



Lower St. Joseph – Bear Creek Stakeholder Meeting  
December 14, 2006  
Allen Co. USDA Service Center

Present: Bill Lambert (DeKalb NRCS), Matt Jarrett (Allen Surveyor's Office), Andy Crow (DeKalb Co. Council), Mary Jane Slaton (FW City Utilities), Greg Lake (Allen SWCD), Sharon Slough (landowner), Raymond Zell (landowner), Sherman Liechty (Allen NRCS), Jane Loomis (SJRWI).

Introductions started off the evening. Landowners Sharon Slough and her father, Raymond Zell, discussed where they live and some of the problems they've seen with the Ely Ditch along SR 1 & Popp Road. The stream is running higher and faster and is washing out big trees. Sewage smell has been noticed, along with soapy bubbles. Jane noted that the Initiative has been sampling at the Ely Ditch bridge on SR 1 this year and will check the WQ data for indicators.

Participants outlined what they or their agencies/groups were working on in the watershed at this time. Matt noted that the Allen Co. surveyor's office is mapping all discharge pipes and putting the information on a GIS database so that they get an understanding of the drainage and stormwater runoff in the county. Right now they are west of the watershed, working in the Autumn Ridge area, working their way east.

Mary Jane noted that Fort Wayne, Allen County and New Haven are working on stormwater education. She indicated to Zell and Slough, who had talked about seeing carpet cleaners dump their shampoo water into the street, that this is an illegal practice and she gave them a phone number to report it.

Jane asked about algae growth in the waterways last summer; Bill Lambert said he had seen some, but not too much this year. Streams were running quite full due to the amount of rain.

Bill said on the DeKalb side, NW Quadrant (Jackson Twp) the number of houses going in signals a change from rural/ag to rural residential. Properties are small as 2 acres. All on septic. Additionally, there are noticeable numbers of horses. There is a concern with overgrazing and continued erosion, animal waste disposal, manure dumping in the woods.

This prompted more input from Greg and Sherman, of discussion earlier in the day about chicken barns increasing in Allen County, along with meat goats and hogs. The group mapped the area in the watershed, generally east of the river, where there is a large population of Amish farmers, many of whom don't take

part in the farm programs. The Cooperative Extension office is in the process of putting together a listing of livestock in each county as part of Homeland Security. This information should be available in the next year.

The limit on chickens for CAFO permitting is 3,000. Many permits are being requested for 29,500 birds, thus bypassing this regulation. We can report these operations to IDEM for investigation. As part of the plan, we should get information on livestock building permits from each county. Bill noted that this has not yet been a problem on the DeKalb side of the line.

Discussion on the worst problems in the watershed brought various responses: Bill said sediment was probably the most visible; Greg noted that bacteria, as a danger to human health, might be the worst. Mary Jane offered that the city had done a survey and that people get their river quality information by “seeing;” therefore, the perception – looking at the river – is that the river is brown and therefore dirty.

Andy spoke of the soils being unsuitable in many cases for septics; Jane gave some information on the Cedar Creek failing septic replacement project and opportunities (or lack thereof) for funding in this watershed as we move toward implementation.

Sherm noted that livestock grazing in the streams is an increasing problem. Bill said they are working with one of the small operations on the DeKalb side of the watershed. The LARE project has buffered a lot of streams, but not many in the Amish farm areas. We need to find a way to entice the Amish farmers into Best Conservation Projects.

The number of homes in DeKalb Co. is increasing along CR 60. St. Joe/Spencerville has a sewage treatment plant, but Newville and Orange are not tied to that plant. Andy reported there is movement toward a deKalb County-wide Sewage District. Mary Jane asked if there was anything Fort Wayne could do to help with this, noting the city works very closely with the Allen Co. Sewer District. Andy also said the St. Joe Lions Club is working on a county park authorization.

There is need for education on septic maintenance, need for maintenance, and reaching new homeowners in the rural areas. Greg suggested a cost-share program for pumping and installing septic filters that make maintenance routine more obvious.

Submitted by Jane Loomis