



# *UPPER WABASH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION*

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

## **2023 – Year In Review**

In February, the UWRBC began its initial meeting for 2023 with a new Administrative Secretary/Fiscal Officer, Abigail Spitler. The Commission did a quick overview of 2022, and ideas for future projects were discussed: another river clean-up, helping in securing funding for removal of an abandoned concrete pad formerly for an electric transmission pole in the Little River in the City of Huntington, a function assessment for Rock Creek in conjuncture with the Rock Creek Conservancy, another 319 grant for better management practices.

During the State legislative session in January to April, House Bill 1639 slowly made its way through the bill-making process and finally passed. The legislation created the regulations for an individual county or adjacent counties to form a Watershed Development Commission (WDC). The main intent of a WDC was to do projects that focused on drainage, flood, or storm water management. The statute would allow for a “special annual assessment” – a new tax – to be assessed on all real estate parcels in the affected watershed. Apparently none of the 3 remaining state statutory created River Basin Commissions were aware of this bill till late in the legislative session. Due to lobbying in April by members of the UWRBC and the Maumee River Basin Commission, the law was amended prior to being signed into law to prevent any WDC to be formed within an existing state statutory created River Basin Commission without the affected River Basin Commission voting to dissolve itself.

During the year, the Bluffton Parks Department executed a LARE Grant to fund a functional assessment done by Christopher Burke Engineering on a stretch of the Wabash River along which sets the River Greenway Trail. This grant had derived from the functional assessment Christopher Burke Engineering had done for the UWRBC, funded by a LARE Grant.

The UWRBC in conjuncture with the City of Huntington submitted a LARE Grant request to fund a design project to remove an abandoned concrete pad formerly for an electric transmission pole in the Little River in the City of Huntington and to install a kayak launch on the river bank where the construction traffic would access the concrete pad. The access would be off river front property owned by the City of Huntington. Though the explanation “why” was a bit complex, the UWRBC wasn’t awarded the grant. Doug Nusbaum, LARE Program Manager, advised that the UWRBC and the City of Huntington should submit a grant application for log jam removal due to history of log jams that have accumulated around the abandoned concrete pad.

Encouraged by the grant section of IDEM, the UWRBC also submitted a 319 grant application requesting funding for better management practices for Phases 1 and 2 of the upper Wabash River basin – the eastern third and middle third of the watershed, from the Ohio state line downstream to the eastern edges of the Huntington Reservoir at Markle. The intent was to renew the UWRBC’s efforts in this part of the watershed as had been done with two previous 319 grants. Due to amount of funds applied for far exceeding the amounts of funds allocated, the UWRBC didn’t secure a grant, but was encouraged to reapply next year.

Late in the year, Abigail Spitler and her husband became approved licensure as foster parents for children with high medical needs, and Abigail submitted her resignation as Administrative Secretary/Fiscal Officer. One of the UWRBC members submitted a name as a possible replacement, and, subsequently, Deanne Jensen was hired to fill the vacancy. Abigail provided transitional training for Ms. Jensen.

The LEAP project west of Lebanon in Boone County had drawn state-wide attention due to the proposal to drill wells near Lafayette and transport water about 40 miles east to provide the projected water needs for the



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9000+ acres of development envisioned by the Indiana Economic Development Commission (IEDC), a quasi-public entity funded by taxpayer dollars. Chair Doug Sundling had attended a Special Session by the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission on October 25 in Newport, Indiana, to listen to 3 speakers, one being an engineer consultant hired by the Indiana Finance Authority (IFA), another quasi-public entity which had been assigned the task of executing a study to help resolve the water issue. The LEAP project had got the attention and curiosity of the members of the UWRBC, and during the UWRBC's December meeting, Commission members had agreed that further information would be beneficial, notably on the bigger issue of Indiana's water resources.

Douglas Sundling  
UWRBC Chair