

**TRIM CREEK  
WATERSHED PLANNING PROJECT  
2005 - 2006**

**YEAR ONE REPORT and  
ACTION PLAN**



Assisted by

Metropolitan Planning Council  
Openlands  
Campaign for Sensible Growth

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## **FOREWORD**

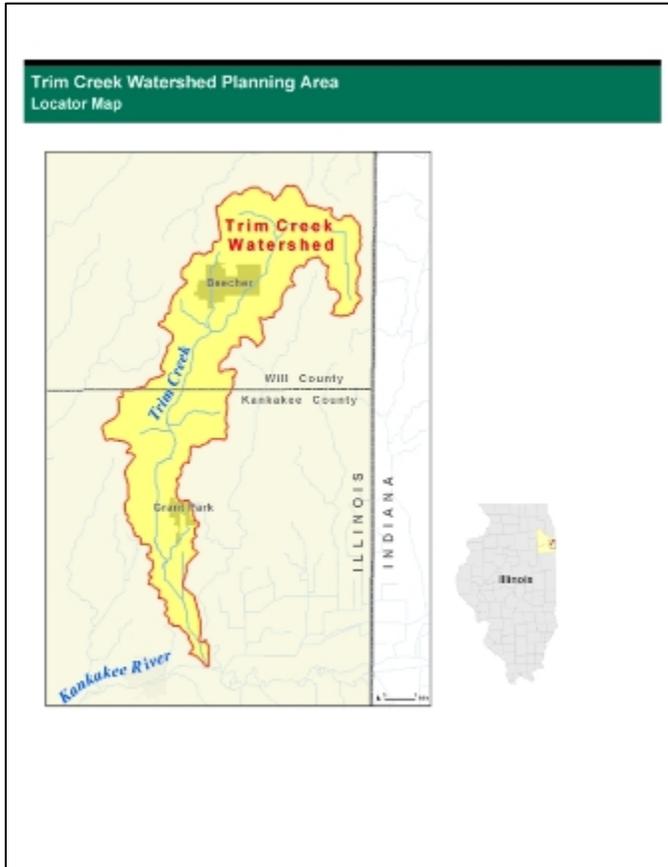
If the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be remembered for the actions and concerns about development pressure in the areas surrounding cities, edge cities, and now edgeless cities, the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be marked by concerns about water, a primary ingredient for development. Water is arguably an area's most precious resource, and the relationship between land use and water is becoming increasingly relevant to regional health. The quantity and quality of any given region's water supplies depend primarily on how much of the land is developed or left as open space, the intensity of the farming practices, various industries, urbanized populations that depend on clean water, and other land-use decisions. Similarly, land-use options are often limited for communities and developers by water resource considerations – with locations of floodplains, depth and quality of aquifers, quality of surface lakes and streams, and other water-related factors affecting where and how development requiring clean water supplies can occur. **The northeastern Illinois region is at a critical junction in its need for management, planning and protection of its water resources.**

In 2003, the Campaign for Sensible Growth, Metropolitan Planning Council, and Openlands launched a collaborative effort to examine the relationships between development and land use and water quality and quantity. Through research, released in the report *Changing Course* (December 2004), it was determined that while surface water quality in northeastern Illinois has shown some improvement over the past three decades, unregulated nonpoint source pollution stemming from continued regional growth has had increasingly negative consequences for surface waters. In addition, it is becoming clear that supply of potable water is limited. With ever-increasing demands for a finite supply of clean water, research shows that sustaining water resources depends on implementation of sustainable land-use practices.

In August 2005, the partners completed the first year of a two-year watershed planning project, designed to help communities and counties play a vital role in improving public policy and practices regarding water quality and quantity. The partners have helped create committees of citizens working at the local level in two watersheds characteristic of the tensions of watershed planning in areas on the edge of urban development. In the watersheds – Trim Creek, a tributary of the Kankakee River in Will and Kankakee counties, and the Greater Marengo-Union Area that drains into the Kishwaukee River in McHenry County – the partners are providing technical assistance to improve the effectiveness of area-scale watershed planning. Each of pilot projects addresses river sub-watersheds of a manageable size for this project (25 – 40 square miles); both are in the path of new suburbanization that is a proven threat to water resource management; both planning projects address tributary flows into critical Class A (highly ranked) Illinois rivers; and both watersheds contain local governments concerned about future water quality, water supply, and flooding.

## THE TRIM CREEK WATERSHED

Trim Creek, in Will and Kankakee counties, flows into the Class A Kankakee River. It is representative of other watersheds that could threaten the Kankakee, most particularly via sediment deposition, if new development is not managed properly. The two villages in the watershed, Beecher (Will County) and Grant Park (Kankakee County) are small, but they offer easy access to jobs in the Chicago area, as well as proximity to the proposed



third regional airport. They are even now confronted with significant proposed development. Beecher's population was 2,033 according to the 2000 census. According to Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission forecasts, Beecher's population will grow to an estimated 20,029 by 2030 – an increase of almost 900 percent. In August 2005, the Plan Commission in one meeting dealt with proposals for an increase of 1,010 homes over the next five years. While specific projections are not available for Grant Park, development is expected to increase in similar patterns over the next 20 years.

The villages of Beecher and Grant Park officially signed onto the project, as did Will and Kankakee counties, Washington

Township, and the Washington Township Drainage District #3. Each provides members to the Steering Committee that meets monthly, alternatively in locations in Beecher and Grant Park. These local governments are working together to create a Trim Creek Watershed Plan that will serve as a roadmap to a coordinated approach for land use and water resource management. The participating local jurisdictions are striving to strengthen codes and ordinances and to establish effective guidelines for reviewing proposed development. Watershed management also involves outreach to property owners and farmers who own and manage the vast majority of land within the Trim Creek watershed.

Over the past seven months, a series of meetings have been held first to organize, and as the months progressed, to learn about Trim Creek and Best Management Practices for

managing stormwater and protecting water quality. These meetings were held on May 3, June 8, July 13, and August 10, 2005. After discussing issues and reviewing drafts, the Steering Committee approved interim watershed goals and objectives at its July 13, 2005 meeting.

## **THE IMPORTANCE AND URGENCY OF PLANNING FOR THE TRIM CREEK WATERSHED**

The participants in the Trim Creek Watershed Planning Project have identified and discussed the natural resource assets, government and institutional setting, growth issues, and the multiple benefits of improved watershed management. There is a consensus that watershed planning is important to the people of the Trim Creek watershed. With significant new growth already underway, there also is an urgent need to be prepared to manage such growth:

1. Trim Creek is a high quality stream that fully supports aquatic life and has a high rating of biological quality.
2. Trim Creek is a tributary of the Kankakee River – a Class A Illinois river that is a high quality aquatic resource providing drinking water and many recreational and economic benefits to the region.
3. The Trim Creek watershed and the Kankakee River are sources of water supply for the property owners and residents of the watershed.
4. The Kankakee River is threatened in various ways, including sedimentation from upstream and its tributaries.
5. Agriculture is the most prevalent land use in the watershed, the practice of which can have significant impacts, positive and negative, on water quantity and quality in the watershed.
6. Significant population and economic growth is expected in the Trim Creek watershed, resulting in increases of run-off and discharges to the stream, with significant potential changes to the volume, rate and quality of water in the stream, as well as potential effects on ground water quality.
7. Trim Creek has a significant floodplain, which is historically part of the ecology of the stream and which presents constraints to new development.
8. Improvement of the quality of Trim Creek and its corridor can provide the communities of the watershed with enhanced access



The higher quality sections of Trim Creek support a diversity of fish and other aquatic life.



Bulrushes and pickerel weed are native aquatic plants found in Trim Creek.

to nature, aesthetic benefits, and recreational enjoyment.

## **FIRST YEAR PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS**

The first year of the Trim Creek watershed planning project included a start-up phase for the overall pilot project being funded by the Joyce Foundation. This entailed assessing and selecting a pilot watershed through outreach to local officials to identify local interest and the potential for creating a collaborative relationship with a reasonable expectation of project success. Subsequent to pilot watershed selection, significant progress has been made. Thus far, the project has:

1. Organized the watershed planning steering committee by executing agreements with collaborating jurisdictions.
2. Prepared GIS-based watershed base maps for watershed planning and public outreach.
3. Developed interim watershed goals and objectives
4. Completed stream assessment and management/restoration recommendations via relationship with the Chicago Wilderness Sustainable Watershed Action Team (SWAT) and JF New, Inc.
5. Assisted Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) fish sampling in Trim Creek
6. Developed photo-documentation of watershed and stream conditions.
7. Developed working relationships with key resource management organizations such as the Forest Preserve District of Will County, Kankakee River Ecosystem Partnership of IDNR, and Soil and Water Conservation districts.
8. Identified primary components of a watershed green infrastructure system.
9. Developed the Action Plan for Year 2 of preparing the Trim Creek Watershed Plan.
10. Completed initial steps to create a demonstration project in the village of Beecher for stormwater management best management practices.



James Less, JFNew consulting landscape designer, points out opportunities for Trim Creek restoration to Grant Park Mayor Robert Schurman.

## **TRIM CREEK WATERSHED PROBLEMS AND ISSUES**

The Trim Creek corridor has evolved over time from the broad drainage swale of pre-settlement times to a drainage channel with remnant natural and re-naturalizing stream segments. It exists today as an important aquatic resource. It varies in quality (e.g. between “A” and “B” ratings), with significantly different conditions along the stream’s length. In recent years, its Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) has fluctuated between 42 and 56. These scores generally indicate very good conditions that support the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) designation as a watershed with highest priority for protection. This priority recognizes potential threats to stream quality in view of the expected growth in the watershed, as well as the importance of Trim Creek and similar streams to the sustainability of the Kankakee River.

A stream assessment, based upon sampling by Crete-based consultant JF New (as part of a study by the Chicago Wilderness SWAT, has revealed a complex picture of physical, chemical and biological conditions caused by highly variable conditions along the stream course. Some of the conditions that exist and should be addressed via improved watershed management include: low levels of dissolved oxygen, high levels of nutrients, and poor stream structural and habitat conditions (bank erosion, lack of sinuosity, lack of riffles and pools, weedy/overgrown bank conditions). The SWAT study also documented the proliferation of stormwater discharges into the creek within the village of Beecher.



Trim Creek could become an aesthetic community asset with control of discharges and improved management of stream banks.

The study recommended measures that can be undertaken by the municipality, property owners, and developers to alleviate stormwater, water quality and aesthetic problems resulting from this situation. These include adoption of stream stewardship practices (reduction in the use of lawn chemicals, discouraging dumping of refuse in the stream, maintenance of stormwater structures, use of infiltration techniques to reduce runoff, and reduction of impervious surfaces). Additional measures were recommended for improved protection of the stream in the agricultural areas of the watershed, including greater use of erosion control practices, streambank stabilization, use of buffer and filter strips, and control of fly dumping.

The Trim Creek Watershed Planning Project Steering Committee identified the following problems and issues related to land use and development, flood and stormwater management, water quality and habitat.

1. Trim Creek has a generally high quality that will be difficult to maintain as its watershed is developed.
2. Water quality, habitat, erosion, and aesthetic problems are caused by current stormwater discharges to Trim Creek.
3. Flooding problems exist in some areas.
4. The Trim Creek corridor has unrealized potential as a community amenity and greenway corridor.
5. Existing drainage facilities need maintenance and enhancement. Trim Creek requires removal of litter, trash and debris on a regular basis in order to preserve drainage capacity.

6. Expected new growth could degrade Trim Creek if new development is not appropriately designed, constructed and managed. Existing ordinances may need to be updated to maximize the protection and enhancement of Trim Creek.



Extensive new development in the Trim Creek watershed provides challenges and opportunities for preserving and enhancing Trim Creek.

1. Previous straightening of Trim Creek and the narrowness of filter/buffer strips in many locations along the Creek contribute to reduced water quality and poor habitat conditions.

2. There are no mechanisms for coordinating development planning within the watershed.

3. Over time, some site-specific agricultural practices have degraded the quality of Trim Creek, but techniques exist and have been used in various locations to minimize adverse stream impacts.



4. Tools are needed to improve the review of proposed new developments.

5. Expanded citizen participation in the management of Trim Creek is needed.

Beecher High School is serving as a steward of a portion of Trim Creek within the village.

6. A program for monitoring watershed and stream conditions is needed.

**INTERIM WATERSHED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

In response to these concerns, the Steering Committee has adopted the following goals and objectives for the watershed:

**Goal A. Achieve an integrated pattern of development and open space that creates sustainable communities, and conserves water resources and ecosystems in Trim Creek watershed and the Kankakee River.**

Objectives:

1. In planning for future growth and development, continue to recognize the protection and management of Trim Creek and the Kankakee River as a critical need.
2. Within existing communities, promote infill development that uses state-of-the-art engineering and design for water resource management and water quality improvement.
3. Promote conservation design for contiguous new development that, contributes to efficient municipal services, minimizes impervious surfaces, and effectively manages stormwater for water quality benefits.
4. Design new development in ways that encourage conservation of green space and natural resources by following conservation development principles.
5. Provide sufficient open space within new development for natural resources management, recreation and aesthetics.
6. Provide a system of trails and bikeways that creates recreational opportunities, access for the enjoyment of Trim Creek and the Kankakee River, and linkages to regional trails and greenways.

**Goal B. Protect, enhance, restore, and properly manage the natural resources and ecosystems of the watershed.**

Objectives:

1. Sustain and enhance the existing high level of biological diversity and quality of Trim Creek. Maintain a quantity and quality of base flow that sustains high species diversity in Trim Creek.
2. Use best management practices to protect Trim Creek, the Kankakee River, wetlands, and other surface waters from adverse impacts of point and nonpoint sources of pollution.
3. Conserve the supply of groundwater and protect aquifers from pollution.
4. Avoid development in floodplains that increases flood levels or impedes flood flow. Reserve floodplains for open space, low-intensity recreation, agricultural, and similar uses.
5. Employ stormwater management techniques that minimize flooding, improve water quality and habitat, increase groundwater recharge, minimize construction costs and maintenance, and enhance the aesthetics of the landscape.

6. Protect the physical integrity of Trim Creek, its tributaries, and the watershed's wetlands. Restore channelized segments of Trim Creek and degraded wetlands where practicable.
7. Maintain setbacks between Trim Creek and intensive development. Create vegetated buffers, preferably of native vegetation, along Trim Creek, its tributaries and around wetlands.
8. Create a green infrastructure of interconnected greenway corridors to preserve continuity of habitat, manage water resources, provide recreational opportunities, and enhance communities with nature.
9. Protect, restore and manage natural areas and native plant communities in order to maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the watershed.
10. Monitor water resource and habitat conditions in order to assess changing conditions, and adapt watershed management strategies.

**Goal C. Maintain the distinctive character of the built environment in communities and rural areas to preserve the quality of life and promote economic vitality.**

Objectives:

1. Protect the important historic and cultural features of communities and rural areas in the Trim Creek watershed.
2. Guide development in order to preserve views, vistas, oak savanna/woodland remnants, and the scenic areas of the Trim Creek watershed.
3. Maintain the overall rural character of the watershed by encouraging the contiguity of new development.

**Goal D. Manage drainage in the watershed in ways that accommodate economic development and agriculture while enhancing water quality and habitat conditions.**

1. Maintain and manage existing drainageways in order to minimize flooding, maintain agricultural productivity, improve water quality, and enhance aquatic and riparian habitat.
2. Prevent the dumping of refuse in Trim Creek, its tributaries, drainageways, and wetlands.
3. Ensure that development activities do not interfere with established farm field drainage systems.



Fly dumping adjacent to Trim Creek.

4. Minimize the alteration of natural drainage patterns and existing topography during the development process.

5. Maintain and restore drainage systems so their aesthetics support community development.

**Goal E. Achieve mutually supportive relationships between agricultural activities, Trim Creek enhancement, and new suburban development.**

Objectives:

1. Preserve prime agricultural lands and promote a diversity of agricultural activities as an integral part of the character and economy of the watershed area.



A previously channelized segment of Trim Creek is reverting to a more natural, meandering course. Vegetated buffers in agricultural areas can protect stream water quality.

2. Adopt agricultural practices that reduce erosion and other adverse impacts on physical, chemical and biological quality of Trim Creek, consistent with recommendations of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

3. Work with landowners and managers to address site-specific stream impact problems and protect identified high quality natural areas.

4. Fence livestock out of stream and stream buffer areas.

5. Do not allow diversions from Trim Creek that would reduce the base flow below what is needed to maintain good quality stream habitat conditions.

6. Preserve distinctive and high quality upland areas, including remnant woodlands and high quality isolated wetlands.



Remaining natural sections of Trim Creek are worthy of preservation.

7. Reduce conflicts between farming and new development by educating residents, particularly residents of new subdivisions, regarding normal agricultural practices.

**Goal E. Maintain a collaborative process that furthers coordinated plan implementation and plan update.**

Objectives:

1. Achieve effective implementation of the watershed plan through intergovernmental cooperation and the use of intergovernmental agreements relating to planning, jurisdictional boundaries, land use, and resource management.
2. Review, update and coordinate the watershed plan, local plans, and codes on a regular basis.
3. Create an effective public outreach and education program that increases resident interest, understanding and involvement in watershed management.

The goals and objectives intended to guide the development of the final watershed plan were endorsed by the Steering Committee at its August 10, 2005 meeting.

**TRIM CREEK WATERSHED PLANNING STRATEGIES**

**Maintain a high priority on protecting the Kankakee River.**

The Trim Creek watershed provides a connection between the Plum Creek watershed to the north and Kankakee River to the south. Protection of Trim Creek is not only important to the property owners and communities of the watershed, but also to sustaining the exceptional resource of the Kankakee River. The significant growth expected as an extension of the south suburban area brings to the Trim Creek watershed and the Kankakee River the challenges associated with the impacts of development, particularly flooding and reduced water quality. At the same time, this expected development provides opportunities for stream preservation and enhancement if development is planned and designed properly. Successful management of the Trim Creek watershed can be a model for many of the other watersheds that similarly flow into the Kankakee River and bring sediment and other pollution.

**Focus new development as expansions of Beecher and Grant Park in order to manage stormwater and improve water quality.**

The Trim Creek watershed plan should place major emphasis on managing new development in order to protect the stream corridor and enhance water quality. Such new development must also be undertaken with an understanding of the need to protect groundwater supplies and groundwater quality. Suburban development should be considered as expansions of Beecher and Grant Park in order to provide appropriate services and protect prime agricultural soils and the agricultural economy. Use of state-of-the-art best management practices (BMPs) is critical to the successful management of stormwater so that flooding is controlled and water quality and habitat are protected. The

encouragement of “conservation development” practices and the use of BMPs can be accomplished through adoption of community guidelines and upgrades to zoning ordinances; subdivision regulations; and codes for stormwater management, soil erosion and sediment control, floodplain management, and stream and wetland protection.

**Develop in-town Strategies for restoring Trim Creek, managing run-off from current development, and creating a high quality community greenway amenity.**

The stream corridor in already built-up areas, such as central Beecher, needs to be restored to the extent possible and otherwise improved to create a community greenway amenity. Without community buy-in of a vision of Trim Creek as an amenity, it will be difficult to achieve the degree of stewardship and improvement of stormwater management needed to accomplish watershed goals. Long-range strategies need to be developed to address the adverse impacts of direct stormwater discharge into the stream. These strategies will include enhanced maintenance, redesign and replacement of selected stormwater and drainage facilities. It will also require improved “housekeeping” by property owners to eliminate refuse and pollutants in the stream, as well as the installation of BMPs that manage stormwater by handling it at its source, slowing run-off and increasing infiltration. The development of more caring public attitudes toward the creek is a foundation for these actions.



Rain gardens, such as this example in Minnesota, intercept and cleanse stormwater while enhancing community appearance.

**Develop an interconnected in-town and countryside green infrastructure/greenway system.**

The north-south orientation of the watershed results in opportunities for creating and connecting regional and local greenways and trails using the Trim Creek corridor and other local and regional connections. Local greenway paths and walkways should be connected with the Vincennes Trail project of the Forest Preserve District of Will County and connected to existing and planned greenways and trails in Kankakee County.

The Trim Creek greenway corridor can be augmented with nodes of local public and private open space as development occurs in Beecher and Grant Park. There are also opportunities to preserve and restore key areas in the rural parts of the watershed, the most significant of which could be an Eagle Lake Reserve at the Trim Creek headwaters. Given the geography of the watershed, the Eagle Lake Reserve provides one of the few major opportunities, in addition to the Trim Creek stream corridor itself, for providing a

regional-scale open space with water resource management, wildlife habitat, recreation, and scenic benefits. Much work remains to be done to understand the feasibility and extent of such a reserve and the appropriate form of management for such an area.

Additional local public and private open space can be created along the Trim Creek corridor to the Kankakee River to protect natural segments and to enhance altered segments in developed and agricultural areas.

### **Increase the stewardship of Trim Creek in agricultural areas.**

Within the agricultural areas, Trim Creek can be protected in part with adequate buffers



Steering Committee members talk with Herman Chapman on his farm, which preserves a natural section of Trim Creek.

between the creek and agricultural activity. Farm field drainage systems should be preserved and maintained, but agricultural practices should be modified according to accepted guidelines as necessary to protect Trim Creek water quality and habitat. On a case-by-case basis measures can be undertaken to address bank erosion problems. The JF New report identified one possible demonstration project along the

creek at Kankakee County Road 5500. Land owners should be encouraged to participate in efforts to improve in-stream and riparian habitat.

### **Increase stream monitoring, public education and stewardship.**

Without sound and regularly updated knowledge of stream and stream corridor conditions, it is difficult to guide an ongoing watershed management program. Monitoring of the stream corridor can consist of evaluations of chemical and physical water quality conditions, the biological quality and diversity of the stream corridor, and the physical conditions of the stream itself. There has been periodic sampling of Trim Creek by the IDNR, Governors State University, Beecher High School, and most recently by JF New. These activities have provided insights into the quality of the stream that have led to interest in watershed planning to protect this high quality stream. The watershed plan needs to emphasize the importance of scientifically rigorous and accurate and more frequent monitoring of Trim Creek.

Chemical analysis of water samples must be conducted by highly reliable, certified



Beecher High School students learn how to care for nature by tending to the clean up and maintenance of Trim Creek.

laboratories according to accepted protocols. The results of stream sampling can serve useful functions in support of public education and stewardship programs. JF New also recommended that a vegetative study of the stream corridor be conducted.

Public interest and involvement in stewardship of Trim Creek is essential to overall watershed plan implementation because it provides support for appropriate public policy regarding watershed management, increases landowner willingness to utilize effective water resource management techniques, and encourages direct citizen involvement in volunteer stream restoration and protection activities.

**Establish a mechanism for ongoing watershed planning and intergovernmental cooperation.**

Management of the Trim Creek Watershed will not be accomplished with the completion of a watershed plan. Perhaps the most important goal of the watershed planning effort is the creation of ongoing mechanisms for intergovernmental cooperation in implementing, updating and sustaining the plan over time. Concerted effort will be needed to procure funding to support this ongoing work, and pay for needed technical work such as hydrologic modeling, stream monitoring, vegetation studies, and review of proposed development.

## **ACTION PLAN FOR 2006**

1. Complete an evaluation of local ordinances with local officials, and develop recommendations for strengthening and improved regulatory consistency in the watershed.

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|---|---------------------------|
| *Complete consultant evaluation of ordinances | September – December 2005 |
| *Develop recommendations                      | January – March 2006      |
| *Conduct ordinance update process             | April – July 2006         |

2. Develop guidelines for review of proposed development projects.

- |  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| *Identify existing checklist formats and sources | September – November 2005 |
| *Draft Trim Creek development guidelines         | December – March 2006     |
| *Review and finalize recommended guidelines      | April – July 2006         |

3. Develop a proposed green infrastructure plan and implementation strategy.

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| * Identify and evaluate implementation options for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Trim Creek headwaters and Eagle Lake area</li><li>- In-Town Trim Creek Enhancement in Beecher</li><li>- Trim Creek protection and enhancement potentials through growth strategies for Beecher and Grant Park</li><li>- Potential local and regional paths and trails</li></ul> | September – December 2005 |
| * Draft green infrastructure recommendations and implementation strategies  | January – February 2006   |
| * Prepare final plan recommendations  | March – May 2006          |

4. Design a program for agricultural area stream management and protection.

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| * Meet with agricultural agencies, organizations and landowners | September – December 2005 |
| * Design an outreach strategy for the watershed                 | January – February 2006   |
| * Prepare watershed plan recommendations                        | March – April 2006        |

5. Identify ongoing watershed and stream monitoring strategies.

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| * Meet with monitoring organizations                   | December 2005 – February 2006 |
| * Develop draft monitoring and funding recommendations | March – May 2006              |
| * Review and finalize recommendations                  | June – July 2006              |

6. Develop a watershed awareness and stewardship program.

- \* Meet with organizations and leaders December 2005 – February 2006
- \* Identify strategies for public information and involvement March – May 2006
- \* Review and finalize recommendations June – July 2006

7. Develop recommendations for ongoing plan implementation mechanisms.

- \* Identify and evaluate long-range watershed management options November 2005 – January 2006
- \* Develop management options for inclusion in the watershed plan February – March 2006
- \* Work with watershed jurisdictions to adopt an ongoing watershed management mechanism April – July 2006

8. Draft and adopt the Trim Creek Watershed Plan document

- \* Prepare draft watershed plan document May 2006
- \* Review and amend draft document June – July 2006
- \* Seek official adoption by project participants July – August 2006
- \* Publish final Trim Creek Watershed Plan August – September 2006

## **PROJECT PARTICIPANTS**

### **Steering Committee**

Robert Barber, Village Administrator, Village of Beecher  
Brian Billingsley, Planning and Development Manager, Kankakee Regional Planning Commission  
Joe Cook, Engineering Senior Manager, Will County Stormwater Committee  
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### **Community Participants**

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Roger Heldt, Chairman of Streets and Alleys, Village of Beecher  
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Trim Creek photographs by Richard Mariner, Sherri Jepsen, and Deanna Glosser.