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City of Decatur Announces Initiative and Broad Partnerships to Address Sediment and Nutrient Challenges of Lake Decatur and its Watershed

DECATUR – The City of Decatur has initiated an ambitious long term watershed management initiative to improve water quality and reduce sediment and nutrient delivery to the 3,090 acre lake. This follows a \$92 million dredging project completed in 2018 that increased storage capacity and recreational value.

“Following successful completion of the dredging, the City made a commitment to significantly scale up watershed planning and management. We know it will be a major long term challenge to achieve results given the size of the watershed (592,665 acres or 926 square miles) and the number and diversity of stakeholders,” said City of Decatur Water Production Manager Keith Alexander.

Northwater Consulting, a Springfield, Illinois based firm specializing in water resources has been contracted to lead execution of the program. The first phase includes development of a 5 year strategy, stakeholder outreach, and submittal of grant applications to start the implementation of shovel ready projects in priority areas of the watershed. Future strategies will include a monitoring program designed to track nutrient and sediment delivery into the lake, and recommend strategies to permanently reduce sediment and nitrate levels in the lake.

“We were impressed by Northwater’s approach and their successes in other Illinois watersheds. They are up to the challenge and the City is excited to have them on board,” said City of Decatur Public Works Director Matt Newell.

Jeff Boeckler, Northwater's principal in charge of the program has been actively engaged in the watershed since the contract was awarded earlier this year. "To ensure this initiative is a success, we have placed a strong emphasis on early engagement of the agricultural community and other strategic partners and industry leaders in the watershed. Input from the farming community is actively being sought to identify opportunities and guide future actions. We firmly believe that strong partnerships with area farmers is key to our success."

Stakeholders and landowners interested in participating in the study should contact the City.

Lake Decatur was created in 1920-1923 by impounding the Upper Sangamon River and serves as the water supply for Decatur, grain processing firms Archer Daniels Midland Co. and Tate & Lyle Ingredients Americas, and the Village of Mt. Zion. Sediment entering the lake reduces the storage capacity and increases drought vulnerability, and occasional excess nitrogen requires the City to run an energy intensive and costly water treatment system. The watershed includes the Upper Sangamon River and the Bluffs area surrounding the lake. The watershed is approximately 70 miles long and spans seven counties, including Piatt, Champaign, Macon, McLean, Ford, DeWitt and Shelby. Approximately 80% of the watershed consists of cultivated crops.

Contact Keith Alexander, City of Decatur, Water Production Manager, at (217) 424-2863 or kalexander@decaturil.gov or Jeff Boeckler, Northwater Consulting, Principal in Charge, at (217) 725-3181 or jeff@northwaterco.com for more information.