

CURRENTS

NEWSLETTER OF THE EMBARRAS RIVER MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

"Giving Nature a Helping Hand"

DECEMBER

2002

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The Lawrenceville High School River Watchers is a group of students in teacher John Clark's Biology II class. This class has been monitoring the condition of the Embarras River at Lawrenceville for the past ten years. The project is an outgrowth of the River Project Curriculum from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, IL.

Students study the Embarras River as a part of their class work in Biology II. The course is interdisciplinary, including geography, geology, biology, chemistry, mathematics and language arts. In the Fall, and again in the Spring, the students sample and test the river water. Nine parameters are utilized to determine the quality of the water: dissolved oxygen, BOD, temperature, pH, nitrates, phosphates, fecal coliform, turbidity, and total solids. In addition, macroinvertebrates are studied to determine the diversity and pollution tolerance in the river.

On October 18, 2002, the River Watchers participated in the National Water Monitoring Day, marking the 30th anniversary of the initial passage of the Clean Water Act. After conducting several water quality tests in the Embarras River, they submitted their results to the EPA's national data bank.

In addition to their scientific work, the students undertook a river cleanup this year. On October 26, 2002, the River Watch group, along with other students, members of the local Kiwanis Club, and Greg Sherwood, ERMA Watershed Coordinator, removed over 1200 pounds of trash from the



river in about 2 1/2 hours.

The LHS River Watchers have been members of ERMA since its inception. ERMA provided a grant to purchase much of the testing equipment that the River Watchers use to monitor the quality of the Embarras River.

ERMA commends the LHS River Watchers for their dedication and accomplishments. We also commend their teacher, Mr. John Clark, for the exemplary work and the valuable education that the students are receiving in the fields of conservation and environmental sciences.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE EMBARRAS RIVER WATERSHED

EWP FUNDS FOR CUMBERLAND CO.

(Submitted by Wayne Johanning, DC)

Last Spring's excessive rains caused numerous problems along drainage channels in Cumberland Co., including several areas adjacent to roads, which caused safety hazards for people traveling on them. Through a cooperative effort between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Cumberland Co. Highway Dept., over \$70,000 was allocated to Cumberland Co. for repairs. The funds were based on 75% of estimated repair costs. The local sponsor is responsible for 25% of the cost. The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program does not repair roadways, but can be used to stabilize channel banks where flooding has endangered the road. Nine sites in Cumberland Co. were approved for funding by EWP. The projects involved placement of large riprap stone along eroded channel banks near roads. The largest project was along Muddy Creek, just south of Johnstown, where a section of road was nearly washed away by spring floodwater. The bank was reshaped and lined with riprap. This is a good example of NRCS working with the local community to solve

NEW ERMA PRESIDENT

Leroy Scott, who has served as President of the Embarras River Management Association for over 9 years, submitted his resignation on June 28, 2002, due to personal and business obligations. Leroy wishes to thank all the people in the Embarras River watershed that have supported the work of ERMA. Bill Burgener of Richland Co. has assumed the office of president until the election is held.

EMBARRAS RIVER ECOSYSTEM PARTNERSHIP RECEIVES C2000 FUNDS

Wabash Valley RC&D Project Receives \$235,000: A permanent conservation easement will be purchased on 204 acres of flood plain forest and wetlands in Shellbark Bottoms Natural Heritage Landmark. Shellbark Bottoms is a 455 acre site located in the floodplain and adjacent uplands of the Embarras River, and provides summer breeding and foraging habitat for the copper belly water snake, a candidate for listing as a federally endangered species. River otters, a state threatened species, and bobcats have also been observed on the site. The easement will be registered in the Illinois Registry of Land and Water Reserves. The project helps to fulfill the goals and objectives of the Embarras River Ecosystem Partnership by providing better fish and wildlife habitat and reducing erosion by protecting forest cover.

Bi-State Airport Authority of Lawrence Co. Receives \$6,264: Allison Gravel Prairie Reconstruction Project. Prairie grass and forb seed will be purchased to complete a 5 acre gravel prairie reconstruction that is providing habitat for a population of the State endangered royal catchfly (*Silene regia*). Interpretive signs and materials will also be purchased.

MERRY CHRISTMAS
& HAPPY NEW
YEAR!!!

CONSERVATION FIELD DAYS

This Fall, several NRCS/SWCD offices in the Watershed hosted outstanding conservation field days for students.



Douglas Co. Conservation Day for 6th Graders at Walnut Point State Park



Jasper Co. Conservation Day for 6th Graders at Sam Parr State Park



Clark Co. Ag/Conservation Days
Above: 5th Graders at Murphy Farms
Below: High School students at North Fork



NEWS FROM AROUND THE EMBARRAS RIVER WATERSHED

FORESTRY WORKSHOP

Nearly 40 people braved the cold and drizzle to participate in the Eastern Illinois Forestry Workshop at the Lois and Rollie Spaniol farm near Charleston, IL. on October 29, 2002. Woodland owners, natural resource agency staff, and others interested in woodland management, income, and conservation attended the session. The agenda featured information about State and Federal forestry programs, including the Forestry and Stewardship Incentives Programs, Conservation Reserve Program, Wetland Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program. A presentation on non-timber products that can be harvested from woodlands for added profits focused on shiitake mushroom production. Participants received on-the-ground training with demonstrations of proper tree cutting techniques, custom sawmilling and guided walks through areas of timber stand improvement. Rounding out the day was a tour of an excellent 15-year-old walnut stand. The Wabash Valley, Lincoln Heritage, and Post Oak Flats Resource Conservation and Development Councils hosted the workshop.



A creative transformation of a tree stump into a mushroom.

You can view this excellent wood carving at Walnut Point State Park,

which is located north of Oakland.

MEETING ERMA WATERSHED GOALS

(Submitted by Bruce Stickers, Champaign Co. RC)

ERMA has developed goals to improve water quality, while reducing flooding along the Embarras River. By individual counties cooperating and doing their part to meet these goals, everyone up and down the entire river can benefit. The Champaign County SWCD and NRCS have teamed up to work with existing State and Federal programs to help meet these goals. Our calculations show the 2-year floodplain in Champaign County consists of approximately 900 acres. Currently 360 of those acres are protected with existing tree plantings. EQIP, CRP, and CPP programs have been promoted to add an additional 190 acres of trees in the floodplain. New filter strips have been added to 5 miles of stream banks covering 50 more acres of the floodplain. We are now offering a strip-till demonstration cost-share program that will reduce soil erosion in the watershed. The state has made funds available for the entire Embarras watershed north of Charleston, as an incentive to farmers for developing and implementing nutrient management plans. These plans cover over 7,000 acres in Champaign County, and much more in Douglas and Coles counties. The EQIP program provides additional incentives and cost-share for demonstration projects in the watershed. All of these programs added together, help ERMA meet its goal of improving water quality and reducing flooding. We will continue to use all programs available and seek additional grants to help us meet these goals. Our philosophy in Champaign County is to take the plan that was developed by ERMA, and then look for existing programs and grant opportunities that will help meet those goals. We then promote those programs with our farmers and landowners within the Watershed. Since we are at the headwaters of the Embarras, our goal is to have the water that exits the county to be as clean as we can possibly make it. With all of the counties of the Watershed working together and implementing conservation programs, the integrity and quality of the Embarras River system will be preserved for future

INTERNATIONAL VISITOR INTERESTED IN NO-TILL

On December 6, 2002, York-Th. Bayer, from Berlin, Germany, came to Tuscola to discuss the Cross-Slot Planter with Butch Fisher, RC for the Douglas County SWCD. York-Th., who operates an agricultural sales and consulting business, had learned of Butch's work with the Cross-Slot Planter from Dr. John Baker of New Zealand. While in the United States on a business trip, York-Th. wanted to take the opportunity to see the Cross-Slot Planter and learn more about it. Butch took York-Th. to the Dave Childress farm in Coles county, where he was able to see the Cross-Slot Planter and talk to Dave, who has utilized the planter for the past four years. York-Th. is working to help farmers change to No-Till farming in Germany, but he faces the same challenges in Germany as we do here in Central Illinois; a lack of understanding and a shortage of trained personnel to educate and assist the farmers in transitioning to No-Till farming operations.



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Embarras River News

ERMA...Lending Nature a Helping Hand

Are Your Dues Up To Date?

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Become a Member of ERMA Today...

ERMA is a non-profit organization funded through membership dues and grants. Individuals and businesses are encouraged to join in our efforts to promote conservation and preserve our natural resources within the Embarras River Watershed.

\$20.00 One Year Membership

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