



## Local News

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### For a creek, being 'flashy' is a drawback

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By WILLIAM F. AST III - H-P Staff Writer

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STEVENSVILLE - Hickory Creek is a "flashy" creek, but that's not necessarily a good thing.

The water levels in "flashy" streams tend to rise quickly after rain, and that can cause banks to erode, trees to fall across the waterway, and sediment to build up, those at the Hickory Creek Watershed Partnership heard on Tuesday. That's one of the problems the organization can try to solve, Marcy Colclough of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission told 16 people at the meeting at Lincoln Township Hall.

It's not that logs in the water are necessarily bad as "some deadfall is good habitat," Colclough said.

Colclough said the solution "isn't just to remove the deadfall. You have to work up in the watershed and determine why the creek is so flashy."

Common causes of "flashiness" are loss of wetlands, increased drainage, and constricted road and stream crossings, Colclough said.

"Whatever is wrong with the creek is what's happening on the land," Colclough said.

The partnership has been meeting over the past year to discuss the creek's well-being and how it can be improved. The creek is important as it drains some 53 square miles of land in Berrien County and empties into the St. Joseph River, which flows into Lake Michigan.

Those at the meeting included municipal officials, people such as Wayne Gleiber of Great Lakes Scientific, who have been helping students test water quality, Lakeshore High School biology teacher Lynda Smith, and some who just wanted some questions answered, such as Jim Frank of Baroda.

Frank's property includes about 250 feet of land along the creek. Some trees are leaning across the creek, and he wanted to know who was responsible for clearing them when they fall.

St. Joseph Township Manager Tim Fenderbosch advised Frank to check with Berrien County Drain Commissioner Roger Zilke, as Hickory Creek is a county drain.

Frank showed Fenderbosch some pictures of trees leaning over the creek along his land, which otherwise appeared neat and well-kept. "I appreciate that, but that's nothing compared" to the tangles of leaning trees and deadfall in other areas of the creek, Fenderbosch chuckled.

Colclough also discussed a resolution the partnership wants placed in front of boards of affected municipalities. The resolution does not obligate them to pledge any money, but only to state they support the partnership's efforts, she said.

Lincoln Township Supervisor Dick Stauffer and St. Joseph Township Trustee Ron Griffin said the resolution will be on their boards' agendas this month.

Gleiber said the students he's trained have sampled Hickory Creek water and water from its tributaries in 15 locations, from Niles Road in St. Joseph Township to Baroda. They've detected some hot spots of E. coli contamination, possibly from raw sewage flowing directly into the system, he said.

Gleiber said those findings have been reported to the Berrien County Health Department for further investigation.

Jack Houser of the partnership's Education Committee said members are looking into working with Sarett Nature Center to establish a section of the creek "as a lab where we can provide field experience for elementary and middle school students."

Smith after the meeting said getting involved in testing water has been enormously important for her students.

"This is real-life conservation, so we really value that," Smith said. Besides learning scientific testing and methods, the students learn "how our local government works, how you work to conserve things within that framework," and "being civic minded and doing things for your community," she said.

Do they enjoy it?

"Being outside and splashing around in the creek?" Smith laughed. "Oh, yeah."

The partnership did not set a date for its next meeting. Colclough said anyone who wants to get the date may call the Planning Commission at 925-1137 and ask to be added to a notification list.

[wast@TheH-P.com](mailto:wast@TheH-P.com)

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