

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

Woodland Park – Sycamore Room

June 4, 2015

Members/Guests Present: Mike Molnar, Dorreen Carey, Leslie Dorworth, Deb Backhus, Geof Benson, Leanne Whitesell, Charlotte Read, Candice Smith, Jennifer Gadzala, Kevin Breitzke, Richard Morrisroe, Tim Kingsland, Ethan Brown, Gia Wagner, Jenny Orsburn

NIRPC Staff: Kathy Luther, Joe Exl, Stephen Sostaric, Amanda Pollard, Meredith Stilwell

Call to order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Benson called the meeting to order at 9:11 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance and self-introductions.

Approval of April 2, 2015 EMPC Minutes

On a motion by Richard Morrisroe and second by Deb Backhus, the April 2, 2015 EMPC meeting minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

Presentations:

a. Lake Michigan Coastal Program 309 Process – Mike Molnar-IDNR Lake Michigan Coastal Program

The Coastal Zone Management Act Sec. 309 Enhancement Program is a voluntary program that encourages states to develop program changes and enhancements in one or more of nine categories and provides dedicated funds to develop assessment and five-year strategy; conduct program changes; and implement program changes for two years. In addition, it provides competitive funds for projects of special merit. The 2016-2020 program is the 3rd assessment with the first program in 2004 and the second in 2011. The nine enhancement categories include wetlands; public access; coastal hazards; cumulative and secondary impacts; energy and government facility siting; lake debris; lake resources management; Special Area Management Plans (SAMP); and Aquaculture. A series of questions that NOAA puts forth and GIS data is used when assessing the categories and if something ranks as high priority, strategies addressed must lead to meaningful impact for program delivery. A lot of input is obtained from partners to see if there are any program changes that need to be put into place. When reviewing program changes, new program pieces and how they can best be delivered as well as new or revised guidelines, procedures, and policy documents that are formally adopted are always looked at.

The project timeline was outlined. Final guidelines from NOAA were set in June 2014 and Phase I to assess high priorities began in October-November 2014 and Phase II to see if there is a means for a strategy to actually do something began in December 2014-January 2015. The draft document was submitted to NOAA February 1, 2015 and with feedback the final document was submitted on June 1, 2015. Funding would not start until July 1, 2016 so there is plenty of time to tweak implementation strategies. Projects of Special Merit FFO is an opportunity for coastal programs to develop special projects that go beyond the scope of what is outlined in an implementation strategy and can be up to \$200k through federal competition. A million dollars is available nationwide.

30 responses were received from a survey and those stakeholder responses, along with agency staff input, were used to calculate the top 3 priorities which were determined to be wetlands, coastal hazards, and public access. A budget has to be identified without knowing the

parameters of what will be involved in the project and is subject to change since the amount of funding to be received from NOAA from year to year is unknown and has varied from \$66k to \$90k. Some funds will go toward staff time or can be used for contractual work. A more detailed report on the strategies for each priority was outlined. The last thing identified which was new under this iteration of NOAA guidance was a cross cutting strategy that covers the four issue areas of coastal hazards; cumulative and secondary impacts; wetlands, and public access. It was identified that a lot of the information developed in the past is underutilized and there is not a coherent, cohesive approach to implementing that information or developing training programs. The first part of the strategy includes developing a coastal training program. Along with this the current coastal website is being overhauled to be more user-friendly and a new coastal website for data delivery will be developed within the next couple of years.

NOAA has to review the final documents after which work will be done with partners for 8 months to develop tasks for first year initiatives and to make sure budgets are realistic. The actual budget probably won't be known until February 2016 and has to be submitted the first week of March 2016.

b. Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway Update – Joe Exl-NIRPC

Within the defined watershed management plan process tasks pertaining to IDEM requirements both the watershed community initiative and watershed inventory components have been completed and work is currently being done on identifying problems and causes as well as identifying sources & calculating loads. Moving forward the tasks to set goals and identify critical areas; choose measures/bmps; action register & schedule; and tracking effectiveness throughout the project are to be done. The project started a little over a year ago to gather stakeholder input regarding the watershed. Stakeholder concerns included habitat; economic & recreation; planning/coordination/management; watershed processes; storm water runoff; groundwater & drinking water; floodplains/flooding/drainage; and other miscellaneous concerns such as impacts of dams. The steering committee is comprised of municipal officials; county and regional government; environmental & conservation groups; recreation; business & industry; universities; and state & federal agencies.

The Deep River Watershed covers about 80 square miles in northern Lake and Porter Counties mostly in Lake County. It drains into Lake Michigan at the Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk. Most of the watershed is in a developed state and there has been a major shift in the agricultural land cover over the last 20 years or so. Some of the natural lands have been fairly stable with the exception of almost 500 acres of wetland loss. A lot of the soils in the watershed have a high potential for runoff and don't promote infiltration well. Over time there has been a wetland loss of probably 80-90%. The 2012 impaired streams map was shown. The EMPC moved for the NIRPC Board to request IDEM to do a water quality monitoring study of the watershed to gather baseline information. 35 sites in the watershed were sampled once a month for a one year period. During a five week recreational season E. coli information was gathered more intensely. Fish macroinvertebrate communities and habitat qualities were also looked at. The 2016 impaired streams map was shown. As a result of the monitoring more issues were found. The number one impairment shifted from E. coli to impaired biotic communities. That means the fish in the macroinvertebrate communities do not meet expectations for this region. Since this can be contributed to a number of stressors in the system it makes it more difficult. A number of targets and thresholds have been set for water quality parameters and are more stringent than some management plans in the past.

Ultimately with the watershed management plan and the Clean Water Act two things are looked at; is water quality safe enough for swimming and is it good enough for supporting a good fishery. Lots of times, the answer is no. In a number of cases some sites exceed almost all the time when recreational use threats were assessed. Sampling was conducted over a one

year period during both wet and dry weather runs. A map of E. coli “hot-spots” was shown. Aquatic life use support criteria and an index of biotic integrity show that a majority of the sampled sites never met the threshold. The good thing to note is that the best sites were along the main stem of Deep River where there are still natural channels. Stressors identified as to why the biology is not right are increased stream temperatures; low dissolved oxygen levels; excess nutrient loading; ammonia toxicity; excessive sediment loading; and poor habitat quality. Box and Whisker plots were shown for the identified stressors. Dissolved oxygen levels are the number one water chemistry parameter to tell how healthy a stream is to support aquatic life. All 35 sites were looked at for where stressors are co-occurring with biologic impairments and a site cluster analysis of fish was completed. A slide showing the most influential factors for fish and macroinvertebrates was shown. Also looked at was linking biotic impairments to stressors, sources, and human activities as well as opportunities for conservation.

Steps going forward include: identify problems that reflect the concerns; potential causes for each problem; potential sources for each pollution problem; pollutant loads; load reductions needed; and set goals and identify critical areas. Engineering students at Purdue University Calumet are completing a water quality modeling project that should be done by the end of June. Also volunteer water quality monitoring has started. One Hoosier Riverwatch workshop has been held so far and have started water quality monitoring at some of the IDEM monitoring sites. USGS has installed monitoring site staff gauges which make it easier to measure flow.

NIRPC Business:

a. CMAQ Funding Update – Kathy Luther, NIRPC

They CMAQ subcommittee met and some direction was obtained on emission calculations for the projects submitted. Kathy has been working on that and just found out that decisions need to be finalized by July 22. The subcommittee will reconvene. She asked those present if they wanted to meet in July to go over the project decisions or would they like to give the subcommittee authority to make the decision. This decision is just the slate that will be sent to INDOT and FHWA for eligibility determination. She also mentioned the possibility of a conference call. There are about five or six projects. A webinar was also suggested by a committee member. A motion was made by Kevin Breitzke and seconded by Richard Morrisroe to hold a webinar rather than an office meeting on July 2, 2015 and also empower the subcommittee to make the decisions to be discussed at the July 2 meeting. With no opposition the motion passed.

Public Comment: *None*

Announcements:

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

Meeting adjourned.