

Name(s) Jennifer Taylor, District Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Michigan.

Gordon Porter, District Technician –Groundwater Technician, Branch County Conservation District, Michigan

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#### Jurisdiction

This interview covered Branch County, Michigan. Major St. Joseph River Sub-watersheds in Branch County include the Coldwater River, Prairie River, Hog Creek and Swan Creek. The St. Joseph River main stem passes through the northwest corner of the county. The cities of Coldwater and Bronson and the villages of Sherwood, Union City, and Quincy are located in the county. Agriculture is primarily corn and soybeans and with approximately 85% under conservation tillage or no-till. There are a number of specialty crops (e.g., potatoes, seed corn, pickles and gladiolas) also grown within the watershed under irrigation. There are also a number of livestock producers within the watershed that raise hogs, chickens, dairy, horses, sheep and beef. A large Amish community exists in the county and maintains pastureland and mixed crops.

#### Projects/beneficial watershed features

Branch County is unique because the four main tributaries are in various stages of watershed planning. Hog Creek and its tributaries are undergoing a 319 watershed planning project. A 319 watershed management plan was written for the Coldwater and Sauk River in 1995. A Swan Creek watershed plan and environmental assessment was conducted in 1997. BMP implementation for the Swan Creek is funded under NRCS – PL-566 and a CMI project. And the Prairie River was slated for a TMDL but was removed from the 2002 303 (d) list for unknown reasons. Additional information about the Prairie River is available from the MDEQ. Subwatershed specific information is covered in the existing or ongoing reports. Additional GIS information for the county is available from Dan List, Branch GIS at MSUE and Brent Stinson, GIS Coordinator with NRCS.

Implementation has focused on rural/agricultural best management practices for both the Sauk/Coldwater and Swan Creek plans to address sediment and nutrient concerns. Hog Creek implementation recommendations are unknown at this time as the plan is not finalized (the draft plan is completed and information is available from Robin Ryan, Hog Creek Watershed Coordinator). Sewer installation in the Coldwater Lake area is believed to be improving water quality.

The county is currently broadening the membership of a Steering Committee assembled to assess land use planning. Some of the original members of the committee included member of Farm Bureau, who have a particular interest in farmland preservation. New members are being invited including township supervisors, commissioners, NRCS, Conservation District, realtors, city officials and other interested citizens. Each township has zoning ordinances of some form and the county has a master zoning plan.

A stakeholder survey was conducted in 2001. General outcomes of the survey indicate 1) familiarity with the conservation district, 2) high concern for groundwater, surface water, and land use, 3) desire for more information about conservation, and 4) preference for an informational newsletter (49%) or website (18%).

#### Volunteer Projects:

Quincy Middle and High School students, led by Jim Krebs, have conducted water quality monitoring on the Sauk/Coldwater River. Additional work has been done by the Quincy students along the length of the St. Joe River stopping at several points looking at quality of stream, macro-invertebrates and teaching students about the impact to watersheds. The Sauk "Adopt-a-Stream" program is also a successful project where several groups have adopted portions of the stream. The Board of Public Utilities monitors water quality in the Sauk. Farmers Day is a great time to promote conservation through education and outreach to the farming community of Branch County and the surrounding counties. The Conservation District and NRCS has put on many presentations surrounding watershed protection with BMP's. Many producers attend to get re-certification credits for their applicators license. The Branch County Agribusiness Association is another local sponsoring group that can be helpful promoting watershed protection through producers.

No specific countywide NPS ordinances were known. State rules designate standard well isolation setbacks from pollutant sources like animal waste. The Health Department and groundwater specialists maintain an active outreach program for groundwater education for agricultural and urban landowners.

There are five county parks maintained by the Road Commission. It was noted that road stream crossing maintenance practices increasingly address concerns about stormwater runoff and erosion.

#### Challenges in the Watershed

Algal blooms in local lakes are increasingly thought to be linked with development and septic systems around the lake perimeter. Recreational groups and lake associations have shown increasing interest in sewer installation. Individual sub-watershed plans provide details.

Grey water (treated sewage) from the City of Quincy is permitted for release to Bagley Drain which flows into the Hog Creek. Grey water from Kinderhook (services Coldwater, Long and George Lake) is permitted for release into Prairie River. Non-point source contributors sometimes question the effects on surface water quality from regulated dischargers such as these. Similar concerns exist over municipal land application of sludge. Alternatives were not discussed.

Irrigation issues exist in the county and are generally addressed through GAAMPS, voluntary guidelines meant to preserve and optimize groundwater use for agriculture. Irrigation with groundwater and surface waters are not regulated in the county. A county groundwater map is available through the Health Department that shows areas of concern. The distribution is varied with some locations unable to reach groundwater. The county is heavily drained with 1200 miles of county drainage.

The Amish community in Branch County consists of three orders. The community is thought to be growing and more traditional than in other parts of the watershed. The more traditional groups tend to question conservation practices. Water quality issues generally associated with Amish farming techniques include animal access and sedimentation due to runoff of tilled ground. It was noted that the best outreach group for interaction with the Amish is MSUE.

There is little navigational activity in Branch County by stream or ditch. Canoeists occasionally report navigational barriers such as logjams on tributaries. Some landowners have expressed opposing drain maintenance practices that trim cover and straighten channels through out the watershed. Zebra mussels and purple loosestrife are a general county-wide concerns.

Additional needs for the jurisdiction

Generally, a great deal more outreach could be conducted with greater resources and staffing in the district office. Land owner interest in conservation programs is not limiting.