

Chapter 12

Public Outreach and Education Programs

12.1 Summary of Existing Programs

12.1.1 Friends of the Fox River

The mission of the Friends of the Fox River is to preserve, restore and protect the Fox River Watershed's resources by connecting people with nature through education, research, restoration and advocacy.

Friends of the Fox River is a non-profit organization made up of citizens and organizations taking action to protect and maintain the quality of the Fox River and its tributaries. Through their programs and activities, FOFR encourages both adults and students to become involved in protecting the river and its watershed. Each year, FOFR administers programs for watershed stakeholders that include a watershed-wide monitoring program (FOFR's Fox River Watershed Monitoring Network), river and stream cleanups, river habitat improvement projects, and water quality education events.

Hundreds of people are members of the FOFR's Watershed Monitoring Network. Members volunteer to collect water quality data, assist at education events, and/or offer their individual expertise or talents. Watershed stakeholders are encouraged to become FOFR members and more importantly, become active stewards of the Fox River Watershed.

The hallmark of the Fox River Watershed Monitoring Network is the water quality monitoring program. Once a year, Network volunteers monitor the water quality of the Fox River and its tributaries at stream monitoring sites throughout the watershed. They collect physical, chemical, and biological data used to assess water quality trends. This data can be the first warning sign of problems in the watershed.

FOFR also sponsors continuing education and community outreach events through special seminars on stream ecology and speaking at public hearings on issues that potentially impact the quality of the Fox River or its tributaries.

More information can be found at: www.friendsofthefoxriver.org

12.1.2 Kane County

Public education and outreach from Kane County is offered mainly through the County's Department of Environmental and Building Management (Kane County DEBM). This department is charged with administering the County's NPDES Phase II Permit issued by the Illinois EPA and insuring that the County is meeting the 6 Minimum Control Measures. Kane County DEBM has also taken responsibility to offer public education and outreach assistance to municipalities throughout the County in the form of public speakers to present watershed / environmental topics to municipal leaders, staff, and private citizens to further explain the importance of watershed resource protection. For more information, visit: www.co.kane.il.us/kcstorm/index.asp

12.1.3 Kane-DuPage Soil & Water Conservation District

The Kane-DuPage Soil and Water Conservation District provides a variety of outreach programs for K-12 classrooms and scout groups. Programs are interdisciplinary and can be designed to meet the needs of classroom curriculum. Possible outreach program topics include, but are not limited to the following topics:

Early Elementary Level

- **Dirt Decomposers**
Did you know there is more life in the ground than above? A teaspoon of soil contains more than a billion organisms! Students will discover the world underneath their feet as they learn about the critters that help recycle plant nutrients and form soil.
- **Trees and Plants**
Plants give us life! Not only do they provide us with oxygen, they provide homes and food for wildlife, help prevent soil erosion, and provide many products we use every day. This program will expose students to the diversity, function, and importance of trees and other plants.
- **Water Wonders**
Water is a key element for all life. The water we drink today is the same water from the time of the dinosaurs! Water is used not only in our homes but by industry and agriculture as well. Learn how water is recycled, how we use this precious natural resource and the importance of water conservation.

Late Elementary Level

- **Groundwater**
Groundwater supplies nearly half of Illinois' residents with their water needs. Activities on the land have an impact on the quality of this resource. Learn about groundwater and its role in the water cycle. Students will see groundwater in action through a demonstration using a groundwater model.
- **Soil**
Soil is more than the loose brown stuff underneath our feet. There are many different types of soil with distinct textures and colors. Students will get their hands dirty as they investigate the formation, components and importance of soil.
- **Wetlands**
Wetlands are important and productive ecosystems. Along with providing habitat for wildlife, they are able to slow flooding and filter impurities from the water. In this program the importance of wetlands will be demonstrated by using the enviroscape model.

Middle School Level

- **The Changing Landscape**
Kane and Du-Page counties have experienced huge growth and development. Students will use historical aerial photos and maps to learn how their area has changed over time and the effects of these land use changes.
- **Pollution Around Us**
Pollution is more than just garbage, it includes any type of contamination to land, air, or water. Pollution affects the natural resources on which we depend. Through use of a model students will investigate sources of point and nonpoint source pollution as well as some ways to prevent it.
- **Watersheds**
Everyone lives in a watershed. Watersheds are simply the area of land from which

surface runoff drains into a stream, river or lake. Learn how the shape of the land determines watersheds boundaries as well how our activities can effect these areas.

High School Level

- **Envirothon** [Envirothon Page](#)
Envirothon is an annual competition, which gives students the opportunity to learn about the environment and the role of individuals in natural resource management. Local competition is held in early April.
- **Solving Land Use Problems**
It is important to take the natural resources of an area into consideration when planning to build on a site. Students will learn how aerial photos and maps are used to determine whether a site is appropriate for proposed land uses
- **Resource Consumption**
We all create waste from the products we use in our daily lives. This problem is made greater by the waste generated from packaging, manufacturing and consumption of products. Students will examine this problem and determine ways to reduce the strain on landfills and natural resources in this program.

For more information, visit: www.kanedupageswcd.org

12.1.4 Fox River Ecosystem Partnership (FREP)

REP was formed in 1996 after IDNR designated a core of high-quality ecological resources in the northern-most watershed as a "Resource Rich Area". Portions of eleven counties, including Lake, McHenry, Kane, Kendall and LaSalle, form the Fox River watershed, which is home to 11% of the state's population. The watershed contains the Fox Chain O'Lakes (one of the nation's busiest inland waterways), many high quality Natural Areas, and suburban areas with some of the highest growth rates in the state. The Partnership is a diverse group, made up of landowners, businesses, non-profit organizations, agencies and governments within the Fox River Watershed region.

In 1998 FREP began a comprehensive planning process, identifying 16 critical factors and 6 areas of concern. The result was the ***Integrated Management Plan for the Fox River Watershed in Illinois*** that makes 35 recommendations for action. The Fox River Ecosystem Partnership is a 501(c)3 not for profit organization.

FREP is open to all watershed stakeholders and interested persons wishing to participate in watershed protection activities or simply wanting to get more information about the Fox River Watershed and the challenges and solutions that people are working on to protect the watershed. General meetings are held every other month and usually include a short presentation about a particular watershed protection activity or program. On "off months" the Fox River Ecosystem Partnership hosts a Noon Network Program, where anyone interested can attend a lunchtime gathering in which a guest speaker is invited to present information about a particular watershed protection or restoration project they are involved in. The goal of the Noon Networks is to share information with other stakeholders and create an opportunity for stakeholders to "network" and learn more about programs and actions they can implement in their region of the Fox Watershed.

For more information, visit: www.foxriverecosystem.org

12.1.5 The Conservation Foundation

The Conservation Foundation is a not for profit land and watershed protection organization. Their mission is to preserve natural areas and open space, protect rivers and watersheds, and promote stewardship of our environment. The Conservation Foundation is a recognized expert and reasoned voice on conservation issues, and with the help of its members and donors, provides the leadership required to achieve this vision.

Conservation@Home is a program started by The Conservation Foundation in 2004. It is an extension of homeowner education and watershed protection efforts that encourages and recognizes property owners that protect and/or create yards that are environmentally friendly and conserve water. It includes planting native vegetation, such as prairie and woodland wildflowers, trees and shrubs, creating butterfly and rain gardens, and removing exotic species of plants. It promotes planting “flower bed” areas. It does not require planting them across an entire yard – as many assume is required in order to achieve some environmental benefit. It encourages individual responsibility to counter practices that have long contributed to environmental degradation, particularly in our rivers and streams. Homeowners association, garden clubs, and others often contact The Conservation Foundation to educate them on the benefits of native plantings, how individuals can use these approaches to make a difference, as well as on how other practices such as rain barrels and other environmentally-friendly practices can be used. This program could be expanded into the Tyler Creek watershed to promote the practices recommended by this watershed plan.

The Conservation Foundation also works with the Kane County Forest Preserve District and private landowners to protect land. We recently ran a campaign passing Kane County’s third referenda for open space protection, in the amount of \$85 million. We help them contact landowners and negotiate purchase of properties they wish to acquire and preserve as open space. The Conservation Foundation also works with private landowners to assist with conservation easements to protect natural lands. Both of these approaches are important components to protecting the watershed’s green infrastructure and thereby protecting and improving its water quality. The Conservation Foundation will continue this work throughout Kane County and the Tyler Creek Watershed.

Another outreach effort of The Conservation Foundation is to work with municipalities to encourage sustainable development practices. This not only includes implementing multiple and cumulative stormwater best management practices in a residential or commercial development, but also working on the development of covenants and restrictions to appropriately address stewardship and maintenance of these areas, with funding dedicated to that. Such work requires immersing ourselves in the development process from the start of annexation agreement negotiations through to the final plat. It includes working with the municipality’s staff and elected officials, representatives for the developer (planners and engineers), and educating the public. The Conservation Foundation has requested funding from Kane County to support its efforts in working with municipalities on these issues. Tyler Creek Watershed will be included in those efforts.

Activities that The Conservation Foundation is involved with in other areas they serve include a storm drain stenciling program, educational efforts about stormwater best

management practices, as well as watershed education including information about where stormwater goes after it hits the street, volunteers to monitor creeks, and youth-based environmental education.

For more information on The Conservation Foundation, visit their website at: www.theconservationfoundation.org

12.2 Education & Outreach Recommendations

Overall, it appears that there are several education and outreach programs already active and working in parts of the Tyler Creek Watershed and indeed throughout the entire Fox River Watershed. It is difficult to quantify just how effective these individual programs are at reaching the public at large and effecting psychological/cultural changes as to how citizens implement watershed resource protection in their everyday life.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of the individual education & outreach programs, one suggestion might be work with all of these organizations in setting up an annual “education & outreach conference” where all of the organizations could come together and learn about the success each entity has and identify critical areas of outreach that are missing and determine which organization or organizations could position themselves to address those critical outreach concerns. This conference could be organized according to education & outreach stakeholders working throughout Kane County, for example, and the conference could be structured to provide a session or discussion period on the efforts being done in a specific subwatershed, such as Tyler Creek.

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