

## ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

Woodland Park – Sycamore Room

November 5, 2015

**Members/Guests:** Geof Benson, Dorreen Carey, Jennifer Gadzala, Maggie Byrne, Paul Labus, Erica Wayne, Katie Rizer, Dale Engquist, Daniel Goldfarb, Kris Krouse, Lara Gonzalez

**NIRPC Staff:** Kathy Luther, Joe Exl, Mitch Barloga, Meredith Stilwell

### Call to order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Benson called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance and self-introductions.

### Approval of September 3, 2015 EMPC Minutes

On motion by Paul Labus and second by Jennifer Gadzala, the September 3, 2015 EMPC meeting minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

### Presentations:

#### a. **Chicago Wilderness (CW) Priority Species Initiative –**

*Suzanne Malec-McKenna, Chicago Wilderness*

Over the past year or so Chicago Wilderness has done a reboot to look at how to move forward to have the most impact and the most relevance in their region to preserve, improve and expand nature and quality of life. Part of that lies in connecting with the Indiana partners in their region. The major funding source for Chicago Wilderness has been a 16 year federal grant, which has now dried up. Funding has to be found to do on the ground projects to build capacity and momentum for members. There has been a reorganization to ensure not only a good system of committee support but also focused efforts to demonstrate measurable impact and ultimately bring a lot more resources to the table. There is currently a team of four, which will ultimately increase to six, to cover 38 counties, 500+ municipalities, 545k protected areas and 225 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline.

For the first five year, the six focus areas for regional impact include priority species; oak ecosystems; landowners; public engagement; data & member tools; and water as a resource. Benefits to the Alliance through the focus areas are to increase collaboration; maximize results; coordinate monitoring efforts; track regional trends; build public support; and tell the region's conservation success stories.

The goal of the priority species focus area is to foster measurable improvements for the species that may include: Increased number of breeding populations; expanded and improved habitat; and enhanced adaptive capacity. While the target is to focus on eight species total, the efforts are expected to further benefit a larger suite of flora and fauna that share similar habitat requirements and management needs. The selection timeline was reviewed by Suzanne. There are a series of questions online that takes around 25 to 30 minutes to detail the species being nominated and why it needs to be considered. The deadline for species nominations is November 19. After the nominations have been received, the advisors will get together to review how things are scoring, to make sure the nominated species are a good representation of the Chicago Wilderness region, and a species workshop will be held the week of December 7. The hope is to have chosen the eight priority species to be focused on for the next five years by the

end of 2015. 50% of the criteria is focused on geographic/biological significance, 30% on feasibility and the remaining 20% on monitoring/measurability. You do not have to be a Chicago Wilderness member to nominate a species.

**NIRPC Business:**

**a. *Greenways + Blueways Survey Results* – Mitch Barloga, NIRPC**

NIRPC is in the process of updating both the Ped and Pedal Plan and the Greenways and Blueways Plan into a cumulative Plan called the Greenways + Blueways 2020 Plan. Two surveys launched in early August, one being an online survey and the other trail surveys conducted on-site with questions based solely on trails. As of November 4<sup>th</sup> around 482 online surveys had been taken. There has not been a definite count yet on the intercept surveys, but approximately 300 were filled out. The surveys are statistically relevant at 5% error based on region population.

474 respondents indicated they have visited natural areas or parks in Lake, Porter or LaPorte Counties, with enjoying nature and outdoors and exercise and fitness being the primary motivators for visiting these areas. Walking and recreation biking ranked highest for activities with most respondents engaging in these weekly. Swimming, paddling and boating were indicated as the activities most responders enjoyed doing on rivers, streams or lakes in Lake, Porter or LaPorte Counties. Most respondents indicated they engage in these activities occasionally. Respondents were asked to state their top three locations to visits and most noted their travel time from home to these locations was 0-15 minutes with most driving to reach the destination.

For land trails, the favorite mode of travel while using the trail was bicycling and exercise and recreation were the top two primary reasons for using the trail. Respondents indicated the average time spent on the trail was between 1 to 2 hours with an average distance of 5 plus miles. Of those who indicated they have made expenditures on the trail, most were on beverages and 56% of those who took the land trails portion of the survey have purchased equipment, shoes or clothing in 2015 related to the trail they use. When asked how close the nearest trail was, the largest response was less than ½ mile.

For the water trails portion of the survey, most respondents indicated their favorite non-motorized mode of transportation on NW Indiana water trails was a kayak and most paddled the trails for recreation purposes. Demographic information on the survey was an option to complete, but was not required.

The close date for survey will likely be November 25<sup>th</sup> and once the final data has been compiled, a draft plan will be out hopefully in early spring of 2016 or late winter. It was noted that a survey geared for the municipalities was also sent out to gather information on how the municipalities handle their trail systems.

**Public Comment:** None

**Announcements:**

- Meeting and event announcements will be forwarded to the EMPC email distribution list.

Meeting adjourned at 10:33 a.m.