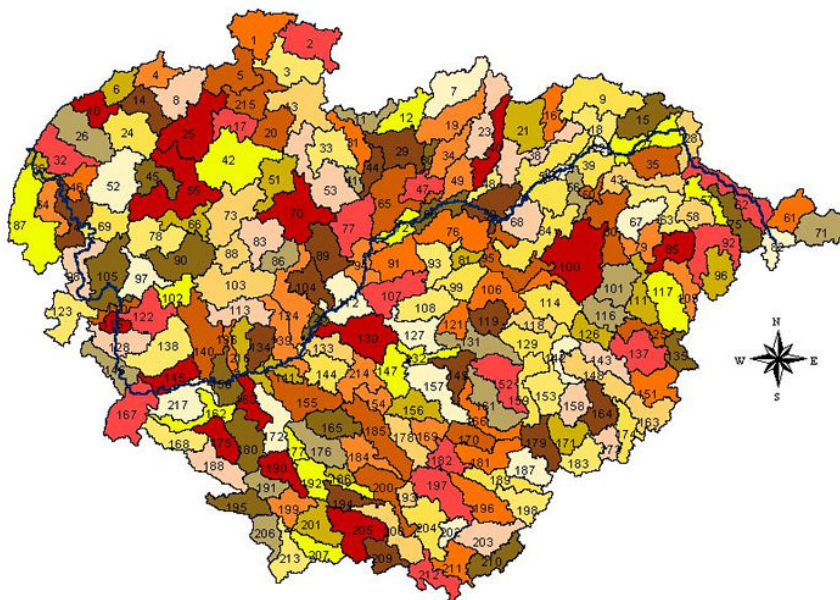


# St. Joseph River Basin Commission 2008-2009 Summary



*The St. Joseph River Basin Commission exists to conserve, enhance and promote the natural resources and benefits of the Watershed for the present and future generations by providing vision, leadership and means*

*St. Joseph River Basin Commission  
227 W. Jefferson Blvd.--#1120  
South Bend, IN 46601-1830  
P: 574-287-1829  
F: 574-287-1840  
[www.sjrbc.com](http://www.sjrbc.com)*



**St. Joseph River Basin Commission**  
**2008-2009 Summary of Activities**  
**July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009**

*The St. Joseph River Basin Commission exists to conserve, enhance and promote the natural resources and benefits of the Watershed for the present and future generations by providing vision, leadership and means.*

The St. Joseph River Basin Commission was organized by the Indiana State Legislature in 1988 with the following purposes:

- ◆ Provide a forum for discussion, study, and evaluation of water resource issues of common concern in the Basin
- ◆ Facilitate and foster cooperative planning and coordinated management of the Basin's water and related land resources
- ◆ Develop positions on major water resource issues and serve as the advocate of the Basin's interests
- ◆ Make recommendations on matters related to its functions and objectives, to political subdivisions in the Basin and to other public and private agencies
- ◆ Develop Plans to improve water quality in the Basin
- ◆ Explore the desirability of entering into an interstate compact with Michigan to improve water quality in the Basin.

The activities conducted by the St. Joseph River Basin Commission during 2008-2009 are in keeping with these purposes. Activities include the following:

**QUARTERLY MEETINGS**

The quarterly meetings of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission serve as a forum for discussion and evaluation of activities in the entire Basin. During this fiscal year, the St. Joseph River Basin Commission heard presentations about:

- 2007 Aquatic Community Monitoring in South Bend, Mishawaka and Elkhart
- Wetlands Issues and Impacts in the St. Joseph River Basin
- CSOnet—An Innovative Approach to Stormwater Management
- Managing the Elkhart County Groundwater Program

**LETTERS OF SUPPORT, FORUMS OF DISCUSSION, DEVELOPING POSITIONS**

Additionally, the Basin Commission had discussions regarding a number of activities in the Basin and developed positions on those matters that held the potential to improve or hinder water quality and aquatic habitat in the River Basin, including:

- The Granger Sewer Project and potential to discharge to Juday Creek (Basin Commission followed up to the St. Joseph County Sewer and Water District to express concerns that discharge to Juday Creek would impact the cold water fisheries in the Creek)
- Aquatic vegetation in the St. Joseph River, Elkhart (Basin Commission worked with the Indiana Department of Natural resources and several aquatic vegetation control companies to identify what the plant species were and what options existed to combat these vegetation “blooms” including potential funding sources).
- Improved fish passage in the St. Joseph River by the elimination of a dam in Elkhart (The project was not pursued due to recommendations from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—Basin Commission took no action)
- The expansion of Aggregate Resources, Inc. mining site in Michigan that served to impact groundwater and exaggerate soil erosion (Basin Commission wrote a letter in opposition of the project and directed concerns to the Township Planning Agency responsible for permitting the land expansion)
- Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) serves to provide cost-share funding for various programs throughout the St. Joseph River Basin and Black River Basin (The Basin Commission provided a letter of support for this grant proposal as it holds the potential to bring a large sum of money to reduce agricultural related nonpoint source pollution in the two basins.)
- City of Elkhart CSO Pump and Storage Project that served to manage discharges from the City’s combined sewer system. (The Basin Commission wrote a letter of support for federal appropriations to aid in completion of this project.)
- Elkhart River as a legal drain (The Basin Commission invited the Noble County Surveyor to a meeting to explained the planned activities, and worked with a number of other agencies and organizations to assess the impacts of the designation. The Basin Commission wrote a letter to the Noble County Commissioners and County Surveyor requesting further evaluation and ultimate consequences of the action prior to making the designation.)

## **WATERSHED MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

The St. Joseph River Basin Commission serves as the main contact for the *Juday Creek Task Force*. The Task Force was organized as part of the Juday Creek Watershed Management Plan to advise the St. Joseph County Drainage Board on actions that need to be taken to continue to protect these rare cold-water fisheries. River Basin Commission staff, serves as the liaison between members of the Task Force, the Project manager of potential projects or activities and the local, state and federal regulatory agencies. The staff collects necessary information on the projects, schedules meetings as needed and communicates the concerns and recommendations to the St. Joseph County Drainage Board, the regulatory agencies and the appropriate project contacts. Meetings are only held as needed. In this fiscal year the Juday Creek Task Force met on six (6) occasions and staff conducted two field evaluations in association with Indiana Department of Natural Resource and St. Joseph County Drainage Board staff members. Additionally, staff attended one public hearing related a potential Indiana Department of Natural Resources permit in the watershed. Finally two minor projects were evaluated by the Task Force through email communications only.

The St. Joseph River Basin Commission continues to be active on the Watershed Council portion of the *Friends of the St. Joe River Association, Inc.* Staff attends monthly meetings in an advisory capacity representing the Indiana portion of the Basin. In addition, several Basin Commission members are on the governing Board of the organization.

The Basin Commission maintains a database of water quality data submitted by various agencies and organizations. Staff periodically requests such data from local health departments, state and federal agencies, cities and towns and volunteer organizations in order to get a more complete picture of the quality of surface water in the Indiana portion of the St. Joseph River and its tributaries.

Because sampling schemes are sporadic, associated with complaint investigations, special projects, or permit requirements, it has become evident that there is little consistency of when and where sampling is conducted. As a result, it is difficult to make a good assessment of a particular site, since there may be only one sample collected over any given time period, or parameters may change from year to year. Even the Indiana Department of Environmental Management 5-year basin assessment does not always include the same sites during any given time period. As more sampling episodes are completed and the data included, a better picture may develop over time. While the Basin Commission will continue to collect data that is available, it may not be able to conduct a yearly report or analysis, as many of the sampling sites don't have enough data to develop a water quality trend.

## **TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

Staff of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission was invited to participate as a member of both the City of Elkhart and the City of Mishawaka *Citizen Advisory Committees* related to development of their Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) programs and funding strategies. This participation includes attending a number of meetings and supporting the final proposals that went before the respective common councils. Combined sewer overflow strategies are very important and will involve a great deal of money to improve the historic system of stormwater management. All the CSO communities have been working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Justice and local Citizen Advisory Committees to develop a plan that reduces the number of discharge events and adequately finances the program. The communities have been challenged to develop a plan that will place the least hardship on rate payers and the jurisdiction's overall budget, but also improve the quality of water to a level directed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Staff regularly receives inquiries related to drinking water well depths, water quality in the St. Joseph River Basin, sources of information related to improving a reach of stream, river, etc. In addition, the St. Joseph River Basin Commission serves as the local contact for complaints related to violation of regulations under the authority of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Indiana Department of Environmental Management, local health departments, Army Corps of Engineers, etc. Staff either makes the referrals or provides the appropriate contacts for those making the complaints.

Annually the St. Joseph River Basin Commission participates in the St. Joseph County Soil and Water Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service prioritization of

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) projects. This fiscal year was no exception. The evaluation team evaluates and ranks the kinds of agricultural projects that need the most attention. This prioritization is forwarded to the State of Indiana that funds those projects that fit the State scheme. St. Joseph County has consistently received funding to complete a number of conservation projects.

The St. Joseph River Basin Commission participates in the St. Joseph County Municipal Separate Storm Sewer (MS4) Education Committee. In that capacity, the staff assists in maintaining a database of contractors, builders and developers that are governed under the local MS4 ordinances. SJRBC staff participates in regular strategizing meetings and aids in development of the annual education/information event for this audience. During this fiscal year, the Education Committee organized and hosted a field day to demonstrate new best management practices (BMPs) on a construction site. The field day took place at Eddy Street Commons in South Bend, and was attended by about 50 people. It included a site visit to view the various BMPs and also an update on local ordinances and regulations related to stormwater management and erosion control on construction sites. The field day also included a number of vendors that distribute a variety of best management practice materials and techniques.

#### **EDUCATION, INFORMATION SHARING, TECHNICAL UPDATES**

The environmental field is constantly changing. It is important to be updated on new information and share that information with all appropriate parties. The St. Joseph River Basin Commission receives some of the new information about activities occurring in the Basin or impacting the Basin during its quarterly meetings. The staff has taken advantage of several opportunities to learn about new developments in the environmental and water quality fields. Those include:

- The Indiana MS4 Annual Meeting
- GoGreen Nappanee Sustainability Workshop
- Integrating Watershed Planning and Implementation at a Local Level

Staff participated in three opportunities to share information to the general public during the year:

- The Green Expo, hosted by WNIT at the Century Center in South Bend
- The Eco-Fest, hosted by Down Town South Bend (DTSB Inc.) at Howard Park, South Bend
- Envirofest, hosted by the City of Elkhart.

Prompted by numerous requests for information and concerns about the deterioration of the St. Joseph River as a result of vegetation blooms over the past couple of years, the St. Joseph River Basin Commission hosted a workshop on April 18, 2009 for all riparian landowners in the Indiana portion of the St. Joseph River Basin. *Aquatic Vegetation Control; Balancing Habitat and Nuisance*, was a half-day workshop that focused on the importance of aquatic vegetation, the causes of excessive aquatic plants, and the methods of managing aquatic plants without causing an imbalance of habitat and water quality. Landowners from throughout the River Basin were invited.

The goal of the workshop was to educate riparian landowners that aquatic ecosystems require some vegetation in order for a balance of fisheries, invertebrates and recreational benefits. Basin Commission worked with the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Foundation to bring in national experts in the field of aquatic ecology, vegetation management, and water quality to provide the best information available for maintaining this balance. Nearly 50 people attended the event with positive reviews by those in attendance.

The 9<sup>th</sup> *Annual Indiana-Michigan St. Joseph River Symposium* was held on June 12 at Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve. The Symposium serves as the annual opportunity for both Michigan and Indiana policymakers and decision makers to learn of recent water quality issues of national, regional and local concern, and also share activities and concerns from throughout the River Basin. The current economy played a part in the attendance in 2009 being slightly down (51) due in part to limited travel budgets and reduction in staff levels, particularly on the state level. The agenda this year focused on two topics—water quality trading and wetlands importance/preservation. Speakers included:

- Water Quality Trading—What it is – *George Azevedo, U.S. EPA*
- Lessons Learned with the Kalamazoo river Watershed Water quality Trading Project—*Elizabeth Binoniemi-Smith, Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians*
- The Role of Wetlands in a Watershed—*Rob Zbiciak*
- Incorporating Wetlands Protection and Restoration into a Watershed Plan; Obstacles and Hurdles—*Christine Livingston*

As in previous years, those attending gave positive feedback for the event, and expressed support for future Symposiums.

*Basin Bites and Technical Tidbits; A Newsletter of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission* continues to serve as a means of sharing information to a wider range of citizens in the entire river basin. Newsletters are developed as new information or new technical developments occur in the water resource field. Distribution has grown over the years to include over 2500 recipients.

The *St. Joseph River Basin Commission Website* ([www.sjrbc.com](http://www.sjrbc.com)) has served as a means of sharing information and activities related to the St. Joseph River Basin and the Commission. The website is currently being evaluated to better serve the needs of the Basin Commission and will be reformatted over the next year.

## **FUNDING**

As a state agency, the St. Joseph River Basin Commission is subject to budget decisions made in association with the Indiana State Legislature, as well as the Indiana State Budget Agency. To compensate for reduced revenue impacting the State over the past few years, the Basin Commission has been instructed to “set aside” funds that to date has not been reinstated to the budget. In 2007, a set aside of 7 percent occurred. In 2008, the biennial budget was reduced an additional 7 percent as instructed by the State Budget Agency and in early 2009 the Basin Commission was instructed to set aside an additional 3 percent of the already-budgeted funding.

With set-aside strategies continuing, the St. Joseph River Basin Commission anticipates greater challenges in the future.

When the legislation was originally developed for the St. Joseph River Basin Commission, no local funding mechanism was included. Unlike other basin commissions in Indiana that have a specific funding coefficient comparable to acreage drained, the St. Joseph River Basin Commission legislation did not include that mechanism. Each year local communities and county governments are asked to consider a small contribution. Many jurisdictions have contributed \$50 to \$2500 depending on their ability. These funds are greatly appreciated as they make up some of the shortfalls created by the state budgeting process.

During this fiscal year, the St. Joseph River Basin Commission aided other agencies in seeking funding for specific projects. The Elkhart County Surveyor's Office sought assistance in applying for funding to develop a two-stage ditch on the south side of Goshen, at Horn Ditch. The Basin Commission staff researched various funding options and made application for foundation funding, but was not successful. The staff continues to be watchful of other opportunities.

The St. Joseph River Basin Commission staff also aided the St. Joseph County Commissioners and Engineering Department in gathering pertinent information and developing the baseline application for State Revolving Funds (SRF) for three sewer projects. The County completed the applications.

The approval of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) ushered in various funding opportunities for environmental and specifically water quality projects. The River Basin staff investigated the various funding options available, evaluated various projects and submitted an application for watershed management planning in 2009. Future funding may be available through this Act related to the restoration of the Great Lakes. The Basin Commission will continue to evaluate these opportunities for funding specific projects, and working in partnership with other agencies to improve, protect, and conserve the water resources of the region.

## **THE FUTURE**

The future activities of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission are dependent on potential funding opportunities. As State funding declines, the Basin Commission will be challenged to maintain its current programming level. This will necessitate development of more partnerships which leverage funds and manpower to complete tasks. Good water resources are a vital component not only for the continued economic development in the region but also for the recreational economy of the area including fisheries, boating, and swimming. We must continue to highlight the value of water resources and take every opportunity to preserve them.



