

## Workgroup to Focus on Des Plaines River Water Quality



**M**unicipalities and agencies that operate wastewater treatment plants within the Des Plaines River watershed in Lake County are taking water quality issues into their own hands by forming

the Des Plaines River Watershed Workgroup (DRWW). The Workgroup is a voluntary, dues paying, membership organization that will monitor water chemistry, sediment, and biology within the Des Plaines River and its tributaries. The group will then develop projects to improve water quality based on scientific data.

Illinois EPA has expressed strong support and recommended the formation of the group to take on water quality problems at the local level. "I'm delighted!" was Marcia Willhite's, Chief of the Bureau of Water for the Illinois EPA, response to the new initiative.

The Workgroup membership consists of municipalities, wastewater treatment plant agencies, environmental groups including sub-watershed groups, consultants, and concerned citizens. The DRWW will meet quarterly, be governed by a set of bylaws and an elected executive board. Annual dues will be used to implement a comprehensive, watershed-wide monitoring program. The data collected for the monitoring program along with a watershed plan proposed for development, will be the basis for implementing water quality improvements by the group membership. The DRWW dues will be used as local match for a Section 319 grant to complete an umbrella watershed-based plan that will cover the entire Des Plaines River watershed within Lake County, integrating and updating existing sub-watershed plans, like the one completed for Bull Creek-Bull's Brook in 2009. The Des Plaines watershed plan will include an action plan for implementing projects watershed wide. SMC recently submitted a 319 grant application to Illinois EPA for this effort.

The DRWW is expected to provide:

- Water quality improvements in the Des Plaines River and its tributaries, such as Bull Creek and Bull's Brook;
- Local decision making regarding how to improve water quality in the most cost effective and efficient manner;
- Cost savings for agency members working together and making decisions locally, which in turn saves money for taxpayers;
- Shared monitoring effort examining water chemistry, sediment chemistry, fish, and aquatic bugs; and
- Education and outreach materials on pollutants of concern and ways to make a difference for municipalities, Homeowners Associations, and residents.

"Collectively, the Workgroup will reduce the financial burden on local municipalities and wastewater treatment plants to meet Illinois EPA water quality standards with the ultimate goal of improving the Des Plaines River and its tributaries," Andrea Cline, SMC Water Resources Professional.

The Des Plaines River is listed by the Illinois EPA as impaired for phosphorus, fecal coliform, chloride and other pollutants. These pollutants are a result of point and non-point source pollution. Point source pollution comes from wastewater discharged through a pipe from a factory or wastewater treatment plant. Nonpoint source pollution comes from a variety of sources such as lawns, roads, parking lots and roofs. Stormwater flowing over the land surface picks up pollutants such as excess nutrients (phosphorus), sediment, pesticides, fecal coliform and metals that are flushed off and carried to lakes, creeks and rivers when it rains.

Seventy percent of the water bodies that are assessed for water quality within the Des Plaines River watershed do not meet Illinois EPA's requirements to support aquatic life, swimming and other recreational activities, and fish consumption. The Workgroup's goal is to improve water quality so that these water bodies, such as the Des Plaines River and its tributaries, can be removed from the State's impaired waters list. The workgroup model to remedy water quality impairments is being successfully imple-

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mented within the Chicago region by the DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup, Fox River Study Group, and the Lower DuPage River Watershed Coalition.

For more information about the newly forming Des Plaines River Watershed Workgroup, attend the August 28<sup>th</sup> meeting of the watershed council or contact Andrea Cline, [acline@lakecountyil.gov](mailto:acline@lakecountyil.gov); (847) 377-7710. You can also watch SMC's website for more information.