LWVIL 2015 Issues Briefing: Water Report

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LWVIL has focused on two primary areas over the course of the last year. The LWVIL Education Fund and LWV Lake Michigan Region jointly carried out an education project on flooding and nonpoint source pollution caused by storm water runoff. Thanks to the cooperation of local Leagues and numerous League member volunteers, 25 programs were presented to the public.

The Clean Water Act was the main focus of advocacy efforts. In October, 2014, LWVIL submitted comments supporting an EPA/Army Corps of Engineers draft rule which clarified the definition of the "Waters of the United States" to which the Clean Water Act applies. LWVIL also signed on to a letter circulated by our coalition partner, the Healing Our Waters - Great Lakes Coalition. In December, LWV Cook County worked with LWVIL to help prevent the adoption of a resolution by the Cook County Board of Commissioners that would have opposed the rule.

Additionally, LWVIL submitted comments to the Illinois EPA asking for improvements to strengthen the Midwest Generation Waukegan Generation Plant NPDES water discharge permit. The plant had been called the largest contributor of toxic pollution in all of the Great Lakes.

Issue Outlook In the coming year, water-related regulatory efforts, rather than state legislative initiatives, will be in the forefront of LWVIL’s attention. We will work with members as necessary to thwart efforts to delay or prevent the implementation of the Clean Water Act expansion to cover small streams and wetlands. Also at the federal level, LWVIL will continue to monitor the ongoing activities of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and other agencies to prevent the transfer of invasive species between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River watersheds.

The Illinois EPA has published a Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus levels in lakes, streams, and rivers in Illinois, and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico. A public comment period ended in January, 2015, and LWVIL will monitor the next steps in the adoption and implementation process.

As a follow-up to the successful education project, LWVIL will continue to work with local Leagues to support and advocate for further adoption and implementation of green infrastructure and other measures to address the impacts of storm water runoff.