

UPPER WABASH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION

A cooperation of local government established in 2001 under IC-14-30-4.
Huntington, Wells, Adams, and Jay Counties

2021 – Year In Review

In February, the UWRBC began its initial meeting for 2021 following the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. With masking, socially distancing, and quickly developed vaccines underscoring an unrelenting dialogue about to-do or not-to-do, the projects the UWRBC set forth in 2020 weren't deterred.

After being hired in September 2019 to replace Stacia Henderson, the UWRBC's first and only Administrative Secretary/Fiscal Officer, Alicia Douglass began assuming total care of the UWRBC.

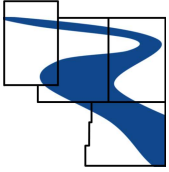
In 2019, based on the findings of an earlier LARE Grant to do a Functional Assessment Study of the eastern third of the upper Wabash River basin located in Jay, Adams, and Wells Counties, from the Ohio state line downriver to the White Bridge immediately east of the City of Bluffton, a subsequent \$50,000 LARE Grant had been awarded to design a bank stabilization solution for where a hair-pin turn in the Wabash River was threatening the integrity of Road 1100S in Adams County. In 2021, a subsequent LARE Grant was awarded to Adams County partnering with the UWRBC to fund the construction of the bank stabilization as designed by Ross St. Clair of Cardno, Inc. Brad Yoder, the Adams County engineer, oversaw the project which was awarded to Jutte Excavating for a \$99,475 contract, under the projected \$125,000 cost. He reported at the UWRBC October meeting that the final invoice for the project was under budget.

Brad Yoder also informed the UWRBC that Adams and Jay Counties were jointly implementing a project to resolve a second site in that Functional Assessment Study of the eastern third of the upper Wabash River – a similar bank stabilization issue at Road 1200S, a county line road shared by Adams and Jay Counties. The project was scheduled to begin in mid October.

Having completed two Functional Assessments, one each of the eastern third and the middle third of the upper Wabash River, the UWRBC partnered with the Huntington SWCD to secure a LARE Grant to execute a Functional Assessment of the Little River segment in Huntington County. The Little River is a major tributary of the upper Wabash River with deep historical significance for human usage over the centuries. That grant will be carried out in 2022.

The Functional Assessment Study for the middle third of the Wabash River had identified one site in need of attention to be where Bill's Creek emptied into the river. A small red covered bridge over the mouth of Bill's Creek provides passage for the River Greenway asphalt trail. The rip-rap that had been piled onto the embankment when the bridge had been installed in 1988 had all slumped into the creek, creating an impediment for both low water flow and aquatic life. Boy Scout Troop 149 on two hour-and-a-half stints on beautiful late summer and early autumn Monday evenings helped clear by hand this rip-rap out of the creek, removing perhaps a third to half of the haplessly placed rocks.

The Bluffton Parks department, in partnership with the UWRBC, put together an application to submit in January 2022 for a LARE Grant. The Parks Department intent was to use the Functional Assessment Study done on the middle third of the Wabash River as the foundation from which to do a more detailed assessment study of stabilization issues along the nearly 2.5 miles of River Greenway asphalt trail along the south side of the Wabash River, one of the issues cited by the Functional Assessment Study.



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A long standing need to sort through existing records to determine what was essential to retain was finally accomplished by Stacia Henderson and Alicia Douglass, and those records, for now, remain in storage at the Wells County SWCD office on Harvest Road in Bluffton.

Alicia revised and updated the UWRBC website.

On May 13, the UWRBC held a public meeting for the sole purpose to discuss strategic planning for future endeavors. Attending the meeting included representatives from Acres Land Trust, Little River Wetlands Project, Ecosystems Connections Institute, Bluffton Parks, Wells County Engineering and Area Plan Commission departments, The Forks of the Wabash, Adams County SWCD, Huntington County SWCD, South Adams Trails, and the Indiana DNR. The majority of the discussion focused on creating more access to the river system via land and water trails while promoting native restoration of the floodplain area which would promote flood management and reduction of erosion and farm field run-off.

A follow-up meeting was held November 12. Lengthy discussions resulted in formulating revised Mission and Vision Statements.

Mission Statement: The Upper Wabash River Basin Commission supports restoring and sustaining the upper Wabash River watershed by providing regional leadership and promotion of flood damage reduction, healthy soil and clean water, and trails for the betterment of the river, our community, and beyond.

Vision Statement: The Commission facilitates restoring and sustaining a healthy upper Wabash River and watershed.

The Strategic Plan remains an ongoing discussion while the State Legislators contemplate legislation to create river basin development commissions which could supersede the established UWRBC. The previously developed watershed management plans for Phases 1, 2, and 3 of the upper Wabash River along with the Functional Assessment Studies for Phases 1 and 2 and for the Little River tributary provide a solid basis with which the UWRBC can apply in conjunction with other local agencies for more grants that align with the commission's mission to create and sustain a healthy watershed. Moreover, the Commission will consider promoting and partnering to implement Functional Assessment Studies for other tributaries of the upper Wabash River and the increasingly needed upgrading of stormwater requirements or ordinances to benefit both the communities that drain into the Wabash River and the upper Wabash River watershed.

Douglas Sundling
UWRBC Chair