



# NORTHWESTERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Together We Make The Difference

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## NEWS FROM NIRPC

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### Funding for Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway Watershed Initiative Secured

It's been nearly two years since efforts began to secure funding for the Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway Watershed Initiative. Collaborating with local partners, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) submitted a Section 319 grant application to the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) last fall to develop and implement a watershed management plan for this watershed. NIRPC received word from IDEM earlier this month that the four-year project proposal was selected for funding by IDEM and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Covering nearly 180 square miles of mixed land use in north central Lake and Porter Counties, the Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway watershed is the largest watershed in Northwest Indiana's Lake Michigan drainage area. Some of its major tributaries include Deep River, Turkey Creek, Main Beaver Dam Ditch and a portion of the West Branch Little Calumet River. IDEM has identified approximately 125 miles of stream in the watershed that are considered impaired based on the draft 2012 303d List of Impaired Waterbodies. Some of the known water quality issues are *E. coli*, siltation, low dissolved oxygen levels and impaired biotic communities. Impaired biotic communities is the by far the most prevalent issue.

"Biological impairments differ from some of the traditional water quality issues we are more familiar with like *E. coli*" says Joe Exl, a Water Resource Planner with NIRPC. "Multiple stressors such as habitat destruction, flow alteration, and excess sediment and nutrient inputs from surrounding land uses can all be factors impacting the types and numbers of fish and aquatic insects being observed or not observed in our streams."

As part of this collaborative effort, the IDEM initiated an intensive one-year water quality study this spring to assist in the watershed plan's development. IDEM is assessing water chemistry, habitat and biological communities at 35 different sites strategically located throughout the watershed. IDEM will use the information collected along with stakeholder input to develop a Total Maximum Daily Load report which will be incorporated into the watershed management plan. "I was definitely very excited when IDEM informed us that they had selected our watershed for this pilot project. The resources that the State is putting into these water quality surveys far exceeds what we would have been able to accomplish locally. We're certainly very grateful."

IDEM has created a webpage for Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway TMDL study to help disseminate information such as public meeting dates, quarterly water quality data results, and site photographs (<http://www.in.gov/idem/nps/3893.htm>). The next TMDL public meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 5<sup>th</sup> beginning at 1p.m. at the Lake County Extension and Soil & Water Conservation District offices in Merrillville. The watershed management project is expected to begin this January with a public meeting kick-off which NIRPC will announce as the project start nears closer. NIRPC hopes to draw in other partners as the initiative moves forward.

NIRPC is the Metropolitan Planning Organization and regional council of local governments for the three counties of Northwest Indiana. NIRPC provides the forum for local elected officials, regional, leadership, and citizens to address regional issues relating to transportation, the environment and community and economic development. NIRPC seeks to develop consensus solutions with the broadest participation.

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