

Minutes
Meeting of the Sustainable Natural Resources Task Force
10:00 a.m., September 28, 2011
The Garrison at Ft. Benjamin State Park

Members present: Senator Doug Eckerty; Senator Richard Young; Representative Mike Karickhoff; Representative Phil Pflum; Ray McCormick (IASWCD); Robert Woodling, (IFWOA); Bill Weeks (ILPA); Dave Wyeth (IFB); Mary McConnell (TNC); and Steve Cecil (IWF).

Others present: Chris Smith (DNR); Jerod Chew (ISDA); Megan Ritter (IFB); Barb Simpson (IWF); Lynn Dennis and Angela Hughes (TNC); John Baugh (PU); Ray Chatten (IASWCD); Dean Farr (PF); James Henry and Ashley Bechman, Indiana AgriNews.

1. Introductions.

Chairman called the meeting to order; members introduced themselves.

2. Minutes.

The Chairman asked members to review the minutes.

3. Presentation, Chris Smith, Legislative Liaison, Department of Natural Resources (PowerPoint attached)

Mr. Smith organized the presentation by divisions. He began with State Parks and Reservoirs and provided details on funding, land management and special projects. Ag lands owned by the DNR are leased to farmers and task force members discussed the rental rates. Chris detailed DNR's efforts in recruitment and retention of hunters and anglers, but also hikers, boaters/paddlers and other passive users. Task force asked about impacts from budget cuts. Mr. Smith noted the State Park's budget is 2/3 user fee based, making them less vulnerable than surrounding states that have closed properties, while Indiana has not. The DNR transitioned Roush Reservoir to a Fish and Wildlife area. (The property's constituents are more oriented toward fish and wildlife activities.) This change enables the DNR to use hunting and fishing license revenue and federal matching dollars to manage the property.

When asked about weaknesses, Mr. Smith mentioned two: DNR lacking the opportunity to look for new funding opportunities and across the board staffing issues, including hiring, retaining, and salary inequity with other states. He also noted the long history of debate about payment in lieu of tax for DNR land that is taken off of the tax rolls.

Next division discussed was the Division of Fish and Wildlife. He provided detail of their funding, of which a significant and stable portion comes from hunters and anglers and federal matching dollars primarily through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Acts. Hunting and fishing license fees are matched 3 to 1. This funding is fairly stable due to Indiana's efforts to attract and retain hunters and fishermen. He detailed other sources of funding, including the lifetime license fund, the nongame fund and the LARE program. Task force members asked about the use of LARE funds as a general offset and if hunting and fishing license fees could also be used as offset. Chris noted that the LARE funds can be moved, but hunting/fishing license revenues cannot. There would be enormous penalties from using license fee revenue because of federal matching requirements.

Due to time constraints the presentations on the Division of Nature Preserves, Lake Michigan Coastal Program, Division of Forestry and Division of Entomology and Plant Pathology, as well as the Indiana Heritage Trust were brief.

There was a question asking what was DNR's biggest concern? Chris noted that invasive species across all areas of their work is a concern, not just from the threat to ecological system, but detracting from other endeavors. It requires timely action, making it difficult to plan for. It will continue to be an issue over time due the increasing global economy.

The Chair mentioned the possibility of DNR going into more detail on certain aspects of their presentation at a later date.

4. Presentation: Tom Easterly, Commissioner, Indiana Department of Environmental Management (PowerPoint attached)

Commissioner Easterly provided an overview of their wastewater and drinking water programs. On the permitting program, which is improving, the Department has brought contract work in-house saving a great deal of money. He also shared information on federal hazardous waste sites and groundwater clean-up.

He reported on improvements in air quality and noted communities and power plants that still have some issues.

Commissioner Easterly reported on the 319 program success in reducing the move of sediments and nitrogen into our streams and waterways. Questions from the task force followed on impaired waters. The commissioner indicated that Indiana samples more and allows only one negative sample to count a stream as impaired. There is no uniform national standard. Their sampling is not showing more nitrogen and phosphorus. The department has been using economic stimulus funds to sample on the Wabash but they will not be able to maintain that. The Commissioner referred to data that shows the Ohio River inputs of nitrogen and phosphorus are staying level, while the Mississippi River continues to increase. The Western Lake Erie Basin total phosphorus load is level, but soluble phosphorus is increasing. It was also reported that there has been a 99% decrease in PCBs in fish.

The task force also inquired about mercury levels. Commissioner Easterly indicated IDEM has reduced mercury discharges by 20%, wet deposition 7%, and no change in bioaccumulation in fish--flat trend.

On greenhouse gases, Commissioner Easterly commented that the National Academy of Science says that climate change is a fact. He shared his concerns about the difficulty of reducing the greenhouse gas footprint in Indiana to the recommended levels. The Commissioner is seeking signatures from Midwest governors on a resolution asking EPA and DOE to comment on how the states are to accomplish the reductions.

5. Presentation: Jerod Chew, Director of Environmental Stewardship, Indiana Department of Agriculture (PowerPoint attached)

Mr. Chew stated that when water is tested, nitrogen and phosphorus levels are high and USGS data shows trend line of nitrogen and phosphorus going into the Gulf is going up. Jerod suggested that a meeting about water quality issues and tools could be an hour or so and offered to assist the task force with that if required. Indiana is serving on the Gulf Nutrient Task Force. Currently all actions are voluntary.

Threats to Indiana and its natural resources as a result of high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus—IN ranks 3rd and 6th in nitrogen and phosphorus out of 31 states--include: 1) the Midwest is a big target in efforts to address nitrogen and phosphorus; 2) improvements may increase food prices since change will not be cheap; and 3) blue green algae poses health threats and costs associated with treatment and abatement.

Other threats discussed included the cost of drainage maintenance and reducing sedimentation, as well as a more environmentally conscious public. This increased awareness can also be an opportunity.

Jerod spent time explaining the structure of the Environmental Stewardship and their interaction with State Soil Conservation Board and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The division works closely with State Soil Conservation Board (7 appointees of the Governor) that guide Soil and Water Conservation Districts' (SWCD) work and also administer Clean Water Indiana funds. A key part of what the ISDA does is support SWCDs. Jerod acts as administrator of the State Soil Conservation Board. Discussed the Indiana Conservation Partnership

The division has 34 staff. One question was asked about staff reductions and the impacts on their work and how would more funding be used. There are 3 district supervisors and 46 resource specialists. When these positions were under DNR there were 60-70 positions. Jerod said the Division works as efficiently as possible. Fewer staff obviously limits their outreach capability. If given more funding, he indicated his highest priority would probably be to provide more grant money and support to SWCDs.

Jerod provided details on programmatic activities and Clean Water Indiana grants. The question was raised if these funds could be used as general fund offset and how Indiana funding compares to other states? Funds have been used as offset and Indiana is typically lower than surrounding states when comparing state funding.

He noted the SWCDs are the lynchpin of Indiana's delivery system. In some situations a county hasn't been supported or provided funding locally and sometimes it is staff retention issue. State dollars and county dollars can dwarf grant funding. Another question followed. Given Indiana's model and the heavy reliance on county funding, is that a significant threat? Jerod said certainly some counties don't have man hours to put together quality grants, etc.

The question was asked, how can the task force help? Jerod referred to a report from a committee appointed by the Governor in the 1980s to do a soil resource study. That committee recommended \$14 million as a minimum level of funding and recommended 90 technical people and cost share funding to take care of soil resources in our state.

6. Conclusion of Meeting

The Chair concluded, putting the last few agenda items off until the next meeting. He will put together his thoughts on how we should proceed and send it to the task force members to respond with their ideas. The chair asked The Nature Conservancy and Indiana Wildlife Federation representatives to do a presentation on biodiversity and wildlife for the next meeting.

The next meeting date was changed from October 26 to November 10th from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm at The Nature Conservancy office (620 E. Ohio) and will include a lunch. The task force will hear the presentations with ample time for discussion and to map the Task Force's schedule for the rest the work.

Meeting was adjourned.