

SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COMMISSION

New Year, New Staff

The SWMC is delighted to welcome two new planners to the office:

Amy Seitz will be assisting with planning projects at the environmental end of the SWMC spectrum. Amy is a 1999 graduate of the University of Wisconsin with a major in Geography and a minor in Biology. In 2004 she received a Master of Science in Geographic Information Science from St. Mary's University. Most recently she worked for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in the wildlife division. Prior to her MDNR experience she worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Amy's primary focus at the SWMC will be on the Paw Paw River Watershed Management Plan alongside Senior Planner Marcy Colclough.

Rachael Tupica will focus primarily on transportation related planning. She is a 2005 graduate of Michigan State University in Urban and Regional Planning and is certified in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping. During

the last year and a half of her coursework, Rachael was a student assistant at the Michigan Department of Transportation in their Statewide Transportation Planning Division. She is comfortable in the world of transportation computer modeling and has worked with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) like the SWMC. Rachael will be a major part of the effort to expand the breadth of transportation planning at the SWMC as she works with Senior Planner Larry Koepfle.

2006 SWMC Staff Directory Phone: 269-925-1137

K. John Egelhaaf	Executive Director	x 12
Marcy Colclough	Senior Planner	x 25
Larry Koepfle	Senior Planner	x 23
Jerry Chase	GIS Specialist	x 19
Kim Gallagher	Associate Planner	x 18
Shelley Klug	Associate Planner	x 13
Amy Seitz	Associate Planner	x 22
Rachael Tupica	Associate Planner	x 24
Nancy Perry	Business Manager	x 14
Terri Moore	Administrative Assistant	x 20
George Tabbert	Traffic Count Specialist	x 17

Website Training for SWMC Staff

In cooperation with the Land Information Access Association (LIAA), the SWMC's newly redesigned website will be launched in early 2006!

In January, SWMC planners and technical support staff will receive three days of website training. This training is an extension of a strong desire to be in control of the ongoing maintenance and updates to our website. This new website will be a byproduct of the expertise that resides in-house and will be sustainable through the efforts of SWMC staff.

Since its inception, the needs of the SWMC and its constituents have changed significantly. The website is now

one of the primary portals through which information is disseminated. With new and improved web technologies, we see opportunities for those involved in the planning processes to get exceptionally relevant and current information at any time. Through this improved web design, the access to information will be easier, faster, and provide a greater depth of information across the breadth of our projects. The new website will support project calendars, the latest drafts of planning documents that are in progress, pages with heightened security for the exclusive access of SWMC Board members, and because mapping is such a vital component of so many of our projects, there will be maps that can be customized by the web visitor.

The City of Bangor Successfully Completes Train Depot Project

The train depot in Bangor was slated for demolition but instead, through a successful cooperative effort, became a "silk purse from a sow's ear." The City received \$120,000 for street, sidewalk, parking lot improvements, and landscaping from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation CDBG program. This was matched with \$22,880 from the City and over \$364,000 from the private sector. Marcy Colclough, SWMC Senior Planner, administered the CDBG portion of the project and worked closely with City Manager Larry Nielsen throughout the rehabilitation process. This successful project resulted in 20 new jobs and a beautiful train depot that houses a restaurant, offices, and a rail passenger station.



Stormwater Public Education (PEP) Phase II Implementation

Several communities in Berrien and Cass County are participating in a regional watershed based initiative in response to the **State of Michigan's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II Storm Water Regulations**. As part of the regional watershed approach, a Watershed Management Plan is being developed for the Lower St. Joseph/Galien River Watershed. SWMC has been asked to implement the PEP for the regulated communities.

The unique purpose of the public education portion of the NPDES Phase II program is to increase the awareness of watershed residents about how their everyday activities contribute pollutants to their community's water resources. Further, the education program strives to educate and empower the public about ways they can reduce water pollution. Most citizens recognize the recreational and aesthetic benefits they receive from water, and most even recognize that water quality degradation is a serious concern in the Great Lakes Region. However, most people have not made the connection that the majority of this pollution is



generated from their normal everyday actions and not simply from large commercial and industrial sources. Compliance with the NPDES Phase II regulations requires residents to be informed, thus they

will be more aware of their responsibilities for improving water quality. Changing the way they manage their lawns, household hazardous wastes, refuse, and septic systems, area residents can have a considerable influence on improving water quality.

The regional approach to public education shares resources and responsibilities, communicates the messages to greater audiences, and provides consistent and repetitive information to

watershed residents. Implementing a successful PEP would take funding and preparation time that one community may find impossible to do alone. With coordination between many communities in the watershed, these resources can be shared and a larger audience can be reached. In this manner, duplication of efforts in neighboring communities, which increases cost of development, will be reduced and the need to hire additional staff to implement the PEP will be minimized. The PEP recognizes that a number of public education and outreach programs already exist in Berrien and Cass County. The regional effort will expand and enhance these programs to meet the goals of the education plan.

To see the implementation goals for the Public Education Plan and to view the list of participating communities, please see the SWMC website.

www.swmicomm.org/SWMC/PEP.htm

Did you know that thirty-seven million people in eight states and two Canadian provinces live in the Great Lakes basin, which stretches from upstate New York to Duluth, Minnesota? The lakes contain 18 percent of the fresh surface water on the planet. Learn more about the Great Lakes at: www.epa.gov/glnpo/atlas/intro.html

Transit Studies and Transportation Coordination

The SWMC completed a study of the Van Buren Public Transit (VBPT) system in late November. This study involved an extensive investigation of the transit system including operations, governance, and performance data. The study also delved into how VBPT fits into the overall transportation system within the region. It was clear throughout the study that stakeholders shared a vision of improved mobility for all residents who were transportation disadvantaged, which included the elderly, disabled, low income, and individuals without a vehicle. For many of the people who served on the steering committee, it was the first time they had all been around the same table discussing the needs of the people they serve.

The study concluded that VBPT would have the most economic and community benefit if it focused on serving the transportation disadvantaged by providing employment, medical, and education trips. Most importantly, the study indicated the need for more coordination of services between human service agencies and transportation providers. Many agencies reported spending a large portion of their budget on specialized transportation because public transportation is not always available. It was also discovered that some agencies are providing the same services that could be provided by VBPT.

A centralized system of transportation coordination and the use of specially designed technology could address many of these issues.

The SWMC invited local transportation stakeholders to participate in a teleconference hosted by the Transportation Research Board on November 10. The event was attended by a well-diversified cross-section of transportation providers and human service agencies from Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. This provided a clear message to the SWMC that there is a very real need for coordination in this region.

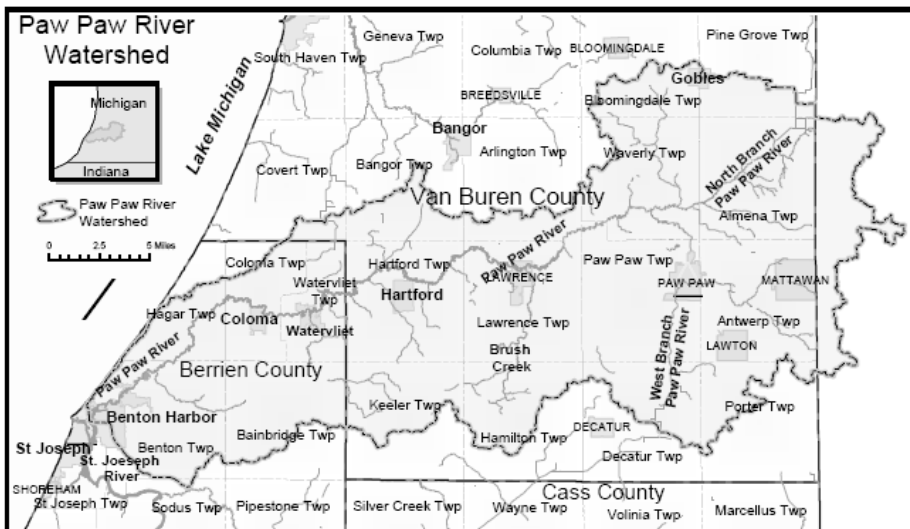
The teleconference discussed transportation challenges and trends and featured strategies to increase transportation coordination through the use of planning, promotion, and technology.

MDEQ Grant will benefit the Paw Paw River Watershed

For the past two years, a group of stakeholders has been meeting and talking about efforts to increase awareness, education, and protection of the Paw Paw River. Now it will no longer be just talk, with a **\$216,087 grant from MDEQ**, the Southwestern Michigan Commission (SWMC) will be facilitating a project over the next two years that will result in a Watershed Management Plan for the Paw Paw River Watershed. Along with this planning effort, there will be several educational opportunities (such as workshops and newsletters) for landowners and municipal officials in the watershed.

Marcy Colclough, Senior Planner at SWMC says she “is amazed at the level of interest and the synergy surrounding this project.” She adds, “so many people are on board and supportive of the efforts. I have never seen this level of interest in a watershed project and from such a diverse group of individuals, agencies, and organizations. I really believe that it is a testament to the incredible resources and natural areas in the Paw Paw River Watershed. People just love this river system and want to see it protected and managed well.”

The original partners in the grant proposal included: SWMC, The Nature Conservancy, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, Van Buren Conservation District, St. Joseph River Conservation District, Sarett Nature Center, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, Almena Township, Watervliet City and Township, Hartford City and Township, Coloma City, Coloma Charter Township, Hagar Township, Benton Charter Township, Coloma/Watervliet Area Economic Development Corporation and Van Buren Intermediate School District. These partners committed almost \$55,000 worth of local in-kind match to the project over two years.



The SWMC will be working to increase the involvement in the watershed planning project. *Amy Seitz, SWMC Associate Planner*, explains, “It is essential to include all stakeholders in the development and implementation of a successful watershed management plan. Everyone brings a different perspective to the table. The goal will be to create a common vision for the watershed and to manage it in a way that allows for growth and development, but also protects the water and other natural and cultural resources within the watershed.”

The Great Lakes Basin Quad State Consortium

During the past year an effort has begun to evolve to connect regional planning organizations in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. *Marcy Colclough and John Egelhaaf* of the SWMC have attended several meetings and a conference dedicated to this collaborative effort. *John Egelhaaf, Executive Director* explains, “The primary objective of this newly forged collaboration is to understand and respond to issues of water supply planning for Lake Michigan.”



The Great Lakes Basin is the major watershed that feeds each of the five Great Lakes. (Lightly shaded area on map)

Particularly around Lake Michigan, major growth has created stress on the water supply of individual communities. Frequently communities outside the Basin look to the plentiful source of fresh water within the Basin as the solution to their water supply issues. However, withdrawals from subsurface wells, surface streams, and Lake Michigan itself can jeopardize the ecological balance. Extractions (removal of water from the basin without returning the treated water back to the Basin after its use) are a still greater danger to the quality of the resource. Even for communities within the Basin, excessive tapping of groundwater can pose problems.

Illinois and Wisconsin in particular have made these concerns about water supply part of their planning for some time. Indiana and Michigan have had relatively less development pressure from outside the Basin. Now the experience in water supply planning is being shared among the four states. The regular collaboration also facilitates other beneficial professional cooperation in the areas of transportation, non-motorized routes, and sub-watershed planning.

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Safe Routes to School Program - This program



will “enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school; to make walking and bicycling to school safe and more appealing, and to facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects that will improve safety and reduce

traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.” Safe Routes to School (**SR2S**) encourages alternatives to motor vehicle use through the creation of facilities such as bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and pedestrian and bicycle trails.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) oversees **SR2S** through the Office of Safety. At the state level, the program is administered through state departments of transportation, with a coordinator for each state’s program.

There are two categories of eligible activities:

Infrastructure funds can be used for the planning, design, and construction of infrastructure related projects that will substantially improve the ability of students to walk and bicycle to school. Such improvements include enhanced sidewalk connections, traffic calming and speed reduction improvements, pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements,

on-street bicycle facilities, off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities, secure bicycle parking facilities, and traffic diversion improvements in the vicinity of schools. **Non-infrastructure** activities are to encourage walking and bicycling to school. Such activities include public awareness campaigns, outreach to press and community leaders, traffic education and enforcement in the vicinity of schools, student sessions on bicycle and pedestrian safety, health, and the environment, and funding for training, volunteers, and managers of safe routes to school programs. *The application process for Safe Routes to School money will be determined by each state.* States are being encouraged to establish criteria and competitive procedures. FHWA plans to develop **SR2S** program guidance by early next year. **The Federal share of the cost of a project in the Safe Routes to School program is 100 percent.**

For more information about Michigan’s SR2S program:

<http://saferoutesmichigan.drum-server.com/indexb.htm>

National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse

c/o Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
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Toll free: (888) 388-NTEC
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Email: ntec@enhancements.org
Website: www.enhancements.org

Transportation Planning Workshop - The SWMC staff participated in a two-day “Statewide

Transportation Planning” workshop presented by the National Highway Institute and the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Transit Administration in December 2005. The workshop was held in Chicago at the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC). The workshop was a great opportunity to examine the relationship between regional transportation planning and statewide transportation planning. It is important for the SWMC to have an understanding of both scales as well as knowledge of the interconnectedness of the processes. Professionals from the Federal Transportation Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, state departments of transportation, city transit administrations, various regional planning organizations, and metropolitan planning organizations were in attendance. Course materials for this and other workshops are available in the SWMC office library
