



Waterway improvement project underway



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HOBART | The weather and driving conditions might have been the major concern for residents Tuesday, but water quality issues in Northwest Indiana also received attention.

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission hosted a program to kick off the Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway watershed project.

Joe Exl, senior water resource planner with NIRPC and the project's coordinator, said NIRPC identified the watershed as a critical area in 2011 because of water quality issues.

There are 14 municipalities in the watershed, and most of them are in Lake County, Exl said.

The project will take place over the next four years. During the next 18 months, a watershed management plan will be developed.

After it's created, those strategies will be implemented for two and a half years.

A public outreach and involvement program will be ongoing throughout the process, Exl said.

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management is completing a study examining 35 sites within the watershed. Those sites include Deep River, Lake George, Deer Creek and Turkey Creek.

The study, which is scheduled to be completed in the fall, will be instrumental in developing the management plan, Exl said.

General chemistry, nutrients, habitat and stream flow are among factors assessed in the study.

Exl said a \$455,550 grant NIRPC obtained will be used for the creation and implementation of the watershed plan. Other funding sources also will be sought.

Community leaders and residents attending the meeting said resources within the watershed are used in a variety of ways and protecting those resources are necessary.

Exl said another meeting covering the same material will be scheduled within the next two weeks for people who couldn't attend Tuesday's session because of the weather.

Contact Meredith Stilwell at mstilwell@nirpc.org to be included in an email list of upcoming

meetings and project updates.