

Indicators ignored

Missed signs led to White River contamination

Editor's note: This is the first part of a five-part series about the 1999 White River contamination.

BY KEN de la BASTIDE
ken.delabastide@heraldbulletin.com

What would become one of the biggest environmental disasters in the history of Indiana started on Dec. 19, 1999, when residents reported some dead fish floating in the White River south of the Anderson sewage plant.

It grew to contaminate 50 miles of river, kill 180 tons of fish, and rack up nearly \$14 million in fines and penalties against Guide Corp. and the city of Anderson. The cost to Anderson taxpayers will be in the millions over the next two decades.

Within four days of the first dead fish report, the contamination would reach Indianapolis and have state officials scrambling to determine its source.

In short, the ecological disaster happened because Guide Corp. was in a hurry to shut down a wastewater treatment plant and the city of Anderson kept ignoring irregular water readings it later received downstream.

Guide Corp. signed an agreement with General Motors to close a pre-treatment wastewater facility 90 days after shutting down plating operations. The deadline was Dec. 22, 1999.

Guide hired Crown Environmental to oversee the shut-down of the facilities.

To save time, Crown Environmental stopped using a clarifier to allow chemicals and suspended solids to settle out,



Above: A sign posted in January 2000 by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management warns people against using the White River in Hamilton County. At left: One of the millions of fish killed by the contamination after the December 1999 discharge.

THB file photos

River

Continued from Page 1

instead discharging wastewater directly to the city of Anderson sewage treatment plant.

Guide didn't inform the city of Anderson about the change in procedures nor the use of additional chemicals, including HMP 2000 which contained sodium dimethyldithiocarbamate, known to be harmful to aquatic life. Guide used 10,000 gallons of HMP 2000 over a 10-day period, 50 percent of the total amount purchased by the company for the entire year, according to records that Guide provided IDEM.

During the first 19 days of December 1999, Guide discharged 1.6 million gallons of pollutant into the city's sewer system.

But the city didn't stop the pollutants.

The Anderson wastewater pollution plant noticed interference in its activated sludge and nitrification process. At first, Guide officials told state investigators only one discharge was made during that period, but later admitted to 11 discharges between Dec. 11 and Dec. 19.

City officials ignored increased levels of ammonia, blaming the elevated levels on a faulty test.

Then, a water sample taken on Dec. 12 was red in color, smelled like dead fish and showed a sudden increase in dissolved oxygen. That warning also was ignored by city officials.

A sample taken directly from



At left: Then-Gov. Frank O'Bannon and Timothy M. Morrison, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Indiana, talk at the press conference that announced that Guide Corp. will pay \$13.927 million to settle the state and federal lawsuits against them for the December 1999 fish kill.

THB file photo / John P. Cleary

Guide on Dec. 16 and Dec. 17 found high levels of ammonia, an element normally not present in their discharge. City officials dismissed the reading as false. But the testing equipment was actually detecting dimethylamine, a breakdown chemical compound of HMP 2000.

As the Anderson wastewater treatment plant tried to cleanse the discharges from Guide, sewage backed up in the system when rains overwhelmed the plant's capacity and the pollutants spilled into the White River.

By Dec. 21, the state began to investigate Guide as the source of

the contamination. IDEM and EPA set up an emergency response team in Anderson and took control of the wastewater treatment plant.

In January, Guide didn't allow state inspectors onto the plant's property, prompting officials to get a search warrant.

It wasn't until 18 months later that the EPA charged Guide with seven violations of the Clean Water Act. The same day the charges were filed, the U.S. district attorney announced a plea agreement and settlement. From that \$13.9 million settlement, \$6 million is used to improve the riv-

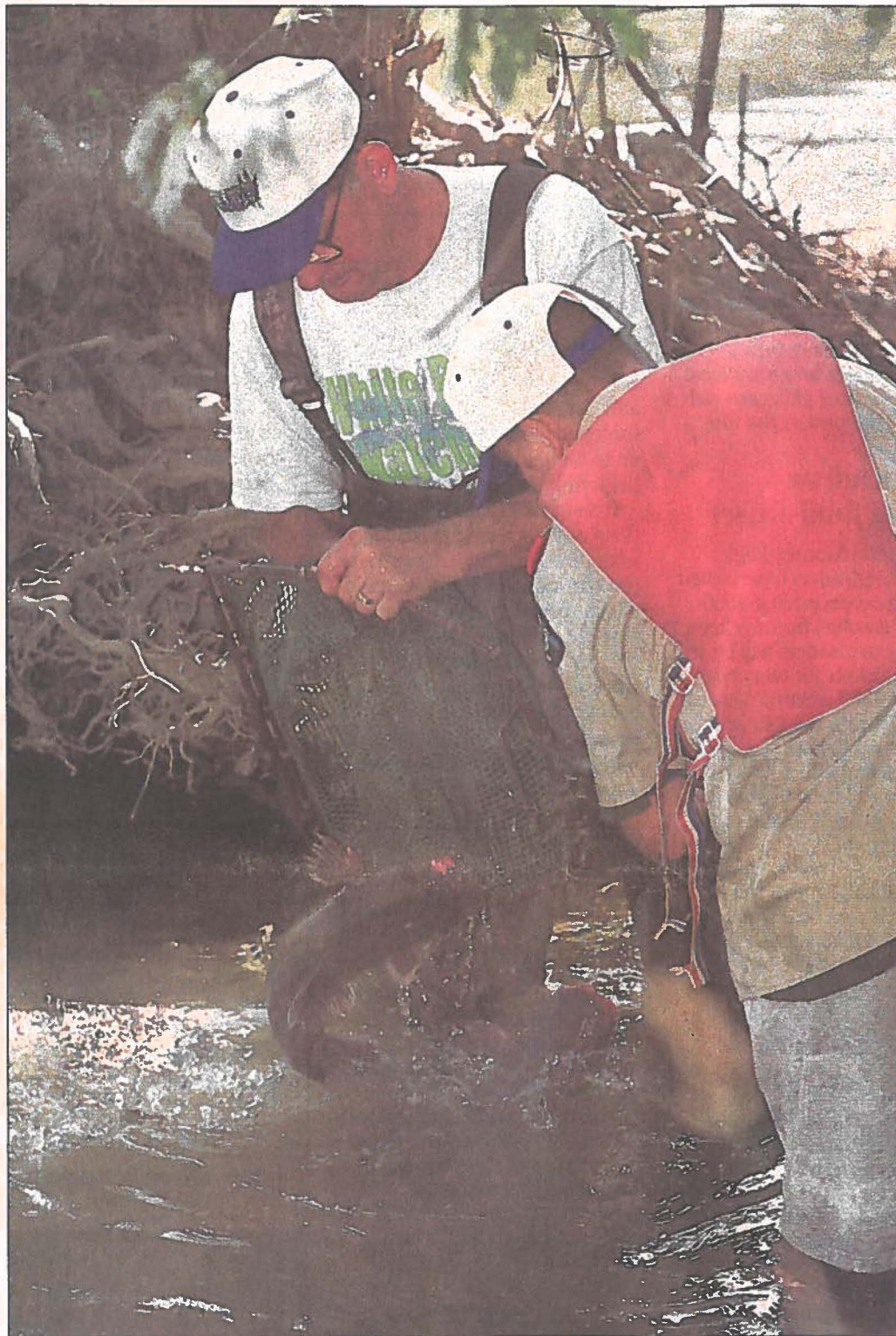
er habitat and to restock the river.

Indiana Gov. Frank O'Bannon in June 2001 said the state had caught "the big fish" in announcing the settlement with Guide as a result of the fish kill.

The city of Anderson later signed a consent decree with IDEM and EPA to make improvements to the sewage plant and to speed up the process of separating the combined storm and sanitary sewers. The consent decree was to resolve the legal issues facing the city over violations at the sewage treatment plant prior to and during the 1999 fish kill. The city also was fined \$250,000.

A RIVER IN RECOVERY: CLEANING UP

Remaking the river



THB file photo/ John P. Cleary

As 15-year-old Lapel Boy Scout Adam McDaniel holds the fish net, John Johnson of White River Watchers dumps flathead catfish into the White River near Strawtown in June 2001.

Guide settlement provided opportunities for restoration

Editor's note: This is the second part of a five-part series about the 1999 White River contamination.

By AYON WATERS
avon.waters@heraldbulletin.com

It's been five years since a chemical released by a contractor closed the water treatment plant at Guide Corp. The mistake dumped sodium dimethyldiphioicarbamate into the river, killing 180 tons of fish from Anderson to Indianapolis.

The \$14.1 million settlement with Guide Corp. and the city of Anderson set aside \$6 million for river restoration projects in the 50-mile kill zone.

More than \$821,000 of the \$2 million spent so far went toward projects solely in Madison County. Many more projects, such as fish stocking, cleanups and easement purchases benefited Madison County and other counties affected by the kill.

Advocate Sheryl Myers call the river restoration the thin green line because of the efforts to create a 100-foot-wide green space on each side of the river for wildlife and to help decrease erosion and runoff pollution.

"I never thought in my lifetime I'd see Moss Island Dump cleaned up," said Myers, a member of the White River Citizens Advisory Council that distributes the settlement money.

The WRCAC spent \$230,000 to clean up the dump this summer. The surface cleanup included restoring the land around the dump by planting a forested riparian buffer.

By creating green space and restoring the banks of the river

"This property is just about as natural as anything you'll find in Indiana. It's like Mounds State Park, but in private hands. It's got the ravines and cliff by the river with huge mature oaks, hickory and maples."

Sheryl Myers
cleanup advocate

A RIVER IN RECOVERY

On the fifth anniversary of one of Indiana's worst ecological disasters, The Herald Bulletin explores what led to the fish kill of December 1999 that killed 180 tons of fish along a 50 mile stretch of the White River.

■ Thursday - A recap of the Guide Corp. spill and the city of Anderson's negligence in detecting it. Also a timeline of the events.

■ Today - Eighteen months after the spill, Guide settles with the U.S. EPA and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources for \$13.9 million. The city of Anderson later settles for \$250,000. Here's how the money has been spent so far.

■ Saturday - In five years, Guide Corp. and the city of Anderson have been significant improvements to their environmental safeguards.

■ Sunday - From the fish kill springs renewed appreciation and stewardship of the river. Going strong is river cleanup powerhouse, White River Watchers.

■ Monday - From the 1940s to today, the public's view of the river has changed from a dumping ground to a recreation and economic development asset.

River

Continued from Page 1

to a more natural habitat, the river stays cleaner. One way to do that is to create conservation easements, Myers said. The landowner agrees to keep the land natural and not develop it.

"We interpret the settlement's No. 1 priority as putting as many acres into conservation easements as possible," she said.

A 37.5-acre plot on the west side of Anderson, at the very end of West Second Street, was purchased using settlement money and turned into River Bend Park.

"It will be Anderson's pride and joy on the west side," Myers said. "I can see 100 years from now it being a very beautiful place."

The city parks department maintains the park that includes a boat launch.

Another property owned by a local family remains in the hands of the family, she said. But they agree to not develop the property and keep it in a natural state.

"This property is just about as natural as anything you'll find in Indiana," Myers said. "It's like Mounds State Park, but in private hands. It's got the ravines and cliff by the river with huge mature oaks, hickory and maples."

The settlement came quickly compared to other environmental disasters that happened, said Myers. In mid-June 2001, Gov. Frank O'Bannon stood on the banks of the White River in Indianapolis and announced the state had come to an agreement with Guide Corp. to pay \$13.9 million. The city of Anderson later would pay \$250,000.

Restocking efforts began before the settlement, said Bill James, chief of fisheries with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. After the kill, IDEM hired three companies to travel the river and pick up the dead fish and take them to a landfill.

"In January, fish were still dying," James recalled. "Right from the beginning we wanted to rebuild the aquatic life using science-based methods."

In the spring of 2000 restocking began and surveys were taken several times a year since,



THB file photo / John P. Cleary

New fish being released into the White River ripple the surface as Rhett Wisner of the DNR and John Bundy release smallmouth bass and catfish into the water in 2000.

James said. In 2000, five people sat around a table in Hamilton County and decided to create the White River Rescue 2000. From the community they raised more than \$150,000 to purchase fish to restock the river. Some of the settlement money went to repay them.

Rather than wait for some settlement that might take years, the DNR used some of its funds to get the restocking started too, James said.

"The river has come back and the restocking was part of that," James said. "About 1 million fish were restocked. We knew mother nature would restock from upstream and tributaries but that could take years and a roll of the dice what species would repopulate the river."

Species diversity is back, he added. There are 40 or 50 species of fish in the river. Settlement money paid for surveys and the science to help the river recover.

"We conducted angler use surveys to see what people were catching," James said. "In 2002 and this year we repeated that. In 2002 we saw people coming back, the fish were small. Anecdotally since 2002, the river seems to be enjoying unprecedented use again. kayaking, photography, fishing and canoeing. Now we're seeing catfish 2 feet long and longer."

It will take years to get the huge catfish and game fish that once lived in the damaged stretch of the river, James said.

The restoration also allowed the reintroduction of a species called sauger. They once were in the river but due to development, years of pollution by industry and metropolitan areas, sauger disappeared from this stretch of the river, James said.

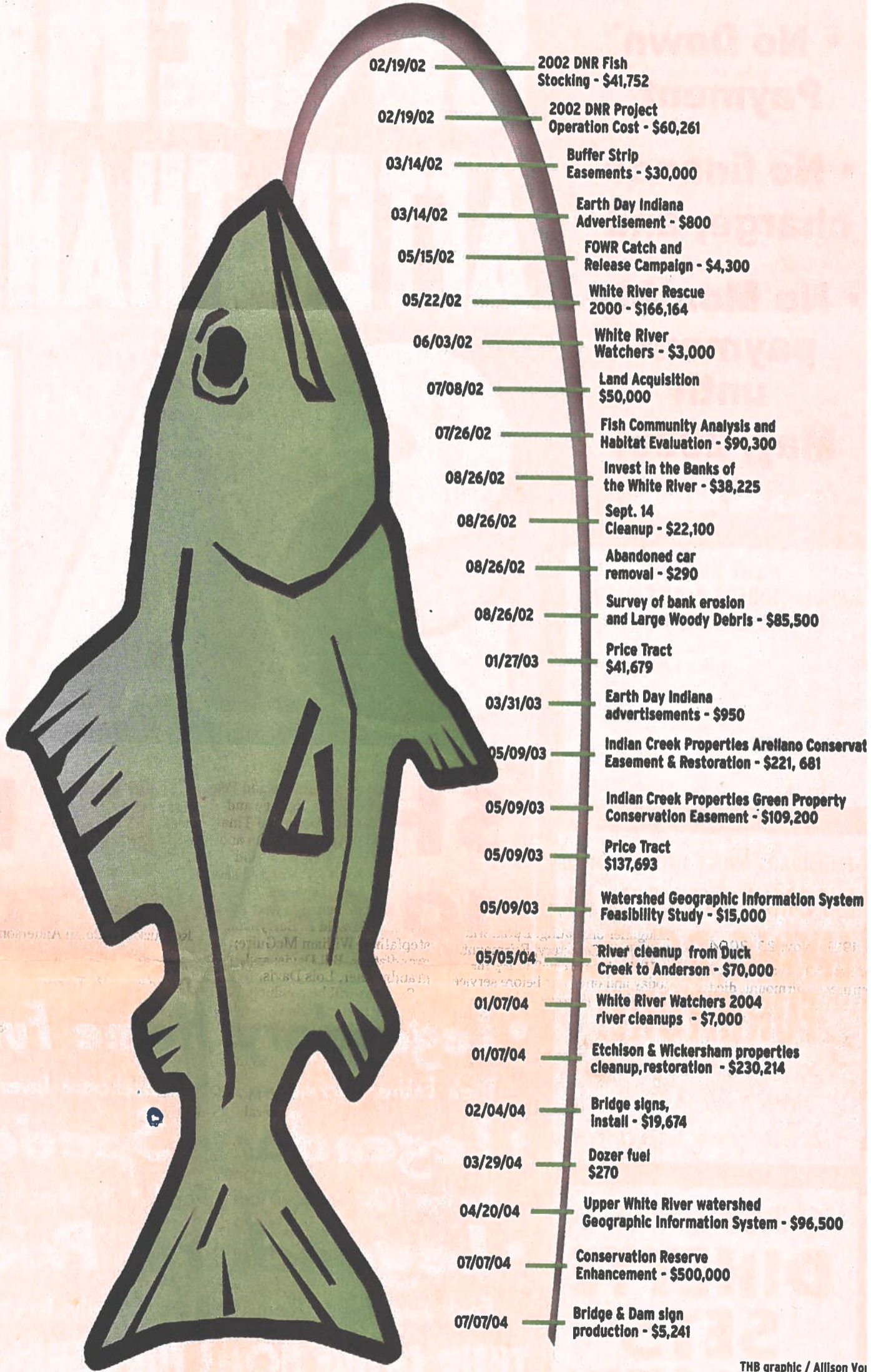
"The sauger is back," he said. "Now we have to see if it will mature and reproduce."

People learned communication, cooperation and responsibility as a result of the kill and settlement.

"We learned that stewardship is a shared responsibility of the public and government," James said. "We still get calls if someone finds even one fish dead. The kill elevated the condition of the river in people's minds."

White River restoration projects

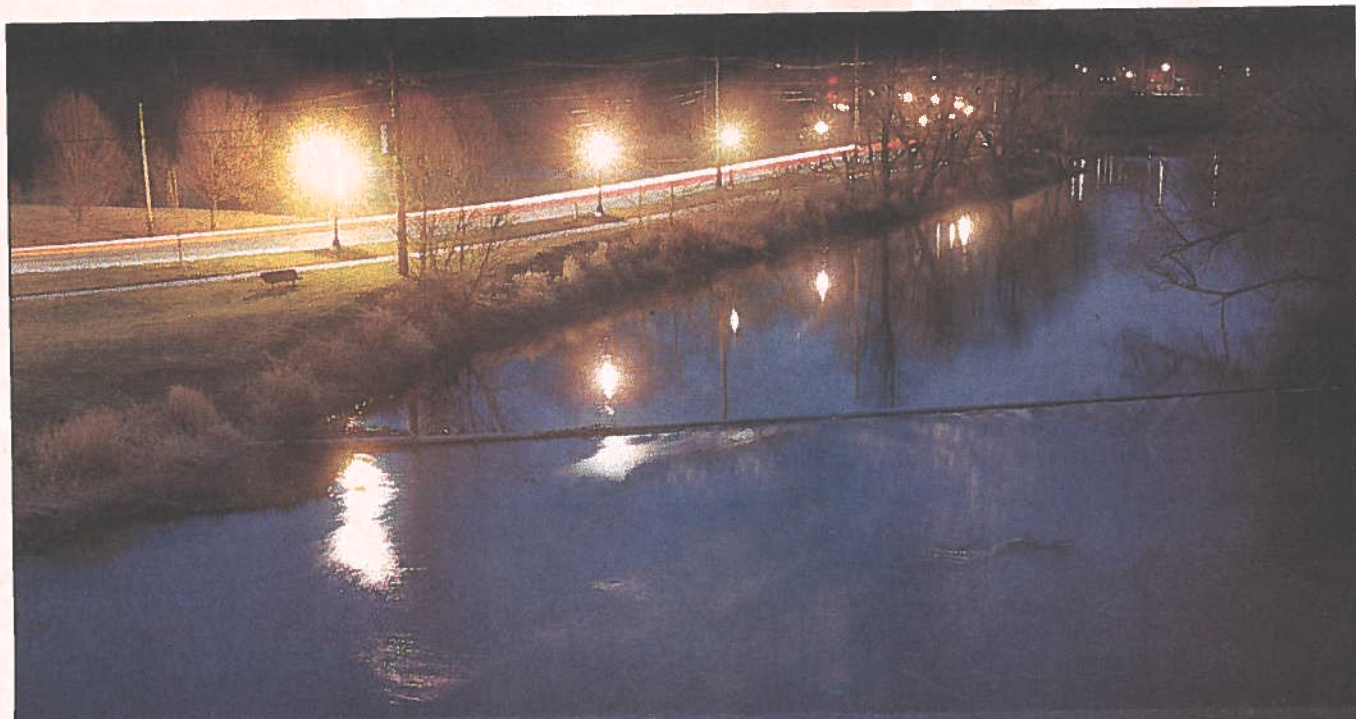
Shown below are approved White River restoration projects that included Madison County and their resolution dates.



THB graphic / Allison Voi

Source: Indiana Department of Environmental Manage

A RIVER IN RECOVERY: CHANGING PROCEDURES



Kill's impact

Following spill, Guide boosts environmental awareness

Editor's Note: This is the third part of a five-part series about the 1999 White River contamination

By JIM BAILEY
jim.bailey@heraldbulletin.com

Soon after the fish kill, environmental engineers swarmed around Guide Corp., said Lance Schattner, president of United Auto Workers Local 663.

Procedures to protect the environment were the most conspicuous effects of the December ecological disaster, Schattner said. The impact of the \$13.9 million settlement was harder to gauge, since Guide is a privately held company. Despite repeated calls to Guide headquarters in Pendleton and Detroit, none was returned to The Herald Bulletin.

A
River in
Recovery

"I don't think there's any doubt that (the settlement) had some impact," Schattner said. "From what I know, Guide has done their part to be a good corporate citizen to this community. That was a monumental lapse that caused a big problem."

John Hagen, president of the Corporation for Economic Development, believes a company of that size would be able to weather the hit, although the size of the settlement surprised him.

"I was glad to see it settled," Hagen said. "Guide is a major employer here, the largest private employer in the county. Those jobs are important to us."

Mike McFall has been a busy man at Guide Corp. since the fish kill.

"We've been quite busy," admitted the senior environmental engineer at Guide.

It appears to be working. This year Guide received a certificate for outstanding compliance with the ISO

See Guide / A7



THB photo / John P. Cleary

Industrial compliance inspector Brandon Shrock prepares an automated sampling device that is taken on location to monitor the discharge from companies and industries.

More dead fish possible, unlikely

By AVON WATERS and KEN de la BASTIDE
The Herald Bulletin

Can an environmental catastrophe happen again along the White River?

Yes, said Randy Hamilton, superintendent of the Anderson Water Pollution Control plant. But the chances of something happening like the 1999 fish kill have been greatly reduced. That's thanks to many changes he and his staff implemented after he became superintendent in June 2000.

In 1999, more than 180 tons of fish died after a chemical was dumped into the sewer system and eventually flowed to the White River. A \$14.1 million settlement included \$250,000 from the city of Anderson for its culpability.

"This could happen again anywhere in the state," Hamilton said. "But here, we'd know about it sooner now. We have a lot of checks and balances in place."

As a result of the fish kill, Anderson is more prepared than most communities, he said.

Today the number of city employees monitoring companies and their activities is greater, Hamilton said. At the time of the kill, there was one man to monitor all of the companies and industries.

"The state said we weren't automated enough to operate that way," Hamilton said. "We implemented a

See Monitor / A7

About the series

On the fifth anniversary of one of Indiana's worst ecological disasters, The Herald Bulletin explores what led to the fish kill of December 1999 that killed 180 tons of fish along a 50 mile stretch of the White River.

■ Thursday - A recap of the Guide Corp. spill and the city of Anderson's negligence in detecting it. Also a timeline of the

events.

■ Friday - Eighteen months after the spill, Guide settles with the U.S. EPA and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources for \$13.9 million. The city of Anderson later settles for \$250,000. Here's how the money has been spent so far.

■ Today - In five years, Guide Corp. and the city of Anderson have made significant

improvements to their environmental safeguards.

■ Sunday - From the fish kill springs renewed appreciation and stewardship of the river. Going strong is river cleanup powerhouse, White River Watchers.

■ Monday - From the 1940s to today, the public's view of the river has changed from a dumping ground to a recreation and economic development asset.



THB file photo

Guide Corp. executive Steve Murray, right, speaks at a news conference along the White River in Noblesville in this March 31, 2000 photo as White River Rescue 2000 founders Steve Schwartz, left, and John Bundy look on. Guide announced at the news conference it had donated \$50,000 to the White River Rescue 2000 to help restock the river.

Guide

Continued from Page 1

14001 environmental standard that controls the uses and disposal of hazardous chemicals.

"We haven't had a violation in three years," McFall remarked.

The company also has a Title V air permit and has had no violations during the last two inspections, McFall said:

Delphi Automotive Systems received a compliance award at the same time. McFall recalled Delphi officials telling him not that many changes had been made over the years. "On our side there is a big difference," he emphasized.

"We've taken a look at all our activities, products and services," he explained. "We wanted to identify things that impact the environment, evaluate the significant impact and define our objectives and targets."

The painting process has come in for a great deal of scrutiny, McFall said. Programs have been instituted to minimize

problems. There has been reformulation of paints. "We're doing a lot of metalizing rather than painting," he said. "We are reducing emissions."

Recycling has been stepped up. A company has been found that takes and recycles used hydraulic oil so it can be reused. The company reuses a strip solution rather than disposing of it. Bulbs, fluorescent tubes, batteries and cardboard all are recycled.

"We look at alternatives," he said. "We try to replace things with something better environmentally."

Guide also is looking at metal working recycling, McFall said.

"We look at the benefits of environmental awareness," he said. "We come up with suggestions to make the process work better."

"We look at the positive at all times," he concluded. "We want to be focused. We pay attention to that and we're working hard."

Schattner agrees.

"Everybody in the plant is

more focused now because I think Guide has tried to be responsible and take some accountability for the fish kill," Schattner said. "We've all been more focused on our jobs and to continually improve our quality and scrap reduction initiative and do what we can to keep our company and union intact."

"The UAW has definitely been focused on those two things to make sure we do what we need to be accountable and help keep our jobs here," he said.

Hagen believes the spill was blown out of proportion on a statewide level. "I thought at the time they were caught up in electoral politics, and I haven't changed my mind," he said.

Hagen didn't know if any part of the settlement would have been covered by insurance. But he doesn't believe it had a bearing on Guide going up for sale.

"B.K. Badahur (the present owner) has a reputation for turning around companies. The report of a sale may suggest he feels it is ready to be turned over to new owners," Hagen said.

A RIVER IN RECOVERY: THE GUARDIANS EYES of the RIVER

Fish kill disaster invigorates White River Watchers

Editor's Note: This is the fourth part of a five-part series about the 1999 White River contamination.

By AVON WATERS
avon.waters@heraldbulletin.com

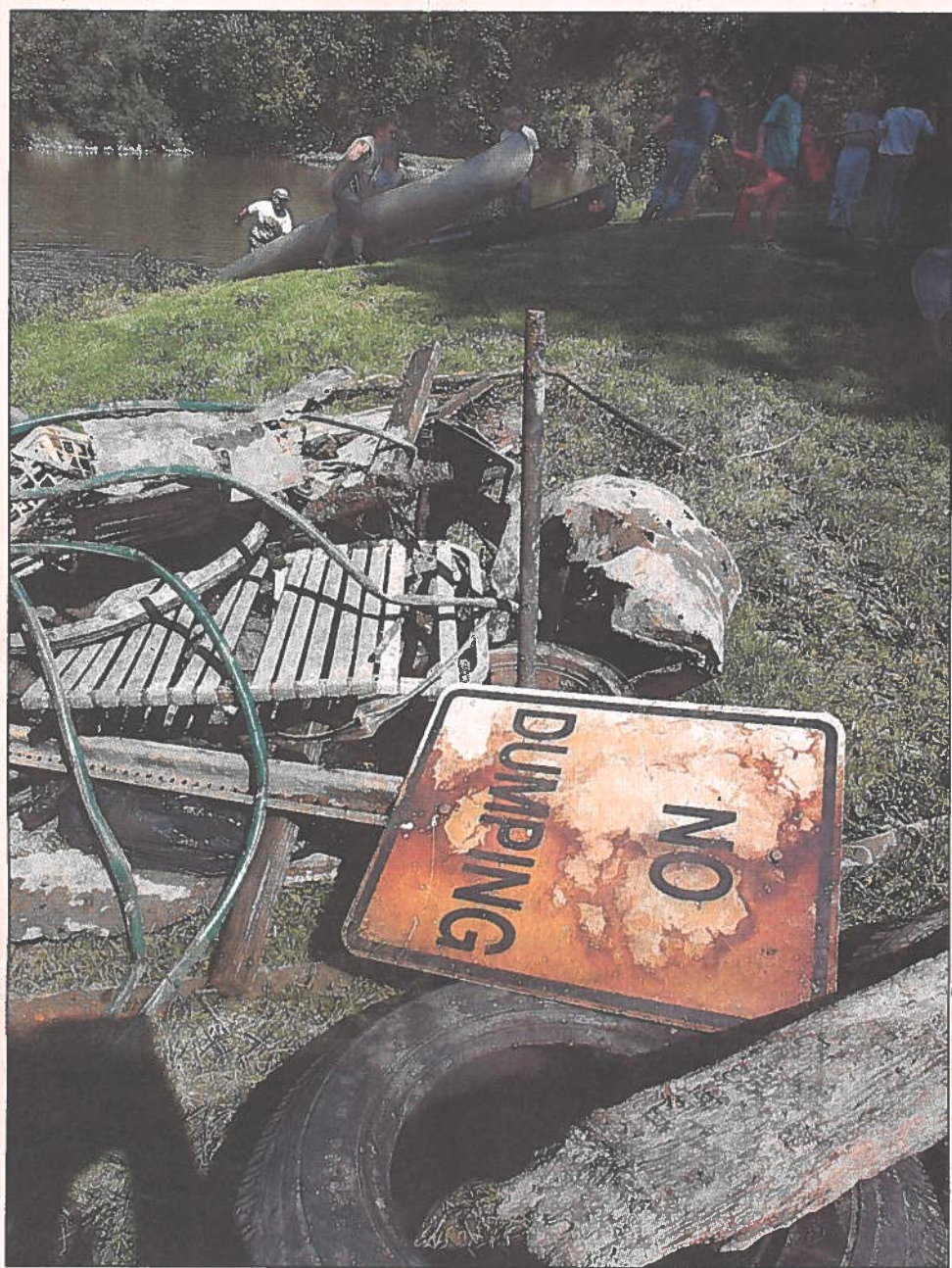
As bad as the fish kill was, it's brought a lot of good to the White River," said John Johnson, a member of the White River Watchers, a group of citizens dedicated to keeping the river clean. "It brought a lot of attention to the river."

The White River Watchers formed two years before the December 1999 fish kill that was caused by the release of DMCK, (sodium dimethyldiphocarbamate) into the river by Guide Corp. A \$14.1 million settlement by Guide, General Motors and the city of Anderson set aside \$6 million to be used for river restoration.

Other groups similar to the White River Watchers existed across the state. It was the Friends of the White River of Indianapolis that came north to help the Madison County group get started, Johnson said. After the fish kill, six people from Hamilton County formed the White River Rescue 2000. They sold duck decoys and raised more than \$150,000 to restock the fish following the fish kill.

To date, the White River Citizens Advisory Council overseeing the distribution of the settlement money, has spent about \$2 million on river projects in Madison, Hamilton and Marion counties. The White River Watchers has been part of most of the projects, Johnson said.

See Watchers / A7



THB photo / Perry Reichanadter

Members of the White River Watchers remove debris from the river like tires, steel, wood and plastic. The city retrieves materials recovered by the group like these along the river in Derby Downs.

Accidental environmentalist

John Johnson takes a pragmatic view of the river

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST
lindsay.whitehurst@heraldbulletin.com

John Johnson has a whole drawer of T-shirts in green, yellow and multiple shades of gray that all say the same thing: White River Watchers Clean Up.

The shirts symbolize each of the 12 times Johnson, an active member of the White River Watchers, has taken part in a big river cleanup over the last six years. The annual fall and spring cleanups are major events for the watchers. Group members and volunteers come out at 8 a.m. and work until the afternoon, when they eat chili made by John's wife.

The rainbow of T-shirts doesn't even count all the "mini-cleanups," the three- or four-man canoe trips that somehow end with a pile of tires dredged from the river's bottom.

Johnson is not the stereotypical environmentalist. A barrel-chested, 70-year-old General Motors retiree, he wore black suspenders over yet another orange White River Watchers T-shirt for a mid-morning interview.

When he speaks about his service to the river, he doesn't talk in terms of big corpo-

"I have love for the land, and this is one way to clean it up. I used to fish, but I don't anymore because I'd rather see them swim."

John Johnson



THB photo / Don Knight

John Johnson looks over photographs of cleanup efforts by the White River Watchers in his home in Anderson. After retiring from General Motors, Johnson purchased land along the river and has become an active watchers member.

rations, big spills or big theories. His eyes don't have the same righteous light that shines in the eyes of other activists.

"What's the use of getting angry? The

See Johnson / A7

Group works to save Fall Creek

Court ruling stops IMI from building gravel plant near reservoir

By AVON WATERS
avon.waters@heraldbulletin.com

A court ruling against Irving Materials Inc. stops a proposed gravel operation in southwestern Madison County.

Maybe only temporarily, since IMI plans to reapply for a permit to extract gravel from land that lies in both Madison and Hamilton counties.

The October ruling by Judge Steven Nation, special judge in Madison County Superior Court 1, stops IMI from building a gravel processing plant on land adjacent to Fall Creek northeast of Geist reservoir. It also states that the Madison County Board of Zoning Appeals used improper procedures regarding the public hearing process.

The suit was filed by a group of concerned citizens from the Fortville and Pendleton areas, The Voice of the Valley. The group organized in 1996 to save green space and habitat around Fall Creek after residents discovered IMI was buying up farms along Fall Creek.

"The BZA failed to notify the adjacent property owners until after the second reading. A large number of us showed up to comment and were told it was too late," said Dave Maxwell, president of the valley group, about a June 2000 hearing to accept public comment regarding the permit.

The court also said the zoning board must have criteria for issuing a special exemption to allow gravel extraction. No such criteria exist, Maxwell said.

In June 2000, the zoning board held a meeting to hear evidence presented by everyone involved, Maxwell said.

"One hundred-twenty-five of us showed up at the hearing," Maxwell said. "The BZA took evidence in a closed hearing (from others). That

See IMI / A7

INSIDE TODAY



"My bark is worse than my bite. Especially if I haven't brushed my teeth."

Reddick's Rhetoric

By David Reddick

INDEX

Auctions C4
Deaths A6
Features E1
Living G1
Local A5
Lotteries A7
Money C1
Opinion D1
Sports B1
Wheels F1

Military training: Region divided over accidental air attack on New Jersey school. Page A3.

Legal guardians: State appeals court extends parental rights to gay women. Page A7.

Merchandising: Retailers embellish old trends to lure customers and spur bigger profits. Page C1.





THB photo / Perry Reichnadtter

John Bundy, left, and Robert Maschino move debris from the White River in Perkinsville.

Watchers

Continued from Page 1

"At first the group met in people's homes," Johnson recalled about the early days of the watchers. "I don't think we discovered (Indiana Department of Natural Resource's) adopt-a-river program until after the kill."

At first, the group had no real direction, he said. There was a lot of talk, but little action until a mission was developed. That mission remains much the same today as it did before the fish kill.

"Our mission was to get the White River back to what it once was," Johnson said. "People thought it was a dirty polluted stream. The fishermen knew better."

But those not around it didn't realize that through the years less sewage was going into it and the dumps along the edges had closed, he said. Unless you were a river user, others just remembered the stories about how dirty the river was.

But the fish kill piqued people's interest in the river, Johnson said. Government reports already indicated that the river was an economic asset.

The White River Watchers now knows the community supports the efforts to clean the river, said Helen Wean, a river watcher and president of the Killbuck Concerned Citizens Association.

"If we see someone contaminating and dumping in the riv-

"When the fish kill happened, I wore a black arm band. I thought people were a lot smarter about putting toxins in the river. I thought those days were long ago over — but obviously not."

Sheryl Myers

White River Watchers

er, we approach the people or business about it and it stops," Wean said. "We do more than cleanup now, we really do watch what's happening on the river."

White River Watchers provides education for others, she said. Communities that want to start their own Adopt-a-river program call on members of the group to help them start cleanups, and give them tips how to do them.

"Like Yorktown," Wean said. "They asked us to come and help with their cleanup. We go down to help them. That's how we got started. The Indianapolis group, Friends of the White River, they came and helped us on our first cleanup."

She sees that kind of educational and cooperative effort moving upstream, she said. Pretty soon Delaware County may start a group and later, it will move on up river to help other communities clean the river.

The cleanups continue to be important, Johnson said. As the river floods, tires and other items wash downstream from

other counties that have not cleaned the river.

"Since 1998, we've taken 5,000-plus tires out of the river," Johnson said, pointing to a pile of nearly 1,000 tires on his property. The tires were dropped on his property as part of a river cleanup paid for by the settlement money.

A man hoisted one of the tires into a machine that compressed it. A large hydraulic cylinder sliced them in two. Tires can't go to landfills unless they are cut up, Johnson said. They eventually float to the top of the fill if they aren't cut.

People's attitudes have changed, Wean said. The fish kill did that. Economic development plans now call for developing more recreational opportunities along the river while preserving the environment.

Walkways along the river improve the quality of life in a community, Wean said, and government officials are starting to see that.

Sheryl Myers, a past president and member of Watchers, also sees more people who care about the river. But there will always be a small group that doesn't care. And it requires constant vigilance to see that another fish kill doesn't happen again.

"When the fish kill happened, I wore a black arm band," Myers said. "I thought people were a lot smarter about putting toxins in the river. I thought those days were long ago over — but obviously not."

IMI

Continued from Page 1

was a violation of due process. The BZA didn't give us an opportunity to respond to the DNR permit."

Maxwell believes the judgment means the whole process must start again from scratch. Jerry Shine, attorney for the Madison County Board of Zoning Appeals, believes the judgment may only require that the BZA allow the public input regarding the DNR permit to extract gravel.

According to the ruling, the BZA is instructed to hear the evidence in a public meeting if IMI decides to continue the process.

Gordon Byers, attorney for IMI, said his client intends to pursue the permit. After a public hearing, the BZA must issue a special exemption that would allow gravel extraction.

"We are asking the judge for clarity," Byers said. "We'd be happy to go back to conduct a new hearing and allow evidence to be heard."

"We think the standards are clear," Byers added. "We think

what the judge meant was that the BZA has standards and needs to clarify those standards."

Maxwell and the valley group members have talked to several experts and believe more protection of habitat along Fall Creek is needed than the permitting rules allow. Under current rules, IMI can mine gravel and sand within 50 feet of the tree drip.

"The experts say to us, that you really have to have 300 feet of undisturbed habitat to protect it," Maxwell said. "IMI wants 50 feet from the tree line and in some places we're talking one tree right on the bank."

There is room for them to come back 300 feet. But they may say there's not, he added.

Byers' understanding was that the Valley group was totally against the gravel extraction process. If a new hearing for the permit is set, the valley group can propose the 300-foot option, he added.

The Valley group fears the permit will open the door to more destructive operations in the future. IMI has a history of opening gravel operations and then

asking for permission to mine the limestone below the gravel, Maxwell said. That leads to asphalt and cement operations.

"Now you've really got a nasty, dusty industry," Maxwell said. "If they start mining limestone, these quarries must be pumped out and that puts people's wells in danger as the water table is lowered."

The permit only allows IMI to mine the gravel and sand 30-feet deep, Byers said. That's nowhere near the level of the limestone.

People of Madison County should be concerned because the proposed operation will lower the property taxes and depress home values, Maxwell said, in one of the fastest growing areas in the county.

"This would be a tremendous black eye on development in this area of Madison County," Maxwell added. "The BZA is supposed to be representing the best interests of the people. There's 100 of us who feel it's very clear they were representing IMI, not us."

Johnson

Continued from Page 1

best thing to do is just pick it up," he said.

His sentiments are simple and personal, and his voice goes soft when he talks about his own brand of activism.

"This is just my way of giving back to nature. It's the way it should be. I have love for the land, and this is one way to clean it up. I used to fish, but I don't anymore because I'd rather see them swim; I don't hunt because I'd rather see them run loose," he said.

Longtime friend and County Surveyor Pat Manship said Johnson is a practical activist.

"Since he worked at the factory, he knows both the commercial side and the environmental side," Manship said. "He knows there are certain things you have to accept. Don't tell people they've been doing it wrong all these years, just do it a little better this year."

But Johnson, like many of the watchers, isn't afraid to speak out. And speak loud.

"If you don't put up a stink, it gets swept under the rug. You have to make an appearance, keep the story in people's minds," Johnson said.

His path first crossed the White River in 1991, the same year he retired from his job as a pipe fitter at General Motors. His wife, Zoena, who was his sweetheart at Jefferson Township High School in Tipton, retired the same year. His two grown daughters, one in Anderson and one in Florida, have homes, children and grandchildren of their own.

"We were wanting something to do besides sitting in the chairs on our sun porch drinking our coffee. Then we saw this little ad," he said.

There was a 54-acre tree farm for sale off West Eighth Street. Eventually, after Johnson talked about it for weeks, his wife told him, "Either look at it or be quiet."

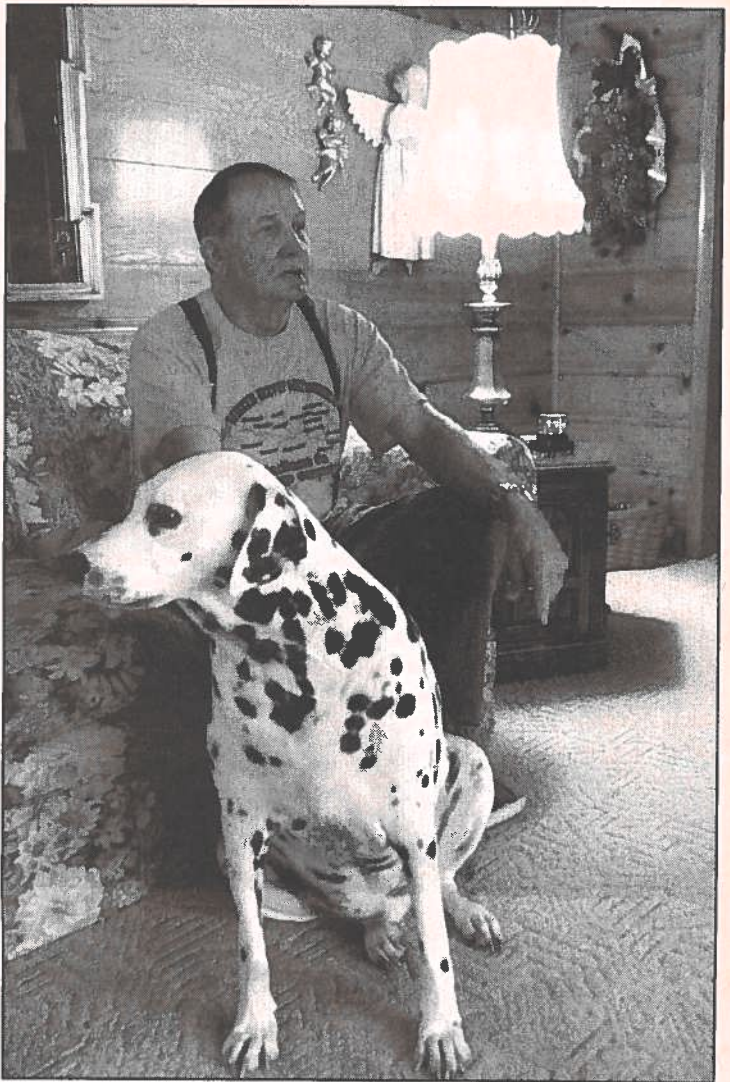
So they did.

"It was love at first sight. My wife said yes," he said.

The previous owner, he said, loved trees and planted 3,500 persimmon, sweet gum, conifer, walnut and bald cypress. He sold them to homeowners and business people who wanted to plant a full-grown tree.

Johnson and his wife set up picnic tables and trailers and invited friends and family to come over and play amidst the trees. He said his six grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren can't get enough of the outdoor spot.

Meanwhile, the Watchers was founded in 1998, when a group of about 12 to 24 people got together to clean up the river. A year before the fish kill, the river wasn't exactly toxic, it was just a mess. For generations,



THB photo / Don Knight

John Johnson sits in his home with his dog, Duke. Johnson retired from General Motors in 1991, and became a member of the White River Watchers.

Anderson residents and businesses had thought nothing of tossing garbage of all kinds into the waters.

"We did two cleanups a year from that point on, and we continue to do it today," he said.

And then the fish kill hit.

"When we found out, it was like a spear through the heart. Here, you do all this work to get it cleaned up and then something like this happens," Johnson said.

The view from his farm wasn't all that different, he said, except for one thing.

"You didn't see nothing, you didn't smell nothing," he said "But from one end to the other, you didn't see a fish. (The river) was frozen until about 15 or 20 feet out from the bank, and there were the fish, all lined up in a row. (Their bodies) had been pushed by the current," he said.

It was eight days, he said, before the watchers knew what was going on. It didn't take long for Guide Corp. to introduce the right microorganisms to bring the water back to normal, but by then all the fish were dead. After the water was deemed safe, the group went back to the river, eventually doing much of the heavy lifting to re-stock the water with over a million fish.

The spill had another unexpected side effect. It made the public, who for generations had

seen the river as little more than a dumping ground, see the river as a precious resource, to be treasured and protected.

"People used to just think, 'out of sight, out of mind.' Since the fish kill, eyes are opened up. People know not to do this. The way it turned out, it's a blessing," he said.

With all the media attention the kill received, and all the funding available from the multi-million dollar settlement, the White River Watchers became more than just a small neighborhood group. The members have expanded into educational activities and thrown their weight into other environmental causes, such as the proposed landfill near Killbuck Elementary School.

Since then, the number of volunteers coming to the fall and spring cleanups has jumped from the two dozen members in the early days to 110 at the last cleanup. They paddled 42 canoes and pulled about 400 tires out of the river, he said.

Incoming White River Watchers President Dick Fetty said Johnson has worked hard on the cleanups, bringing a trailer to haul trash and organizing food service for the workers.

"He's played a pretty big role," Fetty said. "He's been there when we need him most at times."



River running wild

White River has recovered from fish kill chemicals

Editor's Note: This is the fifth part of a five-part series about the 1999 White River contamination

By MELANIE D. HAYES
melanie.hayes@heraldbulletin.com

Brad Childes laughs when he thinks back to one of his first memories of the White River.

Childes, who grew up in Edgewood, remembers playing by the river when he was a third- and fourth-grader in the late 1950s.

"It was nothing but soap suds. It wasn't even fit enough for carp to live there," the 54-year-old said. "We would pick them up and throw them into the Edgewood School playground so the next morning there would be dead carp along the fence.

"It was one of the little pranks we used to do — talk about fish kill," Childes said, chuckling.

Since then White River has gone through many phases — from a cesspool, to the Clean Water Act, to the shocking fish kill, to a recreational outlet — and people's views toward the river have adapted as well.

Kim Rodgers-Hatfield, president of the White River Watchers, also grew up in Anderson and remembers the river's bad days.

"I remember as a child we would drive the area of the river on our way back and forth from church," she said. "There was always this large amount of foam. Now I know it was caused by a type of detergent.

"Back then I thought it was called the White River because



"It was one of the little pranks we used to do — talk about fish kill."

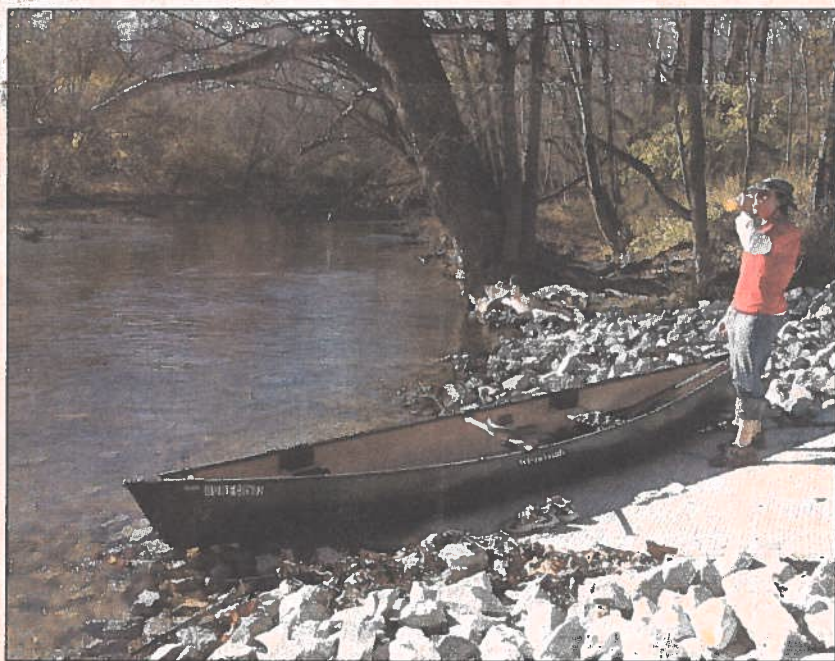
Brad Childes
White River Watchers
board member

of the white foam," she said with a laugh. "As a child I had no comprehension of how bad it was."

But the Clean Water Act changed all that in 1972.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Web site, water pollution was becoming so much of a public concern that the Federal Water Pollution Control Act was amended in 1972, later becoming known as the Clean Water Act.

See River / A8



Above: Jack Baker reels in a smallmouth while fishing in the White River near Edgewater Park in Anderson. Baker was fishing with James VanMeter and they were both using minnows in 2001.

At left: Erik Feldmann takes a break from canoeing on the White River in Mounds State Park.

Far left: Members of the White River Watchers and representatives of the city canoe down the White River to inspect an area to be cleaned in this 2001 file photo.

THB photos / Don Knight



About this series

On the fifth anniversary of one of Indiana's worst ecological disasters, The Herald Bulletin explores what led to the fish kill of December 1999 that killed 180 tons of fish along a 50-mile stretch of the White River.

Thursday - A recap of the Guide Corp. spill and the city of Anderson's negligence in detecting it. Also a timeline of the events.

Friday - Eighteen months after the spill, Guide settles with the U.S. EPA and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources for \$13.9 million.

The city of Anderson later settles for \$250,000. Here's how the money has been spent so far.

Saturday - In five years, Guide Corp. and the city of Anderson have made significant improvements to their environmental safeguards.

Sunday - From the fish kill springs renewed appreciation and stewardship of the river. Going strong is river cleanup powerhouse, White River Watchers.

Today - From the 1940s to today, the public's view of the river has changed from a dumping ground to a recreation and economic development asset.

River

Continued from Page 1

The law implemented pollution control programs like setting regulations for the type and amount of pollutant discharged into waters and setting wastewater standards for industries.

"I remember back in the '70s after the (Clean Water) Act, you started seeing seaweed, you started seeing life. There were changes in the mid '70s — sea shells, river clams, minnows," said Childes, a White River Watchers board member. "Instead of mud you'd see silt."

"There used to be soap suds all the way from the pollution plant to County Road 400 or 450. It just kinda stunk — dirty," he said. "I mean in two or three feet of water you couldn't see the bottom. Now in five or six feet you see the bottom easily. The more trash you take out the more it gets cleaned up."

Environmental organizations worked hard to clean up the river, and beautify it for recreational uses like fishing — and then came the devastating fish kill in 1999. Guide Corp. released chemicals and wastewater pollutants into the river, killing thousands of fish from Anderson to Indianapolis.

"The fish kill didn't affect me. By that time I was in White River Watchers cleaning up," Childes said. "The killer was gone; it flooded downstream. The critters, invertebrates, they were not affected. The river was still clean after that."

"But people, they get scared. At first people didn't want any part; they were afraid to go in it for a year or two," he said. "But every year more people use the river."

Pollution never kept Childes away. Back when he was a teenager and most people stayed away from the sudsy river, he was out canoeing. After the fish kill, he was still out canoeing. He got his first canoe when he was 6, and since then has rarely gone a year without canoeing.

"I know there are people who have for years continued to fish, but it wasn't something that I heard anybody recommend," Rogers said. "Swimming was an absolute no. Canoeing was a possibility, but nothing they were really excited about."

Five years later, people are still concerned with the health of the river. They wonder if it's safe, if the chemical is gone, if it's clean. Local environmental groups, as well as state and federal agencies, have put in a lot of time and money over the years to clean up the river, beautify it and promote it as a local treasure waiting to be discovered.

"Now, I wouldn't necessarily recommend swimming just because of the combined sewage overflows, but boating and fishing and walking along the river's

Anderson still paying consequences for kill

By KEN de la BASTIDE
ken.delabastide@heraldbulletin.com

Although Guide Corp. and the city of Anderson paid out more than \$14 million in fines and penalties from the 1999 White River fish kill, Anderson residents will be doling out money for many years to come.

As part of a consent decree between the city and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management and the EPA, the city agreed to improve the sewage treatment plant and the city's sewer system.

The federal government is requiring all communities to separate storm and sanitary sewers, but the consent decree requires Anderson to do it sooner.

On average, each Anderson homeowner is paying \$13.50 per month because of the fish kill and the resulting consent decree.

Under then-Mayor J. Mark Lawler, the city tacked onto sewer bills a \$3.50 per month stormwater fee to fund improvements. At the time some of the funds were used to increase the salary of the mayor, members of the Anderson Board of Public Works, and city engineer. Mayor Kevin Smith rescinded those salary increases.

To pay for a \$12 million, 20-year bond issue in 2002, sewer rates went up 58 percent or \$10 per month.

But the increases are far from over. City officials figure it could cost up to \$80 million to make all of the required improvements. That \$10 more a month could become \$40 more per month.

edge is something I highly recommend. It's beautiful," Rogers said.

Rogers notes that another major difference with the river today, and the river back then, is the wildlife — and she excitedly urges people to explore the possibilities.

"Especially through Madison County, the wildlife that is there is a huge difference from when I was a child," she said. "When I was a kid, there weren't the blue herons or the kingfishers. I never would have guessed that they would be native. It's something you see on the Discovery Channel, and don't expect in your own city."

Rogers explains that the river and the wetlands used to be in poor condition, but thanks to river cleanups and wetland preservation, waterfowl and other animals have made a huge comeback.

But because of the comeback,

"We don't have a hard figure on what the actual costs will be," said Rob Sparks, chairman of the Board of Public Works. "IDEM and the EPA has agreed to the blending option, which will reduce the costs."

Blending means that in periods of heavy rain or snow melt, runoff would be treated with chlorine and mixed with water that has gone through the sewage treatment plant. At first, the city thought it would have to build enough storage tanks to hold the runoff until it could be treated.

"That is a major improvement," Sparks said. "It eliminates the city from having to store the water until it can be treated in the water pollution control plant."

Sparks said for a relatively small amount, an additional \$20 million, improvements could be made at the sewage treatment plant that will improve the White River during wet weather.

He said another plus for city residents was the fact that the administration of Mayor Kevin Smith was able to roll over a \$9 million bond issue for improvements to the sewage treatment system without impacting taxpayers.

Sparks said the \$12 million improved the sewage treatment plant and the city's sewer system. He said that there is still \$3 million available for plant improvements and \$1.6 million for sewer system work.

This year the city has spent approximately \$3.2 million to eliminate some combined sanitary and sewer overflows into the White River and to add some sewer lines.

she recommends not taking advantage of the fish, especially after the fish kill.

"We recommend catch-and-release first of all because it helps the fish population return full force or better," Rogers said. Secondly, there is an advisory for rivers that recommends a limited consumption of fish.

"In relation to the fish kill, various people have come up to me and asked if it still has that chemical in it that kills fish. And I tell them, no, not anymore," Rogers said. "It has raised awareness of the river that wasn't there before. It is better than it has ever been."

"For some skeptics, they think it's still bad. But if they asked, they'd find out that it's not something permanent. It has run its course," she said. "The river is now healthy and improving. It has room to go, but it's better than it's ever been in our generation."