

Cobus Creek Watershed Diagnostic Study

Public Meeting Kickoff

January 25, 2016 – 7:00pm

Elkhart Conservation Club – Elkhart, IN

Meeting Summary

Approximately 50 individuals were in attendance. Jeremy Reiman with the Michiana Area Council of Governments and St. Joseph River Basin Commission started the meeting with a powerpoint presentation. The presentation covered the following points:

- Defining what a watershed is and why water quality is important
- Information on Cobus Creek Watershed and its unique resources
- The purpose of the study is to assess the conditions and trends of water quality within Cobus Creek watershed and to further prioritize future projects that would benefit the watershed and its citizens within it
- The scope of work for the study entails:
 - mapping current watershed conditions
 - collecting habitat, chemical, and biological data on surface waters
 - modeling pollution in surface waters
 - prioritizing potential projects
 - producing a final document
- The study will be available for public comment towards the end of 2016
- The final approved document will be available to the public in early 2017
- The study is funded by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake and River Enhancement Program as well as through various forms of support from over a dozen local partners
- Attendees were encouraged to keep up to date with the project by filling out a questionnaire on each attendees desired level of involvement. Persons can also go to www.sjrbc.com or email the St. Joseph River Basin Commission at sjrbcdir@macog.com to receive updates.

Sara Peel with Arion Consultants, the lead consultant on the project, presented the findings of her initial data collection on Cobus Creek watershed. Her presentation covered the following points

- Based on 2011 land-use data, the majority of land-use in the watershed is agriculture. The next most popular land use is developed-open space which it is believed that much has since been developed into subdivisions
- A large portion of the watershed has been deemed not suitable for septic tanks

- There are a significant amount of wetlands in the Michigan portion of the watershed surrounding the lakes
- Soils data suggests that there were once several wetlands along the banks of Cobus Creek and Gast Ditch in Indiana at one point
- Several organizations, including the EPA, have completed different types of data sampling in the watershed
- The study will have 11 different sample sites in the watershed; 5 in Michigan and 6 in Indiana. The sites will be sampled twice for water chemistry and once for fish and macroinvertebrate. Sampling will occur during the spring and summer.

All attendees then transitioned into an activity to document areas of interest in the watershed. Maps were laid out on tables and attendees were encouraged to mark:

- High quality locations
- Areas of concern
- Where water quality or stream projects had occurred
- Areas of recreation
- Any general information about resources within the watershed



Below is a summary of the information gathered from the activity:

- Flow data on Cobus Creek has recently been collected in the Michigan portion of the creek
- Locals are interested in the potential of protecting Skab Lake from development. If it's shoreline is developed, they would like to see policies in place to ensure the water quality is projected (i.e. sewer systems, setback ordinances)
- Garver Lake and Pleasant Lake communities are hooked up to sewer
- Coberts Lake community is not hooked up to sewer
- Outlet of Garver Lake has a small dam structure that dumps into a small wetland complex. Unclear whether this structure is necessary to maintain lake levels or built for aesthetics.
- There are several wetland complexes south of the Garver Lake outlet structure that appear to be high quality habitat. Some of those wetlands have been recently cut down along the shoreline by property owners.
- Cobus Creek, between Redfield Road and approximately the Toll Road, tends to run dry in dry summers. Flows through this area are very flashy.
- New subdivisions are being developed along the Creek in the northern portion of Elkhart County. Locals are working with developers on protecting habitat bordering the creek
- Elkhart Community Schools has property at the southeast corner of County Road 2 and Ash Road. They intend to develop onsite projects to teach K-12 students about farming practices

- Boot Lake Nature Preserve is a high quality area that supports several endangered plant/animal species
- Invasive plant species are a consistent issue on Garver Lake
- There is excellent fishing within Cobus Creek; at the Elkhart Conservation Club, Cobus Creek County Park and even some private spots further upstream
- Gast Ditch appears to have consistent flow patterns
- Several parts of Cobus Creek and its banks have been modified by private landowners

The information collected from this meeting will be compiled into a GIS layer indicating areas of interest in the watershed. Arion Consultants and the SJRBC will be working to compile additional GIS layers and water quality data to be incorporated into the study. Once the weather warms up, in the field data collection will occur. All data, new and historic, will be compiled into a watershed scale study of Cobus Creek. A draft of the study will be available for public comment at an additional public meeting in the end of 2016