



7.0 Information & Education Plan

The health of the Upper South Branch Kishwaukee River watershed faces challenges and threats from land use changes, poor land management practices, a lack of natural habitat, invasive species, and flooding. Since a significant portion of the Upper South Branch Kishwaukee River watershed is held as private property, any efforts to improve water quality must include significant education and outreach efforts to those landowners and key stakeholders.

This Information & Education Plan (I&E Plan) recommends campaigns that are designed to enhance understanding of the issues, problems, and opportunities within the Upper South Branch Kishwaukee River watershed. The intention is to promote general acceptance and stakeholder participation in selecting, designing, and implementing recommended Management Measures to improve watershed conditions. The first step in understanding the issues, problems,

and opportunities within Upper South Branch Kishwaukee River watershed is to gain a better perspective on how the watershed evolved over time into what exists today.

The goal of the I&E Plan is to equip municipal staff, elected officials, and other key stakeholders with the tools necessary to establish watershed-based practices and engrain these tools into their respective activities and procedures. If this I&E plan is successfully implemented, developers will follow guidelines that consider watershed health and residents of the Upper South Branch Kishwaukee River watershed will be actively involved in protecting and restoring the river and its tributaries. They will become aware of the factors that threaten surface waters of the watershed and adopt specific behaviors that contribute to improving overall conditions. Through these changes in behaviors, the threats and challenges to the watersheds will decrease, water quality will improve,

and the overall health of the watersheds will improve.

Due to the current conditions of water quality within the watershed, it is imperative that the Management Measure recommendations are closely linked with watershed information and education programs. Thorough public information and stakeholder education efforts will ultimately inspire local residents and community members to adopt recommended implementation actions. The cumulative actions of individuals and communities' watershed-wide can accomplish the goals of the watershed plan. Watershed health is of primary importance for the people of Upper South Branch Kishwaukee River watershed. When people begin to understand the issues related to

water quality and natural resource protection, they begin to change their actions and activities, thereby improving the overall health of the watershed.

Many of the stakeholders in the watershed have been active in the creation and leadership of the Upper South Branch Kishwaukee River Watershed Improvement Plan. Key stakeholders include the DeKalb County Community Foundation, DeKalb County Soil & Water Conservation District, the Cities of DeKalb and Sycamore, the Villages of Malta and Shabbona, DeKalb County, Kishwaukee Water Reclamation District, the Forest Preserve District of DeKalb County, the DeKalb Park District, Illinois Tollway, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Northern Illinois University, Illinois Department of

Natural Resources, and many private residents and land owners. These groups, led by the DeKalb County Soil & Water Conservation District and the DeKalb County Community Foundation, are actively engaging the public in watershed activities such as: educational seminars, watershed outings and bus tours, Regenerative Agriculture workshops, Name-That-Stream programs, water quality monitoring, and extensive public education programs and outreach events. The watershed planning process for the watershed formally began in 2018, but many of the local outreach programs have been underway for much longer. The planning process has allowed watershed partnerships to form that will help with implementing the watershed plan and initiating projects.

*Watershed sign posted by DeKalb County
Soil & Water Conservation District*



Recommended Information & Education Campaigns

A successful I&E Plan first raises awareness among stakeholders of watershed issues, problems, and opportunities. The second step is to provide stakeholders with information on alternatives to implement to address the issues, problems, and opportunities. This I&E Plan includes the following components as referenced in USEPA's "Handbook for Developing Watershed Plans to Restore and Protect Our Waters" (USEPA 2008):

- Define I&E goals and objectives.
- Identify and analyze the target audiences.
- Create the messages for each audience.
- Package the message to various audiences.
- Distribute the message.
- Evaluate the I&E program.

Goals and Objectives

Development of an effective I&E Plan begins by defining goals and objectives. Goals were established for the Upper South Branch Kishwaukee River watershed based on facilitated stakeholder engagement, voting, and responses during the February 5th stakeholder Goals workshop. The goals and objectives were then refined during the planning process. Objectives assigned to each goal are intended to be measurable where appropriate so that future progress can be assessed. The following goals refer to education and communication goals and objectives only (*objectives unrelated to communications have been left out of this section*).

Goal 1: Build stakeholder awareness of watershed issues through education and stewardship while increasing communication and coordination among stakeholders.

Objectives:

1. Implement the Upper South Branch Kishwaukee Watershed Improvement Plan Information & Education Plan.

2. Increase environmental stewardship opportunities and encourage stakeholders to participate in watershed plan implementation and restoration campaigns to increase activism in the watershed.
3. Inform public officials of the benefits of conservation design and low impact development and the importance of ordinance language changes that promote these developments.
4. Create targeted educational information for agricultural landowners.
5. Create targeted educational information for riparian landowners.
6. Install watershed interpretation signage at public access points, major roads, and installed management measures.
7. Develop recommendations and alternatives for the use of fertilizer and road salt and the disposal of pet waste.

Goal 2: Protect and manage natural and cultural components of the Green Infrastructure Network and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

Objectives:

2. Encourage private landowners with parcels within the Green Infrastructure Network to manage their land for ecological and water quality benefits.

Goal 4: Encourage agricultural techniques and soil conservation practices that will protect and conserve topsoil, improve soil health, and protect our water resources.

Objectives:

1. Educate and inform landowners about federal and state cost-share programs, which provide incentives for landowners to enroll in conservation programs and

implement conservation practices.

2. Encourage landowners to utilize existing programs and agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the DeKalb County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Farm Service Agency to install conservation practices that protect soil loss and water quality.
3. Increase support for and develop additional financial assistance programs targeted at increasing the installation of conservation practices.
4. Encourage landowners and farmers to follow the principles of soil health and/or regenerative agriculture on their land.
5. Encourage landowners and farmers to leave in place or install adequate buffers between agricultural land and waterways.
7. Encourage landowners and farmers to support the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy by implementing practices that reduce annual loading of nitrate-nitrogen and total Phosphorus to the Upper South Branch Kishwaukee River by at least 15 percent and 25 percent respectfully by 2025.

Goal 5: Protect groundwater quantity and quality.

Objectives:

1. Encourage the DeKalb County Health Department to monitor the extent and current condition of septic tanks in the watershed and to educate septic tank owners on how to properly maintain their systems.
2. Educate stakeholders about potential groundwater contamination issues and encourage private well testing.
3. Encourage landowners to install downspout disconnection practices such as rain gardens and rain barrels and utilize

pavement alternatives to improve groundwater recharge.

4. Encourage use of Stormwater Treatment Train, Conservation Design, or Low Impact Development within new and redevelopment.
5. Encourage agricultural landowners and farmers to improve soil health, thereby increasing infiltration.

Target Audiences

The recommended target audience for each education campaign is selected based on the ability to attain objectives. The target audience is a group of people with a common denominator who are intended to be reached by a particular message. The target audience of the watershed includes people of all demographics, locations, occupations, and watershed roles. There can be multiple target audiences depending on which topic is being presented. The overall

umbrella target audiences selected to meet watershed goals and objectives include residential and agricultural landowners, homeowners, general public, local government, elected officials, businesses, schools, and stakeholders/residents. Once the target audience is identified for a specific education campaign, existing local programs and communication vehicles should be leveraged to help distribute the message.

Public Input

Creating and distributing a



Rain garden sign at Lions Park

message for each audience is done via campaigns that address education goal objectives. The I&E Plan objectives for the Upper South Branch Kishwaukee River watershed were determined by the Steering Committee with feedback from stakeholder meetings. An I&E Plan matrix (Table 49) was developed as a tool to help implement the I&E Plan. Not only does the matrix include recommended education campaigns, it also includes columns for 1) Target Audience,

- 2) Communications Vehicles,
- 3) Priority/Schedule, 4) Lead & Supporting Organizations, 5) Outcomes/ Change in Action, and
- 6) Estimated Cost.

Evaluation

The I&E Plan should be evaluated regularly to provide feedback regarding the effectiveness of the outreach campaigns. Evaluation conducted early on in the effort will help determine campaigns that are successful and those that are not. Based on the evaluation, information,

money, and time can be saved by focusing on the campaigns that work. Those that do not work should be ended and/or refined. Section 9.2 of this plan contains a “Report Card” with milestones related to watershed education that can be used to evaluate I&E Plan implementation efforts.

The plan will be made available electronically on the DeKalb County Watersheds website upon IEPA approval at <https://dekalbcountywatersheds-il.org/>.



Educational sign posted by DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

Table 49. Information and Education Plan Matrix.

Education Action of Campaign	Target Audience	Communications Vehicles	Priority/Schedule	Lead (Supporting) Organizations	Outcomes, Change in Action	Estimated Cost
Regenerative Agriculture Workshop	Farmers and Ag Industry	Social Media, Websites, local publications	Critical/ Fall/ Winter 2020/2021	SWCD (NRCS)	Understanding of the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, improved water quality and soil health.	\$500 per workshop
Water Quality Educator Resources	DeKalb County Educators	Emails, Communication with School Districts	Critical/ Ongoing	U of I Extension, DeKalb County Farm Bureau Ag Literacy Coordinator, (SWCD)	Provide useful tools to educate the Educators and Students on understanding watersheds and how to improve water quality in DeKalb County	\$1,265 (one time)
Name that Stream	Students in the Watershed	Emails, Letters to the School District	Critical/ Fall/ Winter 2020/2021	Watershed Steering Committee (SWCD)	Encourage student involvement and provide opportunities to discuss water quality and watersheds	\$250 (one time)
Nitrate reduction (strip testing) program	Agricultural Landowners and Farmers	Mailings and Social Media	Medium/ Spring of 2021	SWCD (NIU)	Establish baseline for nitrate loss, encourage timing of nitrogen application to achieve minimal loss	\$500 per year
Water Quality Monitoring	Stakeholders	Social Media, Websites	Critical/ Ongoing	DCCF, SWCD and NIU (Steering Committee)	Collect data that establishes baseline information and identifies issues and accomplishments	\$14,000 per year
Educate Elected Officials about the completed plan to 1) encourage them to adopt the Upper South Branch Kishwaukee Watershed Improvement Plan 2) encourage amendments of municipal comprehensive plans, codes and ordinances to include watershed plan goals/objectives	Elected Officials, Community Leaders	Meetings with boards, special presentations with community leaders	Critical/ Immediately following completion of the plan	SWCD, DeKalb County Community Foundation (Steering Committee)	All communities within the watershed adopt the plan and encourage implementation of identified watershed issues within their jurisdiction	N/A

Education Action of Campaign	Target Audience	Communications Vehicles	Priority/Schedule	Lead (Supporting) Organizations	Outcomes, Change in Action	Estimated Cost
Critical Planning Areas Bus Tour	Stakeholders and Elected Officials	Newspaper, Social Media	Medium/2021	DeKalb County Community Foundation (SWCD)	Bring attention to areas identified as critical planning areas in the watershed plan to encourage buy-in to implement recommended BMPs	\$500 each tour
Citizens Mobilization Programs: (storm drain stenciling, River Clean Ups)	Residents, Volunteers, and Landowners	Newspaper, Social Media and websites	Medium/Seasonally	Municipalities, Park Districts (SWCD)	Create awareness, activism and ownership of the watershed within the community	TBD
Urban Educational Seminars: Examples Rain Gardens, Rain Barrel, Lawn to River Webinar	Stakeholders	Newspaper, Social Media, Websites	Critical/Ongoing	U of I Extension, SWCD, Park Districts, and KWRD (Municipalities)	Encourage Homeowners to install BMPs to control runoff and implement water quality improvements	TBD
Watershed Sign Sponsor Program (continuation of existing program - materials and design donated)	Businesses and Residents	Newspaper, Social Media, Websites	Medium/Fall 2020	DCCF, SWCD (Steering Committee)	Encourage community to participate by paying to sponsor a watershed sign in their watershed	N/A
Inform Farmland owners and renters about the plan and recommended actions, Inform and support farmland owners and renters to evaluate and implement recommended actions within the watershed plan	Agricultural landowners and farmers	Meetings of farmland owners and operators	Critical/Ongoing	SWCD, NRCS, KWRD (Steering Committee)	Encourage implementation of identified watershed projects and discuss funding mechanisms to install BMPs	\$100 per year
Mini- Grant Programs - to help install demonstration practices such as rain gardens or other green infrastructure. 2 awards per year.	Units of Government	Mailings and Social Media	Critical/Ongoing	DeKalb County Community Foundation (Steering Committee)	Encourage local units of government to install special projects that demonstrate ways to improve water quality	\$5,000 per year (\$2,500 per award)
Provide the School Districts within the Upper South Branch of the Kishwaukee River Watershed with information about the watershed as a means to support outdoor curriculum within the watershed's green infrastructure.	Schools, Students and Educators	Emails, letters and Social Media	Critical/Ongoing	U of I Extension, DeKalb County Farm Bureau Ag Literacy Coordinator and SWCD (Steering Committee)	Students within the watershed will have the understanding of how our environmental community works together through curriculum created and delivered by Natural Resource Educators	\$5,000 per year

Education Action of Campaign	Target Audience	Communications Vehicles	Priority/Schedule	Lead (Supporting) Organizations	Outcomes, Change in Action	Estimated Cost
Outreach Programs that inform the community of ways to improve water quality within the watershed.	Stakeholders	Articles, Social Media, face to face meetings	Critical/Ongoing	U of I Extension, SWCD, KWRD (Steering Committee)	Create Awareness	TBD