



UPPER WABASH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION

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

2022 – Year In Review

In February, the UWRBC began its initial meeting for 2022 awarding a contract to Christopher B. Burke Engineering to execute a Functional Assessment of the Little River segment in Huntington County. The Little River, a major tributary of the upper Wabash River, carries deep historical significance of human usage over the centuries. Having completed Functional Assessments of the eastern third and then the middle third of the upper Wabash River, the UWRBC had partnered with the Huntington SWCD to secure a LARE Grant to continue functional assessments of the upper Wabash River. The Commissioners had a lively discussion due to the submission of two very competitive proposals to execute this study, one from the Burke firm and one from V3.

On March 18, Alicia Douglass submitted her resignation as Administrative Secretary/Fiscal Officer. She and her husband had enrolled their two home-schooled children into openings at a private school, and, to adjust for this new need, she quickly was hired by a firm that could utilize her education and experience in environmental science. After being hired in October 2019 to replace Stacey Henderson, the UWRBC's initial Administrative Secretary, Alicia had provided professional and insightful care of the UWRBC. What unfolded was a convoluted journey of finding a replacement. More than one candidate, on the verge of assuming the position, would withdraw due to job promotion, family medical issue, or new job opportunity. This along with numerous stops and stumbles littered the adventure into advertising a job on INDEED, filtering applicants, and responding to candidates deemed a good fit, along with the occasional reference from a commission member.

After the June UWRBC meeting, Stacia Henderson agreed to return to serve as a temporary Administrative Secretary and to help train whomever the Commission would eventually hire.

As part of the UWRBC's ongoing relationship with the Rock Creek Conservancy of Wells County, in June, the UWRBC approved the Conservancy's request to refurbish water quality monitoring equipment rented from the UWRBC in lieu of paying 2022's rent.

In July, the Bluffton Parks department was awarded a LARE Grant to do a detailed assessment study of stabilization issues along the south side of the Wabash River next to which sets the 2.5 miles of River Greenway asphalt trail. This grant, in partnership with the UWRBC, used as its foundation the Functional Assessment Study of the middle third of the River. That study had cited stabilizing areas along the Greenway as needing attention. Later in the year, the Parks Board awarded a \$42,000 contract to Cardno to execute this grant; Cardno had done the design project for the stabilization of a hairpin turn in the Wabash River along the south side of Adams County Road 1100S which had been funded by a LARE Grant awarded the UWRBC in 2019. Cardno expects to complete the project for the Bluffton Parks Department by the end of 2023.

The town of Geneva, through which flows the Wabash River in southern Adams County, celebrated its Sesquicentennial Celebration on Friday and Saturday, August 12 and 13. The festival was held at the covered bridge locate over an abandoned oxbow in the Wabash River near the Rainbow Bend Preserve along the Wabash River and on the east side of Geneva. The UWRBC provided two golf carts and drivers for Friday activities, notably chauffeuring people about 1 mile on a gravel walkway from the covered bridge to a paved trail that extended from Geneva north to the recently restored double iron truss bridges which span the River along the east side of State Road 27. Information was provided either verbally or with a laminated 2-page handout. Commission members attended on Friday and Saturday.

At the October UWRBC meeting, Randy Lehman, the organizer of Geneva's Sesquicentennial, expressed a desire to continue such a festival as an annual event to highlight the Wabash River. He thought forming a



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committee to do so should include representatives from adjacent Mercer County of Ohio, Jay County, and the UWRBC. The Commission concurred, and discussions will follow.

On August 18, representatives of the National Weather Service/Ohio River Forecast Center met with Commission members Jarrod Hahn and Doug Sundling. The ORFC gathers and disseminates weather data, including watersheds of the Ohio River. The intent was to exchange contact information and to bring the UWRBC into the sharing of this data.

On Wednesday afternoon, November 16, Christopher B. Burke Engineering presented their Functional Assessment of the Little River at a public meeting at the Richardville Room at The Forks of the Wabash Historic Park. The Forks of the Wabash is located at the fork of the Wabash River and Little River on the west side of the City of Huntington. A dozen folks attended, and numerous questions and comments highlighted the extensive dialogue that followed the presentation by Ian Haus and Bob Barr.

In December, the Commission approved plans to coordinate with the City of Huntington and the Rock Creek Conservancy to apply for LARE grants in 2023. One LARE grant would be for a functional assessment study of the Rock Creek, a continuation of using LARE grants to fund these studies. The other grant would fund a design project to remove from the Little River an abandoned concrete foundation which once supported an electric transmission tower. The City of Huntington has wanted this obstacle removed for years, and the LARE grant application would include a design project for the construction of a kayak launch and public access point on the city owned property along the Wabash River where the abandoned concrete foundation would be accessed. Conceptual designs solutions for both of these were presented in the just completed LARE funded functional assessment study of the Little River.

Also, at our December meeting, Stacia Henderson submitted her resignation as temporary Administrative Secretary effective Jan. 31, 2023. Family medical needs had become a priority. That same week, two days prior to the meeting, one of the few applicants to the Commission's third round of INDEED Internet job posting was interviewed, and the applicant agreed to accept the job if the Commission members approved the hiring. The Commission did, and Stacia Henderson was given the go-ahead to begin training Abigail Spitler for the job.

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 in Huntington County have provided the 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. Forward movement by the UWRBC remains committed to its Mission and Vision Statements.

Since its inception, the UWRBC sole source of revenue had been via \$1000 from each of the four county commissioners' funds and \$500 from each of the four SWCDs. Commission representatives presented to the 3 commissioners of their respective counties the request the \$1000 be raised to \$2000. Representatives of 3 counties reported the requests had been approved; Jay County indicated the funds weren't available. Based on an internal financial study, each county and SWCD dollar - \$1.00 - invested in the UWRBC from 2001-2021 has leveraged \$8.08 in federal, state, and local funding.

Douglas Sundling
UWRBC Chair