

FOREWORD

The East Branch of the South Branch Kishwaukee River (including the Virgil and Union Ditches) Watershed Plan (Watershed Plan) is a product and a process composed of input from many individuals and organizations. The Watershed Plan is designed to create a collective impact on the water quality, the management of stormwater and the overall quality of life of those who live and work within or who are otherwise affected by this watershed.

Why a watershed planning focus in DeKalb and Kane Counties?

To understand the significance of watershed planning that includes sections of two counties-- an eastern section of DeKalb County and a western section of Kane County--it is helpful to understand how evolving interests and resources from a variety of sectors and perspectives coalesced into a watershed planning process.

Beginning in 2006 – the DeKalb County Community Foundation (DCCF) made a commitment to increase efforts in enhancing the quality of life in DeKalb County by developing its proactive CommunityWorks initiatives which includes the focus of land use along with early care and education and workforce development. Working with generous local donors, DCCF created 20 endowment funds that together annually generate more than \$60,000 in grants that are administered with oversight of a countywide steering committee.

During the next few years, the DCCF CommunityWorks Land Use Committee gathered extensive stakeholder input from municipalities, the DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission, and residents and decided to focus its efforts with the goal of “providing tools for key DeKalb County decision-makers so that future land use decisions are informed, wise and serve the common good”. Further discussions with municipalities helped DCCF to realize that water issues – stormwater management in particular, were issues that municipalities struggle with on a regular basis. As a result, DCCF issued three mini-grants to Genoa, Kingston and Maple Park to upgrade their stormwater ordinances. While working with these municipalities, DCCF and the municipalities learned in the process that they were limited in what they could do to manage stormwater, unless issues were addressed on a broader watershed level, since water doesn’t limit itself to jurisdictional boundaries.

About this same time the DeKalb County Stormwater Management Planning Committee (DCSMPC) was exploring its own options for managing stormwater within the county. Formed in 2005, the DCSMPC identified flooding and problems with stormwater as common and important concerns facing all communities and many farmers and residents in the rural areas of DeKalb County. As a result, the DCSMPC decided to take a watershed-based approach to stormwater assessment and planning, quickly recognizing that by addressing water quality issues, stormwater is also addressed. Recognizing the opportunities inherent in their unique and shared interests, the DCSMPC has been working together with the DCCF since 2009 to identify opportunities to address water quality, flooding and stormwater management issues throughout the county.

The watershed area studied through the EPA Watershed Planning grant was identified by the DCSMPC as a priority area within DeKalb County in need of a watershed plan. Given that a significant portion of the priority watershed extended into Kane County, both the DCSMPC and the

DCCF Land Use Steering Committee recognized the need to establish a process that included the creation of a Watershed Planning Steering Committee that would be comprised of individuals or organizations representative of both counties.

In December 2012, working together through the newly formed “Union Ditch/Virgil Ditch & East Branch Kishwaukee River Watershed Planning Steering Committee” (Watershed Planning Steering Committee), DCCF and DeKalb County government secured \$58,000 of Section 319(h) funding through the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency based upon a \$30,000 cash match from DCCF, plus in-kind support from entities in both Kane and DeKalb County and the DCCF.

Next Steps

The organizations that have been partners of the Union Ditch/Virgil Ditch & East Branch Kishwaukee River Watershed Planning Steering Committee have made a commitment to consider and implement to the extent possible, the prioritized recommendations that have evolved out of the watershed planning process. For example, the DCCF Land Use Committee will look to the prioritized recommendations of the Watershed Plan in considering its Land Use grantmaking decisions. Partners developed through this watershed planning process will prioritize project recommendations for collaborative grant seeking opportunities going forward.

The Watershed Plan is intended to provide watershed stakeholders – virtually anyone living in the watershed – with a framework and the direction needed to improve and/or protect critical areas and minimize the negative impacts of human activities to the critical green infrastructure that has been assessed and is alive and well within this studied section of the Kishwaukee River and its tributaries.

As development or the conversion of land to urban /suburban uses occurs, it is critical that stakeholders in the watershed take appropriate action to recognize, appreciate and protect our natural resources. This Watershed Plan is an advisory document designed for that purpose; to be used by all who live and work in this watershed, including residents, private landowners, municipal and county officials and their staff, developers, and not-for-profit land stewardship organizations.