

## Northwest Indiana (NWI) 2020 Work Plan & 2019 Accomplishments

### Executive Summary

Since 2011, the Urban Waters - Northwest Indiana (NWI) Partnership has been working to protect, restore, and revitalize urban waterways in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties. 2019 was a banner year for the Partnership with substantial achievements on key initiatives! Highlights include:

- CommuniTree partners planted over 2,000 trees and engaged 500+ volunteers.
- More than 6,000 students and residents learned about local waterways and natural resources as part of partners' watershed education programs, which featured paddling with Canoemobile.
- Local partners secured nearly \$3 million in grants to advance green infrastructure and streambank stabilization projects that will restore urban waters and revitalize communities.
- The Septic System Coordinated Working Group helped train residents to be septic system ambassadors in their neighborhoods and began sampling for a microbial source tracking study.
- Urban Waters partners offered hands-on workshops on paddling safety, tree pruning, and tree care and helped to pilot the Master Watershed Steward Program.



NWI Urban Waters partners are collaborating on a variety of initiatives to protect and restore local waterways.

Developed with input from NWI Urban Waters partners, this work plan highlights key projects that advance Urban Waters goals in NWI. Some projects are directly initiated by Urban Waters, and many others are driven by local partners with Urban Waters playing a supporting role. This work plan also identifies tasks for moving existing and new initiatives forward in 2020. Contact Jennifer Birchfield at [jbirchfield@pnw.edu](mailto:jbirchfield@pnw.edu) with suggestions or requests for assistance.

#### COVID-19 Update

This work plan was developed before COVID-19 and associated social distancing. As such, planned projects requiring in-person gatherings or work crews may be modified or delayed.

## Urban Waters - NWI Partnership Background

Since 2011, the Urban Waters-NWI Partnership has been working to protect, restore, and revitalize urban waterways in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties. Co-led by the US Forest Service (USFS), National Park Service (NPS), and US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), the NWI Urban Waters Partnership includes more than 70 local, state, and federal partners (Appendix A). NWI was one of the original Urban Waters Federal Partnership locations and follows the national guiding principles, which include working to promote clean urban waters and connect people to their local waterways.



**Located along the southern shore of Lake Michigan, NWI contains a range of both rural and urban land uses. The region juxtaposes heavy industry with natural treasures and includes, for example, both the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern and the Indiana Dunes National Park. Like its diverse communities, NWI's waterways each have unique characteristics, assets, and challenges.**

NWI residents and visitors enjoy Lake Michigan at Whihala Beach (Eric Allix Rogers, [Flickr](#)).

NWI Urban Waters partners work together to build organizational capacities, move existing water-related projects forward, and spur new initiatives to address challenges. The Partnership pursues the following primary goals:

- Coordinate among partners, including local, state, federal, and regional agencies and organizations to promote collaboration and reduce duplicative efforts.
- Increase organizational capacities by assisting with project design and implementation, identifying potential funding sources, and seeking expert advice.
- Foster open and timely communications by sending monthly e-newsletters with project updates, funding opportunities, partnership meeting information, local events, and useful resources.
- Connect local partners to federal agencies for support, including technical assistance.
- Promote efforts to engage residents of all ages in educational, recreational, and volunteer activities that foster connections to – and stewardship of – local waterways.

# NWI Partnership 2019 Accomplishments and 2020 Tasks

## CommuniTree

### 2019 Accomplishments:

CommuniTree partners planted over 2,000 trees with significant USFS support. An outgrowth of NWI Urban Waters, CommuniTree is an alliance of businesses, not-for-profits, universities, and government agencies working to create a more diverse, healthy, and sustainable urban forest across northwest Indiana.

- Five young adults from NWI gained valuable urban forestry and leadership skills and planted and maintained trees with hundreds of local volunteers as part of the Student Conservation Association Calumet Tree Conservation Corps.
- More than 500 volunteers contributed over 1,500 hours of service.
- Ten communities planted trees through a grant program administered by the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission.
- Wildlife Habitat Council planted trees on industrial land with employees and volunteers.
- Thirty attendees participated in a tree pruning workshop and 22 participants became certified through the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Community and Urban Forestry Tree Steward Program offered in Portage.
- Two Purdue Northwest interns worked to engage underserved communities.
- Urban Waters produced CommuniTree-branded T-shirts, door tags, brochures, and watering buckets for community engagement.
- USFS worked with CommuniTree partners to develop a shared work plan for 2019-2021.
- The Chicago Region Trees Initiative created urban tree canopy summaries for NWI communities.

### Since 2016, CommuniTree partners have:

- Planted over 5,000 Trees
- Engaged over 2,000 volunteers
- Trained 15 youth in urban forestry
- Worked with over 40 communities
- Held 10 trainings on forestry topics



Wildlife Habitat Council works with the Student Conservation Association and industry employees to plant trees at Praxair, Burns Harbor as part of the USFS International Seminar on Urban Forestry.



Indiana DNR Community and Urban Forestry Outreach Coordinator, Abby Krause, demonstrates proper pruning techniques at the Tree Steward Program.



## CommuniTree

### 2020 Tasks:

The CommuniTree steering committee will meet quarterly and work to advance shared goals as listed in the CommuniTree Work Plan (Appendix B).

#### CommuniTree Priority Short-term Goals (2019-2021)

- Build relationships with potential funders and develop a sustainable funding strategy.
- Create educational materials and activities for different target audiences.
- Promote and support TreeCity USA and TreeCampus USA certifications.
- Recruit new volunteers, especially residents and students.
- Develop a basic partner agreement.
- Establish a CommuniTree website.

Tree planting will continue through the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission's CommuniTree grants, the Student Conservation Association Calumet Tree Conservation Corps, and Wildlife Habitat Council. The Nature Conservancy will continue to inventory trees in parks in Gary. New in 2020, The Nature Conservancy will partner with the City of Gary and USFS on a pilot project to manage emerald ash borer die-off to reduce public safety risks while improving overall tree diversification and public perception of parks.



The Student Conservation Association Tree Team worked with Indiana University Northwest students to plant a food forest at the Brother's Keeper Community Garden in Gary.

Additionally, Urban Waters and CommuniTree partners will:

- Work toward development of a community engagement strategy
- Investigate potential formats for improving the CommuniTree website and event sharing
- Work with Indiana DNR Community and Urban Forestry to host the Tree Steward program at Gabis Arboretum
- Promote – and help partners apply for – TreeCity and TreeCampus certifications
- Develop a basic partner agreement
- Investigate use of the current Urban Tree Canopy dataset and local need and capacity for updating the dataset

## Watershed Education

### 2019 Accomplishments:

In 2019, more than 6,000 students and residents had the opportunity to explore local waterways across northwest Indiana while paddling in Wilderness Inquiry's (Canoemobile) 24-foot voyageur canoes through education events organized by Dunes Learning Center, LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), and NPS with support from other partners.

Watershed Education led by Dunes Learning Center connected 4,383 students, teachers, administrators, and parent chaperones from underserved and/or low-income communities to their waterways. These hands-on, place-based experiences featured guided hikes and education stations. Students and adults learned about human impacts on the environment and waterways through water quality and stewardship activities.

Students in grades K-12 worked with classmates to improve ecological conditions on more than 4.5 acres of parks and public lands at 5 sites in their communities. They learned about and removed invasive plants including bush honeysuckle, dogwood, and hawthorn from more than 2 acres along the banks of Lake George and Deep River. They planted native grasses to stabilize the bank at Lake George and planted more than a dozen trees at Wolf Lake Park as part of an ongoing partnership with USFS.

Students practiced water safety while paddling 24' voyageur canoes and enjoying a unique outdoor team-building experience. To deliver this multi-faceted project over 21 school days, Dunes Learning Center worked with partner organizations that provided information on a wide range of environmental career pathways and leadership opportunities.



Students enjoy paddling as part of watershed education experiences, hosted by Dunes Learning Center, LaPorte County SWCD, and others.

LaPorte County SWCD's Trail Creek Week and Kankakee River Days also featured paddling experiences and engaged students in land-based activities on topics such as forestry, fisheries, and – new in 2019 – microplastics. The Michigan City High School Wolves Environmental Restoration Team, an outgrowth of Trail Creek Week, continued restoration efforts at Hansen Park (Michigan City), including invasive species removal and native plantings in a swale. New in 2019, the Team began following the Indiana Junior Master Naturalist curriculum.



**A Michigan City High School Wolves Environmental Restoration Team member removes invasive species along Trail Creek.**

In 2019, many Urban Waters partners worked to secure funding for Wilderness Inquiry Wilderness Inquiry Canoemobile visits, coordinate logistics, and provide environmental education stations. 2019 Wilderness Inquiry visits were funded in part by NPS and the Five Star and Urban Waters grant program.

NPS’s “Dunes Day” field trip successfully engaged over 1,700 students in activities focused on the Lake Michigan dunes and associated waterways. This is just 150 students shy of the Guinness World Record for largest field trip in the world!

Wilderness Inquiry worked with NPS and partners to establish a Canoemobile “hub” in NWI and to hold a two-day captain training. Of the 20 volunteers trained, 15 passed an assessment and can now assist NPS staff with paddling programs on local waterways.

Fifteen residents took the inaugural Indiana Master Watershed Steward course developed by Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant and partners. Participants completed 12 weeks of coursework and passed a written exam; ten completed 35 volunteer hours to become certified. Indiana DNR Lake Michigan Coastal Program’s Coastal Awareness Month in June featured 84 events hosted by 16 partners. Urban Waters partners participated in the Hobart Water Festival, the Gary Clean Water Celebration, and the Grand Calumet River Stewardship Day. Many other partners provided water education activities.



**Master Watershed Steward, Kathy Sipple (right), learns about soils with LaPorte County SWCD’s Nicole Messacar (center) and Purdue Extension’s Gene Matzat (left).**

**2020 Tasks:**

Urban Waters will continue to contribute stations for partner-led watershed education experiences and to support partners in seeking sustainable funding for Canoemobile visits. Wilderness Inquiry will continue working to establish a permanent Canoemobile hub to serve southern Lake Michigan. Urban Waters and partners will explore options to improve evaluation of watershed education impacts. The Michigan City High School Team will continue stewardship work at Hansen Park and explore expanding and sustaining their work. Urban Waters partners will continue to support education events, such as the Hobart Water Fest and Gary Clean Water Celebration. IISG and partners hope to offer the Master Watershed Steward program in 2020.

## Public Access and Accessibility

### 2019 Accomplishments:

Partners continued to implement Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission's Greenways/Blueways Plan and increase access to waterways across NWI. Partners continue opening the Little Calumet River East Branch to paddling after decades of limited access. In 2019, partners installed an ADA-compliant canoe/kayak launch on the East Branch near Dunes Learning Center campus, and over 150 individuals attended the ribbon-cutting at celebration. The July NWI Urban Waters Partnership meeting featured discussion on accessibility along NWI waterways and natural areas. LMCP purchased a trail assessment system for assessing accessibility of trails and made it available on loan to land managers.



NWI partners participated in Paddlesports safety trainings hosted by Urban Waters and NPS.

Urban Waters and NPS hosted an American Canoe Association Paddlesports Safety Facilitator class with USFS funding. Twenty-five partners representing the Miller Citizens Corp Shoreline Water Safety Committee, NPS, the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, and USEPA earned certification. NPS also hosted a Level 2 Canoe and Level 2 Kayak training. The trainings built capacity for partners to utilize the 8 canoe and kayak launches installed across NWI in recent years.

NPS's Outdoor Adventure Festival featured over 70 events throughout NWI over three days, including demonstrations of adaptive outdoor equipment and paddling trips on the Little Calumet River, Lake Michigan, and Lake George. Many Urban Waters partners, including NPS and Northwest Indiana Paddling Association, also hosted public paddling events throughout the year, such as the Trail Creek Fun Float, Marquette Park Lagoon sunset paddles, and the Celebration of the Little Cal East Branch.

### 2020 Tasks:

Partners will continue to work on increasing public access along NWI waterways. NWIPA, Save the Dunes, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, and partners will continue to open the East Branch of the Little Calumet River for recreational use. Partners are planning to install additional non-motorized launches on waterways on Deep River and the Little Calumet West Branch. The accessibility discussion at the July partnership meeting yielded several priorities including:

- Support and expand the exposition, testing, and purchase of adaptive equipment
- Install an accessible walkway and iPaddle port and provide adaptive equipment at Marquette Park
- Continue assessing options for web-maps showcasing accessible features
- Host trainings on paddling safety and rescue



## Septic System Coordination Work Group

### 2019 Accomplishments:

Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) – Lake Michigan Coastal Program (LMCP) continued work on an IDEM Section 319 grant to address septic systems. An estimated 26,000+ septic systems exist in Lake and Porter counties. Progress on the grant in 2019 included:

- Indiana University Northwest completed a quality assurance project plan for molecular source tracking and began sampling for a separate but related study.
- Save the Dunes trained 20 ambassadors who coordinated neighborhood-level septic system education and outreach using NWI-specific outreach materials.
- NIRPC made improvements to the regional septic system maps created in 2018.

In September, IDNR-LMCP participated in SepticSmart Week with the help of partners. Indiana Governor Holcomb proclaimed September 16-20, 2019 to be Septic Smart Week in the Indiana. Additionally, IDNR-LMCP continued to coordinate Septic System Coordination Work Group and 319 Grant Advisory Committee meetings throughout the year. IDNR-LMCP held septic trainings for realtors and presented to county commissioners and to the Northwest Indiana Stormwater Advisory Group.

Amanda Lahners of the LaPorte County Health Department presented on the County's Property Transfer Ordinance - the first in the state to require septic system inspection for property transfer - at the October 2019 NWI Urban Waters Partnership meeting and as part of EPA's Decentralized Wastewater MOU Partnership's webinar "SepticSmart Week 2019: Promoting Best Practices for Community Involvement."



IDNR - LMCP's Katie Vallis and Sarah Nimitz with the Governor's Septic Smart Week Proclamation

### 2020 Tasks:

IDNR-LMCP and partners will continue work on septic system outreach and education and molecular source tracking and will plan and convene a septic system inspector training and a public information sharing workshop. IUN will begin sampling for the 319 molecular source tracking project and continue sampling for a related study. Urban Waters partners will work with IDNR-LMCP and Save the Dunes to sustain the Good Neighbor Ambassador septic system outreach program. Porter County Health Department will transition to a new software system for tracking septic system permits. IDNR-LMCP will submit their final on-site disposal system measure to NOAA and USEPA by May 31. The success of LMCP's 6217 Nonpoint Source Pollution Program is important for not only the coastal zone, but also for the rest of the state.



## Watershed Management Planning and Implementation



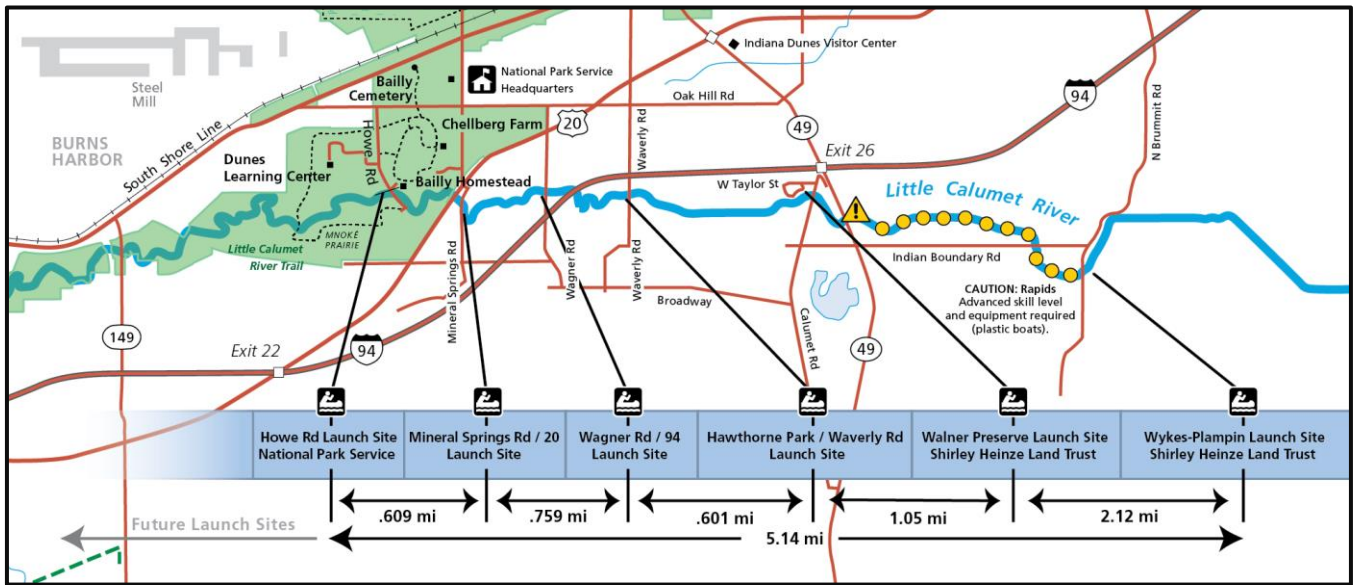
Map of Northwest Indiana Watersheds covered by the Urban Waters partnership.

Efforts to protect and improve individual Lake Michigan tributaries in Northwest Indiana are generally led by local watershed groups with Urban Waters performing a supporting role. For example, projects funded and conducted by US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) help achieve local watershed goals and U. S. Geological Survey (USGS) monitoring provides valuable data to watershed managers. USGS continued watershed-wide water temperature monitoring to enhance recreational information and thermal prediction capabilities in the Little Calumet River and Trail Creek Basins using USGS Urban Waters funding.

Urban Waters partners will continue to support watershed groups. The NWI Stormwater Advisory group will continue to connect watershed groups to Municipal Separate Storm Sewer (MS4) operators and industry. In addition to work in the Lake Michigan watershed, extensive restoration and watershed education continue in the Kankakee watershed. Many federal, state, and local partners support this work.

## EAST BRANCH OF THE LITTLE CALUMET RIVER (EBLC)

### 2019 Accomplishments:



A map of the launch sites along the Little Calumet River Water Trail East Branch (Source: NPS, Indiana Dunes National Park)

Partners, including Dunes Learning Center, NPS, the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission, Save the Dunes, and Shirley Heinze Land Trust continued collaborating to protect and restore the East Branch of the Little Calumet River and to expand and maintain open stretches of the River for paddling access. Partners completed invasive species removal and habitat restoration along the East Branch near Dunes Learning Center campus. SHLT and partners worked with the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science, an USFS-led collaborative, on climate adaptation planning for land along the East Branch.

**2020 Tasks:** Urban Waters will continue to support implementation of the watershed plans for the East Branch and Salt Creek, the River Use and Management Plan for the East Branch, and other efforts as requested by partners. Partners will continue work to expand and maintain the portions of the East Branch that are open to paddling.

## DEEP RIVER WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

**2019 Accomplishments:** Led by the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, partners continued to implement the Deep River Watershed Management Plan. Lake County Parks began to convert a 40-acre agricultural field to grassland with USEPA funding. The City of Hobart and Delta Institute were awarded a Chi-Cal Rivers Fund grant to restore a tributary of Duck Creek. With GLRI funding, the City of Hobart installed the following:

- Rain garden and pervious sidewalk at City Hall
- Bioswale and native plantings at Hillman Park
- Bioswale at North Lake Park
- Riparian restoration of two ravines at 4th Place
- Rain garden, bioswale, riparian restoration, and native plantings at a Deep River access site
- Pervious pavers, rain garden planters, and native plantings at Center Street parking lot



A new rain garden and pervious sidewalk installed at Hobart City Hall.

### 2020 Tasks:

Urban Waters will continue to support implementation of the Deep River Watershed Management Plan, installation of green infrastructure, and improved public access to Deep River as requested by partners. Urban Waters partners will support efforts to modify the Deep River dam following the recommendations of the feasibility study. Partners will seek funding for a priority canoe/kayak launch on Deep River in New Chicago. The City of Hobart will continue seeking funding for several projects including an outdoor learning center, a green infrastructure master plan, the annual Water Festival, an urban forestry inventory, wetland restoration, and other green infrastructure projects. Representatives from the City of Hobart will present on their green infrastructure installations at a 2020 Urban Waters partnership meeting. Delta Institute and the City of Hobart will continue their Chi-Cal Rivers-funded work to restore a tributary of Duck Creek and seek additional funds for future phases of the project.



A rain garden installed in the City of Hobart.



## TRAIL CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP (TCWP)

### 2019 Accomplishments:

The Michigan City Sanitary District completed substantial remediation of a former unregulated dump along Trail Creek at Karwick Nature Park. The project includes installation of a leachate collection system, stabilization of eroding banks, capping, and revegetation. Michigan City continued working with partners to finalize plans for the adjacent Cheney Run wetland project. Michigan City completed a land acquisition strategy, which included Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant modelling of green infrastructure for the top parcels. Michigan City was awarded an USEPA Building Blocks technical assistance grant to implement a Green and Complete Streets tool.



TCWP partners tour remediation underway at the Karwick Nature Park with Michigan City Sanitary District.

The Michigan City Department of Parks and Recreation continued a demonstration project at Winding Creek cove, including streambank stabilization. LaPorte County Parks began work on a bioswale to slow and infiltrate parking lot runoff at Creek Ridge Park.

Hundreds of youth were connected to Trail Creek as part of the Trail Creek Week, and the Michigan City High School Environmental Restoration Team, described under 'Watershed Education' above.

### 2020 Tasks:

Partners will continue to support implementation and update of the Trail Creek Watershed Management Plan and to participate in regular watershed partnership and stormwater advisory group meetings. Remediation at Karwick Nature Park will be completed. Construction of the Cheney Run wetland project will begin. Michigan City and partners will complete the Cheney Run Recreation Amenities Study. Urban Waters will work with Michigan City to implement the USEPA Building Blocks complete streets project. LaPorte County Parks will continue construction of a bioswale at Creek Ridge County Park. Urban Waters partners will continue to support Trail Creek Week and existing and expanded efforts of the MCHS Wolves Environmental Restoration Team as described under 'Watershed Education' above.



The MCHS Wolves Environmental Restoration Team removes invasive plants at Hansen Park.

## WEST BRANCH OF THE LITTLE CALUMET RIVER AND GRAND CALUMET RIVER

**2019 Accomplishments:** The City of Gary finalized the Gary Green Infrastructure Plan. Audubon Great Lakes began work on a Little Calumet River West Branch marsh restoration project with funding from Chi-Cal Rivers Fund. The April NWI Urban Waters meeting featured presentations by Jack Eskin of Delta Institute on the Gary Green Infrastructure Plan and Troy Peters of Audubon on the marsh restoration.

Local partners have long expressed concern that the official watershed boundary Dataset has inaccurate boundaries for some NWI waterways, which could have important ramifications for management efforts and project funding eligibility. The Indiana Geographic Information Council obtained an Indiana DNR – Lake Michigan Coastal Program grant to correct the watershed boundary dataset, issued a request for proposals for the work in 2019, and is currently finalizing the contract.

EPA awarded a \$600,000 Brownfields Program grant to a coalition that includes Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, the NWI Forum Foundation, and the NWI Regional Development Authority. The \$600,000 grant award will be used to conduct environmental site assessments, prepare cleanup plans, and implement community outreach activities in Gary, Hammond, and East Chicago.

The City of Gary trained municipal employees in green infrastructure maintenance through a series of workshops funded by Indiana DNR – Lake Michigan Coastal Program. The City also hosted a Great Lakes Commission Green Infrastructure Champions Knowledge Transfer workshop. The City continued work on its Cities Connecting Children & Nature Program.

### **2020 Tasks:**

The City of Gary's Green Infrastructure/Watershed Management Team will continue to implement and update the Little Calumet River West Branch Watershed Management Plan and will explore developing a watershed management plan for the Grand Calumet River. USGS will continue real-time monitoring in the Grand Calumet River and studying the water quality impacts of a rain garden at Gary City Hall with funding through Urban Waters Federal Partnership Cooperative Matching Funds. Indiana Geologic Information Council will work with stakeholders and contractors to correct the watershed boundary dataset in NWI in 2020. Urban Waters will help the Indiana Geologic Information Council connect to appropriate partners and stakeholders. The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission and partners will begin work on their EPA Brownfields grant.



Leslie Dorworth, aquatic ecology specialist for Illinois-Indiana Sea Great (IISG), teaches students about tadpoles at the seventh annual Grand Calumet River Stewardship Day. (IISG Photo/Hope Charters)

## Grand Calumet River Area of Concern (AOC)

**2019 Accomplishments:** Federal, state, and local partners continue to restore ecosystems and address the 12 remaining beneficial use impairments applicable to the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern. Indiana Department of Environmental Management and the Citizens Advisory for the Remediation of the Environment convened three workgroup meetings, all open to the public.

IDEM and partners continued implementing sediment management projects targeted to remove six beneficial use impairments. USACE dredged 167,845 cubic yards of sediment from the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal, including several areas with polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) concentrations over 50 parts per million. Sediment was disposed of in the Confined Disposal Facility in East Chicago. Project partners began source control and design work as part of a Great Lakes Legacy Act project to dredge and cap portions of the Lake George Branch of the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal between Indianapolis Boulevard and the British Petroleum land bridge. In addition, the initial 30 percent design work for the East Branch, Phase II Sediment Management Project was completed. The East Branch, Phase II project will involve dredging and capping the area between Cline Avenue and the Gary Sanitary District.

Partners continued to implement habitat management activities to address two beneficial use impairments during 2019. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management continued efforts to secure access agreements with property owners in order to implement the River Corridor Project. USGS installed wells to study water quality relative to groundwater/surface-water interactions at restored wetlands at Pine Station and Clark Pine Nature Preserves, using USGS Urban Waters funding.

Partners continued work in 2019 to address high bacteria levels at Jeorse Park Beach in East Chicago. USGS provided USEPA with data summaries of nearshore water quality and flow conditions and metagenomic evaluations of bacterial populations to characterize conditions and potential sources of bacteria relative to several Northwest Indiana beaches on Lake Michigan, including Jeorse Park, Whihala West and Hammond East beaches. USACE contractors are currently in the warranty period for a restoration that is improving habitat and reducing nonpoint source pollution in the area. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management was able to continue a limited-scope gull exclusion project at the East Chicago-managed beaches and worked with municipal staff to implement additional best management practices designed to further reduce levels of *E. coli* at beaches in Hammond, Whiting, East Chicago, and Gary.

### **2020 Tasks:**

The following will continue in 2020 with expected completion by the end of 2021: the Lake George Branch Wetlands project, and a substantial portion of the dune and swale restoration, and Great Lakes Legacy Act Wetland Restoration projects.



## Green Infrastructure and Maintenance

### 2019 Accomplishments:

Urban Waters provided a scholarship for partner Lisa Harris to attend a National Green Infrastructure Certification training program with USFS funding. Lisa earned the certification and agreed to offer her knowledge as a resource for other NWI Urban Waters partners.

Unity Foundation and Legacy Foundation participated in the Lower Lake Michigan Team of the Great Lakes One Water Initiative. The Lower Lake Michigan Team settled on a project concept focused on green infrastructure maintenance and contracted with local partner OAI to coordinate. In 2019, OAI developed a green infrastructure shared services pilot for training regional green infrastructure maintenance teams. Bob Newport of OAI presented on the project at the October NWI Urban Waters partnership meeting.



Urban Waters partner Lisa Harris (bottom right) attended a Green Infrastructure certification training with a scholarship funded by USFS.

### 2020 Tasks:

In 2020, OAI will pilot the Great Lakes One Water green infrastructure shared services project in two southern Lake Michigan locations, one of which will be in NWI. OAI will train a green infrastructure crew and begin providing services. The City of Hobart will present at a 2020 NWI Urban Waters partnership meeting on their green infrastructure projects, maintenance, and lessons learned.

## USEPA Spill Response Planning

### 2019 Accomplishments:

USEPA and partners are working on emergency response planning in NWI. The USEPA Region 5 Superfund team presented at the October 2018 NWI Urban Waters meeting and convened an NWI subarea planning committee in 2019.

### 2020 Tasks:

The USEPA Region 5 Superfund team presented an update on the NWI subarea response plan at the January meeting of the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission's Environmental Management Policy Committee. A draft plan is anticipated in 2020. Urban Waters will invite USEPA to present the draft plan at a quarterly meeting and encourage the incorporation of feedback from NWI partners.

## Funding

### 2019 Accomplishments:

Local Urban Waters partners secured grants totaling over \$2.8 million and leveraged over \$1.6 million in cash and in-kind match for projects that address the Urban Waters priorities. Urban Waters provided direct assistance in preparing proposals that secured over \$600,000. These estimates are conservative and do not capture all of the work of the NWI partners. Awarded funds will benefit more than 14 communities throughout the region. NPS, USEPA, and USFS were able to secure agency funds to support local priority projects, such as Canoemobile. USFS and EPA secured funding for the ambassador position with match from Purdue Northwest.

### 2020 Tasks:

Urban Waters will continue to share information about funding opportunities and help partners develop strong projects and successful proposals. Urban Waters will convene working groups to address funding opportunities that require cross-organization collaboration. Urban Waters partners will support the work of the Calumet Collaborative to develop additional grant database tools. Federal lead agency partners will continue to seek funding to support the Ambassador position.

## Communication

### 2019 Accomplishments:

The Ambassador compiled and distributed a monthly e-newsletter (plus special alerts as needed). The subscriber list grew to 479. The full partnership met quarterly, and the federal partners held their annual meeting. Partner meeting attendance continued to grow with more than 40 partners consistently attending. NRCS representatives attended several partnership meetings, fulfilling a need for more NRCS engagement long-referenced by local partners. Several partners participated in regular Urban Waters national calls. Urban Waters convened one meeting of the university conservation partners work group.



Attendance at NWI Urban Waters quarterly meetings continued to grow in 2019.

### 2020 Tasks:

Urban Waters will continue to facilitate communication among partners through monthly e-newsletters and quarterly partnership meetings. The Ambassador will continue to participate in Urban Waters national calls and assist with specific tasks as needed.

Appendix A. Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Partners as of spring 2020.

<b>Federal Partners</b>	<b>State, Local, and Regional Government</b>
Corporation for National and Community Service U.S. Department of Agriculture -U. S. Forest Service -Natural Resource Conservation Service U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development U.S. Department of Interior - Bureau of Reclamation - Fish and Wildlife Service - U.S. Geological Survey - National Park Service U.S. Department of Transportation U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration - National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration - National Weather Service U.S. Department of Defense - Army Corps of Engineers U.S. Department of Homeland Security - Federal Emergency Management Agency U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Indiana Department of Environmental Management Indiana Department of Health Indiana Department of Natural Resources - Community and Urban Forestry - Lake Michigan Coastal Program City of East Chicago City of Gary City of Hammond City of Hobart City of Michigan City City of Valparaiso/Valparaiso City Utilities Indiana Dunes Tourism Lake County Health Department LaPorte County Parks and Recreation LaPorte County Soil & Water Conservation District Porter County Soil & Water Conservation District Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission Porter County Health Department Porter County Parks and Recreation Town of Chesterton/ Stormwater Utility Town of Highland Town of Lake Station Town of Munster Town of Merrillville
<b>Non-profit Organizations and Other Partners</b>	
Access Miller Alliance for the Great Lakes ArcelorMittal Audubon Society American Rivers Cardno Chicago Wilderness Coffee Creek Watershed Conservancy Davey Resource Group Delta Institute Dunes Learning Center Graf Tree Care Haas and Associates Engineering Hodge Tree Care Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant Indiana Geological Information Council Indiana University Northwest Izaak Walton League of America Legacy Foundation	Miller Spotlight National Parks Conservation Association Northwest Indiana Forum Northwest Indiana Paddling Association Northwest Indiana Public Service Company Northwest Indiana Steelheaders Openlands Purdue University/ Purdue University Northwest Save the Dunes Shedd Aquarium Shirley Heinze Land Trust Student Conservation Association Gabis Arboretum The Field Museum The Nature Conservancy Unity Foundation Wilderness Inquiry Wildlife Habitat Council



# Work Plan

September 2019



CommuniTree is an alliance of businesses, not-for-profits, universities, and government agencies working to create a more diverse, healthy, and sustainable urban forest across northwest Indiana. Founded in 2016, CommuniTree has helped plant and care for over 5,000 trees as of September 2019. CommuniTree partners and allies developed this work plan between July and September 2019. It is meant to provide a shared vision and focus for CommuniTree's work in the coming years.

## Priority Short-term Goals (2019-2021)

- Build relationships with potential funders and develop a sustainable funding strategy
- Create educational materials and activities for different target audiences
- Promote and support TreeCity USA and TreeCampus USA certifications
  - Recruit new volunteers, especially residents and students
  - Develop a basic partner agreement
  - Establish a CommuniTree website

## Additional Short-term Goals

- Create a recognition or incentive program for volunteers (t-shirts, buckets, other swag)
- Increase the number of cities/communities/organizations that plant trees each year
  - Develop and promote a species planting list for the region
  - Offer the TreeStewards program each year
  - Develop a tree-related events calendar

## Medium-term Goals (2021-2025)

- Create a recognition program for industries and businesses
- Develop a volunteer engagement and retention strategy
  - Develop a marketing strategy
  - Hire a volunteer coordinator

## Long-term Goals (2023-2029)

- Establish an apprenticeship program for arborists and green infrastructure maintenance
- Create a regional forester position shared by municipalities
- Develop a regional urban forest plan