

Final Project Report

Project Name St. Joseph River Watershed Planning Project
Code #2002-0084

Grantee Name The Friends of the St. Joe River Association

Project Goals & Objectives

In the fall of 2002, the Friends of the St. Joe River, a nonprofit established in 1994 by Athens, MI residents Al and Margaret Smith for the purpose of cleaning and restoring the river and its tributaries, were awarded a grant to develop a Watershed Management Plan for the entire St. Joseph River Watershed which would unite stakeholders in both Michigan and Indiana in a concerted effort to address water quality issues and natural resource protection across jurisdictional boundaries. To that end, representatives of both MDEQ and IDEM played integral roles in reviewing the plan. The plan would build on existing efforts, partnerships, and programs. Stakeholders would drive the process through a series of scheduled Steering Committee meetings. This Steering Committee would consist of stakeholders from organizations and agencies throughout the watershed and represent a broad cross-section of interests and perspectives.

The fundamental objective of the project was to provide the community with a plan that will facilitate and guide implementation of desired goals for water quality improvements and protection as well as a venue to communicate, adapt and revise the overall plan as new information is obtained and milestones completed. The plan would serve as a template for established jurisdictions to adopt short-term and long-term goals that accommodate existing infrastructure and established community visions, as well as allow growing areas of these subwatersheds to enact new policies and practices which better address water quality protection.

Another important objective of the project was to create a management plan that met the EPA's new requirements for the quantification for the sources of pollutants and expected reductions in pollutants with the implementation of BMPs. While this was not a part of the original work plan (which simply required that the plan meet contemporary CMI requirements) it became clear as the project progressed that having a plan that met these new requirements, in full or in part, was the best possible outcome and would have the most value for stakeholders in both Michigan and Indiana.

The creation and maintenance of a project web site to help compile and store vast amounts of data, disseminate information about the planning process, and gather feedback from stakeholders unable to participate in the traditional fashion was also central to the project.

The Extent to Which Goals and Objectives Were Met

The goals and objectives of the project were met, although significant challenges were present. A plan was created that helps stakeholders (local and regional) throughout the watershed identify, prioritize, and address non point source pollution. The plan included significant input from these stakeholders (although perhaps not as much as been hoped for). The plan meets the EPA's new requirements for quantification of loads and reductions. The plan and all its supporting data is available online at the project web site, www.stjoeriver.net. The plan includes goals and objectives that address the need for ongoing oversight and stakeholder participation. In fact, the first goal of the plan is already being addressed by the Friends of the St. Joe River Association, who have begun a strategic planning process.

The planning process included opportunities for education and outreach to the community. Four public meetings and four educational workshops were held to help engage and inform the public at large. An educational workshop about rain gardens held in partnership with the Elkhart Environmental Center was particularly successful. A public meeting held to gather feedback on water quality issues in the Paw Paw River watershed resulted in a 319 planning grant application.

Challenges and Obstacles

The sheer size of the watershed (4,685 square miles in two states and all or parts of 14 counties) was the central challenge. It proved difficult to consistently gather together a diverse group of stakeholders from across the watershed given the distances some individuals needed to travel to attend committee meetings. Not surprisingly, the further one was from the main stem of the St. Joseph River or one of its major tributaries, the more disconnected that person felt from the planning project. However, many individuals who were not involved at the beginning of the project did attend Steering Committee meetings, including representatives from an ongoing NPDES Phase II project in the Lower St. Joseph and Galien River watersheds.

The size of the watershed also made the formulation of plan goals and objectives more challenging since site specificity was, for all intents and purposes, impossible given the timeframe and resources of the project. Therefore, the goals and objectives of the plan were crafted to be broadly interpreted and locally applied.

Another significant challenge was the departure of the original watershed coordinator half way through the project. It stalled forward momentum while a replacement was found and that person established working relationships with

MDEQ, IDEM, technical consultants, and stakeholders. A project extension was required to compensate.

The EPA's new requirements for the quantification of loads and reductions was also a challenge, coming as it did once the project was underway. The practical impact of the new requirements on a plan of this scale and strategies for meeting them took a great deal of time and consultation to sort out. An extension and additional resources were needed to do the necessary modeling (SWAT modeling work was made possible through a separate 319 grant and a build out analysis was made possible through a separate grant from EPA through the Great Lakes Commission), but the plan does meet the new requirements and is a better plan for it.

Environmental Benefits

The primary environmental benefit is the plan itself, which will help local stakeholders assess, prioritize, and address non point source pollution which will improve overall water quality. The plan and website will help contextualize water quality issues for stakeholders and offer them access to information that may help maximize financial and human capital and avoid costly overlap and duplication. The planning process created and strengthened relationships between stakeholders who served on the Steering Committee (and its subcommittees). These relationships will no doubt help future projects succeed.

Partners

Technical Support Subcommittee

Steve Blumer	USGS Water Resources Division
Dennis Haskins	NRCS
Todd Kesselring	Elkhart County GIS
Dan List	MSU Extension
Beth Moore	Great Lakes Commission
Jim Coury	Potawatami RC&D
Mark Kieser	Kieser & Associates (technical consultants)
Nicole Ott	Kieser & Associates
Chris Bauer	MDEQ

Information and Education Subcommittee

Sally Carpenter	MSU Extension
Korie Bachleda	MSU Extension
Chris Bauer	MDEQ

Sarah VanDelfzijl
Fred Edinger
Rutty Adams

Rocky River Watershed Coordinator
Friends of the St. Joe River Association
Friends of the St. Joe River Association

Steering Committee

Chris Bauer
Barb Cook
Jim Coury
Chuck Cabbage, PhD
Matt Doppke
Fred Edinger
Joe Foy
Juan Ganum
Jon Howard
Deb Knepp
Ed Kretchman
Karen Mackowiak
Jeffrey Reece
Nathan Rice
Kregg Smith
Don Sporleder, FAIA
David Sturgis
Jennifer Tice

Sarah VanDelfzijl
Blaine VanSickle
Sarah Nerenberg
Joe Margol
Rae Schnapp
Troy Manges
Tom Fox
Gary Schrader
Dona Hunter
Dave Arrington
Gaye Blind

MDEQ--- Water Bureau
MEANDRS
Potawatami RC&D
Cabbage Environmental Controls
Michiana Watershed
Friends of the St. Joe River Association
City of Elkhart Aquatic Biologist
City of Niles
Fishing Guide
South Bend NRCS
Farmer
St. Joseph River Basin Commission
American Electric Power
IDEM—Office of Water Quality
MDNR Fisheries
Friends of the St. Joe River Association
Farmer
St. Joseph County Conservation
Club
Watershed Coordinator, Rocky River
Calhoun County Drain Commissioner
Hoosier Environmental Council
Berrien County Road Commission
Hoosier Environmental Council
St. Joseph County (IN) SWCD
Bertrand Township
Niles Township
LaGrange County SWCD
LaGrange County SWCD
St. Joe River/Galien River SWCD

Products

- Project web site www.stjoeriver.net
- Planning brochure and watershed map
- Watershed Management Plan
- 4 public meetings held throughout the watershed
- Project WET workshop for 4-9 grade teachers in Paw Paw River Watershed

- Rain garden workshop in partnership with Elkhart Environmental Center
- Road/stream crossing workshop that helped stakeholders quantify sediment loads
- Volunteer stream monitoring training session for high school teachers and students
- Non point source modeling report
- Report entitled “Analysis of Urban Stormwater Best Management Practice Options for the St. Joseph River Watershed”
- Report entitled “Mechanisms for Watershed Protection”
- Report entitled “Scoring of Major Subwatersheds” which analyzed the need for mitigation and preservation efforts in different areas of the watershed.

Project Sustainability

All data collected and reports compiled in this project are posted on the project website. Printed and CD copies of the plan have been distributed to members of the Steering Committee, who will in turn be responsible for further dissemination. The plan includes managerial goals and objectives concerning the formation of a primary stakeholder group with responsibility for the oversight and implementation of the plan. The Friends of the St. Joe River Association has begun a strategic planning process that addresses Goal #1 of the plan. The National Park Service is a partner in this effort.