

Illinois River Coordinating Council
May 10, 2006 Meeting Minutes
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield

Call to Order:

Marc Miller, Office of Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn, called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Roll Call:

Marc Miller, Office of the Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn, called the roll:

Citizen Members

Rich Nichols (for Lee Bunting), Doug Blodgett (for Michael Reuter), Brad McMillan, Daphne Mitchell, and Wendell Shauman.

State Agency Members

Steve Chard (IDOA), Terry Weldin-Frisch (DCEO), Leslie Sgro (DNR), Charles Perino (IDOT) and Marcia Willhite (IEPA)

Ex-Officio Members

Ron Fisher (US FWS), Scott Whitney (for Colonel Duane Gapinski, US ACE), Roy Deda (US ACE), Bill Kruidenier (College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences, U of I, Chris Urban (US EPA), Robert Holmes (USGS), William Gradle (USDA – NRCS), Jim Ross (USDA – FSA) and John Rogner (US FWS).

Members Absent

Richard Worthen (Citizen Member), Margaret Frisbie (Citizen Member), John Rogner (US FWS), and Commander Dave Fish (US Coast Guard).

Approval of Minutes:

Marc Miller asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the January 27, 2006 meeting held at the Zone Community Center in Chicago. Brad McMillan moved to accept and Marcia Willhite seconded the motion. The Council approved the minutes.

Opening Remarks:

Chairman Quinn announced that the Illinois River CREP program received \$10 Million dollars in the State budget, for a total of \$100 million Federal and State dollars in two

years. The Illinois River Sediment Initiative also received funding in the budget for Mud to Parks projects. The River Watch program has migrated from the Friends of the Fox River to the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center. The Mississippi River Coordinating Council, which creates a sister council to address the Mississippi River mainstem and its tributaries, passed both the House and the Senate.

Member Comment Period:

Robert Holmes – USGS thanked the DNR and other agencies for continuing to fund the stream monitoring gages in Illinois.

Chris Urban – US EPA announced that May is Wetlands Month and directed people to the US EPA's website www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands for more information.

Roy Deda – US ACE gave a fish barrier update. The permanent barrier is up and operational. However, testing of that barrier produced some concern over the electric current. Work is being done to fix the problem.

Jim Ross - USDA - FSA said that the CRP program is celebrating 20 years of existence during which 36 million acres were enrolled in conservation.

Brad McMillan – Citizen Member resigned his seat on the Council. Rep. LaHood's staff was advised to remove themselves from boards seeking funding from Congress due to ethical issues. Mr. McMillan will continue to attend meetings and be involved on a public level.

Chairman Quinn thanked Mr. McMillan for his service to the Council.

Leslie Sgro - IDNR announced that the DNR is excited that the CREP program received money in the State Budget. Money is also available from DNR for the cost share at Peoria Island.

Abraham Lincoln, the Sangamon River, and Other River Tales:

Lonn Pressnall – Richland Community College gave a presentation dressed in the likeness of President Abraham Lincoln. As a young man in Illinois, Abraham Lincoln had many adventures. Transportation in that time relied heavily on rivers, and Lincoln, working on various boats and also exploring various stream and rivers, had an intimate knowledge of the Sangamon, Illinois, and Mississippi Rivers. Mr. Pressnall gave accounts of some of the river adventures that shaped Abraham Lincoln.

Sangamon River: A Sense of Place:

Charles Schweighauser - University of Illinois at Springfield showed highlights from his documentary film *Sangamon River: A Sense of Place*. This film, which took 10 years to produce, documents the life and connections to the Sangamon River. The selected clip from the film showed how local residence catch catfish with their bare hands.

Sangamon Conservancy Trust:

Tom Skelly – Sangamon Conservancy Trust provided information about the Trust and the work that they do. The Sangamon Conservancy Trust is a not-for-profit organization formed to support the work of the Sangamon County Soil and Water Conservation District. Their mission is to foster exceptional conservation activities for the benefit of all persons and provide funding for conservation practices that reduce soil erosion and promote water quality, to provide innovative educational programs on soil conservation and farmland preservation, and to provide estate planning and land preservation opportunities for owners of farmland and natural areas. The Trust has a primary coverage area consisting of Sangamon, Christian, Macon, Logan, Menard, Cass, Morgan, Macoupin, and Montgomery Counties.

Chairman Quinn asked if there are other trusts like this one in the Illinois River watershed.

Mr. Skelly said he did not believe that other trusts existed in the Illinois River watershed. There are only one or two other not-for-profit groups associated with Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the State of Illinois.

Sangamon Targeted Watershed Grant and Biomass Energy Learning Group:

Steve John – Agricultural Watershed Institute gave an update on the Sangamon Targeted Watershed Grant and provided information about Biomass Energy Learning. In 2004, the Agricultural Watershed Institute received the US EPA's Targeted Watershed Grant nomination from Governor Blagojevich. The proposal for this grant addresses hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico. This was a three-year grant, but due to some delays they asked for an extension. Some of the grant money is used to provide risk insurance to farmers that use management practices that reduce the amount of nutrients lost to the streams. Other uses of the grant money include - efficient nitrogen fertilizer management studies, drainage water management, and soil testing as a diagnostic tool. In a separate effort, Mr. John is also looking at biomass to produce energy. The proposed Upper Sangamon Watershed Farm Power project will engage essential participants in exploring innovative ways to close the gap between current fossil fuels prices and the price required to induce farmers or landowners to grow dedicated energy crops. The participants will also explore a viable market for biomass as a fuel stock.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program:

Jim Ross – USDA -FSA gave an update on CREP. He reminded the council that there is \$10 million in the state budget for CREP. Members of DNR, NRCS, FSA and others will need to discuss the logistics of a landowner sign up for the program. Decisions need to be made about when the sign up will be and what kind of sign up to have this year. In 2005, there was a lottery system sign up that yielded 1,118 offers that represented 35,000 Federal acres and 19,000 State acres. They were able to accept 22,500 acres of Federal ground and 14,000 acres of State ground. About the same number of acres accepted in 2005 will be accepted 2006.

Debbie Bruce – IDNR added that overall the lottery system for the sign up worked well.

Status of Landowner Incentive Program:

Debbie Bruce – IDNR gave an update on the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP). In February, the LIP Technical Committee recommended funding for 16 projects. This funding was approved and landowner agreements and implementation will begin the summer of 2006. When implemented these projects will enhance or restore 616 acres. This program has been an enormous success and landowner interest is high.

Van Bitner – Mason County SWCD provided his perspective on the program as a participating landowner. He currently has 2 projects, totaling 67 acres, accepted into the LIP program. One of the projects is a hill prairie habitat and the other is wetland habitat. Mr. Bitner likes the LIP program for many reasons; landowners can manage their land for species in greatest need of conservation, financial and technical resources are available to landowners, and local SWCD offices coordinate parts of the LIP effort.

Update on Spoon River Incentives Program:

Bill Gradle – NRCS gave an update on the status of the Spoon River Incentives Program. All eligible applications from the Cedar Creek Watershed have been approved. The estimated total cost of the 45 projects is \$1 Million. \$700,000 will come from NRCS's EQIP cost share funds. Ten applications, from other parts of the Spoon River Watershed were also approved. The estimated cost of these projects is \$650,000. EQIP funds are estimated at \$445,000. Applications were approved in Fulton, Knox, Peoria, Stark, and Warren Counties. Contracts for these programs should be developed by June 2006 and first construction will be whenever the landowners are ready. IDNR is set to help in the cost sharing on most of the projects.

WRDA, Lock and Dam Maintenance, and Navigation Study Status:

Scott Whitney – US ACE gave an update on the progress of several Army Corps' projects and programs. The Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) has been completed and the implementation of the study is getting underway. Some of the projects that are being implemented in the Illinois River Watershed include; a new 1200' lock at LaGrange, new 1200' lock at Peoria, switchboats, and mooring cells. The comprehensive plan for the Illinois River Basin Restoration was up for public review in March 2006. Six meetings were held and 170 people attended. They are currently working to finalize the report based on public comment. In WRDA 2000, the Corps was authorized to work on Critical Restoration Projects. There are 16 projects considered critical in the Illinois River Basin, when funding is made available they are ready to begin work on most of those projects.

There are three projects along the Illinois River that are in major need of Operation and Maintenance funds. These are the LaGrange Concrete repairs, Lockport Approach Dike, and the T.J. O'Brien Controlling Works. These projects have been approved but have not received funding.

The House of Representatives approved its version of WRDA 2006 in 2005 and the Senate is set to vote on its version by the end of June 2006.

Mud to Marshes:

John Marlin – WMRC gave an update on Mud to Marshes. Louisiana is looking at several different sites as possibilities for a project. Some options include using the sediment in backwater marshes or to build land bridges, which maintain the salinity between the Gulf of Mexico and fresh water marshes and stop storm surges. Illinois would be a viable option for Louisiana to receive sediment because it can be easily loaded on a barge and shipped down stream and be unloaded onto the marshes. The Army Corps in Louisiana has said that if the sediment is chemically approved for use they have places that it could be used right away.

Proposed Mercury Air Emission Rule:

Marcia Willhite – IEPA gave a presentation on the Governor's Mercury Air Emission Rule. Illinois has a statewide fish consumption advisory for mercury. The main stem of the Illinois River and its major tributaries are identified as being impaired due to mercury. This means that the public is limited to the amount of fish that can be safely consumed out of these bodies of water. A main source of mercury is deposition from the atmosphere. Coal-fire power plants are the major contributor of atmospheric mercury. In order to get below the Illinois fish consumption advisory level, there needs to be a 90% reduction of mercury in fish tissue. The amount of mercury that needs to be reduced to achieve this level of reduction is unsure. There have been suggestions that there is a 1:1 relationship. Other states have documented a significant decrease of mercury in fish tissues shortly following reductions in air emissions of mercury. There is a Federal rule that will require coal-fired power plants to reduce their air emissions of mercury by 70%

by 2018. In January of 2006, Governor Blagojevich directed IEPA to create a mercury rule aimed at reducing 90% of mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants by 2012.

National Fish Habitat Initiative:

Nate Caswell – US Fish and Wildlife Service gave an update on the National Fish Habitat Initiative (NFHI). Currently the NFHI board is being formed. This board will ultimately determine the criteria for partnerships and what funding will be available to those partnerships. Director Dale Hall will chair the NFHI board. The board will meet, for the first time, the summer of 2006. It is expected that the board will develop some criteria for partnerships and it will be in place by the end of 2006.

Marc Miller asked Mr. Caswell if a combination Mississippi and Illinois River partnership would be more favorable as a partner than the IRCC alone.

Mr. Caswell said the Fish and Wildlife Service did not want to speculate or steer groups in one direction or the other because the criteria for becoming a partnership has not been created.

Other Business:

Chairman Quinn announced that the next IRCC meeting will be Thursday, August 17, 2006 at Dickson Mounds Museum near Lewistown.

Public Comment Period:

Scott Schneider from Chicago announced that he has created a database of flora and fauna for the parks of Chicago. He is currently working on cataloging the flora and fauna species of Illinois. He would be willing to share his database with Chairman Quinn and his office.

Gerald Kuczera expressed his concern over The Wetlands Initiative's proposed nutrient farm at Saw Mill Lake.

Al Piatt from the Wetlands Initiative (TWI) addressed Mr. Kuczera's concerns and said that TWI is working on restructuring their plan and wants to work with the landowners to alleviate their concerns.

Chairman Quinn suggested that the landowners around Saw Mill Lake and the TWI get together to work out their concerns and issues. The Office of the Lieutenant Governor would like to set up meetings between the two groups.

Meeting Adjournment:

Chairman Quinn asked for a motion to adjourn. Terry Weldin-Frisch moved to adjourn the meeting and Chris Urban seconded the motion. The Council approved the motion. Chairman Quinn adjourned the meeting at 3:40 pm.