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## **Land use specialist to speak in Valpo**

### **Warns of need to protect natural resources**

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VALPARAISO - Without proper planning, Porter County will continue to lose valuable farmland and open space and could endanger its natural resources, according to Purdue University land use specialist Robert McCormick.

McCormick is the Indiana coordinator for the Planning with POWER (Protecting Our Water and Environmental Resources) being run through the Purdue Cooperative Extension Service and the Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant College Program. He will be the guest speaker at tonight's Valparaiso Chain of Lakes Watershed Group meeting.

Planning with POWER is a statewide educational program started two years ago to link local land use planning efforts to natural resource and watershed protection. According to program information, water pollution caused by polluted runoff from the land is the biggest water quality problem in the nation.

"Our goal is to strike a balance between growth and development and the protection of our natural resources," McCormick said.

With Indiana losing 55,000 acres of agricultural land a year to development, the program recommends three strategies for communities to use, starting with incorporating natural resource protection into the planning process. Communities also need to improve site designs for developments and to educate people in better ways to handle stormwater runoff.

McCormick said communities need to do things like clean out storm drains and sweep the streets, and home owners need to maintain their septic systems. The impact of stormwater runoff on natural resources will be one of the issues he will address Monday, along with the loss of open space and farmland..

"Our target audience is the local land use decision makers and the public in general," he said. "We specifically target plan commissions and local officials, both city and county. The final key to all this is comprehensive planning and getting the community to participate in the long-term future of the land and community.

"Porter County has huge development challenges and pressures, and they have a choice to determine how the community will look in the future and to protect the valuable resources in the county. If they don't participate, they will lose a lot of valuable resources. We've already see some of it."

More information about Planning with POWER is available on the Internet at [www.planningwithpower.org](http://www.planningwithpower.org). The watershed group's meeting is at 6:30 p.m. on the second floor of the county administration building, and McCormick's presentation will follow at 7:30. Both sessions are free and open to the public.

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