

URBANWATERS

A Partnership Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities

January 26, 2018 - 9:30AM-12:15PM Central
NIRPC, 6100 Southport Rd, Portage, IN 46368

Meeting Notes

I. Welcome & Introductions

In attendance: Jennifer Birchfield (NWI Urban Waters Coordinator), Rich Underkofler (Town of Highland), Ethan Brown (Alliance for the Great Lakes), Jim Sweeney (Porter County Izaak Walton League (IWLA)), Jim Semelka (Graf Tree Care), Maggie Byrne (DNR Lake Michigan Coastal Program (LMCP)), Nathanael Pilla (Save the Dunes), Amanda Glanz (Michigan City Forestry), Kris Krouse (Shirley Heinze Land Trust), Spike Peller (Michigan City Engineering), Mingyan Zhou (City of Valparaiso), Bill Iltzsche (IWLA), Gary Brown (IWLA), Ryan Bennett (Indiana University Northwest (IUN) Student), Dwayne Polarek (City of Lake Station), Teri Norkus (City of Lake Station), Kaitlyn McClain (LMCP), Jen Fisher (IUN), Russell Hodge (Hodge Tree Care), Tim Kingsland (City of Hobart), Cherie Fisher (US Forest Service (USFS)), Gene Fleming (Chicago District Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE)), Lynda Lancaster (National Park Service), Drew Hart (USFS), Grace Krouse (NPS), Milo Milhatovic (Michigan City Sanitary District), Sequoya Hayes (Independent Researcher), Greg Thoman (LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)), Derek Schmitt (USDA - National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)), Elizabeth McCloskey (US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)), Julie Peller (Valparaiso University), Geof Benson (Dunes Learning Center (DLC)), Nicole Messacar (LaPorte County SWCD), Arber Himaj (Michigan City Sanitary District), Rachelle Ceaser (City of Gary), Jennifer Gott (The Field Museum), Katherine Moore Powell (The Field Museum), Joe Exl (Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission), Sam Henderson (Hoosier Environmental Council)



Figure 1. 39 partners attended the NWI Urban Waters meeting on January 26th, 2018.

After introductions, Jen Birchfield gave a brief overview of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, overviewed of agenda and meeting goals, and meeting ground rules.

II. Review Major Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Partnership Successes

Jen and Cherie gave a brief presentation of the major accomplishments of the NWI UW Partnership to date with emphasis on 2017 accomplishments. Jen distributed a draft summary of major 2017 accomplishments (See Attachment). Jen asked the group, “have we missed any major accomplishments”

Comments and discussion regarding major accomplishments:

Geof Benson (DLC) – The installation of canoe/kayak launches throughout NWI.

Nicole Messacar (LaPorte Co. SWCD) – The Michigan City High School Wolves Environmental Restoration Team.

Porter County IWLA asked for more information on the project and expressed interest in implementing similar programming in Porter Co.

Tim Kingsland (Hobart) – Thank you to IDNR-LMCP for their grants and support.

Rich Underkofler (Highland) – Natalie helped town secure grant for recently completed tree inventory and thank you to the CommuniTree program. Access to federal officials has been useful.

Polling on benefits and roles of Urban Waters



The group was polled (poll later e-mailed to NWI UW list) “In one word, what is the biggest benefit of participating in the Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Partnership?” The word cloud at left depicts the 17 responses received during and after the meeting.

Figure 2. Word cloud generated by participants on benefits of participating in Urban Waters.

The group was polled “Which roles/services of Urban Waters are most important to you?”

- Communication and partnership building – 4 votes (67%)
- Grant seeking/writing support – 1 vote (17%)
- Trainings – 1 vote (17%)
- Direct assistance implementing projects – 0 votes
- Technical expertise – 0 votes
- Other – 0 votes

Comments on benefits of Urban Waters

Nicole Messacar (LaPorte Co. SWCD) – UW adds capacity.

Geof Benson (DLC) – Connection to federal staff is a big benefit. Geof gave an example of Drew Hart responding within hours to a community forestry need. How do we sustain it and replace capacity?

III. [Establish Tasks & Future Successes for 2018 and beyond](#)

Jen asked the group to go around the room and briefly respond to the questions:

- What is your organization planning that Urban Waters partners and the ambassador can support?
- What are the main challenges to your organization and urban waters-related projects?

Attendee responses on projects and challenges

Porter Co. IWLA (Jim Sweeney, Bill Iltzsche, Gary Brown)

- Need help finding volunteers for stream monitoring. Need funding and promotion for family nature hikes. Interested in connecting to the Trail Creek Watershed Partnership's Michigan City High School Restoration program to create a similar program on Salt Creek and property near Purdue Northwest. Interested in water quality monitoring on Salt Creek (Jen suggested they connect with Valparaiso University).

Liz McCloskey (USFWS)-

Need to keep the Grand Calumet River clean and address aquatic invasive species.

Tim Kingsland (City of Hobart) –

Working to improve green infrastructure and address invasive species in Lake George, permitting is a challenge. Water quality testing in Lake George is ongoing. Improving access to Lake George for paddling. Nathanael Pilla and Tim discussed the need for a workshop on aquatic submerged plants and a vegetation inventory for Lake George.

Geof Benson (DLC)-

Staff capacity and focus is a challenge. The ambassador can help with grants. Need help with work to open the East Branch of the Little Calumet River at DLC campus.

Russell Hodge (Hodge Tree Care)-

Towns do not have enough urban forestry capacity and dedicated staff. Need training and capacity for tree maintenance. Address the gap for upkeep of municipal inventories.

Jennifer Gott - The Field Museum

Vacant to Vibrant program can use help making connections

Ryan Bennett (Indiana University Northwest (IUN) Student)-

Working with the CommuniTree program and looking to make connections.

Katherine Moore Powell (The Field Museum)-

Looking at climate change in regards to stormwater. Looking to update green infrastructure vision and make connections to other projects.

Rachelle Ceaser (City of Gary)-

Applied for a coastal grant for green infrastructure at Buchanan. Stormwater management at Little Calumet River. Funding and partnerships. CommuniTree program and volunteer/community engagement, Vacant to Vibrant.

Derek Schmitt (NRCS)-

Works for Lake and Porter County SWCDs with private owners to get conservation on the ground. Focus on soil health, wetlands, forestry, invasives, pollinators. Helped with IWLA wetland project. Need help promoting field days, programs, and successes. Limited by internal infrastructure, staffing. Porter Co. made a new hire. Nicole Messacar commented there is no one in Derek's position in LaPorte Co. and many applicants.

Nathanael Pilla (Save the Dunes)-

Need workshop on aquatic plants, education for fishermen. Work with DLC and others.

Amanda Glanz (Michigan City)-

Maintenance of trees, green infrastructure, landscaping. Turnover of seasonal workers is challenging. No forestry crew. Need a university vector applicant.

Mingyan Zhou (City of Valparaiso)-

Working on sewer separation and upgrades. Need additional funding and grants to further work addressing severe erosion along Beauty Creek. Work with Parks department to manage and maintain trees.

Spike Peller (Michigan City Engineering)-

Need funding. Mike Kuss is doing a lot. Will need ACOE help dredging of Trail Creek if Lake level drops.

LMCP (Maggie Byrne and Deb Backhus)-

Coastal health and a sustainable Lake Michigan. Working to address coastal hazards. How do we have a better regional partnership? Wetland mapping project needs help connecting to partners. Need better collection of data for CommuniTree. Need help gathering input on grant priorities, maybe time on a future UW meeting agenda. Need help ramping up outreach on septic systems. LMCP has a funding matrix for grants as a resource for partners.

Jen Fisher (IUN)-

Help making connections to people who need monitoring/source tracking, environmental groups, sewer districts.

Ethan Brown (Alliance for the Great Lakes)-

Need help and ambassador participation with several projects. Cheney Run wetland community engagement outreach plan, developing friends group. Michigan City Blue Stormwater Advisory Group. Help connecting to other cities. Cleaning up Karwick Park.

Milo Milatovic (Michigan City Sanitary District)-

Need to bring septic communities and shoreline residents online to sewer.

Gene Fleming (ACOE)-

Continuation of GLRI funds. Many projects completed through GLRI, such as Pine Station 111A restoration. PAS funding for 50/50 cost share. 206 aquatic resource restoration and 506 or projects on the lakefront.

Shirley Heinze Land Trust (Kris Krouse)-

Explore new conservation strategies to protect and restore natural areas. Demonstrate the value of natural areas to the public and especially municipalities. Grants, funding emphasis is on restoration but maintenance needed.

Sam Henderson (Hoosier Environmental Council)-

Support to local environmental advocates. East Chicago - Grand Calumet as an asset to the community.

Lake Station (Dwayne Polarek and Teri Norkus)-

Looking to put in a canoe launch at veteran's park. Want Rails to Trails Partnership. Educate the public and network.

Richard Underkofler (Town of Highland)-

Need help with best management practices for stormwater management at points of discharge, particularly low cost. Need watershed management plan for the West Branch of Little Calumet River.

Jim Graf (Graf Tree Care)-

Looking to develop regional coordination and to be a resource. Education and inventories.

LaPorte County SWCD (Nicole Messacar)-

Need NRCS partnership for Trail Creek Watershed Partnership. Wants clarification of geographic extent of Urban Waters. Cherie answered that group prioritized focus areas in early stages of partnership, generally within Lake Michigan Basin. Information and guidance on CAFOs. Better community engagement, diversity, and public participation in Trail Creek Watershed Partnership.

Sequoya Hayes (Independent contractor and social worker)-

Need to connect to urban communities and address gap of who is in the room. Need improved community outreach and she can help.

Poll Questions:

The group was asked to respond to an open-ended poll question: "Thinking broadly across the region, are there regional urban waters-related needs that aren't being addressed or need assistance?" One meaningful response was provided (two others were single words "possibly" and "yes"):

"Water Quality Management Plan for West Watershed of the Little Calumet River and best management economical design plans for treating stormwater from pipes that drain to ditches that flow to the river."

The group was polled "*In one word, what is your biggest challenge or need that the Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Partnership can help with in 2018-19?*"

Responses: *Information, Partnerships, Maintenance training for newly planted trees by Forest Service, Experts, Education, Money, Promotion, Access to partners who could use help with consultant services, Funding, and Site ID.*

IV. Meeting format discussion

Poll: Would you prefer that NWI UW Partnership meets

- Continue with quarterly meetings- 4 votes (24%)
- Replace Quarterly meetings with a series of partner discussion/work groups about topics of shared interest- 6 votes (35%)
- Replace quarterly meetings with learning series of workshops and/or webinars- 3 votes (18%)
- Continue quarterly meetings and add work group meetings- 4 votes (24%)*

*Note: The first three options were presented in a poll at the January 26th meeting. Based upon initial results and discussion, it became clear that many participants preferred a fourth option “Continue quarterly meetings and add work group meetings”. This option was added to the poll before e-mailing it to the larger partnership.

Poll: Where do you prefer to meet?

- NIRPC in Portage- 12 votes (80%)
- Rotate locations throughout Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties- 3 votes (20%)
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Poll: What meeting activities are most useful (Rank)

- Local case studies or tours (1st)
- Discussion of common regional needs (2nd)
- Presentations on tools or skills *and* Roundtable partner updates (Tied for 3rd)

Poll: “What are some topics you would like to see covered in workshop, webinar, or tour?”

- *Environmental Justice (2 upvotes)*
- *CAFOs (1 upvote)*
- *Community Engagement (1 upvote)*
- *Citizen Science (1 upvote)*
- *Green Infrastructure Maintenance (1 upvote)*
- *Effects of extreme weather (1 upvote)*
- *Aquatic invasive management*
- *Aquatics Water quality in association to fish species and other aquatic life*
- *Training on pruning of young, newly planted trees.*
- *Economical engineering design plans or treating storm water that flows to ditches and waterways.*
- *Wetland and stream restoration*
- *Project management*

I. Grant Updates/ Other Business/Announcements

Jen announced several open grant opportunities.

Attachment: Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Partnership

Draft Key 2017 Accomplishments

Regional Urban Waters Accomplishments

- **Ambassador Transition.** The Partnership successfully transitioned to a new Ambassador.
- **E-newsletter.** The e-newsletter distribution list continues to grow and now includes 377 subscribers with average open and click rates (31% and 29% respectively) higher than industry average.
- **Federal Partnership Participation.** The Ambassador participated in regular Urban Waters calls and assisted with tasks, such as reviewing Ambassador Toolkit materials and encouraging voting for the Samuel J. Heyman Service to America award, which the Partnership won.
- **OneDOI/USGS Monitoring.** NWI has been selected for the One DOI Initiative, and outgrowth of Urban Waters. The Ambassador communicated with DOI national staff to initiate the partnership. The One DOI Initiative resulted in USGS matching funds for monitoring being made available to NWI, and the Ambassador worked with USGS to identify appropriate projects for monitoring.
- **Canoemobile.** The Ambassador and multiple Partners contributed on-shore educational activities as part of Wilderness Inquiry Canoemobile educational programs hosted by the Trail Creek Watershed Partnership and Dunes Learning Center. Over 4,500 students and residents from throughout Northwest Indiana were engaged. The National Park Service staff provided funding.
- **CommuniTree.** The Student Conservation Association Calumet Tree Conservation Corps worked to plant and maintain trees with the help of volunteers. Additionally, trees were distributed to community partners through a grant program administered by NIRPC. This year, CommuniTree provided 2 tree care workshops and planted over 1,500 trees. The Ambassador, USFS, and other Urban Waters Partners assisted in volunteer recruitment, workshops, application review, tree distribution, and more.
- **Funding.** The Ambassador and lead agencies helped local partners develop more than 9 funding applications to federal, state, and private grant programs, resulting in nearly 1.5 million in awards with several proposals still pending (*preliminary numbers*).
- **Septic System Outreach.** Save the Dunes conducted a LMCP-funded septic system outreach campaign specific to NWI. The Ambassador helped with many tasks, including piloting a residential sign campaign in two communities, input on outreach materials, and presentations to local communities.
- **Indiana Master Watershed Steward Program.** The Ambassador and several partners wrote or reviewed modules and helped Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant develop an educational program that will recruit and train watershed volunteers for local watershed groups throughout the region.
- **Student engagement in service-learning.** The Ambassador shared information with local university students and professors regarding community and partner events and opportunities, such as volunteer, employment, and internship opportunities. She is working with community partners to compile a list of research-based internship opportunities for PNW students.
- **HUC Boundaries.** USGS proposed changes to the working group on the Watershed Boundary Dataset (WBD) to address boundary re-definition for waterways in northwest Indiana.
- **Committee Participation.** The Ambassador served on several committees, providing assistance in planning, grant seeking, outreach, technical expertise, and more. Committees served this year include IDEM's

Lake Michigan Lakewide Area Management Plan (LAMP) Work Group, Citizens Advisory for the Remediation of the Environment (CARE) Committee, and Jeorse Park Task Force; the Gary Green Infrastructure Committee, Vacant to Vibrant, the Trail Creek Watershed Partnership (serve as chair of Grants and Fundraising Subcommittee), and others.

Trail Creek Watershed Partnership

- The Ambassador and several provided technical assistance in monthly Trail Creek Watershed Partnership meetings and the Ambassador became the Chair of the Grants Committee.
- The Trail Creek Watershed Partnership held the first Creekness Stakes, a canoe race designed to raise awareness and funds for Trail Creek Week. The Ambassador and several Urban Waters partners participated in and/or helped to plan the event.
- The Ambassador and other Urban Waters Partners assisted in several environmental education events, such as Trail Creek week and summer camps.
- Michigan City Sanitary District, the Alliance for the Great Lakes, and the Delta Institute obtained funding for and are beginning planning for the Cheney Run/stormwater wetland project. The Ambassador and several Urban Waters partners are assisting in public engagement tasks.

Grand Calumet River and Grand Calumet Area of Concern

- USACE began construction of an ecosystem restoration project at Jeorse Park Beach that will improve habitat, reduce non-point source runoff, and reduce gull activity.
- Michigan State University completed the USACE-funded modelling of the impact of modification of the breakwater at Jeorse Park Beach on bacterial levels.
- IDEM continued the EPA-funded gull exclusion project at Jeorse Park Beach with, which greatly reduced bacterial levels and decreased the number of beach closure days.
- USGS worked with State and local partners to collect data to quantify the volume of stormwater captured and not directly discharged to sewers by a rain garden installed at Gary City Hall.
- The City of Gary and the Alliance for the Great Lakes continued the Vacant to Vibrant program with a series of neighborhood design charrettes. The Ambassador served on the steering committee.

East Branch Little Calumet River and Salt Creek

- The NPS River Use and Management Plan for the EBLC River was finalized and signed in 2017.
- Northwest Indiana Paddling Association worked to open portions of the river.
- Save the Dunes, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, and Dunes Learning Center completed restoration and public access work along river and received a Chi-Cal Rivers Fund grant to continue work.

Deep River Watershed

- NIRPC administered a 319 cost-share program to implement the Deep River WMP.
- NIRPC began an engineering feasibility study on removal of the Deep River dam.