

BASIN BITES

and

TECHNICAL TIDBITS

FIRST QUARTER – MARCH 2004

A Publication
of the
St. Joseph River
Basin Commission

QUARTERLY MEETING SCHEDULED

The St. Joseph River Basin Commission meeting is scheduled for March 2, 2004. The meeting will be held at the Elkhart County Public Services Building, 4230 Elkhart Road-Goshen, beginning at 10:00 a.m.

Mark Salee, City of Elkhart will give an update of the water quality model developed under a section 205j grant. The model focuses on evaluating E. coli levels in the St. Joseph River. Elkhart, Mishawaka and South Bend have been in partnership to develop this model. Elkhart has received another grant to further refine the model.



2004 OFFICERS

At the Basin Commission 4th Quarter meeting, the 2003 officers were re-elected to serve another term. Those officers include:

Michael Keleman (Representing the
Mayor of Angola) – *Chairperson*

Karl Kopec (Representing the
Mayor of Mishawaka) –
Vice-Chairperson

Dr. Janice Carson, M.D. (St. Joseph County
Health Officer) – *Secretary-Treasurer*



PROPERTY TAX REDUCTION AND WILDLIFE HABITAT PRESERVATION

Property tax reduction may be an end product when landowners assist with wildlife habitat preservation.

Increasing land use changes have resulted in greater loss of wildlife habitat. Animal-vehicle accidents are on the rise, as animals migrate in search of new habitat. Property damage and loss associated with animals venturing onto lands bordering shrinking habitat, have also become a great concern.

In 1979, the Indiana State Legislature passed the *Classified Wildlife Habitat Act*. The Classified Wildlife Habitat Act serves to encourage preservation of lands identified as wildlife habitat. The benefit of lands included in this program is two-fold – First, it maintains lands for all wildlife species thereby preserving future generations.

Secondly, it provides an incentive to the property owner, by reducing the assessed value of all lands included in the wildlife habitat classification program to \$1.00 per acre. Additionally, the program provides property owners free wildlife management technical advice and assistance.

Marshall County leads the State in the number of acres currently enrolled in the Wildlife Habitat preservation program with 4,113.76 acres. Followed closely behind is Kosciusko County with 4,071.25.

Other counties within the St. Joseph River Basin or region and their enrolled acres include:

Elkhart County	1,879.54
LaGrange County	702.13
Noble County	2,669.43
St. Joseph	1,637.64
Steuben	1,327.96

Indiana Code 6-1.1-6.7 allows for further reduction in property taxes through the *Indiana Filter Strip Law*. As defined in the Law, a “filter strip refers to a strip or an area of vegetation for removing sediment, organic matter and other pollutants from runoff and wastewater”.

The law requires that the filter strip must be at least 20 feet wide and not more than 75 feet wide. Several other stipulations related to the parcel are identified in the legislation.

Filter strips have become one of the most encouraged best management practices to reduce erosion, control stormwater runoff and improve water quality. Many cost-share programs allow financial support for the establishment of this resource protection method.

Similar to the Wildlife Habitat Law, the Filter Strip Law provides an added incentive - a tax break for land enrolled in the program. Land that is classified as a filter strip can also be assessed at \$1.00 per acre for property tax purposes. Ditch assessments, associated with maintenance of county waterways, are not changed by this tax change.

Two great opportunities to lower assessed value of land as well as preserve and protect our natural resources. Programs worth getting involved in!

WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR YOUR WATERSHED?

That will be the question asked **February 28** by the *Friends of the St. Joseph River* at a public information session being planned at the St. Joseph County, Michigan Conservation Club from 10:00 a.m. to noon.

The Conservation Club is located at 26549 Featherstone Road, Sturgis, Michigan. For more information call: 269-467-5540.

MARCH 5—FIRST ANNUAL MICHIANA ECO-SUMMIT

Michiana Eco-Summit; Discovering Common Ground is an all-day workshop being organized by the Elkhart EnviroCorp and a group of other local agencies and organizations. The goal of the Eco-Summit is to bring together environmental groups to address the most pressing environmental issues of our area, and foster collaborative action.

The workshop will include sessions on Community Awareness, Habitat Preservation, and Collaboration Building with emphasis on invasive species and wetlands and water resource protection.

A registration fee of \$15.00 covers breaks, a lunch and other materials. Contact the Elkhart EnviroCorp at 574-293-2572 for more information and registration materials.



IS YOUR LAKE CHOKED WITH WEEDS AND SEDIMENT? – GET INTO THE L.A.R.E.

Public Law 233-2003 (HEA 1336) was enacted in 2003 increasing the Lake and River Enhancement (L.A.R.E.) fee paid by boat owners. With this increase in fees comes a new opportunity for lake associations to tackle nuisance weeds and sediment inundating many Indiana lakes.

The new law allows “The Department of Natural Resources to pay for lake projects, including projects to: A. remove sediment; or B. control exotic or invasive plants or animals.”

Activities allowed for funding during the 2004 inaugural year of the program are limited to development of aquatic plant surveys and aquatic plant management plans. No funds will be awarded in future years for plant control, without an approved aquatic plant management plan.

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Soil Conservation will accept

applications later in 2004 for the preparation of sediment removal plans and/or sediment removal projects. Actual plant control activities will not be funded until 2005.

No funds will be distributed to individual lake residents and priority will be given to lake projects that include publicly operated access sites.

According to information provided about the grant program, "The ultimate goal is to improve the ecological health of public lakes and enhance their myriad uses. The program encourages innovative, cost-effective approaches to the resolution of lake-related problems, rather than the perpetuation of antiquated, unimaginative actions that do little to resolve the problems and may, in fact exacerbate them."

Grant applications must be completed by lake associations or organizations and must be submitted no later than April 30, 2004. Proof of funds or in-kind services representing the local match for the grant portion, will be required. The first round of grants are scheduled to be awarded in July 2004.

For more information regarding this new L.A.R.E. funding source, in addition to obtaining an application for a project proposal, contact Jim Ray, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Soil Conservation at 317-233-3870 or jray@dnr.state.in.us.



STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

On February 12, 16 individuals participated in the St. Joseph River Basin Commission strategic planning process. The session included review of goals developed in 1997 and determination of the direction the Basin Commission should be headed over the next several years.

Rory Robinson of the National Park Service facilitated the session. The group developed a new

set of goals along with action plans, which will be discussed at the March 2 meeting of the Basin Commission.

RIVER-CLEAN UP SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 19

There might be ice on the St. Joseph River, but it's not too early to be thinking, "spring cleanup".

The Elkhart EnviroCorp has done just that with plans in the works for a June 19 river cleanup. For more information, and to sign up to help with the project, contact EnviroCorp at 574-293-2572

INDIANA-MICHIGAN ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN SYMPOSIUM PLANNED

On April 23, elected officials, policy makers and individuals interested in natural resources will gather for the 4th Annual Indiana-Michigan St. Joseph River Basin Symposium. As in previous years, the event will be held at Fernwood Nature Preserve and Botanical Garden.

The Basin Commission hosts the Symposium to encourage communication and planning between people in the St. Joseph River Basin in Michigan and Indiana. Attendees learn of issues in the region related to water quality, hear about successful projects and finally receive new ideas that help to improve and preserve our water resources.

This year's invited presenters should prove to be as informative and beneficial as those in previous years. Greg Lamberty of the National Weather Service has been invited to discuss the *Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Services* – an improved flood/draught forecasting tool developed for the region.

Chris Freiburger of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources has been invited to share his research on culvert/bridge placement and how installations can help or hurt water resources.

Announcements regarding the Symposium will be mailed in mid-March.

MISSION

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

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ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION

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