

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

Purdue University Calumet

March 3, 2016

Members/Guests: Geof Benson, Susan Mihalo, Sarah Weaver, Brenda Scott Henry, Deb Backhus, Kaitlyn McClain, Mike Molnar, Leslie Dorworth, Mont Handley, Maggie Byrne, Dorreen Carey, Luann Franklin, Katie Rizer

NIRPC Staff: Kathy Luther, Joe Exl, Meredith Stilwell

Call to order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Benson called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance and self-introductions.

Approval of February 4, 2016 EMPC Minutes

On motion by Deb Backhus and second by Susan MiHalo, the February 4, 2016 EMPC meeting minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

Presentations:

a. **Dunes Residential Guide Project** – *Sarah Weaver, Save the Dunes*

Save the Dunes has been approached often by residents who are aware of invasive plants, but are unsure of what they are or how to get rid of them. They are also unaware of how to promote native plants or how to make their landscaping practices less damaging to the local environment. The Dunes Residential Guide Project was created to help educate and make things easier and will include lists of common invasive plants; native plants which are easy to get and take care of; and templates on care. Work is being done with local communities to create a customized guide that is significant in special resources. The advisory committee for developing this project is made up of members of local communities, local government and local advocacy groups. The guide should be finished in summer or fall of 2016. There will be outreach to show how to use the guide and tours of yards that have great native landscaping. Current outreach includes attending meetings and there will be longer community conversations with key dunes communities. In the fall there will be a lot of presentations. It was brought up to include County Master Gardeners and garden clubs.

NIRPC Business:

a. **Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway Watershed Management Plan Update** – *Joe Exl, NIRPC*

The IDEM required elements in the development of a watershed management plan which follow somewhat along the lines of EPA's checklist of requirements as well were reviewed. About 80% of the streams within the watershed are impaired. The next phase of the process is implementation. Critical areas are the only areas where 319 dollars for cost share programs can be spent. The process used to identify those areas involved pollutant loads; water chemistry; habitat quality; fish and macroinvertebrate community health; and land cover. In addition public concerns were also taken into consideration. While not always statistically able to be shown

how these concerns were impacted streams, they were still important to stakeholders. A tiered approach was used, with areas rated a 1 or 2 being the highest priority and the only locations where the 319 restoration cost share dollars of \$200k can be spent. A lot of the restoration projects being looked at for funding are based on water quality issues and are primarily broken out into urban and agricultural BMPs. Agricultural focus on cover crops; no till; and nutrient management. The focus for the urban environment infiltration type practices such as green infrastructure stormwater; green infrastructure type practices (i.e. rain gardens); and urban forestry. Other community organizations and landowners can still put practices on the ground in the lower priority areas. Critical area problems include E. coli; dissolved oxygen; nutrients; sediment; ammonia toxicity; physical habitat; and aquatic life. Also included in this Watershed Plan is the establishment of priority preservation areas. The Hobart Marsh planning area as well as the Deep River outstanding river corridor have been determined as priority preservation areas. Hopefully by doing this, these areas will be eligible for 319 funds in addition to other funding sources. This section of Deep River has some of the best water quality habitat and aquatic life in the entire system. The hope is to not only maintain this quality but also see improvement. Hopefully communities will adopt some portions of this Plan into their comp plans.

The final draft of the Watershed Plan has been submitted to IDEM for review and their comments are due March 10. EPA will then review with comments due April 11. Once comments have been received, the Plan will be updated and a cost-share program developed. A new committee will be established to implement the plan. A 30 day public comment period begins March 3, after which a public comment report will be produced. EMPC will review for recommendation to the NIRPC Commission for adoption. This would be the first watershed plan adopted by NIRPC.

Discussion followed the presentation regarding septic systems; lack of oxygen in the waterways; the NIRPC adoption process for the Plan; and Red Flag Investigations. Joe mentioned that one NIRPC has taken one of the action items recommended in the Plan and moved it forward by going after additional funding from the DNR lake and river enhancement program to do a feasibility study on dam removal or modification of the Deep River Dam located in East Chicago which will begin summer 2016.

Public Comment: None.

Announcements:

- Kathy Luther announced that Laurie Keagle former environmental reporter for the Times will now be working at Taltree Arboretum.
- Leslie Dorworth announced that the Dangerous Currents group had extra money left over for equipment for the beaches. There had been \$60k - \$80k in requests for equipment. Funding has been secured and it appears that anyone who requested equipment around the Great Lakes will receive it.
- Sarah Weaver announced that the Save the Dunes Residential Guide Project is through the Lake Michigan Coastal Program, Legacy Foundation, and ArcelorMittal.
- Additional meeting, event and funding announcements will be forwarded to the Committee by email.

Meeting adjourned at 9:59 a.m.