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NEWS RELEASE

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Corps, Indiana Earth Day message to northwest Indiana landowners: Call before you fill!

CHICAGO - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District, and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) are partnering on this Earth Day to remind private, public and commercial land owners that permits are required if wetlands and/or streams may be impacted during a project.

“With construction season here, it is crucial to highlight the fact that streams and wetlands are essential to flood reduction and water-quality improvement. Anyone planning to place fill materials, excavate, dredge or use heavy equipment in a wetland, lake, stream, river or pond must ensure they have the proper permits before starting work,” said Mary Hollingsworth, branch chief of the Surface Water Operations and Enforcement Branch, IDEM.

Wetlands are areas that are occasionally or permanently flooded by water and support vegetation that is adapted for life in saturated soil. They help remove pollutants and provide habitat for all types of wildlife.

“One of the biggest environmental concerns in northwest Indiana is flooding. Wetlands help prevent flooding, acting like giant sponges by absorbing flood waters and slowly releasing them downstream. Indiana has lost 85 percent of its wetlands and ranks fourth among the 50 states in proportion of wetland acreage lost,” said Paul Leffler, Chicago District Regulatory Program senior project manager.

Many landowners do not realize the importance of wetlands or that they may exist on their properties. Work in these areas will most likely require Clean Water Act permits from IDEM and the Corps.

“Our job is to enforce the Clean Water Act. We need everyone’s help to reduce flooding in northwest Indiana and to ensure water quality and wildlife issues are addressed. Impacting wetlands without proper approvals can lead to legal action, site restoration, civil and criminal fines and, possibly, imprisonment. We are committed to working with landowners in order to achieve their project goals, while remaining in compliance with regulations,” said Leffler.

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If landowners located within the Chicago District's boundaries are unsure if there are wetlands present on their property, contact the Chicago District's Regulatory Branch at 312-846-5530. Information regarding State regulations can also be obtained by calling IDEM's Wetland Program at 317-233-8488.

The Chicago District's regulatory boundaries in Indiana include Lake, Porter and the approximate northern third of LaPorte counties. If you are located outside of Chicago District Corps' boundaries, your local Corps District can be found here:
http://www.usace.army.mil/CECW/Pages/cecwo_reg.aspx.

The mission of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Regulatory Program is to protect the nation's aquatic resources, while allowing reasonable development through fair, flexible and balanced permit decisions.

In Indiana, streams and wetlands are protected under the federal Clean Water Act of 1972, by Indiana's State Isolated Wetlands Law and by associated state water quality regulations.

The objective of the Clean Water Act is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the Nation's waters. The act specifies that all discharges into the nation's waters are unlawful unless authorized by a permit. Therefore, the law protects wetlands by requiring permits.

IDEM's website at www.idem.IN.gov/4138.htm also contains information to help landowners determine whether their property contains wetlands and understand how to obtain proper permits. A volunteer mitigation website is provided at <http://idemmaps.idem.in.gov/apps/MitigationVolunteer/>.