

URBANWATERS

FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

NORTHWEST INDIANA LOCATION

2024 Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Federal Partnership Work Plan *2023 Accomplishments and 2024 Goals*



Above: A collage of photos shared by NWI UWFP partners and featured throughout the 2024 NWI UWFP Work Plan.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| <i>Executive Summary</i> | 3 |
| <i>NWI Urban Waters Federal Partnership Background</i> | 4 |
| <i>NWI Urban Waters Federal Partnership Focus Areas</i> | 5 |
| Grand Calumet River Area of Concern | 6 |
| Dune and Swale Ecosystem Restoration in the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern | 6 |
| Grand Calumet River Area of Concern Remedial Action Plan | 8 |
| West Branch of the Little Calumet River | 13 |
| Hobart Marsh and Deep River | 17 |
| Restoring The Duck Creek Tributary in Northwest Indiana | 17 |
| East Branch of the Little Calumet River Conservation Corridor | 19 |
| Indiana Dunes Ecosystems | 24 |
| Indiana Dunes Ecosystem Alliance | 24 |
| Student Conservation Association Ecological Restoration Crew | 26 |
| Trail Creek Watershed Partnership | 27 |
| <i>The CommuniTree Program</i> | 28 |
| Student Conservation Association Calumet Tree Conservation Corps | 29 |
| Delta Institute | 30 |
| The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission | 31 |
| Wildlife Habitat Council | 32 |
| Indiana Arborist Association | 33 |
| <i>Educational Initiatives</i> | 34 |
| Dunes Learning Center | 34 |
| Festival de la Monarca | 35 |
| Trail Creek Week | 36 |
| Civic Voice Workshop | 36 |
| <i>Region-Wide Initiatives</i> | 38 |
| Calumet Land Conservation Partnership | 38 |
| Climate Mitigation and Resiliency | 39 |
| Lake Michigan Lakewide Action and Management Plan | 40 |
| Water Pollution Prevention Roundtable | 43 |
| Other Regional Initiatives | 44 |
| <i>Appendices</i> | 45 |
| Appendix 1: 2023 NWI UWFP Meetings & Communications | 45 |
| Appendix 2: 2024 NWI UWFP Partners | 47 |
| Appendix 3: 2024 NWI UWFP Work Plan Commonly Used Acronyms & Definitions ... | 48 |

Executive Summary

Beginning in 2011, the Northwest Indiana (NWI) Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) has been working to protect, restore, and revitalize urban waterways, communities and surrounding environments in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties. Developed with input from NWI UWFP partners, the NWI UWFP Work Plan is updated annually to provide a summary of partner accomplishments from the previous year and look ahead at work planned in the current year.

The 2024 NWI UWFP Work Plan provides a summary of partner accomplishments from 2023 and an overview of partner goals for 2024. The NWI UWFP Ambassador supports partners in their work by serving as a facilitator and coordinator, enhancing collaboration, making connections for technical support and assisting with project proposal development targeted for emerging and recurring funding opportunities.

The impressive scope of work summarized in the 2024 NWI UWFP Work Plan is organized into partners' 2023 accomplishments and 2024 goals for six key focus areas and several regional initiatives including:

- Grand Calumet River Area of Concern
- West Branch of the Little Calumet River
- Hobart Marsh and Deep River
- East Branch of the Little Calumet River
- Indiana Dunes Ecosystems
- Trail Creek Watershed
- CommuniTree Program
- Educational Initiatives
- Calumet Land Conservation Partnership
- Climate Mitigation and Resiliency
- Water Pollution Prevention Roundtable



Located along the southern shore of Lake Michigan the map shown to the left depicts the boundaries of the Lake Michigan Watershed in NWI. NWI is a diverse region with a broad range of both rural and urban land uses. The region also juxtaposes heavy industry with natural resources and includes, for example, both the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern and the Indiana Dunes National Park. Like its diverse communities, major rivers and creeks in NWI, such as the Grand Calumet River, Deep River, the Little Calumet River and Trail Creek, each have unique characteristics, assets, and challenges.

NWI Urban Waters Federal Partnership Background

NWI was one of the original Urban Waters Federal Partnership locations and follows the national initiative's guiding principles, which include working to promote clean urban waters and connect people to local waterways. Since 2011, the NWI UWFP has been working to protect, restore, and revitalize urban waterways and surrounding environments in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties and includes more than 80 local, state and federal partners (Appendix 2). The NWI UWFP is co-led by a core advisory team representing the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), US Forest Service (USFS) and the National Park Service (NPS). The NWI UWFP Ambassador position is hosted through a shared agreement with Purdue University Northwest that is supported with funding from the USEPA and USFS.



Above Photo Montage: Partners from the NWI UWFP examining large focus area maps laid out on tables at several stations to share more about project goals, accomplishments, funding, challenges and opportunities for collaboration at a NWI UWFP meeting held at the Indiana Dunes National Park's Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk meeting facility.
Photo Credits: Victoria Wittig of the NWI UWFP.

The NWI UWFP Ambassador works with regional partners to build organizational capacities, move projects forward, and spur new initiatives to address emerging challenges, including the following primary goals:

- Encourage and facilitate coordination among partners, including local, state, federal, and regional agencies, nonprofit organizations, foundations and regional planning bodies.
- Promote collaboration in all aspects of interaction including having an open exchange of information and partnering across organizations to seek joint funding for shared projects.
- Increase organizational capacities by assisting with project design and implementation, identifying potential funding sources, and connecting partners to federal agencies for support, including technical assistance.
- Promote efforts to engage residents of all ages and backgrounds in educational, recreational, and volunteer activities that foster connections and stewardship of local waterways and their surrounding communities and environments.

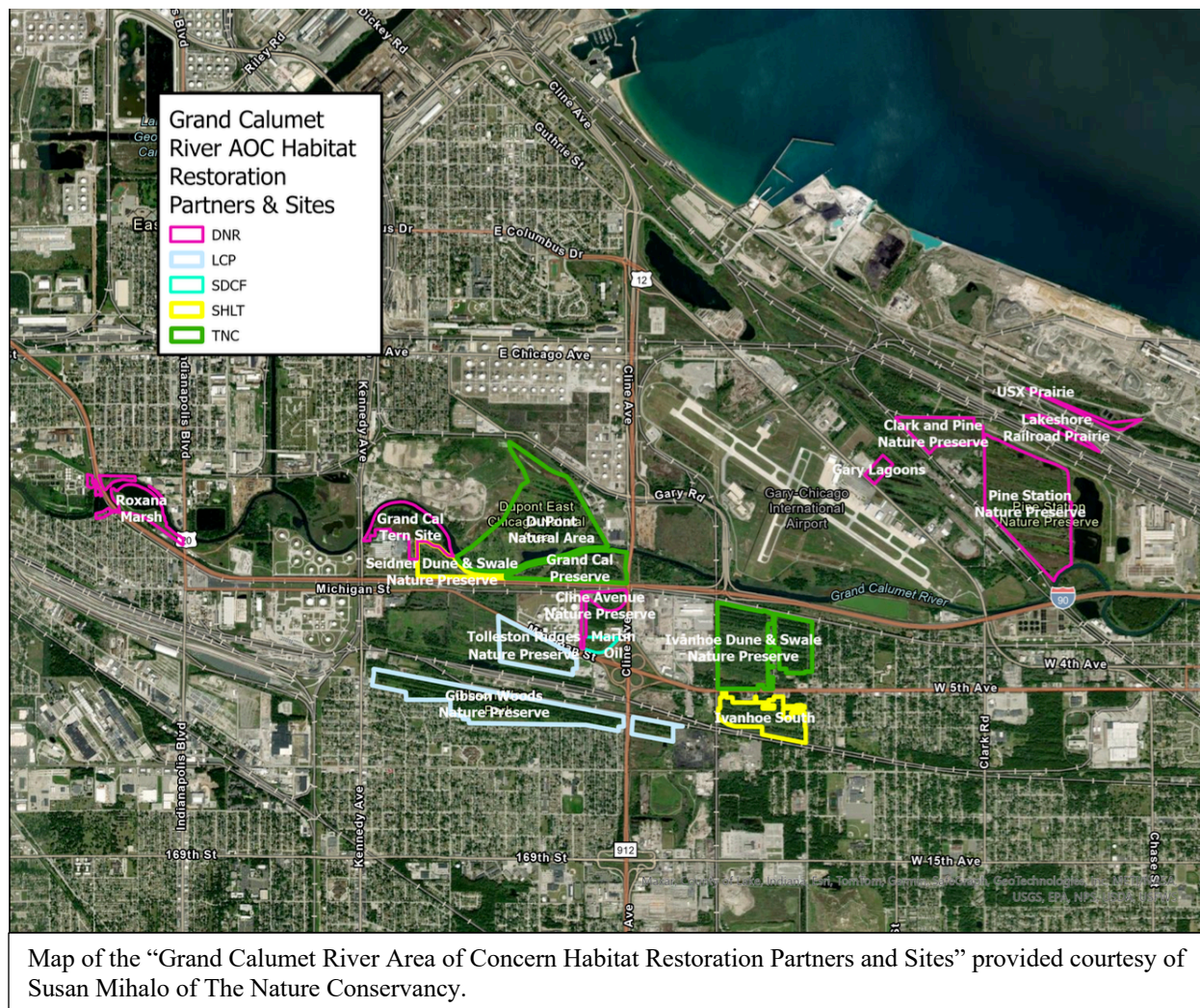
- Hold four partnership meetings per year to highlight projects, strengthen partner connections and provide an opportunity to seek collaborators and share updates and announcements.
- Foster open and timely communications through monthly e-newsletters with project updates, funding opportunities, partnership meeting information, local events, and useful resources.

NWI Urban Waters Federal Partnership Focus Areas



Above: A map of southern Lake Michigan and the Calumet Region including eight focus areas in NWI included in a [“Conservation Action Planning in the Calumet Region”](#) report developed by partners in the NWI UWFP and available at savedunes.org/resources. The map shows the interconnected nature and distribution of focus areas, their proximity to Lake Michigan and the river tributaries they are centered on. NWI focus areas include the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern, also known as the “Heart of Calumet,” the West Branch of the Little Calumet River, Hoosier Prairie, Hobart Marsh & Deep River, the Indiana Dunes Ecosystems, the East Branch of the Little Calumet River, Moraine and Ambler Flatwoods, which includes the Trail Creek Watershed.

Grand Calumet River Area of Concern



Dune and Swale Ecosystem Restoration in the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern

The purpose of this project is to control woody and herbaceous invasive and aggressive species, and to further restoration through seed collection, seeding, plant propagation and plugging of native plants on 394 acres across 12 properties within the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern (AOC). The project goal is to improve habitat quality and structure for native species ensuring that the restoration of these important habitats contribute towards the removal of Beneficial Use Impairment (BUI) #3, Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations, and BUI #14, Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat and ultimately delisting of the Grand Calumet River as an AOC in the Great Lakes.

Partner Organizations Involved

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Lake County Parks and Recreation Department, Shirley Heinze Land Trust (SHLT), City of East Chicago

2023 Accomplishments

During 2023, TNC and partners, including DNR and Lake County Parks, worked together to conduct invasive species management on nearly 900 acres utilizing pass-through funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative subawarded to TNC through IDNR, as well as Natural Resource Damage funding from the Natural Resource Trustees. TNC also worked with these partners plus Shirley Heinze Land Trust to plant forbs at the Grand Cal Tern Site and Ivanhoe South in fall 2023, attracting 22 volunteers.

To help improve relationships with neighbors to Ivanhoe Dune & Swale Nature Preserve, TNC also hosted two outreach events on the north end of Hobart St. and produced two quarterly newsletters mailed in both English and Spanish. Signage was also installed in English and Spanish around the preserve on Hobart St. and 5th Avenue, calling attention to the restoration project and discouraging dumping.

TNC was also awarded a Chi-Cal Rivers Fund grant in 2023 that will further dune and swale and other habitat restoration and enhancement, as well as prescribed fire. Lake County Parks and Shirley Heinze Land Trust also received subawards as part of this project to help further areas not funded and to transition management of Seidner Dune & Swale Nature Preserve back to Shirley Heinze Land Trust. As part of this project, TNC will also work with partners and the City of East Chicago to carry out a visioning project capturing ideas for future uses and recreational opportunities at Roxana Marsh, which has become an important birding hotspot.

With the help of many partners, including Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant and EPA, TNC also hosted more than 60 fourth graders at a Grand Calumet Stewardship Day in May 2023. During the event, students visited with scientists at hand-on stations such as macroinvertebrates, mussels, water quality, dune and swale habitat, birding and fish tissues.

Key 2023 Metrics:

- # Acres of Invasive Species Management: 900
- # Volunteers Engaged: 22
- Grant funding spent during 2023
 - Indiana Department of Natural Resources: \$353,517.69
 - National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Chi-Cal Rivers Fund: \$193,649.20

2024 Goals

- Goal for # Acres to Restore: 900
- Goal for # Acres of Invasive Species Management: 900
- Goal for # Acres to Plant: 6
- Goal for # Volunteers to engaged: 25
- Goal for # Trainings to Hold: 1
- Goal for # Educational Events to Hold: One: Grand Calumet River Stewardship Day
- Goal for #Outreach events centered around Roxana Marsh: 2

Grand Calumet River Area of Concern Remedial Action Plan

The purpose of the Areas of Concern Annex of the 2012 revision to the United States – Canada Great Lakes Water Agreement (GLWQA) is to “contribute to the achievement of the General and Specific Objectives of this Agreement by restoring beneficial uses that have become impaired due to local conditions at Areas of Concern (AOCs), through the development and implementation of Remedial Action Plans (RAPs)...” The Grand Calumet River / Indiana Harbor Ship Canal in northern Lake County is one of 43 designated Great Lakes AOCs under the GLWQA and the only one located in Indiana.

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM), with the aid of the Citizens Advisory for the Remediation of the Environment (CARE) Committee, developed the initial Grand Calumet River AOC Remedial Action Plan (RAP) in 1991, with additional stages developed in 1997, 1998, and 2012. Through the voluntary RAP framework, IDEM has worked with partners to develop and implement “Management Actions” – typically projects funded through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) – designed to address the underlying environmental problems leading to the 12 remaining Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs) currently impacting the AOC. To date, these Management Actions have consisted primarily of (1) cost-shared contaminated sediment remediation projects developed through the Great Lakes Legacy Act and (2) habitat restoration projects funded through the GLRI.

Partner Organizations Involved

IDEM collectively works with U.S. EPA (EPA) and numerous federal, state, and local partners to implement the RAP and conduct associated public outreach and engagement activities. Many of these organizations participate actively in the UWFP.

2023 Accomplishments

Federal, state, and local partners continued to plan and implement ecosystem restoration, sediment remediation, and outreach projects designed to address the 12 remaining beneficial use impairments (BUIs) applicable to the Grand Calumet River AOC during 2023.

Sediment Management Actions

In 2023, IDEM and other partners continued design and implementation of sediment management projects anticipated to result in restoration of six BUIs currently impacting the AOC. All project work occurred through the Great Lakes Legacy Act (GLLA) cost share framework, in which one or more nonfederal sponsors partner with the EPA, providing a minimum of 35 percent of the nonfederal match required to implement a contaminated sediment remediation project within an AOC. Projects were under development or implementation in 2023 to address portions of the Lake George and Grand Calumet branches of the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal (IHSC), the East Branch of the Grand Calumet River (EBGCR), and a small portion of the West Branch of the Grand Calumet River (WBGCR). GLLA projects also typically include aquatic habitat restoration elements. Highlights from 2023 are as follows:

- IDEM, East Chicago, EPA, and other partners worked to study and control potential contaminant inputs to the Grand Calumet River from the former East Chicago city dump, located at the confluence of the river and the IHSC. This will pave the way for a GLLA sediment remediation project to proceed on portions of the Grand Calumet River between Indianapolis Boulevard and Kennedy Avenue and portions of the IHSC south of Columbus Drive.
- On February 22, IDEM requested that EPA conduct an investigation of the easternmost five miles of the Grand Calumet River, Marquette Park Lagoons, and adjacent wetlands to determine the extent of any remaining or unaddressed sediment contamination that might adversely impact BUI removal. U.S. Steel subsequently signed a GLLA Partnership Agreement with EPA to conduct an investigation of sediment contamination within portions of its property within and around the westernmost Marquette Park Lagoon. Efforts during 2023 have revolved around developing the sampling plan for the joint EPA-U.S. Steel investigation, which is planned for 2024.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) conducted sampling in September 2023 to both: (1) inform the design of the second phase of the Lake George Canal East GLLA sediment remediation project and (2) evaluate the risk of recontamination of the IHSC posed by areas lying outside, but adjacent to, portions of the Congressionally authorized channel of the IHSC between Canal Street and Dickey Road.
- USACE's contractor, J.F. Brennan Company, Inc., completed the final sediment capping and aquatic habitat restoration elements as part of the Lake George Canal Middle GLLA sediment remediation project. Completion of this project marks another major step toward removing the applicable BUIs and delisting the AOC by reducing environmental exposure to oil, heavy metals, and other pollutants from portions of the Lake George Branch of the IHSC in Hammond and East Chicago. The East Chicago Waterway Management District (ECWMD), BP Products North America, Inc., and Atlantic Richfield Co. (a BP subsidiary) were the project nonfederal sponsors.

Habitat Management Actions

IDEM, the DNR, and their project partners continued to develop and implement the habitat management actions anticipated to lead to removal of two BUIs impacting the AOC during 2023. In spite of operational impacts due to staffing challenges, invasive species treatment continued on several hundred acres of dune and swale and wetlands areas within the AOC.

2023 highlights are as follows:

- DNR and the project partners (Lake County Parks and TNC) continued treatment of invasive plant species on approximately 394 acres of protected habitat within the Grand Calumet River AOC, with a particular focus on addressing a purple loosestrife infestation sparked by lower water levels over the last few years. This work was part of efforts needed to restore the *Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations* and *Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat* BUIs.

- DNR and other land managers worked to maintain the control of invasive species that was achieved through previous GLRI-funded project work on nearly 600 acres of protected habitat within the AOC.

BUI Removal Target Revisions and Additional Management Action List Development

IDEM, working with its partners, finalized revisions to the *Eutrophication and Undesirable Algae* and *Degradation of Phytoplankton and Zooplankton Populations* BUI restoration targets in December 2023, following a multi-year evaluation process undertaken with the advice of the Citizens Advisory for the Remediation of the Environment (CARE) Committee. The new targets more clearly reflect actions that will be taken through the RAP framework to improve the environment in the Grand Calumet River and IHSC.

In addition, IDEM and its partners drafted a Management Action List for the *Eutrophication and Undesirable Algae* and *Degradation of Phytoplankton and Zooplankton Populations* BUIs, submitting it to EPA for review in December. Two actions were proposed in the list: (1) augmenting the existing native mussel populations found in the Grand Calumet River and (2) partnering with area organizations to conduct an outreach campaign designed to encourage residents and businesses to reduce nonpoint source contributions of nutrients to AOC waterways.

Education, Outreach, and Engagement

IDEM and other partners worked to implement a number of education, outreach, and engagement efforts associated with the RAP Program. Since 2022, IDEM has benefited from a joint Environmental Stakeholder Inclusion (ESI) and Community Outreach Coordinator (COC) position, based in the agency's Northwest Regional Office, to assist in planning and implementing these activities. RAP-related activities of note conducted in 2023 included:

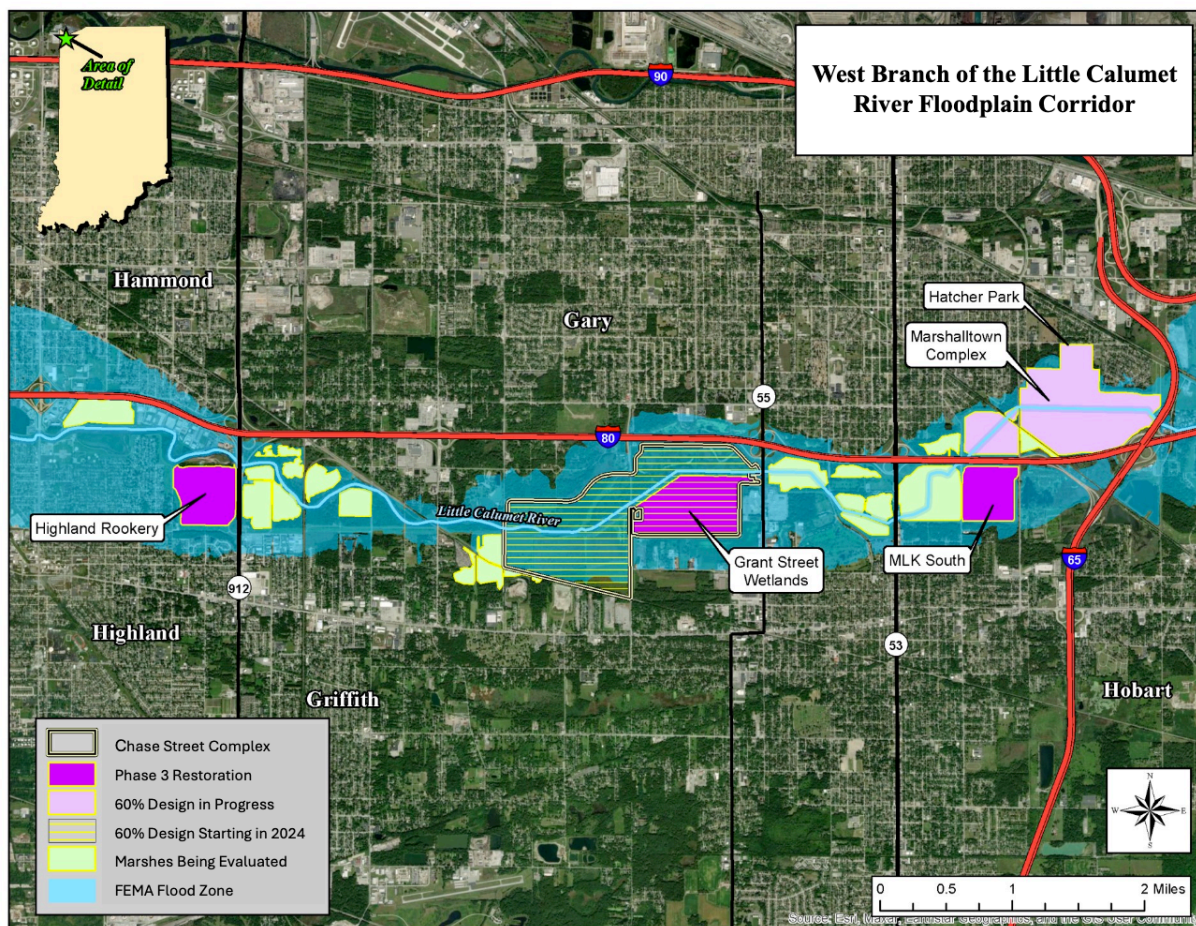
- On January 26, IDEM, in partnership with the Urban Waters Ambassador, convened an all-day Environmental Justice Retreat at Purdue University Northwest in Hammond to discuss community-focused and Environmental Justice related efforts taking place within the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern (AOC) and begin the process of identifying needs and gaps. Over 30 representatives of nonprofit organizations, state and local government, and other stakeholders attended. IDEM worked with partners during much of 2023 to develop some of the funding ideas suggested at the retreat.
- IDEM and partner organizations organized two open house-style events for the public focused on restoration efforts within the Grand Calumet River AOC during 2023. These were held in May at the Pastrick Branch of the East Chicago Library, and in September at the Gibson Woods Nature Center. Both events featured over 10 stations providing information on the AOC restoration and an opportunity to speak with project managers and other key staff from several agencies and organizations. The September event also included a guided hike of Gibson Woods Nature Preserve. For the fall event, IDEM enhanced its outreach on the event, most notably to include additional Spanish language content, flyers placed at public spaces around the AOC, outreach to several local radio stations and community calendars, and an interview with the Times of Northwest Indiana about the AOC and the event.

- IDEM participated in a number of community outreach events, at which Lake Michigan Program topics were discussed with the public. These included the annual Portage Fish-ON event, held at Woodland Park in February, Earth Day events at Krueger Memorial Hall (Michigan City) and the Porter County Expo Center (i.e., Northwest Indiana Earth Day) in April, the annual Grand Calumet Stewardship Day for East Chicago fourth graders at Seidner Dune and Swale Nature Preserve in May, the 2022 LaPorte County Fair in July, the Hammond National Night Out event held in August at the Wolf Lake Pavilion, and the East Chicago Monarch Festival at Kosciuszko Park in September.
- Jeremiah Hunt, one of IDEM Governor’s Summer Interns, worked with DNR and Lake County Parks to develop a short video highlighting the restoration at Roxana Marsh. The video is posted on [IDEM’s YouTube channel](#). The video will be included in an ArcGIS Story Map about the Grand Calumet River AOC expected to be published in 2024.

2024 Goals

| Goal | Implementation Lead | Partners |
|---|---|--|
| Continue to identify nonfederal cost share necessary to design and implement proposed Great Lakes Legacy Act contaminated sediment remediation projects. | Federal, state, and local agencies/organizations | Federal, state, and local agencies/organizations; CARE Committee |
| Complete evaluation and potential revision of the restoration targets for the <i>Restrictions on Dredging Activities</i> and <i>Beach Closings</i> BUIs. | IDEM | Federal, state, and local agencies/organizations; CARE Committee |
| Evaluate sampling and geotechnical data to determine next steps respect to the Lake George Canal West and the “Orphan Areas” regions of the IHSC. | EPA and USACE | Potential nonfederal sponsors and stakeholders |
| Complete the Lake George Canal East Phase 2 GLLA project remedial design. | EPA and USACE | Potential nonfederal sponsors and project stakeholders |
| Finalize Management Action Lists or alternative mechanisms designed to lead to the removal of the <i>Beach Closings</i> and <i>Degradation of Aesthetics</i> BUIs. | EPA and IDEM | Federal, state, and local agencies/organizations; CARE Committee |
| Complete source control measures at the Energy Cooperative Inc. (ECI) South Tank Farm property. | Atlantic Richfield Co. | Project stakeholders |
| Complete the remedial design for the Grand Calumet Junction Reaches GLLA Project. | East Chicago Waterway Management District; EPA | Project stakeholders |
| Complete a preliminary remedial design for the East Branch Phase 2 GLLA Project. | EPA | Gary Sanitary District; Project stakeholders |
| Conducting sampling in portions of the East Branch of the Grand Calumet River, Marquette Lagoons, and adjacent wetlands. | EPA; U.S. Steel | Project stakeholders |
| Continue AOC habitat restoration as part of the Dune and Swale Phase 2 Project. | DNR; Lake County Parks; The Nature Conservancy | IDEM; EPA |
| Update the design for the Pine Station Ponds habitat restoration project and begin bank stabilization. | DNR | IDEM; EPA |
| Continue to maintain habitats restored as part of previous AOC Habitat Management Action projects. | DNR; Lake County Parks; The Nature Conservancy; Shirley Heinze Land Trust | |
| Conduct BUI monitoring of AOC habitat restoration areas. | DNR; Lake County Parks; The Nature Conservancy; Shirley Heinze Land Trust | IDEM; EPA |
| Continue efforts to improve the accessibility and content of the IDEM Lake Michigan Programs Web Portal, including completing the AOC Story Map initiated in 2023. | IDEM | Various federal, state, and local agencies/organizations |
| Continue to develop and utilize strategic partnerships to better engage with community members. | IDEM | EPA; various federal, state, and local agencies/organizations |
| Conduct Lake Michigan Programs outreach at community events and implement separate informational events to inform and engage area community members on the AOC restoration. | IDEM | EPA; various federal, state, and local agencies/organizations |
| Continue to seek federal Environmental Justice funding in Northwest Indiana. | Federal, state, and local agencies/organizations | Federal, state, and local agencies/organizations |

West Branch of the Little Calumet River



Map of the “West Branch of the Little Calumet River Floodplain Corridor” provided courtesy of Harry Kuttner of The Wetlands Initiative and Daniel Suarez of Audubon Great Lakes.

Since 2018, The Little Calumet River Conservation Collaborative, a robust partnership of environmental nonprofits organizations and local agencies, has been working on a phased approach to wetland habitat restoration and developing a shared vision driven by community input within the approximately 2,000-acre West Branch corridor. The West Branch of the Little Calumet River flows east from Harts Ditch near Indianapolis Blvd. to where it joins Deep River at the beginning of Burn’s Ditch, just east of I-65 and north of I-80/94 in northwest Indiana. Our area of interest is an approximate 10-mile reach from Kennedy Ave. to I-65 which contains a mosaic of floodplain wetlands varying in quality and size, and falls within a levee system managed for the purpose of urban flood control. This large, protected greenspace within a densely populated area has significant potential to be restored for quality-of-life benefits for the surrounding environmental justice communities, increased biodiversity, and climate resilience.

One of the primary conservation targets of the Collaborative is to protect marsh birds by enhancing existing and creating new wetland habitat. Marsh birds are dependent on these wetland systems for breeding, nesting and raising young, while other bird species utilize these areas for feeding, resting, and protection from predators. A particular type of floodplain wetland

under development is hemimarsh, a historically significant element of the Calumet River wetland system. Because of the heavily altered hydrology throughout the region, most of the Little Calumet River floodplain wetlands no longer support hemimarsh habitat. Because of this, the Collaborative has developed an approach to land and water management that prioritizes establishing the conditions under which hemimarsh habitat can develop. This approach involves invasive species management, improvements to hydrology dynamics, and the establishment of appropriate native plant communities within each site.



Top Left: Partners gathered for a site visit to wetland restoration sites adjacent to the West Branch levee system. **Top Right:** Wetland restoration site north of the levee showing considerable progress. **Middle:** One of two concrete water control structures installed at wetlands along the West Branch of the Little Calumet River in 2023. The photo above shows the structure at Highland Rookery in Highland, Indiana. **Bottom Left:** Volunteers from NiSource and Students from Indiana University Northwest planted roughly 2,000 native wetland plant plugs at MLK South Wetland in Gary, Indiana on May, 2023. **Bottom Right:** Some of the 7,700 native plugs planted at MLK South by contractors in 2023. Species are dominated by aggressively-growing native sedges, which can compete with invasive species like Phragmites and Hybrid Cattail. **Photo Credits:** Harry Kuttner of The Wetlands Initiative and Victoria Wittig of the NWI UWFP.

Partner Organizations Involved

The Little Calumet River Conservation Collaborative includes: Audubon Great Lakes, the City of Gary, Lake County Parks & Recreation, Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission, NIPSCO, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and The Wetlands Initiative (TWI).

2023 Accomplishments

2023 was largely focused on completing Phase II of habitat restoration work at 3 high-priority parcels within the floodplain corridor: Highland Rookery, MLK South, and Grant Street

Wetlands. This work included additional rounds of invasive plant management, targeted plug planting to further native habitat reestablishment, and improving hydrologic functioning. 2023 also marked the start of a multi-year project at Hatcher Park and The Marshalltown Marsh Complex (Gary, IN) that involves the initial engineering and design for habitat restoration and potential re-meandering of the Little Calumet River across this 400-acre area. This restoration feasibility work is being enriched by a community-driven input process taking place over the course of 2-years being led by Audubon Great Lakes, which will drive the direction of public access and recreation opportunities within this natural area. Specific accomplishments include:

- Invasive species management took place across 190 acres at Highland Rookery, Grant Street, and MLK South wetlands, and Hatcher Park. Management was a combined effort of the full-time Lake County Parks restoration crew and environmental contractors.
- Roughly 2,000 native plugs were planted at MLK South wetland with the help of volunteers from NiSource and students from Indiana University Northwest.
- 7,700 native plugs were planted on the north end of MLK South through contractors.
- Roughly 2,500 plugs were planted at Highland Rookery wetland with the help of community volunteers.
- Marsh bird and vegetation monitoring at nearly 20 sites in Northwest Indiana was conducted, a crucial activity in determining the relative success of our partnership's restoration efforts.
- A project kick-off event was held at Hatcher Park on Earth Day with Rep. Ragen Hatcher and community members in attendance.
- Audubon's Wild Indigo program held three native plant giveaways at community-based events in Gary, in order to educate community members on the benefits of native species and to create links between local green spaces and individual backyards.
- At Highland Rookery and MLK South wetlands concrete water control structures were installed within the outlet channels of each site in order to provide flexibility in water level management. Moving forward, these structures will help establish conditions in which hemimarsch habitat can develop.
- Presentations were given to the Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission, City of Gary Parks leadership, the Urban League of Northwest Indiana's Federation of Block Clubs, Save the Dunes' Green Drinks program, and the Dunes-Calumet Audubon chapter.
- Key Metrics for 2023:
 - # Acres Restored = 436
 - # Acres of Invasive Species Management = 190 acres
 - # Acres Planted = 4 acres
 - # Volunteers Engaged = ~ 100 volunteer hours
 - # Trainings Held = 1
 - # Partner Events Held = 25
 - # Educational Events Held = 5
 - Grant funding spent during 2023
 - NFWF Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, 4/1/2021 – 12/31/2023, \$299,392

- NIPSCO Environmental Action Grant, 2023, \$4,375
- Coastal States Organization (NOAA), early 2023 – March 2024, (approximately) \$110,000
- NOAA Coastal Habitat Restoration and Resilience Grants for Underserved Communities, 2023, \$126,929
- The Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission, 2023, \$229,871
- Grant funding received during 2023
 - NFWF Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, 1/1/2024-6/30/26, \$399,227
 - NiSource Charitable Foundation, 2024, \$50,000
 - NOAA Coastal Habitat Restoration and Resilience Grants for Underserved Communities, 2024, \$180,321
 - NFWF/NOAA National Coastal Resilience Fund, 1/1/2024-12/31/2025, \$269,000

2024 Goals

- Begin Phase III of habitat restoration at Highland Rookery, Grant Street, and MLK S wetlands, focusing on expanding native planting and continuing invasive management to reestablish healthy wetland plant communities across 436 acres, paired with continued involvement of the surrounding communities via volunteer days and other community events.
- Begin managing water levels at Highland Rookery and MLK South wetlands for the benefit of hemimarsch habitat.
- Complete initial 60% engineering and design feasibility for The Marshalltown Marsh Complex and begin a community feedback and visioning process supported by NOAA Coastal Habitat Restoration and Resilience Grants for Underserved Communities.
- Begin detailed site assessment and 60% design for restoration of the roughly 800-acre Chase Street Complex (Gary, IN) supported by NFWF National Coastal Resilience Fund. The Collaborative will engage local community groups and stakeholders to integrate residents' feedback and vision for habitat and recreation opportunities into the design.
- Hold at least two community volunteer days at current restoration sites.
- Staff and volunteers will continue monitoring marsh birds and vegetation at over 20 sites in Northwest Indiana, using their presence or absence to indicate overall marsh health.
- Key Metrics for 2024:
 - Goal for # Acres to Restore = 436 acres of wetland habitat restored
 - Goal for # Acres of Invasive Species Management = 188 acres
 - Goal for # Acres to Plant = 100 acres
 - Goal for # Volunteers to engaged = 100 volunteer hours
 - Goal for # Trainings to Hold = 1 native plant training
 - Goal for # Partner Events to Hold = 25
 - Goal for # Educational Events to Hold = 5

Hobart Marsh and Deep River

Restoring The Duck Creek Tributary in Northwest Indiana

Delta Institute is restoring a key waterway in the Hobart Marsh and Deep River Conservation Area, that flows throughout the entire watershed and ultimately into Lake Michigan. Currently the waterway, the Duck Creek Tributary, overflows with pollution, sediment, and toxins—impacting the water quality downstream for many communities, including multiple that are designated Environmental Justice (EJ) communities.

Delta Institute is assisting the City of Hobart and the Hobart Sanitary District (HSD) to implement streambank stabilization and restoration, and to install a riparian buffer that improves permeability and infiltration along the Tributary corridor within two distinct phases of work. Due to these pressing needs, Delta Institute, in partnership with HSD, is undertaking riparian restoration of the Duck Creek Tributary, with key objectives including (1) streambank stabilization and restoration work and (2) the installation of a riparian buffer along two 0.2 mile segments and one 0.1 mile upstream segment of the Tributary, totaling 0.5 miles of restoration across two distinct phases of work.



Top Left: Implementation partners review and monitor the riparian restoration along the segment of the Duck Creek Tributary that was part of Phase 1 efforts in 2023. **Bottom Left:** 0.1 mile of riparian restoration along the segment of the Duck Creek Tributary that was part of Phase 1 efforts in 2023 that is reducing extensive sediment and nutrient loading in the Deep River – Portage Burns Watershed. **Right:** Vegetation growth one month post completion in Summer 2023 of 0.1 mile of riparian restoration along the segment of the Duck Creek Tributary that was part of Phase 1 efforts. **Photo Credits:** Melina Blanc of Delta Institute.

Partner Organizations Involved

This project was supported by the EPA's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative as well as the NFWF Chi-Cal Rivers Program, and the Dr. Scholl Foundation. Project partners include the City of Hobart and the Hobart Sanitary District (HSD), Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), Cardno (now Stantec) and Baxter and Woodman.

2023 Accomplishments

The first phase of the project was completed in Summer 2023, and exceeded key metrics—including capturing 50% more stormwater gallons and more than 20 times more sediment than previously forecasted via restoration on 3.7 acres of riparian corridor with 1,100 linear feet of perennial stream. Key 2023 metrics include:

- Flood Reduction and Stormwater Management: 127,996 gallons of stormwater storage added, captured and infiltrated per year; 161,172 square feet of green infrastructure added.
- Erosion control: 0.2083 miles streambank stabilized; 24,000 lbs. of sediment inputs avoided annually.
- Water Quality Improvement: 3,682.85 lbs. of phosphorus inputs avoided annually; 7,409 lbs. of nitrogen inputs avoided annually; 64% reduction of E-coli inputs avoided annually.
- Habitat Restoration: 0.2083 miles of instream and riparian habitat restored.

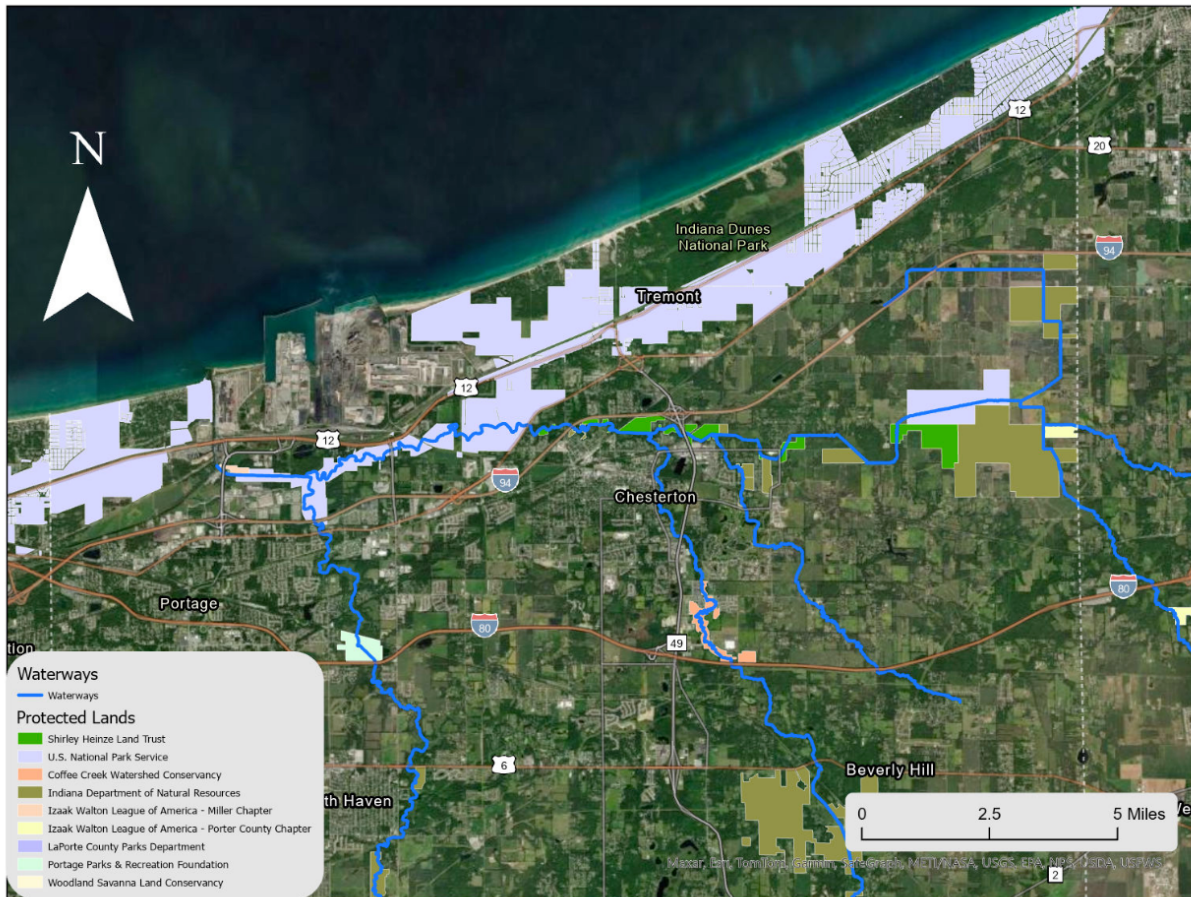
For the second phase of work ongoing from 2023-2025, Delta is providing project management and oversight, and is supporting procuring and retaining contractors that specialize in water resource engineering and wetland and streambank restoration. Second phase efforts increase stormwater capacity and infiltration, reduce nonpoint source pollution from entering the creek, prevent erosion and damage to surrounding infrastructure, and improve the instream and riparian habitat.

2024 Goals

Delta Institute and partners anticipate achieving the below goals in the second phase of work, ongoing until 2025 and including:

- Reduce runoff contamination (via removing 4,612lbs of Phosphorus and 16,564lbs of Nitrogen, annually) and improve water quality in the Tributary,
- Remove invasive species and restore natural habitat within the Tributary,
- Reduce erosion and sedimentation along the Tributary and provide a model for achieving sediment reductions for similar types of projects in the watershed,
- Improving in-stream and riparian habitat quality; and,
- Support climate resiliency in the City of Hobart by improving its infrastructure to manage overbank flooding and promote infiltration by improving the Tributary's capacity via 165,888 untreated stormwater gallons infiltrated annually.

East Branch of the Little Calumet River Conservation Corridor



Map of the “East Branch of the Little Calumet River Conservation Corridor” provided courtesy of Eric Bird of Shirley Heinze Land Trust.

Shirley Heinze Land Trust (SHLT) had a successful 2023 with land acquisitions, expanded programming, and stewardship/restoration in the East Branch of the Little Calumet River Conservation Corridor (EBLCRCC). The year marked the completion of the Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) 2019 grant project that completed follow up restoration work on approximately 90 acres in the corridor and initial invasive species treatments on approximately 75 acres around the Marquette Greenway in the Town of Burns Harbor. SHLT closed on approximately 195 acres within the corridor, plans on closing an additional 158 acres in 2024, and continues to pursue priority acquisitions. 2023 also marked the first year for water quality monitoring volunteer program with over 15 participants. Water quality, agriculture, and student experiences programs expanded in 2023 and will continue to expand in 2024 with new opportunities for students, farmers, volunteers, and landowners to engage with SHLT in making water quality improvements in the EBLCRCC.



Top Left: The photo shows two people installing jute erosion control blanket along the edge of muddy areas within a larger field with brown dormant plants and leafless trees in the background. **Top Middle:** Allison from SHLT training Chesterton High School students about water quality monitoring in the EBLCRCC. The photo shows a Allison holding a clipboard and pointing to a long white measuring stick lying on the ground. There are four other young people standing around her listening intently. **Top Right:** In this photo there is gravel and large stones where the erosion gully used to be. The large stones are a common practice to slow water and prevent erosion of soil into the stream that had occurred prior to stone installation. **Bottom Left:** Two adjacent photos. Left photo shows the paved Marquette Greenway multi use trail with adjacent open fields that are spotted with invasive autumn olive shrubs. The right photo shows a up close photo of the open fields after restoration. The right photo is absent of invasive autumn olive shrubs and shows a diversity of herbaceous native prairie plant species. **Bottom Middle:** Alicia from SHLT teaching Chesterton High School students about water quality monitoring in the EBLCRCC. The photo shows a woman in a field with tall grass and trees in the background. The woman is wearing rubber gloves and pointing to a test tube in her hand. There is a case and equipment on the ground. There are several young people standing around the woman appearing to listen and take notes. **Bottom Right:** Before erosion repair of area at Engquist where wetland drains into regulated drain. The photo shows mostly bare ground with an erosion gully scoured where water drains into an adjacent stream or ditch. The bare ground is lightly vegetated with small clumps of grass and soil has clearly moved down the gully into the stream. **Photo Credits:** Eric Bird of SHLT.

Partner Organizations Involved

Shirley Heinze Land Trust, Indiana Dunes National Park (IDNP), the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association (NWIPA), Save the Dunes, Porter County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), and many others.

2023 Accomplishments

The year 2023 marked the completion of a four-year strategic plan for Shirley Heinze Land Trust (SHLT). The plan had successfully developed new programs and created new staff positions that has led to the expansion and implementation of the organization's mission throughout SHLT's 6 county geography. The plan successfully progressed four overarching strategies, which included:

- Enhance the impact of SHLT's conservation areas.
- Engage partners to foster and advance conservation goals.
- Create programming that connects people with nature.
- Build the organization's capacity.

At the end of 2023 SHLT worked through an inclusive process to develop a consecutive four-year strategic plan with input from staff, the Board of Directors, the Advisory Council, and several stakeholder partners of SHLT. The new plan will be implemented between 2024-2027 and includes overarching strategies to:

- Maximize the impact of SHLT preserves by expanding and linking existing preserves and by making connections with waterways, trails, and parks.
- Expand stewardship capacity to serve St. Joseph, Starke, and Marshall counties.
- Advance the use of management practices that improve water quality and enhance stream corridors in both agricultural and urban areas by serving as a trusted resource to communities and partner organizations.
- Build connections with the residents of SHLT's conservation destination communities to advance conservation and stewardship.
- Serve as a trusted resource to local governments and other partners on conservation strategies and practices.

In addition to organization strategic planning, SHLT also works to support and advance the goals of partnership plans. The Conservation Action Planning in the Calumet Region document has supported grant applications, guided management decisions, and prioritized land acquisitions within the organization. SHLT continues to support new and ongoing strategic plans and conservation action plans developed in partnership with the Calumet Land Conservation Partnership, the Indiana Dunes Ecosystem Alliance, and the Calumet Heritage Partnership.

In 2023 SHLT worked in partnership with the NWI UWWF, the IDNP, Save the Dunes Conservation Fund, NIPSCO and NWIPA to host the first East Branch of the Little Calumet River Conservation Corridor Summit and Paddle event. The event hosted government agencies, municipalities, and non-profit conservation organizations to inclusively workshop strategic goals for the corridor. In 2024 SHLT continues to work with partners in the corridor to develop and implement a strategic plan for the EBLCRCC. The plan is developing and progressing strategies and tactics to advance policy, stewardship and conservation, marketing and ecotourism, and fundraising for the EBLCRCC.



Above: Group photo of partners that organized the East Branch Summit and Paddle.

In 2023 Shirley Heinze Land Trust successfully completed restoration projects funded by the NFWF's Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) grant program. The projects implemented invasive species management and restoration on approximately 165 acres in the EBLCRCC. This includes approximately 75 acres of initial invasive species treatments along the Marquette Greenway multi use trail system through the Town of Burns Harbor. Additionally, SHLT was a sub-

awardee on a NFWF Chi-Cal Rivers Fund grant that ends in the spring of 2024. This grant funding supported wetland enhancement, flood storage, and erosion control projects at SHLT's Dale B. Engquist nature preserve in the EBLCRCC. The NFWF SOGL and Chi-Cal Rivers Fund grant programs have been significant funding sources for restoration and public access improvements within the corridor for over a decade.

At the end of 2023 SHLT was awarded a new SOGL grant and a new Chi-Cal Rivers Fund grant. The SOGL 2023 grant will fund restoration and invasive species management in 5 of SHLT's 7 Conservation Areas including the EBLCRCC. The Chi-Cal Rivers Fund grant includes partners Save the Dunes Conservation Fund, NWIPS, IDNP, Humane Indiana Wildlife, and the Town of Burns Harbor. The project will restore approximately 20 acres of natural area and improve public access connecting river access at the EBLCRCC to the Marquette Greenway multi use trail in the Town of Burns Harbor.

SHLT worked to expand the organization's Conservation Program in 2023, growing the efforts to reach students, volunteers, farmers, and landowners surrounding the EBLCRCC. SHLT launched a volunteer water quality monitoring program with two volunteer training program events. The program successfully enlisted 15 volunteers to engage in water quality monitoring in the main corridor and tributaries. Additionally, the Conservation Program engaged Chesterton High School students with both in class and in field water quality monitoring experiences. The Conservation Program also engaged college level students with internships through the Student Experiences in Conservation program that helped support climate resiliency planning and land use data collection within the EBLCRCC watershed. Interns also supported outreach programs to engage students at Haven Hollow Park and the local YMCA about the importance of water quality and healthy local watersheds. Before the end of their internship with SHLT, Students enjoyed a paddle down the East Branch of the Little Calumet River Water Trail with support from the NWIPA.

The Conservation Program has engaged several partners in SHLT's efforts to initially implement its Water Quality and Agricultural Land Programs. In 2023 the Conservation Program partnered with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program and the Porter County Soil and Water Conservation District to host programs highlighting water quality issues, soil conservation, and agricultural best management practices that would support the EBLCRCC watershed.

2024 Goals

In 2024 SHLT will continue to expand the Conservation Program, Student Experiences in Conservation, Agricultural Land, and Water Quality Programs. SHLT has created a Conservation Program Director position to oversee the implementation of these programs. Funding from the Flora Richardson Foundation and NFWF Five Star and Urban Waters grant has helped to support internships that will expand SHLT's capacity to implement science and educational programs within the corridor. The funding from Flora Richardson Foundation will also support a Student Experiences Coordinator position that will further facilitate these programs and expand organizational capacity. Grant proposals have also been submitted to support a Farmland Coordinator position and implement additional programming to promote agricultural best

management practices for water quality and soil health. SHLT will also continue to expand the Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program with additional training opportunities and monitoring locations to engage more volunteers. Volunteers in the program learn basic skills about water quality monitoring, but also learn the importance of water quality monitoring and an appreciation for their local watersheds.

SHLT continues to seek priority acquisitions within the EBLCRCC watershed to support conservation goals, water quality, regenerative agriculture practices, and equitable public access. In 2023 SHLT closed on the 68.4-acre Swisher Carlson addition to the Dale B. Engquist nature preserve, bringing the total preserve up to 286.9 acres adjacent to Heron Rookery (NPS) and Reynolds Creek Game Bird Habitat (DNR). SHLT also acquired the Boo Rd. property of 127.3 acres adjacent to Marquette Greenway and Indiana Dunes National Park, effectively connecting the Marquette Greenway multi use trail, Little Calumet River Water Trail, and an SHLT nature preserve. In 2024 SHLT seeks to close on an additional 158 acres of farmland, wetlands, and forest near the Heron Rookery and Dale B. Engquist nature preserve. SHLT will continue to pursue land acquisition opportunities and funding for land acquisition within the EBLCRCC that form connectivity, preserve ecologically significant areas, preserve farmland, and improve water quality through wetland creation and regenerative agriculture practices.

Indiana Dunes Ecosystems

Indiana Dunes Ecosystem Alliance

The Indiana Dunes Ecosystem Alliance (IDEA) is a coalition of agencies and organizations formed to develop and implement collaborative conservation strategies for the lands and waters of the Indiana Dunes national and state parks and adjacent lands. IDEA provides a space for the managers of these lands to share updates, discuss emerging issues, and most importantly, collaborate on a shared set of goals.



Top Left: Oak Wilt workshop attended by IDEA partners in July 2023. **Top Middle:** NIPSCO ROW after restoration with GLRI funding. **Top Right:** Partner workday in Tolleston Dunes. **Bottom Left:** Calumet Land Conservation Partnership meeting to discuss funding strategies with the IDEA partners at Barker House. **Bottom Middle:** NIPSCO Right of Way (ROW) before restoration. **Bottom Right:** Partners from IDNP, SHLT, & Save the Dunes participate in a workday to remove autumn olive from Tolleston Dunes. **Photo Credits:** NIPSCO photos by Steve Barker; all other photos by Save the Dunes.

Partner Organizations Involved

Indiana Dunes National Park (IDNP), the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Shirley Heinze Land Trust (SHLT), Save the Dunes, the US Geological Survey (USGS), the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), NIPSCO, Audubon Great Lakes, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the NWI UWFP.

2023 Accomplishments

In 2023, IDEA held four meetings among partners at sites in this landscape, including at the National and State Parks and at Meadowbrook Nature Preserve. At these meetings, partners

discussed pollinator habitat connectivity, prescribed burns, and collaborate land management. Partners also developed content that will be used to create materials to highlight the value of restoration efforts at the Great Marsh.

Collaborative Projects in the IDEA Landscape

- Pollinator Habitat Connectivity
 - Funded by the GLRI, this multi-year project seeks to improve pollinator habitat across hundreds of acres in the Lake Michigan watershed, connecting high-quality natural areas by improving marginal lands that can serve as corridors for pollinators. The IDNP received GLRI funding for habitat restoration and research and Save the Dunes administers a cooperative agreement with the IDNP to enable habitat improvements on non-federal lands. A key partner in this project is NIPSCO. Funds are used to restore NIPSCO Rights-of-Ways (ROW) which run across all of NWI and serve as ideal connective corridors for pollinator movement.
 - 2023 Metrics
 - 111.5 acres treated/enhanced by non-federal partners (NIPSCO, SHLT)
- Invasive Species Management in Tolleston Dunes
 - Substantial restoration efforts have been completed in the Tolleston Dunes area on property owned and managed by SHLT, NIPSCO and IDNP. Partners have identified a shared vision of continued restoration and protection of this unique natural area across jurisdictional lines. Funded by the NFWF SOGL program, this project seeks to support key land managers in re-treatment of invasive species on 310 acres in the Tolleston Dunes area allowing for simultaneous and collaborative work, and leading to greater impact and sustainability across the landscape.
 - 2023 Metrics:
 - 260.5 total acres of invasive treatment by partners (NPS, NIPSCO, SHLT)
 - Of this number, 47 were wetland acres

2024 Goals

The IDEA partners have outlined the following goals for 2024:

- Hold four partner meetings
- Hold one educational event
- Coordinate prescribed burns on adjacent managed lands
- Produce materials to highlight the success and value of restoration work at the Great Marsh
- Build relationships with the new mayoral administration in Gary
- Strengthen collaboration and funding opportunities among partners

Student Conservation Association Ecological Restoration Crew

The Student Conservation Association (SCA) recruits, employs and train local young adults in conservation work skills. The primary focuses of the program is to support the ongoing land management efforts at the Indiana Dunes National Park (IDNP) in NWI, build the next generation of conservation leaders and promote lifelong stewardship of the environment.

Partner Organizations Involved

The SCA partners with the IDNP, National Park Foundation, and onX.

2023 Accomplishments

The SCA in partnership with the National Park Foundation, onX and IDNP was able to protect and manage over 45.75 acres of habitat. This team hosted a two-day service-day event for local SCA alumni and volunteers to connect with the national park and learn about the importance of the ongoing restoration and land management to protect our national parks ecosystem(s).

Key 2023 Metrics:

- # Acres of Invasive Species Management: 45.75 acres
- # Service Days/ Volunteer Events: 2
- # Volunteers Engaged: 17
- Grant funding received during 2023: \$105,000 from the National Park Foundation

2024 Goals

The SCA is looking to partner again with NPF & NPS to continue to provide seasonal employment opportunities for young people looking to start a career or gain more experience in conservation and provide opportunities to more alumni and volunteers to protect our public spaces and increase environmental stewardship.

Key 2024 Metrics:

- Goal for # Volunteers to Engage: 20
- Goal for # Acres of Invasive Species Management: 75
- Goal for # Educational Events to Hold: 1
- Goal for Amount of Grant Funding to Apply for in Order to Achieve Goals: \$150,000

Trail Creek Watershed Partnership

The Trail Creek Watershed is located in northern LaPorte County and drains into Lake Michigan at Michigan City's historic lighthouse and marina. The 37,000+ acre watershed is comprised of over 90 miles of rare cold-water fishery streams and tributaries. The watershed lies almost entirely within Michigan, Center, Coolspring, and Springfield Townships, representing 10% of LaPorte County. The Trail Creek Watershed Partnership (TCWP) is a collaboration of many public and private entities working to keep Trail Creek clean & cold.

Partner Organizations Involved

Michigan City Parks Department, Michigan City Sanitary District, Michigan City Common Council, Unity Foundation of LaPorte County, Indiana DNR Lake Michigan Coastal Program, IDEM, Pottawattamie Park, Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), Northwest Indiana Steelheaders, Save the Dunes, United States Geological Survey (USGS), EPA, Indiana Dunes National Park (IDNP), the NWI UWFP and others.

2023 Accomplishments

The TCWP met monthly throughout the year to focus on navigating changing leadership and explore opportunities to strengthen the partnership. This included exploring the possibility of applying for a 319 Non-Point Source Pollution Grant from IDEM to update the TCWP Watershed Management Plan. The TCWP held its annual Trail Creek Week in September as described in the Educational Initiatives section of this work plan. Sustaining the success of Trail Creek Week depends on the continued engagement of key partners to the TCWP including the Michigan City Parks and Recreation Department and the LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District.

2024 Goals

- Hold regular monthly TCWP partnership meetings
- Convene a monthly meeting of a 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Subcommittee to prepare and submit a Watershed Management Planning grant to IDEM
- Convene a monthly meeting of an Education & Outreach Subcommittee to plan and successfully hold Trail Creek Week and Creekness Stakes and other educational events in the watershed.

The CommuniTree Program

A direct outgrowth of discussions at NWI UWFP meetings, CommuniTree is an alliance of non-profits, government agencies, universities, and businesses working to create a more diverse, healthy, and sustainable urban forest across NWI. The initiative was spurred by the impact of Emerald Ash Borer on local forests and the importance of trees for stormwater management and community revitalization. The initiative has developed into the region's flagship community and urban forestry program that builds capacity for sustainable urban forestry and consistently increases the urban tree canopy in communities across Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties.



Since 2016, CommuniTree partners have:

- Planted over 10,786 Trees
- Engaged over 3,145 volunteers
- Trained 40+ youth in urban forestry
- Partnered with over 40 communities
- Held 23 trainings on forestry topics

Partners regularly involved include the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), the Student Conservation Association (SCA), the Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC), the Delta Institute, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Urban and Community Forestry Department, USFS, the Indiana Arborist Association (IAA) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), in addition to municipalities and county partners across the region. The NWI UWFP convenes a monthly partner meeting to improve coordination, communication and collaboration between CommuniTree partners.



Top Left: Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Community and Urban Forestry (CUF) Program Tree Stewardship Workshop at NIRPC. **Top Right:** 60 local East Chicago HS students and local volunteers celebrate Arbor Day with SCA by planting over 60 trees at community park to create a vegetative buffer to reduce noise and air pollution. **Bottom Left:** Indiana DNR CUF Tree Stewardship Workshop demonstration by instructor with participants gathered around. **Bottom Middle:** Indiana DNR CUF Tree Stewardship Workshop tree planting demonstration by SCA with participants gathered around. **Bottom Right:** SCA hosted a community planting in Hammond at Optimist Park with volunteers. **Photo Credits:** Jacob Roos of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Community and Urban Forestry Program and Leo Sawyers of the SCA.

Student Conservation Association Calumet Tree Conservation Corps

The Student Conservation Association (SCA) recruits, employs and train local young adults in community and urban forestry practices. The primary focuses of the program is to increase the tree canopy in NWI urban and industrial communities, build the next generation of conservation leaders and promote lifelong stewardship of the environment.

Partner Organizations Involved

The SCA partners with local municipalities including Hammond, Whiting, East Chicago, and Gary. As well as philanthropic partnerships with bp America, Whiting refinery, Cleveland-Cliffs and other local organizations including but not limited to Dunes Learning Center, Legacy Foundation, School City of Hammond, East Chicago High School, IDNP, USFS, Purdue University Northwest and other CommuniTree partners.

2023 Accomplishments

The Student Conservation Association with the help of its dedicated volunteers and community groups planted over 400 native and naturalized trees in Hammond, East Chicago and Whiting. They planted a vegetative buffer at Smith Park in East Chicago where 60 East Chicago High School students came out to honor a local high school educator and plant over 60 trees for Arbor Day. This team worked through the record setting hottest spring and summer to water the over 2,000 trees in SCA care. This team helped restore over 1 acre of habitat at Hoosier National Forest and IDNP.

Key 2023 Metrics:

- # Acres Restored: 1
- # Acres of Invasive Species Management: 1
- # Trees Planted: 420 Native and Naturalized Trees Planted
- # Volunteers Engaged: 145 Volunteers Engaged
- # Partner Events Held: 7 Tree Planting Events
- # Educational Events Held: 3 youth educational events/ joint workshops held
- Grant funding received during 2023:
 - \$10,000 from the Legacy Foundation
 - \$2,000 from Indiana American Water's Environmental Grant Program to support maintenance and planting efforts in Gary, IN.

2024 Goals

The SCA with the assistance of local community groups and volunteers endeavors to plant over 2,000 trees in partnership with Delta Institute, USFS, bp America – Whiting Refinery and Cleveland Cliffs. The SCA also plans to host at least 6 volunteer and educational opportunities for local residents and community members, which aim to engage more than 300 volunteers.

Key 2024 Metrics:

- Goal for # Trees to Plant: 2,540
- Goal for # Volunteers to engaged: 300
- Goal for # Trainings to Hold: 1
- Goal for # Educational Events to Hold: 6
- Goal for Amount of Grant Funding to apply for in order to achieve goals: \$300,000

Delta Institute

Through the “Expanding and Stewarding Regional Forest Canopy Via A Tree Planting Consortium In Northwest Indiana (TPC)” project, Delta Institute is working with municipal, business, and community partners in Lake County, Indiana to expand regional forest canopy acreage via an innovative multi-community approach to comprehensive canopy mapping; forest planning, installing 2,240+ trees, and expanding maintenance and capacity building.

These efforts are achieved via a collaborative TPC structure (a coalition public, private, community, and nonprofit partners) with foundational inclusive community engagement throughout the entire process. The TPC is designed to expand and leverage a strong public-private-nonprofit-community partnership to achieve state- and regional- planning goals.

TPC planting activities maximize canopy restoration and stormwater management; expand equity, habitat restoration, climate resilience, biodiversity, and connectivity; and promote community education and capacity building. Hundreds of trees will be planted in demonstrations sites. Planting activities will be done in collaboration with public and private owners. TPC streamlines data analysis and sharing to advance ongoing planning and implementation projects overseen by TPC partners. TPC provides educational resources such as a Best Management Practices (BMP) Toolkit for stormwater tree planting, maintenance, and stewardship and also implement expansive education/training events.

Partner Organizations Involved

This project is generously supported by a grant provided by the USFS Landscape Scale Restoration program, and the Dr. Scholl Foundation. Partners include Davey Resource Group, SCA, Boys and Girls Club, Lake County municipalities, and the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department.

2023 Accomplishments

Delta Institute has held several consortium meetings to share project updates, better understand participant’s needs and challenges, and promote upcoming events. Communities’ outreach has been developed and extensive outreach is done with public/private/non-profit stakeholders interested and/or working on the forestry sector in NWI. A BMP Toolkit is being drafted and will provide guidance on tree planting planning, planting, tree maintenance, creation of Tree City USA ordinance, and forestry program goal setting. A pruning-focused workshop in Deep River County Park was organized with NIRPC, other CommuniTree partners and Lake County Parks and Recreation Department. A modular survey was designed so that municipalities can adjust the

survey based on their needs. Demonstration sites were prioritized by project partners and detailed planting plans maps were created including the recommended number of trees, tree species, and exact locations plantings. Both restoration and landscape plantings are foreseen. A Request for Quote has been published to procure hundreds of trees for the demonstration planting sites and plant them in Spring 2024. Mapping plans were also created for tree plantings at both the Boys and Girls Clubs in East Chicago and Cedar Lake. Contact continues to be made with commercial landowners for potential match planting in the project area.

2024 Goals

- +2250 trees will be planted either at the demonstration sites or at the municipal level or with private owners.
- +200 – Volunteers opportunities will be advertised to support the SCA crew with tree planting
- At least three trainings will be done in 2024 – Davey Resource Group will provide the technical expertise for a mature tree maintenance training and a tree planting and maintenance training for TPC members and, a tree planting and maintenance training for private owners
- Several public events will be organized at the demonstration planting sites.
- Two educational workshops with trees planting will be organized with SCA and the Boys and Girls Clubs of East Chicago and Cedar Lake. These events will occur during the children's summer camp season together with tree plantings activities at the campuses.

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) is a founding CommuniTree partner. NIRPC applies for and administers federal funding from the USFS GLRI to provide a tree pass-through grant program to municipalities and community groups in NWI. NIRPC also hosts information about the CommuniTree program on their website [here](#).

NIRPC's CommuniTree Pass-through Grant Program provides 2-3" caliper trees to municipalities and community groups through an application process in the spring and fall of each year, depending on funding availability. Applications are reviewed by CommuniTree partners including the USFS, NWI UWFP, SCA and others. Applicants are required to detail the number and species of trees they are requesting, planting locations and maintenance plans. This includes a commitment to water and care for trees for the first three years following planting.

2023 Accomplishments

- Distributed 366 trees to communities through USFS GLRI-funded CommuniTree Pass-through Grant Program
- Held two Basic Tree Planting and Maintenance Workshops
- Held Pruning Young Trees Workshop with 25 attendees
- Hosted Indiana DNR Tree Steward Workshop

2024 Goals

- Help to host CommuniTree strategic planning and stakeholder input sessions
- Secure funding to continue CommuniTree pass-through grants program (USFS GLRI proposal pending)
- Secure funding to provide professional arborist services for local governments to inventory trees and plan for removal of dead or high-risk trees and replanting

Wildlife Habitat Council

The Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC) is a key CommuniTree partner focused on the following goals:

- Develop ecological and forestry partnerships between industry, community, conservation groups, and environmental agencies that result in long-term habitat restoration and management, with criteria towards adaptation to climate change threats; projects include urban forestry, ecological land reclamation, community gardens & natural playgrounds, community-based experience and training, conservation advocacy.
- Develop corporate capacity within companies and link community partners to increase employee engagement and community outreach in habitat restoration, land stewardship and education projects linked to Environmental, Sustainability, and Governance objectives and reporting.
- Develop habitat restoration, land reclamation, and urban forestry projects with industries in the Calumet Region with funding from companies such as BP, Cleveland Cliffs, Primary Energy, NiSource, Exelon, Cleveland Cliffs, others and the US Forest Service Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Chicago Community Trust, Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and US Environmental Protection Agency Office of Research and Development, USEPA Air and Radiation, and USEPA Superfund.

WHC is currently implementing two federally funded grants with an emphasis on advancing the WHC's community and urban forestry goals:

- The goals of the WHC's EPA ARP Enhanced Air Quality Monitoring Competitive Grant, titled: ["Collaborative Air Quality Monitoring in Industrial Communities of the Great Lakes Region,"](#) are to:
 - Collaborate with a wide variety of Great Lakes regional partners to monitor and improve air quality in highly impacted and under resourced neighborhoods of Detroit, MI, and the Calumet watershed of Chicago, Illinois, and NWI.
 - Expand community capacity and technology to monitor air quality, quantify the effects of green infrastructure and other nature-based solutions on local air quality, and engage high school and college students in data interpretation to facilitate long term transfer of skills from technical partners to interested residents.
 - \$460,000 in grant funds will be expended between 2022-2024 to complete this project.

- The goals of the WHC’s USFS Urban and Community Forestry, GLRI grant titled: “*Calumet Region Runoff Reduction Industries and Communities Working for Lake Michigan*,” are to:
 - Work between industries and communities in the Indiana and Illinois Coastal Lake Michigan Management Areas to restore degraded near shore and shoreline urban canopies to reduce non-point source pollution into Lake Michigan.
 - WHC and partners will plant 600 trees and 150 shrubs and reclaim 25 acres of Electrical/Gas ROWs in Environmental Justice neighborhoods. Total tree/shrub gallons rainfall intercepted is estimated at 127,500 gallons per year.
 - \$282,242 in grant funds will be expended between 2023-2025 to complete this project.

Indiana Arborist Association

With the support of the NWI UWFP Ambassador and the USFS, the Indiana Arborist Association (IAA) submitted a project proposal for a “Northwest Indiana Workforce Development and Registered Arborist Apprenticeship Program,” to the Indiana DNR Community and Urban Forestry Department’s Inflation Reduction Act Grant Program in December of 2023. The project received \$250,000 in funding in February of 2024 and is actively rolling out throughout 2024.

The objective of this project is to overcome the gap in a trained urban forestry workforce by establishing a U.S. Department of Labor Registered Arborist Apprenticeship (RAA) program that will train a minimum of five arborists per year recruited from under resourced communities in NWI who will acquire their on-the-job training with employers that serve these same communities. While efforts through partnerships such as CommuniTree have provided a robust tree planting program across NWI, sustaining and growing the urban forest in NWI will only be possible if a trained workforce is available.

Partner Organizations Involved

The IAA is working with the USFS, NWI UWFP, Purdue University Northwest, the Center of Workforce Innovations, and the Tree Care Industry Association, to design and launch the program. CommuniTree partners will provide support and guidance throughout the development and implementation of the project.

2024 Goals

The goals for 2024 include implementing the RAA will include hiring a program coordinator, recruiting employers, recruiting apprentices, and managing the first cohort of apprentice’s on-the-job learning and related technical instruction.

Educational Initiatives

Several partners across NWI engage in regular educational initiatives including signature programs developed and implemented by the Dunes Learning Center, TNC, the TCWP and the IDNP.



Top Left: Dunes Learning Center (DLC) Citizen Science Symposium (CSS) group photo with 480 students gathered in orange program t-shirts on a large sandy dune. **Top Right:** DLC CSS participants learning what macroinvertebrates tell us about water quality. **Middle Right:** Festival de la Monarca participants enjoying a monarch art craft at a table. **Bottom Left:** DLC students pulling invasive species during a stewardship day at Wolf Lake. **Bottom Middle:** Three young girls perform a cultural dance in traditional, colorful dresses during the Festival de la Monarca. **Bottom Right:** Children smiling with their arms outstretched to hold a monarch butterfly, with one monarch perched on a young girl's nose. **Photo Credits:** DLC photos by Michelle Benson and Festival de la Monarca photos by Susan Mihalo of The Nature Conservancy.

Dunes Learning Center

In 2023 the US Forest Service's Urban Connections Program, Cleveland Cliffs, the Lake Michigan Coastal Program/IDNR/NOAA, Foundations of East Chicago, Legacy Foundation, Flora Richardson Foundation, First Source Foundation and National Park Foundation provided grant support for the delivery of environmental education programs focused on the natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources of the Indiana Dunes and Lake Michigan.

Along with the development of new programs for 4th graders, high school students, teachers and families, these funds provided scholarships for school groups and summer campers from Title 1

eligible schools with a focus on urban areas impacted by environmental justice. These communities include East Chicago, Gary, Griffith, Hammond, Hobart, Lake Station, Merrillville, and Whiting in Lake County; Portage in Porter County; and LaPorte and Michigan City in LaPorte County.

School year programs align with State Academic Standards for grades K-12 and include a multi-part continuum of STEM-strong outreach programs plus immersive 3-day, 2-night study trips on campus. Summer camp options include six full weeks of classic overnight camp for ages 9-17 plus day camp options for budding naturalists.

Throughout the 2022-23 school year, the focus was on deeper connections for the stewards of tomorrow, including more opportunities for students to experience their very own National Park, Lake Michigan and the Lake Michigan watershed. In total, Dunes Learning Center delivered nearly 10,000 student experiences featuring place-based environmental education:

Students Engaged in School Year Outreach

Nature Navigators (3-5) 1346

Citizen Science (3-8) 480

Career Compass (9-12 pilot) 126

Watershed Education* (3-12) 3144

STEM Weeks* (K-6) 1588

**includes some students also participating in another program during the school year*

Students Engaged in School Year Onsite Programs

Frog in the Bog (4-8) 1991

Winter in the Dunes (3-6) 483

Other Overnight (6-12) 459

Day Programs 313

[Festival de la Monarca](#)

On Saturday, September 16, 2023, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and partners held the sixth annual Festival de la Monarca. The annual, family-friendly festival -- held at East Chicago's Kosciuszko Park -- raises awareness of the plight of the monarch butterfly and unites the surrounding community through educational activities, and Mexican music, art and dance.

The festival occurs by design at the time that the monarchs are migrating through northwest Indiana on their way to Mexico. "Northwest Indiana has a strong Mexican community presence, since many Mexicans moved to the area to work in the steel mills," said Joel Perez, project director for TNC's Southern Lake Michigan Rim office. "They came from Mexican states such as Michoacán, where the monarch overwinters. It has been part of the Michoacán culture even before colonization," he said.

A highlight from the 2023 Festival was also the release of monarch butterflies into the wild, much to the delight of attendees. The more than 600 festival-goers learned how to help the imperiled monarch by receiving pollinator plants, particularly milkweed, and by visiting partner

booths offered by Audubon Great Lakes, The Field Museum, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, the Wild Ones Chapter of Gibson Woods, the National Park Service, Save the Dunes, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, and the Dunes Learning Center.

New this year was The Monarch Experience, designed by TNC to introduce participants to various aspects of the monarch lifecycle through activities and art creations. Participants also visited the north end of nearby Roxana Marsh with a DNR official to see first-hand restoration efforts ongoing along the Grand Calumet River aimed at helping delist the Grand Calumet River as an Area of Concern.

The iconic monarch butterfly, beloved by many, is a perfect species to help people gain appreciation for nature and empower them to make a difference. The festival also enhances a sense of place and showcases cultural resources enjoyed through the generations. To learn more about the festival, click [here](#).

Trail Creek Week

Trail Creek Week is a five-day, place based environmental education event hosted by the Trail Creek Watershed Partnership. Trail Creek Week takes place on the banks of Trail Creek at Hansen Park. Participants in the program attend interactive stations facilitated by local professionals from the LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Michigan City Sanitary District, the Indiana DNR, the Barker Mansion and Civic Center, the NWIPA, the IDNP and many others.

Each year since 2012, Michigan City has played host to the Wilderness Inquiry Canoemobile during Trail Creek Week. This traveling fleet of 24 handmade wooden Voyageur replica canoes provides an opportunity for students to experience Trail Creek from a perspective not often seen. In 2023, 812 students participated from 15 elementary schools.

The Trail Creek Watershed Partnership hosts a “Creekness Stakes Canoe Race” fundraising event for Trail Creek Week. Since 2017, Creekness States has raised over \$12,000. The fifth annual race was held on Saturday, September 23, 2023 at Hansen Park in Michigan City. Teams raced down Trail Creek in giant 24’ Voyageur canoes in pursuit of the coveted “Creeky Cup” trophy. As in previous years, the 2023 event included live entertainment, food, raffles and a family paddle after the race.

Civic Voice Workshop

The National Park Service and the National Parks Conservation Association provided a training for undergraduate students on how to conserve and protect unique spaces by combining strong science with effective communication strategies. The interactive workshop uses the history of Indiana Dunes and the National Parks to illustrate how to:

- Craft a compelling message that combines facts, science and personal passion
- Persuade decision makers to support sound environmental policies
- Get involved in supporting your national parks and conservation in your area

- Advance your career

While focused on conservation, the skills developed in this training allow students to speak up for other causes and issues they care about. Students also meet local experts and learn about job and volunteer opportunities within the National Park Service and other local conservation groups.

Region-Wide Initiatives

Calumet Land Conservation Partnership

The Calumet Land Conservation Partnership (CLCP) is a collaborative partnership of ten well-established conservation organizations that work in the Calumet region spanning across the Indiana/Illinois border in the Lake Michigan watershed. Recently, the CLCP completed a [Conservation Action Plan \(CAP\) alignment report](#) which describes the alignment of nine conservation action plans in the Calumet region.

Partner Organizations Involved

Audubon Great Lakes, Calumet Collaborative, National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), the Metropolitan Planning Council, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), Openlands, Save the Dunes, Shirley Heinze Land Trust (SHLT), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Wetlands Initiative.

2023 Accomplishments

The CLCP met monthly throughout 2023 and was awarded a “Force of Nature Award” from the Chicago Wilderness Alliance for the Conservation Action Plan (CAP) alignment report. “Conservation partners,” including conservation organizations, land managers, planning organizations and other stakeholders contributed to the development of the fundamental aspects of the report including: a conservation vision, geographic scope, focus area map, conservation targets, human well-being targets, conservation threats and conservation strategies for nine conservation areas in the Calumet region.

2024 Goals

The CLCP has moved to a quarterly meeting format supplemented by two working groups. One is a “Cross-geography Working Group” that aims to identify funding and collaborative opportunities to support their work. In spring of 2024 the CLCP, led by Shirley Heinze Land Trust, submitted a proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s National Coastal Resilience Fund grant competition for a project titled, “Linking Conservation Areas and EJ Communities of the Calumet Region to Build Resilience (IL, IN).” The proposed project aims to build capacity through new partnerships with communities, community organizations, municipalities, and rights-of-way land managers. The project aims to create equitable plans that prioritize projects for future implementation to improve wildlife habitat, connectivity, and community resiliency. The second working group is focused on “Outreach and Education” with the aim to authentically engage regional communities and residents in conservation action planning efforts moving forward.

Climate Mitigation and Resiliency

NIRPC, in partnership with Earth Charter Indiana and Indiana University Environmental Resiliency Institute formed an initiative termed: “Climate Action Northwest Indiana,” (CAN). The goal of CAN is to develop a “Northwestern Indiana Regional Climate Action Framework” (Framework) to encourage long term action, engagement, and implementation of climate actions. The outcome of the Framework will include three volumes: 1. NWI Regional Climate Action Planning Framework, 2. NWI Regional Greenhouse Gas Inventory, and 3. NWI Regional Climate Resilience Plan. The Framework may then be utilized to guide local government planning and action around carbon emission reduction and climate resiliency planning, including through provision of technical support.

Partner Organizations Involved

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), Earth Charter Indiana, Indiana University Environmental Resiliency Institute

2023 Accomplishments

In 2023, CAN partners continued developing the Framework including incorporating relevant sections into NIRPC’s 2050+ plan. As a part of CAN, Earth Charter Indiana held the eighth annual Climate Summit at Indiana University Northwest on September 8, 2023. The Summit is a statewide conference specially designed for mayors, city, town and county leaders, and community partners to discuss how to prepare for the changing climate. The Summit was co-hosted by City of Gary, the City of Portage, NIRPC, the Michigan City Commission on Sustainability, and Indiana University Northwest.

2024 Goals

In 2024, NIRPC and partners will finalize the Framework and provide technical support to local governments toward developing and implementing local Climate Action Plans. Earth Charter Indiana will continue to support communities in establishing sustainability committees to advance local climate action.

On behalf of CAN, NIRPC will provide input relevant to NWI for inclusion in the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus (MMC) Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP) that is being developed for the Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area as well as through the Indiana CCAP through an EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant. The CCAP aims to:

- Identify solutions to allow the region to meet net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- Include a comprehensive review of all regional sources and sinks of emissions, develop detailed recommendations for advancing the goals of the Plan, and establish reduction targets and implementation milestones for regional stakeholders.

Related to CAN, NIRPC will also begin work on a transportation vulnerability assessment for NWI, the first step towards creating a transportation focused climate adaptation plan. Similarly,

NIRPC will also conduct outreach to and training for communities on the Sensible Tools Handbook+, which includes best practices for creating resilient and sustainable communities.

Lake Michigan Lakewide Action and Management Plan

The purpose of the Lakewide Management Annex of the 2012 revision to the United States – Canada Great Lakes Water Agreement (GLWQA) is to “contribute to the achievement of the General and Specific Objectives of this Agreement by assessing the status of each Great Lake, and by addressing environmental stressors that adversely affect the Waters of the Great Lakes which are best addressed on a lakewide scale through an ecosystem approach.” Through the Annex 2 framework, which is co-chaired by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), the two nations have agreed to a series of commitments. One of these is the development and implementation of Lakewide Action and Management Plans (LAMPs), five-year public strategic plans summarizing the state of each Great Lake with respect to the nine General Objectives of the GLWQA and setting forth planned management actions and priorities to protect, restore, and assess it. Like the GLWQA as a whole, each LAMP casts these priorities within a watershed-wide ecosystem framework.

As members of the Lake Michigan Partnership, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) and Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) assist U.S. EPA in developing and implementing the Lake Michigan LAMPs; identifying priorities for each five-year Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI) cycle; and conducting associated reporting, outreach, and engagement activities. IDEM and IDNR receive Management Assistance funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to support participation in these activities. This includes integration of many goals and activities taking place through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) framework with LAMP objectives.

Partner Organizations Involved

IDEM and IDNR collectively work with U.S. EPA and the other federal, state, local, and tribal members of the Lake Michigan Partnership on development and implementation of the Lake Michigan LAMP, identification of CSMI field year priorities, reporting, and outreach and engagement activities. The agencies work with various federal, state, local, tribal, and nongovernmental agencies and organizations, including many members of the Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Federal Partnership to accomplish LAMP-related activities in Indiana. There are approximately total 22 members of the Lake Michigan Partnership. A representative of the International Joint Commission (IJC) also attends as an observer.

2023 Accomplishments

LAMP Development

U.S. EPA continued to lead development of the 2020-2024 Lake Michigan LAMP during 2023. IDEM and IDNR, as Lake Michigan Partnership agencies, reviewed most recent version of the document in December 2023 and U.S. EPA is in the process of finalizing a draft for public comment. The 2020-2024 LAMP is expected to be available for public comment by spring 2024, with a final draft issued later in the year.

Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative Monitoring

The Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI) is an intensive binational research effort to provide lake and fishery managers with science and monitoring information to assist with management decisions on each Great Lake. Each Great Lake is on its own rotating five-year CSMI cycle, which consists of priority setting, planning, field year, data analysis, and report out phases. For the 2020 field year, which was extended into 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lake Michigan Partnership identified the following broad research priorities:

- Lower food web changes/declining open water nutrients impacts on prey fish (e.g., alewife), lake whitefish and salmon.
- Groundwater contributions to nutrient and chemical loads.
- Distributions of emerging contaminants in Lake Michigan waters/sediments.
- Impacts of land use changes on cycling of nutrients, carbon, and mercury and impacts to habitats for rare species/critical life stages.
- Identification of values of diverse Lake Michigan stakeholder groups to better understand how people use and value the lake and its resources.
- During 2023, Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant coordinated with researchers to summarize the research findings, including working to develop a summary white paper. Once completed, this and other summary products will be made publicly available.
- In July 2023, Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant organized a Lake Michigan Science Priorities workshop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which was sponsored by the International Joint Commission. Lake Michigan Partnership members, including IDEM, attended the workshop. Government and academic research scientists provided summaries of their findings from the 2020/2021 Lake Michigan Field Year and attendees participated in discussions of management priorities and information gaps. The Lake Michigan Partnership will utilize this information, in addition to the results of a research priorities survey released by Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, to develop the priorities for the 2025 Lake Michigan Field Year.

National Coastal Condition Assessment

The five-year National Coastal Condition Assessment (NCCA), a statistical survey of the condition of the nation's marine and Great Lakes coasts, was expected to be conducted in 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several sampling events were postponed until 2021. In 2022, scientists overseeing the NCCA effort began analyzing the data. Provisional (i.e., draft) data from the 2020-21 field season are publicly available at EPA's [National Aquatic Resource Surveys website](#). Final quality assured results and the National Coastal Condition Assessment report will be forthcoming.

Clean Marina and Clean Boater Program Implementation

DEM continued to work with its partners to develop and expand the Clean Marina and Clean Boater Programs. Both efforts are designed to reduce the risk of adverse environmental impacts from recreational boating. Some of the key initiatives undertaken in 2023 were:

- **Clean Marina/Clean Boater Application Forms.** IDEM completed a redesigned Clean Marina Checklist application, which includes new auto-population and auto-tabulation functionality, in early 2023. It was approved by the Indiana Archives and Records Administration and posted to the State Forms Catalog (forms.in.gov) for use by recreational boating facilities on April 10.
- **2023 Annual Clean Marina Roundtable.** IDEM organized the 2023 Annual Clean Marina Roundtable, which was held at the agency's Northwest Regional Office on June 7. Representatives of 15 recreational boating facilities attended the event virtually or in-person to hear presentations on regulatory matters, potential funding opportunities, invasive species prevention, and other topics.
- **New Designated Clean Marinas.** On October 16, the Miller Chapter of the Izaak Walton League and Doyme's Marine were officially designated as new Clean Marinas in the Lake Michigan basin. These two facilities represent the first new Clean Marinas in the basin since 2015.
- **Boat Shrink Wrap Disposal.** Lake Michigan basin Clean Marinas have long identified disposal of plastic boat shrink wrap used for winterization as a significant solid waste issue. IDEM worked with partners, including Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant to explore ways to address the issue. This included tracking a boat shrink wrap recycling pilot in the Chicago region sponsored by the Council of the Great Lakes Region.

2024 Goals

| Goal | Implementation Lead | Partners |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| Finalize and release the 2020-2024 Lake Michigan LAMP | EPA | Lake Michigan Partnership agencies/organizations |
| Begin development of the 2025-2029 Lake Michigan LAMP | EPA | Lake Michigan Partnership agencies/organizations |
| Develop the 2023 Lake Michigan LAMP Annual Report | EPA | Lake Michigan Partnership agencies/organizations |
| Develop an improved Indiana LAMP partnership to assist in developing and implementing priorities. | IDEM | State agencies and potentially other partners |
| Report out on the results from the 2020-2021 CSMI Lake Michigan field year | Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant | EPA |
| Complete the list of priorities for the 2025 CSMI Lake Michigan field year in early 2024. | EPA | Lake Michigan Partnership agencies/organizations |
| Expand the number of Clean Marinas and pledged Clean Boaters in the Lake Michigan basin. | IDEM | IDNR, Indiana BMV, Local marina owners & operators |
| Implement the W.G. Jackson educational boat tour in summer 2024. | IDEM | Hammond Port Authority, Michigan City Port Authority, Grand Valley State University |
| Deploy two Seabin in-water trash collection devices within the Lake Michigan basin. | IDEM | Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant and/or other partners |
| Conduct LAMP-related outreach at a minimum of four community events | IDEM | Various community partners |

Water Pollution Prevention Roundtable

Convened by Save the Dunes, the Water Pollution Prevention Roundtable brings non-profit and municipal partners together to exchange information and discuss emerging opportunities and challenges that relate to water pollution prevention from heavy industry on the shores of Lake Michigan.

Partner Organizations Involved

Save the Dunes, Environmental Law and Policy Center, Conservation Law Center, Town of Ogden Dunes, League of Women Voters Lake Michigan Region, Surfrider Foundation, National Parks Conservation Association, Hoosier Environmental Council and others.

2023 Accomplishments

- The Roundtable convened 6 times in 2023
 - More than 20 different organizations involved
- Working towards creating a “culture of pollution prevention”
- Partner meeting topics include:
 - Exchanging information and identifying emerging threats and opportunities
 - Developing a rapid response protocol for future emergency situations
 - Coordinating the analysis of and collective comments on 3 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit renewals and various pollution events
- Improved communications and relationships with Indiana Department of Environmental Management
- Strengthened communications with shoreline industries to encourage transparency and cooperation with the shoreline community

2024 Goals

- Hold bimonthly partner meetings
- Respond to emerging threats, developing action plans and working collaboratively with partners as situations unfold
- Provide access to resources for community members, such as facility factsheets and other informative documents
- Work towards educating stakeholders on the risks that NPDES permit violations pose and understanding what to do during rapidly unfolding emergency situations
- Continue to strengthen our relationship with IDEM to identify opportunities to bolster their capacity to ensure effective permitting, monitoring, compliance and accountability for nearshore facilities.
- Continue to strengthen our relationship with shoreline industries to ultimately maintain a “culture of pollution prevention” and encourage open communication in the community

Other Regional Initiatives

Chicago Wilderness Alliance Congress: Building a Resilient Region Through Partnerships

The [Chicago Wilderness Alliance](#) is a network of 300+ partner organizations across 37 counties in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin who work along the shores of Lake Michigan. Alliance partners include conservation organizations, businesses, universities, community-based organizations, cultural institutions, municipalities, government agencies, and others. Partners commit to a shared responsibility known as the Green Vision: to create and protect a vibrant, accessible region where people and nature thrive.

Since its founding in 1996, the Alliance has regularly held events called Congress; at these convenings, partners and other interested parties reaffirm their commitment to the shared vision, network and build new professional contacts, and discuss the region's most pressing environmental challenges.

Planning is now underway for [Congress 2024](#), to be held at Purdue University Northwest in Hammond, Indiana on November 15, 2024. More than 600 people will be invited to this one-day event, which will spotlight the Calumet region as model for collaborative conservation success.

The Marquette Greenway

The Marquette Greenway represents a 60-mile off-road, multi-use trail connecting south Chicago to New Buffalo, MI, and will represent an unparalleled experience, traversing through a geographically and socio-economically diverse landscape. The route will connect a population of 192,600 residents within a mile and a half of the trail (including 60,000 who are employed within the corridor), to recreational facilities, scenic landscapes, and economic opportunities. As of March 2024, 24 miles of the Greenway have been built, with another 22 miles fully funded. 13 miles are partially funded with only one mile remaining. The expected completion of the trail is slated for no later than 2030.

Appendices

Appendix 1: 2023 NWI UWFP Meetings & Communications

2023 Accomplishments

The NWI UWFP Ambassador compiled and distributed a regular e-newsletter plus special announcements as needed for a total of 12 mailings to a subscriber list of over 430. NWI UWFP meetings are held four times a year in January, April, July and October. In 2023, NWI UWFP meetings were held virtually in January and April; hybrid meetings were offered in July and October. Attendance averaged 45 participants.

The regular agenda for quarterly NWI UWFP meetings includes:

- Welcoming partners to the meeting and providing a brief overview of the NWI UWFP
- Round of introductions
- Partner updates and announcements
- Partner presentations

In 2023, the following partner presentations were featured:

Thursday, April 20, 2023 via Teams

- Partner Presentation: “Lake Michigan Coastal Hazards and Coastal Community Resilience,” Joe Exl & Jenny Orsburn, Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program
- Partner Presentation: “The Gem of Chicago Wilderness: Ecology and Restoration of the Greatest (a Great) Ecological Region of the U.S.,” Dr. Spencer Cortwright, Indiana University Northwest

Thursday, July 20, 2023 via Teams and in-person at the Indiana Dunes Visitor Center

- Partner Presentation: “Indiana Dunes Indigenous Cultural Trail Project,” Christine Livingston, Indiana Dunes Tourism
- Partner Presentation: “Our Once and Future Wetlands: Art Ecology and Engineering,” Lindsay Olson, Artist-in-Residence, The Wetlands Initiative

Thursday, October 19, 2023 via Teams and in-person at Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk

- Partner Presentation: “Biodiversity Goals and Pollinator Habitat on NIPSCO Right-of-Ways,” Steve Barker, Environmental Principal, NIPSCO
- Partner Presentation: “Application of Environmental DNA (eDNA) in Restoration and Conservation Ecology,” Murulee Byappanahalli, Research Microbiologist, US Geological Survey Great Lakes Science Center

The January 19, 2023 NWI UWFP meeting held on is reserved for partners to share their accomplishments and goals for the annual update of the NWI UWFP Work Plan.

An annual “Fed-to-Fed” meeting provides an opportunity for federal agency partners to provide updates on emerging funding opportunities, agency information, new opportunities for partner collaboration, emerging challenges and other relevant information. In 2023, the annual Fed-to-Fed meeting was held on February 9 via Teams.

2024 Goals

The NWI UWFP Ambassador will continue to facilitate monthly communications detailing NWI UWFP meeting information, partner announcements, funding opportunities and resources among partners through e-newsletters. Four quarterly partnership meetings will be held in addition to one annual Fed-to-Fed meeting. A continuing goal is to sustain and increase participation in quarterly meetings and to improve coordination, federal agency technical assistance and timely communication of funding opportunities, recent news and resources. Specific goals also include helping to secure federal funding for partners through support, facilitation, and collaborative proposal development. This includes coordinating and supporting the submission of:

1. a Nonpoint Source 319 grant to the Indiana Department of Environmental Management for the update of the Watershed Management Plan for the Trail Creek Watershed Partnership
2. a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation National Coastal Resilience Fund application for partners to the Calumet Land Conservation Partnership
3. Indiana Department of Natural Resources Community and Urban Forestry Grants for NWI municipal partners including the City of Gary and the City of Hammond
4. Other proposal development, support and technical assistance to NWI UWFP as opportunities arise

The NWI UWFP Ambassador also serves as a Steering Committee member of the Chicago Wilderness Alliance (CWA) with the goal of connecting NWI UWFP goals to opportunities available through the CWA. In 2023 this included securing Purdue University Northwest as the location for the 2024 CWA’s bi-annual Congress. The 2024 Congress will spotlight partner accomplishments from the Calumet region, including by partners in NWI.

The NWI UWFP Ambassador is often called on to support partner initiatives through meeting facilitation, coordination and technical support. In 2024, this will include convening monthly meetings for the CommuniTree Program, the Trail Creek Watershed Partnership, the Trail Creek Watershed Partnership’s 319 Grant Subcommittee, and the Calumet Land Conservation Partnership’s Cross-Geography Working Group. Other meeting facilitation and support may be provided for additional initiatives as requested by partners and approved by the NWI UWFP advisory team.

Appendix 2: 2024 NWI UWFP Partners

| Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Federal Partnership 2024 Partners | |
|---|--|
| <i>Federal Partners</i> | <i>State, Regional and Local Government Partners</i> |
| U.S. Department of Agriculture - U. S. Forest Service - Natural Resource Conservation Service U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration - National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration U.S. Department of Defense - Army Corps of Engineers U.S. Environmental Protection Agency U.S. Department of Homeland Security - Federal Emergency Management Agency U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development U.S. Department of Interior - Bureau of Reclamation - Fish and Wildlife Service - National Park Service - U.S. Geological Survey - National Weather Service | Indiana Department of Environmental Management Indiana Department of Health Indiana Department of Natural Resources - Community and Urban Forestry Department - Division of Nature Preserves - Division of Fish and Wildlife - Lake Michigan Coastal Program Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission Cities of East Chicago, Gary, Hammond, Hobart, Michigan City, Valparaiso Towns of Dune Acres, Beverly Shores, Chesterton, Highland, Lake Station, Munster, Merrillville, Ogden Dunes, Schererville Lake County Health Department Lake County Parks and Recreation Department Lake County Soil & Water Conservation District LaPorte County Health Department LaPorte County Parks and Recreation Department LaPorte County Soil & Water Conservation District Porter County Health Department Porter County Parks and Recreation Department Porter County Soil & Water Conservation District |
| <i>Non-profit, Private and Other Partners</i> | |
| Alliance for the Great Lakes Audubon Great Lakes Brown Faces Green Spaces Calumet Collaborative Cardno Resource Group Chicago Wilderness Alliance Cleveland-Cliffs Coffee Creek Watershed Conservancy Davey Resource Group Delta Institute Dunes Learning Center Earth Charter Indiana Gabis Arboretum of PNW Gary Advocates for Responsible Development Great Lakes Urban Forestry Highland Neighbors for Sustainability Hoosier Environmental Council Indiana Arborist Association Indiana Dunes Tourism Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant Indiana Geological Information Council Indiana University Northwest Izaak Walton League of America League of Women Voters Lake Michigan Region | Legacy Foundation National Parks Conservation Association Northwest Indiana Forum Northwest Indiana Paddling Association Northwest Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) Northwest Indiana Steelheaders Orbis Environmental Openlands Porter County Community Foundation Purdue University Purdue University Northwest Purdue Extension Save the Dunes Shirley Heinze Land Trust Stantec Student Conservation Association The Field Museum The Nature Conservancy The Wetlands Initiative Unity Foundation Wilderness Inquiry Wildlife Habitat Council Wild Ones Gibson Woods Chapter Wild Ones South Bend Chapter |

Appendix 3: 2024 NWI UWFP Work Plan Commonly Used Acronyms & Definitions

| Acronym | Definition |
|----------|--|
| AOC | Area of Concern |
| AGL | Audubon Great Lakes |
| BUI | Beneficial Use Impairment |
| CLCP | Calumet Land Conservation Partnership |
| CWA | Chicago Wilderness Alliance |
| CARE | Citizens Advisory for the Remediation of the Environment Committee |
| CUF | Community and Urban Forestry |
| COC | Community Outreach Coordinator |
| DLC | Dunes Learning Center |
| EBGCR | East Branch of the Grand Calumet River |
| EBLCRCC | East Branch of the Little Calumet River Conservation Corridor |
| ECWMD | East Chicago Waterway Management District |
| ESI | Environmental Stakeholder Inclusion |
| GLLA | Great Lakes Legacy Act |
| GLRI | Great Lakes Restoration Initiative |
| GLWQA | Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement |
| HSD | Hobart Sanitary District |
| IHSC | Indian Harbor Ship Canal |
| IAA | Indiana Arborist Association |
| IDEM | Indiana Department of Environmental Management |
| DNR | Indiana Department of Natural Resources |
| IDNP | Indiana Dunes National Park |
| NFWF | National Fish and Wildlife Foundation |
| NIPSCO | Northern Indiana Public Service Company |
| NWI | Northwest Indiana |
| NWI UWFP | Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Federal Partnership |
| NIRPC | Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission |
| RAP | Remedial Action Plan |
| SHLT | Shirley Heinze Land Trust |
| SWCD | Soil and Water Conservation District |
| SCA | Student Conservation Association |
| SOGI | Sustain Our Great Lakes |
| TNC | The Nature Conservancy |
| TWI | The Wetlands Initiative |
| TCWP | Trail Creek Watershed Partnership |
| USACE | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers |
| EPA | U.S. Environmental Protection Agency |
| USFS | U.S. Forest Service |
| USGS | U.S. Geological Survey |
| WBGCR | West Branch of the Grand Calumet River |
| WHC | Wildlife Habitat Council |

