

# ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

NIRPC AUDITORIUM, PORTAGE, IN

May 1, 2014

**Members/Guests Present:** Geof Benson, Deb Backhus, Jennifer Gadzala, Dorreen Carey, Ashley Snyder, Courtney Blouzdis, Maggie Byrne, Charlotte Read, Leslie Dorworth, Kevin Breitzke, Rafi Wilkinson, Laurie Keagle, Mike Molnar, Richard Maxey, Tom Clouser, Michele Bollinger, Matt Keiser, Brenda Scott Henry, Chandra Viswanathan, Jim Sweeney, Michael Kuss, Tim Cole  
**NIPRC Staff:** Joe Exl, Meredith Stilwell

## **Call to order and Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Benson called the meeting to order at 9:09 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance and self-introductions.

## **Approval of March 6, 2014 EMPC Minutes**

Upon motion by Charlotte Read and second by Kevin Breitzke and no opposition, the minutes of the March 6, 2014 meeting were approved.

## **Presentation:**

### **a. Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Managed Shore Bird Habitat Wetland Restoration – *Richard Maxey, Tim Cole and Matt Keiser***

Plans are underway to create a migratory bird sanctuary on abused, abandoned property that borders Meridian Road in Chesterton and is within a half mile of four schools, making it an educational opportunity for the schools on what it takes to restore a wetland and bring it back to life. The land is owned by the Porter County Parks Foundation and is a 501c3. The project could span three to four years depending on how extensive the project is and could not only be a magnet for shorebirds and other wildlife, but also a study and research area. The history of the land, its present condition and what it could look like with restoration was presented. Part of the project area was used for dumping and while there are currently a few trees with birds nesting, there is not one decent piece of flora nor is there any wildlife on the property. Cutting out undesirable trees and bushes and restoring the water will support life. Army corps of Engineers is doing wetland delineation and the proper agencies are being worked with on areas that include the former dump area and how to move forward. The dump could possibly be removed, but could cause more problems so it possibly will have to be worked into the project plan. While there is not a concrete idea on what the area will look like, concepts are being looked into as well as other areas for ideas to incorporate. Action steps and a conceptual layout including a parking lot, associated trail and overlooks for observation points on non-wetland areas was presented by Matt Keiser of Abonmarche, the consulting firm working with Porter County Parks on the project. The temporary working name is Westchester Migratory Bird Sanctuary but is subject to change. Funding is the backbone of this project is being actively and aggressively sought and a large donor could prompt a name change. Volunteers are needed for the project. Current partners include Shirley Heinz Land Trust, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, United States Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife, The Audubon Society and the Northwest Indiana Migratory Bird Association (NIMBA). The Boy Scouts were also contacted and they think it is an excellent opportunity to assist with environmental cleanup. Meeting attendees were encouraged to stop by the site and look around. Discussion followed regarding the Michigan City storm water control facility which received buy-in from homeowners and possible assistance with contacts to reach out to for the bird sanctuary project.

## **NIRPC Business:**

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

Three meetings have been held to date, with the first two being public meetings held in Hobart and Crown Point to gather local input on stakeholder concerns for the watershed. The stakeholders and their concerns were very diverse, including property value concerns, communities working together, understanding that drainage is needed but how to do so while protecting water quality and aquatic habitats and scenic beauty. The project website is housed within the NIRPC website and information will be maintained there. The Watershed plan is being worked on and draft elements will be posted to the website in the near future as they are completed. The first quarterly report has been submitted to IDEM who just finished their water quality sampling of the watershed. Over a year's time, 35 sites were sampled, looking at water chemistry, habitat, fish and macroinvertebrates. Joe just participated in a reassessment process to look at what streams would be included on the 303d list and with the intense sampling there will probably be additional impaired streams listed. IDEM has created a TMDL and baseline study page for the Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway on their website at [www.in.gov/idem/nps/3893.htm](http://www.in.gov/idem/nps/3893.htm). When the study is complete IDEM will hold a public meeting and a 30 day comment period. The TMDL study will be incorporated into the watershed plan. The Deep River-Turkey Creek and West Branch watershed plans will also be incorporated into the Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway watershed plan. The current steering committee is a diverse group which will probably change throughout the process. The next steering committee meeting is May 13<sup>th</sup> at NIRPC. Next steps and work completed to date was presented. IDEM originally required a social indicator survey, but based on data NIRPC has already collected through MS4 program surveys, as well as other surveys to develop an outreach program. Discussion was held regarding nutrient impairments.

**Public Comment:**

None.

**Announcements:**

Upcoming meetings, workshops, trainings and events were announced.

Meeting adjourned at 10:10 a.m.