

# Urban Waters Partnership

## Northwest Indiana Work Plan 2015/2016

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### BACKGROUND

As of January 2016, over 40 organizations including not-for-profit community groups, local, state, and federal governmental agencies have engaged through the Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Partnership's network to develop various projects, identify and apply for funding, and build the capacity to enhance existing work or create new opportunities. The northern portions of Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties in northwest Indiana contain more than 1,200 miles of waterways and 45 miles of shoreline. The many waterways we have worked on include: Lake Michigan, Trail Creek, the East Branch of the Little Calumet River, Salt Creek, Deep River, and the Grand Calumet River and Grand Calumet River Area of Concern.

*Federal efforts in the Northwest Indiana (NWI) Urban Waters partnership location are co-led by three agencies: the US Forest Service, the National Park Service, and US EPA. Natalie Johnson is the NWI Urban Waters coordinator, funded by the US Forest Service. Natalie connects federal staff and resources to meet the needs of local partners.*

### OVERALL GOALS/OBJECTIVES

The Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Partnership works to protect, restore and revitalize waterways and surrounding land in the Northwest Indiana area. As one of the locations of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, the Partnership follows the national program's guiding principles:

- Promote clean urban waters
- Reconnect people to their waterways
- Encourage water conservation
- Use urban water systems as a way to promote economic revitalization and prosperity
- Facilitate community involvement through active partnerships
- Be open and honest, listen to communities
- Focus on measuring results and evaluation to fuel future success

Federal partners, led by the US Forest Service, National Park Service, and US EPA, bring the resources of over a dozen federal agencies to assist local partners in achieving their goals for healthy and accessible waterways in their communities.

### ABOUT THIS WORK PLAN

This work plan was developed based on quarterly meetings of the Urban Waters Partnership, and attempts to capture requests for assistance using the Urban Waters network. This document is not intended to capture all water-related work occurring in the Northwest Indiana region, nor all work of Northwest Indiana Watershed Groups. Rather, the intent is to highlight where assistance has been requested and provided from the Urban Waters network of partners, and identify tasks, projects and goals for the coming year. Those working to accomplish 2015/2016 goals include local, state and federal partners, as well as non-governmental organizations.

The plan below is broken into several sections. Some of the projects are focused more regionally, while a number of local priority projects are focused on a specific waterway. We report first on projects that are region wide, and then report on projects in the Trail Creek Watershed, the East Branch of the Little Calumet River & Salt Creek Watersheds, the Deep River Watershed, and the Grand Calumet River and Grand Calumet Area of Concern which includes locations such as Jeorse Park Beach. In each section, we report on primary goals, 2015 accomplishments and 2016 plans.

This document is fluid, and can be added to or corrected over the course of the year. Contact Natalie Johnson, Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Coordinator, at [Natalie.Johnson@pnw.edu](mailto:Natalie.Johnson@pnw.edu) with ideas and suggestions.

## Regional Projects

### PRIMARY GOALS

- Coordinate with local, state, federal and regional agencies, organizations and entities to link efforts, promote partnering across northwest Indiana and the Lake Michigan Watershed, and reduce duplicative efforts that will improve water quality, increase recreation potential, engage communities, or meet other Urban Waters goals.
- Help municipalities and local organizations increase their organizational capacities by assisting with project design and implementation, identifying potential funding sources, and developing funding proposals when appropriate.
- Continue to send out a monthly e-newsletter that includes current funding opportunities, announcements about partnership meetings, local events of interest, and information about resources such as web-based trainings, upcoming lectures and conferences.
- Continue to work with local and federal partners to assess how the federal partners can best support providing data, mapping, and other regional tools.

### 2015 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- The subscriber list to the Urban Waters monthly newsletter has grown by 53 individuals and now goes out to 254 subscribers. Each newsletter highlights funding opportunities, announcements of partnership meetings and local partner meetings and events, and delivers other opportunities of interest relative to those participating in the Urban Waters network.
- Concluded a study to understand northwest Indiana homeowner's knowledge and awareness of septic system maintenance and care. This information will be used in 2016 to inform the Septic System Coordination Work Group (SSCWG) as they develop and implement a regional outreach and education program that will reduce failing septic system impacts in northwest Indiana.
- Helped local partners develop 18 funding applications to various programs, such as the Urban Waters Small Grant Program, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program, and more. Seven grants totaling approximately \$575,000 were awarded to local UW partners through the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program, the Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, the National Park Service Challenge Cost Share Program, and several state and local funding programs that support Urban Waters goals.

- Assisted Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant and additional UW partners in preliminary development of a program that will result in recruitment of water quality monitoring volunteers across the region (Indiana Master Watershed Steward Program).
- The US Forest Service provided Urban Tree Canopy (UTC+) datasets for Lake and Porter Counties. LaPorte County will soon be available. US Forest Service made two local presentations to educate potential users on the tool. The aim of the UTC+ assessment is to help decision makers understand their urban forest resources, particularly the amount of tree canopy that currently exists and the amount that could exist.
- The National Park Service provided funding support to regional Wilderness Inquiry visits via the National Park Service Challenge Cost-Share Program. Funding was awarded to the Dunes Learning Center which supported visits in Gary, Hammond, and Hobart. Wilderness Inquiry programs support regional watershed education efforts. Additionally, National Park Service dedicated up to three staff at each event to lead additional educational activities.
- Northwest Indiana Urban Waters partners welcomed Mike Shapiro (EPA), Ruth Chemerys (EPA), and Lisa Pelstring (Department of Interior) to the region. Kansas City Urban Waters representatives Roberta Vogel-Leutung (EPA) and Jill Erikson (Heartland Conservation Alliance) also attended. The group toured four sub-watersheds and were greeted by over thirty local partners from various not-for-profit community groups, local, state, and federal governmental agencies. Tour stops included northwest Indiana's first ADA-accessible kayak/canoe launch site, an EPA-US Forest Service funded naturalized detention basin for stormwater treatment/retention, and a restored marsh in the Grand Calumet area of concern. The group visited six project sites in total, showcasing local projects that support Urban Waters goals.

## 2016 TASKS

- Continue to organize regular partnership meetings and provide monthly newsletters and additional communication as needed. Each newsletter/meeting will serve to link partners to new resources and to facilitate further collaborations.
- Continue to assist with project and proposal development and implementation relevant to watershed groups, municipalities, or others completing water-related activities.
- Continue to collaborate with the Lake Michigan Coastal Program (LMCP) and Septic System Coordination Work Group in efforts to reduce septic system failure. Also, work with the newly hired Save the Dunes Project Coordinator to apply findings from 2015 septic system homeowner research to develop and implement an outreach and education program funded by the LMCP. Better maintained septic systems may decrease E. coli and excessive nutrients in local waterways.
- Continue to work with all partners to connect Purdue University Calumet students with internship or experiential learning credit opportunities that support Urban Waters work.
- US Forest Service will provide additional workshops on how to use the Urban Tree Canopy (UTC+) datasets for LaPorte, Lake and Porter Counties.
- Collaborate with the Lake Michigan Coastal Program on grant writing workshops, such as those that emphasize how Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding (GLRI) can be obtained. This funding has the potential to implement work that supports Urban Waters goals.
- Build a relationship with new Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) hire of Porter & Lake Counties and identify opportunities to partner. USDA-NRCS is one of the Urban Waters Federal Partners that local watershed partners would like to engage more with.

- Continue to follow up with USGS on HUC boundary re-definition. Once this identification has been made, partners will know whether or not certain areas of the Lake Michigan Watershed are accurate or actually draining to the Mississippi River.
- US Forest Service will look for opportunities to coordinate regional urban forestry initiatives and provide technical assistance.
- Develop a regional funding strategy that helps municipalities and non-governmental organizations pursue large grants together, finding a larger organization to apply for big grants then sub-award out.
  - Suggested grant themes: invasive species, urban forestry, Wilderness Inquiry, ADA-accessible boat launches
- Utilize MS4 partnerships as a resource for communication and for partnering on potential projects.

## Trail Creek Projects

### PRIMARY GOALS

- Local partners have been working to achieve these primary goals for Trail Creek:
  - Reduce *E. coli* manage sediment and stream flow, address other identified threats, and improve habitat
  - Continue monitoring
  - Increase public awareness and appreciation of the creek
- Will support the efforts of the Trail Creek Watershed Group and its stakeholders as needed. Support will continue to include identifying funding for future watershed management plan implementation, technical assistance, and meeting/committee involvement (see details below).

### 2015 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Chaired the Trail Creek Watershed Group grants committee and with the assistance of federal partners relayed funding opportunities for Trail Creek projects.
- Assisted the LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District and Northwest Indiana Paddling Association in writing a proposal to Michigan City Community Enrichment Corporation for funding of the Wilderness Inquiry Canoemobile program in Michigan City. This program has brought over 800 students and adults on the water in canoes with the goal of to increasing local awareness and appreciation of Trail Creek.
- Assisted the watershed group in writing a 319 application for further watershed implementation projects.
- US EPA and the Urban Waters coordinator regularly attended watershed group meetings to provide technical expertise and input on projects such as those proposed for 319 cost-share funds.
- Assisted the members of the watershed group with outreach and education events such as canoe cleanups and Coastal Awareness month events.
- Facilitated discussion with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the City of Michigan City which resulted in an award \$20,000 (of US Forest Service State & Private Forestry funds for state programs) to Michigan City for riparian habitat improvements near the eroded shoreline of Winding Creek Cove. Project implementation will occur in 2016.

- Members of the Trail Creek Watershed Partnership installed the state's first ADA-compliant launch (funded by the Lake Michigan Coastal Program) this year and other nearby municipalities are seeking funding for additional launches. US EPA provided assistance securing permitting for the launch's installation.

## **2016 TASKS**

- Continue to chair the Trail Creek grant's committee and, with the assistance of federal partners, relay funding opportunities that support Trail Creek identified-projects.
- The US Forest Service and Urban Waters coordinator will organize an urban forestry field day on behalf of the Trail Creek Watershed Group in order to meet IDEM field day requirements for remaining EPA 319 requirements. The field day will teach about trees' benefits to Trail Creek.
- Seek ~\$15,000 to support the 2016 Wilderness Inquiry Canoemobile event in Michigan City to increase public awareness and appreciation of Trail Creek.
- Assist the watershed group in identifying shovel-ready projects, partners and funding opportunities that may apply in order to further implement the watershed management plan.
- Assist the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association in establishing a recreational designation for Trail Creek.

## **East Branch of the Little Calumet & Salt Creek Projects**

### **PRIMARY GOALS**

- Local partners have been working to achieve these primary goals for the East Branch & Salt Creek:
  - Reduce identified water impairments such as *E.coli*, nutrients, and sedimentation
  - Increase public awareness and appreciation of the river
  - Increase access to the East Branch
- Support implementation efforts of the East Branch of the Little Calumet River watershed management plan.
- National Park Service, the US Forest Service, and the Urban Waters coordinator will develop a River Use and Management Plan for the East Branch of the Little Calumet River within the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (Environmental Assessment or EA). This study is a critical step in assessing whether or not paddling can be added as a recreational use of the river within the Park.
- Support the efforts of the Salt Creek watershed group as needed.

### **2015 ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- National Park Service, US Forest Service and the Urban Waters coordinator met to work on the development of the EA. It is anticipated being released early 2016. The plan comprehensively describes the resource as it is and considers various use scenarios for the future and their potential impacts.
- Dunes Learning Center planted 20 native trees around their center in partnership with the National Park Service and the US Forest Service. Volunteers planted oaks, hickories, basswood, pines, sycamore and persimmon trees on the grounds of the DLC to provide shade for the cabins, an arboretum of native trees for educational purposes, and habitat for wildlife.

## **2016 TASKS**

- National Park Service, the US Forest Service, and the Urban Waters coordinator will complete the River Use and Management Plan (EA). Depending on the EA's outcome, federal partners and the Urban Waters Coordinator will assist in access project development.
- Continue to be involved in the East Branch and Salt Creek watershed groups, and support the watershed management plan updates/implementation as needed.
- US Forest Service and the Urban Waters Coordinator will assist the National Park Service in facilitating a public meeting on the environmental assessment (tentatively April).
- Will explore possible role in facilitation of public meetings (if needed) to raise awareness about property acquisition funds on the East Branch of the Little Calumet River. This will be done in partnership with Shirley Heinze Land Trust and the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association.
- Assist the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association in opening permitted portions of the river by removing woody debris.

## **West Branch of the Little Calumet River Watershed Projects**

### **PRIMARY GOALS**

- Local partners are interested in increasing collaboration with local, state, and federal partners in order to:
  - Update and implement the West Branch watershed management plan
  - Increase access to the West Branch

### **2016 TASKS**

- Assist the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) in championing a watershed management plan update.
- Assist the Dunes Learning Center in expanding Wilderness Inquiry visits to the West Branch.

## **Deep River Watershed Projects**

### **PRIMARY GOALS**

- Local partners have been working to achieve these primary goals for the Deep River Watershed:
  - Reduce identified water impairments such as E.coli, nutrients, and sedimentation
  - Increase public awareness and appreciation of the river
- Support the efforts of the IDEM/EPA 319-funded Deep River watershed group, providing technical assistance and being involved in meetings and committees.

## **2015 ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- US EPA and the Urban Waters coordinator regularly attended watershed group meetings to provide technical expertise on the development of the watershed management plan.
- US Army Corps of Engineers worked with watershed partners and stakeholders to suggest modification alternatives of the Deep River dam and surrounding property in Lake Station. The dam is considered a recreational hazard and is thought to negatively impact Deep River water quality. FEMA identified the owners opposite of the Gary School Corporation's property. This information will also aid in future project development regarding the dam.

## **2016 TASKS**

- Help find additional funds to support implementation measures identified by a potential feasibility study on the Deep River dam (possibly led by NIRPC) or implementation of proposed measures once a feasibility study is completed.
- Help the Deep River watershed group finalize the watershed management plan and assist with BMP implementation as needed.
- The Urban Waters coordinator and federal partners will help find additional funds to support implementation measures identified by a potential feasibility study on the Deep River dam or implementation of proposed measures once a feasibility study is completed.
- Assist NIRPC in water quality monitoring in Deep River's critical areas. This may also include forestry monitoring elements as well.
- Provide Hobart with technical assistance regarding approaches to controlling aquatic invasives at Lake George.

## **Grand Calumet River and Grand Calumet Area of Concern Projects**

### **PRIMARY GOALS**

- Local partners have been working to achieve these primary goals for the Grand Calumet & the Area of Concern:
  - Continue habitat restoration within the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern
  - Continue water quality improvements on the Grand Calumet River at Jeorse Park Beach
- Support the efforts of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, Citizens Advisory for the Remediation of the Environment (CARE) committee, the City of East Chicago, and other organizations (such as The Nature Conservancy, Department of Natural Resources, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, US Fish

and Wildlife Service, US EPA, etc.) to meet local goals, including the Jeorse park remediation and local outreach regarding the AOC.

- Assist organizations/entities that target underserved communities to:
  - Educate the public on water quality, stewardship, and/or remediation efforts
  - Promote public access in areas deemed fit (safe) for public use

## **2015 ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- The US EPA awarded \$250,000 to the US Army Corps of Engineers (US ACOE) for additional hydrologic modeling of Jeorse Park Beach and to propose designs for beach restructuring. The outcome of modeling and design is to improve water quality at the beach.
- A National Park Service-funded VISTA AmeriCorps position was filled for the second year at the Douglas Center in the underserved community of Gary. The VISTA coordinated Gary school participation in the Wilderness Inquiry Canoemobile program, collaborated with Save the Dunes to establish a Green Drinks program at 18<sup>th</sup> Street Brewery, and developed new programming at the Douglas Center to reach Gary youth and connect them to various stewardship projects.
- The US EPA & US Forest Service and Urban Waters coordinator participated in a green infrastructure working group led by Brenda Scott Henry with the City of Gary and the Strong Cities, Strong Communities Initiative. The group provided technical assistance to support on the ground efforts in the city such as providing training for the Gary Conservation Corps and support for the development of a green infrastructure plan.

## **2016 TASKS**

- US ACOE will implement an ecosystem restoration project at Jeorse Park Beach. Improved habitat will likely reduce non-point source runoff from the adjacent parking lot as well as reduce gull activity.
- Provide extra capacity to grassroot initiatives, such as the Miller Spotlight Initiative, to increase engagement with underserved communities.
- Assist in development of residential engagement plans for access, stewardship and sustainability.