

Chapter 18

Public Outreach and Education Programs

18.1 Summary of Existing Programs

An early awareness of the unique natural resources of McHenry County resulted in the creation of a number of environmental organizations dedicated to promoting, protecting, and enhancing the environmental quality of the County. Internet links to many of these groups are found in Chapter 20 of this report.

18.1.1 Nippersink Creek Watershed Planning Committee

The Nippersink Creek Watershed Planning Committee (NCWPC) mission is “To protect, preserve, and enhance the natural resources in the Nippersink Creek Watershed.” The group is a subcommittee of the McHenry County Soil and Water Conservation District. The committee was first created to develop a watershed plan for the watershed in the late 1990’s. Since that time, the NCWPC continues to educate watershed residents and community leaders about the quality resources of Nippersink Creek and to foster projects that will enhance the natural resources of the watershed.

More importantly, the NCWPC was the group directly responsible for the preparation of this updated Nippersink Creek Watershed Plan, and met on a monthly basis during the plan preparation phase. Looking to the future, the NCWPC anticipates being the lead entity working to move the Watershed Plan to implementation.

18.1.2 McHenry County Defenders

The McHenry County Defenders (MCDEF) is a citizen organization dedicated to the preservation and improvement of the environment. Their mission is a commitment to building sound ecological relationships between people and the natural world that supports all life. To achieve the aim of environmental preservation and improvement, the Defenders provide the community with educational programs and volunteer action on pollution prevention, sustainable land use and energy and natural resource conservation. MCDEF advocates policies which protect drinking water supplies and conserve land for open space and agriculture. They demonstrate waste reduction through recycling drives and reuse centers. They also encourage natural resource protection through native landscaping and stream protection programs.

MCDEF sponsors the *Friends of Nippersink Creek* effort which has produced a number of educational materials about Nippersink Creek.

These include:

- *Welcome to Your Watershed* brochure with *Your Watershed is Nippersink Creek* insert (produced in conjunction with Friends of the Fox River with funding from the McHenry Co. Conservation Foundation)
- *Nippersink Creek - Opportunities for Enhancement* booklet which describes assistance and funding sources for restoration efforts in the Nippersink watershed. (funded by the Nippersink Creek Watershed Planning Committee)

The Defenders also hold creek cleanups, watershed tours and informs the public about the quality and resources of the Nippersink Creek watershed at community outreach events.

18.1.3 McHenry County Soil & Water Conservation District

The purpose of the McHenry County Soil & Water Conservation District (MCSWCD) is to serve McHenry County, Illinois residents and businesses and assist in conserving and protecting the land, water, air, and other resources. The District provides a variety of educational and natural resource information programs. Educational programs include:

- “The Greatest Show of Earth” is a hands-on education trailer available to McHenry County schools and youth groups free of charge. This handicapped accessible trailer contains a variety of stations where students work through a series of questions on soil texture, soil organisms, sedimentation, plant decomposition, soil life, soil profiles, roots, soil mapping, and erosion. The trailer’s target audience is 4th through 6th grade, with 5th grade being ideal.
- “Envirothon” is a way for high school students to learn about the environment. It combines in-class curriculum with hands-on field experiences, while demonstrating the role people have in important environmental issues, such as forestry and wildlife management, water quality, and soil erosion. At the completion of the year-long learning process, the Envirothon conducts a series of competitions where students are tested on five subjects: soil, aquatics, wildlife, forestry and a specific environmental issue, which changes from year to year.

The District also offer services which residents and communities in the Nippersink watershed can utilize in making natural resources management decisions. These include:

- Digital map service - the SWCD will provide the general public with digital maps displaying natural resources such as drainage and soils, floodplains and wetlands, development potential of land and other natural resource concerns for a small fee.
- Erosion & sediment control plans - in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers and the Illinois EPA, the SWCD provides guidance to land developers on the stormwater pollution prevention plans and erosion and sediment control practices required by every development disturbing more than one acre of land.
- Natural Resource Information (NRI) reports - the SWCD furnishes natural resource information to officials of local governments for decisions concerning variations, amendments, or relief of local zoning ordinances as well as decisions on proposed subdivision of vacant or agricultural lands and the development of these lands. This report is required under 94 Act Ill Compiled Statues, Chapter 70 Paragraph 405/1 Et Seq. and Ill Revised Statues, Chapter 5 Paragraph 106 Et Seq.

18.1.4 The Land Conservancy of McHenry County

The Land Conservancy of McHenry County (TLC) is a member-supported, non-profit organization, recognized by the IRS and the State of Illinois as an organization qualified to hold conservation easements. The mission of TLC is to preserve open, natural and agricultural lands in McHenry County by working with private landowners, communities and developers.

Since 1991, The Land Conservancy has helped protect over 1300 acres of McHenry County's prairies, wetlands and woodlands by working with private landowners, communities and developers. TLC does this by direct acquisition of property (through purchase or donation), or the establishment of conservation easements. The intention is that this land will be protected on behalf of the community, in perpetuity.

The Conservancy has a number of programs which can be utilized to protect the resources of the Nippersink Creek watershed. These include:

- TLC accept conservation easements from willing landowners to voluntarily place permanent restrictions on future use of the land, thereby protecting its particular natural attributes. This legal agreement provides for TLC to hold the easement and enforce the restrictions. Examples of such in the Nippersink Creek watershed include:
 - **The Village of Wonder Lake:
Meadows of West Bay Subdivision/Wonder Lake Sedge Meadow**
 - 28 acre natural area and buffer
 - TLC holds conservation easement and has perpetual management agreement paid through HOA with back-up SSA
 - Up-front endowment provided by developer to cover monitoring and legal expenses in perpetuity
 - **The Village of Spring Grove:
1000 Oaks Subdivision / Horsefair Springs Natural Area**
 - 9 acre creek, wetland and buffer
 - Donation of land to TLC with 25-50 foot buffer on private home sites and perpetual management agreement paid through HOA with back-up SSA
 - Up-front endowment provided by developer to cover monitoring and legal expenses in perpetuity
 - **Alden Township:
Nippersink Creek Headwaters**
 - One existing conservation easement on the mainstem of Nippersink Creek, immediately upstream of Alden Sedge Meadow.
 - Three pending conservation easements on headwater tributaries to Nippersink Creek in the area designated as the Alden High Point Area of Conservation Concern by the McHenry County Natural Area Inventory (MCNAI). Approximately 25 acres of privately owned land, contiguous to the McHenry County Conservation District High Point unit, will be protected.

- **Most Vulnerable Natural Areas Program** outreaches to landowners at vulnerable sites including the Nippersink Headwaters area in Alden Township.
- **Land Heritage Registry Program** recognizes landowners who are interested in conserving and stewarding their land. Through a "handshake" agreement, the landowner agrees to conserve his or her land to the best of their ability.
- The aim of the **McHenry County Farmland Preservation Alliance** is to establish a countywide Farmland Protection Ordinance which would allow purchase of development rights on county farmland
- **Oaks Conservation Program** is an effort to preserve and restore oaks in McHenry County through education and awareness, ordinances, planting programs, and community involvement.

18.1.5 McHenry County Conservation District

The McHenry County Conservation District (MCCD), in addition to its land acquisition and management programs, conduct numerous educational outreach programs throughout the year. Programs include nature walks, workshops, and educational classes geared towards children, teenagers, adults and families. Extremely popular conservation camps held during the summer months are a major component of the MCCD outreach.

MCCD also has an extensive volunteer program for those interested in working on restoration programs. Each major MCCD land holding has a volunteer steward, who organizes workdays on their MCCD site. A new expansion of the steward program is an *Ecological Restoration Certificate Program* where participants will attend sixteen one-day classes on various aspects of ecological restoration.

18.1.6 Friends of the Fox River

The mission of the Friends of the Fox River is to preserve, restore and protect the Fox River Watershed's resources by connecting people with nature through education, research, restoration and advocacy. Friends of the Fox River (FOFR) is a non-profit organization made up of citizens and organizations taking action to protect and maintain the quality of the Fox River and its tributaries.

Through their programs and activities, FOFR encourages both adults and students to become involved in protecting the river and its watershed. Each year, FOFR administers programs for watershed stakeholders that include a watershed-wide monitoring program (FOFR's Fox River Watershed Monitoring Network), river and stream cleanups, river habitat improvement projects, and water quality education events. Hundreds of concerned citizens, teachers, and youth group leaders are members of the FOFR's Watershed Monitoring Network. Members volunteer to collect water quality data, assist at education events, and/or offer their individual expertise or talents.

Watershed stakeholders are encouraged to become FOFR members and more importantly, become active stewards of the Fox River Watershed. The hallmark of the Fox River Watershed Monitoring Network is the water quality monitoring program. Once a year, Network volunteers monitor the water quality of the Fox River and its tributaries at stream monitoring sites throughout the watershed. They collect physical, chemical, and biological data used to assess water quality trends. This data can be the first warning sign of problems in the watershed. FOFR also sponsors continuing education and community outreach events through special seminars on stream ecology and speaking at public hearings on issues that potentially impact the quality of the Fox River or its tributaries.

With assistance from McHenry County Defenders, Friends of the Fox River has produced the *Welcome to Your Watershed* brochure series which includes a *Your Watershed is Nippersink Creek* insert.

18.1.7 Fox River Ecosystem Partnership

The Fox River Ecosystem Partnership (FREP) was formed in 1996 after the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) designated a core of high-quality ecological resources in the northern-most watershed as a "Resource Rich Area". Portions of eleven counties, including Lake, McHenry, Kane, Kendall and LaSalle, form the Fox River watershed, which is home to 11% of the state's population. The watershed contains the Fox Chain O'Lakes (one of the nation's busiest inland waterways), many high quality Natural Areas, and suburban areas with some of the highest growth rates in the state. The Partnership is a diverse group, made up of landowners, businesses, nonprofit organizations, agencies and governments within the Fox River Watershed region.

In 1998, FREP began a comprehensive planning process, identifying 16 critical factors and 6 areas of concern. The result was the *Integrated Management Plan for the Fox River Watershed in Illinois* that makes 35 recommendations for action. The Fox River Ecosystem Partnership is a 501(c)3 not for profit organization.

FREP is open to all watershed stakeholders and interested persons wishing to participate in watershed protection activities or simply wanting to get more information about the Fox River Watershed and the challenges and solutions that people are working on to protect the watershed. General meetings are held every other month and usually include a short presentation about a particular watershed protection activity or program.

On "off months" the Fox River Ecosystem Partnership hosts a Noon Network Program, where anyone interested can attend a lunchtime gathering in which a guest speaker is invited to present information about a particular watershed protection or restoration project they are involved in. The goal of the Noon Networks is to share information with other stakeholders and create an opportunity for stakeholders to "network" and learn more about programs and actions they can implement in their region of the Fox Watershed.

18.1.8 McHenry County

Public education and outreach from McHenry County is offered mainly through the McHenry County Department of Planning & Development. This department is charged with administering the County NPDES Phase II Permit issued by the Illinois EPA and insuring that the County is meeting the six Minimum Control Measures.

18.2 Summary of Outreach During the Watershed Plan Update

The Nippersink Creek Watershed Planning Committee (NCWPC) is the group that directed this update of the Nippersink Creek Watershed Plan. As discussed in Section 18.1.1, the NCWPC has held monthly meetings, which have included discussion of the watershed plan update since May 2005. The NCWPC has maintained a website www.nippersink.org to facilitate information exchange, outreach, and awareness. The minutes of the NCWPC meetings held during the plan update period are presented in Appendix 21.3.

Updates on the planning efforts have also been a regular part of the agenda of the McHenry County Defenders Water Resources Protection Committee during the same period of time.

In addition, input from other agencies and organizations were solicited at NCWPC organized meetings in September 2006 and July 2007. Representatives from the Land Conservancy of McHenry County, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the McHenry County Conservation District, the McHenry County Soil and Water Conservation District, Fox River Ecosystem Partnership, the Sierra Club, and Illinois Department of Natural Resources attended these working meetings.

During Summer and Fall 2007, presentations were made to local government entities in the Nippersink Creek watershed to inform them of the progress on the update of the watershed plan and to solicit their input on the implementation plan. These included City of Woodstock Environmental Commission, Richmond Village Board, Spring Grove Village Board, Greenwood Township Planning Commission, the Richmond Township Planning Commission and the McHenry County Regional Planning Commission.

In addition, information on the plan update was provided to the public at the Nippersink Creek Fest in June 2007, and at the Fox River Summit organized by FREP in October 2007.

18.3 Education & Outreach Recommendations

There are several education and outreach programs already active and working in parts of the Nippersink Creek Watershed and throughout the entire Fox River Watershed. It is difficult to quantify just how effective these individual programs are at reaching the public at large and effecting psychological / cultural changes as to how citizens implement watershed resource protection in their everyday life.

However, the fact that McHenry County voters have now approved the last two McHenry County Conservation District (MCCD) bond referendums (\$ 68.5 million in 2001 & \$ 73 million in 2007), allowing MCCD to acquire additional lands, can only be viewed as a very positive sign.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of the individual education & outreach programs, it is recommended that these organizations set up an annual “education & outreach conference” where all of the organizations could come together and learn about the success each entity has had with its efforts in the Nippersink Creek watershed, identify critical areas of outreach that are missing and determine which organization or organizations could position themselves to address those critical outreach concerns. This conference could also be organized with environmental education & outreach stakeholders working throughout McHenry County, and the conference could be structured to provide a session or discussion period on the efforts being done in a specific subwatershed, such as Nippersink Creek.

The NCWPC should continue to maintain the Nippersink Creek watershed website at www.nippersink.org as a tool to keep watershed residents informed about activities in the watershed.

The NCWPC, together with the other organizations working on environmental programs in the watershed, should develop a plan for continued outreach and interaction with the municipalities in the watershed in order to cooperatively implement the recommendations of the plan.

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