**Monitoring Station for South Fork Salt Creek**

A Water Fund Demonstration Project

In January 2019, a group interested in protecting Lake Monroe’s watershed and water supply gathered with a facilitator. The participants represented eight organizations[[1]](#footnote-1) and discussed their ideas for a Water Fund Exploratory Group, addressing the questions “What do you hope this group will accomplish with their efforts?” and “How do you think that will happen?”. The participant responses to these questions were gathered and reviewed by a steering committee[[2]](#footnote-2), who developed a name and a mission for the group:

*The Lake Monroe Water Fund is an active funder for watershed projects that conserve, protect, and sustain Lake Monroe as our shared community water resource.*

One approach for community investment is known as a water fund. To demonstrate how a (future) water fund can enable investment in the Lake Monroe Watershed to protects and improve water quality, several partners in the community agreed to invest in a demonstration project.

Friends of Lake Monroe (FLM) is developing a watershed plan for Lake Monroe with the 319 project they are leading; this work focuses on the three major tributaries of Salt Creek, North Fork, Middle Fork and South Fork with monitoring conducted monthly for two years, gathering stream flow information and collecting monthly grab samples for water quality analysis.

A previous study by Jones et al (1997) indicated that discharge from the South Fork was likely underestimated due to the distance between the South Fork and the nearest continuous stream gage. FLM was interested to improve the flow data available for the South Fork of Salt Creek and suggested the installation of a stream gage there, and CBU saw the information as helpful too. With this idea, a water fund demonstration project was developed to monitor the South Fork of Salt Creek: a streamgage has been placed at Kurtz, Indiana to measure stream flows between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2021.

It is truly a team effort:

* The US Geological Survey (USGS) installed, operates, and maintains the streamgage at Kurtz and takes additional measurements at Maumee.
* Representatives of Friends of Lake Monroe, the Hoosier National Forest and USGS conducted a site visit to select the best location for the streamgage.
* Organizations that invested in the USGS installation (each contributing $20,000): City of Bloomington Utilities (CBU), Monroe County Stormwater, and the Conservation Law Center (CLC).
* The contributions of local government, specifically from CBU and Monroe County Stormwater, enabled a federal match from USGS that is valued at $14,000.
* The Nature Conservancy helped to define the contracts needed with the multiple investors in the project and worked to clarify roles and responsibilities for the project participants while meeting the funders’ needs.
* During the period of operation of the streamflow gage, CBU is conducting water quality sampling at Kurtz during periods of high flow
* The Lake Monroe Water Fund initiative brought the parties and funding together to invest in this gage for the betterment of the watershed.

The flow monitoring is supplemental to the sampling that the Friends of Lake Monroe (FLM) is conducting with 319 project for developing a watershed plan for the Lake Monroe watershed. The FLM watershed plan work focuses on the three major tributaries of Salt Creek, North Fork, Middle Fork and South Fork with monitoring conducted monthly for two years, gathering stream flow information, and collecting monthly grab samples for water quality analysis. The Kurtz monitoring data will be incorporated into the analysis that is leading to the development of the Watershed Plan

The Lake Monroe Water Fund has now been incorporated in Indiana as a 501c3 nonprofit representing the major stakeholders for Lake Monroe Watershed. The first project will offer water customers the opportunity to contribute to the long-term viability of Lake Monroe and its watershed through an optional donation on the customer’s water bill. In the future, the Lake Monroe Water Fund will make more investments like the water monitoring station on the South Fork of Salt Creek that will help protect the watershed landscape and the water quality.

1. Participants included representatives from Brown County Soil & Water Conservation District, City of Bloomington Utilities, Conservation Law Center, Friends of Lake Monroe, Indiana Department of Environmental Management, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, and a Bloomington citizen. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. City of Bloomington Utilities, Friends of Lake Monroe, The Nature Conservancy, and a Bloomington citizen. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)