

Urban Waters Partnership

Northwest Indiana Work Plan 2014/2015

BACKGROUND

As of January 2015, 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 2014/2015 goals include local, state and federal partners, as well as non-governmental organizations.

The plan below is broken into several sections. A number of the local priority projects are focused on a specific waterway, and several are more regional. We report first 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. Lastly, we report on regional projects that span more than one waterway. In each section, we report on primary goals, 2014 accomplishments and 2015 plans.

This document is fluid, and can be added to or corrected over the course of the year. Contact Natalie Johnson at Natalie.Johnson@purduecal.edu with ideas and suggestions.

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
- Urban Waters efforts: Natalie and federal partners will support the efforts of the IDEM/EPA 319-funded Trail Creek Watershed Group and its stakeholders as needed. Support will continue to include technical assistance and meeting/committee involvement (see details below).

2014 ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

- Natalie chaired the Trail Creek grants committee and, with the assistance of federal partners, relayed funding opportunities for Trail Creek projects.
- Natalie assisted the LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District and Northwest Indiana Paddling Association in writing proposals to fund the Wilderness Inquiry Canoemobile program in Michigan City. This program brought hundreds of children and adults onto the Creek in canoes with the goal of to increasing local awareness and appreciation of Trail Creek.
- Peg Donnelly (US EPA) and Natalie regularly attended watershed group meetings to provide technical expertise and input on projects such as those proposed for 319 cost-share funds.
- Natalie has assisted the members of the watershed group with outreach and education events such as canoe and kayak trips, cleanups, and student engagement events such as the Wilderness Inquiry Canoemobile program.
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources awarded \$20,000 (of US Forest Service State & Private Forestry funds for state programs) to Michigan City for riparian habitat improvements. Project planning and implementation will occur in 2015.

2015 TASKS

- Natalie and federal partners will work with the LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District, Michigan City, Alliance for the Great Lakes and other watershed group members to establish a watershed-wide master priority project list based on the 319-funded watershed management plan as well as newly identified projects. Natalie and federal partners will help the watershed group members as they seek additional funding for priority projects.
- Natalie will continue to chair the Trail Creek grant's committee and, with the assistance of federal partners, relay funding opportunities that supported Trail Creek identified-projects.
- A feasibility study (funded by Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake and River Enhancement Program) to address sediment, nutrients, and excessive flow from Cheney Run will be completed by Smith Group/JJR and Haas and Associates by [estimated date of completion needed]. Natalie, the watershed group members, and federal partners will seek funding for project design and implementation (estimated \$6 million project in total).
- Natalie and federal partners will seek ~\$15,000 to support the 2015 Wilderness Inquiry Canoemobile event in Michigan City to increase public awareness and appreciation of Trail Creek.
- Peg Donnelly (US EPA) and Gene Fleming (ACOE) will assist the Michigan City Department of Parks and Recreation in obtaining permits for the proposed ADA compliant boat launch for Hansen Park. Once the permits are obtained, implementation of this project may continue with the outcome of increased public access and awareness.

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 paddling access to the East Branch
- Natalie and the federal partners will support the efforts of the IDEM/EPA 319-funded East Branch of the Little Calumet River watershed group.
- National Park Service, the US Forest Service, and Natalie 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.
- Natalie and federal partners will work with local partners to support the continued existence of a Salt Creek watershed group.

2014 ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

- Natalie assisted Save the Dunes with onboarding the new watershed coordinator. This also included working with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management to complete grant reporting for IDEM/EPA 319 funding.

- Natalie, Cherie Fisher (USFS), and Gia Wagner (NPS), Charles Morris (NPS), and Judy Collins (NPS) met regularly to plan public meetings and compile the draft EA report which comprehensively describes the resource as it is and considers various use scenarios for the future and their potential impacts.
- Regular internal meetings, one stakeholder meeting, and one public meeting were held by the National Park Service to further progress of the environmental assessment and ultimately the development of the River Use and Management Plan for the East Branch of the Little Calumet River within the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

2015 TASKS

- National Park Service, the US Forest Service, and Natalie will complete the River Use and Management Plan (EA).
- Federal partners will seek funding opportunities to match \$1 million from the Bicentennial Land Trust to buy and protect land adjacent to the East Branch of the Little Calumet River. Match must be cash, and non-federal is preferred (however, federal cash may be negotiable).
- Natalie and the federal partners will continue to be involved in the Salt Creek watershed group, and support the watershed management plan update.

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
- Natalie and the federal partners support the efforts of the IDEM/EPA 319-funded Deep River watershed group, including providing technical assistance and being involved in meetings and committees.
- Natalie and the federal partners will assist the City of Hobart and the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association with increasing and promoting recreational access to Deep River and Lake George.

2014 ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

- Peg Donnelly (US EPA) and Natalie regularly attended watershed group meetings to provide technical expertise on the development of the watershed management plan.
- Gene Fleming (ACOE) 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.
- Natalie helped the City of Hobart apply for an ADA-accessible boat launch on Lake George. Funding was provided from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program.
- USGS installed several stream gauges in Deep River sites for water quality monitoring. The water quality information is used to understand stream flashiness and flow, which will be used to determine critical areas for water quality improvements in the Deep River watershed management plan.

2015 TASKS

- Peg Donnelly (US EPA) and Gene Fleming (ACOE) will help the City of Hobart obtain permits for the funded ADA compliant boat launch for Lake George; this launch will increase public recreational access.
- Natalie and federal partners will help find \$87,000 to support the Deep River dam feasibility study.
- Where possible, Natalie and federal partners will help the Gary School Corporation's improve the Deep River Learning Center. This includes identifying funding opportunities, providing educational materials, and building capacity.

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 AOC:
 - Continue habitat restoration within the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern
 - Continue water quality improvements on the Grand Calumet River at Jeorse Park Beach
- Natalie and federal partners will 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.
- Natalie and federal partners will 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

2014 ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

- The US Army Corps of Engineers (US ACOE), Michigan State University (with funding from the Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program), and partnering organizations/entities completed some hydrologic modeling for Jeorse Park Beach, evaluated several alternatives for beach restructuring, and assessed the impact that each alternative would have on water quality.
- A National Park Service-funded VISTA AmeriCorps position was filled for two years at the Douglas Center in the underserved community of Gary. Through the Dunes Learning Center this person is working with local organizations to design and carry out environmental education programs on topics such as water quality, environmental stewardship, and promoting public access of National Park land.

2015 TASKS

- Natalie and federal partners will assist the Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program identify potential funding for additional hydrologic modeling of Jeorse Park Beach. Additional modeling is needed to identify the best solution for water quality improvements.

- Natalie and federal partners will identify funding sources for the design and implementation of Jeorse Park Beach modification for water quality and/or habitat improvements, once the optimal solution is defined.
- Natalie and federal partners will help Ashley Snyder (IDEM) and additional CARE committee members to connect with IN DOT and/or federal DOT on developing a plan to treat phragmites in rights-of-way near interstate 80/94. This will ultimately improve habitat along the highway corridor.
- Natalie and US Forest Service will identify research opportunities or completed research on resident perceptions of restoration in the Grand Calumet Area of Concern.

Regional Projects

PRIMARY GOALS

- Natalie and the lead federal partners will 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.
- Natalie and federal partners will help municipalities and local organizations increase their organizational capacities by assisting with project design and implementation and identifying potential funding sources.
- Natalie and federal partners will help the Septic System Coordination Work Group (SSCWG) analyze septic system maintenance knowledge and awareness in the region with the goal of decreasing failing septic system impacts to water quality in northwest Indiana.
- Natalie will 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.
- Natalie will work with local and federal partners to assess how the federal partners can best support providing data, mapping, and other regional tools, paying attention to not duplicating existing efforts.

2014 ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

- The subscriber list to our monthly newsletter has grown to 204— an increase of approximately 60, or 30%, since 2013. 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.
- The partnership updated our Urban Waters “Backgrounder” document to highlight northwest Indiana projects. This document provides a useful overview of the Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Initiative and what municipalities, non-profits, state entities, and other organizations are working on in the region.
- The partnership grew during 2014. New local, state, and federal organizations and agencies were engaged in northwest Indiana water-efforts.
- Natalie, Lynne Westphal (USFS) and Cherie Fisher (USFS) and members of the Septic System Coordination Work Group (SSCWG), designed a research study to analyze northwest Indiana homeowner’s knowledge of septic system maintenance. During 2014, Natalie conducted the first of three-four focus groups that

will take place throughout the region. The SSCWG will use information gained from this study to develop meaningful outreach and education material that promotes proper maintenance practices for homeowners in the Lake Michigan watershed.

- Natalie and federal partners helped local partners apply for funding from the Urban Waters Small Grant Program, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program, and other sources. Approximately \$250,000 of funding was obtained for projects that support Urban Waters goals.
- In response to local (and other) concerns, USGS formed a committee on the HUC boundaries of the Grand Calumet River and Plum Creek. Clarifying the boundaries will clarify where certain funding may or may not be spent, and where Lake Michigan watershed work may take place.
- In response to local (and other) concerns, USGS formed a committee on the HUC boundaries of the Grand Calumet River and Plum Creek. Clarifying the boundaries will better inform watershed managers where certain funding may or may not be spent, as well as where watershed work relative to the Lake Michigan watershed may take place.
- US Forest Service secured funding to extend Natalie Johnson's term as the Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Coordinator. Now housed at Purdue Calumet, Natalie continues her partnership work while also engaging students in experiential learning opportunities that advance their education and meet the needs of local partners.

2015 TASKS

- Natalie, with assistance from the US Forest Service, will complete the ongoing septic system study, and disseminate findings to the SSCWG and other interested groups.
- Natalie, federal partners, and Dorreen Carey will engage NRCS in watershed plan development and implementation to explore agricultural projects in the Lake Michigan Watershed. By doing so, watershed managers can have a better understanding of current NRCS projects, and identify partnership opportunities.
- Natalie will work with the SSCWG to develop or obtain outreach and education material to distribute regionally. Better maintained septic systems should result in fewer septic system failures that result in *E. coli* and excessive nutrients in local waterways.
- Natalie and the federal partners will assist the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) with the recruitment of water quality monitoring volunteers across the region. NIRPC is funded for this work by the Urban Waters Small Grant Program, and will establish a volunteer stream monitoring network to produce load calculation data on area waterways.
- USGS will continue to participate in with the HUC watershed boundary committee, ultimately clarifying northwest Indiana's Lake Michigan watershed boundaries.
- Natalie will continue to organize regular partnership meetings and provide monthly newsletters and additional communication as needed.
- Natalie and federal partners will continue to assist with project and proposal development and implementation relevant to watershed groups, municipalities, or others completing water-related activities.
- Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) datasets will be provided for Lake and Porter Counties. A local partner is needed from LaPorte County to help obtain necessary data to incorporate into the dataset.

- Natalie will work with all partners to connect Purdue University Calumet students with internship or experiential learning credit opportunities that support Urban Waters work.
- Natalie and federal partners will provide expertise and other assistance to Wildlife Habitat Council for identifying and mapping invasive species on private, industrial lands.