

# RECLAIMING TRIM CREEK

Managing growth and protecting resources in the  
Kankakee River Watershed

Executive Summary



*This project is funded through a grant from the Joyce Foundation and Lumpkin Family Foundation*

*Sponsored and supported by the Village of Beecher, Village of Grant Park, Will County, Kankakee County, Washington Township, and Washington Township Drainage District #3*



## MANAGING THE WATERSHED AND ITS GROWTH

Trim Creek is a high-quality but underappreciated tributary of the Kankakee River. The health of Trim Creek (and the river’s many other tributaries) is critical to sustaining the Kankakee, a “Class A” Illinois river. Trim Creek’s 38-square-mile drainage area — the watershed — evolved from a vast tallgrass prairie with wetlands and woodlands to today’s agricultural landscape, which includes the agriculturally based communities of Beecher and Grant Park, Ill.

This landscape poses few obstacles to major development, and Beecher alone is expected to grow from 2,970 to 20,029 people between 2005 and 2030.\* If such growth is not properly planned and agricultural lands not carefully managed, Trim Creek and the Kankakee River will be degraded:

- New construction will increase impervious surface area, causing damaging floods and water pollution;
- Lawn and agricultural chemicals will pollute water;
- Soil erosion will cause silt deposits in Trim Creek and the Kankakee River;
- There will be no guiding vision for restoring Trim Creek to be a community and regional asset that provides high quality habitat, natural beauty, and recreational opportunities;
- Local regulations will be inadequate for protecting water and habitat; and

- Lack of awareness of problems and potentials will discourage watershed stewardship and stream improvements

This watershed plan has been developed by public officials who want to avoid these problems and establish a positive course for the future. They welcome economic development, but they also value a high quality of life, natural resources, and agriculture. They want Trim Creek to be protected and enhanced.

The watershed planning participants have created this plan as a guide for promoting environmental, community and economic vitality. Local governments are central to watershed planning because they have authority for managing growth and providing community services. This Trim Creek Watershed Plan is a tool to guide local governments, property owners, and concerned citizens toward achieving watershed goals.

\* Source: Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission

## WHY TAKE A WATERSHED APPROACH?

The Trim Creek Watershed functions as a living, continuous landscape that directs and alters water from where rain falls, all the way to where it flows into the Kankakee River. For purposes of planning, it is important to realize that Trim Creek starts:

Here ...



and here ...



and here ...



and here ...



and here.



Nearly every action taken on the landscape has a potential effect on the health of Trim Creek, as well as on the quality of all the landscape where water flows.



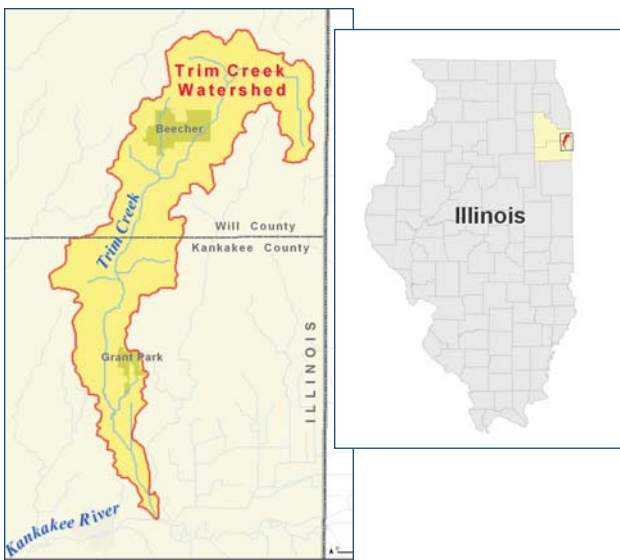
## THE PLAN AND ITS PRINCIPAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Trim Creek Watershed Plan — the work of the sponsoring governmental jurisdictions in collaboration with other stakeholders — creates a framework for the long-term management of the Trim Creek Watershed.

The plan provides a number of tools for improved watershed management. These include:

- This executive summary, which highlights critical needs and actions.
- The full Trim Creek Watershed Plan document, with its detailed assessment and recommendations.
- Large maps for use as guides by the project sponsors when working with developers and planning for growth and conservation.
- Detailed recommendations for strengthening local development regulations.
- Online and CD access to all of the above.

Most importantly, the plan calls for a cooperative, collaborative and consistent approach to managing growth and protecting resources, something that currently does not exist, but has begun through the preparation of this plan.



The Trim Creek Watershed is located in Will and Kankakee counties.

## RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES: A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

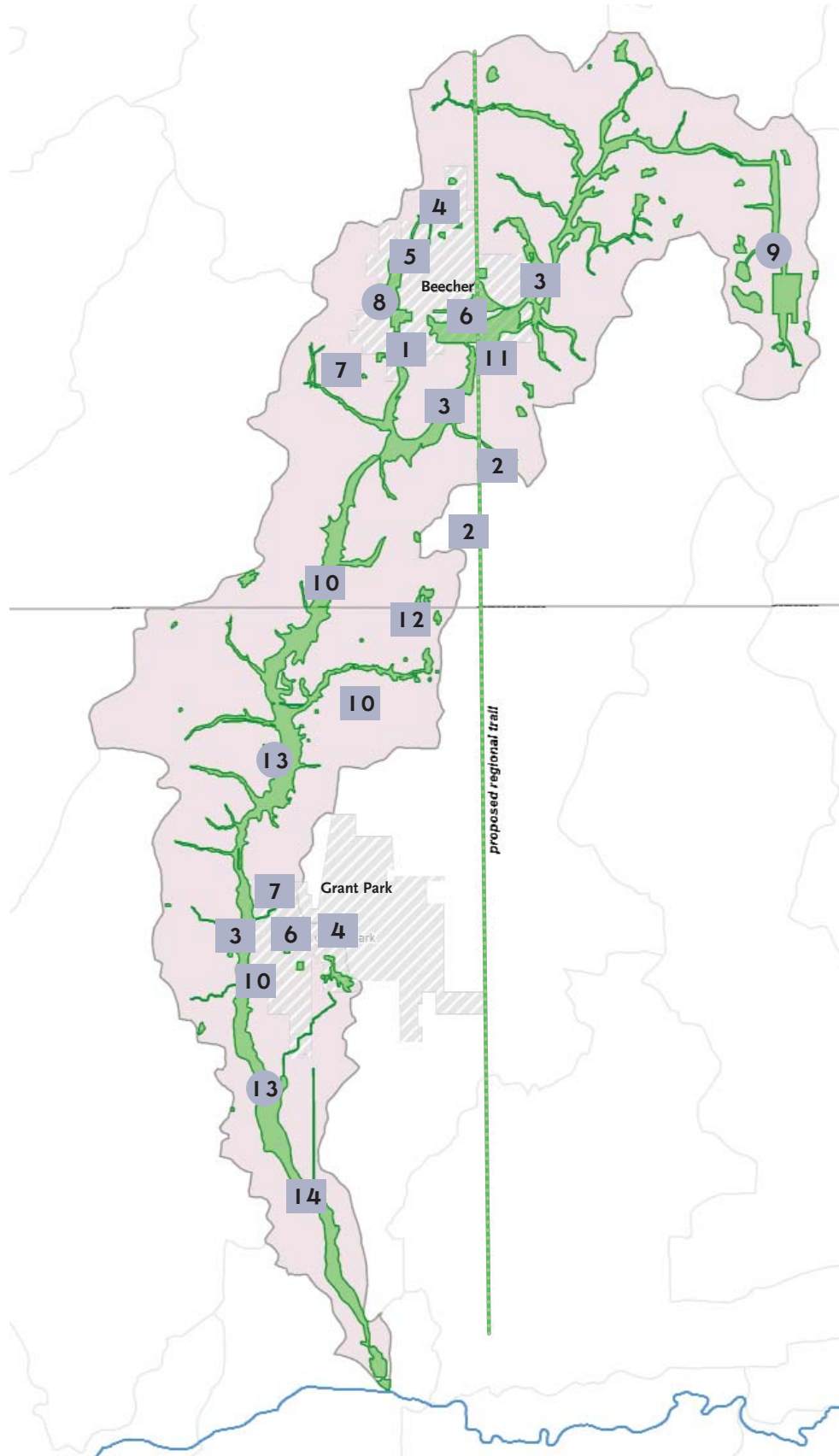
The challenges of the watershed are myriad, complex, interconnecting, and daunting. The largest issues are:

- Adoption of development techniques and farming practices that effectively manage precious surface and groundwater resources.
- Protection of sensitive environmental features and preservation of open space.
- Strengthening of tools local governments can use to create development that protects natural resources and maintains quality of life.
- Improvement of intergovernmental coordination to achieve consistency of growth and resource management across the watershed.
- Creation of greater citizen awareness, appreciation and responsibility regarding resource protection.

The cost of not taking these actions are potential surface and groundwater pollution, lost ability of natural systems to function normally, loss of landscape and community character and distinctiveness, and damage from stormwater and flooding. In order to address these concerns, the following major strategies are recommended as a framework for action:

- 1) Establish and maintain a collaborative intergovernmental mechanism for managing the watershed over time, in cooperation with local, state and federal agencies and organizations.
- 2) Create and manage a network of “green infrastructure,” i.e., open space that is integrated with the pattern of development, and protects habitat, provides recreation, and preserves the scenic character of the landscape.
- 3) Increase the capacities of county and municipal governments to protect, restore and manage the watershed’s resources with effective and consistent regulations, leadership and public education.
- 4) Promote the use of advanced stormwater management and agricultural practices, particularly best management practices (BMPs) that conserve aquifers and protect surface waters.

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE MAP AND KEY IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS





## PLAN RECOMMENDATION HIGHLIGHTS:

The Trim Creek planning area contains waterways, floodplains, wetlands, high quality natural areas, and existing public and private open spaces that together are fundamental to the health and beauty of the area. They are illustrated on the facing page, in the aggregate, as a Green Infrastructure Map. Green infrastructure is land that should be reserved for open space purposes, enhanced and managed properly, and protected from potentially harmful adjacent activities.

- 1** Restore high priority stream segments.
- 2** Create connected regional and local trail systems.
- 3** Use conservation design and stream restoration in subdivisions that include Trim Creek.
- 4** Maximize the use of BMPs in all new development.
- 5** Update maps of flood-prone areas.
- 6** Retrofit developed areas and golf courses using BMPs.
- 7** Promote appropriate use of land application wastewater systems to support compact development, farmland preservation, efficient provision of services and water quality protection.
- 8** Manage stormwater and restore Trim Creek in central Beecher to create a community greenway amenity.
- 9** Develop a resource management strategy for Eagle Lake.
- 10** Promote agricultural conservation practices and buffer strips along Trim Creek.
- 11** Undertake stream maintenance that includes stream restoration.
- 12** Restore farmed wetlands and demonstrate streambank stabilization.
- 13** Preserve scarce natural stream segments and woodlands.
- 14** Fence off Trim Creek from farm animals.

### KEY:

-  Site-specific project locations
-  Sample project locations representing multiple sites

## THE WATERSHED ACTION PLAN FOR THE TRIM CREEK WATERSHED

**ISSUE:** Implementation of the watershed plan requires ongoing collaboration among the planning area’s jurisdictions and organizations. The planning process created the seed of an implementation mechanism, but it needs to be reformulated with committed local leadership and based upon the existing structures.

1. Create an ongoing watershed management steering committee to promote watershed plan implementation, provide a forum for coordination, and initiate and support fundraising efforts on behalf of the watershed. The steering committee should include official representatives of the current participating entities, as well as additional public and private entities that have a role in implementing the plan.
  
2. Recruit a paid or volunteer, part-time, locally based watershed coordinator or shared staff person, potentially in collaboration with other watershed areas or organizations.

**ISSUE:** The watershed planning process has initiated changes in local planning and land use management. These shifts in the way of doing business need to be continued and completed via periodic review and update of official policies, rules and regulations.

3. Adopt the Trim Creek Watershed Plan and Green Infrastructure Map at the municipal, township and county levels and aggressively pursue preservation of key open space sites and naturalized areas within conservation developments. Place a high priority on preserving high-quality segments of Trim Creek.
  
4. Continue the process of amending and upgrading the Beecher, Grant Park, Will County, and Kankakee County development ordinances and stormwater regulations in order to promote land use that conserves natural resources and water quality.
  
5. Begin a local discussion among elected officials, community organizations, and interested citizens on how to anticipate future needs and improve local government capacities for planning, acquiring and managing civic open space for recreation, natural resources, beautification, and economic development.

**ISSUE:** The watershed planning that has been done via this planning process and supported by municipal and county planning, as well as by the organizations participating in Kankakee River Basin organizations, has not satisfied all of the watershed planning requirements of the U.S. and Ill. Environmental Protection agencies (USEPA and IEPA). If all the guidelines and requirements can be accomplished, the stakeholders can significantly increase their eligibility for receiving funding for watershed plan implementation.

6. Pursue a fundraising program that will combine local resources with funding from state and federal natural resources agencies and private sources, to satisfy all IEPA criteria and maximize eligibility for funding of watershed projects.
  
7. Work with IEPA to procure Section 319 funding for addressing nonpoint source pollution — particularly with respect to managing stormwater discharges in the central area of Beecher — using BMPs on existing and new public sites, and managing runoff from agricultural lands.



BEECHER HIGH SCHOOL

*Volunteer stream clean-up projects promote environmental stewardship and provide educational opportunities.*



CONSERVATION DESIGN FORUM, INC.

*Stormwater can be captured and directed into swales of natural vegetation that will purify and infiltrate the runoff.*



**ISSUE:** Existing programs and organizations have the capacity to demonstrate effective watershed management techniques, and build support for their widespread application and increased cooperation and collaboration. It is critical to develop multi-generational participation in stewardship and day-to-day behaviors that help achieve the goals of the plan.

8. Participate in projects approved and funded by Chicago Wilderness:
  - *Watershed Plan Implementation via Conservation Design and BMP Demonstration Projects*
  - *Facilitating On-Going Maintenance of Naturalized Features in Conservation Developments*
  
9. Work with Governors State University, local school districts, and the Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources to increase volunteer stream-monitoring activities.
  
10. Work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Soil & Water Conservation District in Will and Kankakee counties to conduct tours of sites that demonstrate conservation farming practices.
  
11. Conduct tours for public officials to study sites within the greater metropolitan area that demonstrate sustainable development practices.
  
12. Sponsor an annual Trim Creek volunteer event that includes inter-generational study, clean-up, and recreational activities. Leadership could be provided by Beecher and Grant Park, the county governments, townships, school districts, drainage districts, local organizations, and media.
  
13. Develop and promulgate informative and persuasive public information materials about the value and protection of Trim Creek. Potential information vehicles include local print media, cable TV, municipal newsletters, and school district newsletters. There is a need for a stream maintenance and stewardship brochure for property owners that could be used by the drainage districts, municipalities and developers. Another product is a video about the Trim Creek watershed, produced by cable TV and/or Governors State University.



*Native vegetation buffer strips along streams and drainageways help protect and purify water from golf courses and intensively developed areas. They also contribute beauty to the landscape in all seasons; support birds and butterflies, and reduce air pollution by less mowing and less use of lawn chemicals.*

**Local Sponsors and Steering Committee  
Representatives:**

Village of Beecher: Paul Lohmann, President; Robert Barber, Administrator  
Village of Grant Park: Robert Schurman, President  
Will County: Tyson Warner, former Director of Planning (currently Director of Planning for the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning); Colin Duesing, Planner  
Kankakee County: Mike Van Mill, Planning Director; Delbert Skimerhorn, GIS Coordinator  
Washington Township: Bob Howard, Supervisor  
Washington Township Drainage District #3: Dennis Koehn, Chairman

**Additional Participating Agencies and Organizations**

Aqua Illinois  
Baxter & Woodman Consulting Engineers  
Beecher School District 200-U  
Chapman Farm  
Chicago Wilderness  
Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
JFNw  
Kankakee County Soil & Water Conservation District  
Kankakee River Basin Commission  
Kankakee River Conservancy District  
Natural Resource Management, Inc.  
NIES Engineering, Inc.  
Sheaffer International  
Sustainable Watershed Action Team  
U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Will - South Cook Soil & Water Conservation District  
Will County Stormwater Committee

**Project Staff:**

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Richard Mariner

**PROJECT BACKGROUND**

The Trim Creek Watershed Planning Project is the third phase of a joint initiative of the Metropolitan Planning Council, Openlands, and Campaign for Sensible Growth called "Water Resources and Sustainable Growth." The project's research reports, *Changing Course* and *Troubled Waters*, stressed the importance of local governments in effective watershed planning and plan implementation. The Joyce Foundation and Lumpkin Family Foundation funded pilot watershed planning projects in growth areas containing important water resources — the Trim Creek Watershed in Will and Kankakee counties, and the Greater Marengo-Union Area in McHenry County — in order to support local government involvement in watershed planning. The Trim Creek project was also funded by the Village of Beecher, Village of Grant Park, Will County, Kankakee County, Washington Township, and Washington Township Drainage District #3. The development of the watershed plan was guided by a steering committee representing local units of government and key stakeholders.



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