



## OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

SHEILA SIMON – LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

### Illinois River Coordinating Council Quarterly Meeting

Tuesday, October 4, 2011  
Hotel Pere Marquette  
Peoria, IL  
6:30 PM

#### Minutes

Bill White, Conference Co-Chair welcomed the Council.

#### **Call to Order and Roll Call**

DK Hirner, Chief of Staff, Office of the Lt. Governor, called the meeting to order and welcomed members and guests to the fourth quarter meeting of the Illinois River Coordinating Council. Olivia Dorothy, Office of Lt. Governor, called the roll.

#### *Citizen Members*

Doug Blodgett, The Nature Conservancy; Nancy Erickson, Illinois Farm Bureau; Reggie Greenwood; Daphne Mitchell; and Richard Worthen.

#### *State Agency Members*

Joe Bybee, Department of Agriculture; Director Marc Miller, Department of Natural Resources; Charles Perino, Department of Transportation; Terry Weldin-Frisch, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity; and Marcia Willhite, Environmental Protection Agency.

#### *Ex-Officio Members*

Lee Albright, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Nani Bhowmik, Science Advisory Committee; Coleen Callahan, US Department of Agriculture, Rural Development; Louise Clemency, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Mike Demissie, Illinois State Water Survey; Colonel Christopher Hall, US Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis; Don King, US Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency; Colonel Shawn McGinley, US Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island; Christine Urban, US Environmental Protection Agency; Dick Wojner (sp?), US Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago; and Doug Yeskis, US Geological Survey.

#### *Absent Members*

Lee Bunting, Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts; Margaret Frisbie, Friends of the Chicago River; US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service; US Coast Guard; Illinois Sustainable Technology Center; Illinois Geological Survey; and Illinois Natural History Survey.

#### **Approval of Minutes**

Ms. Mitchell moved to approve the minutes from September 16, 2011. Mr. Greenwood seconded. Minutes approved unanimously with no corrections.

## **Chairman's Remarks**

Speaking on behalf of Lt. Governor Simon, Hirner announced that the next meeting will be Wednesday February 6<sup>th</sup>, at the IDNR building in Springfield. This will be a joint meeting of the three River Coordinating Councils. Hirner also commented that Olivia Dorothy will be leaving the Lt. Governor's Office to join the Izaak Walton League as the Upper Mississippi River Coordinator.

Hirner then stated that the evening's agenda will focus on progress made in evaluating the Integrated Management Plan (IMP) for the Illinois River Watershed. This document was developed 15 years ago as the strategic plan for the Illinois River Coordinating Council and the Lt. Governor's Office is working on a comprehensive review and redraft of the plan. This meeting's discussion will address the 7 measurable objectives identified in the IMP and the progress that has been made towards accomplishing the restoration of the Illinois River. Overall, the Illinois River is still a long way from restoration, but the work of this group and the partnerships that have grown from these quarterly meetings have halted further degradation of the waterway.

## **Objective 1: Healthy levels of abundance, distribution, and diversity of plant and animal communities**

**Doug Blodgett, The Nature Conservancy**

**Bill Kruidenier, National Great Rivers Research and Education Center**

Blodgett and Kruidenier addressed the difficulty of determining what constitutes healthy levels of abundance, distribution, and diversity of plant and animal communities in the Illinois River watershed, and the greater difficulty of measuring them. A few data sets exist that allow identification of trends in abundance/distribution/diversity of some plant and animal communities over time. Trends in two such data sets, Land Cover/Land Use, and fish community sampling, indicate continued improvements in abundance/distribution/diversity immediately before and since completion of the Integrated Management Plan for the Illinois River Watershed in 1997. Continued improvements in the abundance/distribution/diversity of plant and animal communities will likely require increased efforts to improve water quality, and to restore and maintain natural and functional habitats. Additionally, potential negative impacts of invasive species of plants (e.g., Eurasian water milfoil and Phragmites) and animals (e.g., Asian carp) need to be better understood, protected against, and controlled as warranted. Long-term data sets, such as the LU/LC and fish sampling, will be indispensable in measuring progress toward achieving ecological objectives and in providing feedback for effective adaptive management of natural resources and systems.

Power Point presentation can be found [here](#).

An audience participant asked if the Clean Water Act (CWA) has had a major impact improving conditions along the Illinois River. Mr. Yeskis responded that the water quality improvements associated with CWA have caused some conditions to improve. However, not every water quality problem has been solved yet in the Illinois River, but compared to 1957 or the late 1960s, it has dramatically improved.

**Objective 2: Restoration of highly-eroded streams: 1% by 2000; 10% by 2010**

**Lee Bunting, Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

**Mike Rahe, Illinois Department of Agriculture**

The presentation was given by Joe Bybee, Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDA).

The IDA has funded 466 projects through the Streambank Stabilization and Restoration Program (SSRP) in the Illinois River Watershed. A total of 56 miles of eroded stream banks have been restored or protected. Soil and Water Conservation Districts play a critical role in the delivery and administration of state cost share programs to landowners. IDA provides up to 75% cost share assistance to landowners, through the 98 Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) offices, for installing low cost practices such as stone toe protection, stream barbs, bend way weirs and rock riffles to prevent stream bank erosion and down cutting in streams. The average cost of installing these practices is \$18.58 per linear foot.

State funding available for the SSRP program to provide cost share and technical assistance has been declining. This trend will reduce the capacity of local SWCDs and the state to provide cost share and technical assistance to landowners for stream protection. The management plan objective will need to be reevaluated and erosion reduction progress goals decreased, unless state funding levels are increased or other funds from federal, state, local or private sources are secured.

An audience participant asked what were the main sources of sediment in the Illinois River. IDA responded that 30-50% of the sediment comes from the stream bank itself, and 50-70% comes from upstream sources.

**Objective 3: In all stream segments, the attainment of water quality standards, and every 10 years, a 10% improvement in the Index for Biotic Integrity**

**Margaret Frisbie, Friends of the Chicago River**

**Marcia Willhite, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency**

Willhite reported that the Illinois River main stem has attained the aquatic life use designation throughout all segments. There has not been a significant change in the percentage of stream segments meeting the aquatic use designation since 2002. Additionally, there has not been a noticeable change in the Index for Biotic Integrity since 1990, but species richness has not declined across the basin. Some tributaries have improved significantly, while others have declined, leading to a relatively stable state.

Power Point presentation can be found [here](#).

An audience participant asked if fish in the Illinois River were safe for consumption. Willhite responded that Illinois, along with other states, have legacy pollutants, such as Mercury, that can cause contamination problems, and that it would be best to limit native cod fish to one fish meal per week. A second participant asked if the Peoria area was safe for recreational contact. Willhite responded she didn't have the recreational use data on hand but would make it available.

**Objective 4: Reduce the river's deviation from the natural hydrograph (volume, depth, and duration of water flows)**

**Objective 5: For floods with 2-5 year frequencies, reduction of peak flows to the river by 2-3%.**

**Richard Worthen**

**Doug Yeskis, US Geological Survey**

**Daphne Mitchell**  
**Nani Bhowmik, Illinois State Water Survey**

Members choose to combine these two objectives and report on the progress for both in one report.

Objectives 4 and 5 both require a comprehensive evaluation of historical data to include: 1) before the river system has been modified; 2) for the period prior to the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan; and 3) for the period after adoption of the Comprehensive Plan. Thorough statistical analyses of the hydrographs and flows of the stipulated frequencies must be done for the periods before, and after, the IMP was adopted. Modeling of the river system, especially prior to modifications, is an important component of this evaluation. This type of analysis will require input from, and resources supplied by, multiple agencies and individuals. Incorporation of existing external stressors, such as climatic trends and water use diversions, will be necessary for this evaluation.

Power Point presentation can be found [here](#).

An audience participant asked what the data show about the health of Illinois River. Yeskis, of the USGS responded it has implemented specific recommendations of the IMP, but it is difficult to get river health data unless a detailed modeling analysis is conducted. There have been improvements in the health of the Illinois River, but is hard to quantify.

**Objective 6: A viable economy that enhances the ecological value of the watershed through high-quality job creation**

**Reggie Greenwood, South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association**  
**Terry Weldin-Frisch, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity**

This objective will never be met completely. Rather, the objective represents an overall vision of an economically and environmentally sustainable development strategy to enhance the value of the watershed through high-quality job creation. With the recent economic crisis, many businesses across the country have been negatively impacted, most likely including ones operating along the river. However, a number of substantive state and regional economic development efforts are currently underway, or have been completed in the last few years, along the Illinois River Watershed.

Power Point presentation can be found [here](#).

An audience participant thanked the Council for its work on the Illinois River, and reminded the others in the audience of the spiritual and emotional contribution of the Illinois River.

**Objective 7: A measureable reduction of the amount of sediment entering the Illinois River and its tributaries**

**Wendell Shauman, Illinois Farm Bureau**  
**Debbie Bruce, Illinois Department of Natural Resources**

Recent data indicate that both sediment and nutrient delivery to the Illinois River have either stabilized or decreased as a result of implementation of conservation practices in the watershed. With the knowledge that reduction in sediment delivery from large watersheds takes time to move through the system, the indication of stabilized sediment delivery shows progress is being made in restoring the Illinois River watershed. If the present trends continue for the next 10 to 15 years, sediment and

nutrient delivery to the Illinois River will be significantly reduced, and lead to improved ecosystems in the river and tributary watersheds.

Power Point presentation can be found [here](#).

An audience participant commented that there were no significant numbers of stream bank erosion control projects being funded by the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDA), or Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) programs, close to the Illinois River corridor. The participant asked if there were any efforts by the IDA or IDNR to bring more program focus to the river corridor with respect to sediment entering the river directly. Bruce, IDNR, responded that the department has nine CREP coordinators in place, and is working with the SWCDs, the IDA, and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), targeting areas in Illinois counties for improvement. The program is voluntary, and every effort is being made to ensure the program is marketed to make landowners aware of the opportunity to restore certain available acreages. Resources are limited for all the above agencies--local, state, and federal--so outreach is difficult.

An audience participant asked about the Council's thoughts in regard to cuts to farm conservation programs. Director Miller, IDNR responded that the Council is very concerned about the impacts of the budget cuts and the plans of the Congressional super committee. Those on the Council are closely monitoring the situation and surrounding discussions. Programs with targeted efforts are more likely to survive in the next Farm Bill.

Adoption of the Capital Bill, signed by Governor Quinn, has been one of the biggest victories in the last several years. Roughly \$10 million dollars a year is required to maintain the CREP program. The Capital Bill allocates \$45 million dollars to CREP for a three year period, which is \$15 million more than the minimum required to operate the program. Illinois has stepped up as a state, investing more in conservation programs, but it is now up to Illinois citizens to make sure Congress hears that these programs are important maintain.

### **Crosswalk of Comprehensive Plan and Integrated Management Plan – Marshall Plumley, US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps)**

In 2007 the Corps and the State of Illinois completed work on the Illinois River Basin Restoration Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan). This collaborative effort built upon the Vision, Ecosystem Goals and Objectives of the Illinois River Management Plan (IMP) produced by the State of Illinois. The Comp Plan broadened the analyses and understanding of the problems, the opportunities, and the existing and future ecological conditions within the Illinois River Basin. The Comp Plan is the next step in the restoration effort originally defined in the IMP. The Corps presentation focused on the linkages between the IMP, and Comp Plan's Goals and Objectives.

Power Point presentation can be found [here](#).

### **Member Comment Period**

Colleen Callahan, USDA Rural Development, responded to a previous question asking what the Council members are doing in terms of lobbying for conservation funding. Callahan reminded the audience that federal employees cannot lobby, they can only implement what Congress has adopted.

## **Public Comment Period**

Maria Lemke, The Nature Conservancy (TNC): River Drinking Watersheds Project. TNC reported that it has identified several project areas to study how to address water quality, and is working with multiple partners including NRCS, SWCDs, and the University of Illinois, to address aspects to reduce impacts on water quality in the watersheds.

Rick Twait, City of Bloomington: Mackinaw, On Farm Network. The On Farm Network is an adaptive management program. The voluntary program focuses on precision agriculture tools and technology to collect information that can increase growers' profits from crop production. The On Farm Network uses remote sensing, GPS and yield monitors to collect data.

Terry Kohlbus, Tri County Regional Planning Commission, suggested that the Office of the Lt. Governor encourage DCEO to be flexible with "Hurricane Ike" funds. If DCEO can find the flexibility to use these funds as a local match, significant progress can be made in fixing stream bank erosion problems in the Ten Mile Creek area.

Russ Crawford, Heartland Water Resources Council, expressed his support for the Peoria Islands Project and stated he was honored to be in a room with two of Illinois preeminent scientists, Mike Demissie and Nani Bhowmik. Crawford supports the creation of Peoria Islands to increase water depth, which could possibly increase the number and species of fish in Peoria Lake. Crawford also offered additional reasons for support: Increased water habitat for aquatic species, increased habitat for birds and mammals, increased removal of sediment to allow greater usage for water recreation by skiers, hunters, and anglers. Peoria Islands also help to increase safety by creating a second channel for small boats to avoid barge traffic.

Taura Edwards, on behalf of River Rescue, asked the Council to address the flow of silt in the Illinois River. Edwards proposed a silt processing plant be constructed to help the economy and create jobs. Opposed to the creation of the Peoria Islands, Edwards presented a petition with over 1,600 signatures, providing copies each to IDNR, the Corps, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, and TNC.

Marilyn Lealand stated she had been involved with the river conference for more than 20 years. Lealand commented that USGS maps have shown islands in both the Upper and Lower Peoria Lakes, and that islands are a natural phenomenon in open water.

Dan Piolinti commented that building more islands only narrows the Illinois River, and stressed the need for finding a more permanent solution.

Tom Tincher commented that it is not a question of if the lakes will fill in, but when. There is no deep water except the main channel. If sediment and mud are to be converted to deep water, they have to be dug out, and the resulting hole needs to be protected or it will fill in again. The islands are important because they create a barrier to protect the deep water. The islands will also help to create a second side channel, and will limit the amount of dredging and maintenance needed to be done.

## **Adjournment**

Worthen motioned to adjourn. Miller seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.