

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

NIRPC AUDITORIUM, PORTAGE, IN

August 7, 2014

Members/Guests Present: Nicole Barker, Mark Reshkin, Bob Daum, Jennifer Gadzala, Mike Molnar, Geof Benson, Kevin Breitzke, Courtney Blouzdis, Kay Nelson, Chandra Viswanathan, Deb Backhus, Maggie Byrne, Charlotte Read, Brenda Scott-Henry, Cathy Martin, Randy Knutson, Brant Baughman, Derek Nimetz, Elizabeth McCloskey, Jared O'Brien, Corbin Miller, Jim Sweeney

NIPRC Staff: Kathy Luther, Joe Exl, Meredith Stilwell

Call to order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Benson called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance and self-introductions.

Approval of June 5, 2014 EMPC Minutes

Upon motion by Deb Backhus and second by Kevin Breitzke and no opposition, the minutes of the June 5, 2014 meeting were approved.

Presentation:

a. Black Oak Savanna Restoration Project in the Indiana Dunes – Cathy Martin, Save the Dunes

As one part of the settlement for violations related to their operations, the now closed Dominion Energy, State Line Power Plant was required to mitigate some of that by providing funding for restoration or acquisition projects in the Indiana Dunes. They invited Save the Dunes to submit a project proposal. One thing Save the Dunes has been trying to identify through two rounds of strategic planning, is the greatest threats to the ecological system of the Indiana Dunes. It became clear that invasive species was one of the greatest threats and proper fire management to the system. In cooperation with the State Park and the National Lakeshore a project was proposed to help the Dunes area and focusing on the Black Oak Savanna habitat was one of the first things found that they could work on together.

An oak savannah habitat is comprised of sparsely populated oak trees which allows for the growth of grasses and wildflowers and represents the transition zone between the forests in the east and the tall grass prairies of the west. The rareness of and diversity in this habitat and the high quality species found within are why this project is so significant. There is only .02% of the oak savannah habitat remaining in the Midwest and there are several state and federally endangered species, such as the Karner Blue Butterfly, that depend upon the habitat structure. The Indiana Dunes contains some of the last oak savannah habitats in the world. The \$1m restoration project has been in the planning stages for over a year and will restore 1,077 acres of rare Black Oak Savannah habitat with 1,045 in the National Lakeshore at Miller Woods in Gary and Tolleston Dunes in Portage and 32 acres in the Indiana Dunes State Park, Trails nine and ten in Chesterton. The restoration will remove invasive species and non-native trees and shrubs that are crowding out native vegetation. Native plantings will be placed in the area to replace species lost along with other activities to restore the oak savannah structure.

The work plan for the National Lakeshore consists of removing invasive species and reducing tree and shrub populations that would have been controlled with wildfires through cutting, pulling, herbicide treatments and prescribed burns. There will be seed collecting, replanting and monitoring after the invasive species removal. More than 99% of the oak savannah habitat has become degraded due to fire suppression and has resulted in thick brush growth and the crowding out of the open area and host plant the Karner Blue Butterfly utilizes and depends on. Work at trails nine

and ten in the State Park will be very similar and is one of the few areas within the Dunes Nature Preserve that still has some open savannah canopy structures. This project will have regional impacts and benefits as well. Biodiversity is important to the entire region and the Indiana Dunes Lakeshore ranks as the 7th most biodiverse in the National Park system which is a huge deal because this is an urban park and many people from urbanized areas get to enjoy the park. Unfortunately, some of the same things that make this area great, industry and urbanization and natural areas co-existing together, also make it very complicated to manage with fragmentation, invasive species and pollution all threatening the biodiversity.

The project will be completed by summer of 2015. Following project completion, some of the open savannah and an increase in high quality species hopefully will be seen. Also, volunteer and educational activities and events are anticipated. Brandt Baughman voiced the State Park's appreciation for the project. Even though not part of the mandate for the mitigation they are extremely grateful to be a part. Bob Daum publicly thanked the Save the Dunes Council and their focus on helping the State Park and National Lakeshore. Nicole Barker thanked Randy Knutson from the National Park Service since most of the project has landed on his plate.

Discussion followed regarding the number and frequency of prescribed burns which are more complicated in the oak savannah in the National Lakeshore where there are Karner Blue Butterflies. Karner Blue Butterflies have not been seen in the State Park for years, if not decades, so prescribed fire isn't something they are as concerned with. The 32 State Park acres in the restoration project, have the most open oak canopy and have had the most prescribed fire implemented. The unit was burned for the fourth time this year in April and they would love to see a rotation every three to five years. Miller Woods and Tolleston Dunes were chosen since they are probably the best oak savannah areas. There was concern regarding how the public would react to a slide in the presentation that referred to pollution as having a role in the canopies closing. While there has to be a nexus with air quality since EPA is involved, it was suggested to put that in the background and source EPA. The aggressive schedule was discussed and although a five year period was desired, work had to be completed by July 2015. Seasonal help will be hired and will work all through winter for the National Lakeshore and since the State Park has different restrictions, they will be contracting out the work. The contracted restoration is \$3,000 per acre and will have oversight by IDNR. Possibly inviting fire departments to prescribed burns for help and educational benefits was discussed and Kathy Luther indicated NIRPC could get the word out to the elected officials.

NIRPC Business:

Update to the 2040 CRP– Kathy Luther, NIRPC Director of Environmental Programs

As part of the long-range transportation plan, the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan is required to be updated in frequent intervals and is due to be updated in the next year. Open house meetings will be held regarding the update and the environmental mitigation priorities, as well as other things, will be reviewed. Nothing of major significance or new can be added, but the language can be strengthened. There will be two days of meetings, with two meetings each day, held for the environmental section. Meetings will be held at Merrillville Town Hall on October 29th and Purdue North Central is being looked at for the second set of meetings.

Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway Initiative Update– Joe Exl, NIRPC Water Resource Planner

IDEM is getting ready to wrap up the TMDL in the next month. This is the first time the watershed has been studied to this extent with 35 sites sampled monthly from April through October and 9 pour point (subwatershed) sites sampled for a year. The parameters looked at were E. coli, nutrients, sediment, flow, habitat, fish and macroinvertebrates. Since 2012, many new impaired bodies have been added for the 2016 draft. The impairment summaries comparing 2012 impaired miles to the 2016 impaired miles were given with increases in E. Coli, nutrients and

dissolved oxygen and PCBs fish tissue, siltation and free cyanide all remaining the same. IDEM's TMDL target values for E. coli, total phosphorous, nitrogen and suspended solids were presented along with the percentage of reductions needed and potential priority implementation areas and BMPs for subwatersheds in the Deep River-Portage Burns Watershed. Next steps include completing the watershed inventory parts two and three and in the next quarter (October-December, 2014) incorporating load reductions from the TMDL into the watershed plan, identifying problems and causes, identifying sources and calculating loads, and setting goals and identifying critical areas. The TMDL comment period is currently open and Joe encouraged looking at it and contacting IDEM with any questions.

Discussion followed the presentation and it was noted that this TMDL is the first in the state, so it is a pilot project. Comments were made that it might not be necessary to compare the 2012 numbers to the 2016 numbers in the way shown since it wasn't that the streams weren't impaired in 2012, it just wasn't known. It was suggested to just list the number of impaired miles or possibly change to a percentage of monitored impaired or make a disclaimer stating the number of impaired miles to the number of miles tested.

Public Comment: None.

Announcements:

Kay Nelson announced the following:

- Farm Bureau is holding statewide meetings regarding the proposed Corps/EPA rule, Waters of the US, to assist the agricultural community in understanding the impact of the rule.
- On the morning of August 8, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce will be releasing their water study that Dr. Jack Whitman was engaged in completing. It is a first step of many to better understanding where the State stands regarding its water supplies.
- In July Senator Kirk testified before a Senate Committee on the bill that he and Senator Durben attempted to push through in 2013 requiring that by the year 2033 no sewage disposal could go into any of the lakes. On Friday, August 1, Senator Kirk held a press conference with the Alliance and Shedd Aquarium referencing the bill. Kay remarked that taking water out of the Great Lakes and not allowing it to be returned violates the Great Lakes Compact.
- Mayor Emmanuel is calling for a Great Lakes Mayors Water Summit Conference in the next couple of weeks in Chicago because of the Toledo water situation.
- September 2nd is the water utilities, energy, and telecommunications summer sub-committee meeting in Indianapolis. That is where Senate Bill 271, the water related bill, is going to be discussed.

Discussion was held regarding upcoming meetings and information on the proposed in-lieu-fee mitigation and stream impacts program.

Nicole Barker commented that Waters of the US is probably one of the most important things happening right now if you care about water quality and wetlands. She remarked that periodically representatives from the Corps speak on monitoring the watershed and when bad practices are seen, point them out. Nicole has been reporting wetland violations she has seen by farms and residential homeowners. While it has taken six months, all three are resulting in major issues with the state and if egregious practices such as dumping manure or lime in the wetland are seen and reported, the Feds and the State have been very effective in following through.

Upcoming regional meetings were announced.

Meeting adjourned at 10:41 a.m.