

# URBANWATERS

A Partnership Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities

**Friday July 20, 2018**  
**9:30 AM -12:00 PM Central**  
**Purdue Northwest Meeting Facility**  
**6100 Southport Rd, Portage, IN 46368**

**In attendance:** Susan MiHalo, TNC; Russell Hodge, Hodge Tree Care; Cherie Fisher, USFS; Ethan Brown, Alliance for the Great Lakes; Kathryn Vallis, IDNR-LMCP; Kathy Luther, NIRPC; Maggie Byrne, DNR-LMCP; Ashley Hodges, Calumet Collaborative; Deb Backus, DNR-LMCP; Peg Donnelley, USEPA; Michelle Krueger, Dunes Learning Center; Maria Kubalweski, VU; Elizabeth McCloskey, USFWS; Sylvia L Collins, DNR-LMCP; Leslie Dorworth, IISG- PNW; Deb Chubb, LWV-LMR; Lynda Lancaster, NPS-UWFP; Michael Spinar, IDEM; Lisa Harris, Consultant; Heather Hahn Sullivan, DLC; Geof Benson, DLC; Sarah Coulter, Calumet Collaborative; Katherine Moore Powell, The Field Museum; Jared O'Brien, Porter County SWCD; Michelle Benson, Porter County SWCD; Randall Dickson, USDA-NRCS; Benjamin Easton, ISDA; Justin Mount, Senator Donnelly's office; Rich Underkofler, Town of Highland; Jennifer Birchfield, NWI Urban Waters

1. Welcome & introductions

2. Urban Waters updates

– *Jen Birchfield, NWI Urban Waters Coordinator*

Jen provided a brief background of the NWI Urban Waters Federal Partnership. She updated the group on upcoming meetings and the learning series and asked participants to write down ideas for presentations for future meetings. She listed current opportunities, including CommuniTree grants, the National Coastal Resistance Fund, the Great Urban Parks Campaign, and Coastal grants.

3. Conservation Action Planning and other efforts relevant to NWI Urban Waters

–*Sarah Coulter, Executive Director, Calumet Collaborative*

*Slides from Sarah's presentation are available and will be mailed to Urban Waters Partners.*

## **Q&A:**

An attendee asked if the Natural Heritage Area is the same as the Calumet Heritage Partnership. Sarah answered that no, that is a small group that has been around since 1998 that was interested in an ecological park. It is a small, grassroots, all volunteer, bi-state group. Calumet Collaborative partnered with them through an MOU to co-develop the NHA.

An attendee asked Sarah to talk more about the return on investment study. Sara said there was a study done on ROI, some estimates are higher some are lower. Lynda added that NPS does a study each year. The Calumet Heritage Area is bookmarked by Dunes and Pullman National Parks. There are great opportunities and it would be the first in Indiana.

Cherie asked what is the scope of the wayfinding. Sarah said the aim is to shine a bigger light. They need branding first, then storytelling to get people to visit the actual sites with signs in the ground. The focus will be on identity, branding and graphic tools. Jen asked if they are working with the tourism agencies, and Sarah said they are.

Sarah added that a small amount of funding comes with the designation, but that isn't the main goal, they will continue the work whether the heritage area is designated or not.

The Calumet Collaborative created conservation action plans for 3 areas. More work needs to be done due to the short grant timeline.

10:20 Porter County SWCD In-School Education Programs  
- *Michelle Benson, Porter County SWCD Administrator/Educator*

10:35 Discussion with EPA on emergency planning in NWI & communicating with communities  
- *Group discussion led by Peg Donnelley, USEPA*

Peg noted that Dan and Carol from the Superfund program were unable to attend today. They have been tasked with thinking about more immediate emergency responses, the chromium spill in April is an example. It is a really immediate human health issue as communities draw water from lake nearby. They are trying to coordinate efforts. There are 6 states in Region 5 and practices are different in each community. When they got the call from US Steel, EPA first called Indiana American Water to determine when was last time it was taking in water and what is current state of water in pipes. The next question was the beaches. NPS helped with fish and water samples. Water people go straight to drinking water and fish and superfund people go to containment and sediment. The coast guard had the lead on emergency response through the National Incident Command System. When they are following that system, it doesn't always look that way to residents. They worked with IDEM quickly and media got onboard. Federal employees could not speak on TV or to reporters, which delayed the effort to get correct info out to the right people. There are lots of active and old industrial sites.

**Superfund Region 5 has been tasked with forming a "NWI subarea response plan".** They need to have right people at the table. Who in your community should be involved? Typically fire departments and police departments. Possibly city council, community groups, neighbors, nonprofits, etc. There is no deadline for the plan, but sooner is better than later.

**Dan and Carol will be invited to speak at the next Urban Waters meeting.** Participants were asked to write down ideas for who should be invited or consulted. The group needs to generate Incident Action Plans (IAPs) after incidents. IAPs can be used to get information out if a similar incident occurs. People can comment on the document. How do we communicate issues of immediate public health?

***Discussion:***

- Geof Benson suggested contacting Mary Thorne regarding NIRPC's newsletter. Kathy added that it contains county surveyors and municipal representatives. She also suggested homeland security, regional crime group, and water sewer groups.
- Peg said that EPA does mock emergency response table top exercises and IDEM's NWI office has an emergency response program. Michael Spinar added that there was a drinking water exercise last year. Police and fire departments are the main players, but anyone is anyone is welcome and can give good perspective on what we aren't focused on.
- Lynda Lancaster asked if there is guidance on using social media. Peg replied that EPA used to be able to but the current administrator says all local media has to go to DC first.
- Kathy Luther asked if media comes to those exercises? NWI has a good relationship with media and interest.
- Kathy Luther added that it can be easier to talk to environmental reporters than others and perhaps we can do a media training.
- Sylvia Collins said that educating and training the media can prevent chaos. When the spill happened, local people did not know. By the time they did it was Chinese telephone. It was not communicated well when testing was all clear.
- Michael Spinar suggested developing a standard messaging template to convey what, where, and impacts. Perhaps tapping into emergency alert systems to target cell phones in certain areas like the Amber Alert system to warn everyone with consistent accurate information
- Peg noted that some spills are more local and the communications people don't want to overwhelm people. Kathy Luther pointed out that since the spill reached Lake Michigan, everyone was concerned. Lake Michigan is complicated. Telling everyone would build trust.
- Lisa Harris asked if they could frame different types of scenarios using a color system so people can relate in a simple way. Peg said that they didn't initially know how bad spill was, it was hard to know when it started and what wave action was. The plant didn't even know.
- Peg's opinion is that its best to be not overly cautious. They have to funnel it all to the communication team and the information was vague.
- Lynda said that the community indicated that they wanted quicker, better communication, so she is glad EPA is doing this.
- Most counties have systems, most cities have their own plans in place.
- Geof Benson said that the chromium spill was bad and the first communication from EPA was that it didn't reach the Lake, so people didn't trust EPA after that.
- Peg recalls that the first communication from EPA was it did reach Lake Michigan , and they can't get immediate test results on chromium.
- Deb noted that Kathy had mentioned a NWI Information System and Security Alliance (NISSA) that deals with natural and manmade emergencies. Steven Shekel used to lead it.
- Susan noted that chromium itself can't be contained, what happens as it interacts during the day?
- Lisa Haris asked if there is one place for updates? Peg said they had a website within hours. Specific data had to be QA/QCed and that can take a month. She suggested they put data up and flag it as draft.

#### 4. Pertinent partner updates and announcements

– Group

- *Jim Semelka*- IDNR grant funding is available for urban forestry- Inventories and management plans.
- *Leslie Dorworth* provided an update on the Master Watershed Steward Program. She will be making phone calls to potential presenters. November have to do exam. Sarah Coulter asked if the program is unique to Indiana or if it could be used in Illinois? Leslie said it is titled for Indiana but could be used in Illinois.
- *Cherie Fisher*- Chicago Wilderness went through an upheaval. It dissolved, reformed as a trust and now has staff. She invited partners to reengage.
- *Lynda Lancaster*- Wilderness Inquiry will be here in September and October. We are working with DLC and Nicole Messacar. They need help on specific days for land based activities. Everyone deserves a pat on the back, because the Secretary of Interior has taken an interest in paddling launches. We have a phone call scheduled this afternoon to talk about that.
- *Maggie Byrne* introduced Sylvia Collins. Coastal grants are open, and applicants are encouraged to attend at least one workshop and talk to Sarah Nimetz.
- *Kathy Luther*- CommuniTree grants are open. Joe is working on a second Deep River 319 grant for a BMP cost-share. NIRPC finished public engagement for 2050 plan on goal and got objective feedback. Lots of feedback was received on the environment, including a lot about water scarcity in the future and how it could impact the NWI population.
- *Michael Spinar*- State and Federal partners are working on developing the next LAMP. 2020 is the completion date. Contact him if interested. LMCP is also involved. They are planning various public learning events on the Grand Calumet AOC. CARE committee meetings will be held in the AOC and members of the public are welcome. The next meeting is next Thursday at PNW Hammond campus.
- *Kathryn Vallis*- Coastal Awareness Month had 70 events, double last year. Thanks to everyone who helped. They will be sending an event debrief survey very soon.
- *Deb Backus*- They just finished development of a coastal outreach program for groups interested in technical assistance. The modules include living along the coast, NPS pollution, building sustainable communities, designing great projects, and conservation resources. Just kicked off 319 septic system project, need historic water quality data. Moving forward with wetland inventory update and functional analysis.
- *Geof Benson* introduced Heather Hahn Sullivan, Director of Marketing and Development.
- DLC is hosting the NWI symphony orchestra at West Beach in October.
- *Richard Underkofler*- Would like to see a WMP for the West Branch of the Little Calumet. Jen suggested he contact Brenda Scott Henry.
- *Deb Chubb*- Watershed games developed by Minnesota are available at the League of Women Voters Chicago office. Geo said they would be good for canoemobile volunteer stations, and asked how many organizations have enviroscares to share and loan?

- *Sarah Coulter*- Calumet Collaborative is interested in Indiana initiatives. Please reach out. All are welcome and expertise is appreciated.
- *Maria Kubalweski*- working on a climate change unit through NPS to be checked out to local educators. If anyone here has data sets showing climate change, stories of hope and heroes, environmental advocates in communities, please contact her.
- *Ben Easton* is the new ISDA resource specialist.
- *Randy Dickson*- his role is in part to bring technical/financial assistance. A version of farm bill passed house and senate and is heading to committee. NRCS has a factsheet. Wetland reserve easement program. He discussed the wetland reserve program to purchase development rights for 30 years or lifetime. It is for private lands with past agricultural use. They don't know the funding level going forward. August 17<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for funding
- *Jared O'Brien*- Lake county SWCD has a cost-share program for pollinator friendly practices and field days.

The meeting ended at 11:45.

Notes received from Participants:

**Attendees were given a list of potential topics for presentations at future meetings and asked to indicate which interest them.**

- The Neighborspace model of community supported gardens - 9
- The Marquette Action Plan - 7
- Indiana DNR Community and Urban Forestry programs and resources - 6
- The Grand Calumet River Area of Concern 101 presentation - 6

**Other ideas for presentations:**

- Climate Change- Information on how it manifests in NWI/Great Lakes, what communities can do to be more resilient, what kinds of education/engagement works
- Watershed Plan Implementation Progress
- IDEM update on WQ Assessment Results from 2018 monitoring in GL Basin
- NIRPC 2050 Plan
- Interactions between voluntary UW partnerships and regulatory actions such as permitting and/or enforcement proceedings
- EDA workshop
- Urban Conservation in the Grand Cal AOC featuring work being done in partnership via Paul with TNC, Field Museum and City of Gary (Brenda)
- Caitie Nigrelli just came out with a great study on Sense of Place in the Grand Cal, and might be willing to present her findings based around the school event we did last May at Seidner.

**Notes for EPA regarding emergency communication:**

- Michigan City contacts for emergency preparedness- Michael Kuss for coordination and Maggi Spartz for spreading the word
- How can I participate in a tabletop exercise? How do I get notification? Amber alert type notification, frame scenarios so public gets general idea of what is happening, consistent site to go to online for info and updates.
- When USSteel was dredging the Grand Cal and putting the material in a CAMU, they had some type of notification system to let people in the neighborhoods know if there were air pollution exceedences- worked with EPA and City of Gary on that.
- District 1 Indiana Homeland Security, Munster Police Chief coordinates a regional initiative e on interactive crime reporting  
Stephen Schekel- (219) 836-6630. Will try to invite him to EMPC joint meeting  
NISSA
- Geof Benson, Nanacy Moldenhauer- [nmoldenhauer@comcast.net](mailto:nmoldenhauer@comcast.net)
- Town of Highland- Fire Chief Bill Timmer, [btimmer@highland.in.gov](mailto:btimmer@highland.in.gov), (219) 923-9876. Ask Bill for contact info of Lake County EM Coordinator

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