

Des Plaines River Watershed Workgroup Factsheet

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Watershed Facts

- The Des Plaines River watershed covers over 130,000 acres or just over 200 square miles in Lake County Illinois.
- The Des Plaines River starts just west of Kenosha, Wisconsin and flows south through Racine and Kenosha Counties in Wisconsin, and then through Lake, Cook, and Will Counties in Illinois. The river then joins the Sanitary and Ship Canal in Lockport, flows west through Joliet, before converging with the Kankakee River to form the Illinois River. The Illinois River then flows into the Mississippi River, which flows south to the Gulf of Mexico.
- In Lake County, there are nine subwatersheds that make up the larger Des Plaines River watershed: North Mill Creek, Mill Creek, Newport Drainage Ditch, Bull Creek, Indian Creek, Buffalo Creek, Aptakisic Creek, Upper Des Plaines mainstem and Lower Des Plaines mainstem.
- The Des Plaines River watershed includes 33 Lake County municipalities, 12 townships, and two drainage districts. There are eight wastewater treatment plants that discharge approximately 80 million gallons a day of treated wastewater to the Des Plaines River in Lake County.
- The majority of the mainstem of the river is bordered by forest preserves and open space in Lake County.

Water Quality

- Within Lake County, portions of the Des Plaines River and its tributaries are impaired and are not meeting their designated uses under the federal Clean Water Act. Sections of the Des Plaines or its tributaries are listed as impaired for the following pollutants:
 - Arsenic
 - Chloride
 - Dissolved oxygen
 - Fecal coliform
 - Iron
 - Manganese
 - Methoxychlor
 - Mercury
 - Phosphorus
 - Polychlorinated biphenyls
 - Total Suspended Solids
- The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Illinois EPA) is in the process of creating Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), or “pollution diets”, for several stream segments and lakes, in the Des Plaines River watershed. A TMDL has been completed for part of the Des Plaines River and includes the Indian, Buffalo, Aptakisic subwatersheds and the lower Des Plaines mainstem in Lake County.
- Water pollution in the watershed is caused by a combination of point sources, a single source such as an outfall pipe conveying wastewater from an industrial plant or wastewater treatment facility, and non-point sources, runoff from the land, impervious surfaces, the drainage system, and deposition of air pollutants.



What is the Des Plaines River Watershed Workgroup?

- The Des Plaines River Watershed Workgroup (DRWW) is a voluntary, dues paying organization with a mission to bring together a diverse coalition of stakeholders to work together to improve water quality in the Des Plaines River and its tributaries in a cost effective manner to meet Illinois EPA requirements.
- Membership of the DRWW consists of communities, Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTWs), and other interested parties. The Workgroup consists of Agency members represented by NPDES permit holders, Associate members which are non-permit holding organizations, and individual members. Agency members will be represented by four votes, Associates members by two votes, and individual members by one vote.
- The DRWW will monitor water quality in the river and tributaries, prioritize and implement water quality improvement projects, and secure grant funding to offset the cost. Monitoring data will allow for a greater understanding of the water quality impairments, identify priority restoration activities, and track water quality improvements.
- The Workgroup is committed to an approach for attaining water quality standards that focuses on stakeholder involvement, monitoring, and locally led decision-making based on sound science.
- Both point and non-point sources are permitted by the Illinois EPA under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). Illinois EPA has been calling for more stringent limits of phosphorus discharge from POTWs that would necessitate costly plant upgrades. DRWW's method for improving water quality through prioritized project implementation based on monitoring will be more cost effective and efficient.
- The DRWW will be governed by bylaws, an elected Executive Board, and a voting, dues paying membership.
- Dues are based on Design Average Flow for POTWs and area within the watershed for MS4s. Dues are weighted so that POTWs will be responsible for two thirds of the annual budget and MS4s will be responsible for 1/3 of the annual budget.

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Benefits of DRWW membership - the bottom line

- Improved water quality is the end goal. Through local decision making, members will decide based on data collected how to best make water quality improvements.
- NPDES permit compliance: monitoring is required.
- Cost savings: through collaboration and combining efforts, DRWW can prevent duplication and accomplish more with less. The DRWW will address water quality issues in a cost effective manner.
- The initial work plan includes funds for a coordinated monitoring effort to accurately assess current conditions, and for administrative coordination including grant funding development. The annual budget is developed and adopted by the Executive Board.

