



WAWASEE AREA CONSERVANCY FOUNDATION

CONSERVANCY VIEWS

Spring 2024



Protecting our watershed through **AWARENESS, ANALYSIS** and **ACTION**.



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Photo credit: Larry Baumgardt



Chairman's Message

By J. Terry Clapacs, Board Chair

Your WACF owns 945 acres and have CEs and Deed Restrictions in addition in the Wawasee Watershed. Our properties stretch from Little Knapp Lake in Noble County to Syracuse Lake on the line between Kosciusko and Elkhart counties. These parcels have been acquired slowly over the past thirty three years as prior owners have been interested in selling or donating funds have been available to purchase. Occasionally our friends and supporters ask why we need to own such a large amount of land. The answer is simple; it is the only way to be sure these grounds are fully protected. Many of the acres we own are located near where tributaries flow into Lake Wawasee. Turkey Creek, Martin Creek, Dillon Creek, and Lake Papakeechee all carry large amounts of agricultural runoff into Lake Wawasee. The WINS study, which has been underway for the past four years, has identified trouble spots where phosphorus buildup has become problematic and a threat to the water quality of the Watershed. Owning the land adjacent to these inlets allows for remediation efforts to be employed and protects functioning wetlands to help filter our supply water.

Permanent wetland protection is also a WACF goal. Indiana has lost 85% of original wetlands through development

and agricultural conversion. Most of the State's remaining wetland acres are in northern Indiana, and it is important to protect this asset. Wetlands are like nature's filter. They help purify water, recharge aquifers and reduce flooding. In short, wetlands filter out impurities. A bill passed by the Indiana Legislature in 2021 (SEA 389) changed the State Regulated Wetlands Law, significantly reducing protection for Indiana's isolated wetlands by eliminating protection for Class I wetlands and reducing protection for Class II wetlands. Indiana wetland protection was further eroded by the passage of HEA 1383 during the 2024 legislative session. That action redefines wetland classes resulting in less mitigation if wetlands are destroyed.

WACF has responded by placing perpetuity protection for those lands that are important to the continued enjoyment of the Wawasee Watershed and the property within. Without good water quality our special place in the sun would be very different. Please join in making the future of our Lake Wawasee area one that can be passed on to the next generation fully protected and enjoyed by our families and friends.

Photo of Conklin Bay wetlands

Executive Director Update

By Heather Harwood, Executive Director

One of the important ways WACF protects water quality is by protecting contiguous wetlands and upland areas along our waterways. To date, 946 acres have been donated or purchased as fee simple, in addition 57 acres are in Conservation Easement, and 74 acres have Deed Restrictions, for a total of 1,077 acres protected. This success is thanks to our donors who help to make this important land protection possible.

Another way WACF protects water quality is by completing projects upstream in our watershed. WACF recent projects include:

- **Timber stand improvement and invasive plant removal on WACF lands in the upper watershed at Knapp, Moss, Hindman, Gordy, Rider and Duely Lakes** to protect forest health. This is a part of our forestry management plan with funds granted through the **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**. These funds are used for forest improvements on 375 acres of WACF-owned land in the Wawasee Watershed. EQIP is overseen by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and managed locally through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The invasive plant removal program improves habitat by encouraging the native seed bank aiding forest health. Here are examples of before and after EQIP work:

EQIP invasive removal



Before Brazel Wilson Farm



After Brazel Wilson Farm



Before Honeysuckle woods



After Honeysuckle woods

WACF's work upstream and in the lakes.....

Other invasive plant removal work is in partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service at our Levinson LaBrosse Lakes and Wetlands Education Center at the Hinrichs Waterfront Park and throughout the property.

- **Engineering Feasibility Study to generate shovel-ready projects in hotspot areas along our feeder streams.** This work is made possible with a grant from IDNR Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) for engineering designs on 5 inlet stream hotspots at Martin Creek, Dillon Creek and Turkey Creek. The projects will include wetland enhancement and restoration, erosion control and shoreline stabilization.
- **Aquatic Plant Management** - Eurasian Water Milfoil (EWM) and Starry Stonewort (SSW) surveys and treatment are ongoing in Wawasee and Syracuse Lakes. Thanks to WPOA and SLA for their help to fund the match for grants from the IDNR LARE and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI).

This year our LARE grant will cover up to 80% of the cost of Aquatic vegetation surveys at Wawasee and Syracuse Lakes up to \$3,000. It will also cover up to 80% of the cost of maintenance treatment of approximately 65 acres of Eurasian watermilfoil at Wawasee and Syracuse Lakes (up to 40 acres in Wawasee and up to 25 acres in Syracuse Lake) not to exceed \$5,000. We were pleased to see the recent survey revealed EWM was more under control in both lakes this year.

Since SSW was first discovered in a channel off Johnson Bay, the total acreage has grown from 15 acres in 2009 to an estimated 230 acres in Syracuse Lake, and 240 acres mapped of dense beds in Wawasee. GLRI has been treating about 130 acres on Wawasee annually and around 8.5 acres on Syracuse Lake. The survey found that SSW has an 80% abundance (a rough estimate in treatment areas only). Abundance is not to that level everywhere, but in some areas SSW is the only aquatic plant growing. This summer, 180 acres will be treated in Lake Wawasee and 21 acres in Syracuse Lake. Since 2009, with help through GRLI and IDNR, treatments have been made in both lakes.

- **Other grants:** Security lighting is being installed at the Levinson-LaBrosse Lakes and Wetlands Education Center thanks to a grant from the Kosciusko County Community Foundation. And thanks to a grant from the Harkless Foundation, WACF has completed the installation of security lighting at the Buletty Pavilion at the WACF Between-the-Lakes property.

Thank you to our partners at EQIP, IDNR-LARE, GLRI, USFWS, the Kosciusko County Community Foundation, the Harkless Foundation, SLA and WPOA!

Update on National Water Quality Initiative: WINS data at work

By Beth Morris, Ecology Chair

April showers bring May flowers, so the saying goes. In the case of glacial lakes, spring showers can also bring runoff from erosion on stream banks, agricultural fields, construction sites and hard surfaces like our roofs, patios and decks. The lower picture shows the impact of a 1.5 inch rain in March that brought sediment into Lake Wawasee from Dillon Creek. The bulk of WACF's efforts in the last 30 years have been focused on reducing this erosion and slowing down the water flow that carries sediment into the lakes. We've made great progress, but there is a lot more to do!

The Wawasee Inlets Nutrient Study (WINS) was initiated in 2019, an investment to scientifically characterize the amount of nutrients and sediment coming into the lake from each of the four inflows, staying in the lake, and exiting the lake at the Turkey Creek Dam. The data from this study is used to identify priority areas in the watershed for WACF's remediation projects.

WINS data provide insight into the seasonal and annual variability in rainfall and land use and their impact on water quality. Additionally, it quantifies the contribution to chronic pollution made by the four subwatersheds feeding Lake Wawasee.

National Water Quality Initiative

As you've heard me say before, data derives its true value when it drives action. Because of the powerful dataset from the Wawasee Inlets Nutrient Study (WINS), our watershed was awarded a \$1.2 million

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) grant last year. The funds, spread over three years, are awarded directly to farmers for implementing specific "best management practices," farming techniques focused on improving soil health, reducing runoff of fertilizer and sediment, and thereby helping to keep water clean.

Of the 7 applications put forth by farmers in our watershed for these funds, 4 were awarded a combined total of \$508,952/year for 3 years to implement practices such as nutrient management and cover crops (see picture). These "best management practices" impact 2,028 acres of cultivated land in our watershed. WACF is grateful for the work of our partners at the National Resource Conservation Services and Soil and Water Conservation District for their roles in working with farmers to put this grant money to work to mutually benefit the farmers and the watershed.

Engineering Feasibility Study: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Runoff

With the help of a LARE grant, WACF has contracted an engineering firm to look at possible remediation projects to slow down the flow of water in high priority areas identified by the WINS study. When implemented, these measures will help reduce the sediment and nutrients coming into the lake. We must continue to be vigilant and proactive to protect our beautiful lakes. WACF is committed to using scientifically informed action to preserve the lakes for future generations.



Cover crops grow after a cash crop is harvested, keeping live roots growing year-round, thus improving soil health and reducing runoff of sediment and fertilizer.

Photo courtesy of Russell Anderson



Greater Dillon inflow after 1.5 inch rainfall on March 14, 2024. Work last year to install a weir on Launer Ditch - a joint effort between Enchanted Hills Community Association, DNR LARE, and WACF - substantially reduced the sediment flowing into the lake during such a rainfall. This picture, while an improvement, shows there's still more work to be done!

A Thanks to our Donors

By Bill McCully, Development Chair

Recently, I was able to join several friends of the WACF, including board members, staff, donors, and volunteers, on a beautiful Friday afternoon to tour several properties that the foundation is privileged to own. The tour included land such as the beautiful 40 acres strategically adjacent to the Turkey Creek Wetlands acquired last summer from the Dumlija family. We also toured the Zimmerman Preserve, located at the back of Johnson's Bay, the Tom and Nancy Cottrell Lakefront, and the Rusted Root Property, which interestingly used to be a very rustic (!) campground. I am a bit embarrassed to admit it was my first time visiting some of these gems. The vistas at the Dumlija property were breathtaking. The late afternoon sun provided a true visual treat. The Cottrell Waterfront provides an unspoiled and unobstructed view from the very outlet of Turkey Creek into Lake Wawasee. It also features some beautiful trails for exploring. Rusted Root was a lovely area with the creek swollen by spring rains rushing through the property. The Zimmerman Preserve is a lovely hidden area with accessible pathways to explore.

Beyond the beauty and peace afforded by the visit, I was struck by how it was all made possible by the thousands of people who support the WACF through their generous gifts of time, talent, and treasure. The investment made by our donors does more than provide a picturesque scene we can visit and enjoy. It makes possible our true mission which is to take action to preserve and improve water quality in the Wawasee Watershed.

The data gathered in our landmark five-year research effort, the Wawasee Inlets Nutrient Study (WINS,) clearly points to the Turkey Creek Inlet as being a major source of harmful nutrients making their way into Lake Wawasee. The investment that WACF has made in building a portfolio of land which can be remediated, protected, and leveraged allows



Dillon Creek at the Zimmerman Property

us to take the necessary actions to truly affect water quality. That investment has been recently focused on improving water quality near the Turkey Creek Inlet.

Through the continued support of our donors, we can invest to truly make progress by utilizing our land assets to directly improve water quality while sharing the beauty of pristine vistas and hidden treasures with our community. Our Ecology Committee is exploring specific action plans to improve water quality by leveraging our investment there and throughout the watershed. Please contact me or Development Officer Emily Maggart to explore how you can help make that possible and secure the legacy of the lakes we all love.

Summer Event Schedule

By Pam Schumm, Education Officer

How can I get my kids out of the house and into nature more this summer? I know that being outdoors is good for them. It keeps them offline and gets their eyes to focus on distance rather than the screen. What can I do? Where can we go?

WACF has the answer for you! We have four (yes, 4!) Wetland Adventure days this summer. June 4 and 25, plus July 9 and 30. Our Wetland Adventures are different this year. We've changed the day's times and format! I guess you could say we've changed just about everything! Our adventures will be on Tuesdays this year from 10 – 3. Come and go as you wish. Stay for the day or an hour; it's your call. We will have many activities and "centers" for your elementary & preschool children to enjoy, including a creation station and reading nook for some free and quiet time. Bring a sack lunch and enjoy a picnic at the amphitheater or under a shade tree. Be prepared to help your children with some crafts to take home, go on a scavenger hunt, explore nature, and much more! Each

week is a different set of activities with a different theme, so come often, stay awhile, and return to nature! There's also Fishing with the DNR on July 3 at Between the Lakes from 9 – 11 am. Poles and bait are provided. Bring the kids and learn to fish!

But that's not all! In addition to Wetland Adventures, our popular Lake Talk and Eats programs are back for another exciting season. And guess what? Bug Catch is ON!!! We'll start with a brief introduction at the Ruddell Pavilion before embarking on a thrilling adventure to the lake to catch some critters. It is a perfect opportunity for you to bring all the kids and grandkids along! Remember to dress comfortably, as we might get wet and walk in the lake. We'll provide the nets, but if you have a special one, please bring it along for a more personalized experience.

But wait, there's more! We have a range of engaging programs for adults too. Our Lake Talk and Eats and Trivia events are back by popular demand. On June 1,

we're hosting a Native Plant Talk and Sale. This year, you'll have the opportunity to learn about edible native plants. Remember to arrive before 9 to enjoy breakfast and listen to the speaker before purchasing your plants.

Our August 3 program is the annual Ecology Cruise around Lake Wawasee. Tickets for this brunch cruise (10:00 departure from the Frog) can be purchased by contacting info@wacf.com. And finally, our first Trivia Night FUNdraiser is scheduled for June 20 starting at 7 pm. Contact emily@wacf.com to reserve your table. We encourage nautical attire for this themed night of fun! A cash bar and refreshments will be available for purchase. All proceeds will go toward our education expenses, ensuring we can continue to provide informative and engaging programs for our community.

So...where do we go to get back to nature? WACF, of course! See you soon!





- 27 Apr** Birdwalk
8:00 am
- 04 May** Earth Day
11:00 am-3:00 pm
- 01 Jun** Lake Talk & Eats
Native Plant Sale
9:00 am
- 17 Jun** Snapshot Day
12:00 pm-5:00 pm
- 20 Jun** Trivia Night
7:00 pm
- 03 Jul** Fish with the DNR at
Between the Lakes
9:00 am
- 06 Jul** Lake Talk & Eats
Bug Catch
9:00 am
- 27 Jul** Annual Lake
Celebration at
Between the Lakes
9:00 am
- 31 Jul** Farm Tour at
Anderson Farms
9:30 am
- 5&6 Oct** Fall Tastic Walk
12:00 pm-4:00 pm

All events will be held at the Levinson-LaBrosse Lakes and Wetlands Education Center 11586 N SR 13 unless noted otherwise.

For more information for individual events and canoe trip registration, please visit wacf.com.

Wetland Adventure

- June 4th
- June 25th
- July 9th
- July 30th

10:00 am-
3:00 pm

Canoe Trips
7:00 am

- June 21st
- July 12th
- July 19th
- July 26th
- August 2nd
- August 9th



WAWASEE AREA CONSERVANCY FOUNDATION

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Meet The Team

Audrey Smith

Audrey, a Wawasee graduate, has returned to our community after living in Indianapolis and Chicago. Since joining WACF in November 2023, she has been a dynamic force, not only assisting with general office needs but also taking over our social media and updating our marketing materials. Her versatility and dedication are evident in her eagerness to transition to a non-profit role and contribute meaningfully to the community she grew up in. Welcome, Audrey.



RIGHT: Accepting a grant for the Nature Cameras from the Arrowhead Country RC&D