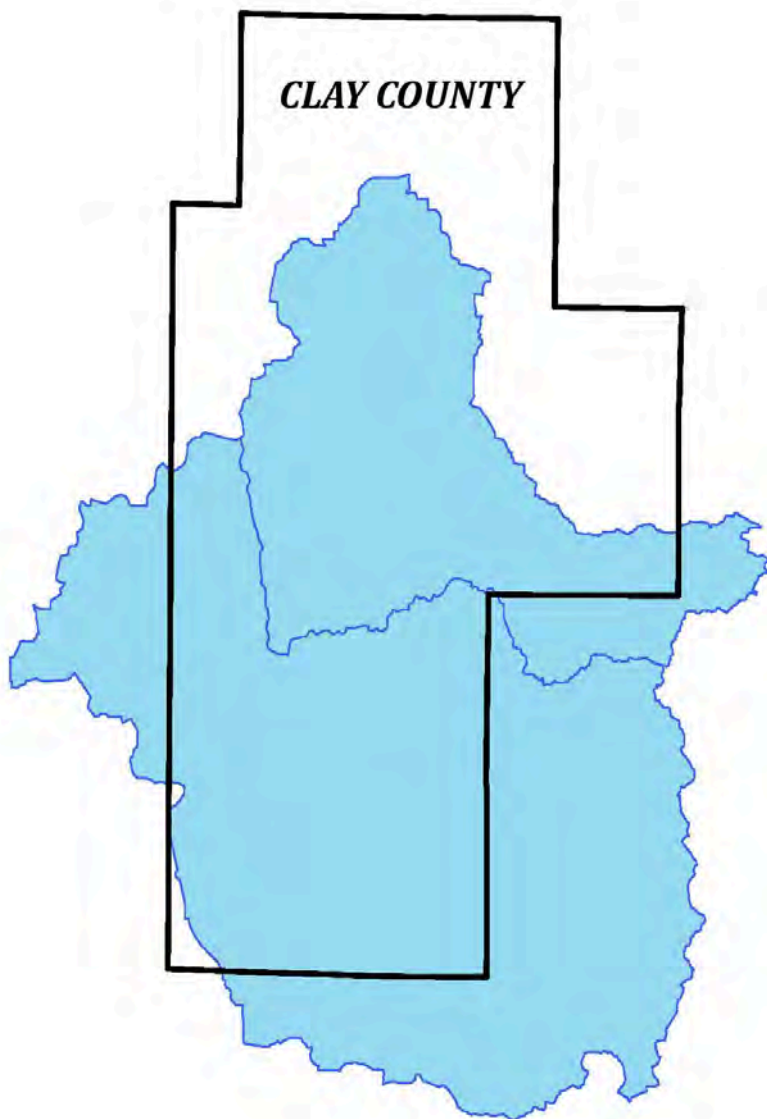


2022-2026

Lower Eel River Watershed

319 Implementation III Project

Final Report



**Clay County Soil & Water
Conservation District**



**LOWER EEL RIVER
WATERSHED**
319 GRANT

ARN: #60144

Project Sponsor: Clay Co. SWCD

Report Period:

January 28th, 2022-January 24th, 2025

Report Completed by:

Laura Demarest (Watershed Alliance, LLC)

Watershed Coordinator

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INTRODUCTION and OVERVIEW

The LERW (Lower Eel River Watershed) 319 Implementation III project officially began on January 28th, 2022 and ended on January 24th, 2026 after being selected by EPA for additional funding and a timeline extension. The purpose of the LERW 319 Implementation III project was to implement a variety of conservation BMPs throughout the area, resulting in improved regional water quality and management changes at the individual farm level, to work towards goals outlined in the Watershed Management Plan (approved 2008) and proposed in the 319 grant application.

The LERW 319 Implementation III project (#60144) was primarily managed by Watershed Coordinator, Laura Demarest (Watershed Alliance, LLC), with financial oversight from the Clay County SWCD Board of Supervisors and SWCD Coordinator, Jennifer Creager.

PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The LERW WMP was approved in May 2008 and was written according to IDEM's 2003 Checklist. The goals from the LERW Watershed Management Plan (WMP pgs. 43-49) are somewhat limited in scope as the load reduction goals were too modestly estimated. It is likely that the tools available for estimating load reductions at the time the WMP was written were not as advanced as those being used today. During the first round of 319 Implementation (A305-6-183), the LERW Advisory Committee reviewed the goals of the WMP and came to a consensus on an updated set of goals that would more appropriately align with the current timeline for implementation. These updated goals set by the LERW Advisory Committee in 2016 are as follows:

...To implement practices described in the Lower Eel River Watershed Management Plan (LERWMP) in order to achieve the LERWMP goals established by the steering committee. The goals of the LERWMP include: (1) reduce the current level of E. coli by 10% within 5 years, (2) reduce nitrates and phosphates by 10% within 5 years, and (3) reduce sediment loads by 10% within 5 years. The goals of the LERW project will align with the LERWMP goals as they will be: (1) a reduction of E. coli concentrations by 6% within 3 years, (2) a reduction in nitrates and phosphates by 6% in 3 years, (3) a reduction of sediment by 3% in 3 years, (4) provide a cost-share program to implement best management practices (BMPs), and (5) increase public awareness. These goals will be accomplished by completing three tasks: (1) provide a cost-share program to implement BMPs, (2) education and outreach, and (3) evaluate water monitoring data collected and increase the number of volunteers in the Hoosier Riverwatch (HRW) water monitoring program.

The 319 grant application for LERW III funding also included several generalized goals, which were adapted into 'Tasks' for the Grant Agreement and can be found summarized below. The Grant Application also included several 'Outcomes and Measures of Success', which will also be discussed further.

Task A: Update and Promote a Cost-Share Program to fulfill goals of the LERW WMP

- Revise and submit the Cost-Share Program Guidelines for IDEM approval.
- Conduct Steering Committee meetings two times per year for the first three years to review progress and concerns of the district and landowners for a total of six (6).
- Hold (1) one public meeting each year for the first three years, targeting stakeholders for a total of three (3).
- Provide technical assistance to landowners to facilitate BMP implementation.

Task B: Cost-Share Implementation

- Implement the approved Cost-Share Program described in Task A.
- Ensure that all BMPs conform to NRCS specifications or other applicable, approved specifications.
- Implement BMPs only in critical areas as described in the LERW WMP.
- Follow cost-share payment and reporting protocol according to IDEM 319 program requirements.
- Tabulate pollutant load reductions for every BMP funded by 319 or utilized for match.
- Create and maintain a geo-referenced database for all BMPs implemented through the 319 project.

Task C: Education and Outreach

- Conduct an education and outreach program that includes the following efforts:
 - *Update the Clay County SWCD Facebook or other social media at least one (1) time per month (36 total)*
 - *Develop and distribute six (6) electronic newsletters.*
 - *Market and promote the LERW Cost-Share Program through participating in field days, PARP workshops, regional conservation events, prescribed grazing field days, and local fairs/community days. Participate in a minimum of six (6) events total.*
 - *Host or actively partner in one (1) regional workshop per year to promote water quality (3 total)*
 - *Provide three (3) updates to governing bodies in person.*
 - *Develop and distribute five (5) brochures or flyers to promote the LERW Cost-Share Program, educate about conservation BMPs, and/or provide information about water quality stewardship.*
 - *Review and update a filterable database of volunteers, partners, and contacts; sort into groups pertaining to interest, qualification, or potential donor/partner/stakeholder one (1) time per month (36 total)*
 - *Provide at least six (6) media releases/advertisements to local newspapers and/or radio and television stations.*
 - *Install a minimum of five (5) promotional signs throughout the watershed to raise awareness about the LERW project and to highlight BMPs.*
 - *Host one (1) water quality workshop such as Hoosier Riverwatch training or other community monitoring event.*
 - *Compile one (1) comprehensive Annual Report on the LERW 319 Implementation project activities per year and distribute to stakeholders (3 total)*
 - *Present one (1) “Friend of the Watershed” award per year to a deserving program participant at the Clay SWCD Annual Meeting (3 total)*
 - *Track attendance at all LERW functions (meetings, field days, workshops) to determine success of outreach efforts.*

Task D: Reporting

- Prepare and submit a progress report to the State with each invoice package, at least quarterly (a total of 15).
- Submit two electronic copies of a final report to the State via USB or other applicable media.

EVALUATION OF GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

Overall, the LERW 319 Implementation III project was a huge success, providing an abundance of BMP opportunities for many producers throughout the watershed. This success can also be validated by assessing the completion of the items listed in each of the previously outlined Tasks, especially those associated with the Cost Share Program where 100% of the allocated funding was utilized and the demand was high enough to warrant the award of an additional \$150,000 in cost-share funding and a timeline extension.

Favorable trends in producer interest and participation in conservation efforts continued throughout the duration of the project. The power of local word-of-mouth has been a vital key to success for this program and has proven more effective for generating producer interest than any sort of paid public advertising efforts.

The LERW Implementation III project utilized every cent of the 319 grant funding, exceeded the match goal by a large amount, and delivered a variety of conservation projects to producers in critical areas. Cover crops and Nutrient Management in the form of precision agriculture technology upgrades gained the most traction during implementation, netting the highest load reductions and most inquiries from new participants.

When considering the specific goals stated in the LERW Watershed Management Plan, it is difficult to ascertain overall completion when comparing the numbers to those represented in the dated publication, though it is safe to confirm that an amazing amount of progress was made through these implementation efforts. In the next few years, IDEM will conduct performance monitoring to determine if any significant improvements have been made that would warrant the delisting of certain stream segments that carry an ‘impaired’ status. In fact, in 2024, Lafferty Ditch was delisted for E.coli and biological impairments after notable improvements and shared by IDEM as a ‘Success Story’.

A series of ‘Project Outcomes’ and ‘Measures of Success’ was posited in the LERW 319 Implementation III grant application (presented below). Each ‘Measure of Success’ below will receive a check mark to indicate it was completed during the project timeline. Additional discussion may be included, as necessary.

Project Outcomes and Measures of Success for LERW Implementation III:

1. Execute a Cost-Share Program, reducing (at a minimum) Sediment by 12,000 t/year, Phosphorus by 15,000 lbs/yr, and Nitrogen by 94,000 lbs/year.
 - ~ Great progress was made on these ambitious load reduction goals, but only Nitrogen was exceeded
 - o *Nitrogen: 130,432.61 lbs/year*
 - o *Phosphorus: 13,499.8 lbs/year*
 - o *Sediment: 9,268.5 tons/year*
 - ✓ Implement a Cost-Share Program in critical areas as defined by the Lower Eel River WMP
 - ✓ Install BMPs affecting at least 7,300 acres (4,000 ac. Cover Crops, 3,000 ac. Nutrient Management, 300 ac Prescribed Grazing) to reduce nutrients, sediment, and E.coli.
 - ✓ Geolocate BMPs
 - ✓ Calculate and report resulting load reductions
2. Educate a minimum of 300 watershed stakeholders about Best Management Practices (BMPs).
 - ✓ Host a minimum of 3 field days (1 septic-focused workshop)
**Note: Field days were held as specified in Grant Agreement where a septic workshop was not required*
 - ✓ Participate in at least 6 promotional events with local/regional partners
 - ✓ Monthly website/social media updates
 - ✓ Conduct one-on-one conservation planning meetings with producers
 - ✓ Develop/distribute LERW newsletters (6 total) and brochures/flyers (5 total).
 - ✓ Hold 1 Hoosier Riverwatch training
 - ✓ Track number of people reached via newsletters, events, social media
 - ✓ Track all volunteers and program participants
**Note: Attendees and estimated outreach is recorded in Quarterly Progress Reports with each event listed.*
3. Promote successful BMP implementation in the LERW watershed
 - ✓ Install 5 publicly-visible signs promoting BMPs in the watershed
 - ✓ Provide updates at public stakeholder meetings (3 total)
 - ✓ Announce annual “Friend of the Watershed” award
 - ✓ Convey updates/success to governing organizations (3 total)
 - ✓ Publish media updates in local newspapers (6 total)
 - ✓ Compile and distribute Annual Report each years
 - ✓ Track all attendees at events/meetings to gauge success

Watershed Management Plan Goals:

The 2008 Lower Eel River Watershed Management Plan was established with a focus on long-term water quality improvement through the widespread adoption of BMPs. Following a decade of targeted 319 implementation, the group believes it has successfully met the overarching intent of the plan. However, a precise quantitative comparison to the original load reduction goals does not accurately reflect this progress due to the early goals of the WMP being conservatively set using tools that are considered obsolete by today’s standards. At this stage, there is a need for more comprehensive, high-precision data as opposed to the ‘trend-based’ monitoring that was collected during the creation of the WMP. Over the years, Hoosier Riverwatch methods have provided some valuable water quality insights and community engagement, though they are still subject to seasonal variability and lacks the necessary precision needed to make an accurate assessment of water quality improvements using monitoring methods alone. Cost is the major limiting factor when it comes to being able to gather better monitoring data, so the group must work with the best tools available.

At this time, the best methods available for evaluating load reduction goal achievement consist of modeling tools such as Region 5, StepL, and estimations based on information from local agronomists. These tools are quite useful, especially when used in conjunction with a funded, high-precision monitoring program. The table below represents load reduction

goals outlined in the WMP alongside recorded load reductions from installed BMPs during the LERW Implementation project (phases I, II, and III). In the future, it would be best to ‘ground-truth’ the collected load reduction data with accurate stream monitoring data before beginning implementation efforts. To make this possible, it would be best to have adequate funding for the collection of high-quality water samples to be sent for lab analysis on a more frequent basis rather than relying on unfunded volunteer monitoring methods conducted on an infrequent basis.

The LERW WMP originally established a 10% reduction goal for Nitrate, Phosphorus, Sediment, and E. coli loads over a five-year timeline. After three rounds of 319 implementation, our calculated reductions have significantly surpassed these initial benchmarks, which suggests that these inconsistencies stem from the load reduction calculation tools and methods used during the Planning phase when the WMP and its goals were created.

In the future as the group considers updating the Lower Eel River WMP, refining these calculation tools will be essential to establishing more quantifiable short and long-term goals. Load reduction models provide a necessary framework for being able to track progress, but they are theoretical and possess limitations. Securing funding for high-precision water monitoring should be a priority for future LERW efforts. In the immediate future, IDEM performance monitoring will be the key to verifying the positive impacts of these conservation practices and identifying stream segments with significant water quality improvements.

At the conclusion of three rounds of LERW implementation efforts, the following total load reduction calculations have been tabulated from 2016-2026:

	LERW WMP Baseline Load Estimates	LERW WMP Reduction Goals	LERW I Reduction 2016-2018	LERW II Reduction 2018-2021	LERW III Reduction 2022-2026	Total Load Reduction (2016-2026)	Goal Completion Percentage
Nitrogen	123,180 lbs/yr	10%	43,277.8 lbs/yr	108,612.63 lbs/yr	130,432.61 lbs/yr	282,323.04 lbs/yr	229.2%
Phosphorus	11,380 lbs/yr	10%	16,525.5 lbs/yr	18,190.1 lbs/yr	13,499.8 lbs/yr	48,215.4 lbs/yr	423.7%
Sediment	700.52 tons/yr	10%	16,206.4 tons/yr	11,580.7 tons/yr	9,268.5 tons/yr	37,055.6 tons/yr	5,289.7%
E.coli	1.857E+13 cfu/yr	10%	Cannot be determined	Cannot be determined	Cannot be determined	Cannot be determined	Cannot be determined

**WMP Load reduction goals can be found on pgs. 43-50 of the Lower Eel WMP*

It is also worth noting that until the fall of 2020 no adequate load reduction tool for E.coli had been definitively approved for use in 319 projects. An E.coli tool was recently developed by IDEM but is reported to produce questionable results and is still being tested. All BMPs installed after the development of the new E.coli load reduction tool did not have a measureable effect on E.coli load reduction so this calculation tool was not utilized during this project. Increasing public awareness is the main strategy for reducing E.coli loads in the watershed though the success of these efforts cannot be accurately quantified.

COMPLETION OF TASKS

One straightforward way to quantify the success of the LERW Implementation III grant project is to review the completion of the objectives outlined in each Task. More complex topics will be further discussed and analyzed as necessary. Supporting documentation can be found in the LERW Final Report Appendices (USB and Google Drive).

Task A: Update and Promote a Cost-Share Program to fulfill goals of the LERW WMP

- ☒ Revise and submit the Cost-Share Program Guidelines for IDEM approval.

- ☒ Conduct Steering Committee meetings two time per year for the first three years to review progress and concerns of the district and landowners for a total of six (6).

The LERW Steering Committee was required to meet twice per year for the first three years of the 319 Implementation III grant (a total of 6). Applicable supporting documentation for meetings can be found in Appendix A on the LERW #41471 Final Report USB/Google Drive.

Steering Committee scheduled meetings were held during the daytime at the Clay County SWCD office: 3/15/22, 3/7/23, 7/11/23, 2/15/24, 6/20/24, 11/21/24

- ☒ Hold (1) one public meeting each year for the first three years, targeting stakeholders for a total of three (3).

The Clay County SWCD Annual Business meetings served this function, where approximately 75-100 stakeholders were in attendance each year. These meetings were typically held in February each year and a 319 Annual Report was provided to the public for review.

Public Meetings: Clay Co. SWCD Annual Meetings at the Fairgrounds: 3/10/22, 3/2/23, 3/21/24

- ☒ Provide technical assistance to landowners to facilitate BMP implementation.

Task B: Cost-Share for BMP Implementation

- ☒ Implement the approved cost-share program described in Task A

The LERW Implementation Cost-Share Program was approved by IDEM on 4/20/22 before being updated and resubmitted for approval in December 2025 after a minor revision to increase the per customer cost-share cap from \$50,000 to \$75,000. See below for a summary of BMP Implementation projects and **Appendix B** on the LERW Final Report USB/Google Drive for related BMP documentation.

Overall, the LERW 319 Implementation III grant was very successful, resulting in the installation of an impressive number BMPs on critical area acreage. Several of these producers were first-time participants and younger farmers who showed keen interest especially when it came to cover crops, precision agriculture, and planter upgrades to increase residue. This is a promising observation for future conservation in the region.

Total BMPs implemented in LERW critical areas during LERW III Implementation (2022-2026):

- *Cover Crops (and Seeders) = 9,696.26 acres*
- *Grassed Waterway = 580'*
- *Nutrient Management (Precision Ag. upgrades) = 18,694.44 acres*
- *Prescribed Grazing = 465.54 acres (7,571' pipeline, 11 hydrants, 272.74 acres pasture seeding, 1 mountable seeding tool, non-permanent interior fence, livestock corridor 780')*
- *Residue & Tillage Management (Planter upgrades) = 3,126.05 acres*
- *WASCOBs = 8 total (2,860' gully erosion repaired)*

The total pollutant load reduction estimates of the BMPs installed as a direct result of the LERW 319

Implementation III project (Cost-Share and Match projects) are summarized as follows:

- *Nitrogen: 130,432.61 lbs/year*
- *Phosphorus: 13,499.8 lbs/year*
- *Sediment: 9,268.5 tons/year*

Lesson Learned (Again): Interest in cost-share funding has not been a problem in this region, though there is usually a rush to spend a sizeable amount of funding in the final months of a grant because some planned projects don't get finished due to lack of producer time/money or weather-related challenges. This creates inconveniences on the administrative end, but one of the main advantages of the 319 cost-share program is that, in comparison to most of the federal programs, there is no penalty to the applicant for non-completion. This feature of the 319 programs often opens the door for new participants and offers some flexibility, however it is recommended to assign an earlier 'deadline' for projects to be completed or to consider limiting the number of projects for a first-time applicant. Fortunately, there are always projects on the wait list to fill this gap. By staying on top of languishing projects during this grant, there were no last-minute surprises and other projects were lined up to replace those who did not complete their planned projects.

- ☒ Ensure that all BMPs conform to NRCS specifications or other applicable, approved specifications
- ☒ Implement BMPs only in critical areas as described in the LERW WMP
- ☒ Follow cost-share payment and reporting protocol according to IDEM 319 program requirements
- ☒ Tabulate pollutant load reductions for every BMP funded by 319 or utilized for match
- ☒ Create and maintain a geo-referenced database for all BMPs implemented through the 319 project

Pollutant load reduction totals corresponding to each individual project are reported in the Quarterly Progress Reports submitted to IDEM with each Invoice Package. See **Appendix D** to review QPRs and/or **Appendix E** for collected Invoice Package documentation. Geodata for the implemented practices is in **Appendix B**.

Task C: Education and Outreach

Conduct an education and outreach program that includes the following efforts:

- ☒ Update the Clay County SWCD Facebook page and other social media at least one (1) time per month (36 total).
- ☒ Develop and distribute six (6) electronic newsletters

A total of 6 newsletters were created and distributed. Most were via email or Clay Co. SWCD social media. Annual summary reports were created to showcase LERW Implementation III progress were shared online. Supporting documentation can be found in **Appendix D** and descriptions are reflected below:

- SWCD Annual Mtg reports shared via social media/website: 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 (4 total)
- Nov 2024 Clay SWCD social media LERW update/mtg invite
- 8/2025 post Field Day update YouTube video Clay SWCD social media

- ☒ Market and promote the LERW Cost-Share Program through participating in field days, PARP workshops, regional conservation events, prescribed grazing field days, and local fairs/community days. Participate in a minimum of six (6) events total.

A total of 6 community events were completed to educate stakeholders and the general public about the LERW Implementation III grant, non-point source pollution, and conservation practices. Supporting documentation can be found in **Appendix D** and a description of events is reflected below:

- 3/15/22 - Owen SWCD Annual Mtg
- 3/30/22 - Cattleman's Association Annual Mtg
- 2022 Clay Co. 4-H Fair booth
- 2023 Clay Co. 4-H Fair booth
- 5/8/24 Indiana Master Naturalist 'Water Quality' presentation at the Clay Fairgrounds
- 2024 Clay Co. 4-H Fair booth
- 2025 Clay Co. 4-H Fair booth

- ☒ Host or actively partner in one (1) regional workshop per year to promote water quality (3 total).

A total of 3 larger-scale field days/events were completed to educate stakeholders about the LERW Implementation III grant and conservation practices that can improve water quality. Supporting documentation can be found in **Appendix D** and a description of events is reflected below:

- 2022, 2023, 2025 Tire Recycling Days (3 total)
- August 2024 - Sunset Grazing Tour – Davis Farm (cancelled due to low RSVPs)
- August 2025 - CCSI Soil Health Field Day at Farm Connection to showcase grazing management

- ☒ Provide three (3) updates to governing bodies in person.

Updates were provided regularly to government officials to inform them about project successes and garner support for subsequent grant application efforts.

- 4/4/22 – Clay County Council mtg
- 4/4/22 – Clay Co. Commissioners mtg
- 7/26/22 – Owen Co. SWCD Board mtg

- ☒ Develop and distribute five (5) brochures or flyers to promote the LERW Cost-Share Program, educate about conservation BMPs, and/or provide information about water quality stewardship

A total of 5 flyers/brochures were created during the LERW Implementation III grant and can be found in **Appendix D** on the LERW Final Report USB/Google Drive. These include the following:

- Updated Cost-Share Brochure (2022-2025)
- LERW Soil Health flyer

- LERW Septic flyer
- LERW Grazing flyer
- LERW Wetlands flyer

- ☒ Review and update a filterable database of volunteers, partners, and contacts; sort into groups pertaining to interest, qualification, or potential donor/partner/stakeholder one (1) time per month.

Google Contacts is being used by the Watershed Coordinator to maintain the LERW contact list.

This free Google account (wciwacoordinator@gmail.com) easily adds new contacts, sorts them into multiple groups, and can make edits quickly. Group emails can be sent though some government email servers are not compatible so it's often easier to export a .csv to send a large group email through Outlook. Google Contacts is cloud-based and therefore, always backed-up. Additionally, the contacts can be synced with other devices, shared with partners, and can be used as a reference during lapses between grant funding.

- ☒ Provide at least six (6) media releases/advertisements to local newspapers and/or radio and television stations.

News regarding the LERW watershed project was often featured in the Brazil Times newspaper. Since the watershed is situated primarily in Clay County it was not often necessary to interface with the media of neighboring counties as frequently, though partner SWCDs and other organizations informally circulated news of events/workshops via their own email lists/social media. Copies of press releases can be found in **Appendix D** on the LERW Final Report USB/Google Drive.

Articles and Advertisements:

- Brazil Times – 2022 Clay SWCD Annual Mtg tabloid
- Brazil Times – Tire Recycling Event article 2022
- 8/7/23 – Updates to local Government officials publicized in Brazil Times
- Brazil Times – Tire Recycling Event article 2024
- 8/15/24 - Updates to local government officials publicized in Brazil Times
- Lafferty Ditch Success Story – 2025 Indiana Public Radio

- ☒ Install a minimum of five (5) promotional signs throughout the watershed to raise awareness about the LERW project and to highlight BMPs.

The LERW signs were distributed to participating producers and placed in cover crop fields during completion checks. The design was attractive and received compliments though it's unclear how effective they may be when it comes to advertising and promotion of the LERW program.

- ☒ Host one (1) water quality workshop such as Hoosier Riverwatch training or other community water monitoring event.

On 10/2/24, a Hoosier Riverwatch training was held at the Purdue Extension office. Classroom activities occurred in the morning, and the afternoon portion sampled the creek behind the fairgrounds with good

success. This proved to be an excellent site with easy access and a surprising amount of species diversity.

- ☒ Compile one (1) comprehensive Annual Report on the LERW 319 Implementation project activities per year and distribute to stakeholders (3 total).

To share project successes, an annual report was created and made available at the Clay SWCD Annual Meeting. These reports shared financial info, BMP totals, pollution load reductions, and other relevant news.

Annual reports were created for 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025.

- ☒ Present one (1) “Friend of the Watershed” award per year to a deserving program participant at the Clay SWCD Annual Meeting.

Each year an individual was selected to receive the ‘Friend of the Watershed’ award, which was presented at the Clay County SWCD Annual Meeting.

Award recipients: Henry Buell (2022), Davis Family Farms (2023), Jim Luzar (2024), BE-N-Ag (2025)

- ☒ Track attendance at all LERW functions (meetings, field days, workshops) to determine success of outreach efforts.

Attendance was estimated at each LERW III event, meeting, and/or field day and recorded in the QPRs which can be found in **Appendix D** on the LERW Final Report USB/Google Drive.

Task D: Reporting

- ☒ Prepare and submit a progress report to the State with each invoice package at least quarterly.

A total of 15 Quarterly Progress Reports were submitted while the LERW 319 Implementation III project, meeting the Task D requirement. Copies of all Progress Reports can be found in **Appendix D** on the LERW Final Report USB/Google Drive.

Progress Reports were submitted for the following time periods:

- January 28th, 2022-April 30th, 2022
- May 1st, 2022 – August 19th, 2022
- August 20th, 2022-October 1st, 2022
- October 2nd, 2022-December 31st, 2022
- January 1st, 2023-February 1st, 2023
- February 2nd, 2023-May 31st, 2023
- June 1st, 2023-September 15th, 2023
- September 16th, 2023-December 4th, 2023
- December 6th, 2023-June 6th, 2024
- June 7th, 2024-August 31, 2024
- September 1st, 2024-December 31st, 2024

- January 1st, 2025-February 15th, 2025
- February 15th, 2025- June 23rd, 2025
- June 24th, 2025-December 26th, 2025
- December 27th, 2025-January 24th, 2026

- ☒ Submit two electronic copies of a final report to the State.

The LERW 319 Implementation III project Final Report and all supporting documentation was submitted to the State as a Google Drive link provided to the Watershed Specialist. Documents related to this project will be archived in the shared Google Drive for at least the next three years. All hard copy information will be retained as long as necessary at the Clay SWCD Office. The Google Drive link has also been shared with the Clay Co. SWCD Coordinator, to archive collected project documentation as desired.

Discussion of Monitoring Results

No 319-funded monitoring activities were conducted during the LERW Implementation III project.

Public Participation and Partnerships

The success of this final installment of LERW 319 Implementation is a direct result of the strong commitment shown by everyone involved. With the Clay County SWCD team leading the way, the project was effectively promoted through various regional field days and community events. This phase allowed for the strengthening of existing partnerships and building new ones with a wide range of organizations, including neighboring SWCDs (Owen, Greene, Parke, and Vigo), ISDA, Purdue Extension, Ceres Solutions, Staley's Soil Service, Duke Energy, Clay Co. Health Department, Sycamore Trails RC&D, Ouabache Land Conservancy, the Otter Creek 319 project, DNR, Farm Bureau, and the FSA.

Beyond these agencies, valuable support was gained from regional agronomists, seed dealers, and local contractors. The NRCS CIT and District Conservationist were once again essential in providing the technical planning and engineering required for many installed conservation practices. A special thank you goes to Dale Walker (ISDA) for his hard work in producer planning and construction checks, as well as Billy Pigg and Holden Abrell, who stepped in to support these efforts after Dale's retirement in 2024.

Clay County Council and Commissioners (several who are farmers themselves) were also great advocates for the program. Ultimately, this project succeeded because of the Clay SWCD Board's consistent oversight and the work of SWCD Coordinator, Jennifer Creager, whose administrative skills kept the project organized and the finances on track.

One major credit for the LERW Implementation III program is the fact that the Match requirement was not only fulfilled but greatly exceeded! Indeed, the match requirement was \$414,774.00 and the final total reached \$570,835.31 exceeding the goal by \$156,061.31! This is a true testament to the commitment of the local producers and partners!

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

In summary, the LERW 319 Implementation III project demonstrated many positive efforts, including:

- Awarded additional \$200,000 (\$150,000 cost-share) in 319 funding and timeline extension
- Exceeded match requirement by \$156,061.31
- BMPs installed on thousands of acres
- Large load reductions achieved through Nutrient Management and Cover Crops

- Widespread adoption of precision agriculture techniques and innovative cover cropping methods
- Pioneering new technology with drone application for cover crops
- Strong support from the Clay SWCD and partners
- High level of participation from landowners and producers due to strong word-of-mouth promotion
- Excellent communication with SWCD Coordinator regarding finances, event planning, etc.
- Other conservation efforts including:
 - Clean Water Indiana grant for cover crops in Clay County
 - ISDA technical assistance and annual Tillage/Cover Crop transects
 - Continued cross-promotion NRCS/FSA programs
 - Duke Energy and IDEM grants to promote native plants, water quality, tire recycling

However, all roads to success often have a few ‘bumps’ along the way. Below are some challenges the LERW 319 Implementation III project experienced (and learned from):

- The additional funding and timeline extension approved by EPA was a fortunate windfall but the execution of the updated grant agreement and actual confirmation of when the additional funding would be received can make it difficult to effectively plan projects and obligate funding without compromising the trust of the producers. It is not recommended to ‘promise’ funding to wait-listed producers without updated grant agreement paperwork completed. Gaps in funding can be a hardship for staff as well.
- As is sometimes the case with Implementation (and because there is no penalty to producers for non-completion of 319 projects), there were several larger projects that were cancelled, changed, or were under budget in the final year of this grant project. Experience has shown that it’s best to provide producers with an earlier project completion deadline and to follow up with them frequently to stay ahead of surprise cancellations.
- Quickly evolving precision agriculture technology can make it challenging to stay informed.

Future Activity

Even though 319 implementation in the Lower Eel River watershed has concluded for the time being, the Clay County SWCD Board will continue to facilitate federal, state, and local conservation programs. They will also pursue various types of conservation grant funding when possible. It is hoped that IDEM will return to complete performance monitoring in this watershed soon and that several impaired streams will be delisted thanks to the years of implementation and outreach efforts in this area.

Once IDEM performance monitoring has occurred, the Clay County SWCD can confidently move forward with plans to update the Lower Eel River Watershed Management Plan by applying for a 319 Planning grant or pursuing other funding sources that will provide for the intensive collection of updated baseline water quality data throughout the working area. Once a new WMP with updated critical areas and goals that follow modern standards is created and approved, additional 319 implementation funds may be considered. Until then, conservation education, outreach, and program matchmaking will continue if there is local need and interest.

The experience gained during the LERW 319 grants, along with the partnerships and local contacts, will be extremely helpful during any future initiatives in this area and as the Clay County SWCD continues efforts to assess and improve water quality throughout the region.



LOWER EEL RIVER WATERSHED

319 GRANT



Completed 319 BMPs FINAL SUMMARY 2016-2026

Note: Due to the map scale, not all BMPs are visible and repeat years cannot be effectively represented. Full data on all completed projects can be found in the LERW Final Reports on www.watershed-alliance.org

