

I have attached a copy of the presentation slides to let you know what I spoke about. Below is a summary of what I spoke about that doesn't occur on the slides.

Watershed Maps

Although we tend to think in terms of political boundaries, such as townships, cities and counties, we need to focus the effort within the community that shares the Wabash River. I have included maps in the presentation to show the difference between the different sized watershed communities. The first map shows the entire 8 digit HUC Upper Wabash watershed, which is used by the federal government. You may have seen or heard of this in the recent NRCS publications about the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative (MRBI). There is possible funding available at that 8 HUC level from the NRCS and we are currently preparing a proposal to bring some of that money to the community. The following map shows the area where the Upper Wabash River Basin Commission (UWRBC) works. I used this map to clarify the difference in the entire Upper Wabash and the commission's area. The third map shows the 319 grant project area, which is the Implementation project presented in the following slides.

Watershed Concerns

The goal of the watershed commission is to have a clean and healthy river. The current funding will help the commission to address Non-Point Source pollution, by implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs). These BMPs are more often called conservation practices and they will help to reduce the amount of these pollutants from entering the Wabash River. These NPS pollutants include sediment, nutrients (Nitrogen and Phosphorus), bacteria (the bad kind) and toxic chemicals. These nutrients act differently with water and soil. Phosphorus attaches easily to soils and will flush into the river with the sediment and contribute both forms of pollution. Nitrogen attaches to water and not the soil as much, which means it flushes with water if it isn't being used by any form of plant. The cover or crops will hold the nitrogen on the land and keep it from flushing into the river when the snow melts or when it rains heavily. These nutrients act the same for the crops as they do for the algae in the river. The microscopic algae (which are basically tiny water plants) will take up those nutrients (and the abundant summer light) and grow out of control, which is what we see in the late summer in the river.

The following slides are taken from the WMP and show the levels of NPS pollutants in the river as of 2007 and the reduction goals that were established by the community. The Nitrogen levels were not high when the WMP was produced, but I emphasized that conservation practices will still help reduce them in all seasons and for the folks downstream. The nitrogen we release to the water here eventually ends up in the Gulf of Mexico, killing off fish and shrimp and impacting the producers down there.

The critical areas are listed next and can also be found in more detail in the WMP on the UWRBC [website](#); pages 46-54. I addressed the issues that cannot be targeted with this current grant. These "exclusions" are mandated by the state and the USEPA. The watershed community can still use some conservation practices that help with pollutants and drainage, but our funding cannot go directly to drainage issues.

The point was made that this project only deals with water quality and that drainage is still an important issue to farmers and producers in the watershed. This will be addressed by the commission, but cannot be funded by the current project.

I also spoke about the currently permitted facilities, including CAFOs, NPDES, or storm water areas. These cannot be paid for by our grant funds, because these facilities are already regulated by the state.

There was a question on this point as to how the community/watershed commission can be involved in permitted facilities, especially CAFOs. The commission will not regulate any facilities. Our program is voluntary and works with landowners to implement conservation practices. That being said, there is no reason for landowners to silence their concerns. It was discussed that members of the community with concerns about these facilities could still deliver their concerns to the state agency in charge of regulating these facilities. As with any conflict, it is best to work with the facility in question before going to the state with your concerns.

The cost-share program will primarily focus on agricultural practices, since 92% of the land area is used for agricultural production. The commission will not exclude urban conservation practices and welcomes any suggestions or requests for funding to address urban non-point source pollution.

Water Quality Monitoring

The water quality will be monitored through this project to ensure that the watershed community is involved, informed and successful. We cannot know what success we have achieved without the monitoring. Any member of the watershed is welcome to participate. The Hoosier Riverwatch method will be used and volunteers will be trained in this method free of charge.

There was a question about the monitoring and how it would be scheduled and when the training would occur. The training is usually held in the warmer months of the year and will be much more enjoyable later in the spring. The current plan is to hold a training day in Mid-April for volunteers. That information will be made widely available when a specific date is scheduled. The sites will be sampled throughout the watershed with an effort to keep most sites accessible to any volunteer who wishes to help.

Education/Outreach

The project also provides funding for education and outreach that will allow us to hold field days and various events to spread information. The commission currently plans to hold farm demonstration days to allow producers, who have or are currently working with conservation practices, to share their experience and provide valuable insight into the difficulties and successes.

There was a question after the meeting, asking if these field days would be held in Jay Co. also. We want to hold these field days wherever there is interest by landowners. We are only limited by the boundaries of the project area within the watershed (please contact me for a map of those bounds). The watershed coordinator will be working with landowners to gauge interest in various conservation practices. We will then work with producers who are currently implementing those practices of interest and hold field days to address those practices.

Snow Melt

This wasn't originally a portion of the presentation, but I wanted to demonstrate the winter season inputs to the river also. The rain, snow melt and higher temperatures raised river levels very high and washed NPS pollutants with it. The picture is a mason jar of river water from Jan. 24 at the White Bridge just outside of Bluffton. If you were to take over 100,000 of those jars every second on the river, it would equal the amount of sediment and nutrients passing down the Upper Wabash. I also discussed the contribution of goose droppings to the river (evidenced by the yellow-green spots on the ice). The geese have grown in number and will defecate on the ice throughout the winter, but when that ice melts, the nutrients and bacteria enter the river. It may not be a large source, but it is a contribution.

Questions/Discussion

I have included many comments and questions with the part of the presentation that included that topic.

Drainage/Recreation

There was also discussion about how we can deal with log-jams and drainage issues, since this funding will not pay for those projects. I suggested a network of interested watershed citizens that could provide early detection. I believe this will allow the watershed to cut out log-jams and eliminate that drainage concern, before it becomes a problem to farmers. The elected officials at the meeting emphasized that these drainage issues are a large concern for farmers and elections often depend on this issue. There was additional input from the group about creating a forested waterway that provides recreational (and economic) opportunity. Trees are often removed on the sides of waterways to avoid future drainage issues.

Although these two views on the river will have to be reconciled to move forward, they share a very important common view. Canoeing/kayaking down the river will require clear waterways free of log-jams. Farmers and recreationalists share this goal and I believe we can work out a solution in which these groups report potential log-jams before they become a problem for either group. It was agreed that this is a difficult issue and long-term goals for both recreation and drainage must be met with very workable short-term solutions.

River flow

While discussing the drainage issues and log-jams we discussed river flow. The river is a very powerful force and the state has seen quite a few floods in recent history. The efforts to control the river will work, but we cannot completely control the flow of the river. The discussion of drainage will be similar to the concept of river flow. The long-term vision of a more naturally flowing river and the short-term concern for using the river as a channel will have to be reconciled to move forward.

Historically, the floodplain acted to alleviate the excess water during floods. The community will have to find a way to manage floodplain space so that we can avoid property damage and crop losses, while still allowing the river to handle all of the rainfall and incoming water from upstream. It was said that we need to manage the flow of the Wabash and avoid trying to control the flow. There will have to be a balance between economic interest and risk for floodplain management to be successful.

Fishery

Fishing and the Upper Wabash fishery was discussed and I have acquired more information on the IDNR-Fish & Wildlife study of the fishes of the entire Wabash River. I will include this information with my efforts to compile a brief natural history of the area. This will be available to the public on the website and by request.