

# ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

Construction Advancement Foundation

February 4, 2016

**Members/Guests:** Geof Benson, Lara Gonzalez, Susan Mihaló, Jennifer Gadzala, Sarah Weaver, Carl Lisek, Vince Epps, Brenda Scott Henry, Daniel Goldfarb, Kevin Breitzke, Dan Plath, Kay Nelson, Deb Backhus, Laurie Keagle

**NIRPC Staff:** Kathy Luther, Meredith Stilwell

## Call to order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Benson called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance and self-introductions.

## Approval of January 7, 2016 EMPC Minutes

On motion by Deb Backhus and second by Brenda Scott Henry, the January 7, 2016 EMPC meeting minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

## Presentations:

### a. **G & B 2020 Survey Data Analysis & Goal Review From Existing Plans – Kathy Luther**

The Ped and Pedal and the Greenways and Blueways Plans are in the process of being updated and combined into one plan known as the Greenways + Blueways 2020 Plan. Results from public surveys completed in regard to the update reflected the primary motivation for visiting natural areas or parks is to enjoy nature and outdoors, with exercise and fitness ranking second. When asked for the top three natural areas or parks and the length of time it took to get there, most respondents indicated it took 0-15 minutes and when rating what is most important when thinking about the activities and places enjoyed, the quality of the scenery; water and natural areas all ranked high. The main take away from the survey was ease of access and distance and quality were most important to those responding about the region's natural areas and parks.

The Ped, Pedal and Paddle Committee conducted a workshop to assess and update goals and objectives for the bicycle and pedestrian access sections at their January meeting. Establishing why the plans are together is important, including reasons such as when trails are installed, natural areas should be paid attention to for a more pleasant experience and establishing blueway access points when natural areas are being planted so they do not have to be destroyed at a later date. Kathy questioned the Committee regarding their thoughts on if the Greenways + Blueways 2020 Plan needed its own goals and if so how should they be created or could they be borrowed and incorporated from the many other environmental plans already created. She noted that in reviewing other plans, there are not many measurable goals and questioned if there was a need for those types of goals in this plan. Goals from a few different plans were presented. Plans that were suggested to look at that were not included in the list of relevant plans were pipeline management plans and the Remedial Action Plan. Common themes from the plans included riparian buffers; wetland preservation and restoration; and the restoring of hydrology/hydrologic function and linkages with riparian buffers rising to the top of most plans.

After discussion it was determined that the goals for this new plan couldn't just be pulled from other plans. It was also noted that communities need more information from city officials before decisions can be made. Next steps include doing more analysis with a possible concentrated goals workshop scheduled.

## Round Robin – Big 2016 Projects

As part of the EMPC's role in coordination, various regional partners can possibly help one another out with projects. Kathy indicated she would like to give opportunity for organizations to make others aware of their projects and how regional partners can help. These updates will possibly be an annual or bi-annual feature of the EMPC.

- **Wildlife Habitat Council:** Daniel Goldfarb reported the Council is continuing focus on engaging companies, corporations and industrial sites to be proactive about managing habitats. If companies do not have greenspace, they are encouraged to form partnerships with the immediate community, adjacent landowners or others working nearby to help. Work is continuing to obtain a DNR Coastal grant to promote programs on industrial sites relative to invasive species control. There is already a project with ArcelorMittal and East Chicago so other companies can see what is being done. An invasive species control day platform was held at Exxon Mobile in Hammond. Work is being done with ArcelorMittal Burns Harbor on restoration/reformation work.
- **South Shore Clean Cities (SSCC):** Carl Lisek reported SSCC is working with the Northern Indiana Green Fleet program to try to identify all the greenhouse gas emissions with all the green fleet markers. There are currently eight green fleet markers communities and four private sector groups with hopes for expansion. Port of Indiana is looking at ways, such as electric cranes, etc. to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions will be part of the Program. SSCC is coordinating with six clean cities coalitions across the area on a biofuels corridor project. A prior project took biofuels from Gary to the Gulf of Mexico and this new project will run east/west on 94. Work will be done with partners around 94 to apply for funding for fueling infrastructure and clean vehicles. SSCC is collaborating with CMAP to have an electric vehicle corridor from Chicago and Wisconsin into northern Indiana. A new grant is coming out and SSCC and will hopefully collaborate with NIPSCO to extend electric charging stations across northern Indiana. Work is also being done with Ivy Tech for grant opportunities and curriculums for local training courses for mechanics to work on alternative fuel vehicles. SSCC has started a northwest Indiana U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) to try to incorporate LEED building standards and different types of green initiatives.
- **The Nature Conservancy (TNC):** Susan MiHalo reported TNC will help the EPA, US fish and wildlife, IDEM and IDNR to delist beneficial use impairments for wildlife and wildlife habitat in the Grand Cal area of concern by 2020, following the IDEM remedial action plan. An \$830k grant was received to restore and maintain about 580 acres, primarily dune and swale in TNC, Shirley Heinze and IDNR properties, using roving crews that move from site to site as the seasons progress over the next two years. If GLRI funding is available in fall 2017, another \$1.2m will be received for three additional years to include wetlands between Kennedy and Cline Avenues that Cardno is currently maintaining. Between what Cardno is maintaining and what TNC is working on in this area is about 320 acres of restored habitat.
- **Indiana Coastal Property Management Area:** Susan MiHalo reported they will be working with the Indiana coastal Cooperative Weed Management Area (ICCWMA) members to develop an early detection network in northwest Indiana. Anyone can become involved as a citizen scientist. A similar type of effort exists in northeast Illinois called the New Invaders Watch Program and this project is being modeled after several successful programs of this type that exist across the country. The goal is to recruit 15 people who pledge to monitor and report out, positively or negatively, on certain areas in northwest Indiana four to six times over a growing season. Land stewards and staff will also be involved in this program. Work is also being done with the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore train on the trail program to get people to walk the trails and help maintain them. Beach community residents are being involved in this effort and is linked to the Save the Dunes project to develop a

citizen's action guide for the Dunes. There will also be training with the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association. The regional species list has been narrowed down to 27 or 28 and working with the ICCWMA members will be narrowed down to a regional list of 10 species to be aware of that are coming this way. There will be training on those 10 species, but those willing to walk on trails will be trained on species relative to the specific trail they are monitoring. Training opportunities will be available. The goal is to have 85 new reports entered into edmaps.org.

- Field Museum: Lara Gonzalez reported the Museum is working with the Calumet Heritage Partnership in an attempt to create a National Heritage Area for the Calumet region. A heritage area is defined by the National Park Service as an area or region that is designated by Congress for natural, cultural, and historical resources that come together to have a cohesive, nationally important landscape. This creates a platform to facilitate the goals that other region partners are already accomplishing. The feasibility study is currently in process with the final round of public comment meetings being held May 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Input is being sought from local recreational and environmental organizations on the assets to highlight in the feasibility study process. The study will be completed and submitted in the summer and hopefully submitted to Congress in the fall legislation. Support and getting word out is needed for this proposed National Heritage Area.
- Town of Chesterton: Jennifer Gadzala reported that the Town has committed to help implement some of the plans within the Little Calumet East Branch Watershed Management Plan. Work is continuing with the Septic Systems Coordination Word Group to help facilitate ideas culminating from the Group. The Town continues to help support the Westchester Bird Sanctuary on 11<sup>th</sup> Street. This piece of land is large and in need of a lot of invasive work.
- Coffee Creek Watershed Preserve: Jennifer Gadzala reported that a lot of invasive work has been accomplished in identifying problem areas and plants in the Preserve. The new stewardship manager is working on a plan to provide enhancements to the native plants and trees to bring it back to its glory within the next 10 years. Coffee Creek Watershed Conservancy is hosting a master naturalist program this spring.
- Porter County: Kevin Breitzke reported the County is implementing a stormwater fee and are close to making the transition from the old regulated drain assessments, which will be suspended. This will result in approximately five to eight times as much money being available for stormwater quantity and quality projects. Part of the impetus was support for the MS4 program which was previously being supported with about \$10k - \$20k per year and was raised around eight to ten times that amount about three years ago. With regulated drainage assessments by statute, money couldn't really be invested for storm water quality. All of unincorporated Porter County will be paying a fee with the exception of the Conservancy Districts who choose to continue on with their mission for stormwater quality.
- Dunes Learning Center: Geof Benson reported regional help is needed for the Canoemobile which will start around September 19<sup>th</sup> and run for about three or four weeks. Regional partners are needed to do land-based activities. The Canoemobile will be on Lake George in Hobart, Marquette Park in Gary, and Wolf Lake in Hammond.
- Save the Dunes: Sarah Weaver reported on two new projects. The first is the 2016 Dunes Blowout, which is a performing arts festival being held at West Beach in September. Volunteers are being sought for assistance to get underserved children and adults to the event as well as wayfinding and docents for the event. The second is the Dunes Residential Guide project which is currently in development. The guide is being developed to help people who live in near-shore dunes communities plant native plants and remove some invasive plants. As part of the development process, the residents of those communities are being asked what they want and need, and what would help them. Save the Dunes is looking for different community events to attend and also need help with outreach.

- City of Gary: Deb Backhus reported the City is developing green infrastructure for stormwater management. There are two large green infrastructure installations currently happening particularly in the north side development region. The goal is not only water quality improvements through stormwater management, but revitalization of blighted areas to turn them into beautiful community spaces.
- NIPSCO: Dan Plath reported NIPSCO is getting close to completing a conservation framework for all of NISOURCE's properties. The plan is being designed by the Wildlife Habitat Council out of Baltimore. This effort dovetails with the 2020 Plan and the Greenways Plan and the idea is for properties that NIPSCO/NISOURCE owns to complement natural areas where NIPSCO will make more concentrated efforts in eradicating invasives and promoting biodiversity. There will be a stakeholder meeting in the near future. NIPSCO is starting a new environmental impact grant. \$50k will be set aside each year with awards of \$500 to \$5,000 targeting restoration or environmental education. It will be an online grant process. It does not appear there that there will be a match requirement and the money will be distributed the week of Earth Day. In addition, the all-volunteer, NIPSCO employee, Environmental Action Team would like to help with the restoration and education projects.
- Northwestern Indiana Paddling Association (NWIPA): Dan Plath reported NWIPA has been working for the last year and a half on the national water trail designation for the Kankakee River and have been informed the application was one of the strongest and the designation is very close. Pictures and stories of restoration work in the Kankakee Basin are being sought. In partnership with the Gary Park's Department, there is an application going out shortly for installation of an ADA launch this year in the lagoons at Marquette Park. In partnership with the City of Hobart, two ADA launches are slated for installation. This year on Deep River and next year on Lake George. Using a Chi-Cal grant with Shirley Heinze, Save the Dunes and the National Lakeshore an ADA launch will be installed on the Little Cal wetlands across from Brummit School in Chesterton as well as a public access point at the Nature Preserve near St. Pats. NWIPA will be convening a group to reopen the river from the Little Cal wetlands to the national lakeshore border. A decision from the national lakeshore environmental assessment should be coming in by April. Shirley Heinze has spearheaded an effort to have the Little Cal designated as a conservation corridor. Around \$1m has been set aside for land acquisition. NWIPA would like to see a concerted effort to get the properties along the corridor before the money goes away.
- Kay Nelson reported a letter was issued to President Obama from the Chicago Waterways System Advisory Committee in mid-January outlining suggestions for continued efforts by the Corps of Engineers on the aquatic nuisance species issue. Kay also reported February 3<sup>rd</sup> was the official day for bills to swap houses and there was a number of bills that did go to opposing homes. House Bill 1082, environmental rules and standards, passed. Senate Bill 255, underground storage tanks, passed. Senate Bill 256, legitimate use of solid waste and waste tires, passed. Senate Bill 257, distressed water and wastewater utilities, passed. Senate Bill 347, waste resources, passed. Senate Bill 366, solid waste management districts, passed.

## **NIRPC Business:**

### **a. Environmental Department Project Updates and Plans for 2016**

A handout was provided to those in attendance detailing the 2016 work plan for NIRPC's environmental department. The MS4 program will not be continued in 2016 due to lack of funding so water education will be through the watershed and Urban Waters grants. Activities related to the air program include the Green Fleets and Diesel Retrofits programs; CMAQ programming support; and public education through various outlets, some of which include

media, Partners for Clean Air, and gas can exchanges. 2016 water related undertakings include the Portage Burns Waterway Initiative; Urban Waters Small Grant; Deep River Dam Feasibility Study and participation in regional collaborations. Other environmental activities will be focused on green infrastructure and conservation planning; brownfields, including the Northwest Indiana Brownfield Coalition; energy and climate; as well as support for transportation planning. The Solar project is wrapping up with seven new solar installations and several communities agreeing to adopt best practices. Kathy reported she was asked by Purdue Climate Change Research Institute to serve on the statewide steering committee for a statewide climate impact assessment and volunteered the EMPC for a pilot stakeholder workshop. This listening session workshop on what climate impacts the EMPC is concerned about in this region will most likely take place after the March EMPC meeting. NIRPC's transportation department has been working on a transportation corridor project looking at areas where new roads are needed. Joe Exl will be doing the preliminary NEPA analysis of environmental factors in these corridors. More roads could result in environmental mitigation projects, but the order of things is avoid, minimize, mitigate.

**Public Comment:** Carl Lisek announced that Hobart, Hammond, East Chicago, Michigan City, Valparaiso and South Bend will be receiving grant award announcements at the South Shore Clean Cities annual meeting on February 16. On May 19, Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana will be hosting Midwest Clean Drives at Northern Illinois University. SSCC also received a Midwest Drives grant which is a free lease program with 42 vehicles available for anyone interested in driving an alternative fuel or hybrid vehicle for 30 days. He also announced that he is looking for a truck to take donated water to Flint Michigan.

**Announcements:** Announcements will be forwarded to the Committee by email.

Meeting adjourned at 10:51 a.m.