of how we can accomplish so much. Without their devotion, expertise, new and creative ideas, we would be hard pressed as volunteers to maintain any viable program. Thank you, Dave, Theresa and Julie.

I would also like to thank all the legislators, agencies, organizations, counties, and communities who support the RC&D program.



Our Governing Board

The Blackhawk Hills RC&D is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization that serves as a vital focus point for many local, state, and federal programs. A governing body called the Council administers the RC&D program. The 18-member Council, three from each county, is made up of one representative from each of the local sponsors (Soil and Water Conservation District and County Board) and one area representative, selected at large by the two sponsors.

Blackhawk Hills RC&D Council Members service the organization in many ways. They donate their personal resources and time to facilitate the programs in Northwest Illinois. They are a group of individuals that dedicated their time in getting involved in running the organization and supporting the projects that they have a passion for. The Council's diversity represents a cross section of our area. Each member brings a unique skill to our organization.

RC&D Council Members & Staff

Carroll County

- John Newcomer, SWCD
- Edie Block, County Board
- Cathy Brunner, Area Rep.

Jo Daviess County

- Dr. William Tonne, SWCD
- Beth Baranski, County Board
- Bridgette Stocks, Area Rep.

Lee County

- Thomas Millard, SWCD
- Isaac Mercer, County Board
- Ed Uphoff, Area Rep.

Ogle County

- Lynne Kilker, SWCD
- Ron Colson, County Board
- Marcia Heuer, Area Rep.

Stephenson County

- Charles Moen, SWCD
- Samuel Newton, County Board
- Della Moen, Area Rep.

Whiteside County

- Tim Keller, SWCD
- Karen Nelson, County Board
- Glen Kuhlemier, Area Rep.

RC&D Officers

- Cathy Brunner, President
- Dr. William Tonne, Vice President
- Karen Nelson, Secretary-Treasurer

Staff

- Dave Dornbusch, RC&D Coordinator
- Theresa Wittenauer, Economic Development Professional
- Julie Jacobs, Program Assistant

New Logo



This past year brought a new look for Blackhawk Hills RC&D. The RC&D Marketing Committee and staff worked with M45 Marketing Services, Freeport, IL to develop a new logo and website to make the RC&D more visible and recognizable to the general public. The new logo tops our letterhead, fax cover sheet, note pads, business cards and website. The new website can be accessed at www.blackhawkhills.com. In FY 2009, two RC&D displays will be unveiled. One for the RC&D Program in general and one to promote the Industrial Parks in the RC&D area.

2007 Annual Dinner Meeting

Blackhawk Hills RC&D Council held their Annual Dinner Meeting on June 28, 2007 at Buck's Barn in Thomson, IL. Lynne Kilker was presented the "Worker of the Year" Award. Forty-five people were present to hear David Beurle, Innovative Leadership Australia, as the guest speaker.

Forestry Management Workshop

Blackhawk Hills' Forestry Planning Committee has organized a Forestry Management Workshop for April 11, 2008 at Chestnut Mountain Resort. Topics to be covered will include: Identification of Crop Trees and Selection for Harvest, Machine Tree Planting, Selecting the Proper tool to do the job, Forestry Management Plan, Improving your Forest for Game Species, Method of Crop Tree Release, Max Out Tree Sale Profit, Harvesting Concerns for a Logger and Improving your Forest for Song Birds.

Women & the Wild: An Outdoor Skills Workshop

Blackhawk Hills co-sponsored the second Outdoor Skills Workshop on May 12, 2007 at the Oakdale Nature Preserve. Thirty-five area women attended the day long workshop which offered the joys of birding, tips on what to know before hiking, relaxation with outdoor yoga, tracking wildlife, learning to fly cast and how to enjoy what nature has to offer.



Grazing Workgroup

The Grazing Workgroup is made up of Natural Resources Conservation Service, Extension Service, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Farm Bureau representatives. The goal is to increase the number of beef, dairy and sheep operations who use intensive managed grazing systems. The RC&D is acting as a facilitator for the group and the RC&D Council has given the group some start up money. The group hosted two workshops this past year discussing How To Better Manage Your Pasture and Invasive Species Control. Fifty-five producers participated in the workshops.

USDA-Environmental Quality Incentive Program

Blackhawk Hills' Program Assistant and Coordinator continued to assist the USDA Field Offices with the review of EQIP requests for payments. This past year over 140 contracts were approved, totaling about \$800,000 in funding to local producers.

Mission

This mission of the Blackhawk Hills RC&D Council is to assist the people of Northwest IL with the development of rural economies by improving and conserving all resources.

NW Illinois Livestock Project



Blackhawk Hills RC&D continued to work with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency on the Northwest Illinois Livestock Project. This past year Blackhawk Hills helped six producers totaling \$41,797.34 in funding to the area. The program has been designed to minimize the impacts of milk house waste and to reduce the amount of clean water that comes in contact with manure. Milk house waste cost share includes the tank, pump, electrical hook ups, the plumbing and excavating. Clean water practices include: clean water diversions, gutters on buildings and critical area shaping and seeding. The cost share rates are set at 60 percent of the total cost.

Funds will be available until July 2008. If you know of a project that might qualify for funding, please contact the RC&D Office.

Driftless Area Initiative (DAI)

Blackhawk Hills is one of six RC&D Councils, located in four States, who are working together promoting cooperation across state and organizational lines to address resource concerns in the Driftless Area of the Mississippi River. The DAI has secured a \$608,000 federal appropriation for a Driftless Area Biomass Energy for Rural Sustainability project. This is a three year project to promote production and utilization of perennial biomass crops to meet energy needs while reducing erosion, improving water quality and benefiting wildlife.



Jo-Carroll Electric Biomass Project

Jo-Carroll Electric is building an 80 MW Biomass Energy Facility and would like to use 20 percent of their biomass from local farmers. Blackhawk Hills is working with local Farm Bureaus and landowners to see if it will be feasible to use local biomass. Blackhawk Hills RC&D has secured a \$75,000 grant from the Driftless Area Initiative for this project.

Outdoor Stewardship



Blackhawk Hills RC&D has a strong commitment to environmental stewardship. The RC&D Council was a sponsor of the Envirothon competition, a nationwide competition of teams of students from local high schools. Blackhawk Hills RC&D Council continues to offer scholarships to the local Envirothon winners. Morrison High School Team 1 were the winners.

The RC&D staff also serves as volunteers at the Outdoor Stewardship Days. The Stewardship Days focus on educating grade school students on the environment and conservation.

Jo Daviess Land and Farm Preservation Committee

The RC&D assisted the Jo Daviess Land and Farm Preservation Committee in hosting a series of workshops to help new landowners understand their roles and responsibilities. Workshops were held this past summer and in early 2008. Topics discussed at the workshop included: pond care and maintenance, bee keeping and small farm business options. Each workshop averaged about 25 participants.

The Vision of the RC&D is to provide a balanced approach for a strong rural economy, enhanced quality of life and conservation of our natural resources through the formation of partnerships and coalitions.

Economic Development

The RC&D Council serves the region as an Economic Development District (EDD). The EDD was established under criteria of the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). The program's purpose is to accelerate overall economic development program planning on a regional basis and to utilize all applicable federal, state, and local agencies, groups, and organizations in implementing the plan(s). As an EDD, we are responsible for coordinating economic development activities and offering assistance with regional and community economic development efforts.

Mill Race Crossing



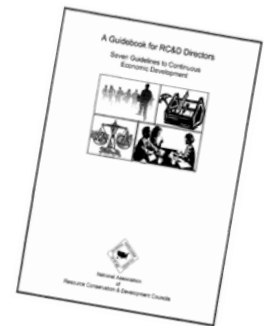
Blackhawk Hills RC&D worked with Stephenson County and the City of Freeport on the preliminary Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant for public works infrastructure improvement to be implemented at Mill Race Crossing Industrial Park. Our office assisted in providing planning and technical support for land development and finding potential, non-local alternative funds to complete the plans required. Furthermore, Blackhawk Hills RC&D helped facilitate the federal EDA grant process for the City of Freeport and Stephenson County, and provided letters of support directly to EDA naming it a priority project for the 6-county region.

Riverlands Economic Development Policy Project

Blackhawk Hills participated in the Riverlands project which aims to chart an economic development strategy that can build prosperity throughout the region. The project will focus on five key steps now widely recognized as the road map for economic growth in the 21st century: identify the region, building regional governance, mapping the region's economic assets, diagnosing the region's competitive advantage, and identifying public investment priorities.

Economic Development Guidebook

The Blackhawk Hills RC&D was awarded funding from the National Association of RC&D Councils to compile a guidebook in regards to Economic Development. The main objective of the guidebook was to produce a logically ordered, basic guide to economic development and community improvement for RC&D Councils. The guide will provide the overarching information needed to begin planning for smart, successful economic development in rural America.



Entrepreneurs & Inventors Club

Blackhawk Hills continues to provide technical and financial assistance to the Entrepreneurs & Inventors Club. The group meets on a monthly basis for networking and educational opportunities. The group invites speakers to share their success stories at the monthly meetings. A new website was developed for the Club, www.bheic.com.

Creative Community Collaboration Workshop

Thirty six participants attended the August 14th Workshop at the Holiday Inn in Rock Falls, IL. The workshop was facilitated by David Beurle, Innovative Leadership Australia, who shared his international experience in working on rural and regional revitalization projects.



Tri State Alliance

The Tri-State Alliance is a collaboration of Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin cities through its Chambers of Commerce and Economic Development Organizations. It includes cities from Dubuque to Janesville to Belvidere, Rockford, Freeport and surrounding communities. By joining forces with other like-minded communities, the Alliance hopes to bring a regional focus to vital issues like transportation and economic development. Developing a competitive infrastructure base is key to participating in the global economy.



Pecatonica River Watershed Summit – “Take Home Stewardship”

Landowners, stakeholders and interested parties were invited to a habitat and wildlife management workshop that was held in Monroe, Wisconsin on March 29, 2008. The 150 participants learned about important habitat stewardship practices. Blackhawk Hills provided technical support towards this event.

Leadership Forum

Cathy Brunner, Blackhawk Hills RC&D President attended the National RC&D Councils Annual Leadership Forum in Washington, D.C. on February 25-27, 2008. Each year the National Association of RC&Ds holds the Forum to educate Council Members across the country on the important issues facing the RC&D Program. Cathy spent February 27 on Capitol Hill meeting with Legislators and/or staff of all nineteen congressional districts and both US Senators to educate them about the importance of the RC&D Program, its benefit and most importantly to restore funding to the program. President Bush's budget proposal zeros out the RC&D program.

Society Honors Dornbusch



Galena Trail Society recognized Dave Dornbusch, Blackhawk Hills RC&D Coordinator for his work on the Galena Trail. Dave helped structure and guide the Society in its first years, as board members conducted their corridor inventory study and developed grass roots support for the Galena and Coach Roads interpretive Trail. The IL General Assembly has since endorsed the project and instructed the IL Department of Transportation to make and oversee the installation of directional signs along the trail and coach road route between Peoria and Galena, IL.

Hispanic Employee Manager

Blackhawk Hills' Program Assistant, Julie Jacobs, was selected as the IL Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager. In this position Julie will assist the Natural Resources Conservation Service's State Conservationist with matters that affect the outreach, employment, advancement and civil rights of employees.

Earth Team

Blackhawk Hills RC&D uses volunteer time, talent and energy to help accomplish its mission. In Fiscal Year 2008 approximately 12 volunteers donated more than 300 hours to Blackhawk Hills. Thank you volunteers!

If you are interested in signing up as an Earth Team Volunteer, contact the RC&D Office at 815/625-3854.

Training & Conferences

The RC&D Council and Staff continue to increase their knowledge by attending training sessions and conferences. Blackhawk Hills participates in the following training sessions or conferences: IL Association of RC&D Meetings, North Central Association of RC&Ds, RC&D Leadership Forum, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Employee Meetings, IL Institute for Rural Affairs/Rural Partners Conference, IL Development Council Conference, and the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Training Conference.

Regional Committees

The RC&D continues to host regional committee meetings to stay informed of economic, environmental, and social needs as they relate to county boards, communities, development corporations, chambers of commerce, and business and industry. Each committee has its own activities and programs. This action alone saves the region thousands of dollars annually. Committees include: RC&D Council, County Board Chairpersons, Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Zoning Administrators and District Conservationists.

Appreciation

Blackhawk Hills RC&D Council could not begin to accomplish all we do without the generosity of many donors to the Council. Blackhawk Hills RC&D appreciates the contributions from all the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, County Boards, Legislators, committee members, corporations and organizations that help us make things happen in our region. Blackhawk Hills RC&D especially thanks US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service and US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration for their continued financial support.

BLACKHAWK HILLS

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