



NORTHWESTERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Together We Make The Difference

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Kicking Off the Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway Watershed Initiative

Working together with local communities and organizations, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) is kicking off a project to improve water quality and restore aquatic habitats in the Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway watershed. NIRPC identified the watershed as a priority area in a 2011 study due to the nearly 125 miles of stream in the watershed listed as “impaired” by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM). The impairment designation means portions of these streams do not currently meet state water quality standards or their ability to support swimming and fishing are at risk. NIRPC has been awarded a \$455,550 grant from IDEM to develop and begin implementing a watershed management plan to address the negative impacts associated with storm water runoff from urban and agricultural areas that carry pathogens, sediment, and nutrients into nearby streams.

The watershed includes several municipalities within its boundaries including the entirety of Hobart, Lake Station, Merrillville, and New Chicago along with portions of Cedar Lake, Crown Point, Gary, Griffith, Portage, Saint John, Schererville, and Winfield. Watershed management planning helps to ensure that investments in water quality are made where they do the most good.

The project will begin with the first in a series of public meetings on January 21st, 1 p.m. CST at the Hobart Community Center located in Festival Park at 111 East Old Ridge Road. NIRPC will be providing an overview of the four year project, a brief description of the watershed and most importantly begin documenting watershed concerns identified by attendees. NIRPC will use this information and the guidance of a steering committee to begin drafting a watershed management plan that provides a framework to improve water quality and aquatic habitats within the watershed.

“I can’t stress enough how important it is to engage as many partners as possible when dealing with something as challenging as storm water runoff. It’s one of the biggest threats to our region’s streams and ultimately Lake Michigan,” says Joe Exl, a water resource planner with NIRPC and the project’s coordinator. “By using a watershed approach we can begin to understand what the most important issues are, prioritize what work needs to be done and then combine resources to make positive changes that benefit the region as a whole.”

The benefit and need to coordinate efforts is a shared one for a number communities within the watershed. “This watershed plan will provide valuable information to prioritize/define management strategies,” said Matt Lake, executive director of the Merrillville Stormwater Utility. “The key is having all of the stakeholders participate to ensure this document is not just another plan that sits on the shelf collecting dust.” Tim Kingsland, storm water district coordinator with the City of Hobart, understands that protecting Lake George and Deep River requires the “coordination among the region’s community storm water programs and developing partnerships with businesses, agricultural producers, and interested stakeholders.” Working together with the communities upstream of the City of Portage is important, as Portage sits at the confluence of the receiving waters before it flows into Lake Michigan. “The City of Portage values Lake Michigan and its contributing waterways and this planning effort is vital to their protection,” says Portage Park Superintendent Jenny Orsburn.

Anyone interested in the project and that would like to receive future meeting announcements and project updates may contact Meredith Stilwell at mstilwell@nirpc.org to be added to a project information e-mail distribution list.

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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