Illinois River Coordinating Council
November 6, 2008 Meeting Minutes
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie
Wilmington, Illinois
1:30 pm

Call to Order:
Marc Miller, Office of Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn, called the meeting to order at 1:26 pm, and welcomed members and guests.

Roll Call:
Citizen Members
Richard Worthen; Michael Reuter, The Nature Conservancy of Illinois; Daphne Mitchell; Nancy Erickson, Illinois Farm Bureau; and Margaret Frisbie, Friends of the Chicago River.

State Agency Members
Joe Bybee, Illinois Department of Agriculture; Terry Weldin-Frisch, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity; Debbie Bruce, Illinois Department of Natural Resources; Charles Perrino, Illinois Department of Transportation; and Marcia Willhite, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Ex-Officio Members
Colonel Robert Sinkler, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District; Sue Davis, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District; Rip Sparks, University of Illinois, College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences; Christine Urban, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; George Groschen, U.S. Geological Survey; William Gradle, U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service; Don King, U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency; John Rogner, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Lieutenant Erick Johnson, U.S. Coast Guard; Doug Wilson, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development; Lieutenant Colonel Robert Bayham, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District.

Approval of Minutes:
Mitchell moved to approve August 12, 2008 minutes. Worthen seconded. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Member Comment:
Urban announced a patch project with the Girl Scouts of America. The patch dovetails with the Lt. Governor's Clean Water Initiatives. Watershed groups and others can interface with the Girl Scouts through this program. Project booklets are available.

Miller commented that the Great Lakes Governors have recently criticized Illinois' carp barrier. As chairman of the Great Lakes Commission, the Lt. Governor is interested in ensuring the carp problem does not expand to the Great Lakes.

Lt. Johnson responded that demonstration barrier is operating at one volt per inch. The Coast Guard is working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) evaluating safety concerns on potential sparking conditions. It could be up to a year before the permanent barrier is turned on. The demonstration barrier is operating and it has been upgraded to last another five years until permanent barrier is operational.

Sparks added that he is assessing the performance of the barrier. An experiment placed common carp out between the barriers to see if they could escape. Unfortunately, a large rain event raised current velocities such that the fish were washed downstream. However, previous testing of the demonstration barrier was effective.

Frisbie mentioned that comments for the proposed Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) water quality standards for the Chicago River system are still open. For more information, please go to www.chicagoriver.org.

King commented that the Farm Bill is still in the rule writing process. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) will not roll out until fall 2009. The CRP will pilot a project in Iowa allowing wetlands construction on non-farmland.

The Once and Future Prairie State: Native polycultures for bioenergy and biodiversity - Steve John, Executive Director, Agricultural Watershed Institute (AWI)

Almost all high profile work on cellulosic bioenergy focuses on monocultures, such as switchgrass. The University of Northern Iowa's Tallgrass Prairie Center in Cedar Falls, Iowa is starting the Prairie Power Project. It is growing plots ranging from switchgrass monoculture to a five species "CRP" mix to a 16 and 32 species mix of prairie grasses and forbs. It will track energy yield and ecological parameters.

Using native polycultures pursues environmental objectives while producing energy feedstock. Projects currently are split into two groups: landscape design, and market development. For national leadership on biomass energy, legislation is needed to support near-term use of grass biomass for power and heat.

King commented that the Farm Bill allowed for five year biomass contracts in CRP. It is probably a year away from proposals.

Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie – Renee Thakali

The Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie is administered by the U.S. Forest Service, in cooperation with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and with the support of hundreds of volunteers and partner agencies, businesses, and organizations. Part of the former Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, Midewin remained largely closed to the public while the Army cleaned up contamination remaining from decades of TNT manufacturing and packaging. A bill was introduced last fall to transfer Army training land north of Midewin to the Forest Service.

The Illinois Land Conservation Act (1995 Public Law 104-106) designated the transfer of

19,165 acres of land in Illinois from the U.S. Army to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, and mandates that Midewin be managed to meet four primary objectives:

- To conserve, restore, and enhance the native populations and habitats of fish, wildlife, and plants.
- To provide opportunities for scientific, environmental, and land use education and research.
- To allow the continuation of existing agricultural uses of lands within Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie for the next 20 years, or for compatible resource management uses thereafter.
- To provide recreational opportunities which are compatible with the above purposes in mind.

There are 6,000 acres open to the public for hiking, biking, horseback riding, and hunting. The trails are open 7 days a week and the visitor's center is open 6 days a week.

The Illinois Soil Nitrogen Test – Rich Mulvaney, University of Illinois

The soils of Illinois are among the worlds richest, but Illinois farmers lead the nation in their use of fertilizer. Fertilizer application is nearly 850,000 tons per year at a cost of more than $1 billion. This rationale is a result of the 1970's "proven-yield method." The method does not take into account soil property variations, which determine nitrogen uptake by plants. The result is overfertilization. Nitrogen fertilizer rates should account for soil differences, and should be varied on a site-specific basis.

Soil nitrogen availability can be measured with the Illinois Soil Nitrogen Test (ISNT). The ISNT can help farmers cut their fertilizer costs while minimizing adverse environmental consequences from excessive nitrogen use. ISNT tests the soils nitrogen supplying power. Instead of applying the same rate throughout the whole field, the farmer has the option of cutting back the rate in good areas. The process involves adequate soil sampling, and interpretation based on test values, crop rotation, planting density, and any occurrence of a soil fertility limitation.

Discussion on Nutrient Policy – Marcia Willhite, IEPA

Nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) have been identified as a potential cause of water quality impairment in many Illinois watersheds and the Gulf of Mexico. The Clean Water Act provides two general paths for dealing with pollution problems. One is a technology-based approach that requires facilities to implement control equipment. The other is a water-quality based approach that develops Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) to reduce pollutant loading in a water body. Illinois has numerical water quality standards for lakes, but not for streams. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has been urging states to develop action-based nutrient water quality standards.

There are at least two challenges to achieving load reductions in a water-quality based approach. The first is that research has not revealed strong cause-effect relationships between nutrient concentrations in water and adverse impacts on aquatic life. The second is that once a needed load reduction is identified, the non-regulatory tools available for reducing nutrient discharges from non-point sources (the dominant contributor in many

Illinois watersheds) do not assure that targets will be met.

It is time for a stakeholder dialogue on a nutrient strategy for Illinois to reduce pollution. IEPA has committed to USEPA that it will propose a phosphorus water quality standard in late 2009-early 2010. Actions need to be identified that would reduce nutrient pollution even if water quality standards are a long time coming. Other states, lacking nutrient standards, are taking actions to reduce loads. Illinois state agencies can pool knowledge on nutrient hotspots in Illinois.

Municipalities are addressing their contributions to Gulf hypoxia through permits. However, a regional approach is needed. Even at this meeting, we have discussed new methods that can be implemented to address this issue. AWI has a program that looks at fertilizer rates and end of drain bioreactor in the upper Sangamon system. On-farm management practices can conserve nitrogen, like end of pipe bioreactors or wetlands or things like using lost fertilizer to grow energy grasses.

Reuter recommended that we create a task force to these projects at a large scale.

Reuter moved to continue this conversation and to propose a set of steps to focus on nutrient pollution at the next meeting. Wilhite seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Signs at the Crossroads: A 90-Day Plan to Cleaner Water – Kristian Gustavson

Nature is incredibly resilient. If we can allow the river to take care of itself by cleaning up our act for three months—the time it takes for the Mississippi to travel from its source, Lake Itasca, MN to the sea—we could see conditions improve relatively quickly.

The 90-Day Plan is a series of steps for individuals to take and choices to make one day at a time over the course of three months. It is a comprehensive approach for individuals to take which will provide solutions to water pollution nationwide, upstream and down, particularly, with regard to non-point pollution. Taking action will enable the participant to reduce their water mark and play a part in cleaning up the Mississippi River and subsequently the ocean. The plan is nearly operational; it will be launched once final considerations have been made.

Illinois River Working Group Proposal for NESP – Marc Miller, Lt. Governor

IRCC has been working to increase participation with the USACE planning process. This past summer, IRCC presented a proposal that creates several different levels of planning, within the Illinois River reach, under the Water Resources Development Act, NESP program. The proposal creates two Illinois River groups to work on planning and prioritization and interact with the USACE to provide input and coordination.

The USACE advised IRCC to form an Illinois River working group or technical group, from state and federal representatives, that would develop projects and report to the Rock Island's River Resources Coordination Team, and St. Louis's River Resources Action team. Task members found that unacceptable and produced a counter proposal, which lays out an Illinois River Working Group and an Illinois Rivers Executive Team that will

work on larger picture coordination. Organization of the Illinois River Team will move forward with charter creation and the establishment of members.

Mitchell moved to go ahead with the counter proposal. Bruce seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Chloride Reduction: Best Management Practices for Communities - Stephen McCracken, The Conservation Foundation

The Upper DuPage River and Salt Creek are listed as impaired for Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) on the States 303 (d) list. Locally run monitoring and analyses by the DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup (DRSCW) confirms the TMDLs conclusion that this loading is caused by chloride salt from winter de-icing operations and found substantially higher levels than those predicted. At national and international levels, several public agencies have shown significant reductions by adopting certain Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as pre-wetting, anti-icing, and alternative products. The DRSCW has launched a campaign of workshops, presentations and educational material to get these BMPs adopted across the target watersheds. BMP adoption is being monitored, as are chloride levels in receiving streams.

TMDLs set for waterways in DuPage and Cook Counties are shooting for about 30% of chloride reduction. We developed a number of reduction methods. The best BMP wets the road before spreading salt, decreasing the scatter of the salt. This can reduce salt runoff by 30%. The second best BMP is anti-icing, which puts down salt brine on the road in advance of a storm. This also reduces chloride use by 30%. The BMPs change some of the standard protocols in use, but has great potential to reduce chloride use.

Legislation requiring salt storage area protection would also reduce runoff.

Save Our State Parks – Marc Miller, Lt. Governor's Office

In September, the Governor announced the closing of 11 state parks. The Lt. Governor's online petition has around 33,000 signatures to keep state parks open. Go to www.SaveOurStateParks.org to sign the petition.

Celebrating 150 Years of the Illinois Natural History Survey – Brian Anderson, Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS)

Many employees have left INHS to take on multi-million dollar national projects. Right now, our scientists leverage $4 for every state dollar invested. Illinois is facing threats to our biota on a scale we have never before seen. We must develop new ways of working together to manage our conservation lands. Climate change can possibly cause shifts in population distributions rendering our conservation areas without their dedicated species.

INHS is developing programs for children interested in math and science. INHS also has two new publications, one about field biologists that takes excerpts from old field journals and today's scientists. Another depicts the science Illinois' of plants and animals.

The INHS state wildlife action plan divides into conservation opportunity areas. Rogner

suggested the Illinois River conservation opportunity area group speak to the IRCC.

Harnessing the Power of Sensors and Cyber infrastructure Towards Environmental Sustainability: The WATERS Network Vision and Test bedding Research in Illinois - Barbara Minsker, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The WATERS Network (http://watersnet.org) is a National Science Foundation environmental observatory initiative whose goal is to more reliably predict and manage water quantity and quality as climate changes, populations grow, land use evolves, and individual and societal choices are made. The network will address how regional-scale fresh water availability and demand will change in the future.

The network will be built using a national sampling strategy integrating existing and remotely sensed data; plus new measurements, analyses, and experiments at a realistic number of facilities and basins. We can then extend this data to large scales and to all regions through models, synthesis, remote sensing, and cyber infrastructure; and with education and outreach, citizen science, and interaction with stakeholders.

In this one-year phase of the WATERS Network design, the Upper Illinois River Basin (UIRB) has been selected as one of three test bed locations nationwide for modeling studies to identify observatory data and infrastructure needs. Identifying the role of local and state agencies and NGO's in the WATERS Network will also be a key focus.

IRCC can help by discussing research needs and compelling water problems in UIRB, inventory data, and experimental facilities available with WATERS Network researchers.

Miller invited WATERS Network to science advisory committee meeting. He recommended they work with the Great Lakes Information Network.

Other Business:

Next year's schedule: March 2 in downtown Chicago at 1:30, April 21 in Springfield, July 24 at the Chicago Botanical Garden, October 20 at the Governor's Illinois River Management Conference in Peoria.

Public Comment:

Terry Kohlbuss presented Quinn with the book *Life Along the Illinois River* by David Zalaznik for him to present to the delegation to introduce them to the Illinois River.

Sue Davis commented that Asian carp barrier one is operating and barrier two is off. No fish species have gotten through. A future report to the USACE and the Coast Guard will request activation of barrier two. Then the USACE will test at higher voltages.

Audrey Fischer, International Dark Sky Association, commented that Chicago made the cover of National Geographic because of their light pollution. There are several problems associated lighted cities. Only one Illinois town has light pollution ordinances, Homer Glen. Hinsdale and a couple other cities are looking into light pollution ordinances. Next year is the UN's National Year of Astronomy.

Michael Fisher, Calumet Watersheds Action Coalition, commented that Midewin was recipient of a partial EarthShare of Illinois Award. He added that Hurricane Ike cancelled IORD activities in Calumet. However, the flooding did underscore the communities need for stormwater management.

Sparks announced a flood forum in the St. Louis area next week. Visit www.NGRREC.org for more information.

Adjourn:

Worthen moved to adjourn. Reuter seconded. Meeting adjourned at 4:15 PM unanimously.