

INDIANA SILVER JACKETS NORTH BRANCH ELKHART RIVER WEST LAKES TASK TEAM



Executive Summary

A recent extended period of above normal precipitation resulted in multiple flooding events in 2008 and 2009 throughout Indiana. A local steering group known as the “Flood Focus Committee of the Elkhart River Alliance” was formed. To assist the local committee, instead of creating a report with a single agency’s perspective, a voluntary multi-agency group — the Silver Jackets North Branch Elkhart River West Lakes Task Team — brought federal, state and regional professionals together to develop this more broadly focused report.

In brief this review found:

- The North Branch Elkhart River (NBR Elkhart River) watershed/drainage basin is a fairly unique system. The extensive, naturally existing storage and the natural regional relationships between precipitation, geology, topography, stream flow, the groundwater resource, lake levels, and flooding have not been altered dramatically.
- Water level issues exist in many previously developed areas around lakes within the basin. These issues range from seasonal high water levels that persist over extended time frames and limit road access to existing homes, to infrequent but potentially devastating flood levels that could cause extensive property damage.
- Over several decades, studies have stated that flood damage in the watershed can be attributed to a combination of factors, with a major cause being the construction of structures in the floodplain, many at or below the minimum recommended elevation.
- Data show that during normal conditions, Waldron Lake’s outlet channel carries a large rate of flow, and it responds with a substantial increase in flow during flooding events.

While no simple, single, feasible construction solution exists that can solve all water resource issues in this basin, this review found many opportunities to cumulatively improve the situation. This review also confirmed the unintended consequence of making flooding conditions in the basin much worse than currently experienced could occur if future human activities are not evaluated carefully and coordinated from a multi-county regional perspective.

The voluntary efforts of the Task Team end with this report. Future locally led efforts are encouraged to pursue the many opportunities to cumulatively reduce flood damage risk, which include: increase flood insurance coverage; identify and gather data for grant opportunities; seek to acquire, relocate, or elevate flood-prone homes; strengthen regional leadership using best floodplain management practices and ordinances; address access roads; seek to limit nutrient loading; seek sustainable growth; maintain existing streams using best management practices; prepare detailed basin hydrologic and hydraulic modeling to assess future projects; and protect existing natural flood storage areas using public/private resource partnerships.