

Environmental Management Policy Committee

NIRPC – Virtual Meeting

June 3, 2021

Minutes

This meeting was convened as an electronic meeting, pursuant to Governor Holcomb's extended Executive Order 21-16. All persons were meeting remotely on a Zoom platform that allowed for real time interaction and supported the public's ability to observe and record the proceedings. When the agenda item was provided for public comment, this was supported as well. A roll call was taken to motion and approve the agenda items.

Bill Emerson called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance and roll call.

In attendance were Bill Emerson (Lake County), Lauri Keagle (SSCC), Leslie Thompson, Ashley Sharkey, Chandramouli Viswanathan (Purdue), George Topoll (Union Township), Tim Kingsland (Hobart), Kay Nelson (Forum), Carl Lisek (SSCC), Susan MiHalo (TNC) and Alex Olesker.

NIRPC staff present were Kathy Luther, Meredith Stilwell, Candice Eklund, Joe Exl, Kevin Polette, Scott Weber, and Flor Baum.

The meeting minutes of April 1, 2021 were approved on motion by Tim Kingsland and second by Chandramouli Viswanathan. A roll call was taken, and the committee voted unanimously to approve.

There were no public comments.

Joe Exl presented on identifying wetland restoration within the Deep River – Portage Burns Waterway Watershed (DRW) and other agricultural land conservation opportunities. The 180 sq. mi. of coastal watershed is in northern Lake and Porter counties, draining into Lake Michigan. Funding was in part by the Indiana Lake Michigan Coastal Program and other local funding. The tool used was the Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework; a GIS-based planning tool developed by the US Dept. of Agriculture. It uses spatial data to identify locations where landscape attributes are favorable for implementing certain conservation practices and helps prioritize locations susceptible to runoff and erosion. It also emphasizes soil conservation as the foundation to agricultural watershed management. 209 acres (pool) of nutrient removal wetlands were identified to store more than 580 acre-feet of water. Depressions as well as water and sediment control basins (WASCOBs) were identified as potential opportunities within the watershed. Another potential opportunity was runoff control. It identified grassed waterways, contour buffer strips, and water & sediment control basins. There are runoff risks associated with farm fields within the watershed and are classified from very high risk to low risk. All measures are voluntary and may not have an economic return for the farmer to implement. To help prioritize restoration opportunities within the watershed, there is a riparian assessment as part of the model. NRCS specs can be modified to have riparian zone plantings that incorporate trees. However, there may be a conflict along a regulated drain where entry is needed for maintenance. The next steps for NIRPC staff will be to incorporate this information into an update of the DRW management plan. Joe will meet with the Soil Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). He will also meet with land conservation partners to discuss findings and opportunities. Due to the COVID pandemic, these meetings had been postponed. The committee discussed the possibility of assisting with Deep River or other park departments. Contact Joe Exl at jexl@nirpc.org for more information.

Kathy Luther and Joe Exl updated the committee on the Regional Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory. NIRPC has hosted weekly check-ins with the team. ICLEI has given support in assisting communities with data collection and entry. June 1 was the official start date for interns and have been going through training videos and discussion groups. Interns have also been provided emails and phone numbers.

Lauri Keagle (SSCC) updated the committee on Green Fleets. Please click [here](#) to view the report. For more information, please visit www.southshorecleancities.org or contact Lauri at lkeagle@southshorecleancities.org

The next EMPC meeting is scheduled for October 7, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. in the NIRPC offices.

Hearing no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:44 a.m.