

Little Elkhart River Watershed

HUC #0405000112

The Little Elkhart River Watershed is located in Elkhart and LaGrange Counties Indiana, spanning 82,982 acres. A very prevalent Amish community within this watershed has resulted in three quarters of the land being dedicated to agriculture, with a primary use of pasture for livestock. Conventional livestock practices, primarily in the headwaters of the watershed, have been a major contributor to several water quality impairments, such as high levels of nutrients, *E. coli*, and sediment. Generally these issues can be combated through federal and state cost-share conservation programs; however, many Amish communities do not feel comfortable accepting government monies. This presents a unique social challenge to improving water quality within the watershed, which is addressed within the Little Elkhart River Watershed Management Plan defined by the following mission statement:

“Establish a diverse group of stakeholders within the watershed in a cooperative effort to protect, restore, and educate the public on the importance of the Little Elkhart River Watershed as a critical component of the St. Joseph River System”

-Little Elkhart River Watershed Management Plan Addendum (2011)

Size: 82,982 ac. **Subwatersheds:** 5

Cities/Towns/Villages:

- Elkhart County - Bristol & Middlebury
- LaGrange County -Topeka

Population: ~17,990

Landuse:

- Pasture/Grass (56%)
- Cropland (18%)
- Wetlands (11%)

Notable Tributaries: 194 mi linear waterways

- Emma Creek
- Hostetler Ditch

Environmental Concerns

- Direct livestock access to surface waters
- Unstable ditch banks
- Lack of filter/buffer strips
- Little Elkhart -IDEM 303(d) impaired waterbody

Unique Resources

- Bonneyville Mill County Park
- Trout fishing in Little Elkhart River
- Cass Lake & Hunter Lake

