



UPPER WABASH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION

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

2024 – Year In Review

In February, the UWRBC began its initial meeting for 2024 with a new Administrative Secretary/Fiscal Officer, Deanne Jensen. The Commission discussed ideas for future projects: grants from Clean Water Indiana, Conservation Partners Program, and Healthy River Initiative or a IDEM grant to do another 319 better management program. Chair Doug Sundling lead a discussion on sponsoring speakers for community outreach and education, notably to broaden the perspective of the dynamics of a watershed in lieu of the State's regional water supply studies now reaching into the Wabash Headwaters region.

During the year, the Bluffton Parks Department submitted a LARE Grant to fund stabilizing a stretch of the Wabash River along which sets the River Greenway Trail, one of three projects identified in the recently completed functional assessment done by Christopher Burke Engineering , which had been funded by a LARE Grant, which had derived from the functional assessment Christopher Burke Engineering had done for the UWRBC, funded by a LARE Grant.

As in 2023, encouraged by the grant section of IDEM, the UWRBC re-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. By October, IDEM had informed the UWRBC that the implementation funds for better management practices wouldn't be awarded to UWRBC due to high competition and the need for the Commission to update its Water Management Plans from 2007 (Phase 1) and 2016 (Phase 2) to align with more recent Federal guidelines.

On Thursday, August 1, the UWRBC held a special public meeting with Jim McGoff, the Chief Operating Officer of the Indiana Finance Authority – the COO of the IFA. Mr McGoff had agreed to meet with the UWRBC and discuss the IFA's regional water supply study program. The fifth such study, the North Central Indiana Regional Water Supply Study, had been assigned by Gov. Eric Holcomb in response to the "from where is the water coming" problem created by the LEAP project west of Lebanon in Boone County. The project had drawn state-wide attention due the proposal to drill wells near Lafayette and transport water about 40 miles east to provide the projected water needs for the 9000+ acres of development envisioned by the Indiana Economic Development Commission (IEDC), a quasi-public entity funded by taxpayer dollars. The IFA had expanded to include the Wabash Headwaters watershed as a sixth study. The 2-hour± meeting offered a very good exchange of information, questions, answers, and opinions between Mr. McGoff and 18 others comprised of commission members and folks from the public.

To further provide more information about the dynamics of a watershed, three separate seminars and another special meeting ensued.

- (1) Wednesday, August 28, 3 PM. Two speakers presented and entertained questions from an audience of a dozen folks. Ginger Davis, Research Geologist with the Indiana Geological & Water Survey, Indiana University, shared her knowledge and work on groundwater quantity and quality, aquifers in bedrock and glacial landscapes, and surface water-groundwater interactions. Jack Wittman, VP & Principal Water Resources Hydrologist of consulting firm INTERA, shared his knowledge and work with the IFA and their regional water supply studies along with his extensive work over many years with utility regulators, governor's offices, professional organizations, and water utilities of all sizes with water planning, supply, and compliance challenges.



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- (2) Wednesday, October 30, 6:30 PM. To an audience of 15 folks, Dr. Stephen Jacquemin, Professor of Biology at Wright State University Lake Campus at Celina, Ohio, shared his knowledge and work on the Grand Lake St. Mary's area. He talked about Grand Lake being constructed in the early 19th century as a reservoir for the Miami and Erie Canal system; out of this former swampy prairie emerges the headwaters of the St. Mary's River which flows to Lake Erie and the headwaters of the Wabash River which flows to the Ohio River. The seminar discussed the Grand Lake watershed restoration efforts and impacts on the St. Mary's River watershed and Wabash River watershed.
- (3) Tuesday, December 3, 6:30 PM. Two speakers presented and entertained questions from an audience of 14 folks. John Ketzenberger, Director of Government Relations for The Nature Conservancy in Indiana, discussed his many years of experience with Statehouse legislating and his evaluation of the current situation post November election. Les Zimmerman, Legislative Affairs Manager for Indiana Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD), shared his knowledge from nearly 40 years devoted to improving soil and water quality both at the local level as the Supervisor of the Vermillion County SWCD and as the IASWCD person working with the State's legislators to fund the conservation of Indiana's natural resources.
- (4) Monday, December 9, 8:00 AM. The UWRBC held a special public meeting with State House District 29 Representative Matt Lehman. Within the UWRBC watershed, District 79 includes Adams and Wells Counties and the north end of Jay County. The 2-hour± meeting offered a very good exchange of information, questions, answers, and opinions focused on water policy and legislation between Rep. Lehman and 19 others comprised of commission members and folks from the public.

While there had been minor issues during the year, after the Oct. 30 seminar, Deanne Jensen, who had begun duties of being the Administrative Secretary/Fiscal Officer for the UWRBC in January, began a period of no response to the repeated e-mails, text messages, and voice mails from Chair Sundling or others. On December 7, she sent an e-mail to the UWRBC e-mail list apologizing for her behavior and resigning effective with that e-mail. Thus began an effort that extended into 2025 by Chair Sundling to collect documents from Ms. Jensen, manage accounts and deadlines for appropriate reports, and bring the necessary paperwork for the UWRBC up to date.

It has been a fascinating year of learning about the complexities of our watershed and the politics that can alter it, and a frustrating year of fulfilling the profane paperwork necessities of being a public entity. We anticipate the latter will extend into 2025 and the former will continue into and beyond 2025.

Douglas Sundling
UWRBC Chair