

# ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

NIRPC- Lake Michigan Room

May 4, 2017

**Members/Guests:** Geof Benson, Deb Backhus, Jennifer Gadzala, Will Farrellbegg, Michael Kuss, Tim Kingsland, Reggie Korthals, Richard Morrisroe, Natalie Johnson, George Topoll, Michelle Caldwell, Mary Tanis, Tim Zorn, Lauri Keagle, Susan MiHalo, Dorreen Carey, Jeff Loewe, Maggie Byrne, Michael Spinar, Brenda Scott-Henry, Jeff Edstrom, Kay Nelson, Nathanael Pilla

**NIRPC Staff:** Kathy Luther, 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 April 6, 2017 EMPC Minutes

On motion by Will Farrellbegg and second by Richard Morrisroe, the April 6, 2017 EMPC meeting minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

## Presentations:

### a. **Minimizing Our Impact: Why Native Plants Matter** – *Nathanael Pilla, Save the Dunes*

There are 15,000 acres within the National Lakeshore and ranks in the top 10 in species diversity, with over 1,200 species of vascular plants and over 250 bird species. In comparison, the Great Smoky Mountains is 244,000 acres and Yellowstone is 2,219,789 acres. The National Lakeshore ranks third in number of orchid species with 31. Only Everglade National Park and Great Smoky Mountains National Park have more with 39 and 36. The habitat setup of the Lakeshore that allow for plant assemblies to thrive. There has been over a 90% decline in monarchs since 1976 and is mainly due to habitat loss. Gardening smart helps not only the butterflies, but also other species that are plant specific and if the plants are gone, there is not a food or pollinator source. Phragmites are one of the many invasive plants that is impacting the habitat and does not only shades out other plants, but also destroys habitats for reptiles. Save the Dunes has created a booklet for homeowners called *Living in the Dunes* which is a resource that provides a simple tool for those that want to take part in removing some of the stresses that invasive plants pose on Northwest Indiana's natural communities.

## NIRPC Business:

### a. **Federal Environmental Budget Cuts Survey Results** – *Kathy Luther, NIRPC*

Proposed budget cuts for FY 2018 were discussed at the April EMPC meeting. Based on the discussion, a survey to rank the priority of proposed budget cuts was distributed to the EMPC email list. Based on the results which did not produce a significant spread in rankings, Kathy proposed ways to narrow down top priorities. Boards reflecting the survey rankings were posted in the room. In addition, a draft memo to the Legislative Committee regarding the budget cut impacts was distributed to those present for review. Kathy noted she wanted to include in the memo that all of the categories are important and after evaluating, surveying, and discussing them the top rankings would be listed. The rankings and memo would be what is in common to the group as a whole and everyone can lobby individually as well.

b. **Recommendation to NIRPC Legislative Committee on Federal Budget Cuts Prioritization**

After discussion, voting members of the Committee voted on the greatest impacts to the region/2040 Plan and impacts to their organization using different colored markers to denote each. Kathy will tally the results for completion of the memo to the Legislative Committee.

**Public Comment:**

Richard Morrisroe thanked NIRPC for its role with Drew Hart and the Forest Service for the 50 trees planted in Washington Park in East Chicago.

The Town of Dyer gave out 50 trees to residents and 250 trees were planted on Arbor Day. Due to the response this year, 500 trees will be ordered next year.

**Announcements:**

- May is military appreciation month.
- Kay Nelson reviewed Bills that came out of the session successfully.
- Upcoming meetings and events information will be forwarded to the Committee.

Meeting adjourned at 10:26 a.m.