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Jurisdiction

The scope of the interview was LaGrange County, Indiana, located entirely within the St. Joseph River Watershed. LaGrange County is ranked fourth in the state for dairy production and has a large and growing chicken population. Corn and soybeans account for approximately 90% of crops with approximately 40% grown with no-till practices. Hay and wheat are the next most common crops. Amish lands are typically a mix of pasture with some hay and corn production.

Beneficial watershed features

LaGrange County is finalizing a comprehensive county planning initiative that will include ordinance revisions. Input came from many entities, including the Amish community. The County has three Commissioners who have the ultimate authority regarding comprehensive planning and ordinances. An Amish man sits as an *ex-officio* member of the Planning Commission. A few highlights of the plan include the promotion of intensive rotational grazing, the need to address the growing environmental impact of many Amish cottage industries spread around the county, and the need to address development in areas where sandy soils raise groundwater contamination concerns.

There are no specific county-wide stormwater or erosion ordinances. The county follows Indiana Rule 5 general guidelines. There is a county-wide sewer district. State law requires that houses within 300 feet of a line connect to the sewer system. IDEM has a compliance and enforcement program, but no money to staff it. A SWCD annual report exists, as do Natural Resource Inventory data.

The rural character and dense Amish community is unique to the county. On-going outreach work with the Amish community is strengthening the ties with the SWCD. The SWCD understands the Amish community organization and points of contact (based mostly on school districts and school leaders). Regular activities include pasture walks, educational outreach, and transportation of Amish groups to land management seminars. It was noted that the Amish respond well to word of mouth from other Amish about proven water quality practices. Some Amish refuse cost-share yet still implement land and animal management practices, though response time varies greatly. The Amish tend to support efforts to enhance wildlife habitats.

The district is hosting its 3rd Annual Grazing Conference, which is unique to the Great Lakes area. Local school groups participate in Water Quality Field Days in junior high and high schools where they investigate macroinvertebrates, wildlife, forestry, and soils. A past 319 grant funded a mobile water quality unit that is geared toward school and public presentations.

It is believed that past atrazine concerns have been addressed, but data are not readily available for interpretation.

Land management projects address impairments identified on the 303(d) and 305(b) lists. Sewage treatment upgrades in the Fly Creek Headwaters and a wetland treatment system were completed to address pathogen related impairments. LARE funds were used to do land treatment in the Shipshewana Lake Watershed, and Build Indiana funds were used for actual in-lake

dredging to remove the sediments that continued to cause algae blooms and problems with lake clarity. Bill Grant with the Health Department was instrumental in getting the project underway, but now the Shipshewana Lake Association is the lead contact for the project. There are no central sewers around the lake. The next needed project in order to complete all the work out there would be the installation of central sewer around the lake. The LaGrange County Sewer Board is responsible for installation of all central sewer systems around the lakes and in the unincorporated towns throughout the county.

The Hoosier River Watch program monitors eight county sites in LaGrange. The grant to support the effort originates out of Noble County where the data are also assembled. The GLC funded a well water quality demonstration project in Buck Creek ten years ago that involved volunteer sampling and laboratory work.

The LaGrange County SWCD office is the home base for a multi-county 319 grant led by Dennis Wolheter. Dennis works one-on-one with farmers to implement livestock management options to improve water quality. Dennis operates in multiple Indiana counties, all of which are in the St. Joseph River Watershed. Examples of implemented improvements include alternative watering systems, fencing to exclude livestock from surface water, filter strips, manure application and nutrient management planning, pasture planting and improvement, and other innovative practices. The program offers cost-share incentives. Dennis has been working for four years and has until June 30th to complete this last grant. The grant has been renewed for another year, but no firm start date has been established with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management. Multiple county representatives form a steering committee that meets quarterly to discuss the program.

Manure management plans for all new livestock facilities in LaGrange County are being written at the request of the Building Department, Health Department and County Commissioners. This is only for LaGrange County and is strictly being done on a voluntary basis. There is not an ordinance in place to address manure storage or handling in the county. An old ordinance addresses only setbacks for building construction.

A 319 project is set to start in the Little Elkhart River Watershed covering 3 subwatersheds. A complete land use inventory will be conducted in these three subwatersheds. Other 319 projects are occurring with Pheasants Forever for grassland and wetland rehabilitation and construction. Walking inventories (land use inventories) have been completed for Fish, Royer, Adams, McClish/Lake of the Woods, Oliver, Olin, and Martin Lakes.

The USDA, DNR, and SWCD staff are all actively involved in a watershed management plan just being started by the Five Lakes Conservation Association covering a large portion of the lakes in the southern part of the county and going into the northern part of Noble County. D. J. Case & Associates is the communications firm hired to assist with the watershed plan.

Regular working contacts for the district include Amish community leaders and families, Pheasants Forever, the Health Department, the Countywide Lakes Council, the Sewer Board, schools, Pigeon River Fish & Wildlife staff, Army Corps of Engineers, and surrounding IDEM officials.

There are six major county parks administered by the County Parks Department. ACRES Inc. and the Nature Conservancy (TNC) have protected approximately 80 acres around Olin Lake and an area called Fawn River Fen in the northern part of the county. There are two wetland reserve

projects in the county funded by USDA. Pigeon River Wildlife Area covers approximately 15,000 acres in LaGrange and Steuben Counties.

Challenges in the watershed

LaGrange County has 64 lakes. Septic systems surrounding lakes are common, and problems with contamination are suspected. Beach closures have occurred in the past due to pathogens, but distinctions between human or animal sources were unknown. Shipshewana lake has had nutrient blooms in the past. Shipshewana has a permanent population of around 800. However, on auction days May through October, that population can reach 20,000 visitors per day. Once a treatment plant is completed, improvements are expected.

LaGrange County's population is approximately 35,000, with approximately half of the population being Amish. Amish families own approximately half of the land in the county. Most Amish homesteads have small livestock numbers on small acreages. The Amish generally do not use many chemicals, therefore no-till soil erosion reduction practices can be difficult for them.

There are numerous Amish schoolhouses built near livestock facilities, creating a nitrogen contamination problem in well water. The Health Department monitors wells periodically. The county now has regulations restrict new housing construction within 500 feet of a livestock facility, and new livestock facilities within 500 feet of an existing residence, with the exception of those residences associated with that livestock operation.

Additional needs for the jurisdiction

The SWCD believes the following goals are already being pursued but noted that they need continued support and visibility:

- Water quality outreach with the Amish community should continue and techniques to improve relations should be continually improved upon.
- Working with the lake associations is important as lake populations continue to change from part-time to year round residents.
- Shipshewana tourism is important to the economy and water quality issues of stormwater, septic, and sewer are being addressed with a recent sewage system upgrade.

It was noted again in this Indiana county that the districts are critical links to their local communities. Current planning efforts need to be recognized and shared in this management plan that reaches out to both Michigan and Indiana.