

Fiscal Year 2024 Accomplishments Report

OCTOBER 1, 2023 TO SEPTEMBER 30, 2024





The Conservation of natural resources is the key to the future. It is the key to the safety and prosperity of the American people, and all the people of the world, for all time to come. The very existence of our Nation, and of all the rest, depends on conserving the resources which are the foundations of its life.



— From “The Birth of Conservation” in the book *Breaking New Ground* by Gifford Pinchot in 1947

Executive Summary

The Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape (SISL) is a collaborative partnership advancing the pace and scale of conservation throughout a three and a half million-acre swath of south-central Indiana to protect military missions on four critical installations and ranges.

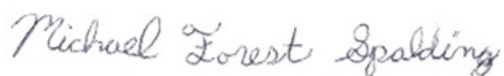
Established in 2013, the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership enhances collaboration among the Department of Defense, Department of Interior, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and other government and private sector partners for measures that protect military lands and airspace from incompatible development, regulatory restrictions, and threats to military installation resilience, while also promoting conservation, agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation, and the health of natural resources and of the rural economy.

In February 2022, the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership Federal Coordinating Committee designated SISL, at the time one of only ten in the country. This designation recognizes the significance of southern Indiana's four military installations and the landscape's rich natural and agricultural heritage.

The Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape, coordinated by the Conservation Law Center at Indiana University's Maurer School of Law, includes federal agencies, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations who work with private and public landowners to advance sustainable land management practices for natural resource, agricultural, and military interests.

The twelve-member Landscape Coordinating Committee (LCC) serves as the coordination and oversight body for the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape partnership. The LCC is composed of the following partners: Indiana Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Forest Service Hoosier National Forest, Department of Interior US Fish and Wildlife Service, Indiana National Guard, US Navy, Conservation Law Center, Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Indiana State Department of Agriculture, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Indiana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Sycamore Land Trust, and Central Indiana Land Trust. This LCC partnership was memorialized through a charter, which was fully executed on December 4, 2023.

This accomplishment report for Fiscal Year 2024 (October 1, 2023 through September 30, 2024) highlights the partnership's progress towards the SISL Strategic Plan 2024-2027. This report represents a great deal of work by our dedicated partners to achieve more together in partnership than we could have individually. Enjoy reading!



Michael Spalding

Coordinator, Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape
Conservation Law Center

Our strategic plan outlined five goals:

Protect Military Missions

Preserve and protect mission readiness, operations, and testing/training capabilities on all military lands and ranges within the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape



Sustainable Farming and Forestry

Support sustainable farming and forestry practices to conserve rural working lands for environmental, ecological, and economical benefits.



Restore and Sustain Ecosystems

Restore and sustain ecosystems, improving function while preparing for ongoing and future challenges and ensuring a healthy environment and clean water.



People and Partnerships

Ensure thriving human communities within the landscape taking into account needs for access to safe and healthy food, sustainable housing and commercial development, job security, and cultural resources.



Reduce Impacts from Extreme Weather

Address weather-related impacts through built infrastructure and nature-based solutions



How does SISL operate to meet our goals?

Sentinel Driven

The coordinator or partnership leads the effort to pursue a project and leads or coordinates it through completion, or the funding source is tied to the Sentinel Landscape Partnership.

Sentinel Participated

Projects that may have happened without SISL but were bolstered by SISL's participation.

Sentinel Supported

The Sentinel Landscape Coordinator is involved in proposal drafting and reviewing. Consideration to the project approval may have been given through SISL Under Section 2693 of the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act, whereby the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of the Interior, and the heads of other Federal agencies which become full partners in the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership are encouraged to give any owners and managers of land within a designated sentinel landscape "priority consideration for participation in any easement, grant, or assistance program administered by that Secretary."

Sentinel Approved

Basic approval or partnering including letters of support. These are projects for which SISL did not directly help pursue or write a proposal.

Business as Usual

Those activities and accomplishments that partners are doing within SISL but are occurring without any SISL involvement.



A photograph of a dense forest. In the foreground, a large, textured tree trunk is on the right side. A fallen log lies in the water in the lower left. The water reflects the surrounding green foliage. The background is filled with more trees and leaves, creating a lush green scene.

Sentinel Driven Projects

Busseron Creek Fish and Wildlife Area



In November 2022, SISL identified a real estate listing for a 191-acre property for sale in the heart of this nearly 4,000-acre contiguous land holding. If this piece had sold, the entire property would have been fractured, likely permanently. SISL swiftly engaged partners to assist. The Conservation Fund (TCF) and the Indiana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) both stepped into action with SISL. Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Fish and Wildlife (DNR) enthusiastically supported being the eventual owners of this property. Thanks to the supportive listing agent from Kurtz Auction and Realty, SISL was able to meet with key leadership from Peabody, who agreed to pull the property off the open market. This allowed time for the partnership to secure the following commitments

in funding: \$910,000 REPI, \$600,000 NFWF Acres for America, \$1,900,000 - State Budget Appropriation, \$9,261,750 USFWS WSFR, \$300,000 Indiana TNC.

TCF purchased the land from Peabody (American Land Holdings of Indiana Inc.) in May 2024. This land used to be part of the beloved DNR Minnehaha Fish and Wildlife Area. That property was available for public recreation through a lease from 1985 until 2016, when it permanently closed. These nearly 4,000 were set to be once again, and permanently this time, available for public outdoor recreation and to buffer Lake Glendora Test Facility.

Indiana Prescribed Fire Legislation



Prescribed Fire is the planned application of fire under specified weather and fuel conditions to achieve specific and clear management objectives. Fire has been a significant component of Indiana's ecosystems for thousands of years. Native Americans used this stewardship practice to shape ecosystems to provide for numerous species of plants and animals. The exclusion of fire from our ecosystems within the past century is causing destructive consequences to the biodiversity of the ecosystems that depend on this essential component. Indiana administrative code did not define a standard of liability for the application of prescribed fire. Indiana was one of only a few states in the country that did not have prescribed fire liability clearly defined

through prescribed fire legislation. Prescribed fire legislation accomplishes the following: defines a standard of liability for prescribed fire, establishes prescribed fire as a public good, and bolsters a standard of prescribed fire training.

The Indiana Prescribed Fire Council began to lead the effort for prescribed fire legislation in FY 2024, assembling partners and meeting to discuss strategy and details. During the fall 2024 semester the Conservation Law Center's Conservation Law Clinic drafted potential legislation with the intent of 2025 introduction. The Nature Conservancy and Indiana DNR partnered with the Council, CLC, and SISL.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program



NRCS awarded the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape with a \$25 million Regional Conservation Partnership Program on October 31, 2023. This RCPP would have increase private lands conservation in southern Indiana through over 2,500 acres of forestland conservation easements, restoration of 5,000 to 10,000 acres of oak-hickory forest ecosystems, and cropland

conservation practices on tens of thousands of acres. On September 30, 2025, Conservation Law Center received notice that funds were not available to support the programs of the SISL RCPP. The notice further explained CLC's rights and the procedure to appeal this decision.

CLC has submitted an appeal to this decision.

Spring 2024 Prescribed Fire Outreach Events Lead to Potential Cross-boundary Fire Collaboration



SISL partners held three outreach events focusing on prescribed fire and oak ecosystems in Spring 2024. Indiana Prescribed Fire Council led the effort with SISL. Many partners came together to make these events a success: Sam Shine Foundation, Hardwood Ecosystem Experiment, The Nature Conservancy, Hoosier National Forest, Purdue University Extension, Indiana Forestry and Woodland Owners Association, Sycamore Land Trust, Oak Woodlands and Forests Fire Consortium, City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation, American Bird Conservancy, Central Hardwoods Joint Venture, and Let the Sun Shine IN. Duke Energy Foundation's financial support made these events possible.

A total of eighty-eight people attended all three events. Two events were held in the evenings of April 11 and 18 at Upland Brewing Company's Woodshop in Bloomington and Upland Brewing Company's Pump House in Columbus. These events included speakers from the Sam Shine Foundation, Purdue University and the Hardwood Ecosystem Experiment, and the Indiana Prescribed Fire Council. Fire in Indiana was presented in three contexts: historical, ecological, and safe application and use. The April 13 event was held in the field at Griffy Lake, a property

owned and managed by the City of Bloomington. This event featured a recently restored oak woodland, where both cutting and prescribed fire were used to restore the ecosystem. The owner of Habitat Solutions consulting, who performed the restoration, spoke about the project. An exciting guest at this event was a group of Red Headed Woodpeckers, a species that has been in long term decline in Indiana and relies on open oak woodlands for habitat!

As a result of these events, SISL identified a potential Wyden Project with HNF, DNR, and a private landowner. Planning is underway.





A photograph of a forest fire. In the foreground, a large fire burns brightly, consuming dry leaves and twigs. The fire is orange and yellow. In the background, several tall, thin trees stand vertically, their trunks dark and textured. The air is filled with a thick, hazy smoke that is light brown and grey, partially obscuring the trees. The overall scene is dramatic and captures the intensity of a controlled burn in a wooded area.

Sentinel Supported Projects

Hoosiers for Native Habitat America the Beautiful Challenge Grant



The State of Indiana Cooperative Invasive Species Management led this successful grant with support from SISL. Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) in Bartholomew, Brown, Jennings, Johnson, and Sullivan Counties; Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) in Bartholomew, Brown, and Johnson County; Naval Support Activity Crane; Atterbury-Muscatatuck Training Center; and the Cordry Sweetwater Conservation District were the other key partners. The grant includes three components: invasive species control projects, establishment of two new CISMAs, and outreach and education.

Invasive plant species removal on adjacent private lands to military installations - Approximately 80 properties, encompassing approximately 1,200 acres, will receive invasive species control through a grant program managed by SICIM. This work will occur primarily on pre-identified properties near Camp Atterbury Training Center and the Muscatatuck Training Center. In addition to their locations, these properties have been selected because they are not likely eligible to receive cost share support through existing federal programs supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Establishment of CISMAs in Sullivan and Jennings Counties - Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas work with Indiana County SWCDs. CISMAs are instrumental in providing long-term support to landowners for invasive plant removal and invasive plant education. SICIM will establish two new CISMAs: one in Sullivan County where the Lake Glendora Test Facility is located and another in Jennings County where the Muscatatuck Training Center is located. This will put in place the infrastructure to establish long-term support for community-based invasive species management in these

counties with military installations that currently do not have CISMAs. SICIM will assist, train, and facilitate leadership for these CISMAs. Sullivan and Jennings CISMAs will join with other Indiana CISMAs under the Indiana Invasives Initiative project for support and resources.

Outreach and Education - SICIM will host a minimum of forty (40) Weed Wrangles® that demonstrate how to manage invasive species to support native habitat. Weed Wrangles® often assist local parks with habitat management projects and one of the project areas will be 40 acres of the Johnson County Park which is adjacent to Camp Atterbury Training Center. Each Weed Wrangle® consists of a brief educational session and at least two hours of invasive species control activities in a local park or natural area open to the public. These events are designed to teach residents the value of native species, the impacts of invasive species, how to identify invasive species, how to manage them, as well as inspire residents to collaborate for habitat improvement in their parks and at home. In addition to Weed Wrangles®, six workshops will be held across the project area on private lands. These workshops will be led by professionals and hosted by residents, which is key to building trust for the program. They will consist of an overview of basic ecology, species identification, and hands-on demonstration of management techniques that address ecological issues relevant to landowners.

Partners conducted 30 of the 66 outreach events and 12 landowner site visits in FY2024. Jennings County joined with Jackson County to form the Winding Waters Cisma. Hoosiers for Native Habitat America the Beautiful Challenge grant Implementation of invasive species management had not yet begun in FY2024. (SICIM, Jennings SWCD, Jackson SWCD)

Ready-Set-Fire in White Oak Woodlands Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership



The Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration partnership is a collaborative effort between USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the US Forest Service (USFS) that aims to work with private, state, and Tribal landowners to conserve forest and agricultural land alongside federally managed lands while safeguarding communities by reducing the impact of wildfire threats and protecting water quality and supply.

Indiana received funding for the Ready-Set-Fire in White Oak Woodlands proposal in June of 2024 with the expectation of three years of funding for NRCS and USFS totaling \$7.9 million.

The Ready-Set-Fire in White Oak Woodlands project will fund prescribed fire along with numerous forest management projects across 16 counties in southern Indiana to improve habitat for at risk species and reduce wildfire risk. The combination of forest management and prescribed fire will restore and reinvigorate the declining white oak woodlands and associated fire-dependent plant communities, prepare sites to deal with future increased wildfire risk, and aid in forest health.

NRCS and USFS are partnering with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), SISL, the IDNR Division of Forestry, and the Central Hardwood Joint

Ventures

Let the Sun Shine In (LSSI) program in Indiana to increase the amount of forest stand improvement, non-native invasive species control, and appropriate prescribed fire that is implemented in Brown, Crawford, Dubois, Floyd, Greene, Harrison, Jackson, Lawrence, Martin, Monroe, Morgan, Orange, Owen, Perry, Putnam, and Washington Counties.

The Hoosier National Forest (HNF) will be partnering with TNC to develop a prescribed fire strike team that will help increase the capacity to do appropriate prescribed burning on HNF, TNC, and other partner properties. The project includes funding for prescribed fire research in cave and karst areas, invasive species control, and prepping areas for prescribed fire.

In 2024, the funding was received late in the year, but Indiana NRCS was able to enroll 30 private landowners in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Joint Chiefs. The 30 EQIP contracts encompassed 2,290 acres and utilized \$994,192 in Joint Chiefs funding to improve wildlife habitat and help restore declining oak hickory forest ecosystems. TNC drafted the position roles and descriptions for the two fire crew members to be hired in support of award.

Indiana Forests to Faucets: Native Landscapes for Clean Water USFS Landscape Scale Restoration Grant



This funding, awarded by the U.S. Forest Service's Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program in May 2024 includes \$213,336 in federal funds, matched by \$213,354 in non-federal contributions. The total funds will support three vital conservation projects in the Lake Monroe watershed, located in the heart of the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape.

The forest cover surrounding Lake Monroe is essential for maintaining the water quality of the lake, the sole source of municipal drinking water for nearly 130,000 customers in Bloomington. The Indiana Forests to Faucets project aims to preserve and enhance watershed function through several initiatives, including invasive plant mitigation, planting native trees, educating the public, and providing technical assistance to private landowners.

Over the course of three years, the project will involve on-the-ground invasive plant mitigation on Yellowwood State Forest, conducted by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. The Town of Nashville will benefit from community outreach efforts, invasive tree removal from town property and rights of way, and the replacement of those trees with native species. Private

landowners will receive technical assistance from a grant-funded position overseen by SICIM (State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management) and hosted by the Brown County Soil & Water Conservation District office.

Expected outcomes of the project include improved watershed function through invasive plant mitigation on 20,000 acres, the provision of 120 native trees and 12,000 native seedlings, engagement with 25 private landowners impacting 250 acres, and the utilization of over 800 volunteer hours for invasive Weed Wrangles®, public outreach, and tree planting and care. Partners involved in this project include the following: Indiana Department of Natural Resources - Division of Forestry, Town of Nashville, SICIM (State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management), Brown County Soil and Water Conservation District, The Nature Conservancy in Indiana, Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape, Central Hardwoods Joint Venture, Let the Sun Shine In Indiana, MC-IRIS (Monroe County Identify and Reduce Invasive Species)

New REPI Conservation Easement



American Farmland Trust closed on a REPI easement near Lake Glendora Test Facility for

212.65 acres of newly protected land.

NSA Crane and Lake Glendora Test Facility Joint Land Use Study



Through continued implementation of the existing NSA Crane and LGTF Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) recommendations to include encroachment management strategies for noise encroachment

mitigations, communication & notifications, and land use controls. NSA Crane and the surrounding community have assessed and/or implemented 89% of recommendations.

Military Installation Readiness Review



With assistance from a contractor, partners identified and assessed military installation readiness for natural and manmade threats by analyzing hazards and vulnerabilities in

the counties within the study area. Key risks assessed include flooding, excessive heat, severe storms, seismic activity, and environmental threats.



Hands on Ordnance Training at NSA Crane - More than 80 Soldiers from the 452nd Ordnance Company received important training at Crane Army Ammunition Activity Nov. 5-19, 2016, which directly related to the missions specific skills needed for when they deploy. Training at Crane covered the full spectrum of ammunition duties to include inventory, surveillance, and blocking and bracing. Soldiers practice using a palletized loading system (PLS) to load CONNEXs on military vehicles.

Business as usual partner accomplishments for Fiscal Year 2024

Routine partner accomplishments within the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape footprint, known as “Business as Usual” accomplishments, are impactful and making a difference to meet the partnership’s shared goals. The intent of calling them Business as Usual is to acknowledge that the partners are accomplishing these shared goals for the benefit of our partnership without the support of the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape. Acronyms in parentheses are contributing partners. Please see Partner Acronym Key for full partner names.

Business as Usual Partner Accomplishments Towards Strategic Plan Metrics

Partners enrolled a combined **36,808.9 acres** into CRP, EQIP, CSP, CWI, CREP, and local SWCD cost-share programs for livestock and croplands.
(NRCS, IASWCD, ISDA)



Partners permanently protected **171.6 acres** of land within the SISL (Not including REPI) through fee title acquisitions and conservation easements on public and private lands.
(CILTI, DNR, NRCS, SLT)

NRCS enrolled **82 new acres** into Wetland Reserve Easements.

Partners enrolled a combined **9,236.1 acres** into CRP, EQIP, CSP, CWI, CREP, and local SWCD cost-share programs for forest land.
(NRCS, IASWCD, ISDA)

Central Indiana Land Trust and DNR permanently protected **57.5 acres** of high-quality natural areas.

Indiana DNR Division of Forestry enrolled **1,130 new acres** into the Classified Forest and Wildlands program.

The Nature Conservancy enrolled **205 acres** of new forest into their Forest Bank Management Agreements.

Partners restored or maintained oak-hickory ecosystems on **1,480 acres**.
(AMTC, CILTI, HNF, TNC, SLT)

123.5 miles reconnected through removal of dams on Big Blue River at Edinburgh and East Fork White River at Seymour
(SSF, TNC)

Partners improved **9,778.6 acres** of forest habitat for endangered bats on partner lands and on private lands.
(NRCS, ISDA, IASWCD, CILTI, NSA Crane, USFWS, AMTC, SLT, HNF, TNC)

Partners reforested **108.7 acres** of bottomland hardwoods.
(NRCS, ISDA)



Partners improved or created **28,699.3 acres** of forest, grassland, and wetland bird habitat on public and private lands
(NRCS, ISDA, IASWCD, CILTI, NSA Crane, USFWS, AMTC, SLT, HNF, TNC)

Partners implemented **7,137.7 acres** of invasive species control on public and private lands.
(NRCS, SLT, AMTC, CILTI, NSA Crane, HNF, USFWS, IASWCD, ISDA)

Partners permanently protected **383.2 acres** of bat habitat through fee title acquisitions and conservation easements on public and private lands.
(CILTI, DNR, NRCS, AFT)



Partners conducted **106 outreach events** with a combined attendance of 4,429 people.
(NSA Crane, HNF, SLT, SISL)

Indiana Farmland Loss Study

In 2023, Indiana House Enrolled Act 1557 directed the Indiana State Department of Agriculture to complete an inventory of lost farmland in Indiana from 2010-2022. The report released by ISDA on July 1, 2024 revealed a staggering **350,000 acres** of farmland were lost. This report established the need to introduce farmland protection legislation in upcoming sessions.

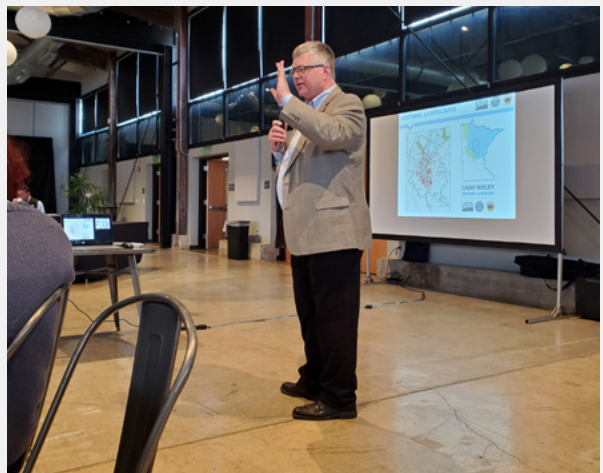
SISL Partnership Administration Highlights

At the September 12, 2024 meeting, the LCC approved 35 individuals from **26 organizations** to serve on the three subcommittees.

SISL coordinators and TNC Met with **State Senator Greg Goode** June 18, 2024 for an educational tour of the Busseron Creek property.

SISL held a partner outreach event on March 26, 2024 in Bloomington. **90 people** attended, representing **59 organizations**.

SISL released **newsletters** on December 18, 2023; April 9, 2024; and August 21, 2024.



PHOTOS BY COURT SMITH

Partner Acronym Key

AFT

American Farmland Trust

AMTC

Atterbury-Muscatatuck Training Center, Adjutant General's Office, Indiana National Guard

CILT

Central Indiana Land Trust

DNR

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

DNR DoF

DNR Division of Forestry

HNF

Hoosier National Forest, United States Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture

IASWCD

Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

ISDA

Indiana State Department of Agriculture

NSA Crane

Naval Support Activity Crane and Lake Glendora Test Facility

NRCS

Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States Department of Agriculture

SISL

Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape

SLT

Sycamore Land Trust

SSF

Sam Shine Foundation

TNC

Indiana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

USFWS

United States Fish and Wildlife Service; Partners, Refuges, and/or Ecological Services

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Michael Spalding

SISL Coordinator

mspalding@sentinellandscapes.org

812.855.1898

sisl.org

COVER PHOTO: BRENT DRINKUT, DNR

