Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program 2006 Annual Report

A Partnership Between The USDA and the State of Illinois

December 2006

Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
(CREP)
Reporting Period: October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006

The Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a federal-state program that was created by a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Commodity Credit Corporation, and the State of Illinois in March 1998. Enrollments into this program began on May 1, 1998.

Since the beginning, the program has been extremely well received by the landowners in the targeted area. The MOA was re-authorized by all the parties on December 18, 2002 increasing the eligible acreage for enrollment to 232,000 acres.

CREP is being implemented through a federal-state-local partnership in the eligible area. The Agencies that are implementing the program are USDA - Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA - Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA), the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and the County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) along with the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD) in the eligible area. Other agencies and organizations provide guidance and assistance for the program through the CREP Advisory committee, which is a subcommittee of the State Technical Committee.

ENROLLMENT SUMMARY:

For the reporting period of October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006, the Federal CREP Program enrolled 47 new contracts. Total Federal enrollment figures from the inception of the program May 1, 1998 through September 30, 2006 are as follows:

Number of contracts	-	5,808
Average acres/contract	-	20
Total acres contracted	-	116,409.7
Average rental rate/acre	-	$160.00

Total State enrollments for the same period are as follows:

Number of Contracts	-	1224
Average acres/contract	-	59.33
Total acres enrolled	-	72,617.77
Average cost/acre	-	$677.84

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND PROGRAM STAFF:

Technical assistance in this program is made up of three types:
1. Assistance to the landowners during the enrollment process in determining eligibility, options, and selecting approved practices;
2. Assistance to landowners in implementing the approved CREP practice once the property is enrolled in the program; and
3. Assistance to the SWCD and landowners in the state requirements for execution of the state easement documents.

The Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Department of Natural Resources, and the County Soil and Water Conservation Districts provide primary technical assistance.

NON-FEDERAL CREP PROGRAM EXPENDITURES:

For this reporting period, the State obligated $776,502.22 for CREP expenditures, State cost-share expenses, monitoring costs, SWCD administrative fees and other associated enrollment and easement costs.

In addition, the IDNR has provided another $279,718.14 from its operational dollars to provide for CREP Administrative Expenses, bringing the total State dollars directly expended for CREP enrollments to $1,056,220.36.

State CREP Expenses
October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006

State Bonus Payment for State Option	$ 196,031.96
State Cost-Share Payments	$ 60,830.15
Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Administrative Fees	$ 14,242.38
DNR Administrative Expenses - Contract and Data Management, Technical Assistance, Reports, Training	$ 279,718.14
Add. Admin. Fees – Legal, Survey, filing costs	$ 23,040.14
Monitoring	$ 482,357.59
TOTAL	**$ 1,056,220.36**

The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Illinois CREP, as amended on December 18, 2002, details the formula to determine the overall costs of the program and to determine if the State has fulfilled its obligation to provide 20% of the total program costs. A summary of these enrollments follows: The total federal annual rent payment for the 47 CREP contracts (662.7 acres) is $110,218. The total annual incentive payment is $23,343. The total federal annual rent plus incentive and maintenance over the life of the 15-year contracts is $1,532,789. The estimated total federal cost-share is $155,330.

To determine the overall costs of CREP, the following costs are to be used: the total land retirement costs, which will include the CRP payments made by the Commodity Credit Corporation and the easement payments or the bonus payments made by Illinois; the total reimbursement for conservation practices paid by the CCC and Illinois; the total costs of the monitoring program; and the aggregate costs of technical assistance incurred by Illinois for implementing contracts and easements, and a reasonable estimate of the cost incurred by the State to develop conservation plans. Since the CRP contract payments will be annual payments, an 8 percent per annum discount rate (per the MOA) is normally used to compare the CRP Payments with the State Bonus payment.

Annual CRP Payments
Discounted at 8% for 15 Years

Payment Year	Annual Payment	Payment Year	Annual Payment
Year 1	$110,218	Year 9	$56,566
Year 2	$101,401	Year 10	$52,041
Year 3	$93,289	Year 11	$47,878
Year 4	$85,825	Year 12	$44,047
Year 5	$78,959	Year 13	$40524
Year 6	$72,643	Year 14	$37,282
Year 7	$66,831	Year 15	$34,299
Year 8	$61,485	TOTAL 15 Years	$983,288

Total Federal and State Expenditures
October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006

CRP Payments (Before Discount)	$ 1,532,789	CRP Payment (Discounted 8%)	$ 983,288
Federal Cost-Share	$ 155,330	Federal Cost-Share	$ 155,330
State Payments for CREP Enrollments	$ 370,795	State Payments for CREP Enrollments	$ 370,795
Total Program Costs	$ 2,049,914	Total Program Costs	$ 1,509,413

The total Federal and State costs of CREP from October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006 was $ 2,049,914. The State's share of costs for the reporting period was $370,795. Using the 8% per annum discount rate per the MOA, the Federal costs to be used for comparison to the state expenditures are $ 983,288.

Per the December 18, 2002 Agreement, the State must contribute 20% from the Program inception in May 1998. Total Program discounted costs for this period are $228,920,859. The State contributed $49,222,920, or 21.51% of the total program costs after using the discount rate. The State has met the requirement for incurring 20% of the total Program costs.

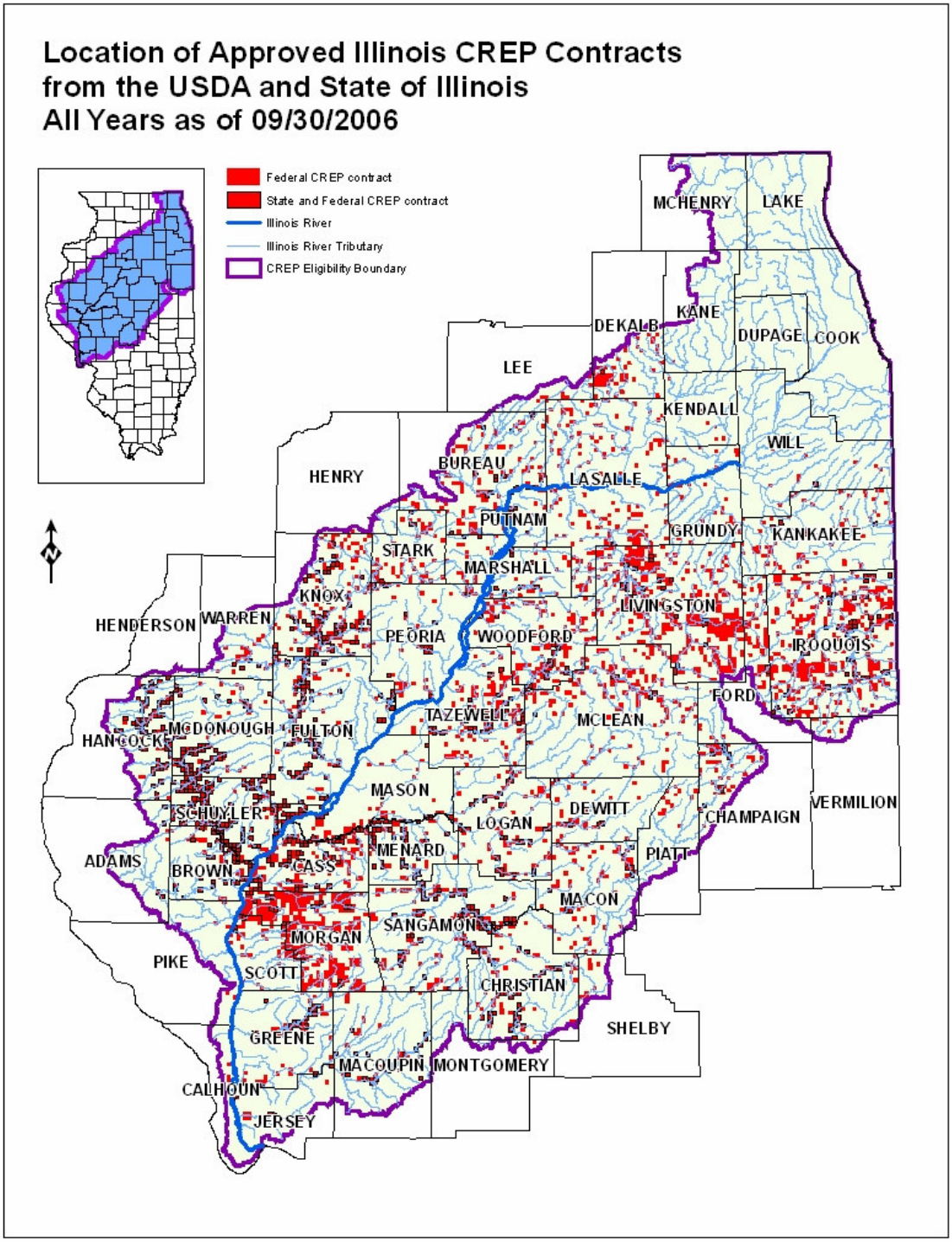
PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since the beginning of the CREP program on May 1, 1998 through the end of the current reporting period (September 30, 2006), CREP has restored and/or protected 110,011.4 acres of land either in existing native vegetation or in a previous CRP sign-up (See Map 1).

Of the 44,548.63 Federal acres enrolled in the State option, 7.6% selected the 15-year extension, 5.3% selected the 35-year extension, and 87.1% selected the permanent easement option. In Illinois, 38.3% of the 116,409.7 acres enrolling in the Federal CREP Program also enrolled in the State enhanced option.

The CREP program is restoring and protecting large stretches of floodplain corridors both on the main stem of the Illinois River and along the major tributaries. It is helping landowners, who have only been able to produce crops in the area once or twice in the last decade, to retire these lands from agricultural production.

MAP 1


Location of Approved Illinois CREP Contracts
from the USDA and State of Illinois
All Years as of 09/30/2006
Federal CREP contract
State and Federal CREP contract
Illinois River
Illinois River Tributary
CREP Eligibility Boundary
MCHENRY
LAKE
KANE
DEKALB
DUPAGE
COOK
LEE
KENDALL
WILL
HENRY
BUREAU
LASALLE
PUTNAM
GRUNDY
KANKAKEE
STARK
MARSHALL
KNOX
LIVINGSTON
HENDERSON
WARREN
PEORIA
WOODFORD
IROQUOIS
FORD
TAZEWELL
MCLEAN
HANCOCK
MCDONOUGH
FULTON
MASON
DEWITT
VERMILION
SCHUYLER
LOGAN
CHAMPAIGN
MENARD
ADAMS
BROWN
CASS
PIATT
MACON
SANGAMON
MORGAN
PIKE
SCOTT
CHRISTIAN
SHELBY
GREENE
MACOUPIN
MONTGOMERY
CALHOUN
JERSEY

OTHER PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

There are other state, federal and organizational programs that are contributing to the accomplishment of the goals of the Illinois CREP. The following highlights a few of the programs that contributed to achieving the goals the State has set for the Illinois River Basin. Any state or non-federal dollars that have been expended in these programs have not been included in the previous section that describe and list the direct state expenditures for CREP match.

STATE SUPPORTING AGENCIES

CREP and C2000: Another Great Partnership

Conservation 2000 (C2000) is a 14 year, multi-agency, $276 million comprehensive program designed to take a holistic, long-term approach to protecting and managing Illinois' natural resources. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources administers the Ecosystems Program and the Critical Trends Assessment Program (CTAP), a statewide ecosystem assessment and monitoring program.

The Ecosystems Program**,** a landmark program, is based upon an extensive network of local volunteers working to leverage technical and financial resources to promote ecosystem based management primarily on private lands. With 95% of the state in private ownership, the main objective of the program is to assist in the formation of public/private partnerships, *Ecosystem Partnerships*, to develop plans and projects on a watershed scale with an ecosystem-based approach. There are two key criteria established for the Ecosystems Program. One, that they must be voluntary, and based on incentives rather than government regulation; and, two, they must be broad-based, locally organized efforts, incorporating the interests and participation of local communities, and of private, public and corporate landowners.

Currently there are 41 Ecosystem Partnerships covering 85% of Illinois. Half of those partnerships are located in counties that comprise the Illinois River watershed; 21 to be exact. They are Big Rivers, Chicago Wilderness, DuPage River Coalition, Fox River, Headwaters, Heart of the Sangamon, Illinois River Bluffs, Kankakee River, Lake Calumet, LaMoine River, Lake Michigan Watershed, Lower Des Plaines, Lower Sangamon Valley, Mackinaw River, North Branch of the Chicago River, Prairie Parklands, Spoon River, Thorn Creek, Upper Des Plaines, Upper Salt Creek, and Vermillion Watershed Task Force.

Since 1996, the C2000 Program has awarded more than $12.8 million in grants to Ecosystem Partnerships in the Illinois River watershed basin for projects providing a variety of conservation practices. In FY06, 44 projects were funded to restore 4,335 acres of habitat. Projects consisted of restoring 74 riparian acres, 330 wetland acres, 1,437 prairie acres, 2,487 forest acres, and 10,150 feet of stream bank. In addition to habitat restoration, over 34,000 students, teachers, landowners, and local officials

were educated on the importance of biodiversity in the Illinois River watershed. For FY07, 17 of the 21 Ecosystem Partnerships located in the CREP area will benefit from C2000 grants to continue implementing projects for habitat restoration, education and outreach, research, and land acquisitions.

The C2000 Ecosystems Program also awards support grants to partnerships in the CREP area. Support grants are available to partnerships to assist them in functioning effectively. 2 Vision planning grants were awarded in FY 04 to the LaMoine River Ecosystem Partnership and the Vermilion Watershed Task Force Ecosystem Partnership. These watershed planning grants are completed and the partnerships are in the process of project implementation activities throughout the watershed.

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ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Illinois Department of Agriculture administers numerous soil and water conservation programs that produce environmental benefits in the Illinois River Watershed. During FY 06, the Conservation 2000 Program (C-2000), administered by IDOA, has allocated $1.4 million dollars to the 43 counties that have significant acreage in the Illinois River Watershed for cost-sharing the installation of upland soil and water conservation practices. Administered by the Department and County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), this program provides up to 60% of the cost of constructing conservation practices that reduce soil erosion and protect water quality.

Eligible conservation practices include terraces, grassed waterways, water and sediment control basins, grade stabilization structures and nutrient management planning. Although the FY 06 results are not yet available and no funding was provided in FY05, approximately 1330 individual conservation projects were completed with FY 04 funding of $2.2 million dollars. These projects are responsible for bringing soil loss to tolerable levels on over 20,894 acres of land. This translates into over 113,914 fewer tons of soil loss each year, or the equivalent of more than 5,000 semi truckloads of soil.

In FY 06, the State of Illinois, through the Department of Agriculture, provided over $3.3 million to 51 county SWCD offices in the Illinois River Watershed. These funds were used to provide financial support for SWCD offices, programs, and employees' salaries. Employees, in turn, provided technical and educational assistance to both urban and rural residents of the Illinois River Watershed. Their efforts are instrumental in delivering programs that reduce soil erosion and sedimentation and protect water quality.

In an effort to stabilize and restore severely eroding streambanks that would otherwise contribute sediment to the Illinois River and its tributaries, the Department of Agriculture, with assistance from SWCDs, is administering the Streambank Stabilization and Restoration Program (SSRP). The SSRP, funded under C-2000, provides funds to construct low-cost techniques to stabilize eroding streambanks. In FY 06, 13 individual streambank stabilization projects totaling $106,081 were constructed in 11 counties within the Illinois River Watershed. In all, over 5,485 linear feet of streambank have been stabilized to protect adjacent water bodies during the fiscal year.

Another environmentally oriented C-2000 Program administered by the Department of Agriculture is the Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program. Grants are made available to agencies, institutions, and individuals for conducting research, demonstration, or education programs or projects related to profitable and environmentally safe agriculture. In FY 06, over $202,660 was

awarded to 14 grant recipients with programs or projects in the Illinois River Watershed in such areas as alternative crops, nitrogen rate studies, riparian management, integrated pest management, and residue management.

In the spring of 2006, the Department, in cooperation with SWCDs, conducted the eleventh Transect Survey to assess the status of the adoption of conservation practices on a county and watershed basis. The survey conducted biennially, provides data that can be used by SWCDs, the Department and other agencies/organizations to identify trends and develop plans for targeting financial and technical resources to further reduce soil loss and to enhance water quality.

The 2006 Survey showed that SWCD staff assessed more than 24,000 fields while driving county routes to conduct the survey within the Illinois River Basin. The data shows sheet and rill erosion has been reduced to an average of about 2.3 tons per acre and about 90 percent of the fields surveyed are at or below the Tolerable Soil Loss to maintain productivity. The gains realized in reducing soil loss from sheet erosion in the basin are largely due to the increase in farmers' use of conservation tillage. Tillage systems like mulch-till or no-till are considered forms of conservation tillage because they leave more than 30 percent of the previous crop's residue on the soils surface after planting which protects the soil from erosion. The survey shows nearly half (48%) of the fields surveyed in the Illinois River Basin were farmed using conservation tillage methods. The data also documents the continuation of a trend which shows about 71 percent of soybean fields are farmed using conservation tillage.

Although significant gains have been made in the reduction of sheet and rill erosion, the survey shows an increase in erosion caused by water leaving fields in a concentrated flow, which is known as ephemeral erosion. The 2006 survey indicated that 24 percent of the fields surveyed were in need of a conservation practice to control this type of erosion that can cause gullies in fields.

The agricultural community has and will continue to employ environmental-friendly practices that will conserve and protect natural resources in the Illinois River Watershed for the long term.

ILLINOIS ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

One of the key missions of Illinois EPA is to monitor and protect the water resources of Illinois; these resources are relied upon for drinking water, fishing, transportation and recreational use and other environmental and economic benefits. One of the most dramatic improvements in water quality that Illinois EPA has documented has taken place on the Illinois River.

Illinois EPA has eight Ambient Water Quality Monitoring Sites on the main channel of the Illinois River. Water chemistry is collected at these sites nine times per year. There are also approximately 250 Intensive Basin Survey Sites in the Illinois River watershed. These sites are monitored "intensively" once every five years. The monitoring includes water chemistry, macroinvertebrates, fish, habitat, sediment and at some sites fish tissue contaminants are collected. This information is cooperatively collected with the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, a partnership that began many years ago and continues annually.

The monitoring shows that the Illinois River mainstream water quality has improved significantly since the passage of the Federal Clean Water Act in 1972. Early improvements were due primarily to point source controls, such as additional treatment requirements and limits on discharges from wastewater treatment plants. The majority

of water quality improvements over the last fifteen years have been from the implementation of nonpoint source management programs that reduce urban and agricultural runoff, programs such as CREP.

Illinois EPA believes that CREP has played a significant role in the improvement of the water quality in the Illinois River through the reduction of nonpoint source pollution. Seventy-three percent of the stream miles in the Illinois River Basin are currently rated as "good," compared with 62 percent statewide and 98 percent of the lakes in the Illinois River Basin are rated "good" or "fair" compared with 97 percent statewide.

In 2006, Illinois EPA continued to participate on the State CREP Advisory Committee and continued to provide financial assistance to local soil and water conservation district staff, so that they could assist landowners enroll in CREP. To date, more than $1,107,634 of 319 grant funds have been put towards implementation of the CREP program.

The benefits derived through this financial support is not only efficiency in the sign-up process to increase CREP enrollment, but it also allows the existing SWCD and NRCS staff to continue to implement the other conservation programs so desperately needed to improve water quality in the Illinois River watershed. Some of those Illinois EPA programs include:

Section 319: Since 1990, the IEPA has implemented over 200 Clean Water Act Section 319 projects within the Illinois River Watershed. The Agency receives these federal funds from USEPA to identify and administer projects to prevent nonpoint source pollution. These projects include watershed management planning; best management practices implementation and outreach efforts. Illinois EPA has dedicated over $40 million towards these projects to help improve the health of the Illinois River, its tributaries and ultimately the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico. Hundreds of conservation practices have been installed in the Illinois River watershed by dozens of our partners through the Section 319 program. Traditional practices such as terraces and waterways are dotting the landscape along with porous pavement parking lots, green roofs and miles of rural and urban stabilized streambank.

Since 1990, the 319 NPS program, through on the ground implementation can show load reduction decreases of: 199,928 lbs of nitrogen, 1,486,064 pounds of phosphorus, 1,111,231 pounds of total suspended solids, and 65,896 TONS of sediment per year, each and every year since the Best Management Practices were implemented as a result of 319 grant projects between IEPA and our local partners, in both the private and government sectors.

Pilot Construction Site Erosion Control Program: Illinois EPA has continued a program subcontracting with several soil and water conservation districts, the majority of them in the Illinois River Basin. Those partners include the DeWitt, Macon, McHenry and Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District Offices. District staff complete on-site NPDES Construction Stormwater Permit inspections and provide technical assistance in implementing best management practices to minimize runoff to nearby water bodies. This program is a natural fit for properly developing acreage that does not qualify for CREP.

Other Illinois EPA programs that complement CREP include:

Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL): USEPA has approved 45 completed TMDL evaluations and Illinois EPA is currently developing another 35 TMDLs and is in the early planning stages for an additional 186 TMDS in the Illinois River Basin. TMDLs are a tool that we use to restore impaired watersheds so that their waters will meet

Water Quality Standards and Full Use Support for those uses that the water bodies are designated. A TMDL looks at the identified pollutants and develops, through water quality sampling and modeling, the amount or load reductions needed for the water body to meet its designated uses.

Conservation 2000: A total of 25 lakes in the Illinois River watershed have been improved by intensive monitoring and/or implementation projects, and more than $5 million dollars of local, state and some federal monies have been used.

In conclusion, the Illinois River is a valuable resource that we are working hard to protect and restore. Illinois EPA will continue long-term monitoring of the river and its watershed and will continue to pursue funds to help implement CREP and other water quality restoration and protection projects and to work with citizen groups and local government and industry to continue the progress we have made.

FEDERAL PARTNERS

NRCS CONTRIBUTIONS TO ILLINOIS RIVER WATERSHED

EQIP

One of NRCS' primary conservation programs is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which is designed to provide cost-share funds to farmers who qualify for practices designed to improve or create conservation-minded operations or solutions. EQIP addresses practices for livestock operations, grazing operations or non-livestock operations, which covers most of Illinois' private landowners in need of conservation solutions. Last year, landowners in Illinois received $13.4 million to support conservation solutions that improved Illinois' soil and water resources.

Grazing School

NRCS staff and a number of partners conducted a number of Grazing School sessions across the state of Illinois to educate livestock producers about EQIP program options, forage species, forage fertility, weed control in pastures, system layout and design suggestions, grazing management, summer and winter annuals, stockpiling options, forage risks and animal disorders, meeting animal nutritional needs with forages, and economics of managed grazing. The day-long sessions were well-attended and producers appreciated the chance to gain knowledge they can put to good use. The improvement they make in their operations will make improvements in the land and the water across the state.

Streambank Solutions

In 2006, EQIP directed $1.5 million in the Spoon River Watershed to stream bank erosion repair. Funds targeted private landowner in the Cedar Creek Watershed, a subwatershed within the Spoon River, selected as a demonstration site for stream bank stabilization solutions. EQIP applications were also accepted for producers within the entire Spoon River watershed. For 2007, more special EQIP funds will target stream bank erosion in the Spoon River Watershed.

EQIP's Newest Forestry Efforts

For 2007 NRCS added an EQIP Incentive for Forestry. The primary focus of the Forest Management Plans special project incentive is to help applicants develop management plans and protect their forested acres. Eligible applicants will receive $400 to help hire a professional forester who will visit the property, inventory the site, and write out a complete woodland management plan. This Special Projects opportunity through

Illinois' EQIP can help landowners manage their woodland resources better and obtain a quality management plan that is also approved by the State of Illinois. With more acres of Illinois forest resources well planned for and managed, the health and value of our forest resources will be greatly improved.

Wetland Reserve Program
NRCS' Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) continues to create and restore quality wetland habitats in the Illinois River Watershed and across the state. The particular success of fiscal year 2006 includes Illinois NRCS' largest WRP easement, the Emiquon wetland, a 6,400 acre area located in Fulton County. The property, owned by The Nature Conservancy, will ultimately become a naturalized haven and habitat for wetland flora and fauna and enjoyed by nature and naturalists for years to come. At present, the TNC is developing a management plan for the area. The environmental benefits this large wetland area will offer the watershed and the state—improvements in wetland habitats, species biodiversity, water quality, and erosion reduction—will be significant.

Conservation Security Program (CSP)
The Upper Sangamon River Watershed is located within the Illinois River Watershed and includes portions of: Ford, Champaign, Dewitt, Piatt, Macon, Christian, Sangamon, Moultrie, McLean, Logan, and Shelby Counties. The Upper Sangamon was selected as the 2006 NRCS CSP Watershed for Illinois. Sixty-five participants were recognized and rewarded for their excellent stewardship practices that serve to protect the natural resources on their land. All 65 participants clearly demonstrated long-term commitment to conservation tillage, nutrient management, water quality, soil quality and management, all of which contribute to conservation of the natural resource base of the state.

For more information on NRCS conservation programs, please visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE/PARTNERS FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) endorses and supports the Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). CREP continues to provide opportunities on a landscape scale for restoration, enhancement, and preservation natural habitats on private land. The Service recognizes that CREP has produced significant benefits for Federal Trust Resources through the expansion of habitats important to migratory birds as well as federally listed threatened and endangered species. Equally significant are benefits to National Wildlife Refuge lands located on the Illinois River which benefit from improved water quality both directly and indirectly.

The Service's primary contribution to the Illinois CREP is through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners). Partners staff participated on the CREP Advisory Committee, providing technical and policy assistance input to the program. At the local level, Partners personnel coordinate with local NRCS, SWCD, and Illinois DNR staff as necessary on individual or groups of projects. CREP presents a host of opportunities for habitat restoration, enhancement, and preservation on private land that fulfills the objectives of a broad coalition of Federal, State, local, and non-government conservation organizations.

Within the Illinois River Watershed, Partners projects compliment CREP and other habitat programs. The Partners program provides a tool for restoration and enhancement of habitats on private lands that may not be eligible for other landowner assistance programs. Partners coordinators also review the full range of landowner

assistance programs with each potential cooperator and refer landowners to CREP and other programs that best meet their habitat development and economic goals.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL PARTICIPANTS

ASSOCIATION OF ILLINOIS SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

The AISWCD, in partnership with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, helps with administration of the CREP program, by providing funding to SWCDs through a 319 grant. The grant is given to certain SWCDs who express the need of additional support in their District office to complete CREP related duties. Currently there are 9 CREP Assistants in 18 Soil and water conservation districts enrolled in the CREP Assistant Funding program.

The AISWCD serves on the CREP Advisory Committee.

ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU

Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) continues to publicize and promote the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). In 2006, articles in FarmWeek provided information about aspects of the program. IFB also used our statewide radio network to highlight details of the program.

Information on CREP was sent directly to county Farm Bureaus® (CFB) via e-mail and through our county Farm Bureau mail system. An Illinois Farm Bureau statewide workshop in 2006 on voluntary programs for farmers included information about CREP and other conservation programs through various agencies. Details about CREP were also provided to a statewide committee comprised of other agricultural organizations.

Illinois Farm Bureau continues to provide input about CREP through various groups and committees and also continues to voice support for the program. CREP is another tool producers can use that provides cost-share incentives and technical assistance for establishing long-term, resource-conserving practices and is a positive program in Illinois.

SUCCESS STORY

Bellrose Farms

In 1953, Frank Bellrose, an outdoorsman and world-renowned expert on waterfowl, traded a treeless farm in LaSalle County for a 386-acre farm along Sugar Creek in Logan County with his brother. Sugar Creek was an area Frank had always been interested in because of its wildlife, in particular its abundance of Bluebirds.

In 1980, Frank's son, Ron, and his wife moved to Logan County to take over management of the farm. Ron's objective for the farm represented his father's wishes and in his own words, he wanted to "be a good environmental shepherd of the land while making some money". He went on to say that "this farm was always in my soul". Ron Bellrose and his wife, Sandra, were among the first in Logan County to implement no-till practices, and it did not take long for them to devote their time and efforts toward long-term conservation of the land they had set out to manage.

This property is historically unique and the stretch of Sugar Creek running through it is of exceptionally high quality. The Bellrose property is part of a 12-mile section of Sugar Creek that is designated as one of Illinois' Natural Areas. It is known for 22 species of mussels, far exceeding the minimum required for this type of designation. With a Nature Preserve Dedication and 2 CREP Permanent Easements, the entire property is now under permanent protection.

The on-site work plans include a LIP (Landowner Incentive Program) project to remove invasive species in the 100 acres of upland forest, and a CREP Enhancement project to create a 5-acre wetland in the riparian buffer zone which will provide brood area for wood ducks as well as critical habitat for a number of other species listed in the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan. There is a second CREP Enhancement project for in-stream restoration to enhance the area for mussel diversity and smallmouth bass. The second CREP Permanent Easement, currently underway, will reforest previous pasture and permanently protect 170+ acres in native grasses from older CRP sign-ups.

This is a success story in many respects and is a wonderful example of how staff from many different agencies and disciplines have come together to restore a critical site and meet the landowners' objectives. In closing, Ron said, "We feel like we have been pretty lucky and are excited to get the help we needed to achieve our goals".

LaSalle County Boltonia decurrens site CREP summary – Todd Bittner, Wildlife Biologist

In the 2000 CREP Program in LaSalle County, forty-four (44) acres were enrolled in the CP23 wetland restoration practice. The goal of the plan was to allow the field to naturally re-vegetate, and be managed for Boltonia decurrens (decurrent false aster), a federally threatened plant

species endemic to the Illinois River floodplain. This field is adjacent to 50 acres of non-cropped wetlands and floodplain forest. In 2000, the year before the site was enrolled in CREP, the population increased from an estimated 7000 plants to over 1,000,000 in 2006. The majority of the plants are present outside the CREP enrolled acres, but there are presently over 100,000 within the CREP acreage.

Decurrent false aster is known to have significant swings in population numbers, depending on cyclical, beneficial disturbance regimes. The large increase in plant numbers at this site is likely a combination of beneficial, seasonal floods and increases in available habitat from CREP. However, large population increases can disappear if appropriate, beneficial disturbances do not regularly occur, and habitats are overgrown with herbaceous and woody competitors.

The only management allowed at the time of this site's enrollment to write into the conservation plan -- schedule of operations was annual dormant season mowing (Nov - March). From field observations in September, 2006, it does not appear that this management is consistently being conducted, and brush and tree encroachment is occurring.

Since the initial enrollment, mid-contract management has been approved as an allowable management practice. SWCD, FSA, and I are presently looking into amending the schedule to allow for this management technique. Presently, we would recommend a post October disking every three years, with dormant season mowing in the intervening years for brush control.

Another significant threat to the population is the invasive exotic Phragmities australis (common reed). Large patches of this species are present at this site both within and outside the CREP enrollment. This species requires chemical treatment to be controlled. Common reed is a clonal species that reaches heights of over 15 feet and can crowd out and extirpate the decurrent false aster. This species requires active management to control, which is presently not being done at this site either.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS OF THE CREP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Setbacks from past reductions in CREP appropriations have had a significant impact on not only enrollment, but the loss of momentum that had been achieved with the State's successful achievement of its' original goal, and the USDA approval of expanded acreage to 232,000 acres. This has resulted in the development of new fiscal strategies.

ACTIONS ON PAST FUTURE PLANS

1. Taking into consideration the source of Illinois CREP Funding, establish a long-term staffing and monitoring strategy to assure adequate staff and support for the proper administration of the program. (*Results: Staff has been increased to a level to manage the CREP Program at its current level. Expansion of the Program will require further analysis.*)

2. Hold training and workshops, as needed, for all field staff and SWCD's as a means of updating new and existing staff on issues, and refinement of the enrollment process. Update and keep the training manual up-to-date for field use. (*Results: Training workshops are being held in November and December 2006 and January, 2007 to update new SWCD Staff and provide updated training manuals as part of the re-opening of the program.*)

3. Continue to pursue long-term additional staff to assist all SWCDs in the administration of the CREP program at the County level. Efforts to work with IEPA and other supporters need to continue and expand. (*Results: Meetings with IEPA have resulted in continued financial support to select SWCDs while consideration of long-term funding support.*)

FUTURE PLANS

- Additional funding will continue to be sought for dedicated full-time staff to provide technical assistance to landowners in the following agencies: NRCS, DNR, and SWCDs.

- Efforts will be made to provide mid-management habitat assistance to achieve Wildlife Action Plan objectives while complying with CREP objectives.

- Continue Efforts to secure a dedicated funding source for State CREP funds.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE ILLINOIS RIVER

- **Impact of Conservation Practices on Sediment and Nutrient Delivery to the Illinois River**

- **CREP and Watershed Management Education in Illinois**

Impact of Conservation Practices on Sediment and Nutrient Delivery to the Illinois River

Background

The ecology of the Illinois River has been negatively impacted by developments in the watershed over the last century. The two main causes of ecological degradation have been identified as excessive sedimentation and water quality. Excessive sedimentation resulted in the loss of important habitats including backwater lakes and side channels along the river. A good example to illustrate the impacts of excessive sedimentation is Peoria Lake, the largest bottomland lake along the Illinois River. Peoria Lake lost over 70 percent of its volume since 1903 resulting in a decrease of the average water depth from 8 feet to 2.6 feet in 1985. Similar sedimentation and reduction in water depth took place in most of the backwater lakes along the Illinois River. Such drastic reduction of water depth had a significant impact on the ecology of the river. Furthermore, the rate of sedimentation had significantly increased at least since 1965 as compared to the rate since 1903 as shown in figure 1. These trends alarmed ordinary citizens, local and state governmental agencies in the state resulting in serious restoration efforts for the Illinois River. In 1997, the state developed the first major report on the Integrated Management Plan for the Illinois River Watershed with full participation of all the stakeholders in the watershed. As a result of the plan two major restoration efforts, the Illinois River Conservation Enhancement Program (CREP) and the Illinois River Ecosystem Restoration Project were initiated as joint efforts by the state and federal agencies. In addition to these major initiatives, numerous restoration efforts have been undertaken by different groups and agencies throughout the watershed. Cumulatively, these restoration efforts are starting to have impacts in the Illinois River and its watersheds. Trends in sedimentation and nutrient loadings have started to indicate that things are getting better and if these trends continue for the next 10 to 15 years, there would be significant improvement in the ecology of the Illinois River and its watershed.

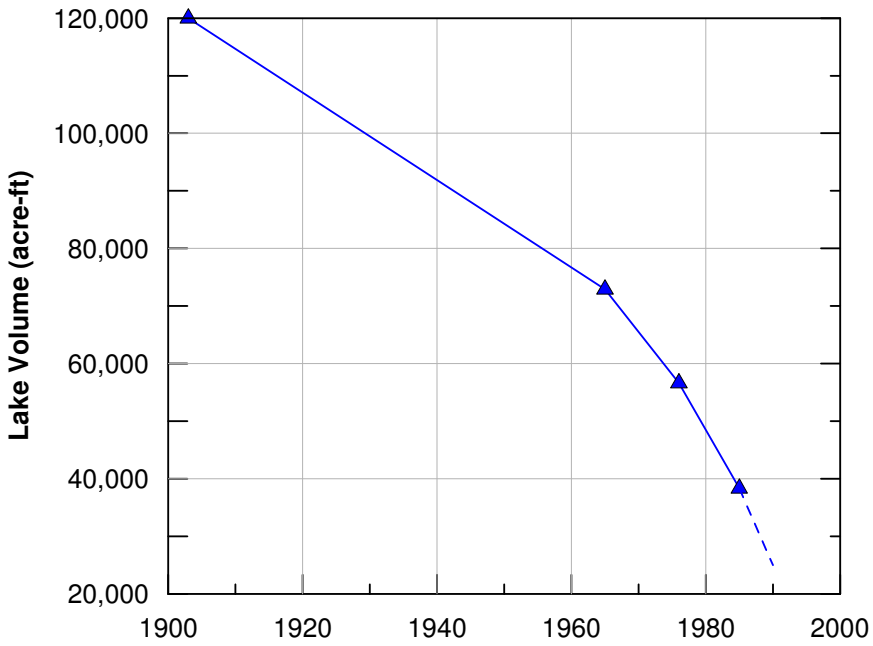

Figure 1. Loss of lake volume in Peoria Lake due to sedimentation

Sediment and Nutrient Delivery to the Illinois River

The Illinois River Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) was initiated as a joint federal/state program with the goal of improving water quality and wildlife habitat in the Illinois River. The two main causes of water quality impairment and habitat degradation in the Illinois River were related to excessive sedimentation and nutrient loadings. Based on these understandings, two main objectives of the Illinois River CREP were to reduce the amount of sediment entering the river by 20 percent and the amount of phosphorous and nitrogen loadings by 10 percent.

To assess the progress of the program towards meeting its goals, the state is collecting new data and analyzing long-term datasets collected by state and federal agencies. Analyses of the new and the long-term datasets to assess trends in sediment and nutrient delivery are presented in the following sections.

Sediment Delivery

Based on sediment records since 1980, the Illinois River on the average receives approximately 12 million tons of sediment annually from tributary streams. About 55 percent of the sediment delivered to the river (6.7 million tons) is deposited in the river, backwater lakes, and side channels along the river. Most of this sediment is generated in the tributary watersheds to the Lower Illinois River, with the Spoon and LaMoine River watersheds as the highest per unit area generators of sediment among the major tributaries. The smaller tributaries draining directly to the river also contribute significant sediment. Controlling the erosion processes that are producing excessive sediment and reducing sediment delivery to the Illinois River will be a long term effort, since sediment storage and mobilization along major rivers is a slow process. It will take some time to flush the sediment already in the system. In the initial phase of a restoration project, the major goal is to stabilize the system so that the erosion process is not accelerating and generating more sediment. The readjustment processes will take a number of years to reach a dynamic equilibrium condition where the natural processes of erosion and sedimentation are in balance. The long-term goal of the Illinois River restoration projects is to reach such a state where continued excessive sedimentation is eliminated.

To assess these processes, long-term monitoring is needed. As part of the CREP program, the state has been collecting sediment data at selected watersheds to supplement other monitoring programs. The data collection for the CREP program started in 1999 and has generated six years of data. The sediment load data for the five monitoring stations is shown in figure 2. Because of the short duration of data collection program, this data cannot yet be used to assess long-term trends. However, the data was compared with historical data collected by the USGS for small watersheds in the Illinois River basin as shown in figure 3. As shown in the figure, the CREP dataset is consistent with the older dataset and will be used to develop improved sediment delivery estimates for small watersheds in the Illinois River basin and improve our assessment and evaluation capability.

To assess long-term trends, data collected by the USGS since 1980 were used to compute sediment delivery for the major tributaries to the Lower Illinois River. Sediment delivery from the three major tributary watersheds to the Lower Illinois River was computed for the downstream gaging stations near the outlet of the watersheds, and the outflow of sediment from the Illinois River basin as measured at Valley City are shown in figure 4 for the last 25 years. The loads were computed using available sediment data collected by the USGS since 1980 and presented for five-year period increments since 1980. To illustrate the strong correlation between sediment load and water discharge, the corresponding water discharge (blue) are also shown. The period 1991-1995 generally shows the highest sediment delivery to the Illinois River and the highest outflow from the Illinois River for the period under consideration, primarily because of the 1993 major floods. Since that period, sediment delivery from the tributaries and outflow from the Illinois River has generally been decreasing. If these trends continue into the future, there would be significant reduction in sediment delivery to the Illinois River.

Nutrient Loadings

The other major goal of the Illinois River CREP is to decrease nutrient delivery to the Illinois River by 10 percent over the life of the program. To assess long-term trends in nutrient loadings as conservation practices are implemented, the state has been collecting nutrient data at the five monitoring stations where sediment data has been collected since 1999. The nutrient load data at the five stations are shown in figures 5 and 6. Figure 5 shows the annual nitrate-N load while figure 6 shows annual total phosphorous load in pounds (lbs). Even though there are some low and high nutrient load years, the dataset is not long enough to assess trends in nutrient loading. However, long-term data collected by the Illinois EPA as part of their Ambient Water Quality Monitoring Network can provide a fair indication of the general trend in nutrient delivery to the Illinois River. Figure 7 shows annual nitrate-N yields in tons per square mile from the three major tributaries of the Lower Illinois River (Spoon, Sangamon, and LaMoine Rivers). Nitrate-N represents about 70 percent of the total nitrogen load in most of Illinois' agricultural watershed, and thus is a good surrogate for total nitrogen load. As can be seen in the figure, the nitrate yields can range from almost zero during a drought year like 1989 to a high of about 11 tons per square mile during a major wet period like the 1993 flood year. Therefore, climatic factors do play a major role in nutrient transport and delivery. The most important observation that can be made for the figure is the slow decreasing trend of nitrate-N yield from the major tributary watersheds. Even though it is very difficult to measure how much impact the CREP program might have had, it is obvious that conservation practices in these watersheds, where most of the CREP lands are located, are making a difference in nitrogen delivery to the Illinois River.

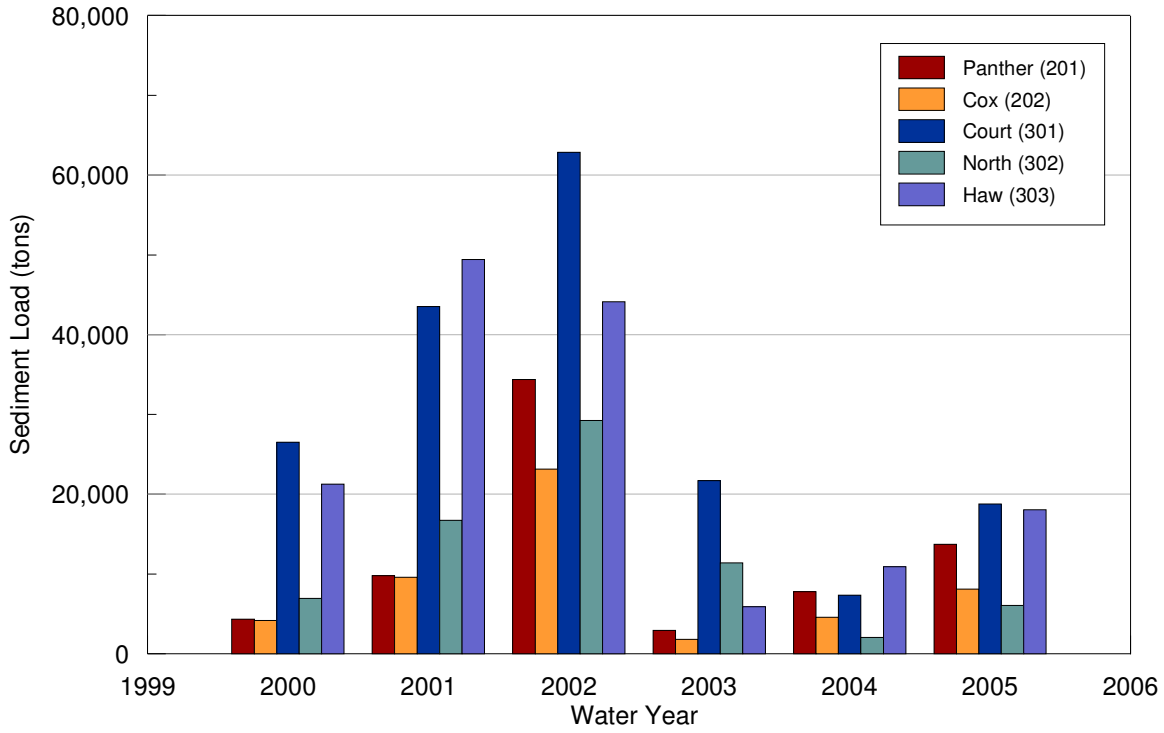

Figure 2. Sediment loads at five CREP monitoring stations

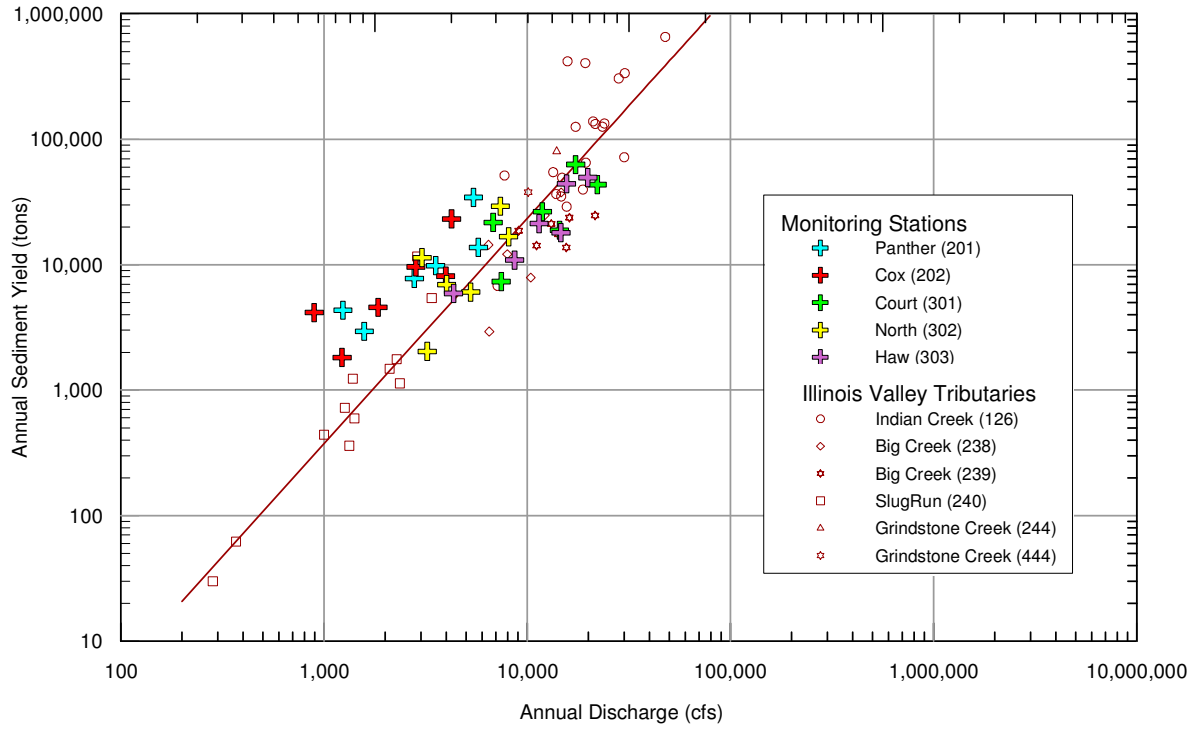

Figure 3. Comparison of sediment yield from CREP monitoring stations with historical sediment data for small watersheds by the USGS

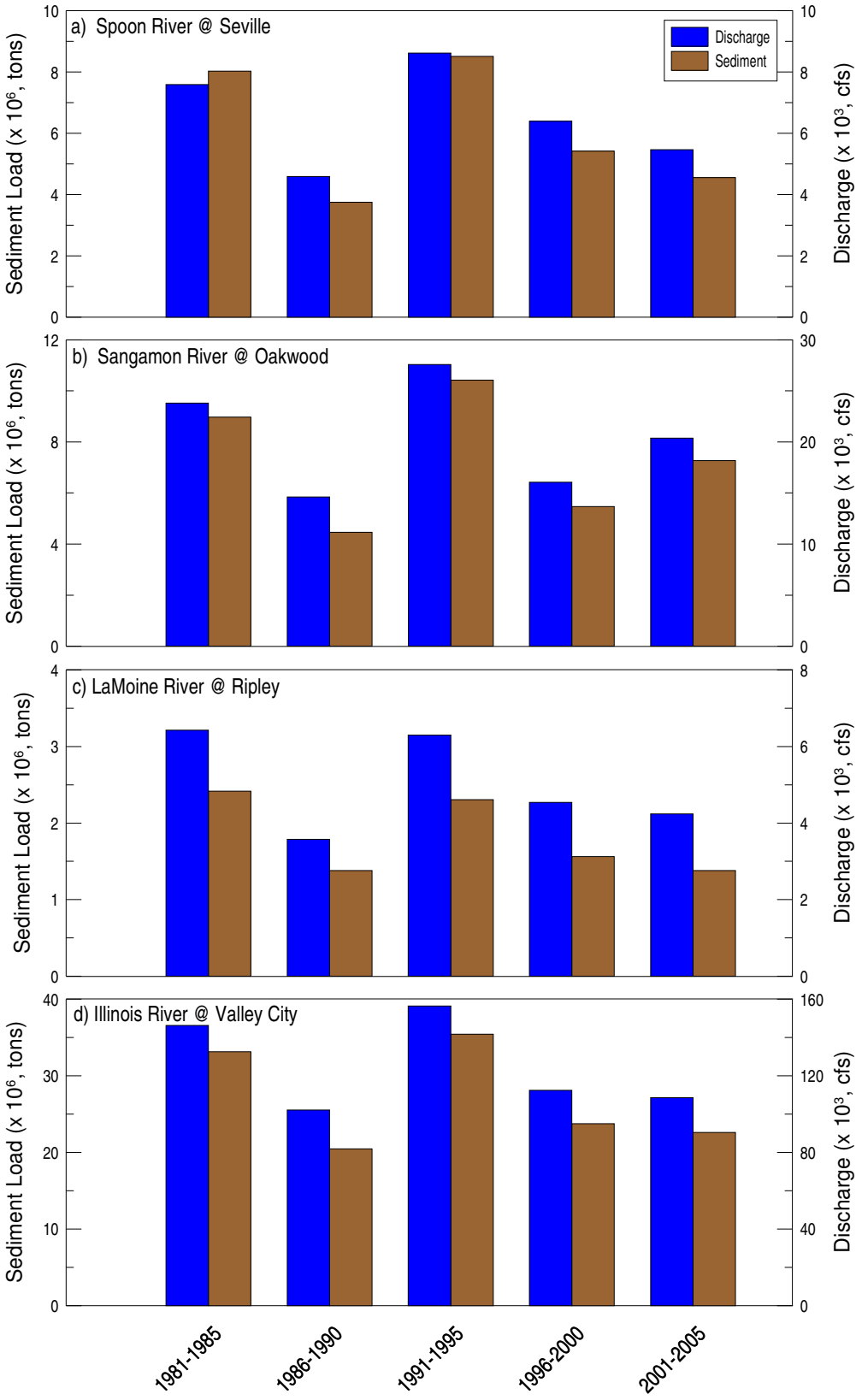

Figure 4. Sediment delivery from the three major tributary watersheds to the Illinois River and sediment outflow from the Illinois River at Valley City

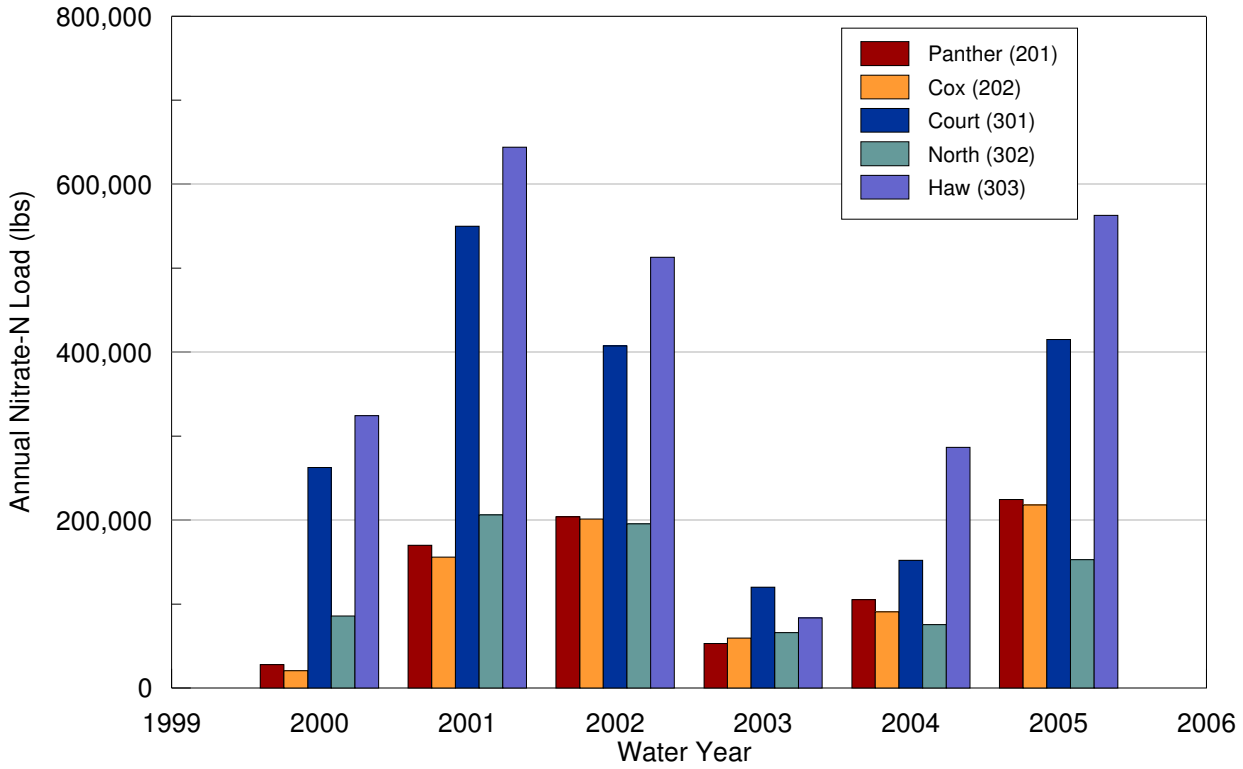

Figure 5. Annual nitrate-N loads at the five CREP monitoring stations in the Illinois River basin

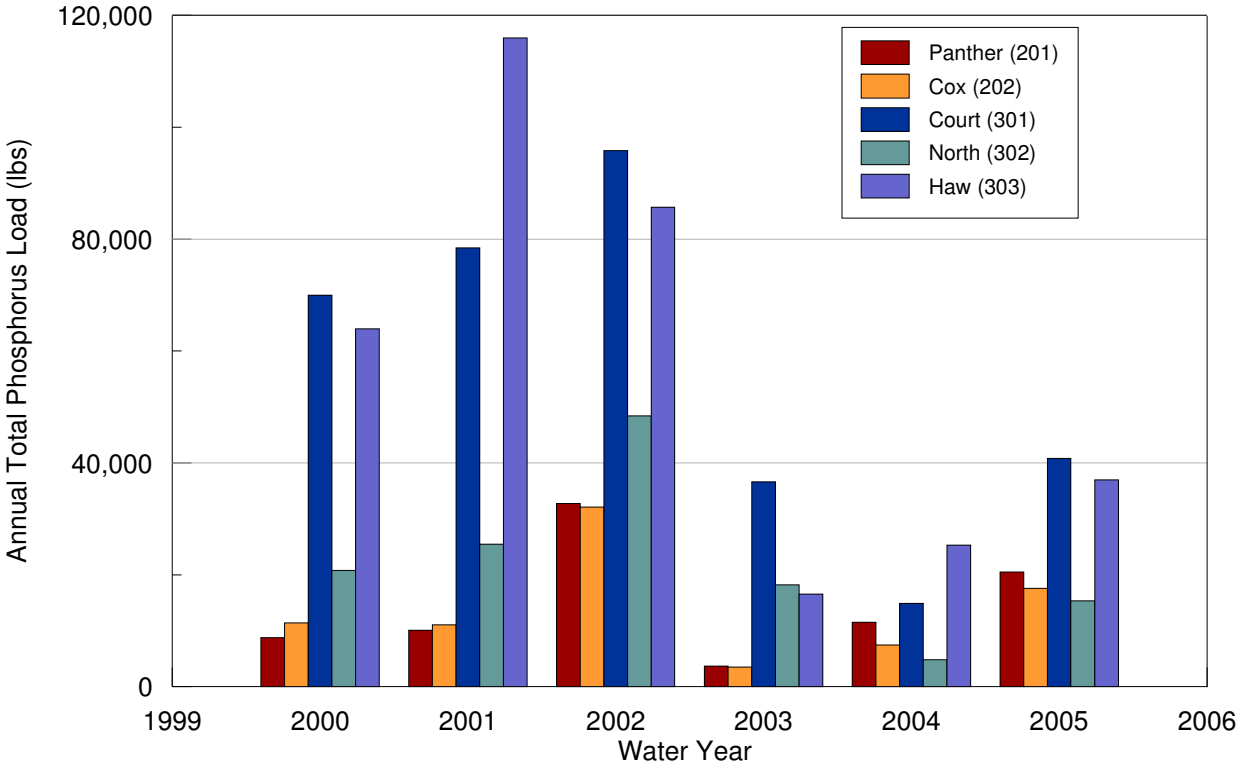

Figure 6. Annual total phosphorous loads at the five CREP monitoring stations in the Illinois River basin

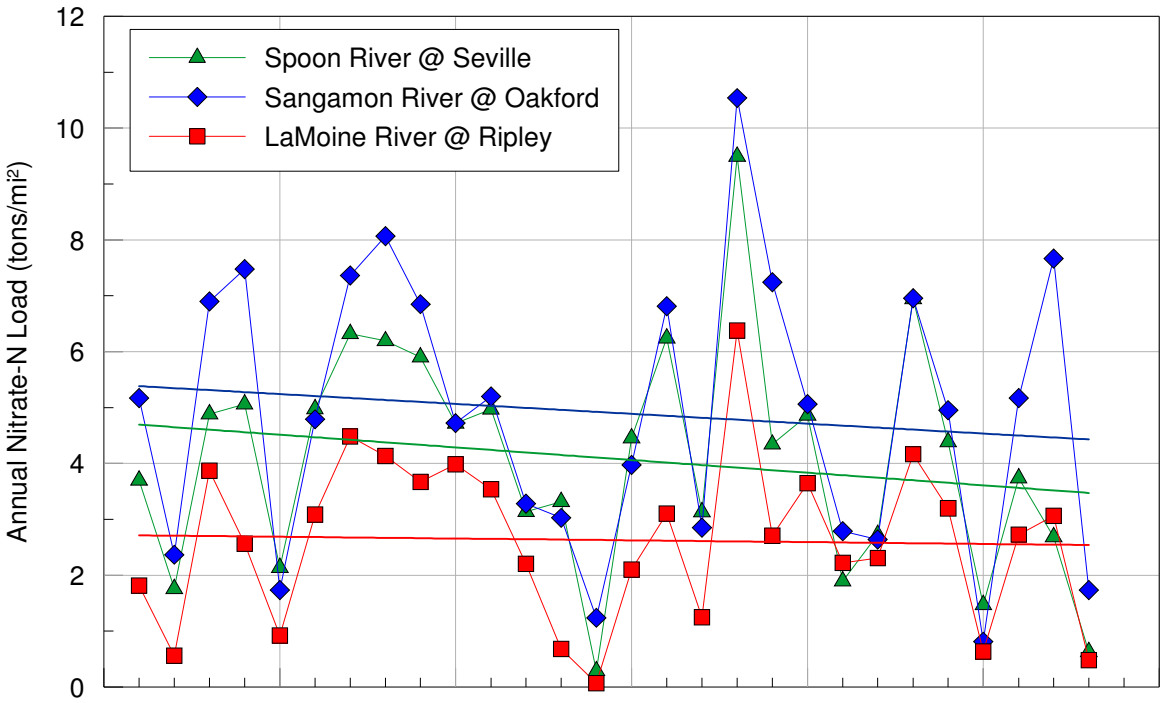

Figure 7. Annual nitrate-N loads for the three major tributary watersheds to the Lower Illinois River

Figure 8 shows the total phosphorous yield from the same three tributary watersheds discussed in the previous figure. Annual phosphorous delivery ranges from a low of almost zero during the drought year 1989 to a high of almost one ton per mi^2 for the extreme wet year of 1993. The data also shows how dependant phosphorous delivery is on climatic variability. Similar to the trends to the nitrate delivery, there is a slow but gradual decreasing trend in phosphorous yield from the Spoon and LaMoine Rivers, while there is a gradual increase from the Sangamon River.

The trends in nutrient loads from the major tributaries are reflected in nutrients transported by the Illinois River. Analyses of the data from the two downstream monitoring stations, Havana and Valley City, are shown in figure 9 for nitrate-N and total phosphorous, respectively. In general, the trend is a gradual decrease to no increase. These observations are extremely important as to nutrient delivery from Illinois streams to the Mississippi River and eventually to the Gulf of Mexico. Illinois had been identified as one of the major sources of nutrients to the Gulf of Mexico, and the fact that nutrient delivery from Illinois has not increased and is gradually decreasing is good news not only to Illinois but to the Gulf of Mexico, too.

Summary

As outlined in the draft Illinois River Basin Restoration Plan, the alternative of no-action in the Illinois River watershed will result in increased sediment delivery to the Illinois River and habitats and ecosystem would continue to degrade. However, recent data indicates that both sediment and nutrient delivery to the Illinois River have either stabilized or decreased as a result

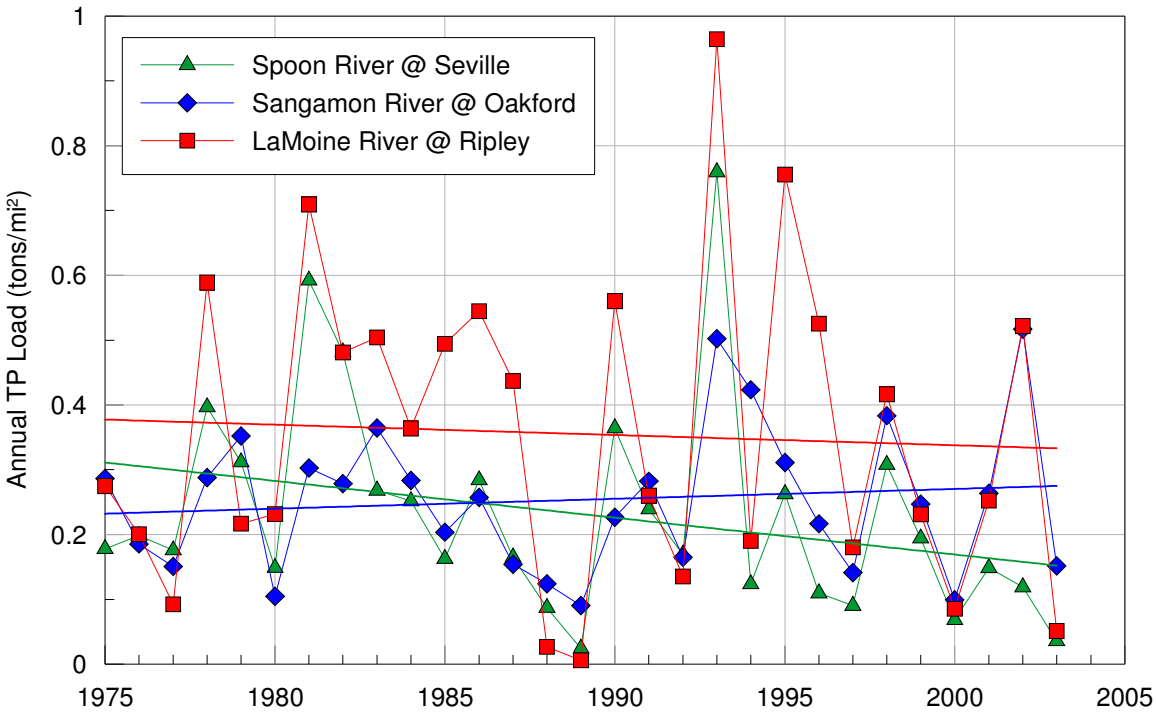

Figure 8. Annual total phosphorous loads for the three major tributary watersheds to the Lower Illinois River

of implementation of conservation practices in the watershed. With the knowledge that reduction in sediment delivery from large watersheds takes time to move through the system, the indication of stabilized sediment delivery shows progress is being made in restoring the Illinois River watershed. If the present trends continue for the next 10 to 15 years, sediment and nutrient delivery to the Illinois River will be significantly reduced, and lead to an improved ecosystem in the river and tributary watersheds.

As we move into the future taking into consideration the limited resources available to restore the river and its watershed, it becomes more important that the limited resources are spent in critical areas where most of the excessive sediment is generated. This could be accomplished by developing an assessment and ranking protocol to guide and prioritize the restoration effort.

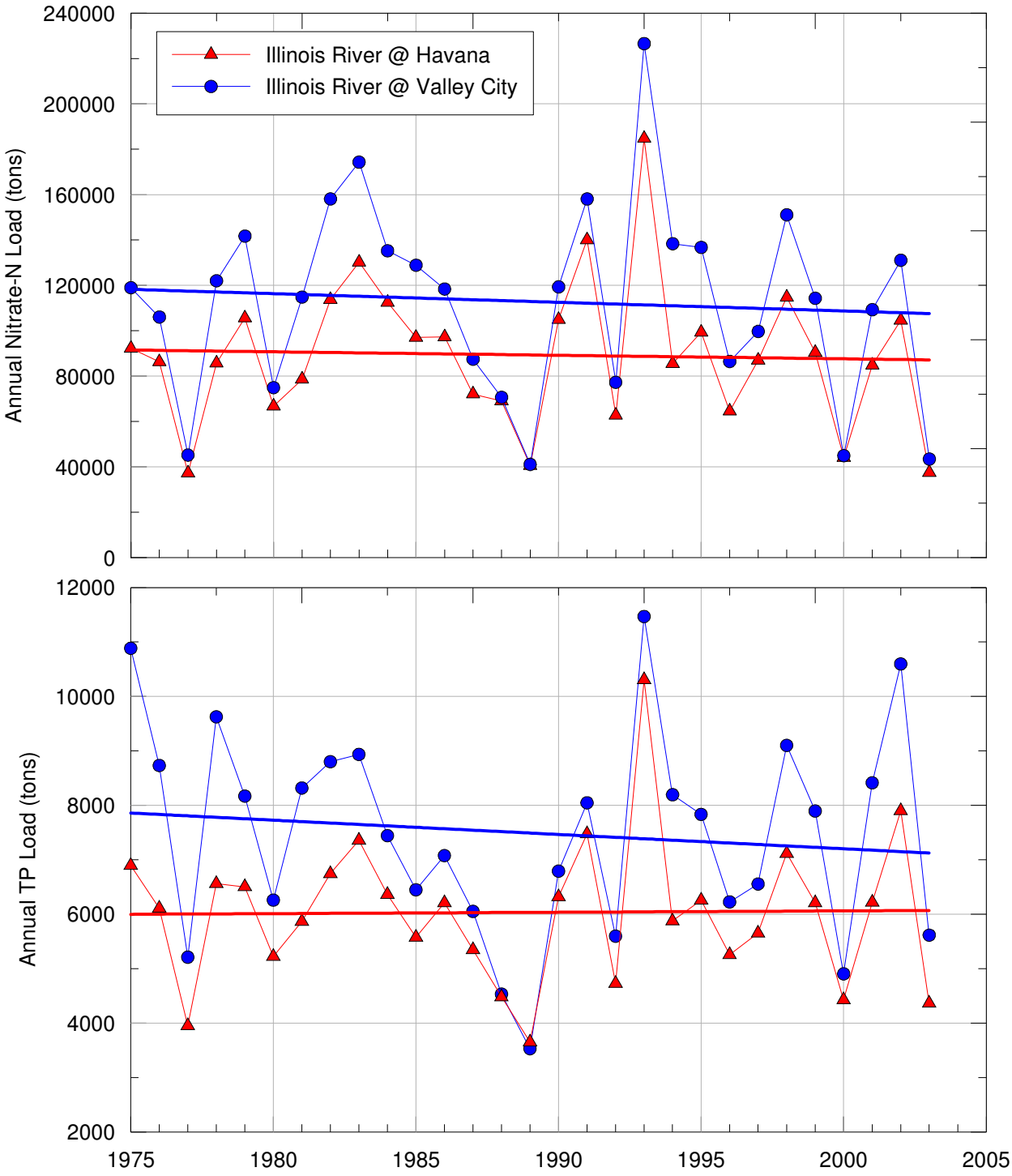

Figure 9. Nitrate-N and total phosphorous loads along the Lower Illinois River

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CREP and Watershed Management Education in Illinois

Submitted To:
State of Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
&
Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Prepared By:
Susan Meeker
University of Illinois Extension
Agreement No 3190103

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CREP and Watershed Management Education in Illinois

Abstract

The following report describes the partnership grant between Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and the University of Illinois Extension (UI Extension). The project goals were to provide comprehensive information and educational programs for the Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and watershed management.

The grant continues to be an effective mechanism for providing educational support for watershed groups and others interested in natural resources. The grant accomplished the development of a CREP website, redesign of the Illinois Watershed Clearinghouse website, regional workshops, educational programs, statewide watershed conference, formation of a Statewide Watershed Association and a pilot Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO) program.

CREP and Watershed Management Education in Illinois

Introduction

The CREP and Watershed Management Education in Illinois grant was built on the strong interest of the three agencies in partnership to address the information and education needs for the Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and watershed management. The project was jointly funded by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and University of Illinois Extension (UI Extension).

The grant started in the fall of 2001, with two educator positions designed to address educational needs of landowners, watershed groups, and organizations regarding watershed management. In the summer of 2004 the two educator positions was reduced to one position. The grant coordinates with a larger group that advises the position including Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA), U.S. Farm Services Agency (FSA), CREP Advisory Committee, and others. The grant created the only position in our State agencies that is dedicated to watershed management throughout the state.

Watershed management is the practice of combining science, technology and the community together to protect our greatest resource, water, by empowering people to address environmental, social, and economic issues. Watershed management is developed to address water quality issues. Water quality is the most important issue in most communities. Community growth and development are stressing our natural resources, reducing our green space and potentially harming our water quality. Effective watershed management can increase property values, expand the marketability of a community and improve the health of the environment. Watershed management involves the whole community in addressing and solving natural resource concerns. Local watershed management involves assessment of natural resources, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The educators developed and updated information and education programs to improve the knowledge base of local land use officials, watershed groups, natural resource agencies and others interested in natural resources about CREP, watershed management, non-point source pollution control, and other important natural resource issues and programs. The educators worked closely with IDNR, IEPA, UI Extension, NRCS, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts to coordinate educational and informational materials about CREP and watershed management.

Project Description

The project objectives and goals included the development of two information and education programs; one for CREP and one for watershed management. The primary audience for both programs will be agency staff and organizations responsible for CREP and watershed management. The project deliverables included developing, delivering,

and updating information and educational programs on CREP and watershed management. The educators coordinated CREP and watershed management information, education, other activities among IEPA, IDNR, UI Extension, and other natural resource agencies and organization.

Results

Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)
(**http://www.ilcrep.org/**)

Created in 2002, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) website (http://www.ilcrep.org) is the most comprehensive source of information for this conservation program available to the public. The goal of the website is to provide the most current information available for both the Federal and State side of the program. Individuals from around the world can access the site and learn the primary goals of the program, eligibility requirements for enrollment, financial incentives offered by the Federal and State contracts, whom to contact to enroll and which conservation practices qualify. The "Contact Us" section provides visitors to the site with instant access to professionals who will answer their questions and concerns. USDA Service Center staff and State Agency individuals could access enrollment documents and download PowerPoint presentations in the non-public sector of the site.

The following agencies were consulted regarding content of the CREP website: IDNR, IEPA, FSA NRCS, IDOA, Illinois Farm Bureau, The Nature Conservancy, US Fish and Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Soil and Water Conservation Service and UI Extension.

The grant enables the creation of educational information to promote CREP and watershed management. The position coordinated CREP information and research activities among natural resource agencies and groups. The educator served on the CREP Advisory Committee and CREP National Forum planning committee, presented papers at the Soil and Water Conservation Society meeting and Illinois Land and Water Resources Conferences, and conducted yearly Farm Conservation Telenets. The CREP Advisor Committee is made up of twelve different agencies that provide guidance on the implementation of the CREP program. The educator was an integral part of the CREP Advisory committee that developed a one-page fact sheet for officials on the benefits of the program and discussed the reopening of the CREP program. Farm Conservation Telenets provide landowners and agency personal updated information on conservation programs, technical support, economic incentives, and grants available from state and federal agencies.

Educational information material consists of fact sheets, presentations, website, manual and other materials to create awareness and promote conservation and environmental stewardship. The CREP web site provided for the coordination of information and educational materials on a very successful program. Materials include fact sheets on frequently asked questions and eligible conservation practices. The web site maintained by the educator serves as a clearinghouse for activities among IDNR, IEPA, UI Extension, and the CREP advisory committee. The web site serves as a primary source

of information on CREP. The CREP website was a National Association of County Agricultural Agents national finalist communication award winner.

Illinois Watershed Management Clearinghouse Web Site:
(**http://www.watershed.uiuc.edu/**)

The Illinois Watershed Management Clearinghouse (IWMC) web site offers resources and technical assistance to local watershed planners who need to form a local watershed group and/or need to assist in developing or implementing watershed plans. IWMC provides access to a tremendous amount of resources available from state, federal and non-governmental organizations. Completed watershed plans compile information from a variety of sources including state and federal agencies. The site supplies links to tools, case studies, and scientific research. The website is designed for local communities and professionals interested in protecting our natural resources.

Revamped as a goal of the grant, the IWMC website serves as a one stop location for those interested in Illinois watersheds and their management. The web site incorporates new information, educational materials, and watershed related information. Features include a calendar of events which allows groups to post activities occurring in their area, an *Ask the Expert* section where the educator will answer the questions by working with technical experts from IEPA, IDNR, NRCS, SWCD, IDOA, FSA, and other relevant agencies, a watershed locator that gives contact information on local watershed groups on a county and regional basis, and an internet mapping engine. The website hosted the registration information for the Connecting Illinois Watersheds conference, used to conduct a survey that was used during the formation process of the Illinois Watershed Association, and host information for the Illinois Watershed Association.

The site combines the resources of Illinois and federal agencies into one organized site. The following agencies partnered together to develop the web site: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Council on Food and Agricultural Research and University of Illinois Extension. The IWMC website was marketed through displays, workshops, news releases, bookmarks, and conferences. The educators authored a journal article on the IWMC website that appeared in the Journal of Extension. The IWMC website was a National Association of County Agricultural Agents national finalist communication award winner.

Since revamping the IWMC website traffic has increased by over 1030%. The average number of successful requests from May 2005 until May 2006 was 8,595 per month. The average distinct hosts from May 2005 until May 2006 were 1,206 per month. Distinct hosts are the number of different computers requesting information. IWMC web traffic increases have been attributed to the advertising at conferences, workshops, new releases, bookmarks, and survey.

Workshops

The educator organized the Connecting Illinois Watersheds conference in February 2004, which was designed to bring together watershed groups, state and federal agency staff, scientists, water experts, and non-governmental organizations to discuss many aspects of watershed planning. The conference expanded individual and group knowledge on land

and water issues, watershed management tools, data collection, technological resources and provided an excellent opportunity for networking. More than 170 participants from 5 states attended, including state and federal agency staff, researchers, educators and government officials. Conference highlights included an address by Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn that focused on the future of the State's water resources and an energizing keynote address presented by John Hassell, Executive Director for the Conservation Technology Information Center.

The educators hosted nine Resource Management Mapping Service (RMMS) Web Site Workshops throughout the state targeted to IEPA, IDNR, UI Extension, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NRCS, and watershed groups to assist them in learning more about mapping their watershed using information available on the Internet. The objectives of the RMMS workshops were to familiarize watershed planners with the data support available to watershed groups. Using the RMMS map tools, participants learned how to map demographic data, resource data, insert buffers, tabulate acreage for given areas, view aerial photographs and print and/or save maps. The mapping tool is designed to provide communities and natural resource professionals with the ability to map their natural resources using information available on the Internet.

Agency staff can use the RMMS Web Site to view natural resources, farmers can use the site to view individual fields, and city planners can use the site to review town boundaries and plan future growth. Users can quickly locate, create, print, save, and email maps of large and small areas within Illinois in a few minutes. Numerous map layers from demographic data to resource data may be added to the base map to give a better idea of a specific location's resources and other important attributes. After the base map is selected you can choose resource layers (lakes, river, watershed), administrative layers (townships, legislative, IDNR districts), and economic layers (highways, county roads, railroads). The map engine allows people to buffer points, buffer critical areas, view aerial photographs and tabulate acreages on data features. Users can create maps within watershed, farms, and fields.

100% of workshop participants rated the workshops good or excellent in a post-workshop survey regarding the quality and information provided during the workshop. Participants were encouraged to complete a take home exercise to reinforce skills learned during the workshop. The take home exercise provided detailed step-by-step instructions on completing a simple task using the map engine tools.

The RMMS Web Site is funded by IDNR, IEPA, University of Illinois and the Council on Food and Agricultural Research. This cooperation has allowed for better management of Illinois' natural resources.

The educator hosted two watershed walks targeted at local officials and citizens concerned about their natural resources. The walks were a guided tour on how the health of your watershed affects the water quality. The walks provided an opportunity for people to learn more about local land and water~~s~~ issues. The watershed walks addressed the following subjects: fundamentals of watersheds, value of conservation practices, water quality, Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) and Best Management Practices (BMP), and homeowner's issues.

Illinois Watershed Association

In a survey conducted by educators in late 2003, over 160 watershed groups were identified in Illinois. It became evident that coordination among Illinois watershed associations would be beneficial as they are a large and diverse group. In preliminary discussions with federal, state, regional, non-governmental organizations, universities and watershed group representatives, interest in developing a statewide watershed association was expressed. A journal article highlighting the survey results will be submitted soon for publication.

In February of 2004, at the Connecting Illinois Watersheds conference, an informational meeting was held to discuss formation of a statewide watershed association. It was suggested that answers to common questions and a survey be provided so watershed organizations and concerned individuals could express their opinion in forming a statewide organization. In the summer of 2004 the educators conducted a survey, 87 people replied, of which 77% were in favor of forming a statewide association.
In the spring of 2005 an educator hosted an informational meeting and a steering committee was formed. The steering committee developed marketing materials outlining proposed benefits, goals, and a mission. The Steering Committee also selected the interim Board of Directors with representation from watershed groups in the major river basins throughout Illinois. The interim board members started their term in January 2006. An educator served on the steering committee and is serving as an advisory member to the Board of Directors. Currently the Illinois Watershed Association web pages are located on the IWMC web site.

The mission of the Illinois Watershed Association is to improve information sharing and technical support among watershed organizations, advocate sound watershed management practices and programs, and amplify local watershed group's public outreach and educational efforts. The educator has submitted two abstracts for the Water 2006 conference and the Innovation in Reducing NPS conference to showcase the Illinois Watershed Association.
Watershed List

The educators compiled and maintain a web based database on name and contact information for watershed groups in Illinois with assistance from the county Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Of the ninety-nine Soil and Water Conservation Districts offices contacted, seventy-seven provided information on watershed organization active in their county. The list was cross-referenced with directories provided by IDNR and IEPA to form the watershed group list.

To better understand the watershed groups in Illinois a survey was created by the educators asking the watershed coordinators about the organization structure, funding, method of communicating, and issues of concern. In late 2003 139 surveys were mailed, a total of 72 were returned for a 52% response rate. Two surveys were discarded for being incomplete, 70 surveys were used to compile the results.

The survey showed that 39% of watershed coordinators were NRCS or Soil and Water Conservation District employees and 33% of the coordinators were volunteers; the balance were environmental organizations or individuals employed by the watershed

group. The structure of the watershed groups was extremely diverse. The survey did show that 75% of the groups have been in existence for less than 10 years. Funding for watershed groups ranged from 24% of the groups funding from NRCS and/or Soil and Water Conservation Districts or a program facilitated by the agencies. Another 25% received funding through IDNR, United States Department of Agriculture or the C-2000 program. 95% of watershed coordinators indicated they were concerned or very concerned with sedimentation. The top three concerns of watershed groups were sedimentation, nutrients, and land use. Survey results were presented at the Connecting Illinois Watersheds conference and are submitted for publication in the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation.

NonPoint Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO)

Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO) is a nationally supported educational program targeted at decision makers to assist them in making better land use decisions. The NEMO program provides education on a wide range of issues, from urban stormwater issues to Best Management Practices for business and communities. NEMO's core focus is to provide research-based education for land use decision makers on the relationship of land use to water quality in the residential and commercial areas. The educators provide education on non-point pollution and how land use affects water quality.

The NEMO program started in the fall of 2004 in the Peoria Tri-County area, which includes the major city of Peoria. The overall objective of this program is to provide comprehensive information and education to local land use decision makers on the management of nonpoint source pollutants and assist with balancing community growth with natural resource protection. Education consists of nonpoint pollution, policy changes, best management practices, and how land use affects water quality. The primary audience is local land use decision makers in the geographic area, watershed coordinators, watershed groups, county planning staff, zoning, planning, and others interested in natural resource based planning. The educational program is designed to assist local decision makers in developing and implementing economically viable solutions along with resource conserving strategies.

Educational materials are developed and distributed by the educator through meetings, workshops, conferences, news releases, and posted to the IWMC web site, which serves as primary location for watershed management information. Educational materials include technical papers, fact sheets, new releases, web pages, and presentations. The educator presents on nonpoint source pollution and watersheds, as well as reviewing the impacts of land use on water resources at meeting, workshops, and conferences. The educator has provided NEMO training to the city of Peoria, Morton, East Peoria, Washington, and Peoria County.

A regional meeting was held for local officials by the educator. Around 40 people attended the training to learn about stormwater management ordinances, re-seeding detention/retention ponds, farmland preservation, best management practices, building with trees, and land use and water quality. The Illinois chapter of the American Public Works Association asked the educator to speak at their annual meeting on the relationship between land use and water quality. Peoria County Zoning and Planning

Office, local developers and engineers have requested information and suggestions on using swales in subdivision designs, street width, model conservation and district overlay ordinances. Peoria County has obtained funding in May 2006 to create a Regional Stormwater Management Plan for the Tri-County area, and the educator has been asked to be a member of the stormwater committee.

The educator serves an active member of the Natural Resource and Your Development Task Force, which involves city engineers and natural resource professionals from the Peoria area. The task force offers workshops and is asked to provide comment on proposed ordinances. The educator reviewed and offered comments on the City of Peoria Stream Buffer ordinances, City of East Peoria steep slope ordinances, and other stream ordinances. The City of East Peoria discussed their decision to install an underground stormwater retention system with the educator.

Public Outreach/Education

The educator participated in quarterly Agribusiness Interview with the local radio station where the educator discussed the nonpoint water pollution and ways people can make a positive impact in their watersheds. News articles were developed and distributed by the educator to local Extension offices, Illinois Agri-News, and other natural resource organizations. The educator serves as editor of the University of Illinois Extension Natural Resource Team newsletter called Conservation Connection. The newsletter's goal is to improve the environmental awareness of citizens, which leads to healthy, productive and sustainable ecosystems. The newsletter is marketed to homeowners and the general public.

The educator was asked to be a member of an Extension proposal. Extension is led by the State Cooperative Extension System nationwide and the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) in cooperation with the USDA's Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES). Extension is an Internet-based educational partnership of Land-Grant University system that helps people by providing access to research-based information and learning opportunities. The proposal will focus on improving delivery of information in the human dimensions of water management area specifically addressing natural resources and the environment. If the proposal is accepted it will help agencies, producer groups, watershed organizations, and local communities with NPS and other water programs.

The educators developed and delivered youth minded natural resource training for Conservation Days and Clean Water Celebration. Youth education focused on water cycle, soil erosion, watersheds, wetlands, point source pollution, and non-point pollution. Youth education included hands activities for example: watershed charms necklaces, water cycle game, earth bracelets, watershed model (Enviroscape), wetland plant hunt, soil erosion demonstration, and land use exercise.

Future of the Project

The future of the project would allow for the continuing coordination of watershed related information, education, and research activities among the agencies and organizations within Illinois. Agencies and organization resources and talents could be combined and, as a state, we could better serve in protecting our watershed. Coordination, maintenance and updates to the Illinois Watershed Clearinghouse and CREP web site would be continued and enhanced.

If the project were continued the educator could host additional NEMO meetings, explore the potential of on-line training, develop additional NEMO education materials, support the Regional Stormwater Management Plan, assist with the submitted Extension proposal and offer support to Illinois Watershed Association.

Summary

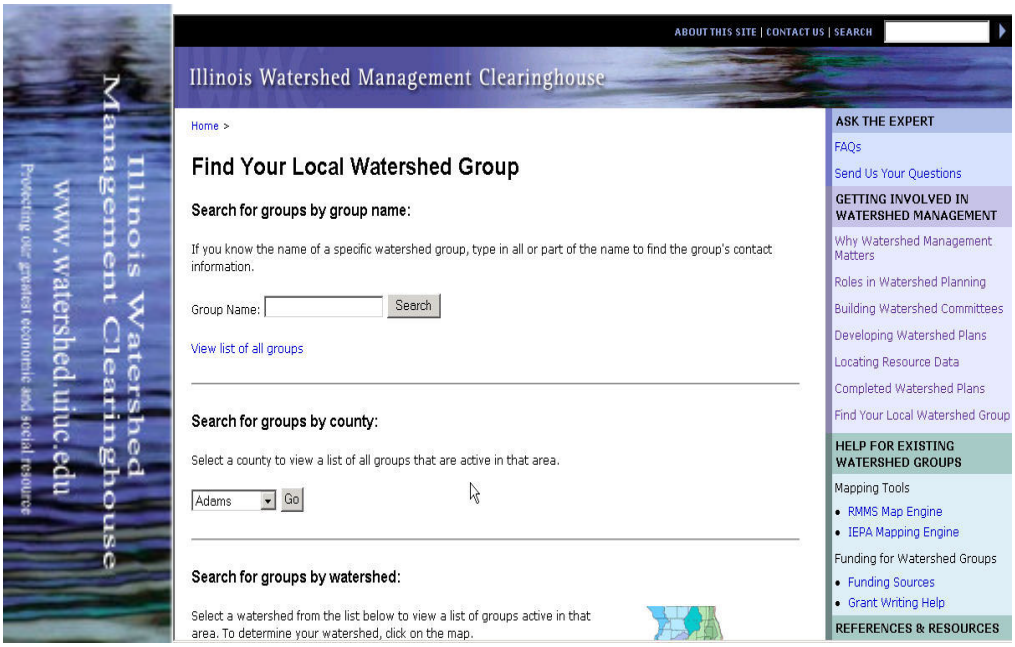
The CREP and Watershed Management Education Grant proved to be an effective mechanism for providing educational support for watershed groups and others interested in natural resources. The grant accomplished the development of a CREP website, redesign of the IWMC website, workshops, educational programs, statewide watershed conference formation of a Statewide Watershed Association and a pilot Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO) program.

The educators developed and updated information and education programs to improve the knowledge base of local land use officials, watershed groups, natural resource agencies and others interested in natural resources about CREP, watershed management, non-point source pollution control, and other important natural resource issues and programs. The educators worked closely with IDNR, IEPA, UI Extension, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts to coordinate educational and informational materials about CREP and watershed management.

Photos:

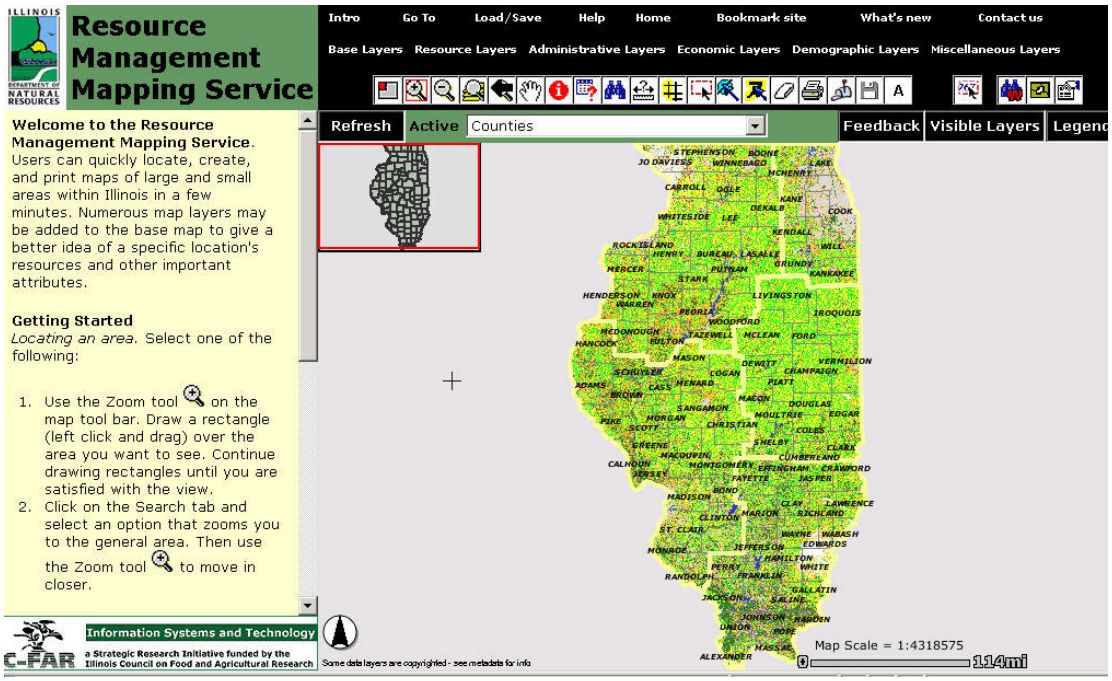
CREP Website:

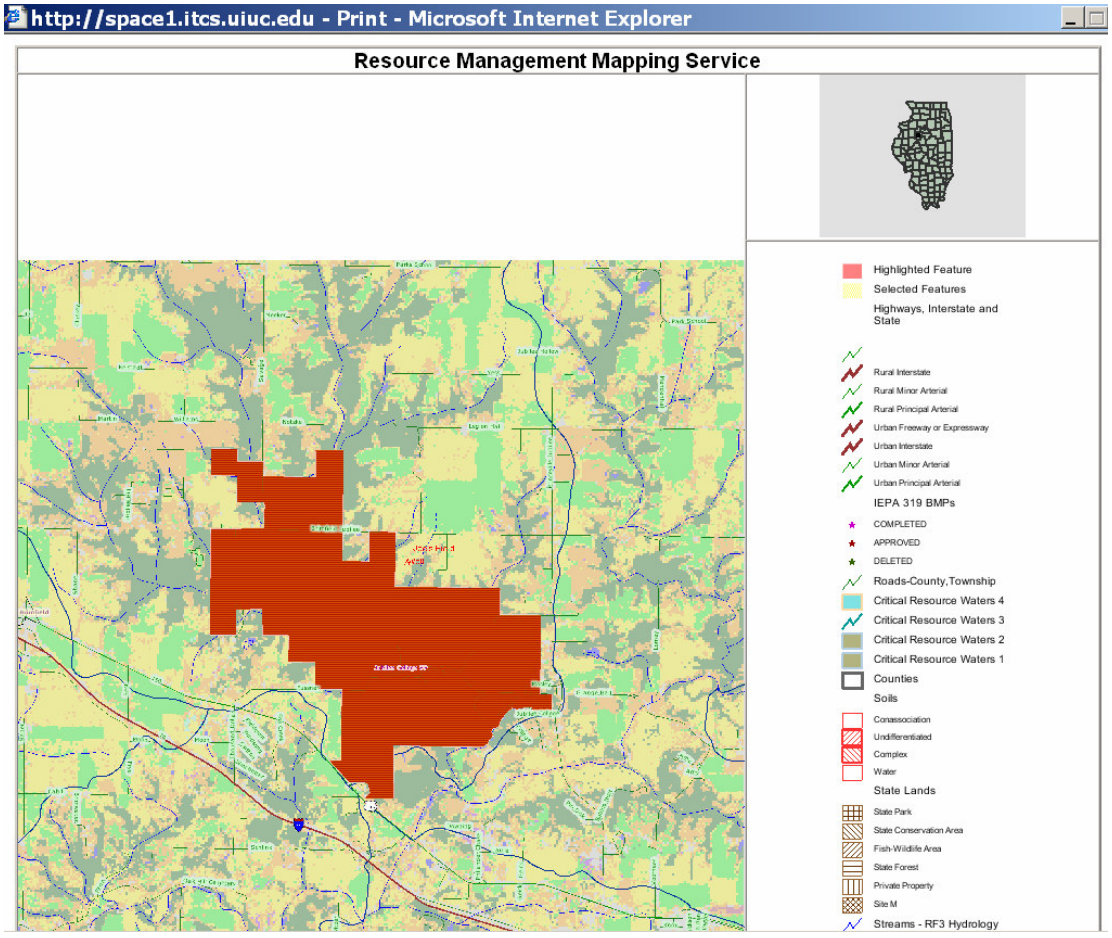
IWMC Website:



Connecting Illinois Watershed Conference:

RMMS Website:





Watershed Walks

Illinois Watershed Association:

Illinois Watershed Association

"The Mission of the Illinois Watershed Association is to improve information sharing and technical support among watershed organizations, advocate sound watershed management practices and programs, and amplify local watershed group's public outreach and educational efforts."

BENEFITS OF JOINING (proposed)

- An amplified voice for Illinois watershed groups
- Improved sharing of resources
- Increased awareness in new statewide funding strategies
- Web clearinghouse to all watershed groups and agencies
- Improved access to government agencies and services
- Use of Association's website to host local web pages
- Organization development support
- Discounted fees for conferences, workshops and trainings
- Discounted insurance premiums

The Steering Committee encourages all persons that have a desire and passion for creating the Illinois Watershed Association to consider contributing and representing their watershed.

Illinois Watershed Association Goals:

Host a watershed list serve for information sharing

Develop a plan-of-operation; identify funding and resources to support activities and programs

Organize and present watershed conferences and workshops

Develop a website with current information on Illinois watershed groups

Gather and distribute information on financial and technical assistance for watershed activities

Provide information and education about training opportunities, meetings, workshops, etc.

Provide information and assistance on how to form a local watershed group

Provide information and examples of Best Management Practices

Foster working relationships with agencies and organizations having watershed-related interests

Provide resources for planning assistance

Provide assistance on how to search for, write and obtain grants

Steering Committee:

Jason Beverlin, co-chairman
-The Nature Conservancy
Steve Black-*Southwestern Illinois RC&D*
Jessi DeMartini-*Friends of the Fox River*
Melissa Eaton-*Tri-County Regional Planning Commission*
Nancy Erickson-*Illinois Farm Bureau*
Susan Meeker-*University of Illinois Extension*
John Oldenburg-*Forest Preserve District of DuPage County*
Jody Rendziak-*USDA-NRCS*
Richard Spangler, co-chairman
-Spoon River Ecosystem Partnership
Tammy Watson-*Illinois Department of Natural Resources*
Bill White-*Illinois Department of Natural Resources-Illinois State Water Survey*

The Search is on...

Prospective interim Board Members will come from a variety of watershed groups and will represent one of ten watershed ISIS basins (see map on back). All known watershed groups and organizations are welcome to become members of the Illinois Watershed Association and are encouraged to nominate someone from their organization to serve on the interim Board of Directors. Nominees for the interim Board are due by December 15, 2005. Ten (10) interim Board Members will be chosen and begin their 12 month term January 1, 2006.

For more information or to send your nomination for Interim Board of Directors, contact:
Jason Beverlin, Co-Chair
The Nature Conservancy
11304 North Prairie Road
Lewistown, IL 61542
(309) 547-2730
jbeverlin@tnc.org

Or visit the website at www.watershed.uiuc.edu