

# MEETING MINUTES

## Watershed Planning Advisory Council (WPAC) Meeting June 12, 2015

The general WPAC group held its quarterly meeting on Friday, June 12, 2015, at the Urbandale Public Library with co-chairs Ben Gleason (Iowa Corn Growers Association) and Jennifer Terry (Iowa Environmental Council) presiding.

Organizations/designees present at the meeting: Shawn Richmond, Agribusiness Association of Iowa; John Torbert, Drainage Districts of Iowa; Rick Robinson, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation; Clare Lindahl, Conservation Districts of Iowa; Laura Sarcone, Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities; Jerry Peckumn, Iowa Rivers Revival; Mike Delaney, Iowa Conservation Alliance; Roger Wolf, Iowa Soybean Association; Cody McKinley, Iowa Pork Producers; Luis Leon, Iowa Floodplain & Stormwater Management; Jeremy Rosonke, Iowa Conservation Alliance; Mark Ackelson, Growing Green Communities; Dean Mattoon, League of Cities; Greg Sindt, Iowa Water Environment Association for a total of 16 voting members.

Advisory and/or ex-officio organizations/designees present: Jake Hanson, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship; Iowa State Representative Chuck Isenhart; Meeting was called to order at 1:30PM by Ben Gleason.

### Old Business:

Jake Hanson reminded members to submit their organizations' reports for the nutrient reduction strategy annual legislative report. The logic model template was sent to all WPAC members with instructions to complete and submit by June 12. Only eight groups have submitted reports. Ben and Jennifer will decide how to compile the WPAC reports into one submission. Jake acknowledged that the template is better-suited for some organizations than others but wants to strongly encourage all groups to participate. Jake will have a draft of the report ready in a week or two, and will submit the final version to the Water Resources Coordinating Council (WRCC) at the next meeting on June 30, 2015, in Room 103 of the capitol, which will convene at 9AM. Jake announced there will be a presentation at the June 30 WRCC meeting about water monitoring by Matt Helmers and Bill Crompton of Iowa State University.

Representative Isenhart announced that a group from the Chesapeake Bay Project has created a website in which Iowans are invited to share ideas at: [www.cleanwaterdialogue.org](http://www.cleanwaterdialogue.org). The group recently visited Iowa and has posted documents on the website which they shared on their visit. Iowans interested in sharing information about water quality may send documents to Rep. Isenhart for uploading on the site.

### New Business:

**Task Force Group #1 – “Create Economic Incentives”** – presented the group's goals and objectives which are detailed in the *attached document*. Goal 1 is to secure state and federal funding for existing and new conservation programs and projects. Goal 2 is to promote nongovernmental incentives and agricultural technologies. Goal 3 is to advance the installation of CREP Wetlands. There was significant discussion about SRF loans in which a city borrows money to upgrade a water treatment facility and they have the opportunity to take advantage of an interest rate deferral, i.e. the city can use the 10% they would have paid back in interest to invest in conservation practices in the watershed. Roger sees this as an exciting opportunity and a chance to collaborate between point and nonpoint. Jake stated this is a good proposal for WPAC to be working on and hopes that it will also raise awareness among nonpoint about the opportunities. Clare and Greg noted the importance of regulatory certainty to ensure that the cities receive credit for the investment. Clare Lindahl reported that the task force's recommendations are not

ready to be voted on as yet by the WPAC—that they are still gathering information. Their next task force meeting is set for June 25.

**Task Force #2 – “Improve Water Quality and Optimize Costs”** - Chair Dean Mattoon talked about their proposal involving a farmer-led water quality monitoring program with the goal of raising awareness with farmers about what’s happening on their particular ground, i.e. how is the nitrogen level? Is there an opportunity for cost-savings for them if they can reduce nitrogen application? Dean’s group has been communicating with Clare Lindahl, who is also working on a similar initiative along with Iowa State University Extension, and there appears to be opportunity to collaborate. [Clare explained that the goal would be for farmers to receive a nitrate testing “kit” including test strips, an informational booklet, instructions, metrics about drinking water, why there’s an increasing interest in retaining nitrogen, etc. Clare’s group hopes to distribute the kits via the Water Quality Initiative (WQI) projects and the ISU Extension staff. Clare’s group hopes to post a video online as well. She stated that the goal of their program is education and outreach, so she is unsure about collecting results at this juncture. Ben stated that the Corn Promotion Board will also be distributing the kits to test tile lines as an educational opportunity.] Eventually, the task force envisions water quality feedback being shared with each farmer individually, and then as an aggregate centralized database of the whole watershed. Dean’s group has talked about training farmers similarly to IOWATER volunteer monitoring program. Jennifer stated that there generally appeared to be “heads nodding around the table” without objections to this program. No objections were voiced. Dean’s task force group will continue to identify collaborative opportunities with Clare’s group.

**Task Force #3 – “Develop Reliable Protocols and Procedures for Pollution Control Quantification”** – Chair Jennifer Terry stated that their task force group was prepared to discuss two of their recommendations. She presented Recommendation #1 (*detailed in attached document*) for the second time to the WPAC group, having presented it for the first time in March at which time Jennifer’s group stated it would “revise the recommendation and bring it to WPAC in June in order to gain consensus”. Jennifer noted that nearly 100% of the feedback received at the March meeting was incorporated into the recommendation in order to include diverse perspectives. Additionally, Jennifer noted that all WPAC members had received the document weeks prior to the meeting so they would have ample time for review.

WPAC members discussed this recommendation at length which calls for appropriate water quality monitoring in all watershed projects, with the WRCC in charge of defining and implementing the monitoring protocols, etc. Shawn expressed concern that the WQI projects are demonstration projects and that monitoring would be “challenged at best” to show any movement one way or another given the three-year length of the projects. Shawn also expressed concern that WQI projects were being isolated from others. Shawn suggested that a “mandate” is not the appropriate approach, but rather supply resources and guides to coordinators instead. Roger agreed with Shawn and added that many of the WQI projects are embracing monitoring already and that “mandating WQI monitoring is not the correct approach”, but also acknowledged the importance of monitoring. Roger also stated that water quality is “the hardest thing to measure in the nonpoint source realm.” Roger further noted that there seems to be consensus to monitor, but would rather make informational resources available rather than mandate. Mike stated that taxpayer money is allocated to these projects, so the public has a stake in knowing about water quality results in terms of accountability.

Dean asked what good a demonstration project is without monitoring, i.e. monitoring should be used to “be able to say what’s working” as far as practices—it’s the only way we’re going to see what practices are working. Jerry pointed out that the way a practice is implemented has a big impact on results; therefore, monitoring should be used to measure progress and doesn’t understand the objection to monitoring. Jeremy noted that there appears to be fear of monitoring, but that without it “all we’ll ever be

able to say is ‘well, it should have worked’”. Ben stated that there is already measurement being done by modeling for estimated reductions in the NRS science assessment, and also expressed concern that this type of spirited debate is an example of why people feel they may be “attacked” on these issues. Rep. Isenhardt indicated that at some point we need to stop merely demonstrating—in order to continue to receive funding and begin securing evidence that the strategy is working. Mark stated that monitoring is absolutely necessary to get a complete picture of what is happening. Jennifer stressed the fact that her group has been working on revising this recommendation for several months and it seems unfair to her group to completely deny the recommendation. Rick then suggested removing the words “water quality initiative” and adding the word “guidelines”; Greg suggested we use specific NRCS text for protecting private information; Ben would like a wording change to indicate we are not measuring the practices themselves but the results. Jennifer indicated that she would make the revisions Rick and Greg suggested, and both Rick and Jennifer indicated they would like more detail about Ben’s request.

Jennifer then called for a vote and reminded the group of the definition of consensus in this group. Eleven group designees voted “yes” in support of the recommendation: John Torbert, Drainage Districts of Iowa; Rick Robinson, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation; Clare Lindahl, Conservation Districts of Iowa; Laura Sarcone, Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities; Jerry Peckum, Iowa Rivers Revival; Mike Delaney, Iowa Conservation Alliance; Jeremy Rosonke, Iowa Conservation Alliance; Mark Ackelson, Growing Green Communities; Dean Mattoon, League of Cities; Greg Sindt, Iowa Water Environment Association; Jennifer Terry, Iowa Environmental Council. Five groups voted “no support”: Shawn Richmond, Agribusiness Association of Iowa; Roger Wolf, Iowa Soybean Association; Cody McKinley, Iowa Pork Producers (might change position once a final version is issued); Luis Leon, Iowa Floodplain & Stormwater Management (might change position once a final version is issued); Ben Gleason, Iowa Corn Growers Association (might change position once a final version is issued). Jennifer indicated she would share a revised version with the group in order to see whether some of the “no” votes may want to change to a vote of support.

During public comment period, Mark Kennett (farmer, soil and water commissioner) stated that monitoring is “absolutely necessary”, as farmers can see the effects that conservation practices have on their yields, but they have no way of knowing how their collective practices are affecting the watershed—that monitoring gives a “picture” of water quality. Bob Bernard, representing Trout Unlimited, stated that he has worked in diverse landscapes in other states over the years and found watershed-level monitoring improved collaboration and feedback. Bob also questioned why we can’t get such a program approved here in Iowa; farmers and taxpayers need to know the status of water quality. Brett Lorenzen, representing Environmental Working Group, wonders why “Iowa farmers are uniquely terrified of signing easements and monitoring” and becoming part of the program in comparison to Minnesota farmers.

Ben indicated that the next WPAC general meeting will be September 11 and will be held jointly with WRCC. Details will be sent to members. Jennifer commended the group on its ability to collaborate and achieve progress as the co-chairs had been hoping when creating the new framework. Ben adjourned the meeting.

Submitted by Jennifer Terry, Co-Chair  
June 23, 2015

**Watershed Planning Advisory Council**  
**2015 Task Force Work Group**  
**Task Force Group #1**

**Members:**

Conservation Districts of Iowa, Clare Lindahl, *Group Recorder*  
Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Jim Gillespie/Jake Hansen/Will Myers  
Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Rick Robinson  
Iowa Soybean Association, Roger Wolf

**Task Force Group #1: CREATE ECONOMIC INCENTIVES**

Creating economic incentives for voluntary nonpoint source load reductions, point source discharge reductions beyond those required by the federal Water Pollution Control Act, implementation of pollution prevention programs, wetland restoration and creation, and the development of emerging pollution control technologies.

**Goal 1:** Secure state and federal funding for existing and new conservation programs and projects

**Objectives:**

1.1: Assess existing conservation programs, determine if needs are being met, propose new innovative programs and projects as part of existing funding or a new funding need

**Recommendations:**

- Promote the exploration of SRF loan interest being used in the entire watershed
- Explore providing municipalities certainty that investments they make in the watershed will be credited to their permit
- A conference be held to explore Environmental Finance opportunities
- Discussion be held between urban and rural
- Others, TBD

**Tasks being conducted to make recommendation:** Information to be requested of IDALS-DSC and DNR

1.2: Create 3 legislative priorities annually all groups can get behind

**Recommendations:**

- Support of the Secretary of Agriculture's request for the Water Quality Initiative
- Support tax credits for conservation practices
- Municipalities be given certainty that investments they make in the watershed will be credited to their permit

1.3: Assist members and farmers to have a relationship with their legislators

**Recommendation:**

-WPAC will make available a one sheet document of the recommendations in the legislative report for members to use in communicating priorities to their legislators

**Goal 2:** Promote nongovernment incentives and agricultural technologies

**Objectives:**

2.1: Identify, understand and compile all private sector incentive opportunities for conservation and agricultural technologies

2.2: Invite private sector speakers and speakers with expertise on agricultural technologies

2.3: Identify opportunities for and encourage additional private sector engagement and agricultural technology development

2.4: Focus conservation marketing on agronomic benefits

**Recommendations:**

- Bring in experts to speak

- Education and outreach be conducted to the private sector

- Funding to promote private sector engagement and for the research of emerging pollution control technologies

**Tasks being conducted to make recommendation:** Information is being requested of IDALS-DSC and DNR

**Goal 3:** Advance the installation of CREP Wetlands

**Objectives:** In development

**Recommendations:**

- TBD

**Tasks being conducted to make recommendation:** Information is being requested

**Date for next meeting set for June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1:30 – 3PM, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation**

2015 Watershed Planning Advisory Council (WPAC) Task Force #3:

OBJECTIVE: DEVELOP RELIABLE PROTOCOLS AND PROCEDURES FOR  
POLLUTION CONTROL QUANTIFICATION

Members of WPAC Task Force #3 submit the following recommendations to the larger WPAC membership for consideration and consensus:

Recommendation No. 1:

**We recommend that all Water Quality Initiative watershed projects include appropriate water quality monitoring and assessment elements in order to evaluate the effectiveness of practices on nutrient reduction. Members of the Water Resources Coordinating Council (WRCC) will develop monitoring protocols for the watersheds (for example, developing baselines, using paired watershed analysis, etc.).**

We further recommend the following parameters for such monitoring:

- Utilize a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) which includes Best Practices;
- Utilize DNR certified laboratories for water quality analysis;
- Provide list of approved monitoring program providers to watershed groups and organizations;
- Make aggregate water quality data, which does not identify individual farms, available to the public;
- It is up to the discretion of WRCC whether to retroactively begin a monitoring program in the existing projects.

Water quality monitoring is an integral component of watershed projects for these reasons:

- To secure stakeholder involvement by raising awareness about water quality issues;
- To responsibly and effectively manage limited resources—with limited resources, it is important to validate which practices are producing results on particular landscapes and target those practices accordingly;
- To ground-truth (calibrate, evaluate) modeling;
- To set baselines and demonstrate progress using legitimate scientific data which ensure accountability;
- Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy calls for it under Accountability and Verification Measures, Regarding Nonpoint Sources, Section 1.4(6)(3) pg. 25;
- Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Inspector General's report recommends doing so in addition to cataloguing practice adoption (September, 2014, Chapter 2 entitled "Nutrient Pollution: EPA Needs to Work With States to Develop Strategies for Monitoring the Impact of State Activities on the Gulf of Mexico Hypoxic Zone", pages 8-14, excerpt attached).

It is also important to consider:

- Individual farm-level data must be protected;

- Monitoring must not be done in isolation, but rather as part of a larger picture including educating and informing stakeholders; and
- The amount of funds allocated to monitoring must not be so large as to detract from practice implementation.

## Recommendation No. 2:

We recommend commissioning a study, conducted by outside experts in water quality monitoring and data analysis, of all Iowa water quality monitoring programs in order to: a. ensure coordination of water quality monitoring activity around the state; b. to identify any gaps and/or redundancies; and c. make the information readily available to the public at the watershed level. Members of WPAC may assist by advocating for legislative funding for the study.

- 1) Compile a detailed inventory of current monitoring programs including names of organizations conducting monitoring programs, data quality, and monitoring locations, frequencies, and parameters. *The report that Iowa Department of Natural Resources is considering, under the direction of Roger Bruner, might suffice for this component.*
- 2) Define state monitoring program objectives and potential uses of monitoring data
  - i. Multiple objectives at different HUC levels
- 3) Evaluate adequacy of the existing monitoring framework including monitoring locations, methods, and parameters, as well as gaps and/or redundancies, and recommend appropriate modifications
- 4) Develop recommendations for coordination of monitoring programs by various organizations to ensure a more comprehensive, cost effective program. Combine resources of several groups and agencies including:
  - i. Iowa Department of Natural Resources
  - ii. United States Geological Survey
  - iii. Iowa State University
  - iv. IHR Hydroscience and Engineering, University of Iowa
  - v. Commodity Producer Organizations such as the Iowa Soybean Association
  - vi. Environmental Interest Groups such as Iowa Environmental Council and its member organizations
  - vii. Professional and Trade Organizations such as the Iowa Water Environment Association and American Water Works Association including wastewater and water treatment facility operators
  - viii. Others

5) Potential Experts

- ix. Environmental Consulting firm (ENVIRON, TetraTech, others?) to conduct the study, act as facilitator among the monitoring entities, and make appropriate recommendations;
- x. In-State review panel in addition to outside Iowa such as university professors and others.

Recommendation No. 3:

*<More detail to come on this recommendation; discussion at a later date.>*

We recommend developing statistical methods for normalizing nutrient water quality data to account for seasonal variations in precipitation, temperature, and other factors that impact nutrient transport. Normalizing the data will allow valid year to year comparisons to assess overall nutrient reduction progress.

Submitted by Task Force #3 Members: Greg Sindt, Iowa Water Environment Association (alternate Jay Brady); Robin Fortney, Iowa Rivers Revival; Mike Delaney, Iowa Conservation Alliance (alternate Steve Roe); and Jennifer Terry, Iowa Environmental Council. Matt Lechtenberg, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, serves on the work group in an advisory position.