

## The Patoka South Fork Watershed Steering Committee's Partners

The success of the Patoka South Fork Watershed Steering Committee could not have been possible without the following “partners.” Each has contributed time, resources – and in many cases – financial support to ensure the success of the group.

American Disposal Services  
Four Rivers RC&D  
IDNR – Division of Oil and Gas  
IDNR – Division of Outdoor Recreation  
IDNR – Division of Soil Conservation  
IDNR – Division of Reclamation  
IDNR - Division of Water  
Indiana Department of Environmental Management  
Indiana Geological Survey  
Indiana State University  
Indiana University  
Indianapolis Power and Light  
Natural Resource Professionals  
Oakland City University  
Office of Surface Mining  
Pike County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Practical Resource Management  
Residents and Concerned Citizens  
Southern Indiana Gas and Electric Company  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
US Geological Survey  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

## What Can You Do?

- \* Learn the value of your watershed and help others to understand and appreciate it.
- \* Work and recreate “wisely” within the watershed.
- \* Be aware of local, state, and federal legislation and voice your view to your elected and appointed officials.
- \* **Join the PSFWSC and become part of the solution!**

The PSFWSC meets the second Thursday of each month at the Oakland City Public Library. Check for times. EVERYONE IS WELCOME.

If you would like and additional information, please contact a PSFWSC officer or member.

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## Patoka South Fork Watershed Steering Committee



*“Never doubt that a small group of citizens can  
change the World.  
Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”*

*Margaret Mead*

## What is the Patoka South Fork Watershed?

The Patoka South Fork Watershed is part of the Patoka River Watershed. The Patoka River stretches from Orange County, Indiana through Dubois, Pike, and Gibson Counties in Southwestern Indiana before joining the Wabash River at Mt. Carmel, Illinois. The drainage of the Patoka River Watershed includes 862 square miles (551,680) acres in eight counties).

Major coal beds were discovered close to the surface where the Patoka Valley flattens out about midway in its flow. Beginning in 1836, underground coal mining became a major industry in Pike County. In the 1920s, surface mining began to replace deep mining. During the next fifty years, over 20,000 acres of Pike County were surfaced mined and left abandoned and unreclaimed, resulting in acid mine drainage (AMD). These conditions eradicated all fish in long stretches of the Patoka River, and the entire length of the 17 mile long South Fork Tributary.

Today, the South Fork of the Patoka River Watershed is considered the most heavily impacted watershed in the State of Indiana. Of the approximately 52,000 acre watershed, between 60 and 75 percent has been impacted or impaired. The environmental degradation from AMD has been well documented by numerous scientific studies. These studies have documented the loss of fish, aquatic insects, and plants due to inflow of water with low pH, heavy metals, suspended sediments, and precipitates that coat the stream bottoms.

Other resource concerns are present and documented in the watershed as well. Agricultural crop and pasture land occurs on approximately 10,000 acres in the watershed. Oil and gas drilling activities are also quite prolific. In the process of extraction, oil related problems such as salt water and oil spills have impaired water and soil quality. These degraded soil and water conditions impair cropland and all other watershed land-uses.

In conclusion, thousands of acres of natural floodplain wetlands have been biologically degraded from acidic water, dissolved toxic metals, salt and oil contamination, and severe sedimentation from erosion occurring off mined uplands.

## Who is the Patoka South Fork Watershed Steering Committee

At the December 1994 meeting of the Indiana Society for Mining and Reclamation, the Office of Surface Mining sparked the interest of two local agencies into exploring watershed opportunities for OSM's Appalachian Clean Streams Initiative. This was the beginning.

Starting in February of 1995, and continuing through August of 1995, multi-agency meetings were held to discuss OSM's new initiative and its possible impact on the Patoka South Fork Watershed. The following philosophies were agreed to:

- \* The Patoka South Fork Watershed was identified as having a severe AMD problem;
- \* No one government entity could pool enough resources to evaluate and abate all of the economic and environmental impacts;
- \* Multi-agency involvement would focus new ideas and talents to solve old problems, like sharing responsibilities and decreasing the overwhelming workload needed to involve public commitment and input as a separate agency agenda;
- \* No agency was trusted by the public to help evaluate community, social, and economic needs.
- \* And most importantly;

**This would be a community effort, locally led and directed from within the community, identifying and prioritizing needs.**

In August of 1995, a public meeting was held to solicit public comments and involvement. From the 125 attendees a watershed awareness was created. Monthly meetings continued with more public attendees. Tours of the watershed were given. Early in 1996, the group elected a President, Vice-President, and Secretary.

THE GOAL OF THE PSFWSC IS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE WATER QUALITY OF THE PATOKA SOUTH FORK WATERSHED, AND TO PROVIDE GRASSROOTS ACCESS TO THE VARIOUS AND NUMEROUS PEOPLE LIVING IN THE AREA FOR THE PURPOSE OF ASSISTING AND GUIDING THE VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES IN THEIR EFFORTS TO HELP THE PSFWSC IN ACHIEVING OUR GOAL. THE PSFWSC IS OPEN TO ALL SUGGESTIONS FROM THE INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WITH SOME KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROBLEMS IN THE PSFW, WHO HAVE IDEAS AND EXPERTISE TO HELP CORRECT THEM.

To date, the PSFWSC has grown and now has standing committees organized around Clean Water, Oil and Gas, Wildlife, Education, Finance, and Public Relations. The committee evolved to meet the needs of the community and all are dedicated to a healthy watershed environment.

THE AIM OF THE PSFWSC:

- \* TO ASSIST AND PROMOTE EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE PSFW WATER QUALITY.
- \* TO RECOGNIZE AND PROMOTE PROPERTY RIGHTS.
- \* TO PROMOTE CLEAN RECREATION AND ENJOYMENT OF THE PSFW.
- \* TO PROVIDE A MEANS FOR THE DISCUSSION OF ANY PROJECT THAT AFFECTS THE WATER QUALITY OR DRAINAGE IN THE PSFW.
- \* TO PROMOTE WATER STORAGE TO REDUCE RUNOFF AND FLOODING.
- \* TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY OF THE WATERSHED.
- \* PUBLIC AWARENESS.
- \* TO DISCOURAGE LITTERING AND DUMPING.