

Doing Things "The League Way" in Jo Daviess County: As of January, 2018

The League of Women Voter (LWV) structure and approach allow members to play an instrumental role in efforts to address complex issues. Organized at the local, state, regional, and national levels, LWV efforts and resources can be scaled up and down as appropriate. With a formal process for studying issues important to voters and coming to consensus before taking action, the LWV has become widely respected for its non-partisan, fact-based, educational approach.

In Jo Daviess County, Illinois, the local chapter of the League of Women Voters (LWV-JDC) is creating a model that showcases how "The League Way" is working with residents in this rural area on the locally controversial, nationally important, and globally critical topic of water resource management. Here are some highlights:

- Following a divisive multi-year (2007-10) controversy (based in large measure on differing opinions on potential contamination of groundwater in the karst aquifer) over the siting of a 10,000-head confined dairy feeding operation, the LWV-JDC organized a public forum bringing in representatives from the Illinois EPA, the Illinois Department of Agriculture, and others to provide information on the siting process and the pressures impacting the dairy industry.
- In 2013, the LWV-JDC organized a public forum entitled "The Land and Water Beneath Us" at which scientists from the Illinois State Geological and Water Surveys shared information they currently had on the hydrogeology of the area, explained what scientific information was lacking, and proposed ways to obtain new information.
- From 2014-16, local LWV members organized and facilitated a countywide water resource management planning project. A diverse set of stakeholders were brought to the table to learn together about the area's water resources, and to agree on a set of facts so that we could develop goals and objectives to maintain our resources effectively. We agreed to use evidence-based decision making to achieve science-based stewardship. We presented to and surveyed every local governing board (county, municipal, township, and resort community) at the start and at the finish of our planning effort. An Illinois EPA-approved Quality Assurance Project Plan was completed for the survey effort. To date, the county board, 9 municipalities, 5 townships and a resort community have approved this plan. This project, a 100% volunteer effort, received the "Community Engagement Award" at the 2016 LWV-US Convention.
- One of the county plan action items was a focused sub-watershed plan to identify specific projects for water resource management. The sub-watershed surrounding the City of Galena was selected. Using private donations and volunteer time for match, a 2016 \$38,000 Illinois EPA Grant was obtained to cover technical assistance, printing costs, and planning consultant expenses for this 2-year planning project.
- With help and guidance of the LWV-Lake Michigan Region Inter-League Organization, members of LWV-JDC initiated the formation of the LWV-Upper Mississippi River Region ILO. With 60 local LWVs and the four state LWVs of Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin as members, this ILO was officially recognized by LWV-US and incorporated in October of 2015.
- The LWV-JDC used private donations and a grant from the Galena Lions Club to purchase copies of "The Watershed Game" created by the University of Minnesota Extension. They then offered two training days for those wishing to be able to facilitate the game for local governing boards, service organizations, students, etc. Forty-seven individuals, including 30 in Jo Daviess County, were trained in October 2016.
- The LWV-JDC partnered with the Galena Rotary Club to put on a day-long conference in January 2017, entitled "Water: We're All in the Same Boat" - bringing in speakers to share information about current water management issues and approaches, and providing breakout sessions sharing information about local projects. The LWV and Rotary is actively working to expand this organizational partnership for conferences and educational programming in other areas of the Upper Mississippi River Region.
- Using private donations and volunteer time as match, a 2016 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) grant for \$7,000 was obtained to conduct spring sampling with scientists from the Illinois State Geological and Water Surveys. This sampling will help establish baseline water chemistry in the area's shallow aquifer for future reference. The project also included the development of a model karst feature database to store information on springs, sinkholes and bedrock fractures to be used both locally and by the USFWS.
- Using the Galena Watershed planning project; state EPA grant funds; and financial contributions from the City of Galena, a local fertilizer plant, local not-for profits and private donors for match; a 2017 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Fishers & Farmers grant for \$20,000

was obtained to support the formation of a farmer advisory group in the Galena Watershed. Workshops, field days, river water sampling, and soil nitrate testing will be conducted to engage the agricultural community in water resource management.

- A project has been initiated to collect water samples on the Lower Galena River and its tributaries to study nitrates and determine whether the source of nitrates in the samples is predominantly chemical fertilizer or animal waste. Further analysis using a caffeine marker will determine whether the animal waste has a human component (assuming that livestock don't drink coffee!) and show whether the waste is from faulty septic systems or livestock. The first round of sampling was completed in August when the river was at low flow, and a second round will take place in early spring to capture the impacts of run-off during high flow.
- In September of 2017, a second regional Watershed Game training was held for potential facilitators in Rockford. A full set of games (Lake, River, Stream, and Classroom versions) were purchased to be stored in McHenry County and made available to those interested in having the game facilitated for their groups/boards/organizations. Funding for this training and the acquisition of games was provided by 1 Mississippi and the Mississippi Network (focused on protecting the land, water and people of the United State's greatest river).
- In 2017, the LWV-Jo Daviess County and LWV-IL submitted a proposal for installing low-cost nitrate sensors on the Galena River to the "Stage I Nutrient Sensor Action Challenge" put forth by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), the United States Geological Survey (USGS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), Alliance for Coastal Technologies (ACT), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and National Institute of Science and Technology (NIST). The USEPA awarded LWV-JDC/IL a \$10,000 prize in light of this work.
- The LWV is dedicating the \$10,000 "Stage I Nutrient Sensor Action Challenge" prize money towards the installation of two innovative edge of farm field sensors (installation scheduled for March) set up to provide continuous online data to a farmer for reference on soil moisture, stormwater flow, and nitrates leaving the field, as a reference for best management decision-making.
- Working with a group of farmers in the Galena area, the LWV is assisting in the planning and execution of a series of 12 educational events designed by farmers for farmers to promote sustainable agricultural practices. The first event in December of 2017 was on Ag Economics, looking at the potential of alternative crops (alternatives to corn and soybeans). The second event on January 16th, was on Agriculture and Water Quality.

And the work continues...