

C H A P T E R T W E L V E

Little Wabash River Watershed

The Little Wabash is the smallest of the 10 watersheds and has the smallest amount of both cropland and urban and built-up acreage. Because of its small size, it ranks near the bottom for statewide acreage in most of the other land cover categories, except for bottomland forest, of which it has the fourth largest amount. (See page 111 for a color map of the watershed's land cover.)

Two Resource Rich Areas are in the watershed, the Lower Wabash River RRA and the Southern Till Plain RRA.

- The 256-square-mile Lower Wabash River RRA includes the mainstem of the Wabash River below Lawrenceville to its confluence with the Ohio River and its small tributaries. The area has bottomland forest with wet prairie, sloughs, oxbows, and marshes. The



bottomlands are the last strongholds of the eastern deciduous forest in Illinois.

The immense size of the trees (some are over 130 feet tall and six feet in diameter) and diversity of species are remarkable features of the woods. Several state tree champions are present in Beall Woods Nature Preserve.

- Most of the Southern Till Plain RRA lies within the Little Wabash River watershed, but the western arm comprising 12% of the area lies in the Kaskaskia River watershed. With 914 square miles, the Southern Till Plain is the second largest RRA.

In presettlement times, the region was characterized by rolling prairies between broad woodlands following stream corridors. Today the area is largely agricultural. Nevertheless, a 50-mile stretch of the Little Wabash is a Biologically Significant Stream and almost one-fifth of the area is wooded.



The Little Wabash is the smallest of the 10 watersheds.

Table 45. Watershed Land Cover

Land Cover	Acres	Percent of Watershed	Statewide Percentage*
Upland forest	259,737	10.8% (6)	6.3% (8)
Grassland	456,555	18.9% (4)	7.1% (8)
Non-forested wetland	9,949	0.4% (9)	2.8% (9)
Bottomland forest	90,652	3.8% (2)	10.4% (4)
Water	15,851	0.7% (9)	3.2% (9)
Urban/built-up	31,979	1.3% (10)	1.7% (10)
Cropland	1,547,458	64.2% (8)	7.2% (10)
Total acreage	2,412,183	100.0%	6.7% (10)

* The watershed's percentage of the land cover type statewide, e.g., 6.3% of the state's upland forests. Note: the watershed rank (1st-10th) is shown in parentheses.

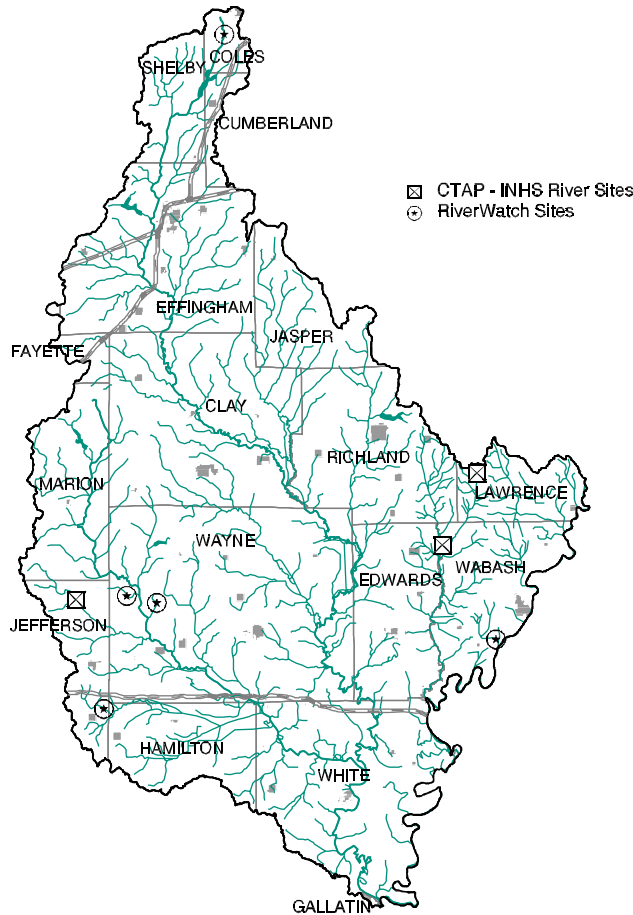
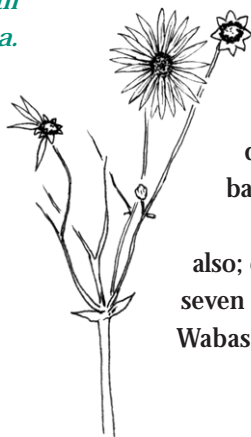


Figure 58. Monitoring Sites

ECOSYSTEM MONITORING

Because CTAP biologists have sampled only three sites in the Little Wabash watershed, no definitive statement can be made about the quality of its streams. Of the three sites, Horse Creek near Dix was the best. While it had a somewhat lower EPT taxa richness, its HBI score was very good and its fish richness and habitat quality were extremely high. Bonpas Creek, a large sandy stream near West Salem in Wabash County, had low habitat quality due to tremendous sand deposition, channelization, frequent bank failures, and frequent flooding.

RiverWatch sampling was low also; only 20 samples were collected at seven sites on seven streams. The Little Wabash watershed scored poorly



The Little Wabash watershed scored poorly according to every biological indicator constructed with RiverWatch data.



according to every biological indicator constructed with RiverWatch data. The watershed had the worst MBI among the 10 Illinois watersheds and was ninth or tenth in the other three indicators. Midge larvae, bloodworms, and hydropsychid caddisfly larvae were the most common taxa collected. No trends in MBI or other indices are evident.

Table 46. Watershed Indicator Scorecard

Indicator	Watershed Value	Statewide Value	Watershed Ranking
<i>Macroinvertebrates</i>			
HBI	4.6	5.2	2
MBI	6.6	5.7	10
EPT richness	7.0	7.1	5
EPT taxa (RW)	1.9	2.6	9
Taxa richness	7.3	8.9	10
Taxa dominance	82.7%	80.4%	9
<i>Fish</i>			
Native fish	16.5	13.6	2
Darter richness	2.5	1.9	3
Exotic species	0.0	0.2	1
<i>Habitat</i>			
Habitat score	104.0	88.6	2

Table 47. MBI Values

Statistic	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Overall
Average	7.77	6.11	7.42	6.10	5.60	6.61
Standard deviation	2.21	0.72	1.49	0.53	0.24	1.45
Minimum	5.13	5.61	5.96	5.42	5.28	5.13
Maximum	10.33	6.62	8.95	6.71	5.84	10.33
Number of sites	4	2	3	4	4	17

* Only samples with at least 25 organisms were included in the analysis.